



الجمعية الكويتية لحقوق الإنسان
KUWAIT SOCIETY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



MEDI

Women in Kuwait Media

A History of Little Media Coverage





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Executive summary

The reporting period witnessed a prominent event in the history of Kuwaiti women, as they were able to access to and progress through the judiciary for the first time in their history after the position was monopolized by men.

This qualitative shift for Kuwaiti women occurred on June 30, 2020, and Kuwait had taken a preliminary step in 2012 when the Supreme Judicial Council issued a decision to accept Kuwaiti women applying for the position of public prosecutor, and then the Kuwaiti Minister of Justice, Yaqoub Al-Sani', issued a decision in 2014 to appoint 62 public prosecutors among them 22 female public prosecutors.

This is a historic occasion in Kuwait, in which many expressed their happiness while others expressed their displeasure of this step, which is considered a victory for the feminist movement in Kuwait that aims to involve women in all aspects of the state without discrimination between them and men, a movement that is not only led by women, but by civil society as well.

This occasion was preceded by a celebration of writings and press materials. This report will highlight them, and the next report will monitor the reactions. This report also monitors the events related to women during the reporting period.

The reporting period coincided with the occasion of the Kuwaiti Women's Day, which falls on May 16 of each year, and during the report the media coverage of this occasion was monitored.

Introduction

On May 16, 2005, the political rights of Kuwaiti women were approved in terms of nominating themselves in the parliamentary elections and voting on whomever they deem appropriate to represent them in the National Assembly, after the nomination and election process was monopolized by men.

From that day hitherto, May 16 has been celebrated as Kuwaiti Women's Day, as a prominent day in the march of the women's movement in Kuwait, that continues to this day its struggle to obtain its full rights in society to move forward in the service of itself, society and the country.

It is important to state that the Kuwaiti National Assembly's official approval to grant women their political rights preceded by efforts made by the State of Kuwait represented by the late Emir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who expressed in the Emiri Decree issued on May 25, 1999 his Emiri desire to grant women their political rights to nominate and be elected, but this decree did not find its way to implementation due to the failure to be voted on by members of Parliament, that rejected the law by a majority of 41 votes in the session of November 22, 1999, and this princely desire was established as His Highness knew that women have role and enthusiasm that can be employed in the renaissance of Kuwait as well as in motivating and accelerating the development process of the country in conjunction with the men's role.

In this regard, it can be said that the political rights of Kuwaiti women still suffer from a deep gap between the desire of the Kuwaiti state, represented by royal decrees, and the penetration of male culture in Kuwaiti society, which appears every time in the Kuwaiti parliament, and prevents the arrival of a feminist parliamentary bloc in Parliament to obtain their rights. According to a study issued by Kuwait Society for Human Rights, in order to face this problem, the Kuwaiti state must put in place, before issuing the decrees in this regard, a package of procedures and mechanisms to ensure voting and nomination processes, in addition to the adoption of a quota system in this area.

In the context of addressing gender equality, it is not logical for the state to deal

with its female citizens as unworthy of responsibility, which results in women's movement that tries to confirm that the woman is able to perform all the different duties, whether in societal or functional roles in the state. In the same approach, demands continued during the reporting period in support of granting Kuwaiti women the right to sign on behalf of their family members in medical procedures.

Kuwaiti women in Kuwaiti society represent 51.06 % of the total population^[1], and their number is about 723263 people^[2]. This means that women are more than half of the citizens of Kuwait, that is, more than half of the Kuwait capabilities. Equality between women and men in Kuwait is, in addition to being a basic human right, necessary to achieve peace in society and employ its full potentialities, as it has been proven that empowering women stimulates productivity and increases economic growth, as well as it has been proven that women are not inferior to men in societal matters.

How did the local media cover the Kuwaiti Women's Day?

