

Women's Rights and Status, The Environment, Physical Disabilities, Drug Abuse, and Leadership:

Seminars in the Retreat of the National YWCA Youth Leadership:

Reported by Laura Abdallah and Mona Katul

Lebanon, September 19-21, 1992

The Youth Leadership Committee of the National YWCA of Lebanon organized a weekend retreat for thirty youth members representing six out of eight centers in Lebanon: Ain Mraisseh, Ashrafieh, Hadath, Byblos, Tripoli, and Tyre while Ablah of the North and Marjayoun of the South were absent from this occasion. The meeting took place in September 19-21, 1992 at the Rockland Hotel in Meshmesh, Byblos area

The main objective of the retreat was to get acquainted with youth members from other Y centers, and to learn about their various activities in a relaxing and clean environmental context. Guest speakers were invited to give presentations and workshops pertaining to topics of vital interest to the groups and the benefit of the community. Maitre Jacqueline Masabki opened the seminar with an interesting lecture on the rights of women in the Lebanese law. The participants were eager to know about the rights of women with respect to marriage, divorce, child adoption, equal opportunities for work, wages



and professional advancement.

The second speaker was Dr. Ilham Kallab who traced the status of women from a historical and religious perspective outlining the differences between males and females from the Jahiliyah to modern times.

The third session of the seminar was devoted to the environment in general with emphasis on what was being done in Lebanon at the present time. Dr. Mohamad Khawli, Chairman of the Geology Department at the American University of Beirut and Maitre Abdallah Zakhya chaired the discussion. A documentary film, that was released on television the following week, was shown to the participants and a lively discussion followed. As a result of the important

issues that emerged and the need for urgent action, youth members pledged to undertake an awareness campaign in schools and in the various YWCA centers, the material for which is being prepared by the Lebanese environmentalists.

The fourth session was devoted to the problems of drug abuse in Lebanon. Father Benoit Succar was invited to give an up-date on measures that are being undertaken and on rehabilitation programs available in the country. In turn, the participants reported on the implementation of the WYCA Drug Awareness and Prevention Campaign. This campaign has been active during the past year and involved preparing educational materials for use by school groups and the media, towards stopping the

spread of this serious social problem. The seminar ended with a session on how to deal with physically handicapped persons. Ms. Jamileh Tannous, who lost her sight at the age of twelve, shared with Y members her experience and her guidelines for enhanced communication with compassion towards the physically impaired.

In addition to the guest speakers, the youth leaders themselves were indirectly acquiring leadership skills by way of chairing the sessions, keeping order during the lectures, enabling the discussions and steering the various tasks of the seminar. Moreover, the beauty of our Lebanese mountains and the relaxing natural setting were an added asset and inspiration •



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