

For Immediate Release



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AUB Symposium about Women's Gains in the Moroccan Experience and the Lebanese Track

A symposium entitled "Women's Gains: A Reading in the Moroccan Experience and Possible Options for the Lebanese Track" was held at the American University of Beirut (AUB). The symposium was organized by the Lebanese Association of Women Researchers (Bahithat) and was supported by the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship and the ESCWA Centre for Women (UN).

The themes of the symposium were:

- The Dynamics of Women's Access to Decision-Making
- Women and Legal Reforms through the Moroccan Family Code and Family Law in Lebanon
- Women and the Renewal of Religious Discourse
- Human Development as a Means to Change the Reality of Women in their environment
- Women and citizenship between equity (munasafa) and nationality (jinsiyya).
- Women, national policies and knowledge building

The importance of this symposium stems from its inception as a women's initiative from Lebanon with AUB lecturer and member of Bahithat Dr. Hosn Abboud (Islamic studies and women's issues) and Morocco by sociologist Nazha Ammour.

The symposium aimed to explore the comprehensive reform process that began in Morocco in the late 1990s (1998), when the government declared that women's issues constituted a challenge to democracy, and to consider the possibility of a national reform policy process that would restore the stature of democracy in Lebanon.

The questions raised by the initiators of the symposium were:

- Is it possible to draw on the experience of an Arab-Muslim country in the process of reform desired by Lebanese women, who face exclusion from decision-making and political

participation (3.1%) and suffer from discrimination in the 15 personal status laws of all 18 sects in Lebanon?

- What is the real reason for the failure to lift reservations, mainly concerning the granting by a woman, married to a foreigner, of her nationality to her children and her husband (article 9, second clause)?

- What is the real reason for reservations in individual status relating to the equality of women and men (article 16) in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was signed by Lebanon (1996) and Morocco, with the latter lifting all of its reservations on this convention (2008)?

The symposium reviewed experiences and studies by women in decision-making positions in Morocco. During the first session, the Moroccan Ambassador to Canada (2009-2017) and former Minister for Women, Children, Family and the Handicapped in Morocco Dr. Nouzha Chekrouni spoke about the democratic process in Morocco and her political experience beginning with party work in the Socialist Union of Popular Forces. Chekrouni is firmly convinced that the defense of women's issues is part of the political process.

Parliamentarian Rachida Benmassaoud presented her paper on positive discrimination (women's quota) saying that 30% is the golden ratio for women's equity and participation in legislative decision-making centers, in the political, legal and electoral contexts.

From Lebanon, Dr. Fadia Kiwan presented proposals for a medium-range solution, which she developed in three ways: First, organization of party life and promotion of democratic performance in its ranks; Second, coordination among women organizations with a feminist agenda; Third, preparation of generations of political feminists who possess knowledge and communication skills. Dr. Mary Nassif Debs commented on the three papers presented during the first session.

During the second session, Judge Zuhour al-Hurr presented "The Methodology and Path of Reform in the "Family Code" (mudawwanat al-Ussra), which is considered a "white revolution" in the traditions and customs that no longer reflect contemporary family life in Morocco and women's participation in family expenses (20% of households are provided for by women). The "Family Code" spurred heated debates within the committee charged with drafting it by jurists, civil society and women's movements before the reforms were approved by the king (2004). The Lebanese scholar Judge Abdel Rahman al-Helou addressed some personal status issues in the Lebanese experience with a focus on the Sunni sect in an attempt to explain the most important legal points affecting family life and its cultural, social and economic transformations within the framework of current justice practice in Lebanon. The research papers presented by Judge

Zuhour al-Hurr and Judge Abdel-Rahman al-Helou, were commented on by Judge Wael Tabbara, who reviewed the full spectrum of Lebanese reality.

The session on "Renewal of Religious Discourse" was commented on by Dr. Ridwan al-Sayyid who described the development of the "renewal of religious discourse". He argued that it falls on Muslims to accommodate the international agreements on religious and cultural specificities, and to use a discourse of mercy, tranquility and universal common values.

The director of the Center for Studies and Research on Women's Issues in Islam, Dr. Asma' al-Morabit then presented a reform approach to women's issues and Islam, using the example of the Muhammadan League of Morocco's 'Ulamah as a model. Dr. al-Morabit has been working for a decade and writing pioneering books including: "Quran and Women: A Reading for Liberation" (2010); "Islam and Women: The Third Way" (2014) and "Women and Men in the Quran: What Equality?" (2015). Al-Morabit carries out a liberal reading of the Qur'an. In the same session on "Renewal of the Religious Discourse," the Lebanese lawyer Dr. Hania Hammoud presented questions to the Lebanese religious establishment about its rigidity and social reality in Lebanon. Dr. Dima Dabbous analyzed the discussions in the Islamic Sunni courtroom to raise the age of custody in the Personal Status Law (12 years for both sexes).

The session before last was devoted to the reservations on articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), most notably the granting of the nationality of a woman married to a foreigner, to her children and husband (art. 9, part 2).

Dr. Fahmiyya Charafeddin, a founding member of the National Committee for Follow-up on Women's Issues and contributor to the shadow report on the progress made in the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in Lebanon (CEDAW) in Lebanon, raised this question of nationality, which has ceased to be an issue in many countries, including Morocco, Egypt and Sudan.

"The National Initiative for Human Development in Morocco and the process of alleviating the poverty of women: A model for development in the service of women," was presented by the National Coordinator for Human Development, Dr. Nazira El-Kerma'y. She was joined by Adib Nemah, Regional Adviser in the ESCWA, who presented "elements of comparison between Morocco and Lebanon: Between a Central State present and active with a plan expressed in national policies and a weak state distracted and occupied by projects outside gender equality and the status of women in legislation, politics and society".

Participants in this session were Randa Buhamdan of Lebanon's Ministry of Social Affairs, Raghda Darwish and Fadia Jrady of Ibdaa Microfinance Company and Dr. Nasser Yassin (AUB,IFS) who detailed the profile of development policies in Lebanon.

During the last session, Ms. Hanan Ennadir, an advisor to the Moroccan Ministry of Women headed by Mrs. Busaima Haqqawi, addressed the role of women in society and the creation of public equality policies.

The symposium ended with a talk by Dr. Hosn Abboud entitled "For the Purpose of Building Knowledge on the Concepts of 'Qiwama' (Quranic ruling of men's guardianship over women) and 'Wilaya' (men's mandate on women and children)." These two concepts coincide and intersect in family status law, and are defined differently by traditional jurists and modern scholars. This talk referred to the open and peaceful scholarly exchange of knowledge about Islam in Morocco. It showed how these concepts must be reinterpreted in light of the definition of the marriage in the new Moroccan Family Code and its emphasis on couple responsibility (2004, article 4).

The symposium's committee, composed of Dr. Hosn Abboud, Nouzha Ammour, Dr. Fadia Kiwan, and Dr. Amal Habib, will convene very soon with some symposium participants from Morocco and Lebanon in order to highlight the lessons learned. After that, recommendations will be drafted and submitted to the authorities concerned with women and the legislative and political reforms in Lebanon.

ENDS

For more information please contact:

Simon Kachar
Director of News and Media Relations
Mobile: 03427024 Office: 01374374 Ext: 2676
Email: sk158@aub.edu.lb

Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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