Strengthening the Role of Women Parliamentarians in the Arab Region: Challenges and Options

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arab women's entry into the political arena is not without its difficulties. With the lowest regional average of women Members of Parliament in the world, the Arab world ranks at 3.5% only, according to the statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union. As such, Arab women face a number of challenges:

Economy: Poverty and illiteracy are still features of the majority of women, and as such constitute significant stumbling blocks in their attempts to spread awareness and the necessary opportunities for social and political development;

❖ Culture: Many mind-sets in the Arab word remain fixed on certain unchanging notions of a 'woman's place', and many of the existing political institutions reflect a male-dominated and male-oriented culture as well;

❖ Freedom of Association: Laws governing this feature, as well as related organisational concerns within the non-governmental sector, and the necessary networking skills among NGOs and politicians, still constitute stumbling blocks for developments;

❖ Political Parties: The role played by political parties remains in need of re-evaluation and revamping by the parties themselves. In many instances, some of these political parties perpetuate (and mirror) the same technical and operative difficulties faced by large regimes and bureaucracies. The support of political parties for their women members needs to be systematically strengthened and encouraged.

❖ The Media: The role the media plays in promoting women politicians is still highly problematic. Mirroring all the prejudices in society is unhelpful for women wishing to further their political careers. To that end, increased networking and training for women politicians with media personnel remains a need.

The paper then goes on to briefly present the mechanisms which enhance women's legislative *presence*, looking specifically at aspects such as the need for a 'critical mass' in various political institutions generally and in parliament particularly; the arguments for and against quotas (reserved seats); and the impact of different electoral systems operating in the Arab world today.

Bringing in a comparative international dimension, the paper presents a table (SHOW Table 1) outlining various mechanisms for women to enhance their legislative *performance*. These mechanisms revolve around 'the Rules strategy' and its three main pillars: learning the rules, using the rules, and changing the rules. The idea being that a number of rules – written and unwritten – govern a great deal of the interaction within and without parliaments. Women MPs are immediately either directly or more subtly confronted with these rules in their every-day job. The need to understand what these rules are therefore, and the need to be able to use them for their own benefit become extremely important tools in the process of making an impact on the parliamentary process. The Table indicates various step-by-step suggestions for women MPs to use – at their discretion – in order to achieve their desired aims.

The final section of this paper looks at the role that international organisations can play – particularly the UN - to promote women's political participation. A number of suggestions are made relating to the need to

- ❖ assist in enhancing democratisation endeavours;
- ❖ facilitate access to knowledge/information and technology;
- ❖ encourage concerted efforts to collect more gender-segregated data;
- ❖ provide training and know-how, promote further necessary research, and last but not least, linking economic and political co-operation with specific remuneration schemes for men and women MPs.

The paper concludes by arguing that Arab women politicians in general, and MPs in particular, need to critically assess the progress they have made thus far, such that they can collate the lessons learned from their experiences, while setting themselves some very clear targets for the future.

Ends.
Azza Karam
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Strengthening the Role of Women Parliamentarians in the Arab Region: Challenges and Options[1]

"I do not even think it is necessary for us to talk about being in politics as women, we must do our work and do it well - showing our strength through our work and thereby saying here we are, reckon with us" (Farkhanda Hassan, member of the ruling National Democratic Party, Egypt).

Introduction:

Latest (September 1999) statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) indicate that the Arab world has 3.4% or less of women in its respective legislatures. According to these statistics, this is the lowest *regional* figure in the world, following Sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific (each with 11.7% and 13.7% respectively), and with the leaders in this domain being the Nordic countries, with as much as 38.9%.

Parliaments are where many of the decisions that affect the lives of ordinary people are debated and passed as law. In theory, parliaments are the quintessential democratic forum where popular political participation is both reflected and emanated, so the importance of these fora cannot be underestimated. Hence, the fact that the Arab world 'enjoys' such a small percentage, gives rise to many questions, the most burning of which is why? This question becomes particularly interesting when the context of the region is taken into account. The Arab world is part of what used to be known as the Orient - a region of the world which was colonised for many years, and the staid study of which was shattered by the well-known work of Edward Said (1978) and others. In his seminal work, *Orientalism,* Said laid bare the extent to which colonial history, and its intellectual legacy, resulted in knowledge produced about the region being as biased and disfiguring as the colonial experience itself was. The Orient is one of the regions of the world where women are still largely perceived by the western world as subordinated, oppressed and subjugated in various ways. In much of western popular imagination, the Arab world is frequently associated with veiled women, men with long beards, religious fundamentalism (inevitably Islamic), terrorism, war, and hostage-taking. Moreover, the line between Arab and Islamic culture and traditions is hardly drawn by the

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[1] This paper is an edited and reformulated version of an earlier paper entitled 'Democrats Without Democracy: Women and Politics in the Arab World' in Shirin Rai (ed.) *Women and Democratisation* (London: Macmillan, in print).

average layperson. All together, both the region and its women remain interesting objects of (mis)information. The available statistics reinforce the above images of women's exclusion.

And yet, Arab women outnumber men in some countries, and historically, have a long legacy of activism – politically, economically, and culturally. In addition, their influence on a larger political arena (one that makes room for non-governmental organisations) is also vast, since, traditionally, women have been most active in the charity sectors of the Arab countries. So why the extremely low and unrepresentative legislative representation?

The Concepts:

In order to address the issues posed by such statistics, certain concepts need to be clarified, what is the Arab world and, most importantly what is meant by 'politics'? The Arab world, at the simplest level, is a term which is used to refer to all twenty-one countries, extending from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf[1], which have Arabic as their official language, and which share common (though by no means identical) historical and political trajectories. Needless to say, each country differs from its neighbours as well as encompasses a great deal of diversity within its own borders. In the case of Palestine, for instance, the specificities of the Israeli occupation and the ongoing struggles, characterise a great deal of the political dynamics within the territories, let alone the entire region. It is not the purpose of this paper to deal with all of these countries, since such an endeavour would require enormous resources and data. Rather, the idea is to mention as many as are relevant to the issues raised, which are: current impediments facing increased political participation, as well as achievements and successes of women in politics.

