

Focus on rights of Bahraini women married to foreigners

Gender definition, citizenship and nationality were discussed at a workshop which aimed to chalk out a strategy and action plan for 2005-07, writes Meena Menezes. The event was organised by the Bahrain Women's Society following queries on the issue from Bahraini women married to foreigners. Egyptian Mrat Abou Tieg conducted the workshop at the Bahrain Medical Society in Juffair, at the invitation of the BWS. About 21 heads of women's societies in Bahrain and media personnel attended. Ibtisam Zaid, head of Unbounded Women's Programmes at the BWS for the Empowerment of Women said: "A human-development report published two years ago revealed there is a major problem in Arab countries on this issue. It underscored how to put together strategic laws and develop Arab countries in establishing laws for Bahraini women married to foreigners who have until now been deprived of equal rights for both genders in terms of citizenship of children and government services. A nationwide campaign was launched after the workshop to give Bahraini women who marry foreigners the right to citizenship for their children and husbands. BWS organised the campaign as part of a regional campaign launched by women's societies simultaneously in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Yemen, Tunisia and Jordan. It was attended by representatives of various ministries to create awareness of this issue.

Also discussed at the campaign were all aspects of research conducted on Bahraini law pertaining to women. Tieg also spoke of the Egyptian experience in this regard which was followed by open discussion. "The plan of action after the campaign will be to educate women on their rights, meet with those facing this situation and inform the public about updated statistics and progress made through the media, to highlight this issue," said Zaid. Presently, there are two proposed draft laws under discussion at the Shura Council. The first proposal focuses on the nationalisation rights of Bahraini women married to non-Bahrainis.

The draft law aims to eradicate any type of discrimination between male and female citizens. The second draft law underscores the need to give citizenship to children of Bahraini mothers and fathers without citizenship who were born in Bahrain or abroad. It also stresses the importance of granting citizenship to the youngsters of Bahraini mothers who speak Arabic fluently and have no criminal record. The proposal also allows mothers to sponsor their non-Bahraini children and deal with each nationalisation case individually as priority will be given to youngsters involved in society and the Bahraini culture.

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