

The Testimony of an Egyptian MP



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When my dear friend, Mona Khalaf asked me to contribute a short piece on my experience in politics this gave me an opportunity to think about my experiences in general and how they affected my life. I would like to share a few of those thoughts with you.

Adopted by the Leader

As I think back, two factors have greatly affected my political life: my family background and my academic education. I grew up in a home where politics was part of the air you breathe! From a very tender age, I developed a very strong affection towards the “patriarch” of the family: Makram-Ebeid, one of the most remarkable politicians, social thinker, reputed lawyer with unique oratorical skills, and a lover of poetry, of music in addition to possessing an irresistible sense of humor. Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde and P.G. Woodehouse are the authors I remembered figuring prominently on his bedside next to French authors such as Montesquieu, Rousseau as well as books on religion and The CORAN. For him too, I was his favorite member of the family. Having had no children of his own, I was his “adopted” child which he took along in all his trips, to Alexandria, Luxor, Aswan, etc ... As a youthful rebel against parental authority, I was very often seriously reprimanded both by my parents and my school teachers who often suspended me from the different schools I went to! But I always found a steadfast defensor in him! He was a passionate narrator of his own journey through life, a journey closely intertwined with the history of Egypt between 1919-1952. From him I learnt about his (and Egypt’s) struggle for independence, his exile by the British to the Seychelles in 1921 with the “Father” of the nation, the revered leader, Saad Zaghloul, his unfailing efforts as a Secretary-General of the famous Wafd party to establish a parliamentary system, his masterful command of English, French and particularly classical

Arabic, his devotion, commitment and loyalty to Egypt and his steadfast attachment to his ideas on the necessity of an Arab Union and to the social plight of the poor.

All these factors had a major influence on my formative years. I developed a passion for historical books and biographies of great personalities. So from a very early age I “devoured” books which became my favorite companions. When I did not buy them, I would read them in the bookstore and spend hours on end in libraries. Although my years at school did not teach us

much about the history of Egypt, as I grew up in the Nasser years and all that part (Egypt’s Liberal Experiment between 1919 and 1952) had been removed from school texts, my family upbringing and my love for historical books greatly compensated that dearth. I must add here that, while at school, my major childhood trauma was the death of my father. I always remembered how much he supported the notion that I should continue my education abroad (at Oxford) and prepare for a role in addition to being a wife and mother. He wanted me very much to be like a boy, in the sense of achievement in the world of education.

As I think back again, my first reading assignment at AUC comes to mind. It was an essay by C. Wright Mills entitled “On Intellectual Craftsmanship.” It offers a number of ideas that have served me well over the years. The most important idea appears at the beginning of the essay, where Mills writes that “the most admirable thinkers ... do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other ... you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually to examine and interpret it. In this sense craftsmanship is the center of yourself.” Though I did not intend to pursue a career as a

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scholar at the time, the principles Mills presents are applicable to whatever life one chooses to lead. The idea of regarding one's life's work as a craft is, in my view, the key to success. It means diligently and persistently developing one's skills, even when there is no immediate professional reward for doing so. It means integrity and professionalism in every aspect of one's life and one's work. It also means a whole-hearted, unwavering dedication to work that enables one to persist even when confronted by discouragement and temporary set-backs.

I learned these principles at AUC, and I have drawn on them many times in my career. They played a particularly important role in my decision to join Parliament. Many Egyptians are cynical about our Parliament, believing it to be a weak institution that only ratifies decisions taken by the President. I must admit that I shared this view for many years. When I first entered AUC, I had no political ambitions whatsoever. My goal was to become a University professor. Yet when the multi-party system was consolidated in the early 1980s, new opportunities emerged for building a strong and effective democracy in Egypt. At that time, my decision to run for a seat in Parliament was based on three considerations:

First, I felt a strong obligation to participate in the decision-making of my country, rather than simply sit on the sidelines and offer criticism. I was fully aware that our Parliament had many flaws. Yet an institution is not an impersonal monolith. It is made up of individuals, who determine its character and behavior. If enough dedicated individuals enter Parliament, it will become an effective body that can move our country toward greater democracy and justice. As I learned at AUC, dedicated individuals can make a difference in any institution.