An important and formative feature of political development in the Arab world is that of nascent democracies. With the exception of Palestine, Lebanon, Algeria, and Yemen, few of the Arab countries have democratically elected political leaders . In fact, the Arab leaders of today represent an impressive continuity with the past. This is not to say that elections have never taken place in the other countries, the issue is rather that democratic, free, and fair elections, which involve choice of the populace of their leadership and representation, participation, and an eventual change of government, have yet to happen. What this virtually translates into is a situation where politics in general, and democracy in particular, form a complex domain: complete with electoral apathy, personalised and often unaccountable leadership, and the lack of credible and legitimate ruling structures. This is the larger framework within which women 'do' politics in the Arab world. Far from being a

homogenous disempowered group therefore, Arab women are a diverse group of democrats in search of a democratic structure. To lay out the ground for this argument, the understanding of politics itself is looked at, followed by a closer look at the various common challenges Arab women in particular face. The latter section of the paper is an overview of the different political arena within which Arab women 'do' politics.

On Politics:

Like in most countries, politics in the Arab world is identified with the 'public' sphere which men occupy and continue to dominate. This notion, however, has been sufficiently challenged by feminists on several grounds (Karam 1998a;Farahat 1996;Al-Bizri 1995). The argument being that a 'public' sphere in and of itself denotes a dichotomy - that of a supposedly 'private' one. Till today, many would still distinguish between that which takes place within the four walls of a household and that which takes place 'out there' in the public domain. Many feminist writers and activists have challenged both the dichotomy, as well as the exclusivity of definition and application of the term 'politics'. The boundaries between public and private are argued to be far less consolidated, consistent, and universal than assumed. Moreover, what is taken for politics - participation - is wide enough to include a plethora of different activities and interests. It is argued, for instance, that participation, particularly in decision-making, takes place at all levels of any society. Such arguments eventually lead to the by now famous - and still controversial edict - 'the personal is political'.

In fact, the boundary between the personal and public spaces has often diminished - if not exploded - in different parts of the world. Charles and Hintjens (1998) mention the feature of motherhood and political activism where the private and the political merged to one, citing the cases from Argentina, Chile, and Algeria, among others, where women publicly demonstrated and participated in defending families and communities. Similarly, in describing the Arab world, many authors have pointed out the permeability of the boundaries between the public and private spaces (Nelson 1974; Mernissi 1985, 1993; Tucker 1993; Sharara-Beydoun 1998; Karam 1998; Bodman and Tohidi 1998). The arguments ranged from the religious ones which argue that the dichotomy is only a recent construct since it did not exist in the early days of Islam, to those which maintain that each and every interaction and sphere is a political space which involves power and authority.

However, it is still largely perceived to be the case that 'politics' is really the stuff of parliaments, heads of state, foreign policy and such institutions. So much so that even within

the existing and established 'political institutions' (e.g. parliament), a distinction tends to be made between 'soft political issues' and 'hard politics', where the former refers to policies dealing with welfare, children, maternity, and the like, and the latter with such issues as defence, budget, foreign policy, and so on. A rather ironic feature of this distinction is made on the assumption that 'soft' issues are those that 'have to do with women or women's issues'. which begs the question whether other policies are 'men's issues'? Has it ever been the case that whether it is a budget deficit, inflation, or war, these would tend to affect men only? Or perhaps it is simply taken for granted that welfare, caring for the elderly, or caring for children, are really aspects which are, ultimately, women's business.

While challenging these artificial binaries, I would argue that despite the oddity of these often unwritten distinctions, to have arrived at a notion of 'soft politics' is, in and of itself, a massive leap forward. This is because it implies that some of the so-called 'women's issues' are nevertheless, 'political'. Hence, women's political participation has grown to encompass not only women's access to political institutions, but also the nature of the issues that are dealt with. It is undoubtedly the case that many of these issues would not have merited any mention in 'established' political spaces, had it not been for women campaigning, lobbying, entering, and in some cases, espousing and putting forward some of these issues on the agendas.

However, this is not to say that all women politicians adopt - or are even keen to take on - similar issues. In fact, many would shy away from any – but particularly public - involvement in discussions on 'women's issues'. One can go so far as to maintain that it is precisely because of this attitude that we have a persistent notion of 'real' politics as seemingly coinciding with 'male' interests and activities. It is very much the case that in many parts of the world, women who have entered male-dominated 'political' spaces, either refuse to - or are simply unaware of - take up so-called 'women's issues'. The reasons for this are numerous. Shvedova[2], in an analysis of the major impediments women face to enter parliaments world-wide (impediments which actually apply to any political space), mentions one of the most oft-recurring arguments: to take up 'women's issues' is to marginalise one-self further in a male-dominated sphere, which does not give much credibility to such 'soft' issues in the first place. A related rhetorical excuse is why should women go for women's issues just because they are women - do men go for issues just because they are men? It is interesting to note that the answer to the latter question is most likely to be in the affirmative, since any politician, given the choice, would tend to go for issues which interest them and are

related to their own lives. Extending that logic further may lead to the implication that some women politicians are perhaps uninterested in women's rights in their own surroundings. Whereas in fact, a number of studies have indicated that it is precisely because of women's presence in political spaces, that these 'politics of care' issues have been put on the agenda in the first place (Dahlerup 1988; van der Ros 1989; Skjeie 1998). Most of these valuable insights, however, focus on countries in the western hemisphere, and can therefore not speak to the realities of other parts of the world.

While the mainstream understanding of politics (including among many women) remains limited to the formal domains, feminists have fought and succeeded in broadening the definition of politics to include diverse work and strategies carried out in different non-governmental fora. Jill Bystydzienski captures best the description of the strategies and definition referred to in this paper:

> …interpersonal networking, grass-roots economic development projects, protests of many kinds, and use of traditional women's activities in the cause of national liberation, and involvement in nongovernmental and informal women's groups and organizations…politics includes people's everyday experiences of oppressive conditions, the recognition of the injustice of power relationships at all societal levels (1992:4).

It is precisely this outlook which enables one to look at the Arab world, and bring to light the different forms of politics that women are, and have been, involved in for more than a hundred years. Whether in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco or Egypt, women's involvement in politics has historically spanned a range of activities which invariably began with different forms of social, and/or charity work since the end of the last century. Involvement in liberation struggles (such as in Palestine, Egypt, Algeria, and the Sudan to name but a few), or in civil wars (such as in Algeria, Yemen and in Lebanon), or simply in social development and the demand for their civil and political rights (in almost all Arab countries), have been fertile grounds for women's political activism.

