

Arab Women? Present!

A number of events recently helped advance the cause of Arab women and their achievements. Many of these developments are taking place in the mainstreams of society, through women's and men's input.

In Lebanon, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), BUC, active in promoting women's concerns and rights, improving their conditions and highlighting their assets, held its regional conference on **Arab Women and the Environment**. The conference featured presentations on the environmental conditions of a number of Arab countries linking them to women's lives, needs and abilities to protect a viable environment. Women and men participated in the conference.

In Lebanon again, and on the occasion of International Women's Day, IWSAW mobilized students, staff, faculty and friends of Beirut University College to speak up. During the activity, called a **Talk In**, young women and men raised, discussed and argued issues of concern to women in Lebanon and the Arab world. May Shoulhod and May Smith expressed their agony and victory in dances. Woman artist, Gretta Nawfal, prepared the poster for the event which appears on the cover of this issue of *Al-Raida*. This activity successfully served its purpose of raising initial consciousness among young people.

Still in Lebanon, two women, Tina Nakkash and Nazek Yared, are attempting to create a **concern group that will address the sufferings of women from domestic violence**. (for more informations contact Dr. Nazek Yared, BUC, Humanities Division, Box 13-5053, Beirut, Lebanon)

Long-time activist and militant, Lawyer Laure Moghazel recently published a booklet in simple language to inform all socio-economic classes about the rights of working women. This book was publicly supported by the lawyers and judges, men and women, of the Lebanese judicial system. **Legislative amendments** so far include the repudiation of the civil law that equates the testimony of two women with that of one man and therefore, does not acknowledge hers independently in court. Now, the testimony of one woman is legally equal to that of a man. The law regarding nationality whereby Lebanese women who are married to foreigners are not allowed to give their children Lebanese citizenship, and other civil laws which discriminate against women are being studied by legislative committees for further amendments. Personal Status Laws and the possibility of creating an alternative civil code have not been addressed, yet. These, they say, would require more elaborate cross-analysis with the social, political and regional parameters of Arab society. (for more information contact: Lebanese Association for Human Rights. SNA Bldg. Box 16-6742, Beirut, Lebanon).

In Egypt, a group of five Arab women from various countries and professional fields established a publishing house for women, **Nour**. (see page 7 for more information).

In Berne, January 1994, reputed author and supporter of the women's plight, **Emily Nasrallah**, was invited by the organization of the Berne Declaration to read excerpts from her books The Birds of September and Flight Against Time which have been translated into German. The Berne Declaration is the tenant of a non-governmental Swiss organization

whose goals are to change the role of Switzerland in the global system notably with respect to cultural issues. Emily Nasrallah's prominence in international literature is yet another achievement and victory for Arab women. (Emily Nasrallah, Imm. Othman Bashir Othman, facing central Laboratory, UNESCO are, Beirut, Lebanon).

In Jordan, the **Business and Professional Women Club** is expanding its documentation and networking efforts. (Business and Professional Women Club, Box 910415, Amman, Jordan).

In Algeria, women demonstrated taking off their veil (in the same way that bras were removed in the sixties) in protest against fundamentalist pressures to officially enforce the veil as a national dress code for women.

Across the continents, in Washington D.C., a breakthrough was made on the art scene with the opening of the traveling exhibit entitled **Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World** in February 1994. Organized by the International Council for Women in the Arts, it will travel around the United States to exhibit the high standard of feminine art in the Arab world to that part of the world which continues to be plagued with negative stereotypes of Arab women. (see pages 4-6).

Of course, this list is not exhaustive and women's problems are far from being resolved. The work that still needs to be done is tremendous and these women can use all the support they get. **STILL ARAB WOMEN ARE PRESENT!**

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