My second reason for entering Parliament was a desire to apply my academic training to the many problems that confront Egypt. I was trained as a sociologist at AUC, where I acquired all the skills for objective, dispassionate analysis of society and its problems. During my research, I found myself developing solutions to many of the challenges facing Egypt, particularly in the areas of education and foreign policy. I became dissatisfied with simply writing papers about these problems and then walking away. In short, I wanted to make the transition from being an observer of Egypt's political life to being a participant. My studies at AUC trained me in the technical skills needed to be an effective participant in public life. Furthermore, my experiences there gave me the confi-

dence to believe that I could, in fact, succeed as a parliamentarian.

My third reason for joining parliament was my belief that women must overcome the cultural barriers that prevent them from participating fully in public life. When I studied at AUC, men and women were treated with equal respect. As a result, women were involved in every aspect of the University. The accomplishments of women at AUC made me aware of the enormous contribution that they could make to Egyptian public life. And yet, much of this potential goes untapped because of prevailing cultural attitudes toward women. Egypt will be able to solve its many problems only when it utilizes the talents of all its citizens. This includes encouraging women to fully participate in public and professional life.

Last but not least, AUC has always provided a setting where Egyptians can express their views openly and without fear of derision or persecution. As a result, it had become an

important bastion of tolerance and intellectual freedom. At a time when religious fanaticism has made restrictions on thought and speech fashionable, AUC has continued to provide a secure environment for the exchange of ideas. It has also produced thousands of graduates who understand the importance of free expression and who practice tolerance and civility in their daily lives.

The Women's Movement in Egypt

Now let me try to give a brief historical survey that will serve as a background to our discussion. The periodization of history is always arbitrary, but it maybe helpful to think about the twentieth-century changes affecting the roles and status of women in Egypt as having gone through four fairly distinct phases and as having entered a new period starting in 1979. The chronology in the back of this paper may help orient readers, as it summarizes major events relevant to the public role of women in Egypt.¹

From about 1900 to 1923, men as well as women appeared as prominent participants in the women's movement. Some influential women, including a princess, organized fashionable intellectual salons. Both proponents and opponents of an expanded role for women defended their views, most frequently in Islamic terms and in reference to the need to modernize Egypt. In this regard, little has changed since, and the debate is still coached in these terms, thus supporting the suggestion of a prominent Egyptian sociologist (Saadeddin Ibrahim) that in Egypt nothing is ever really dis-

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carded. Rather, Egyptian history is a process of recycling and accumulation.

The second stage in the women's movement began in 1923 with the establishment of the Egyptian Women's Union. It ended in 1935, when the process of women setting the agenda for the movement was basically completed. Upper-class women organized, marched, gave speeches, established private voluntary charitable organizations, defined issues and stacked claims. Women went abroad for higher education, schools for girls were founded, and, in 1928, women were admitted to the Egyptian National University. Feminist leaders such as Hoda Sha'rawi and Ceza Nabarawi made a point during this period of linking feminism with nationalism, but also emphasized that women had the right to personal development and fulfillment.

In 1935, the mainstream of the women's movement in Egypt began to be more assertive regarding women's rights. For the first time, the Women's Union endorsed the principle of full political equality for both sexes. As they were graduated from university, more women entered the professions. Some worked as active feminists. Others concentrated on professional development, eschewing politics for the time but, consciously or unconsciously, laying a foundation for a future political career. The question of Palestine and the need for Arab unity were new themes taken up by women activists after 1935. But traditional programs also continued, such as the effort to abolish legalized prostitution. This last effort finally succeeded, but not until 1949. In general, women became more active in public life and help set the tone for the period. Following World War II, political work was accelerated, and more strictly political groups of women were formed, especially after the death of Hoda Sha'rawi in 1947.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, social feminists, who specialized in attempts to improve social and economic conditions, vied for leadership with political feminists who advocated direct political participation by women and reform of the Personal Status Laws regulating marriage, divorce, and child custody. The feminist movement adopted, albeit piecemeal, the goals of political feminists. However, most day-to-day work fell within the scope of social feminism, by which women established and ran a variety of private voluntary social service organizations. Politically, the most important of these were in the health field, such as Tahseen El-Seha, the Red Crescent, and the Mabarrat Muhammed Ali hospitals.

