

Equality, Peace and Development Highlighted at Conference

In preparing for the Fourth International Women's Conference in Beijing, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) organized an important national meeting, sponsored by Lebanese First Lady Mona Al-Hrawi at the Riviera Hotel in Beirut on August 12 and 13, 1995.

The primary objective of the conference, which was organized in cooperation with the Lebanese Committee, '95, was to examine problems related to "Equality, Peace and Development" in Lebanon, as well as to discuss and evaluate the methods and techniques used to achieve these aims.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, Director of IWSAW, stressed an increasing concern about women's reality which she described as "the reality of society as a whole." She also called attention to the unstinting efforts of the IWSAW in improving women's status in Lebanon. Mr. Shawki Fakhouri, Lebanese Minister of Agriculture, praised the heart-felt contributions of Lebanese women and disapproved of the various injustices inflicted upon them. Lebanese Deputy Habeeb Sadek hoped that women would successfully present their recommendations at the Beijing Conference, and that they would find new incentives for exerting efforts on behalf of the women of Lebanon. First Lady Mona Al-Hrawi then asserted that all the debates, seminars and conferences that are currently being held reflect a growing awareness throughout society about the seriousness of the issues confronting women, not only in Lebanon, but throughout the world.

After the opening speeches, three workshops were convened. The first workshop addressed the topic of equality. Participants stressed the necessity of signing and implementing the international agreements condemning all forms of discrimination against women. They also called for the establishment of an elective civil law for personal matters as well as other laws ensuring the progress of Lebanese society. One of the participants expressed her annoyance with the current Lebanese laws, recounting that, when she attempted to get a divorce in Lebanon, "I really felt humiliated, because I had to translate the Cypriot divorce laws in order to have a divorce in my own country, when both the judge and I were Lebanese!". The second workshop focused on the issue of peace. Its participants urged that all concerned parties maximize efforts to secure the release of all Lebanese hostages currently being held in Israeli-run prisons and concentration camps. One of the interesting points raised during this workshop was stated by one woman, who observed, "If the large amounts of money that we now spend on weapons, airplanes and submarines were instead spent on human needs, the problems of humanity might all be solved". The third workshop addressed the issue of development. Experts emphasized the sad fact that both the environment and

agriculture are in real danger in Lebanon, and stressed that effective action must be taken immediately. The participants also recommended that the issue of development be adopted as the issue of utmost concern to women, especially since the world is now undergoing dramatic transformations, politically and economically. It was also suggested that women's organizations should organize a major conference for the specific purpose of evaluating development policies and their impact on women.

Finally, resolutions reached by workshop participants were announced during a press conference. Key resolutions stressed the necessity of:

- * signing and implementing the international agreement condemning all forms of discrimination against women.
- * encouraging rural women and highlighting their important potential economic role in Lebanon.
- * increasing and broadening social awareness of issues confronting women.
- * Implementing needed changes in the educational curricula and promoting and enforcing compulsory education for girls throughout the country.

The proceedings of the conference and workshops were recently published, in Arabic, under the title *Musawaa, tan-miya, salaam* ("Equality, Development and Peace"). This publication is being distributed by the IWSAW.

Mune, Traditional Lebanese Food Conservation, Highlighted in Ethnographic Study

An ethnographic study, *Mune, La conservation alimentaire traditionnelle au Liban*, by Dr. Aida Kanafani-Zahar, has recently been published by *Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris*. In the ethnography, which is based upon field research conducted in Lebanese villages in the 1980s, the author illustrates that traditional methods of conserving and storing food constitute an art form performed by women, who are largely responsible for the nourishment of the social group throughout rural Lebanon. Kanafani-Zahar also discusses the ways in which images and symbols of the community's life process are expressed in the art of food conservation, illuminating the ways that women and their daily work mediate important life passages of birth, marriage and death in rural Lebanese communities.

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World provided assistance for Dr. Kanafani-Zahar's research, and is now helping to distribute the ethnography in the Middle East.

Academic Journal Focuses on Women and Gender in the Middle East

The Summer 1995 issue of *The Middle East Journal* (Vol. 49, No. 3) was a special issue devoted to the topic of "Women and Gender in the Middle East." Articles included "Modernization and its Discontents: State and Gender in Kuwait," by Drs. Mary Ann Tetreault and Haya al-Mughni, and "Reform of Personal Status Laws in North Africa: A Problem of Islamic or Mediterranean Laws?" by Dr. Ann Elizabeth Mayer. For more information, contact The Middle East Institute, 1761 N Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-2882, U.S.A.

IWSAW Activities (1994-95)

As in previous years, the IWSAW was actively involved in different kinds of activities in 1994-1995, all of which aimed at improving the quality of life for women and children in the Arab world while promoting social awareness of their reality. Activities included research, documentation, training, publications, conferences, community outreach and action programs geared to women and children in Lebanon and the wider Arab world. 1995 was a special year, however, since extra efforts were required to prepare for the Beijing Conference on Women. The following report gives a glimpse of the Institute's activities throughout the academic year 1994-1995.

IWSAW introduced several courses in Women's Studies into the LAU curriculum in 1994. These courses include the following: "Issues and Debates in Feminist Theory," "Women and Economic Power," "Psychology of Women," and "Representations of Women in the Arts and the Media." The Institute also published four issues of its quarterly journal, *Al-Raida*, featuring File sections about the following topics: Battered Women, Women's Health, Women and Education, and Women in Management. It is worth mentioning that the issue on Battered Women was the most well-read issue in the history of *Al-Raida*. In addition to *Al-Raida*, the Institute issued publications about "Arab Women and the Environment" and "The Conflict Control Program Children's Manual." Furthermore, the Institute was involved in wide-ranging research activities. It carried out research for updating the bibliography published by MANSELL, a study of the contribution of married women to family income; two surveys of women in the garment indus-

try; and research on women in higher education. It also hosted a study on the well-being of war widows and the wives of kidnapped people in Beirut, and it participated in an exciting international project of world-wide monitoring of women's issues in the news on television, radio and newspapers during an "ordinary day."

