

Kuwait Women Demand the Vote

More than forty Kuwaiti women activists from fields as diverse as the law, the sciences, and literature demonstrated outside the Kuwaiti Legislature building in March, demanding the right to vote and run for parliamentary seats. The women, representing a variety of political and ideological perspectives, some clothed in abayas, others wearing western garb, were all united in their belief that the Kuwaiti Government reneged on promises made during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis to give women increased political rights. As a symbol of their cause and demands, some of the women planted a blackthorn tree on a strip of land dividing the highway in front of the Parliament building. An environmental activist, Fatima Abdali, said the blackthorn tree was chosen because it symbolizes toughness and resistance to all hardships and obstacles, and because it is very fruitful in all conditions. The demonstrators, while acknowledging that they have more rights and freedoms than their sisters in Saudi Arabia, stressed that women need to be more involved in political decision-making in Kuwait, especially in areas related to personal status laws, housing, nationality, and education. Lawyer Nadia Tawash indicated that these topics are not adequately addressed by the current all-male Kuwaiti Parliament. Noting a relatively low turn-out of participants for the demonstration, some women complained that the average Kuwaiti woman lacks political awareness and a sense that she can make a change. Nearly all of the protesters were educated urban women. Critics of the demonstration noted that the activists' views do not represent the concerns and priorities of rural women, adding that most uneducated women, if given the vote, would simply cast a ballot for whomever their husbands order them to elect.

UNICEF Report Cites Dangers of Pregnancy and Child Birth in Developing World

In a report entitled *The Progress of Nations, 1996*, the United Nation's Children's Fund provides statistics showing that approximately 600,000 women die during pregnancy and childbirth each year. The vast majority of these deaths occur in the developing nations, mostly among young mothers still in their teens. According to UNICEF Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, most of these deaths are preventable. The up-to-date statistical data contained in the report show that one in 13 women in sub-Saharan Africa dies during childbirth, compared to one in 35 in South Asia and one in 3,200 in Western Europe. The 600,000 women who die each year while bringing new lives into the world leave behind them at least one million motherless children. The primary causes of death

during childbirth, according to medical data included in the report, are hemorrhaging, attempted abortions, sepsis and obstructed labor. Since the beginning of this decade alone, more than three million young women have died painful deaths during child-birth. UNICEF stresses that lessening the suffering incurred by maternal death and injury will require breaking the silence concerning sex education and family planning in many conservative societies throughout the world. UNICEF demands that every pregnant woman be provided with adequate obstetric care, and notes that such care need not be expensive.

UNDP-Lebanon Director Calls for the Empowerment of Lebanese Rural Women

Ross Mountain, United Nations Development Program Director in Lebanon, declared that "the empowerment of women is a necessary condition to ensure that Lebanon will have a reasonably prosperous future. Mr. Mountain's remarks came in the course of a press conference convened to present the United Nation's 1996 Report on the State of the World's Population. The theme of the 1996 report is "Changing Places: Population, Development and the Urban Future," which dovetails with the world summit on human settlements held in Istanbul in early June. Citing the dire need for countries throughout the world to improve housing and quality of life in urban areas, Mountain called attention to the plight of the war-displaced in Lebanon, not only those made homeless during the 1975-1990 conflict, but also those forced to flee south Lebanon during the Israeli assault in mid-April. Mountain stressed the necessity of developing the rural areas of Lebanon. Efforts must be made by governmental and non-governmental bodies to keep people on their land by improving infrastructure, encouraging agriculture, and extending educational and vocational training to Lebanon's rural areas. In this light, he emphasized the importance of raising the position of rural women, especially by providing them with better educational services and resources.

Iraq's Torment Continues

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports that the international sanctions against Iraq have led to the deaths of 650,000 Iraqi children in the last five years. A recent FAO report indicates that in November 1995 alone, more than 8,000 Iraqi children perished as a result of shortages of food and medical supplies. According to the British journal *Torture* (Vol. 5, No. 3, 1995), the deteriorating situation in Iraq is causing irreparable harm to the Iraqi family structure and placing unbearable stress on Iraqi women.