

14. There are many obstacles to the growth and development of the Arab women's movement. The repressiveness of regimes leaves little room for public discourse for women or men. A fall out related to the repressiveness of regimes is that religious political movements are often the most vigorous alternative to the repressive regimes. Most of these religious political movements have brought with them further constraints on women's rights. A further related phenomenon to the repressiveness of regimes is that women often cling to family systems which are patriarchal because families provide a security from the state and a security that the state cannot provide.

15. The Arab women's movement is not a unified organization or set of institutions, so it is not possible to argue that the change of 'one' element of the movement will magically transform the movement. That said, the increased democratization of the movement from within women's organizations would be important to opening up future possibilities of growth of the movement. Leadership that invests less in its own reproduction and prioritizes the advance of the goals of the movement is critical. We can envision a future in which a primary goal of leadership is to replace themselves with others who are dedicated and empowered to act on behalf of women's rights.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Suad Joseph (1997) "Shopkeepers and Feminists: The Reproduction of Political Process among Women Activists in Lebanon" in Dawn Chatty and Annika Rabo eds., *Organizing Women: Formal and Informal Groups in the Middle East* (Oxford and New York: Berg).
2. Suad Joseph (2002) "Feminism and Familism", paper presented to the WOCMES conference, Mainz.

Email: sjoseph@ucdavis.edu

#### Fatima Sbaity-Kassem:

*Team Leader, Women Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming, Social Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).*

1. The greatest achievement has been women's acquisition of suffrage rights in many Arab countries. The greatest failure is the limited political participation of women (3.4% of parliamentary seats were occupied by women in 2000). Second, the inability to break with harmful prac-

tices (e.g. FGM) and customs, norms and traditions that limit them.

2. There is no harm in emulating good practices to consolidate the status of Arab women in society; since women are a major partner/stakeholder in the development process.

3. The main reasons are the vacuum in ideologies and disappointment with current political regimes. And Yes, religious fundamentalism could threaten the Arab women's movement if enlightened women activists do not raise gender awareness of the real status of women in Islam.

4. There is room for all types of activities to empower women. In a holistic approach, work should proceed on all fronts and at all levels.

5. Yes, by all means, legislation and laws are the backbone of the Arab women's movement. The gap is still wide between de jure legislation and the laws as they are carried out in practice.

6. Yes, we should form alliances with the West and East and "pick and choose" what is the best for us. Alliances ought to be built with women and men. Arab women should organize!

7. Ignorance, illiteracy and poverty change women's priorities and create a large difference between urban and poor rural women.

8. This is a leading question! But of course, we should push for the pursuit of a more participatory approach to development. In fact, one of the twelve critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action is related to decision-making and power sharing. Good governance is premised on transparency, accountability and responsibility.

9. Obviously more has to be done and the road is still long. Women have to practice what they preach at the domestic level, especially with their children and foreign domestic helpers.

10. Violence against women is not acceptable. Foreign domestic helpers should be treated humanely and with respect. Women should reflect on how they treat their domestic non-Arab helpers and should avoid class discrimination.

11. There are disparities among women in the Arab countries, and women's movements differ

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from one country to another. The short answer to your question is Yes and No. There is no one Arab woman. But there are issues and concerns that are common to all Arab women. The intensity of the problems differs from one country to another and even within the same country between rural and urban areas.

12. The UN Decade for Women (1975-1985), and the subsequent four conferences on women have been instrumental in raising awareness for women's issues and putting these issues on the global agenda. UNIFEM, INSTRAW, the regional commissions and the Division for the Advancement of Women, have played a major role in making the cause of women move forward.

13. This is true. But it may be too early to say what is the impact of this expansion on the culture and agenda of the women's movements. There is more than one women's movement in the Arab world and each has its salient features. This should be documented and explored. Overall the impact should be positive and forward looking.

14. Political instability in the region. Traditions and customs. Legal and alphabetical illiteracy among women. Poverty among women which shifts the focus of their priorities and demands. The dominance of a patriarchal society. Gender-insensitivity or -blindness in our society.