“Women are not a guest of honor” is a sentence included in an article entitled: “Today is for the family celebration ... and the Kuwaiti women's celebration shall be tomorrow”^[3] by Muhammad Nasser Al-Asousi, was published in Al-Qabas newspaper and the writer stated that: It is necessary for the consultative committee of the constitution amendment to focus on guaranteeing equality between citizens and criminalizing contempt for women”. In addition, the writer asserts that the constitutional provision shall not be emptied of its content with articles that rob women of their rights, and not to undo the gains obtained by women because they

[1] The data is according to the statistics of the statistical services system of the Public Authority for Civil Information until the end of June 2019, source link: <https://www.paci.gov.kw/stat/>

[2] Previous source: <https://www.paci.gov.kw/stat/Demog.aspx>

[3] Al-Qabas Newspaper May 14, 2020, link: <https://alqabas.com/article/5774166-%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9>

are the result of the struggle of Kuwaiti women, and he added that: “in order to make Kuwait a safe and stable state that achieves equality between its citizens, the right of every family to more decent life for its children and the right of every woman to maximize her gains and increase her participation shall be guaranteed.”

Al-Rai newspaper also published a brief report, based on sources available on the Internet, in which it said that Kuwaiti women have proven their pioneering role in the development process that the country is witnessing in various fields and this was not reached by chance but it was preceded by a long history of struggle from the stage of oil emergence till the women have proven that they are half of the society along with the man on the way to Kuwait’s progress. It also asserted that women confirmed their presence at all levels, as they held many leadership positions from minister to deputy minister, university director and ambassador, in addition to going through experiences in the private sector through which they were able to occupy advanced positions regionally and internationally.

The newspaper covered the celebration, where it promoted and highlighted the civilized face of Kuwaiti women, affirming their positive and pioneering role, their social and political career, and their constant contribution to building the society, and said that: “Despite her long struggle, woman would not have achieved this success without the caring environment represented by the legislative and social system. Further, the political and economic freedom climate which Kuwaiti women enjoyed has resulted in great confidence, creativity and distinction in various fields.

Al-Watan newspaper^[4] also published a brief news about a statement made by the President of the Union of Kuwaiti Women Associations and Chair of the Board of Directors of the Kuwaiti Volunteer Women’s Association for Community Service and Development, Sheikha Fadia Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, to Kuwait News Agency KUNA^[5], in which she urged the need to support Kuwaiti women, raise their status and involve them in targeted strategies and decision-making, and she said that the Kuwaiti woman deserves to be highlighted and her favor to be recognized at all times, especially after she has proven her presence and distinction in various

[4] Al-Watan newspaper May 16, 2020, link:

<http://alwatan.kuwait.tt/articledetails.aspx?id=617270&yearquarter=20202>

[5] Kuwait News Agency KUNA May 16, 2020, link:

<https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2895056>

fields and in light of the current crisis of the outbreak of the new Corona virus, she appeared in the front rows giving her life at every moment as a sacrifice for her homeland.

This statement was circulated on websites however there were no suitable spaces in the media to talk about the political role of Kuwaiti women on their national day, and perhaps the reason for this is that no public events were held under the supervision of public benefit associations, and it seems that no media effort is being made such as designating spaces for discussing women's issues. Comparing to previous years, we find that media coverage was based on participation in public events, and according to our belief this is the reason behind the little media coverage of women's issues during the reporting period.

Addressing this point agrees with what we has discussed in previous reports regarding the conjunction of media coverage with events and celebrations, as the activities organized by public benefit associations are the motivation for presenting women's issues, meaning that they provide information and resources to representatives of the media and those who deal with the issues according to the publishing policy at the newspaper, since some of them deal with the issue in a way that indicate interest, as we are accustomed to from Al-Qabas newspaper, and others deal with it in a superficial manner and the media material is published in places that are not prominent in the newspaper.

Even when press publishing is related to women's special events, whether the publication is just a superficial news or broader in presenting the issue, the positive investment of this occasion absented when introducing vital treatments and discussions, meaning that the process is just like reporting what is conducted in the activities of public benefit associations, Since the extensive discussion will be reflected in the media coverage, and vice versa, which means that the mission of the media representatives is only to inform, and this in general does not serve women's issues in a positive way as much as the press publication by the reporter and the press documentation of the association.

