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From Homeland to AUB

"Young women who want an education will not be stopped." -Freida Pinto-

Life is full of challenges, and being a woman makes them even more challenging.

Throughout the history of mankind, women have faced injustice in different parts of the world. The biggest issues that women confront, particularly in the global South and Third World, are illiteracy and lack of awareness.

For instance, in countries such as Bangladesh and Afghanistan, more than two-thirds of girls are married and have children under the age of 18 or younger. On the other hand, in most Middle Eastern countries, the marriage of teenage girls to older men is unfortunately accepted.

Along with patriarchal society's conventions, traditions, and negative beliefs, women's lack of education and awareness play a significant role in forming such a catastrophic situation. Among the societies of the Middle East, which encompass the southern world, the fundamental concern in these regions is religion, with many laws and practices connected to marriage, divorce, polygamy, child custody, inheritance, and hijab that are derived from interpretations of Islamic law (whether Sunni or Shiite). Even feminists, in the process of trying to change and reform women's rights laws, thought that without the support of rulers and religious intellectuals, they would be unable to fight for these reforms. Unfortunately, this misperception persists, and many women's rights advocates pursue their goals through the lens of religion. As a result, effort should be made in these countries to raise awareness about women's rights and should be addressed independently from the topic of religion.

Furthermore, there is a significant disparity in income between men and women in the world's southern countries. Women are economically dependent, vulnerable, and have no legal standing. Women's labor is underestimated, and they are underpaid. As little more than a result, one of the most important challenges is to define women's labor in these countries. It will be extremely difficult to work toward an equitable and developed society unless women gain economic independence. Since, economic prosperity can be achieved through gender equality, and all of these issues go back to the lack of awareness of society and women themselves about women's rights. So, education is essential for women to understand their rights, believe in their abilities, and attain their goals.

Academic institutions, particularly universities, play a critical role in this process. Universities, as we all know, are the lighthouses of every region and serve as mind-openers. It is not just about academics or obtaining a degree; it is where students get experience of independence, learn to be responsible, think critically, analyze situations from various perspectives, and think out of the box.

When it comes to the American University of Beirut, one of the world's most prestigious universities with a history of 100 years of co-education and a valued mission that supports tolerance, diversity, freedom of opinion, and educational quality, it truly serves the Middle East and beyond.

As previously stated, it is indeed the low level of awareness that causes numerous barriers for women. Therefore, one of the most important steps that the AUB can take is to advocate for women's access to education and literacy in these countries.

This literacy includes awareness of their rights, awareness of the importance of women's employment and their financial income, and defense of their rights through the educational system.

In addition, AUB as a famous institution could share awareness through social media and even through AUB's outlook on discussing women's rights, which could play a major role. Hence, small steps can pave the way for a bright future, and more educated women lead to more sophisticated societies. AUB's role cannot be limited to a few lines, but I want to write about an AUB student who is proud of being a part of this community and is committed to making sure that AUB will be proud of her in the future.

A girl from Afghanistan, the one who believes in equality, freedom of speech, knows the power of her voice, and wants to work toward a world where women and men are seen as equal.

AUB paved the way for her to start a bachelor's degree in her favorite major and live on one of the most beautiful campuses in the world. She grew up in Afghanistan, where she struggled to get an education.

But now, her homeland is being ruined by a group of extremists (the Taliban) that killed innocent children and killed young girls who wanted to go to school. She may be passing these days, watching the news and hoping for some good news about her homeland, where there is uncertainty and endless questions to be answered.

But, being an AUB student and knowing that she is on the right road to reach her destination makes her confident and committed to her goals, and makes her unique enough to be a future leader and agent of positive change for her region.

Throughout history, cultures have sought to silence women's voices and treat them as a second gender. They didn't even allow women to speak for themselves, but I want to ask why women should live in silence and be anonymous? That is why I do not want to be anonymous. The Afghan girl, the little feminist, and the one who has commitment to her goals and is grateful to AUB for providing a great opportunity for her, is me (Yalda Negah).

All in all, AUB has already played a key role in the crucial topic of women's rights, and I am certain that it will continue to do so. The American University of Beirut is not only an academic institution; it is a lifestyle that is truly worth living.

All the best,
The little feminist