15. I believe in a holistic approach. Therefore, we need to work on all fronts: continue working and believe that you can make a difference; organize, call for solidarity among women; highlight the potential role of women in peace-making; believe in the right to choose; work on changing mentalities and laws.

Email: fkassem@escwa.org

#### Muna Khugali:

*Sudanese citizen, coordinator of the Sudanese National Women's Convention, MPhil/PhD student, University of Westminster, London.*

1. Sudanese women fought hard beside men from the 'forties for the independence of Sudan, achieved in 1956. Thus the women's movement in Sudan did not start as a movement to obtain

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women's rights, but as a political struggle against British colonialism. After independence, women's struggle continued, making demands for Sudanese women's political and civil rights until they got these rights. The first Sudanese woman entered parliament in the 'sixties, and was followed by others. A new era in Sudanese women's lives had started. Through all the political struggles against dictatorship, Sudanese women stood beside men and strengthened the efforts for freedom and rights, which resulted in them enjoying a more advanced status than other women in the region.

The Sudanese Women's Union was the largest women's organization in Sudan, and the one that played the leading role in obtaining and defending women's rights, to the extent of being awarded an international prize in 1993. During the 'seventies, as a result of the Sudanese Women's Union's efforts, Sudanese women were able to get more rights, despite the fact that the Union was accused of being a communist movement, and was banned by the May and June regimes. The following are gains for women made by the Union:

- The right to education for all.
- The right to vote and to be elected.
- The right to employment.
- The right to equal pay for equal work.

The struggle continued for other rights, including campaigns of literacy education, training and raising awareness in many different parts of the country. As a result, more rights were obtained: to maternity leave with full pay; to a free breastfeeding hour; and for a working wife to accompany her husband abroad without losing her job. During the seventies the first Sudanese woman joined the army and the police force; and Sudan was one of the first countries in the area that had women judges in the *Sharia* courts.

But there were also failures:

- The movement seems not to have struggled for the enforcement of laws for the equality of women, though this was also due to the restrictions put by military governments on Sudanese organizations' freedom of expression.
- The movement did not fight enough against the abusive articles of the Personal Law; their fight for the abolition of the '*Bayt al-Ta'a*' (house of obedience) was frozen.
- The issue of female circumcision was not

one of the priorities of the movement.

- The political affiliation of some women's organizations (eg the SWU) with the regime and the boycotting of others, caused the alienation of the Islamists, and resulted in the government supporting their own women cadres and excluding others.

- The structure of women's organizations was and is not transparent and accountable.

- Leadership in women's organizations and their relationship with the grassroots is very weak.

- The long duration of the leadership of the women's organizations without new elections, as well as the conflict between old and new generations, has also affected the growth of the women's movement. To some extent this is due to the absence of democracy and of freedom of work under the military regimes, and the fact that they prohibit open activities, meetings, freedom of movement, and the sense of democracy.

- The belief of some organizations that a united women's movement means dissolving all organizations in one body has made many women prefer not to join the movement.

- The poverty of the women's organizations has made them unable to reach different regions and local organizations.

- They have failed to address the conditions of women in distant areas, especially in the war zones. While there is not at present an united Sudanese women's movement, some women's organizations have recently made attempts at networking, indicating a renaissance of the women's movement. For example there was a co-coordinated effort made by women's organizations, including the Islamic ones, against the Labor Act of 2000, when over 45 women's and civil society organizations sued the government.

Another example of cooperation is the Sudan National Women's Convention, which was held in Kampala, in 2002. 120 women activists representing Sudanese women's organizations and political parties attended the conference. For the first time, women from the war zones joined their sisters from the government-held areas in the conference to discuss their rights together.

There have been other initiatives bringing women's organizations together to work for peace, and one can say that, despite all the

shortcomings, women are working for a united women's movement.

(Qu 2, 3, omitted)

4. Definitely pluralism is good and essential. Women have always proved their strength in fighting for their rights and in obtaining them. Now women are occupying leading positions and have proved their success in their jobs. However, networking between the different specializations is as important as specialization. In some societies, families may refuse to allow women to receive education or other services unless delivered by women, so in these cases it is important to have qualified women to deliver these services. It is the duty of the movement to encourage women from different backgrounds to work in the different areas because pluralism of experience is needed for the advancement of the women's movements. Pluralism is important, and it should be accompanied by a widening of women's participation and the democratization of the organizations.

