

## FROM PALESTINE

### **NEW WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM AT BIR ZEIT UNIVERSITY**

A Women's Studies Program was established at Bir Zeit University in 1994. The program's goal is to create a deeper vision of social, political, and cultural issues from a women's perspective; it aims to influence the society's and official governing bodies' opinions concerning women's rights and issues. The program itself consists of three facets: teaching, research, and community outreach.

**Teaching:** Teaching began in the 1994-1995 academic year, and the program currently offers a minor in Women's Studies. The program has developed an interdisciplinary core curriculum of eleven courses.

**Research:** The Women's Studies Program aims to facilitate research on Palestinian women, both through instituting its own research projects and through collecting archival material and offering services to other researchers.

**Community Outreach:** The Women's Studies Program aims to develop avenues to empower Palestinian women through a community outreach program in conjunction with the expanding network of Palestinian women's institutions, as well as to contribute to gender-informed public and institutional policies that recognize and secure the economic, social, and political rights of all citizens.

## FROM LEBANON

### **THE OPINION AND PRACTICES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS SURVEYED**

Upon the request of An-Nahar newspaper, "The International Co. for Information"- which specializes in public opinion polls-conducted a study about students in the five major Lebanese universities: the American University of Beirut (AUB), the Lebanese American University (LAU), Saint Joseph University, the Lebanese University, and the Beirut Arab University. The aims of this study were to survey the idea of civil society among university students and to test their vulnerability to Western ideas in contrast to their Oriental identity. The study was divided into four parts, each of which focused on a particular theme.

*(For more information, see p. 31)*

## FROM THE U.S.A.

### **THE FIRST ARABIC-SPEAKING AND CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE AGENCY IN NEW YORK**

The Arab-American Family Support Center (AAFSC) was established in June 1994 to address the social service needs of the Arab-American community in New York City. Its Board of Directors is made up of Arab-American professionals and leaders in the community. It was incorporated as a non-profit social service agency in the

State of New York. AAFSC is the first Arabic-speaking and culturally-sensitive agency of its kind in the New York City metropolitan region. Its activities are directed towards newly arrived Arab immigrants, and its main purpose is to strengthen families and to help them adapt to life in the United States. It seeks to prevent the marginalization of families by addressing the destabilizing effects of immigration and by guiding Arabic-speaking newcomers through American laws and cultural norms in order to gain their full rights as Americans.

## FROM EGYPT

### **AL-MUFTI'S DECLARATION PROVOKED EGYPTIAN INTELLECTUALS**

On Tues. January 27, 1996 the Mufti of Egypt, El-Sheikh Nasr Fareed Wasel, declared in a general assembly that woman's command of high positions is contradictory to her nature, because such demanding jobs require firmness, whereas the woman is known to be soft. This declaration angered a number of Egyptian intellectuals, men and women alike, who saw in it a flagrant neglect of women's great achievements over the past years and a cover for the inferior way she is being looked upon.

*Reference: An-Nahar; Saturday, February 1st, 1996, P.24*

## FROM SAUDI ARABIA

### **AL-MISYAR MARRIAGE PROVOKED CONTRADICTION REACTIONS**

Fahed Suleiman is playing the role of a go-between in the so-called "Al-Misyar marriage". By fax, Suleiman invites those who are miserable in their marital lives and are interested in an "Al-Misyar marriage" to call him. Those who respond to this invitation and make the call, hear a soft female voice asking them to call a coded number for further information. The "mediator" is paid, according to the faxed message, five thousand riyals (*i.e.* \$1500) for a virgin and three thousand riyals (*i.e.*, \$1000) for a non-virgin.

An *Al-Misyar* marriage imposes fewer financial responsibilities on the man and does not require him to live with his "wife". Moreover, it gives him the right to set the conditions of marriage. El-Sheikh Moh'd Mo'bi, a religious leader, states that in such a marriage the man can visit his "wife" whenever he wishes: "in the morning, afternoon, or in the evening; he is not obliged to live with her."

These conditions infuriated many Saudi women who saw in them an insult to the principle of marriage. The journalist Intisar El-Ujeil said that the *Al-Misyar* marriage is merely a way to legalize having a mistress. She further commented that women are being deceived in this marriage "as if men are buying cows, lambs or water-melon." It is worth noting that whilst this kind of marriage is condemned by some people such as Intisar El-Ujeil, others approve of it, especially divorcees, widows, and those who are beyond the traditional age of marriage.

*Reference: An-Nahar; Monday, March 3rd, 1997, P. 24*