

Dr. Fadia Kiwan

How to Enter the Cabinet



In her lecture at the Conference on Women and the Environment organized by the Insitute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (see page 12), Dr. Fadia Kiwandiscussed major political concepts concerning women. She noted that women in Lebanon did attain parliamentary posts, but are not members of the cabinet, pointing out that Lebanon is the only country in the Middle East where women have never participated in cabinet. She insisted that women should become ministers and must have an active and direct involvement in national politics.

In a private interview we asked her:

Q How do you propose that women enter the cabinet?

A. Women's participation in government should be part of a global political network and through participation in a political movement. It is not a question of women being in office in ways that would allow the political world to perceive their participation as a part or an extension of women's traditional (patriarchal)

role or as having a purely women's background and orientation.

Q. Do you think that women being appointed in the cabinet is more imminent and probable, now that three Lebanese women have been elected to Parliament?

A. I believe that it is more probable. Political circles are speculating that ministerial offices will be given to women, either to the deputies themselves or to other women. This is a very important and positive development. However, experience is of crucial importance here, for if these women fail, the general attitude will be that women failed in politics. Therefore, I feel that the ascension to parliamentary and governmental offices through political channels based on experience is safer and stronger than other methods. For instance, if I am elected by proxy or because I am related to a prominent male relative or family member, I am taking a big risk. Thus, I stand the risk of discrediting the entire women's movement and women's

credibility in politics, if I should fail. Therefore, it is sounder and safer to practice politics and to move through the regular channels than to remain within the patriarchal history of the women who have participated in the politics of my country.

I also refuse to be treated in politics in the same way a woman is treated in society. Yes, women may have domestic and maternal skills, but these should not be used as judging grounds when it comes to where they would perform better in public life. I refuse to be given only service duties in the government, I want women to have a direct involvement, participation and decision-making in all the sectors of the government.

In her speech, before the interview, Kiwan emphasized this very point by identifying the pit-fall women could face with respect to the women-environment-politics argument. She wondered if taking a leading political interest in environmental issues would only serve to keep women away from other major and leading political responsibilities and decision-making posts?

In reality Kiwan was calling for an entire change of texture for women in politics and for the environment issue in politics. Experience remains the test of how the situation will develop •

R.A.H

Dr. Fadia Kiwan is a Professor of Politics at the University Saint Joseph in Lebanon. she is also a prominent researcher. She presented a paper entitled "The Political Aspects of the Issue of Women and The Environment" at the conference on Women and the Environment, October 8-10, 1992