Moreover, the process of women's political participation fits into a certain pattern whereby the women's issue tends to be seen as part and parcel of a larger struggle. In the early part of the century, the struggle was for freedom from colonial rule. In the 1950s it was a struggle to implement socialism and Arab nationalism. In the 1980s and 1990s, the struggle is one of democratisation and human rights. Many feminists in the Arab world are arguing that it is now time to prioritise women's rights above all other struggles, rather than subsuming them[3]. Although there seems to be more sympathy with this perspective, there remains a general preference, from a strategic and moral point of view, not to divide the

issues. In the words of one Palestinian MP "how are we going to argue for women's rights above all else, when our human right to exist and truly govern ourselves as a people, is denied us?"[4].

Common Challenges For Women's Entry into Politics and Parliaments

As mentioned earlier, each Arab country has its own highly detailed, complex and unique set of historical, social, cultural and political conditions. Yemen's existence as two separate states, its unification, eventual civil war and reunification, for example, differs from the consequences of Qaddafi's populist regime in Libya, or those of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, or of Al-Assad in Syria. And these in turn, differ from the particularities of the occupied Palestinian territories, the civil war and reconstruction efforts in Lebanon, or the monarchic regimes of either Morocco or Jordan, and yet again from the strong characteristics of the Tunisian state.

Yet, there are common characteristics shared by women in the Arab world. The most prominent of these is what Hisham Sharabi (1998:3) elaborates as 'neopatriarchy'. Sharabi argues that neopatriarchy is the mixture of both patriarchy and dependency, where the former is a feature of how power has consistently exercised and manifested itself internally, and the latter is the interaction with external forces - i.e. pressures that come with the pursuit of modernisation. Sharabi's main contention is that pressures of modernity - which today would be more adequately referred to as the consequences of globalisation in terms of the spread of similar information, economic facets, as well as cultural and political frameworks - have in fact, strengthened patriarchal norms and values.

Globalisation is here understood as two seemingly contradictory processes: on the one hand certain traits and values are incorporated into local cultures (e.g. fast food and 'McDonaldisation'); and on the other hand, a self-reflexive and more localised process takes place wherein what are considered to be authentic values are restated and redesigned in the face of perceived threats of cultural and political 'loss'. It is in the reinstatement of such values in the Arab world, as evidenced for example through ideologies of political Islam, that women tend to get most affected, and neopatriarchy unfolds. Neopatriarchy is also a feature of relations between the state and the non-governmental sectors, particularly women's organisations, as well as the varying degrees of violence and tension in some parts of the Arab world between

the state and Islamist[5] groups. It could thus be argued that neopatriarchy, with its impact on women, may be a localised backlash against globalisation.

These issues are at the heart of a contemporary debate in most of the Arab world, namely does the state 'give' women certain rights, or do women themselves have to continue to struggle for their rights. The role of the state is a thus a very important feature of the reality of women and politics in the Arab world. Some women politicians and researchers alike would maintain that the state plays a pivotal role in granting women rights they demand, as in the Tunisian case where it is maintained that the relatively unique progressive status of Tunisian women's rights (among almost all other Arab countries) would not be in evidence today had it not been for the strong role played by the government. Indeed, the Tunisian case does pose a dilemma, since it cannot be argued that Tunisian women struggled more than their Arab counterparts to obtain gender equality mirrored in progressive legislation. Egyptian women boast the first organised feminist movement in the Arab world, dating back to more than a hundred years, and yet, compared to the Tunisians, Egyptian women have some way to go to achieve similar legal and social norms for gender equality. So why, then, is Tunisia the only Arab country where equality between women and men is legally enshrined? The answer to this question points to the role played by the state, and - most notably in the context of the Arab world - to the 'condition' of democracy: the personalised-leadership nature of the political system, and thus the role of the ruler himself, in adopting and implementing issues. The history of the Arab region is littered with political 'moments' where some leaders tried to implement or bring about certain legislative reform (some of which could be considered 'progressive', e.g. Sadat's attempts to change the Personal Status Laws in early 1980), but were either rebutted or prevented from doing so through more conservative cultural elements in the respective societies. Often, these elements speak in the name of religion or culture.

Economic Challenges -
Apart from the impact of globalisation, authoritarian political systems, and religious frameworks, Arab women share with each other, as well as with other women, many features which impact on their political participation. Illiteracy and poverty are among the most common of those features. According to the United Nations Development Programme, overcoming illiteracy and facilitating the access of women to reproductive health and credit are key to any form of development for women anywhere in the world[6]. According to the *Women in the World Atlas*[7], illiteracy levels in most of the Arab world countries fall between

51% to 75% for women, even though countries like Egypt, Jordan and Morocco, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Chad have all witnessed an increase in the proportion of literate women between 1970 and 1990, of one and a half, two and a half and more than three times respectively (pp.74-75).

As far as poverty is concerned, it is noteworthy that only in Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco is the percentage of the population living below the national poverty line known, and then it falls within the 10% to 25% level (which is similar to that of the USA and Canada). Similar information for the rest of the Arab world seems to be unknown, and sex-segregated information is not readily available either, but one can expect that the rate of women living on or even under the poverty line, would tend to be low.

Poverty is a feature of the economics of survival. A related issue is economic independence in and of itself. Although the main religion in the Arab world entitles women to the right to keep their own income and own their property, some family dynamics dictate that the man, as the head of the family, is the one who actually keeps and controls the sources of wealth. What this translates into is a situation where some women have no economic means to disengage from their daily struggle for survival. Those that can afford to - as in the case of the large majority of women politicians in the Arab world who generally come from the well-off classes - have relatively fewer financial means at their disposal than their male colleagues. As one experienced Egyptian trade union activist said, "those of us who have made it to being elected to decision-making posts, did so not because we could afford it financially, but because we were able to mobilize or win over a volunteer force of largely male solidarity and support - no wonder few women can make it"[8]. Raising financial support therefore, is yet another hurdle facing women politicians. However, whereas it is seen as legitimate for a man to appear financially capable, and indeed, ambitious, this would not apply to women. In fact, a Tunisian woman MP narrates that "for a woman politician to be credible and politically viable, the unspoken condition is for her to have no financial ambitions" (as quoted in Hassan 1997:53). In other words, it will be a long time before we hear of a successful Arab woman politician who is also a rich business-woman. In fact, it would seem that not only is access to finances difficult, but the attempt to seek financial influence is itself seen as a possible disqualifier from the political arena. Women politicians are expected to be without even the desire to be financially powerful. Although this is unreasonable, a likely explanation is that in order to enter into the traditional male territory of politics, women must prove that they can do a better job at it than their male colleagues. Hence even the hint of any corruptability

(where corruption is almost synonymous with financial dealings) and particularly in a context where women are generally perceived as 'wily' and 'devious' (i.e. untrustworthy) must be eliminated.

