

# Women and The Environment

## National Conference

### by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World

Beirut, October 8-10, 1992

The first time the issue of Women and the Environment was discussed, publicly and on a national level (Lebanon), was at the Conference entitled "Women and the Environment." This Conference was organized by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Beirut University College and sponsored by The Friederich-Ebert-Stiftung and The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), under the patronage of the Minister of Health and Social affairs in the absence of a Ministry of Environment. The Conference brought scholars, environmentalists, economists, politicians and educators among other specialists, women's groups, and concerned citizens together to discuss crucial topics. The three main panel discussions and workshops dealt with "Physical and Economic Aspects as related to Women and Environment", "Social and Political Aspects as related to Women and Environment", and "Media as related to Women and Environment".

The objective of the Conference "is first and foremost to raise awareness among Arab women and offer them knowledge and sound advice to be incorporated into the so-called daily or frequent habitual actions which reflect on the environment" stated Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, Director of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, in her opening address. She insisted "It is not in vain that we hold this conference on Women and the Environment. The environmental

crisis, in its natural and biological aspects, is quite obvious and evident. The examples, conditions, unhealthy habits, modern technology and waste disposal politics are clear evidence of an acute crisis. . . . It is an entire network of interaction between population issues, as well as economic, political, scientific, social and educational issues. There is a need to focus on "environmental management", i.e. conscious, strategic decisions as opposed to habitual, unconscious actions." Abu Nasr referred to the active participation of Women in the Rio Global Forum, notably Tent Fermea, indicating that improvement on our national level would be a contribution to the world and for Mother Earth. She also noted that "What women do not know about the environment or about the various issues being raised in the world, is simply because they were not told about it. We could begin with Information and Education."

Mr. Samir Farah, Director of the Friederich-Ebert Foundation, on another hand, approached the issue from a macro-societal point of view with emphasis on women's absence from basic policy-making, politics, and the diplomatic corps. He explained that discrimination between men and women in society is largely a result of discrepancies in their respective levels of awareness, education and participation. He emphasized that this conference aims to motivate women's potentials and to promote their participation in public matters particularly those related to the

environment. Farah is optimistic that economic, humanitarian and environmental development can occur simultaneously and be consistent with political development. Such development is possible through programmes related to population issues, women and the general public's awareness and participation in developmental issues. Thus, "it is imperative at this point to elaborate on the developmental link between women and environment keeping in mind that environmental issues cannot be resolved without women who are dynamic and effective members of society".

Ms. Nayla Moawad, the newly-elected Deputy to Parliament is an earnest supporter of this Conference. . . . Moawad was a member, notably one of the most active members, of the Lebanese delegation at the Rio Summit. In her absence from the country, Dr. Fadia Kiwan presented the paper of Ms Moawad, which raised important points and demands. Hence, based on the discussions she participated in at the Summit, the primary roles of women in environmental issues were identified as: 1) women's direct relationship with the upbringing of future generations and therefore the production of environmentally conscious societies; 2) women's equal responsibility with men towards securing public policies and politics that insure environmental rights and protection for the people. The emphasis of the talks at the Rio Summit was on networking between people and governments and between





Left to Right: Dr. Mounir Khoury; Mr. Samir Farah; Mr. Marwan Hamadeh, Minister of Health and Social Affairs; Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr.; and Mr Hagop Jokhadarian

the various countries of the world. Based on these observations and findings, Moawad, questioned how long so-called other political priorities will keep us from securing the actual needs of the people of Lebanon of which healthy environmental parameters, civic education, economic assistance and health care are urgent. She commended the organizers of the Conference and urged them to produce sound resolutions which would be advanced and put forth for implementation.

The Minister of Health and Social Affairs, Mr. Marwan Hamadeh, congratulated the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World and the sponsors of the Conference for this bold and important initiative towards raising the issue of environment and women. He acknowledged the primary role of women in any environmental matter as half of the population and the primary managers of that environment. Hamadeh, indicated that women have

begun to participate in public and political mainstreams in Lebanon. In addition to the recent election of three women deputies, Hamadeh stated, there are a number of female consultants in the government, one ambassador, three chargee d'Affaire, and three consulates in the diplomatic corps. Hamadeh hoped that women would enter the Cabinet, which is due to be formed shortly after the Conference. He then spoke of the government's neglect of the environment and called upon the conferees to demand for the re-enactment of the ministry in question. He furthermore held the conferees responsible for pressuring the people in charge of health, nutrition, and social affairs to reserve attention to environmental concerns in their curricula's and in their agendas.