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One example of their importance can be seen in the response to problems Egypt faced in the aftermath of World War II, in which these agencies were active in efforts to deal with major epidemics such as cholera and malaria. The women's associations, particularly the Mabarat, were probably more active than the government in handling these crises and they, along with the government, and some foreign help agencies, were responsible for ending the epidemics. In this and other ways, women demonstrated their value to society and supported their nationalist cause. In the process, and in a conscious exercise of linkage politics, they worked to gain support for items on their political agenda. This tactic bore fruit, but not until after the Free Officers came to power.

The 1952 revolution started a new phase in the life of Egypt. But for women, the period which began in 1935 did not end until 1956, when the new Constitution gave women the right to vote. Between 1956 and 1979, pathbreaking women participated in Egyptian public life in new ways. Egyptian women started their own businesses, entered parliament, were appointed to cabinet posts and became increasingly conspicuous and visible. An increasing number of women became active in more fields, particularly the professions. On perhaps a more negative note, the 1960s women's groups were absorbed into the only legal political organization of the time, the Arab Socialist Union, and many of the welfare activities of women were taken over by the state. For a while, the political nature of feminist activity was limited to serving the party and the state. However, even though feminist organizations were somewhat co-opted by the regime, the pace

and scope of female involvement in public life was accelerated by accumulated momentum from the past achievements, notably in education. After 1970, when Anwar Sadat became president of Egypt, this trend was given further encouragement by the regime. The president's wife, Jihan, an ardent feminist, became the focus for both blame and praise as she developed into a public personality and a force in her own right. The period which began in 1956 with women gaining the right to vote, ended in 1979. In that year, with strong presidential support, the Personal Status Laws were reformed and women were given guaranteed seats in all of Egypt's elected assemblies.

After 1979, Egypt's leading women continued to do the kind of things they had been doing throughout the century. Now, however, a new role was added: defending and consolidating established rights and protecting the position of women from erosion or wholesale attack. What was a radi-



cal and to many, outrageous program in 1923 is now partly legal, traditional, and even regarded as conservative in some quarters. But for others, all proposals to enhance the role or improve the status of women remain objectionable. The new *status quo* has been supported by, among other, the Sadat-Mubarak regime and most of the women elected or appointed to high public office. Some feminists, including many in the political opposition, however, want more substantial change in the direction of full equality. Other opposition figures, including some Islamic fundamentalists, advocate enacting legalization which would severely restrict the role of women in public life. Thus, what has been accomplished remains controversial and should not be regarded as permanent.

Women in Parliament

The first women to become members of Egypt's National Assembly in the late 1950's joined an unusual institution. Party politics and parliament had been suspended following the 1952 revolution. When the new constitution was promulgated in 1956 it envisaged a National Assembly, universal adult franchise, and an organization called the National Union to supervise and guide politics. There were to be no political parties, as they were perceived by the leadership of the country to be divisive. The Assembly was to make laws and approve the budget as in Britain, and cabinet ministers were to be subject to questioning by members of the Assembly. The Suez crisis of 1956 and related events delayed the implementation of the new constitution until July, 1957, when the new 360-member National Assembly convened for the first time. The constitution allowed the president to appoint ten members, while the other 350 were elected, two from each of the 175 districts. Two of the successful candidates were women, one from Cairo (Rawya Attia), the other from Alexandria (Amina Shoukry). Defeating men in open elections, they successfully overcame the bias among their constituents against women in politics.

All candidates for the 1957 election had been approved by the Executive Committee of the National Union, an organization created by President Nasser to specialize in policy-making and serve as the functional substitute for political parties. Parliamentary politics restarted in Egypt as a pale vestige of the frequently lively and sometimes raucous Parliament of pre-revolutionary times, which was precisely what the new regime wanted. Since that time, Egypt has had 10 parliamentary elections (excluding the 1960 selection of members for the Assembly of the United Arab Republic),

some of which (1964, 1976) have been quite animated. Women fared differently in each election. For example, eight were successful in 1964 but only two, both incumbents, were elected in 1969.

