

Making Women's Rights Part of Human Rights

How can Lebanon speak of making Women's Rights part of the Global Human Rights Agenda when it has not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women? Seventeen years of war carry a toll of human rights violations, yet the Lebanese praise themselves for the fact that women were not a target like women in Croatia.

In principle, women's rights in Lebanon is a legislative issue. Women's status is dictated by the Personal Status Code and in the civil code, the value of her signature is equal to half that of a man. According to Fadi Jamaledin, lawyer and activist in the Lebanese Human Rights Association who gave a keynote address at the Beirut University College's lecture for International Human Rights Day (December 8, 1992), civil laws that discriminate against women are often contradictory. He explained that a

woman's signature, i.e. her word of honor, is subject to many restrictions; yet she has the power to annul a transaction drawn on her behalf by a male relative.

Why Lebanon has not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is a question that has not been answered yet. Women's rights may be the hardest to achieve given the complications and dualism between Personal Status Code which are essentially religious codes and secular state laws. Some government officials, men, who support women's rights have gone as far as preparing agendas for amendments securing women's legislative rights. Their proposals remain unheard under the pretext that other matters of law and order have higher priority in this precarious and critical phase of post-war reconstruction.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has now been ratified

or acceded by 113 countries (see box). However, discrimination against women remains very hard to assess and reverse because reports can only be accepted from states who have ratified the Convention.

Key organizations working on Women's Human Rights are mobilizing to institute women's rights as a specific thematic item on the agenda of the first World Conference on Human Rights, and to integrate gender in all discussions. This Conference will be the first to be held in 25 years and will take place in June 1993 in Vienna, Austria. The group have collected over 75,000 signatures on a petition circulated in 78 countries asking the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights to comprehensively address women's rights at every level of the proceedings. Al-Raida has produced this petition in two of its issues and hopes that our readers have supported this call for Women's Human Rights. •

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Countries which have not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Arab countries are highlighted)

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Botswana, Brunei, Darussalam, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Fiji, Gambia, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Kuwait,

Lebanon, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshal Islands, Mauritania, Federated States of Micronesia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Niger, Oman, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Vanuatu.

Countries which have ratified the convention with reservations limiting its meaning

Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Germany, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, Libya, Luxembourg, Malta, Mauritius, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Spain, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom.

All other U.N. member states have ratified the convention.