Still on the subject of economics, one of the outcomes of mismanaged or overprotected local industries (which in the long run result in government deficit-spending, heavy borrowing, and poverty), are structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) imposed on many Arab countries by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). SAPs often involve forcing governments to retract from the public sector through subsidy cuts on basic commodities and services, in the name of cutting government expenditure, encouraging a private sector, encouraging exports, and reducing budgetary deficits. The problem with SAPs is that while they are indeed forcing governments to withdraw subsidies on basic commodities and services, many of these heavily state-controlled economies had no alternative capable and dynamic private sector. Hence, the withdrawal of the state in many countries[9] created a vacuum. In many instances this vacuum is being filled by non-governmental associations and networks with varying degrees of success. Non-governmental organisations, or NGOs, took over a wide range of activities, from education, to health, to political consciousness-raising to religious education, to social work and the provision of all kinds of basic services.

Religion and Culture -

Some viewpoints maintain that the cultures of the Arab world, particularly those which identify themselves with Islam, are the root cause of women's low political representation. Such arguments can and do take as 'proof' the fact that countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for example, forbid women political suffrage – let alone parliamentary representation. Apart from being generally rejected, this argument has been refuted quite strongly by those who point out that such perceptions form an essentialisation (and therefore distortion) of Islam. Those who argue against such essentialisation maintain that firstly, what is at issue is not so much the religion per se, but a broader aspect of neopatriarchy, which may also be found in societies such as Latin America with its own notions of 'machismo' (the domineering and all-powerful male).

Secondly, it is not culture alone that impacts on women's political participation, but a whole host of other factors combine to render the situation as it is. Moghadam rightly asserts that Islam and culture are not the sole determinant of women's status, but argues, in faithful Marxist fashion, that state ideology, economic development, and class location are also

crucial determinants. As she succinctly asserts: "a sex/gender system may be identified, but to ascribe principal explanatory power to religion and culture is methodologically deficient, as it exaggerates their influence and renders them timeless and unchanging" (1993:14).

NGOs:

In most parts of the Arab world, however, NGOs have not come without their own baggage of problems. Generally speaking, the freedom to set up such associations or organisations, is legally curtailed by most of the Arab states. If and when NGOs are allowed to come into existence, the restrictions imposed on them are numerous, and tend to range from not being allowed to work on any 'political' issues, to having their finances curtailed and each decision subject to approval by a board which, according to legal stipulations, includes a government official or representative. Recent new laws governing associations in Egypt and Palestine point to the strengthening of the tendency to curtail the political activities of NGOs, and their submission to state control.

Hence the often heated debates and wide-ranging scepticism as to the extent to which the 'non' in non-governmental is genuine. Nevertheless, the restrictions have also meant that NGOs are finding increasingly creative ways to avoid government control. Hence the appeal in many Arab countries for the importance of respect for democracy and human rights and, within that framework, the respect for the freedom of association, in order to facilitate the tasks of the functioning of NGOs.

One of the aspects that NGOs became increasingly involved with - again, with varying levels of success - is women's political participation. Although there are no definite figures for the total number of NGOs dealing with women's issues in the Arab world, they are roughly estimated to be in the thousands. Assessments of their role in promoting women's political participation differ, but there is overall consensus that despite the immense competition over resources between these organisations, and despite the accusations that they are too numerous and spend more time on bickering among themselves, they *are* filling in a vacuum and performing a useful function in mobilizing public opinion and making visible women's issues.

One of the common features of women in politics in the Arab world, voiced by both women politicians as well as those involved with politics from NGOs, is the mutual accusations that neither listens to the other. This lack of communication is seriously hampering a collaboration which could bear many fruits for Arab women. As the experience

of countries as far apart as Norway, Sweden and South Africa shows, networking between women's interest groups and women politicians is crucial in the successful institutionalisation of gender equality policies[10].

Political parties

This is another domain where networking between the different groups dealing with women's issues and/or those including women, comes up very frequently. Many a debate still echoes within Arab political parties on whether to set up a separate section or secretariat for women within a party, or whether to avoid that and thus see women's concerns as a feature of all of the party's agendas. Both arguments have their pros and cons, but one feature remains highly indicative: *as long as women's concerns are seen as of secondary priority, then it remains politically unwise to assume that mainstreaming (the spreading of) gender concerns can occur without a clear-cut emphasis and an agenda*. As yet, women's presence within political parties has not led to the mainstreaming of gender issues in political agendas. This battle, though still being waged in many contexts, has yet to be won.

Moreover, numerous cases have highlighted that women are at best, subservient to the party line, and at worst, disillusioned with their party's lack of support. A former Lebanese woman MP, echoing several women members of parliaments all over the world, said

> [t]he party may have a standpoint on an issue which I disagree with. However, as a member of parliament representing this party, and particularly as one of the handful - if that - of women, I cannot afford to oppose this. If I do, I might as well run as an independent and that means zero support and much opposition to even *get into* the parliament[11].

A Tunisian woman MP, again in an echo of many others, says "relying on the political party to support us to get into positions of power is not feasible. Very often, being a member of the party is seen as sufficient recognition. In any case, a party is a reflection of the society anyway, so my male colleagues, including the ones on top, may not necessarily wish me that well... we need intra-party democracy"[12]. A Yemeni woman MP complained that women in political parties were useful as 'vote-fodder', once their votes were obtained, they were seen as more or less redundant[13].

The lack of intra-party democracy forms an important reason why political parties often have little or no credibility. Many of the existing political parties in the Arab region, like the political systems within which they function, lack democracy, creativity, vigour, and therefore, appeal. To exist in these conditions, a party must 'tow the government line', which

effectively means a muted discourse of opposition. Many of the leaders of Arab parties are either the presidents in power, or men that have been around for the last 20 years at least, while other party members may include men of questionable democratic credentials e.g. in Egypt. In other cases, some political parties may be tarnished with the role they played during conflict. In Lebanon during the civil war for example, many political parties lost their credibility due to the nature of the alliances made and the manner in which the conflict itself was escalated and manipulated by some parties. All these factors culminate and reinforce a general political apathy, and a particular lack of interest or faith in political parties in the Arab world. As politicians, women are thus faced with the challenge of party politicking and competition from within, presenting an alternative image of doing politics, as well as wooing an electorate that no longer believes in either the political process, the party, or women as politicians. Even if the electorate has faith in the process, the possibility to articulate political concerns democratically and in a representative fashion, is itself, largely illusive.