For the first time in 1979, a relatively large number of women were elected to Majlis al-Shaab, due to the creation in that body of thirty seats specifically reserved for women, including at least one from each governorate. These new seats were additions to the total number of members in the Majlis, so that men could not complain that they had "lost" anything. Thus, the new Majlis al-Shaab had a total of 390 members, 9% of whom women. Only women were permitted to contest elections for the reserved seats, but both men and women were allowed to vote. These elections involved over 200 female candidates for thirty places. In addition, two women were appointed, one in 1979, the other in 1981. Three ran against men and defeated them. In 1983, thirty-five women were members of Egypt's Majlis al-Shaab. In Majlis al-Shura, 140 of the seats were filled by elections held in 1980. The elections were on the party list system and no seats were reserved for women. Two women were on the list of the government party, however, and were elected. The remaining seventy seats, five of which went to women, were filled by presidential appointment, bringing the number of women in both houses of parliament to forty-two, which amounts to 7% of the membership.

In 1976, President Sadat introduced the multiparty system and three political parties were established. In 1979, the Arab Socialist Union was formally abolished as was the center platform or group which had represented the government in parliament, and three political parties were permitted to organize, publicize their activities, and contest elections. The largest of these, holding 90% of the seats in Majlis al-Shaab in 1979, was the government party, the Hizb al-Watani al-Democrati, the National Democratic Party (NDP). President Sadat was its first president and Hosny Mubarak its second. All but one of the women in parliament between 1979 and 1983 were listed as members of the NDP. The other two parties represented in parliament in the early 1980s were two of the three "illegal" opposition parties in Egypt. The Muslim Brothers were not permitted to form a party because religious parties are proscribed. The Wafd al-Gideed (New Wafd), the inheritor of the mantle of pre-revolutionary nationalism and legitimacy, "dissolved" itself in 1978, rather than deal with continual government harassment.

My Experience as an MP

After President Mubarak came to power in 1981, the Wafd

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Party, resumed its activities through a court ruling and participated in the 1984 elections. None of its women candidates won a seat. In these elections, over 140 women were candidates for office. Roughly 75 percent of these women competed on behalf of an opposition party, but only two were successful, both representing the New Wafd. Olfat Kamel, a veteran Cairo politician and incumbent parliamentarian and Rizqah al-Balashi, a veiled social worker from Alexandria whose candidacy was supported strongly by the Muslim Brothers, joined the thirty-three NDP women elected to Majlis al-Shaab. These two women have little in common although they are members of the same party, and they help to illustrate the diverse and sometimes paradoxical position of women in the opposition. One attracted votes from one of Cairo's slums, the other from mainly male Islamic fundamentalists. In 1987, the number of women diminished to 18 and in 1990, when the electoral law was changed once more to the individual constituency, women only garnered five elected seats and four were appointed by the president. In 1995, the same occurred and in 2000, seven women were elected and four appointed (out of a total of 454 seats)

Following the relative liberalization of 1979, it is against this background that I entered public life in 1983. This was not easily accepted by my family, particularly my uncles on my father's side, drawing on the notion that "politics is a man's business" but I resisted and was ostracized for some time. I ran for the women's seat in 1984. At that time, the electoral system was based on the party list system, with 30 seats reserved for women. (This was the first multi-party election since the 1952 Revolution which had abolished all parties.) Political and professional experience in addition to family reputation were major factors which played in my selection as a candidate on the party list. However, what was equally interesting during the campaign, is that apart from using my academic experience as a political asset (ordinary Egyptians have great reverence for education) the use of my family's upper Egyptian background (my family originates from Kena, 60 kms from Luxor) drew a great deal of support as most of the population of my constituency which included Rod el Farag, El Sahel, El Sharabeya, Choubra, and Zawya Hamra, (what is known as North Cairo District), with a population of 3.5 million, were originally from Upper Egypt.

