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The Women's Movement: The Second Wave

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On May 15 and 16, 1995, Foundation Rene Moawwad and Friedrich-Naumann Stiftung sponsored a workshop entitled "The Women's Movement: The Second Wave". The purpose of the meeting, as stated by the organizers, was to explain the absence of the younger generation from the scene of women's activism. The projected aim was to draw up a new agenda that rephrases the women's issue, using a different language and finding new meanings. The women who were invited to participate were mostly university-educated, but they came from various socio-cultural backgrounds, and thus had different experiences and viewpoints.

The meeting began with a re-evaluation of the women's movement in Lebanon during the past 25 years. Maitre Laure Moghaizel, who has been an activist since her student days in the late 1940s, embarked on this delicate task of discussing both the achievements and failures of the Lebanese women's movement. Maitre Moghaizel signaled a number of successful landmarks for Lebanese women: In 1952, they obtained the right to vote; in 1959, Christian women obtained the right for equal inheritance; in 1974, Lebanese women acquired the freedom to travel; and in 1983, all punishments relating to the use of contraceptive measures were annulled. Maitre Moghaizel also noted that, although a majority of Lebanon's charitable organizations are constituted of female members, they do not

have feminist goals. In addition, she criticized the successive Lebanese governments for their lack of initiative and cooperation, noting that "the authorities always give half-measures whenever they give anything." A discussion then followed between the speaker and the participants.

The workshop also included a presentation by Randa Al-Husseini (UNIFEM) and Randa Abul Husn (UNDP) on the kinds of programs and mandates that international women's organizations have provided for women. A summary of the draft of the platform of action that will be discussed at the World Conference in Beijing was presented. A few participants criticized the draft for being on the defensive in its phrasing and wording, reflecting a compromising position that women in the Arab

world cannot afford to adopt if they hope to improve their overall social, political and economic situation.

As for the workshop itself, the various groups were first asked to define what they understand by the expression "The Second Wave." Once each group reached a definition or a certain understanding, the members of the group had to formulate their intended goals. What seemed to be a straightforward task soon proved to be much more complicated in the presence of various levels of awareness and/or activism. Much time was spent on discussing various concepts and terms, agreeing on the basics, and trying to reach least common denominators in the various aspects and facets concerning fundamental issues. In retrospect, this preliminary and unplanned session was the most revealing and productive as it witnessed discussions of topics that are rarely, if ever, touched upon in Arab society, such as domestic violence against women and the nature of the relationship between men and women. The latter issue monopolized a relatively large amount of time, especially when the question arose of whether men should be included in any potential group that may come out of the meeting.

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