The Minister of Environment, while the Ministry was operational, Mr. Hagop Jokhadarian reminded the audience that "we do not inherit the environment but borrow it from our

children". Therefore, he called on the government and women to expand beyond the conventional, classical and traditional roles that have prevailed thus far. Women must be effective on a larger administrative level, not simply through their role as environmentally conscious mothers. He addressed the entire political network to pay precise and special attention to environment and women.

Evidently, the opening ceremony raised questions related to women-environment-politics simultaneously. Women's involvement in environment was advanced as both biological and social with a distinct emphasis on political activism. The general atmosphere presented the shortcoming of the government, women and society towards a healthy environment, identified the need to change and correct the situation and encouraged the participants, panelists and contributors to the Conference to promote awareness and public concern.



**Following** the opening ceremony an active environmentalist, organizer of the conference and the Chairperson of the Geology Department at the American University of Beirut, Dr. Mohamad Khawli gave the keynote address.

Khawli indicated that women, worldwide have not achieved equality as such although they form half of the population, i.e. 2.7 billion. Consequently, there are 600 million illiterate women as opposed to 350 illiterate men in the world, keeping in mind that women play a basic role in the lives of societies by virtue of their daily traditional duties and their child-bearing role. The environment is a part of this cycle. Hence, "If we review where environment has made the most progress and received the greatest degree of attention and awareness in the world, we notice that it is in those countries where women have achieved more in terms of equality, rights and participation".

Women's participation in development in general and environmental issues in particular, constitute substantial and essential support to the lives of people and societies. For instance, 14 million children die and 3 million are disabled because of precarious and polluted water, and food supplies. . . . .

Khawli listed the essential needs and requirements for an environmentally healthy society: 1) Reducing poverty; 2) Controlling population growth; 3) Organizing an egalitarian distribution of production; 4) Creating healthier and more educated people; 5) Decentralizing government projects in order to promote wider participation in development; 6) Resolving administrative problems related to distribution of local production; 7) Improving the relationship between the environment and life forms; 8) Producing sound solutions for environmental problems.



Dr. Mohamad Khawli



# PANEL I: Physical and Economic Aspects as related to Women and Environment

Thursday October 8, 1992

The first panels included three prominent women in the field of economics. Mrs. Mona Khalaf concentrated on "Poverty and Development"; Dr. Fadwa MardamBeik Mansour spoke about "Women as an Economic Pressure Group"; and Dr. Wafa' Charafeddine discussed "Planning".

Khalaf - Poverty and Development - examined the effects of poverty on women and on environment. She presented worldwide statistics emphasizing that 85 percent of women in the world in the 80s earn less than ten dollars a year and work 60 to 80 hours a week to sustain family needs. Meanwhile the level of production have decreased by approximately 20 percent in continents like Africa while the population doubled. According to World Bank statistics, poverty is one of the leading cause of environmental deterioration. Hence, the struggle to survive is directly related to environmental deterioration which in turn is directly related to the deterioration of a healthy quality of life and living standard. To resolve the situation, Khalaf noted two requirements: 1) Improving political and public policies of under-developed and developing countries with respect to women. In this respect, women should not only be classified as victims of a bad environment, but as members of the development task. 2) Participation of international networks and governments to support and aid poor countries. Khalaf reminded the audience that each and everyone is a citizen of the world and therefore bear the responsibility of solving imminent problems. she concluded with a Rio Summit slogan "The question is not whether we can afford to do it; the question is, can we afford not to do it."



From left to Right: Dr. Mohamad Khawli; Ms. Mona Khalaf; Mr. Hagop Jokhadarian; Dr. Fadwa Mansour and Ms. Leila Saleeby Dagher, Director of Public Relations, BUC.

Mansour - Women as an Economic Pressure Group - dealt with pollution brought forth from the import of environmentally-unfriendly products and consumption habits from developed wealthy countries. She illustrated her point with the growing supply of convenient disposable products, what she called "one-way" products like Pepsi-Cola and Coca Cola bottles. There are no recycling facilities or environmental solutions for them. "In other words, we are consuming and using material which are produced by wealthy developed industrial countries for the convenience of their relatively wealthy consumer, as opposed to Third World standards. In turn, that technology and that wealth cause a significant portion of the pollution the world community is complaining about" she told us in a brief interview afterwards.