As a political sociologist by training, my campaigning experience proved to be an incredibly rewarding one. Being the only female on a list of 11 men, my assignment consisted of doing the door-to-door campaign. That meant paying visits to constituents in their homes which men candidates do not

do because of tradition. This opened my eyes to a society entirely different from the one I knew, where conformity to tradition was dominant. Yet, at the same time, the constituency had almost the highest number of working women but none would be seen attending electoral rallies which we held daily in different places. Their sons, brothers or husbands would tape the speeches delivered in those meetings and take them home! That is what I found out during my household visits, as the women would repeat to me every word I had pronounced in those rallies. Another discovery was the high level of politicization among the youth, (certainly much more than my elite AUC students!). What they shared in common, though, was their skeptical outlook on the validity of the whole process of elections, since, according to them, the results were known in advance! Another interesting aspect of my constituency was the relative high percentage of Coptic Christians (about 20%) most of whom had a thorough religious upbringing and were quite concerned about the growing tensions between Muslims and Christians, which had seen a peak at the time, in 1981. Although I did not gain a seat in 1984, my experience had been so rich and exciting that I lobbied extensively to be selected as a candidate for the 1987 elections.

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Meanwhile I had been very active in the party, as the rapporteur of the Foreign Relations Committee, a contributor to the party newspaper with a weekly column which was an important outlet for non-conventional opinion partaking in a variety of national regional and international issues. I considered that writing organizing and joining different NGO's such as the Arab Human Rights Organization, were as meaningful as running for office.

So once again, I ran in 1987. The reserved seats for women were dropped but proportional representation using the Party List electoral system was kept. I was placed high enough on the list (no.3) which gave me a reasonable chance of success. But although I was announced winner in the evening newspapers the day the results were announced, the next day my name had disappeared from the morning papers. The reason given was that there was a mistake in the computer count! (Quite reminiscent of the Gore/Bush campaign, one could say!!) In any event, it was quite clear that with the rules stacked in favor of the ruling party and manipulated results, it would have been hardly conceivable to let a woman in the opposition garner a seat in the elections! There was no such a precedent since women had the vote in 1956.

The President has the prerogative to appoint 10 MPs. This device permits him to appoint women and Christians, as very few of both have won office in elections, particularly

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since 1990, when the electoral system was once again changed the individual constituency. Luckily, I was appointed to in 1990 and served in parliament until 1995 as an independent. Although parliament is by definition a democratic institution, Egypt is not a full fledged democracy and, for the most part, extra parliamentary authorities expect compliance. It is within this atmosphere and hemmed by these constraints that I was functioning as a parliamentarian. Many of my colleagues were more frustrated than exhilarated by playing the role expected of them. For my part, I thoroughly enjoyed the work of parliament and felt I was doing something useful for the country. I served on the Foreign affairs Committee as a full member and chose the Committee on Education, second, due to my professional background and expertise. This has allowed me to make a substantive contribution to debates, discussions and legislation. Circumventing bias against women in politics meant that much more work and participation was expected than from male colleagues.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the activities which always attracted me has been working with voluntary associations. I helped found several of them such as the Civic Forum, the Egyptian Organization of Human Rights, etc. The reason was my strong belief that for the process of democratization to go forward, a robust civil society was essential in order to foster a culture of democracy. Over the past several decades, the government of Egypt has tried to control these organizations through a restrictive law (Law 32) introduced in 1964. Consequently I considered that one of my contributions in parliament was to raise consciousness among the members on the obstacles to development that government encroachment on these organizations were causing and I persistently called during five years for associational autonomy. Today, there is an amended law, hopefully less restrictive, which will be soon discussed in parliament. In other words, by offering alternative ideas or plans, one could help change conventional notions of behavior regarding a wide range of issues, particularly issues of special interest to women.

