

DEBATE

Mona Makram EBEID, Egyptian Senator and former member of Parliament, Distinguished Lecturer, Political Science Department, American University in Cairo

The floor is now open for any questions.

Riad TABET, President of Berit International Holding SA

Je voudrais remercier Mesdames les conférencières pour cet exposé clair sur la situation de la femme dans nos pays arabes mais j'ai une question importante à leur poser. Ce matin même et hier, en Turquie, les femmes sont descendues dans les rues pour protester contre un projet de loi sur l'abrogation ou la dépenalisation des abus sexuels sur les mineurs. Une loi qui a été faite du temps du gouvernement laïc d'Atatürk. Je voudrais poser la question sur le rapport entre la modernité et l'Islam sur ce sujet de l'abus sexuel sur les mineurs.

Mona Makram EBEID, Egyptian Senator and former member of Parliament, Distinguished Lecturer, Political Science Department, American University in Cairo

Je vais répondre brièvement. Je ne pense pas qu'il y ait un lien entre la modernité et les abus sexuels contre les mineurs. Aujourd'hui c'est considéré comme un crime - et non seulement comme une condamnation contre la liberté des femmes mais comme un crime qui doit être jugé. Et cela dans plusieurs pays, entre autres l'Egypte, qui a changé le code pénal pour en faire un crime passible de prison. Je regrette de le dire mais cette violence contre les mineurs est assez étendue dans le monde arabe.

Hamda Hassan AL-SULAITI, Secretary General, Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science

Rape is prohibited by Islam and is criminal in law; it is also criminalised by international instruments and laws. In addition, it is unacceptable from a human position.

Ram RASSIF

Good morning. I would like to extend my thanks to Dr Mona. I believe she is a woman for all times and ages and Dr Hamda as well. In reality, I have no doubt that education plays a big role. In Qatar, education has taken women from an era of marginalisation to an era of efficiency and productivity. This is something we have seen. However, the perception remains of how, not how many. It is not sufficient to say that education has achieved this or that, and give figures. We want an educational efficiency that is truly reflected in the character of men and women.

I do not want to be lengthy; I have read the 2015 Human Development Report. Qatar, witnessed by the whole world, has come first among Arab countries. The pillars of development are threefold: education, health, and income level. Qatar has come first on an Arab level; however, it did not rank as expected on an international level. The reason, please do not misunderstand me, it was said that there is discrimination between men and women because women have not so far had enough opportunities and have not achieved enough economically and politically. The report states that women's presence is not obvious in those two sectors, the economy and the political realm. What about education? Is it truly the responsibility of women? This is the real gap. This is the real shortcoming that has delayed us from being in the best position among the countries of the world. Is it a problem of women, of education, or of authorities that employ and recruit?

My last observation is that empowering women is quintessential for human development. However, we should also discuss the obstacles and hindering factors before women's empowerment and access to political and economic positions so that we can truly rank among the best countries at either Arab or international level. Thank you.

Mona Makram EBEID, Egyptian Senator and former member of Parliament, Distinguished Lecturer, Political Science Department, American University in Cairo

Thank you for your courage and I will answer you; the reason is this male-dominated society. I will give the floor to Miss Hamda to answer you.

Hamda Hassan AL-SULAITI, Secretary General, Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science

I have read the competition report and, indeed, the state of Qatar has achieved a very good position amongst Arab countries. What truly affected it is the issue of women's empowerment at the political level. At the economic level, we do not have any problem. The main cause for concern was the lack of equal opportunities in the political realm. This is linked to a number of issues, as you mentioned, Doctor, in your comments, partly the authorities who recruit, some of the policies adopted, and the patriarchal perception could be another reason. These are issues that we have to focus on and look for solutions to fill the gap. Since we have made great strides in terms of human development, we will need a little more work on this. We have to devise a strategy so that we fill this gap.

Iman

My name is Iman and I come from Oman. Dr Mona and I were together two years ago in Egypt and discussed the political empowerment of women in the political arena. That was one of our recommendations, that we have to push for women in the arena of politics, whether Jamal Aribya or the United Nations, etc. My question, as well as my concern today in the World Policy Conference, is that we have hardly seen women as speakers, only associates or journalists. Do we not have speakers and talented women who could speak on issues that concern our world? As Mackenzie says, if we push women into the arena of politics, more things will be solved. Do you not agree with me?

Mona Makram EBEID, Egyptian Senator and former member of Parliament, Distinguished Lecturer, Political Science Department, American University in Cairo

I agree with you entirely, and I have always said that there are too many trousers in this particular WPC; we want some more skirts. However, what I am going to tell you now is that women must engage in civil society. It is not enough to just say 'We want equality'. You must engage; you must enter civil society. This is what I did when I first started my political career 20 years ago, so today we have the feminist union which was established where you were last year, in Cairo. There are also many other similar organisations for women. There must be regional coordination of women in the region, because most of them face exactly the same challenges. I must say that Qatar has made leaps forward in a few years. My sister will answer now.

Nesreen Abdulla AL-HASHIMI

I am a Professor of Chemistry at Qatar University and currently serving on the Committee to Colleges the Head of Effectiveness. I wanted to comment on a few points made by both the guest speakers today.

Firstly, I would just like to elaborate on what Dr Hamda has said about women's education in the Gulf and certainly in Qatar. The shape of women's education in the Gulf is very similar but it is completely different from North Africa. In



fact, the government encourages women to continue in higher education, so much so that we are suffering at the University of Qatar and the community college where 70% of the student population are women and we are challenged by attracting more male students than female students in this country. Therefore, even though the government and the leadership encourages women and has opened the arena to every well-educated women to pursue their career and achieve the highest level, I believe that society is not ready to accommodate women in every area, as my colleague said in politics and economics. Those are only two examples of sectors in which women are prevented from entering.

The other point I wanted to make was that you mentioned something about the cultural and religious environment of Arab countries that is generating movements such as ISIS, Daesh, etc. As Gulf nations, we believe that Daesh did not grow organically but was implemented and implanted through intervening in Iraq and ...

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Can you please ask your question? We only have one minute.

Nesreen Abdulla AL-HASHIMI

I will ask you. The problem is the environment, the culture, and the religion of the region is generating things like Daesh, etc. However, if you really look at it, a lot of the fighters are from Europe or North America.

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What is your question?

Nesreen Abdulla AL-HASHIMI

Do you really think that Arab culture, religion, and environment are generating these movements?

Mona Makram EBEID, Egyptian Senator and former member of Parliament, Distinguished Lecturer, Political Science Department, American University in Cairo

Neither I nor my colleague said that. Now we would like to close because people are hungry. Thank you all for your attention and for being so involved in women's issues.