5. I strongly believe that women and male activists should struggle hard for the reform of family law. Women's organizations and activists, female lawyers and judges should participate in writing the laws, not only because women should always take part in making policy but also because family law mainly affects women. All Arab societies are patriarchal and men have always interpreted religion in ways that serve their interests, and in many cases laws strip women of their rights. Women's participation in writing law will limit male control, and will add justice to the spirit of laws.

6. It is important to benefit from women's experiences in different movements, in the east - Iran, Africa, India, Pakistan - as well as in the west, since the west has a long history of women's struggle. The western schools of feminism have had a profound affect on all women's struggles for rights. Listening and considering doesn't necessarily mean adopting and, given the difference in women's situation in different societies, women need to be careful when dealing with these issues. It is easy for others to accuse them of being 'western affiliated' and so damage their image and work.

7. In the case of Sudan there are many causal factors:

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**Muna Khugali:**

- The absence of democracy that would allow women's organizations to function freely, and to move to the rural areas in order to deliver education and awareness.

- The concept of a women's movement is sometimes limited to political participation, leading to targeting women from the urban areas and neglecting the rural areas. This means lack of communication between educated and uneducated women.

- The emigration of qualified cadres from rural areas to cities.

- In the case of Sudan, the war, the centralization of services in the northern cities, and the economic and political marginalization of the rural areas, has created different classes.

- Poverty deprives women of the time or ability to think about women's rights.

- The high illiteracy in rural regions, especially among women.

- The wide gap in living standards and life style between urban and rural Sudanese women.

- The absence of the concept of women's rights in rural areas, and the prevalence of male domination.

- The extreme distances between cities and villages in Sudan, the lack of proper transport, and the poverty of women's organizations.

8. One of the main reasons for failure of the women's movement in general, is the widespread phenomenon of a few leaders controlling the organizations and ruling without democracy. In our organizations, the phenomenon of the 'life-leader' is a common fact. Women at the grassroots are used as members without being consulted. Some women's organizations are created by governments, and their leaders are appointed according to the government ideology and not according to women's needs. Some are appointed to serve certain individuals, which raises questions about the legitimacy of these organizations. In the absence of legitimacy, credibility is also absent.

There is a fear on the side of the older women leaders and doubts about the new cadres. The women's movement has enough obstacles without this. It should adopt more democratic practices instead of acting like an oppressive regime.

In order to be able to improve the women's orga-

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nizations/movement, they should evaluate themselves and other voices should be heard.

9. Women have gained a better position now in their communities because of their successful efforts to obtain their rights, and because of the active roles they have undertaken in family and society. The image of women has definitely improved in many countries. However, the road of struggle is long and the overwhelming majority of women are still far from full rights. The women's movement is a continuous process of struggle for obtaining rights, and for the enforcement of practice of these rights. This means to seek true equality in gender relations and practice.

10. The first principle in human rights is the right of minorities. In Sudan there are over 400 spoken languages, but only Arabic is officially taught and used. This means discrimination against, and marginalization of, many Sudanese citizens including women. It is important that the women's movement should use the languages of the minorities so to bring them on board, and to create a sense of belonging to the movement amongst them. This would definitely help the movement to spread more and gain strength. The movement can use the local cadres in these minority areas to train women leaders to take leading roles in their communities.

(Qu 11 omitted)

12. The UN declarations on human rights, the conventions (eg. CEDAW), and the UN international and regional conferences on women, have had a great impact. For example the conferences and seminars organized by the UN agencies have brought women from different backgrounds together and enabled them to discuss the issues affecting them. They have also helped women in setting up education and training programmes, and have provided women with opportunities to improve their positions, and to address different issues that matter to them like women's rights, poverty, political participation, etc.

13. This has added strength to the activities of the women's organizations and consequently to the advancement of women's rights. Organizations that lead the women's movement now benefit from the expertise of professionals and scholars. This has definitely improved public ideas of