I found out that by engaging in organizational work, one can try to change what people in Egypt do, and directly influence behavior. On the other hand, through my academic affiliation I have worked to change how and what people think, to influence ideas, and, through ideas, to alter future behavior. So, in addition to writing, and through my teaching at university, I have tried to influence my students directly and feel greatly rewarded when some of them look up to me as a role model. But what is more important is to encourage students to think on their own. Today, I devote an enormous amount of my time to the non-governmental organization, that, together with many friends and "concerned citizens", I have founded in 1995 and preside: the Association for the Advancement of Education which has received observer status by the ECOSOC of the UN. This came as a result of my thorough involvement as a member

of the Parliamentary Committee on Education, which allowed me to travel all over Egypt to visit schools. This experience convinced me that most of Egypt's problems start with education and that no progress could be made without improving education. I have therefore made a trilateral agreement between my association (AAE), the Ministry of Education and the Egyptian Swiss Fund for Development to upgrade basic services in 100 government primary schools in poor areas.

Future Prospects

Future prospects for women depend on the overall prospects for freedom for interest groups and political parties to organize, and for individuals to exercise freedom of speech, press and assembly. While individual rights are important, the history of the women's movement in Egypt, illustrates the centrality of organization. The Egyptian government has done a great deal to improve the status of women in Egypt and women are using the opportunities afforded to them by the Mubarak regime although the signals relative to democracy and freedom to organize have been ambiguous. So for example, this year's election has seen the first elections since 1952 to be conducted under judicial supervision. However, the NDP (ruling party) although it suffered its most severe set back since its inception in 1978 (it gained 175 seats out of 444) has managed to keep its dominance in parliament (87% of seats) by putting pressure on most of the independents (213) to re-join its ranks. On the positive side, however, the opposition press (as well as the government press) has been able to publish and criticize the NDP policies as well as the personnel associated with the regime. On balance, one can say that the ability of women to continue their role and face the challenge of trying to strengthen civility and tolerance in society as a whole, whether in politics or in non-governmental associations, appear relatively secure, guaranteed by law, presidential support, especially by Mrs. Mubarak², and the women's own enthusiastic efforts to help build a civil society and a democratic system.

In conclusion, I can say, that my experience as a participant in public life has been a busy, multifaceted and rewarding one. I believe public service has made me, if not a better Egyptian, perhaps a more grateful Egyptian - realizing what a privileged country Egypt is and what creative, friendly, tolerant people Egyptians are. We have every reason to be proud of past accomplishments by both men and women, and have confidence in our ability to meet successfully the challenges ahead.

END NOTES

1 Most of the discussion on the historical survey of Egyptian women in politics is adapted from Earl L. Sullivan, *Women in Egyptian Public Life*. AUC Press. 1987

2 Mrs. Mubarak, has used all her clout to press for more rights for women and has lately founded (in 2000) the National Council for Women based on her firm belief that women should learn how to exercise their rights.