Consequently She felt there is a need for awareness, especially among women, with respect to these products and these habits. Only then can women, significant consumers,

become an environmentally-friendly economic pressure group affecting consumption patterns, production and related economic, social and environmental qualities of the society at large.

Charafeddine - Planning - discussed the absence of women in the planning force. She indicated that, generally speaking, men have been the planners and that planning is inherently linked with politics, political systems and people. Therefore, women do not play a leading role, by virtue of their limited participation and/or exclusion from these sectors. Consequently, the issue of the environment is rarely perceived as related to women as such but to the population at large. Women are largely concentrated in the administrative sectors of the planning machine and their influence does not extend beyond their technical and administrative expertise. Charafeddine warned against a passive role by women in the current phase of planning for the reconstruction of Lebanon.



## PANEL II: Social and Political Aspects as related to Women and Environment

Friday October 9, 1992.

The second panel, "Social and Political Aspects as related to Women and Environment" included Dr. Huda Rizk on "Environmental Education and Women"; Dr. Lamia Mansour on "The Importance of Research in Environmental Development and the Role of Women in it"; and Dr. Fadia Kiwan on "Political Aspects related to Women and Environment"; Lawyer, Mr. Hyam Mallat on "Legislation for the Environment and the Role of Women in implementing and developing it".

Rizk - Environmental Education and Women - presented basic educational methods needed for a healthier environment: 1) The incorporation of environmental education in school curricula; 2) The preparation of educational programs using the media, radio and television; 3) Medical Care through public dispensaries to proper child care and healthy pregnancies for women; 4) Educating young females in population control issues such as family planning, spacing of pregnancies and birth control methods in order to counter population explosions and the consequent problems of poverty, etc . . . ; 5) Specifying minimum age of marriage in order to permit the young female to acquire knowledge in health, environment, and other health related matters.

Mansour - The Importance of Research in Environmental Development and the Role of Women in it - emphasized the importance and validity of research and data for the planning and implementation of environmental development. Research should attempt: 1) To



From Left to Right: Dr. Wafa Khoury; Dr. Huda Rizk, Dr. Lamia Mansour; Dr. Leila Azouri; Mrs. Hyam Mallat, Dr. Fadia Kiwan

identify the sources and causes of pollution; 2) To understand environmental processes and channels; 3) To design the scientific and proper channels for protecting and saving the environment, including natural means and human resources of which women are basic.

Kiwan - Political Aspects related to Women and Environment - began by questioning the relationship between the issues of "Women and politics"; "Women and the environment"; and "The environment and politics"?. At first instance they seemed very distant, she pointed, but the link can be seen in three important developments: 1) the Ascension of women to the political world; 2) The abundant presence of women in associations for the preservation of the environment and human rights; 3) The politization of environmental issues. Dr. Kiwan discussed each variable in details and raised interesting questions along the way. 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 warned against a pit-fall women could face with respect to the women-environment-politics argument. Hence, 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?

Mallat - Legislation for the Environment and the Role of Women in implementing and developing it - pointed out that specific environmental laws as such have not been drafted, but there are certain regulations which are related to the environment and its protection. On women, Mallat said the well-being of our society is largely dependent on women and that these regulations are first steps towards saving the environment. Mallat, urged Conferees to pressure for the enactment of the Ministry of Environment saying it constitutes the first step and the legal prerequisite for planning, proposal and implementation of development, awareness and action programs and laws.



## PANEL III: Media Aspects as related to Women and Environment



From Left to Right: Ms. Mirella Abdel Sater; Mr. Rafik Shlala; Ms. Sonia Beiruti; Ms. Mirna Semaan Habre; Mr. Ismael Al-Saghir

**Saturday October 10, 1992**

The third panel discussion included: Ms. Mirna Semaan Habre who presented a paper entitled "Promotion of the Environmental Development through Media and Education"; Mr. Ismael Al-Saghir who spoke about "The Role of Journalism in Environmental Education"; and Mr. Rafik Shlala who insisted on "The Importance of Environmental Education for Media People".

Habre - Promotion of the Environmental Development through Media and Education - warned against a random and unplanned approach to development and environmental projects. Hence, development projects should be specific and relevant to specific situation of the country in question. Development should entail cooperation between the government and the people and development organizations. The government should delegate responsibilities to the people to promote organized and reliable participation in development. In addition to its role as a disseminator and reporter of information, the media

in turn should act a guide and a critical observer of the relevance of the development.

