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BWS members discuss rights of foreign husbands

Members of the Bahrain Women's Society (BWS) met officials from the Supreme Council for Women yesterday to discuss the issue of citizenship rights for Bahraini women married to foreign husbands, writes Meena Menezes.

Present at the meeting were Najwa A.Rahim Abdullah, Assistant General Secretary for Strategy Planning and Implementation of the Supreme Council of Women, Farida Maskati, council member and Head of the Complaints committee, and Lena Abu Habib, director of Research and Training Group based in Lebanon and the regional coordinator for Women's Nationalisation, who was in Bahrain at the invitation of the BWS. Also present were Amina Essa, from the Women's Gateway, Mariam Al Ruwaiee from the Women's Union, Wajeha Baharna from the BWS and Ibtisam Zaid, Head of Unbounded Women's Programmes at the BWS for the Empowerment of Women.

Discussions were held on the progress of the campaign and the role that the Supreme Council could undertake to help.

"The members of the Supreme Council represent the Government while we represent non-government organisations and it is essential for both sides to coordinate on this issue," said Ibtisam Zaid.

"We highlighted the work done so far and suggested that a member from their side be a part of the steering committee. We were told to put in the request in writing for further consideration," said Ibtisam.

Mastaki said that the complaints committee had 400 cases registered with them on this issue of nationality and that the same had been forwarded to a joint committee that was formed between the supreme council and immigration officials. Mastaki said that each case would be studied individually and submitted with the recommendations of the joint committee to His Majesty the King, Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, for final approval.

"We don't want individual cases to be studied but want to work towards changing the law whereby equal rights will be granted to all Bahraini women married to foreigners," said Ibtisam.

Under the current laws, foreign husbands of Bahraini women are not given special citizenship privileges and their children are not automatically granted nationality. However, children of Bahraini men who marry foreign women are automatically granted full Bahraini citizenship and their wives too are allowed to apply for citizenship rights.

Meanwhile, members of the steering committee plan to meet members of the Shura Council and parliamentary council to highlight this issue and seek their support towards having it implemented in the constitution.

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