Major Events in Egyptian Feminism, 1873-2001

1873 The first government primary school opened for girls.
1892 The magazine *Al-Fatat*, the first women's magazine published in Egypt, was started in Alexandria by Hind Nawfal, a Syrian Christian.
1899 Qasim Amin published *Tahrir al-Mar'a* (Women's Emancipation).
1908 Fatima Rashid launched the first women's magazine to be published by an Egyptian Muslim, *Majallat Tarqiyat al Mara*.
1914 The educational Union of Women founded in Cairo.
1919 Hoda Sha'rawi led demonstrations of veiled women in support of the Egyptian nationalist cause, the first demonstrations of their kind in Egypt.
1921 The first government secondary school opened for girls.
1923 Hoda Sha'rawi attended the meeting of the International Alliance for Women in Rome. She, and the rest of the Egyptian delegation, returned to Egypt unveiled. Many other women began to follow their example.
The Egyptian Women's Union was established in Cairo by Hoda Sha'rawi in March.
1924 The new constitution approved. It included the principle that elementary education was to be free and obligatory for both sexes. The 1924 constitution did not give women the right to vote.
1925 The first Egyptian girls to be sent abroad by the government for advanced degrees left for England. *L'Egyptienne* magazine, edited by Ceza Nabarawi, was published in French by the Egyptian Women's Union.
1925 *Rose al-Yussuf*, which came to be the leading weekly political magazine in Egypt, was founded in Cairo by Fatma al-Yussef, a former actress.
1928 The first female students entered Cairo University.
1935 The Egyptian Women's Union advocated for the first time equal political rights for women.
1937 *Al-Masreyya*, a fortnightly periodical, was published in Arabic by the Egyptian Women's Union.
1938 The Eastern Women's Conference held in Cairo. The chief issue was the question of Palestine.
1939 The Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs established.
1944 The Arab Women's Union founded in Cairo. Hoda Sha'rawi elected president.
1945 The United Nations founded, with Egypt as a founding member. World War II ended. The League of Arab States founded, with Egypt as a founding member.
1947 On December 12, 1947, Hoda Sha'rawi died at the age of 68.
1948 A woman's political party, *Bint al-Nil*, established in Cairo by Mrs. Doria Shafik.
1949 Legalized prostitution abolished, culminating a 35-year campaign by Egyptian feminists.
1951 Members of *Bint al-Nil* briefly occupied parliament demanding representation for women.
1952 The Free Officers' Revolution. The Constitution abolished and political activity circumscribed.
1956 The new constitution promulgated giving women the right to vote for the first time in the history of Egypt.
1957 Parliamentary elections. The first women elected to parliament.
1961 A government decision to make higher education free.
1962 Dr. Hekmat Abu Zeid was the first woman appointed to the cabinet, as minister for social affairs, serving until 1965.
1967 Egypt, Syria, and Jordan defeated by Israel in the June War.

1970 Anwar Sadat replaced Gamal Abdel Nasser as president of Egypt.
1971 Dr. Aisha Rateb became the second woman appointed to the cabinet as minister for social affairs. A new constitution promulgated and perceived by many as more conservative than the old one, as it emphasized women's role in the family.
1973 The October War with Israel.
1976 Parliamentary elections held using the political "platforms" of right, left and center, according to a law issued in November 1975. The center, government, platform won 82% of the seats.
1977 In January, the government announced cuts in subsidies for such basic staples as bread and cooking oil. Riots ensued and the subsidies restored. In a cabinet reshuffle in February, Aisha Rateb replaced as minister for social affairs by Dr. Amal Othman, who became the third woman to serve in that post.
1979 The electoral law amended to provide for 30 reserved seats for women in *Majlis al-Shaab*. The law of local government amended to provide that 10% to 20% of the seats on all local councils be reserved for women. The Personal Status Laws amended, reforming rules pertaining to divorce, alimony, and child custody. Dr. Aisha Rateb became the first Egyptian woman to be appointed ambassador.
1980 *Majlis al-Shura* was formed with 7 women among its 210 original members.
1981 President Sadat ordered over 1500 people arrested for political as well as domestic security reasons. Several women were among them.
1985 In May, the Higher Constitutional Court declared the 1979 amendments to the Personal Status Laws unconstitutional on procedural grounds. In July, *Majlis al-Shaab* passed new amendments to the Personal Status Laws which were almost identical to the 1979 amendments. First Lady went to Nairobi to represent Egypt in the women's conference.
1987 Parliamentary elections. 18 women became MP's, 14 elected and 4 appointed by the President.
1988 The establishment of the Mater i,nity and Childhood Council.
1990 Parliamentary elections.
1994 Population Conference held in Cairo.
1995 Beijing Conference for women development. Parliamentary elections: 9 women became MP's, 5 elected and four appointed by the President.
1996 The construction of 3000 one-class schools to fight women's illiteracy.
1997 The allocation of a part of the Egypt's budget for women's development and the inclusion of this project in the country's five-year plan (1997-1998/2000-2001). The appointment of the first woman as Deputy of the People's Assembly, *Majlis al-Shaab*.
1998 The appointment of the first woman in the Administrative Prosecution Office, *al-Niyaba al-Idariyah*.
1999 The law of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) amended. The appointment of the first woman as secretary of Giza Zone. The appointment of the first woman as head of a village in South Sinai governorate.
2000 The establishment of the National Council for Women (NCW) by presidential decree. The amendment of the Personal Status Law allowing women to have the right of "Khol'a," or divorcing themselves. Parliamentary elections: 11 women became MP's, 7 were elected and 4 appointed by the President. The First Arab Women Conference held in Cairo.
2001 The National Conference for Women.



