

WILPF- Women as Policy Makers and Agents of Change

On the 11th of February 2013, PeaceWomen in partnership with the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination and Permanent Mission of Liechtenstein organized the fourth lecture in the series on Women, Peace and Security. We were pleased to host our featured speaker Raghida Dergham, Founder and Executive Chairperson of the Beirut Institute. Dergham underlined the pivotal role women play in media, politics and reforming constitutions.

Raghida began her discussion by emphasizing the significant role of women in curtailing any form of extremism. She stressed the role of women as agents of change during these turbulent times.

Dergham called for women to reform constitutions to safeguard their own rights. She also gave personal insight into her career as a columnist and Senior Diplomatic Correspondent for the London-based Al Hayat and as the Founder and Executive Chairperson of the Beirut Institute; as an independent non-partisan Arab think tank.

She used two case studies, particularly Egypt and Tunisia to highlight the shortcomings of reducing democracy to elections. Egypt rushed too quickly into elections, as a result, islamists won the elections because moderates and secularists were not given enough time to organize and win the people over. In Tunisia, women tended to have more legal rights than in any other country in the Arab world. Unfortunately, democracy was also reduced to elections which lead to monopolizes of power.

She underscored the invaluable role of legislation in providing vehicles for underrepresented groups such as women, youth and moderates. In her view, if women, youth, secularists and moderates are left out of political participation, this will most likely result in islamists taking over the power vacuum.

Dergham made broad recommendations including the importance of reforming political parties by creating parties specifically for women. She also underlined the need for institutional and constitutional reform to protect women's rights.

The participants commented on the role of women in national security and the need for cooperation from other stakeholders including civil society leaders, government representatives and even men, for these changes to be included and implemented in constructional documents. Dergham closed the discussion by reiterating the need for women to speak up and voice their opinions as key Agents for change amidst these contentious issues.

Bio Dergham is Founder and Executive Chairperson of the Beirut Institute, an independent non-partisan Arab think tank focusing on inter-generational, innovative, solution-oriented thinking for current and future policy opportunities and challenges affecting the Arab region and its place in the world. She is also a columnist and Senior Diplomatic Correspondent for the London-based *Al Hayat*. Dergham is a member of the International Media Council of the World Economic Forum, composed of 100 of the most respected and influential media figures worldwide. Dergham was featured in the PBS Documentary "Caught in the Crossfire." Dergham is in the State University of New York's Hall of Fame as a Distinguished Alumna and in 2003 received an Honorary Doctorate of Letters.