Media

Another facet of communication and one of the factors which most women activists as well as politicians would agree upon, is the role of the media. Images of women in the media is a subject which has attracted increasing attention over the last few years from many writers. The Arab world has its fair share of these studies, although the material available about women in the media and the impact on political participation is not as much. A symposium was held in Cairo towards the end of 1997, as a regional follow-up to the international Cairo and Beijing meetings earlier on. The seminar was entitled 'Arab Women in Public Life', and it brought together several women members of parliament, political parties, as well as researchers from Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. The symposium, which was followed by a series of follow-ups and similar gatherings in the region, is notable largely because of its failure to address the issue of women and media. In a similar gathering in Amman in 1997, the importance of media was mentioned almost only in passing. All women - researchers and politicians alike - would agree that women are portrayed in all manner of media as "either angels or whores", the strong characters are presented as domineering, sly and generally untrustworthy and unpleasant; whereas the nicer characters are usually the quieter, loyal mothers and obedient, long-suffering housewives[14]. As a Jordanian member of Parliament said, "these kinds of images play to cultural values about good women staying in

their place, and strong women, -like those who would get into politics - being basically untrustworthy and out of control"[15].

So why is the image of women in Arab media so inconducive to their active public participation and how is it being countered, if at all? In answer to these questions, some Arab researchers have pointed to the fact that the media, in most of the Arab countries, reflects cultural norms and patterns, and as such, gathers its information from these sources[16]. Another feature of Arab media is the fact that it is directly or indirectly controlled by the respective governments. This means that what gets portrayed in the different forms of media, is that which is allowed and approved by the state, and forms a large part of state-ideology. States themselves are often the strongest proponents of women's 'natural' roles in society, in addition to their tradition of conditional support for formal gender-equality. The most important condition for state-support being that the particular gender-equality issues are not controversial to the conservative religious establishments, most of which are meant to support the state's 'Righteous Religious Male' image. By the selective courting of the religious establishment on gender-equality issues, Arab states use gender issues as a bargaining chip, whereby the biggest losers are women.

To counter this image, several Arab women's NGOs have started to take this aspect seriously, and have targeted media as part of their general campaign to encourage women's political participation. Nevertheless, as the above-mentioned gatherings indicated, awareness of the centrality of the media is still relatively young, and thus the process to bridge the gap is yet to develop further. In the meeting of women politicians in Cairo for example, out of a total of over forty points of advice given to women both within and those contemplating entry into the traditional political domain, there was not a single point which referred to dealing with the media, in any way.

"Attempting to make the media woman-friendly is part and parcel of a larger democratisation process that is struggling to exist and impact in the Arab world" argues a feminist journalist, "as long as there is censorship over what is permissible, then what dominates the state agenda presides over the media itself… and our states are not known for their pro-women attitudes"[17]. Yet another journalist and vice-president of an umbrella women's NGO in Cairo, says, "the media is used as an instrument for our governments, and as second-class citizens, women are not a political force that our governments have to reckon with, cater to, or cajole. What the governments do take into account, are the religious spokespersons, for whom a woman to be seen in public in charge of any decision-making

post, would be difficult to stomach"[18]. What Arab governments will do, more often than not, is not to engage directly in the debates on women's political participation, but in fact to allow the religious establishment to have the final say on the matter. By keeping the media free of insinuations that would promote or laude women's political participation, most of these governments defer to the dominant patriarchal culture of which they are but an extension, while not appearing to be directly either for or against any particular position on the issue.

In summary, the challenges facing Arab women are many. However, none of them are unique (to the Arabs) nor insurmountable. Although there is a unanimous agreement - and oft repeated refrain - that 'there is no unified women's movement' anywhere in the Arab world, this is equally true at the international level. In fact, women have come together on specific issues, but rarely has there been a women's movement that agreed on each and every issue and fought for these consistently. It is precisely this comparative global perspective which Arab women can and do benefit from. An observation from the streets of Cairo during the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in September 1994 indicated that for the first time, 'the women's issue' became a matter of public discussion. Although not all the discussions were complementary and supportive, the fact remains that this was a major breakthrough for women's organisations and allowed a space for women in the general political discourse. Some women's organisations reported a doubling in their membership, while previously marginalised women politicians suddenly found the media limelight focused on them.

What the incidence of the ICPD also succeeded in doing, along with the Beijing Fourth International Women's Conference in 1995, was to shift the political discourse on women from the margin to a position closer to the centre. The sheer publicity, media attention, international interest and allure, involvement of various actors governmental as well as non-governmental, all formed important elements of that paradigmatic shift in the Arab world. The international exposure brought in not only the comparative dimension - much needed in the Arab world since the overarching tendency was to compare only with the Western world[19], but also *pressure* on Arab governments to at least appear to be doing the right thing.

But it can also be argued that international dimensions have been there for more than a decade since Nairobi 1975, so why is there a difference now? The answer is a testament to the increasing activism of the women's movement, an activism that was enhanced, ironically, by the region's toughest political encounters. Political Islam has mobilised women both for as

well as against its objectives in North Africa; the civil wars in Lebanon, Yemen and Algeria have sometimes brought about that women are somehow 'pushed' into a certain public role to fight to maintain their political rights as citizens and as women; the Palestinians have had to be involved in the politics of the defense of their existence; and the Gulf war raised to the surface many issues which formed a part and parcel of debates on Arab identity, regional relations, and global politics.

What remains here is to look at the ways and means through which women's political influence can be enhanced. To do this, the following sections will look at two specific general mechanisms that are being used (i.e. electoral systems and quotas/reserved seats) in other countries around the world; and the arguments thereto. Following this, a 'strategy' suggestion, specific to women parliamentarians will be presented.

Mechanisms to Enhance Women's Legislative Presence:

One of the most common viewpoints regarding how women can make a difference to political processes anywhere in the world, is that women need to have a 'critical mass'[2]. The idea behind this concept is the one mentioned earlier, where women, by sheer force of numbers, can feel less inhibited (by the trappings of parliament) and be encouraged to forge common standpoints on issues of relevance to all women. According to some of the UNDP reports[3], this 'critical mass' can and should be reached when women occupy around 30% or more of any decision-making body, and this figure thus becomes a target for any major policy. There are two common mechanisms which have been used in different countries around the world, primarily to increase the number of women involved in legislative assemblies. This is not to say that these are the only two, but certainly that they are the most cited within the literature, and have successful case histories. These mechanisms are the quota system and the electoral system. What follows is a brief look at both.