What are Quotas?

The core idea behind quota systems is to recruit women into political positions and ensure that women are not isolated in political life.

Quota systems aim at ensuring that women constitute at least a "critical minority" of 30 or 40 per cent. Quotas for women entail that women must constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body, whether it is a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a committee or a government. The quota system places the burden of recruitment not on the individual woman, but on those who control the recruitment process. The core idea behind this system is to recruit women into political positions and ensure that women are not isolated in political life. Previous notions of reserved seats for only one or for very few women, representing a vague and all-embracing category of "woman", are no longer considered sufficient. Today, quota systems aim at ensuring that women constitute at least a "critical minority" of 30 or 40 per cent. Quotas may be applied as a temporary measure, that is to say, until the barriers for women's entry into politics are removed.

Most quotas aim at increasing women's representation, because the problem to be addressed usually is the under-representation of women. This is particularly relevant since women constitute 50 per cent of the population in most countries. A quota regulation may, for example, require that at least 40 per cent of the members of a committee are women.

Quota systems may also be constructed as gender-neutral, which means that they aim at correcting the under-representation of both women and men. In this case, the requirement may be that men as well as women should constitute 40 per cent of the members of a committee, or that neither gender should occupy more than 60 per cent and no less than 40 per cent of the seats.

Quotas to help men into certain positions may be used in sectors with an overwhelming representation of women, for example, in social work. But even in this sector, men occupy the majority of leadership positions; thus quotas are aimed more at getting men into education and into entry-level positions in this field. There are, however, rare examples of gender-neutral quota systems to help men into politics, for example, in the Socialist People's Party in Denmark, a party with many active women. In this discussion we focus mainly on quotas for women.

Quotas are a much debated issue among both men and women around the world. Opinions vary among women regarding the effects, fairness and repercussions of using quotas to increase women's representation. In August 1997, International IDEA gathered women MPs from around the world to discuss this issue within the broader context of women's effectiveness and participation in politics.

Pros and Cons

Various arguments have been set forth for and against the introduction of quotas as a means to increase the political presence of women. Some of the pros and cons include:

Cons

- Quotas are against the principle of equal opportunity for all, since women are given preference in it;
- Quotas are undemocratic, because voters should be able to decide who is elected;
- Quotas imply that politicians are elected because of their gender, not because of their qualifications, and that more qualified candidates are pushed aside;
- Many women do not want to get elected just because they are women;
- Introducing quotas creates significant conflicts within party organizations.

Pros

- Quotas for women do not discriminate, but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from acquiring their fair share of the political seats;
- Quotas imply that there are several women together in a committee or assembly, thus minimizing the stress often experienced by the token women;
- Women have the right to equal representation;
- Women's experiences are needed in political life;
- Election is about representation, not educational qualifications;
- Women are just as qualified as men, but women's qualifications are downgraded and minimized in a male-dominated political system;
- It is in fact the political parties that control the nominations, and it is not primarily the voters who decide who gets elected;
- Introducing quotas may cause conflicts, but only temporarily.

Two Concepts of Equality

In general, quotas for women represent a shift from one concept of equality to another. The classic liberal notion of equality was a notion of "equal opportunity" or "competitive equality". Removing the formal barriers, for example, giving women voting rights, was considered sufficient. The rest was up to the individual women.

Following strong feminist pressure in the last few decades, a second concept of equality is gaining increasing relevance and support: the notion of "equality of result". The argument is that real equal opportunity does not exist just because formal barriers are removed. Direct discrimination, as well as a complex pattern of hidden barriers, prevent women from getting their share of political influence. Quotas and other forms of positive measures are thus a means towards equality of result. The argument is based on the experience that equality as a goal cannot be reached by formal equal treatment as a means. If barriers exist, it is argued, compensatory measures must be introduced as a means to reach equality of result.

Source: <http://www.idea.int/women/parl/ch4b.htm>