

Women Must Participate in Political Decisions

Beirut, November 11-12, 1992

Lebanese feminists came together with leading officials, ministers and deputies to reiterate the age old demands of Lebanese women's rights. Cheerfully, they all seemed to agree that women have been excluded from politics, knowing that any real possibility of implementation lies in the hands of the men monopolizing the legislative and political scene. These same men earnestly acclaimed Lebanese women's potentials and admitted that their participation in political decision-making is basic and must be achieved in this post-war new Republic. Thus, to emphasize Lebanese women's political rights, the Lebanese Council of Women in collaboration with the Friederich-Ebert-Stiftung held a conference, under the patronage of the First Lady, Mrs. Mona Hrawi, entitled *The Activation of the Role of Women in Political Decision-Making in Lebanon*.

"The problem is not with the men, but, the solution is in the hands of the women" emphasized Mrs. Hrawi, who then urged the Council to act and to be effective in mobilizing women for development. She noted that since Lebanon is in a developing phase, three observations come to mind: 1) We do not need anybody to assist us in restructuring our country: Lebanese women must form an integral part of reconstruction at this critical stage. 2) The rebuilding of a country begins with the rehabilitation of its people, and Lebanese women have proven to be the backbone of the family and therefore can be the backbone of the country. 3) Political decision-making requires wisdom, knowledge and experience which are evident among Lebanese women who have pioneered and excelled in

various walks of life throughout history.

The keynote address of Dr. Aman Shaarani, the President of The Council and a Professor of Education at the Lebanese University, concentrated on men's monopoly of the political machine in Lebanon and society's persistence in seeing politics as a masculine profession. She noted that even political parties who advocate change and consider themselves progressive, neither support women nor involve them in the decision-making processes and positions. Also the government, the institution which holds the key to women's participation in politics, is run by men who hinder women's empowerment. Consequently, Shaarani observed that Lebanese women are still on the defensive demanding their rights instead of exercising them. She reminded the conferees that Lebanese women have proven their historical, nationalistic, and responsible potentials, if only by surviving of the war. Hence, she explained that the purpose of the conference is to emphasize trust in women's abilities to participate in development and reconstruction. This reality, she noted, can only be achieved through equality, democracy, liberation and participation.

The agenda included three major topics of discussion: 1) The Required Status of Women, notably in the economy, society, the law and politics 2) The Role of the Public Sectors in



Left to right: Dr. Aman Shaarani, President of the Lebanese Council of Women; Ms. Linda Matar, President of the Lebanese Association of Women's Rights

Increasing Women's Participation in Political Decision-Making, with emphasis on the educational sector, syndicates and political parties. 3) The Role of the Government Increasing Women's Participation in Political Decision-Making, notably, the understanding of democracy, planning and implementation.

The highlight of the Conference was in bringing together government officials, deputies and women in the same room to discuss and debate pertinent issues. The officials jokingly admitted that their views on women's issues and their plans for women in the second Lebanese Republic were under scrutiny. The advantage of such a conference may have been this confrontation between politicians and women-activists, but the danger lies in its ending here, with the smiles and small talk in front of cameras and reporters. Will any development occur? Will there be any follow-up by the Women's Council and by the officials who were enthusiastically supporting women? •