Quotas Or Reserved Seats: Quotas are another term for reserved seats, and although the term has often been used in political discourse to mean seats for women in particular, it is actually a broader term meant to refer to any seats reserved for any sex at any moment in time and for a temporary period. In fact, in some Western countries (such as in Scandinavia) there are

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[2] See Matland (p.29) and Lovenduski and Karam (p128), in Azza Karam (Ed.) *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*.

attempts of trying to introduce quotas for men in specific woman-dominated professions - such as teaching and nursing in particular. However, in many countries, quotas for women in important political decision-making occupations – i.e. in parliaments and political parties especially - and various other forum – are being used to enhance women's legislative representation.

Quotas come with a fair baggage of controversy however, since they engender both a great deal of support as well as an equally vehement opposition. Among the arguments against quotas is the notion that, in order to positively discriminate *for* women, reserved seats discriminate *against* men. The point being that by reserving seats for women, men are being denied the option of access to those seats. Another argument against quotas is that they may lead to a number of women occupying seats in parliament for example, when they are not necessarily adequately qualified. In other words, women were being allotted seats, not because of their capabilities, but because of their sex. Yet another criticism of quotas for women is that they work against them, since these women are then looked down upon, or not treated with equal respect by either their legislative colleagues, or their 'constituencies', since they are seen as the 'token women'. In addition, quotas are seen as an anti-democratic measure because they pre-empt voters choices.

Those who argue pro-quotas insist that under ordinary circumstances, women tend to be discriminated against and rarely voted for, and that some measures of positive discrimination is not a luxury, but a necessity. Another response to the critics of quotas is that women who may be equally qualified (and often are), still run a high chance of not getting elected by the voters simply because of their sex. By ensuring access to seats for such women, therefore, is not a matter of discriminating against them or their male colleagues, but actually a means of ensuring that they get to where they rightfully belong, and to where their legitimate experiences and viewpoints, can be incorporated into the political process. Moreover, supporters of the quota are among the first to argue that increasing the number of women in any given male-dominated political forum, facilitates increased visibility for women, since they then acquire strength in numbers, and are more confident to present their respective cases[4].

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[3] See the UNDP website via www.http://un.org
[4] For a more detailed overview of the different quotas and arguments surrounding them, see Drude Dahlerup 'Using Quotas to Increase Women's Political Representation', in Azza Karam (Ed.) Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers (Stockholm: International IDEA, 1998), pp.91-106.

The arguments which propose reserved seats as an important tool for women in societies with institutionalised mechanisms to exclude women from public arenas, would be of relevance for the Arab region. What must be kept in mind, however, is that quotas on their own are not a guarantee against the phenomenon of 'tokenism'. The latter is a situation which confronts many Arab countries, whereupon those seats which are reserved for women, are occupied by those the ruling establishment deems to be 'safe' (i.e. not likely to make trouble for the leading parties). The argument then is that these 'token' women politicians may well do more harm than good for the rest of their women compatriots, since they are counted as 'women', and yet rarely take up any questions or issues relevant to their gender group. In fact, as has been proven elsewhere, these token appointed women tend to try to avoid any area of political work which may lead to them be identified as working on 'women's issues'. The fact does remain however, that quotas or reserved seats are not meant to be permanent measures, but temporary ones until such time as women do not require them. This places a direct onus of responsibility on women across the board who have succeeded in arriving at important decision-making seats, to 'pave the way' as it were, for others.

Electoral Systems: In essence, electoral systems are what translate votes into actual seats won by either parties or candidates (or both). Their choice is important in any political system today because they determine which individual and which party actually gets into power, and how. According to the *International IDEA Handbook on Electoral Systems Design* (1997), most of the Arab region tends to have varieties of plurality-majority systems[5]. The latter are characterised by outcomes where the candidate with the most votes fills in the positions, regardless of the actual percentage of these votes. In research carried out mostly in the developed countries, these forms of electoral systems generally do not lead to high numbers of women in national legislatures[6]. Three Arab countries however, actually have a Proportional Representation (PR) System or Semi-PR: Algeria, Tunisia, and Jordan, with the latter two having a semi-PR. According to the research carried out in developed countries such as the USA, Canada and Norway, the PR electoral system was seen to favour women's legislative representation.

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[5] The following Arab countries have different varieties of Plurality-Majority Systems electoral systems: Morocco, Sudan, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, and Palestine.
[6] See R. Matland's articles in Azza Karam (ed.) *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 1998). Also see Reynolds et. al*., The International IDEA Handbook on Electoral System Design* (International IDEA, 1997).

The main reasons for this were to be found in the fact that PR systems tend to have larger district magnitudes (i.e. there are more seats available for each party per district), and hence political parties were more likely to field more women on their party electoral lists, and thus balance their tickets[7]. This in turn meant it was easier for women to find themselves being nominated and thus closer to a parliamentary seat. It must be pointed out however, that these results were by no means universal. In the United Kingdom for example, despite the fact that they did not use any PR system, in the 1997 parliamentary elections, the number of women in parliament almost doubled (from 60 to 119). This was then due to the fact that the Labour party had used women-only candidate short-lists[8].

It is important to note there is a general shortage of comparative and country-studies of the gendered impact of different electoral systems in the developing world. This is particularly true (and dismally so) when it comes to research and information on the Arab region in particular, where despite the large number of studies on electoral systems, their gendered impact, and any gender-segregated data on elections, is scarce. What remains an area of need is the proliferation of these kinds of electoral studies both within and about specific Arab countries, and comparative gender analysis of such information across the developing world.

Of course, both quotas and electoral systems are important and largely successful *process* mechanisms to enhance the number of women in parliament. But what of the effectiveness of those within these venerable establishments? It has been the case that for a long time – and till today – the needs and requirements of women in power have long been ignored, in favour of attempts to ensure that more women get *into power*. Although there is a small number of women in these hallowed corridors of influence, information about how they are finding it and what specific needs they may appreciate, remains sorely lacking. To refer the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)'s report of its 41st session in March 1997, an urgent need has been identified for case studies on "women making a difference" in politics[9]. This lack of information is particularly true of the Arab region, where most of the emphasis tends to be focused on phase 1: attempting to reach a critical mass, with little, if any, thought, given to assisting the ones who have made it to important positions of political influence. Although this situation makes it difficult to come up with universalised strategies,

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[7] R. Matland, pp. 78.
[8] Reynolds et. al, p.98
[9] Excerpted from the Moderator's Summary published as E/CN.6/1997/L.2/Add.2.

there are nevertheless important steps that can be taken into account in women's attempts to make a difference to and within, political institutions.

