

# Can Arab Gulf women be successful as peace negotiators!

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"Ittijahat" one of the most popular programs of the Rotana Khalijiah TV network featured a special edition of women in the Gulf and highlighted the need to promote the role of women as agents for peace in the region. In a frank and bold discussion, the eloquent talk show host Nadine Bedair prodded two prominent women and myself to address the need to strengthen the role of women in the transformation process of Gulf societies. It was evident during the discussion that public awareness campaigns are critical to enhance the role of women and to change the negative mindset that encourages the discrimination against women which continues to block all initiatives towards peace and development in the region.

Innovative approach involving women to address the threatening challenges within the region is the need of the hour. The conflicts and the political crisis in the Arab region make it very critical to involve women according to their merit and not their gender in addressing the

threats of wars, conflicts and terrorist activities. Educated and qualified women experts should be given an opportunity to negotiate solutions to the escalating violence and highlight the injustices inflicted by wars and global conflicts.

It is unfortunate that women do not have a proper podium to voice their concerns and be heard in the international community. Governments should facilitate the connections of Gulf women with regional and international networks. They should have a stronger presence and a more prominent role in the international support mechanism. The Arab world could benefit from better access to the international community for political and humanitarian cooperation.

It is time we empower Gulf women and promote their roles in alternative diplomacy, dialogue and security initiatives. There should be more initiatives to allow their participation in the international arena.

In order to promote peace and put an end to the sectarian wars that have so far killed thousands and displaced millions we need to mobilize every effort to confront our challenges. Women of the region are the victims of the alarming threat of terrorism and the continued sectarian conflicts. Getting women involved can combat extremism and save lives. The region needs to strengthen the role of women in NGOs to promote nonviolence and prepare for the process of post conflict peace building. More durable peace can be achieved if more women are encouraged as decision-making partners in the international security assistance programs.

More capacity building programs are needed to develop their political participation. Women need training and proper experience in humanitarian aid and skills in negotiations and peace talks.

Women should be promoted as the first line of defense and encouraged to act as agents of change and as the driving forces to stabilize an insecure and troubled region. There are many international organizations that involve women in the security arena and as agents for peace. One of the most prominent organizations is, "Sisters against Violent Extremism", the world's first female counter-terrorism platform.

In 2008 Edit Schlaffer, Founder and Executive Director of Women without Borders/SAVE launched the international organization. She believes, "Including women in the security arena is a great challenge, but times of crisis are also often times of opportunity. This is our moment as women to exercise our smart power and meet global challenges with competence and confidence." We need to promote our own NGOs to negotiate peace and create better understanding between the Gulf region and the international community.

Gender based discrimination is detrimental to the progress and peace in the region. Marginalizing the role of women continues to be an obstacle to the development of just societies. Women need organizational capacity development and constitutional, legal and policy reforms to play a more effective and constructive role in nation building.

Not many women in the region have such experience and awareness to confront the threat of violent extremism that is prevalent in Gulf societies. Women should be empowered to take an active role in safeguarding their families. Concerned mothers need training in parenting skills to protect their children from radicalization. They need to react with counter narratives that can foster positive youth development and productive citizens. More is needed to train more women as social workers, psychologists, educators and security experts to change the negative mindset against women and the radicalization of our youth that continues to be a major threat that is facing the Gulf region today.

The conflicts and the challenges in the Arab world need constructive interventions that can bring about harmony and lasting peace. It is time Arab countries draw a strategy to promote women in peace building initiatives. Extensive awareness campaigns are needed to challenge male dominance in decision- making and Arab society's discriminatory attitudes towards women.

The media must play a bigger role to spread awareness and change the extremist mindset that is detrimental to peace and progress. We need more bold programs like "Ittijahat" and more active TV talk hosts like Nadine Bedair to mobilize the campaign to promote the empowerment of women as agents for peace and progress in the Gulf.

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