In addition to its academic activities, the Institute has created a number of action programs for women. It administered workshops to teach displaced women skills which will help them earn an income in areas that are in demand, such as sequin embroidery, secretarial studies, hair-dressing techniques, professional sewing, and factory sewing. Institute staff also devised literacy programs which designed and distributed reading materials for newly literate people. Twenty manuscripts have been completed and tested on 30 women to ascertain the material's effectiveness.

In collaboration with the Lebanese Management Association, the Institute organized a Regional Conference on "Arab Women in Management." The objectives of the conference were to plan strategies which will ensure women's career advancement to the highest levels of management. Institute staff also attended several international and local conferences related to children and women.

In celebration of International Women's Day, the Institute prepared a program that consisted of sketches depicting the changes in women's roles and images throughout history. Also, it held an exhibition where all new books recently received on women were displayed.

Since many people were focusing on the Beijing Conference this year, the Institute organized several gatherings - formal and informal - in order to share with the public some of the main issues to be discussed at the conference. In preparation for the Beijing Conference, a coalition between the Institute and four other influential governmental organizations (NGOs) has been formed. The activities of the Lebanese Committee, '95, as the coalition is known, included lectures which addressed the main themes of the Beijing Conference: Equality, Development and Peace.

The activities of the Institute also focused on the Arab child's needs. This year, IWSAW organized seminars and workshops that aimed at training teachers to use different tools for education such as reading, rhythmic, and music. Another children's program, the portable libraries, won the IBBY-ASAHI Reading Promotion Award last year. This year, 40 libraries containing a total of 4800 books were distributed, in addition to 1200 books that were provided to centers without the portable wooden boxes. The Institute's programs for children also included a "Puppet Theater for Children in the Private and Public Schools" and the "Conflict Control Program" (CCP).

The first program aimed at promoting reading among Lebanese children and exposed them to quality theater performances which provide alternative models to those of the fighters they may have emulated during the war, while the latter was directed at youngsters in the fourth and fifth elementary grades and concentrated on social skills for reducing aggression and for promoting cooperation and mutual respect for rights and feelings. Traumatized children are also of profound concern to the Institute. Therefore, IWSAW hosted Dr. George Awad (American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology) who presented a series of training sessions for social workers, teachers, parents and counselors in three different regions of Lebanon, namely, Saida, Beirut and Aintoura. These training sessions addressed important topics such as behavioral disorders, hyperactivity, autism, sexual disorders and deviance.



Friend of IWSAW, Mr Nidal Gharzeddine, Al-Raida Editorial Assistant Ghena Ismail, and IWSAW Program Officer Hania Osseiran prepare for a presentation by author Emily Nasrallah.

Filipina Maid Has a Brush with Death in the UAE

Within the same week that the UAE representatives attending the Fourth International Women's Conference committed themselves to taking action to protect children from exploitation, a death sentence was passed on Sarah Balabagan, sixteen-year-old Filipina Muslim maid.

Sarah is but one of thousands of poor women and children who immigrate yearly from their own countries to secure a living for themselves and their families in the Arab world and the West. Are such women and children aware of all that awaits them in foreign countries lacking laws to protect their basic

human rights? Probably not, but even if they are aware, one has to wonder what other choice they have, since most are escaping conditions of extreme poverty.

What awaited Sarah, however, could not possibly have crossed her mind. Overnight, she found herself almost raped, and threatened with execution. Despite her protests that she only killed her employer because he attempted to assault and rape her, the judges dealt with her harshly. The court decided that attempted rape could not be proven, because the finding of the court-appointed physician was that Sarah was still a virgin. The court also argued that Sarah is not sixteen years old, as she claimed to be, but rather, ten years older, as the papers she submitted to enter the UAE indicated. Here we should note that the Philippines' Government must also be blamed for allowing a sixteen-year-old child to forge papers in order to be able to work abroad.

One cannot but wonder whether a judge is really incapable of distinguishing between a sixteen-year-old girl and a twenty-six-year-old woman. One cannot help but wonder whether a girl has to lose her virginity in order to prove that she was the victim of a rape attempt. Sarah's lawyers re-appealed her case, and petitions were sent to the UAE from different humanitarian organizations throughout the world requesting Sarah's release. Her final sentence, however, was recently announced: one year imprisonment and one hundred lashes!

In response to the Balabagan case, the IWSAW sent the following letter of protest to the UAE Government:

His Excellency Issa Faleh al-Gurg, CBE
Embassy of the United Arab Emirates
30 Prince's Gate
London SW7 1PT

10 October 95

Your Excellency:

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) wishes to express concern about the death sentence recently passed on Sarah Balabagan, age sixteen. Our Institute aims to improve the quality of life for women in the Arab World through educational and developmental projects. We were distressed to learn that a death sentence was passed on Sarah. This death sentence is particularly alarming, as it comes within the same week that the UAE representatives attending the Fourth International Conference on Women in Beijing committed themselves to taking action to protect children from exploitation. The conference also agreed on a *Platform for Action* which condemns all forms of violence against women.

Thus, we respectfully urge you to reverse Sarah's execution and allow her to return home to her family. Also, we bring to your attention the importance of establishing laws to ensure the safety of female domestic workers in your country from such countries as the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Respectfully Yours,
Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World
Lebanese American University
Beirut, Lebanon

Ghena Ismail