Mechanisms to Enhance Women's Legislative Performance

One of the most important challenges women parliamentarians face from the outset is related to their lack of familiarity with the different rules that are imbedded in parliamentary procedure and relations. Working on that need in mind therefore, it would seem most sensible to assume that once women have *learned* these rules (both the written and unwritten ones so to speak), they can then proceed to *use* them to their own advantage, in the sense of furthering their causes and being able to adequately carry out their job. Once that, in turn, is achieved, it would seem that it is then up to these women MPs, should they so wish, to *change* these rules according to what they would see as necessary and/or more appropriate. What women MPs need to keep in mind is the ways in which they can learn, use and/or change the rules. There are essentially four types of 'areas' in which activities could be concentrated and progress monitored. These are: procedural/institutional, Influence on Output, representation and discourse[10].

1. *Institutional /procedural* : This refers to measures that affect the nature of the institution itself and the procedures that take place within it, to make it more woman-friendly. The cultural acceptance of women as legislators should correspond to changes within the procedures of such institutions which can accommodate women members.

2. *Representation* : The reference here is to alterations that occur in terms of facilitating access to the assemblies by women. This would necessitate specific and directed efforts, which should also result in enabling women to occupy high calibre positions. These alterations should thus entail changes in political parties as an essential step towards ensuring that more women can enter the legislatures.

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[10] The following information, including table 1, is reproduced from Azza Karam and Joni Lovenduski, 'Making Inroads Into Parliament', in Azza Karam (Ed.) The International IDEA Handbook on *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 1998, pp. 125-156).

3. ***Discourse*** : This refers to the parliamentary language and attitudes both within parliament, as well as outside of it. Normalising women's perspectives is an important pre-requisite to enabling them to impact on the general political discourse, in such a way that would eventually lead to an alteration of public attitudes.

4. ***Influence on output***: The reference here is clearly to the output of these legislative fora, i.e. the way in which legislation itself and concomitant policies are more inclusive of women's perspectives, concerns, and suggestions.

	Institutional/Procedural & Representation	***Discourse & Impact***
Learning the Rules	- Training and orientation exercises on internal parliamentary codes of conduct (e.g. how to ask for the floor); public speech and effective communication; relating to and lobbying male colleagues; - Networking with women's organisations - Mentoring and shadowing by more senior MPs. - Understanding and handling media.	- Distinguish between women's perspectives and women's issues; - Caucasing with media and national as well as international organisations; - Bring to attention sexist discourse; - Establish presence within different committees (e.g. budget, defence, foreign affairs); - Clarify added value to others of importance of 'soft' committees.
Using the Rules	- Make a point of nominating and voting for women in internal elections - within parties or intra-parties; - Draw attention to absence of women in key positions; - Invest in committee work; - Push for and establish government equal opportunities positions and women's ministries; - Campaign to expand existing structures to include women's concerns; - Set up networks to train in more convincing and less adversarial types of debate.	- Influencing parliamentary agendas: introduce women's concerns (e.g. changes in parliamentary work schedules); - Establish public enquiries on women's issues and use findings to place on government agendas and within legislative programmes; - Speaking for, co-sponsoring and sponsoring of bills; - Seeking partnership with male colleagues; - Making public issues out of certain concerns by co-operating with media (e.g. ways of referring to women in parliament, sexual harassment issues).

| ***Changing the Rules*** | • Changing candidate selection rules for entire party and especially on leadership positions;
• Introduce quota systems on certain committees or issue of proportionality of men/women representation;
• Establishment of a woman's whip;
• Establishment of national machinery to monitor implementation and ensure accountability - institutionalize regular debates on progress into parliamentary timetable;
• Establishment of mechanisms to encourage female speakers: e.g. giving them priority (their turn) over male colleagues; | • Providing financial incentives to programmes/projects designed to facilitate women's decision-making endeavours (e.g. for leadership-training schools, increasing government subsidies to political parties with more women in leadership positions/candidates; introducing a specific women's budget earmarked for enhancing women's decision-making);
• Co-operating with women's movement to change image of women as only housewives, to portray them as effective and efficient politicians, and to normalize the image of a woman politician;
• Take pride in their femininity instead of attempting to imitate men and hide or deny their womanhood;
• Expanding legislation to include emerging issues of importance to women (e.g. conflict and peace-making, human rights, special women's budgets, etc.). |

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Table 1

The Role of International Organisations

International organisations, particularly the United Nations (UN) have occupied an important socio-political role for the last 50 years. Intended as an independent and unbiased global forum, the potential for influence, actual prestige, and embodiment of hope that such organisations enjoy is priceless. Perhaps uniquely, this is the one organisation from which a great deal is still expected in the developing world generally, and the Arab region particularly. International legislation has provided much needed frameworks and objectives for women's organisations and women-related projects undertaken by governmental as well as non-governmental sources alike. The international meeting-place context also provided both the platforms and the credibility for a number of historical and contemporary socio-political endeavours in the Arab basin.

This is also particularly true of developments on the gender front. The UN Decade for Women encouraged a significant amount of global networking and flow of information on the issue of gender relations, gender and development, and women's rights (as part of human rights) more broadly. In the context of the Arab world, the UN provided a much-needed aegis of support and activism which greatly benefits existing women-based and human rights networks, as well as encourages ongoing efforts towards strengthening existing endeavours on that front. The International Conference on Population and Development (held in Cairo in 1994) for example, resulted in a noticeable increase in awareness among the general population of women's issues and 'women's rights'. Similarly, the lead up to the Fourth World Women's Conference in China in 1995, and the Conference itself, provided an added momentum and motivation for a great deal of women-related endeavours. In addition, international legislation such as the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Beijing Platform for Action among others, are crucial practical tools for women involved in these fields.

