



# Women's Centers in the Arab World

The idea of a *Raida* issue on women centers in the Arab world has been on our minds for a long time. The reason for this is because we are very much aware of the pioneering role that these centers have played to enhance the rights of women and to make space for them within the frame. Women's Centers in the Arab world have been active at various levels and have contributed to alleviating discrimination against women, enhancing and developing their status in society, and increasing awareness. Women centers have worked to fight illiteracy, improve women's access to cultural and social services, and health education, inform women of their basic rights within the law, coordinate programs that provide care for women, and enhance women's involvement in politics. Moreover, they have continued to search for gender equity, and social justice by forming pressure groups that influence decision makers and have also worked on the organization of workshops and training programs to improve the skills of poor and rural women which have given them an effective role within the local communities. Furthermore, they have helped develop knowledge by facilitating research and applied studies as well as practical training and legal and economic consultations in order to locate problems and propose solutions. Finally, they have offered insights into the status of women through the publication of journals, and the establishment of academic centers dedicated to teaching, training, and research.

The first article in the file "Women's Organizations in Egypt" by Nadjie S. Al-Ali's focuses on the role of secular women's centers in Egypt and the various problems they are encountering in the face of contradictory state policies towards women. Abir Hamdar's "Women in Jordan" deals with the vast amount of work that women centers in Jordan have accomplished at the social, political and cultural levels of society. "Yemen Politically United, Scholarly United: A Consecrate Interest in Women Research and Studies" by Rania Al-Abiad focuses on the success of women's centers in the Yemen precisely because they have maintained a strong experimental orientation with a strong emphasis on field research work, and thus have remained close to the immediate problems of Yemeni women. The interview with Eileen Kuttab, Director of Women Studies Institute at Birzeit University focuses on social as well as political issues since the Palestinian women's movement has always been an integral part of the national movement. "Assessing Gender/women's Studies: A Comparative Perspective" by Nahla Abdo addresses the experience of Canadian Women's Studies programs and assesses their applicability and challenges to the Middle Eastern context. The file also includes a survey of other women's centers in the Middle East that have worked for the promotion of women's cause. This *Raida* edition also includes under "Special Features" the challenging and thought-provoking Thematic Conversation entitled "Insiders/Outsiders-Emic/Etic Study of Women and gender in the New Millennium" coordinated by Sherifa Zuhur. It revolves around transformations in research methodologies and pedagogical approaches in the study of and teaching on women and gender of the Middle East. The participants in this thematic discussion are scholars (Arab and non-Arab) on Middle Eastern Women's studies from various universities in the U.S.A. and the Arab world.