

Arab Women and the Environment

BUC: November 25-27, 1993

Realizing the importance of safeguarding the environment and its impact on Arab women, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) and Beirut University College (BUC) intensified efforts to raise awareness by organizing a regional conference. **Arab Women and the Environment** was the first regional conference to be held in Lebanon to create gender awareness towards the environment following a national conference, *Women and the Environment*, which took place in October 1992 (see *Al-Raida* #58, 59).



Arab Women and the Environment incarnates the responsibility and awareness needed to take action towards a viable environment. The aim of the conference was to highlight the impact of the environment on human life and namely women, whose domestic tasks are directly related to environmental parameters. Not only are they primarily affected by them but they are environmental managers as

well. Therefore, they must participate in planning, implementation and evaluation processes, projects and policies.

Initial public reaction to the conference questioned the significance of the emphasis on women in the

environmental crisis when, in reality, it affects all of humanity, equally. The link between women and the environment was not clear to many. Furthermore, many felt this conference would be another intellectual exercise for scholars and that it will not produce concrete action. The criticisms that preceded the event were many, but the event itself turned out to be a bigger success than expected. Those who participated, enthusiastically, were not restricted to the persons called on by the organizing committee but represented various sectors of society. They included politicians, environmentalists, social scientists, academicians, media specialists, social workers, members of UN agencies as well as women's groups from all over the country not to mention students of BUC and other institutions of higher learning, both women and men. Therefore, the significance of these conferences was in evoking relevant





in a workshop

specialization, social scientists, and educators.

The most constructive aspect of the Regional Conference was the participation of environmentalists and scientists, notably women, from the Arab world. They included Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Sudan, Syria, and Tunisia.

Panels comprised different aspects and points of view: Sustainable Development; The Effects of Pollution on Health; Protection of the Environment and Pollution Control; The Environment and Education; The Environment and the Media; Urban Environmental Policies and Rural Environmental Policies. Workshops that followed examined the problems, their magnitude, as well as methods, techniques of dealing with them. Workshop participants brought forth a number of resolutions. A follow-up committee was organized for pursuing policy makers for the implementation

questions, producing the research data, i.e. speaker's papers, needed for action projects and formulating resolutions.

In the conference, the link between women and the environment was interpreted corresponding to domestic management, which has the greatest bearing in the Arab region as in most world societies. Furthermore, resolutions brought forth for women in the conference workshops demanded legal action, technical training, awareness campaigns, media and educational projects for improving their status on the domestic level. They also expanded on women's involvement with the environment crisis by demanding and encouraging their participation in relevant decision and policy making.

The conference was officially supported by the Presidency of the country and the First Lady of Lebanon, Ms. Mona Hrawi gave the opening statement. Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, Director of IWSAW and Dr. Riyad Nassar, President of BUC stressed the importance of the event and the issue for women and society and the Keynote address was presented by Dr. Georges Tohmeh, President of the National Council for Scientific Research.

Every panel was presided by a Member of Parliament or a Minister from the Lebanese Cabinet. Parliamentary Deputies included Ms. Nayla Mouawad and Ms. Bahia Hariri, the two prominent women who were recently elected (see Al-Raida, #59, 1992). Cabinet members were the Ministers of Environment, of Agriculture, of Health, of Information, and of Interior. Panelists consisted of environmentalists with various