In short therefore, the UN matters in a number of ways. Moreover, the road to travel as far as women politicians in particular are concerned, remains rather long. But what can the UN do to enhance women's legislative representation and performance? Elsewhere I have set out specific recommendations for organisations like the UNDP, in light of assessing general strategies and trends since Beijing[11]. Highlighted herein are some brief suggestions as to what

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[11] See Azza Karam, 'Beijing+5: Review of Strategies and Trends' (New York: UNDP, 1999).

pending areas the UN needs to keep in mind when it comes to women and parliaments in the Arab world:

❖ Democratisation: The larger democratic framework has and will influence the extent to which various groups within any given Arab society can organise themselves and their resources, efficiently. Freedom of association remains an irksome issue in many parts of the Arab world, and comparative sharing of experiences, as well as focused attempts at enhancing the democratic process in general would form the framework of valuable assistance and basis for co-operation.

❖ Information Technology: In an age of globalised knowledge and technology, it remains a ludicrous reality for many that their access to different sources of information is still significantly curtailed. There are still a large number of women's networks which lack any access to computers for example, let alone to sources such as the internet – which is fast becoming an essential information and communication resource. Very often the lack of access is accompanied by a concomitant lack of know-how for operating technology – in itself a serious handicap – for later availability. Few Arab women MPs would have the necessary know-how to operate basic computer skills, surf the net, or even know how to type on a computer. Ensuring that these facilities are made available, and that significant training is provided to operate them, would also facilitate an enhanced performance capability for these political professionals.

❖ Research Knowledge and Data: As pointed out earlier, a serious gap exists with respect to up-to-date and gender-segregated data about aspects which are integral to enhancing women's political/legislative representation. Such aspects include for example the type and impact of different forms of electoral systems, an estimation of the success or failure of reserved seats, and generally lessons learned and best practices from the existing experience of women's political participation in general, and parliamentary representation in particular.

❖ Link economic to political Co-operation AND remuneration: It seems clear that the economic (and poverty-related) framework in many – though by no means all - parts of the Arab world, cannot be ignored. However, it is also true to say that economic

development has already been an important aspect of much of the work of international organisations, whether they are donor organisations, or arms of the UN such as UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF etc.. What is missing till now however, is a clearer linkage between the economic programmes and the political ones. Because of the potential sensitivities around these issues from some quarters in the Arab region, the economic programmes have been – largely – conceived of and implemented separately from political ones. Whereas this strategy made sense earlier in the era of specialisation and segregation of activities, in today's global village, synergy and synthesis seem to be more pressing agenda objectives. This is not to argue for conditionality (and consequent punishment) clauses for those countries or partners who fail to deliver either politically or economically. Far from it. Rather, the point here is to urge for a more comprehensive and constructively critical evaluation of the efforts of some of these international networks thus far. Such an approach may well emerge with a favourable view regarding, for instance, the benefits of instituting positive remuneration schemes for those Arab women and men MPs who have done most to ensure that their female compatriots have benefited during the MPs tenure in office. Such a scheme or process would motivate relevant actors (Members of Parliament) to contribute actively and positively during their tenure in office to further the agenda of both gender and democratic development.

To conclude, women parliamentarians in the Arab world have already achieved a position of some power and influence. Their routes towards these legislative fora have been fraught with difficulties, but the avenues for increased participation and enhanced performance remain open to them. Certainly, there is a great deal to be learned from the experience of their fellow women MPs in other parts of the world, but there is also a great deal of culling and sharing of experiences among each other that they are and should be capable of benefiting from. It may now be the time for them to ask themselves the following questions:

- ❖ How to assess what they have achieved?
- ❖ How to learn from the lessons of the past? and
- ❖ What concrete goals do they wish to aim for in the future?

Answering these questions will not only provide a much needed assessment, but also enable an insight and thus the key, to future strategies and achievements. The development of means of evaluating women's political achievements is one that is on the agendas of various

organisations as well as researchers. Although there can not - nor should not - be one yardstick with which all things are measured, there may be some common elements that would give an indication as to what steps have been taken. Some of these common elements could include changes or amendments to various legislation, as well as shifts in public discourse about or with women politicians, with family laws being one example of the former, and image in the media mirroring the latter. It is important that women's equal participation in the political process in the Arab world is seen not as an end, but as a means to a more democratic and just society.

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[1] They span the Gulf (Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Oman), other countries on the Asian side (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan), as well as North Africa (Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Chad, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Western Sahara, and Mauritania).

[2] See Nadezdha Shvedova, "Obstacles to Women's Participation in Parliaments", in Azza Karam Ed. 1998. *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (Stockholm: International IDEA), pp. 19-42.

[3] In several personal interviews carried out with a number of researchers and politicians in the Arab world from 1991 till the present day.

[4] Rawya Shawa, in a workshop on *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, Stockholm, August 1997.

[5] Islamist here denotes political Islam, what in Arabic would be '*Islamiyyeen'*. These groups are to be distinguished from the more generally used term of 'fundamentalist' (*usuliyeen)* since the former have explicit political agendas involving capture of state power and Islamization of state and society. For more detail on the

interaction and power dynamics in the interaction between state, Islamists and women's activism, see Karam 1998, *Women, Islamisms and the State* (London and New York: Macmillan and St. Martin's Press).

[6] UNDP 1995. *Human Development Report: Gender and Development*. Oxford University Press.

[7] 1997 new revised second edition by Joni Seager. The percentages quoted are 1990 ones.

[8] Amina Al-Guindi, current Minister of Social Affairs, in a personal interview with the author, November 1993.

[9] Lebanon must be seen as an exception to this since the non-existence of a centralised state for a long time lead to a culture of non-governmental institutions, which was particularly strengthened during the civil war, and remains a distinguishing feature of Lebanese political life, and state-civil society relations. Another possible exception is Yemen. Since its reunification it continues to suffer from a lack of centralised state control and resources, and the strong impact of tribal custom on social and economic organisation.

[10] See Case Studies on Norway (by Hege Skeije) and South Africa (by Mavivi Manzini), in Karam, Ed. 1998, *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (Stockholm: International IDEA).

[11] Personal interview with the author, April 1998.

[12] Hassan, pp. 53

[13] Hassan, pp. 49

[14] This information is a summary from personal interviews carried out with several women researchers and politicians in the course of 1995 and 1998.

[15] In a discussion with Toujan Al-Faisel, November 1998.

[16] Awatef Waly (1988) and Shahida Al-Baz (1997).

[17] Mariz Tadros, in a discussion in a meeting organised by the Women's Feature Service in Holland, in October 1998.

[18] Personal interview, August 1998.

[19] This is a serious moral and intellectual handicap in a region which still smarts from the colonial past and the blunt edge of US and British foreign policy.