Al-Saghir - The Role of Journalism in Environmental Education - noted that the problems have not reached the point of no return. However, environmental issues continue to have last priority on the media's agenda. Therefore, it is up to all those concerned to stimulate the media to transfer the issue from the news desk to that of primary national issues. In a pilot study, Al-Saghir noticed that the bulk of coverage prepared by female journalists as if to reinforce women's knowledge and relationship with the environment.

Shlala - The Importance of Environmental Education for Media People - strongly addressed the need to train and educate journalists, the members of the media and notably the students of the media in environmental education. He emphasized that the media's coverage of issues like the environment and women are rather brief and lack controversy. He attributed it to two factors: 1) the lack

of education and training of students of the media therefore, a weak background for relevant, efficient and effective coverage and reporting; 2) The issue of the environment does not produce the controversies and dialogues we notice in political, economic and social scandals reported by the media. Consequently, Shlala presented the conferees with a list of demands and resolutions they should bring forth to educational institutions and the government: 1) To incorporate environmental education in the school of journalism and media; 2) To hold public seminars for members of the various forms of media in the country; 3) To send delegations and groups of media people, to attend seminars in other countries with more experience in the relevant issues; 4) To produce a specialized press or release on environmental issues prepared in cooperation between the media, environmentalists and other specialists; 5) To administer and create an information network in the country; 6) To prepare programs on environment for radio and television; 7) To launch a public campaign on environmental issues. **R.A.H.**



# Resolutions of the Conference

1. To call for the re-enactment of the Ministry of The Environment.

2. To pressure for the implementation of laws protecting the environment and the enforcement of penalties and fines on violators.

3. To form a committee in charge of coordinating between the various institutions and groups working for the environment.

4. To reactivate the center for industrial research and the organization for the supervision of environmental parameters and products.

5. To support the government and international associations which concentrate on environmental issues, consequently reinforcing and activating the efforts of the people working with them.

6. To call upon social, humanitarian and philanthropic organization to include the environment on their agendas.

7. To encourage women to participate in municipalities and coordinate between women's groups and community affairs.

8. To call upon political parties and groups to include the environment on their social and political agendas.

9. To perform a census of population and environmental conditions in the country.

10. To promote skills of women and increase their income in order to curtail further deterioration in their living standards.

11. To create public awareness about important environmental parameters and train women to play an active role in this respect.

12. To control production and consumption patterns in order to reduce waste.

13. To encourage local productions.

14. To include environmental education in public and private schools and at all the levels of education.

15. To call the Ministry of the Public affairs and the media itself to reserve space, time and attention to environmental issues in their schedules and programs•

**On November 1, 1992 A new Cabinet was formed in Lebanon. The cabinet included a Ministry for Environmental Affairs**

**A Ministry for the affairs of people with special needs was also established in the cabinet.**

## List of Participants

Dr. Mohamad Khawli: Chairperson of the Department of Geology, American University of Beirut

Ms. Mona Khalaf: Economist and previously an instructor at Beirut University College

Dr. Fadwa Mansour: Economist and instructor at St. Joseph University, Beirut.

Dr. Wafa' Charafeddine: Town Planner and member of the Planning Committee of the Council for Reconstruction and Development in Lebanon.

Dr. Huda Rizk: Professor of sociology and politics at the Lebanese University.

Dr. Lamia Mansour: Environment researcher.

Dr. Fadia Kiwan: Professor of Politics at St. Joseph University, Beirut.

Mr. Hyam Mallat: Lawyer

Ms. Mirna Semaan Habre: Lecturer at Hagazian College, Beirut

Mr. Ismael Al-Saghir: Journalist

Mr. Rafik Shalal: Director of the National News Agency

## chair of Panels

H.E Mr. Hagop Jokhadarian: Previous Minister of the Environment (Panel I)

Dr. Leila Azouri: Professor of Law, Lebanese University (Panel II)

Ms. Sonia Beiruti: Journalist (Panel III).

Dr. Hendrick Van der Kloet: Representative of UNDP

Dr. Mounir Khoury: Professor of Sociology

## Rapporteurs

Dr. Wafa Khoury: Professor of Agriculture.

Ms. Mirella AbdelSater: Journalist

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Beirut University College extends its appreciation to Mr. Samir Farah and The Friederich-Ebert-Stiftung, and Dr. Hendrick Van der Kloet and UNDP.