It is unreasonable for women's issues to be marginalized in the media in this way, since how the issues of half of society, in the literal and digital sense, be absent from discussion, especially since social media is full of issues that are presented continuously, and not seasonally. Further, the number of women leaders in the media are limited and even their handling of women's issues does not often serve women in the right way.

Women in advertisements

During the reporting period, it was monitored that various forms of advertisements used women as a temptation element in an unjustified manner, as the advertisements were not about women-specific materials, but rather services that had nothing to do with women, and thus they use women as a promotional commodity and that is neither useful nor positive for the status of women in Kuwait.

It is worth mentioning that instead of presenting women for their bodies to promote services, the media are supposed to present women as partners in construction and development and show them discussing matters periodically in more depth in order to reach a realistic positive image of women and achieve the principle of gender equality.

In this regard, we recommend the media to develop media awareness of women's rights and issues away from the prevailing stereotype through specialized programs that marginalize women and confine them to traditional matters that away from serious treatment of their issues and problems. Whereupon, the media speech shall be developed to be consistent with the current stage that we live and suits the progress of the societies as well as the rapid development of media and its multiplicity of means.

Women in electronic newspapers

The Media Observatory for the Advocacy of Gender Issues (Shaqae'q i.e. Sisters) is a specialized center affiliated with the Kuwaiti Society for Human Rights, aims to advocate for gender issues and follows up the latest developments in women's rights in the State of Kuwait. During its follow-up of the latest developments in women's rights, it repeatedly notes that many online newspapers do not respect women as a human being, since they often publish pictures of women that do not fit the context of the news, as if they aim to publish the picture mainly and accompany the news as a secondary element, perhaps the goal is to achieve an increase in the

number of visitors on the site or increasing the interaction, sharing and commenting on the tweet.

As for the overall coverage of women's issues and their activities, most of the websites intend to report news or articles as they are published in the main source, and we did not notice that the sites provide professional coverage of women's news and activities. Twitter newspapers are not so different as they sometimes hosts women to talk about an issue and share an interview on its platforms.

Heroines from Kuwait

It is the title of a report published in Al-Qabas newspaper^[6] in which interviews were conducted with women working in a volunteer initiative named: "Waraha" launched by the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises Development and Welfare, and they work on manufacturing cloth masks.

At the beginning of this report, it was stated: "We serve the country as our fathers and grandfathers did, and: "We are at the service of wherever we are needed" by these simple words the women summarized their participation in the initiative and the reasons that prompted them to join it.

According to Al-Qabas: "The female leaders and participants in the initiative have proven that Kuwaiti women are a major part of the nation's body, and a cornerstone that can be relied upon, since their words referred to a full and complete conviction of their duty towards the state and the society as the female volunteers of all ages, had to sacrifice their time to stand altogether with the beloved Kuwait, one of the volunteers said to the reporter of Al-Qabas that: " The Kuwaiti woman is one of the most powerful women in the world"

From this media visit, two "text and video" reports were made. The video lasted for five minutes and 44 seconds, while the text report was 500 words, and the number of views on the website exceeded 11,000 views at the time of writing the report.

[6] Al-Qabas newspaper, on April 29, 2020, link: <https://alqabas.com/watch/5770954>

Gender equality in the media

Al-Jarida newspaper^[7] has made an “online” coverage of an event carried out by World Bank in Kuwait in cooperation with the Kuwait Bar Association and Women’s Research & Studies Center at Kuwait University on “Women, Business and the Law Activities and the Role of the Private Sector”. The spotlight was on gender equality and it was asserted that equality leads to more flourished and stable economy, and many studies have indicated the positive economic impact when laws treat women and men on an equal footing in economic opportunities, and another study has clarified that if women play the same role as men in labor markets, they can add up to \$ 28 trillion to the global output by 2025”.

In addition, the report of “Women, Business and the Law “ issued by World Bank includes legal provisions that affect the economic integration of women, based on international standards, and give a score for each economy based on its legislation, Stressing that Kuwait’s score in the international index is very low, reaching thirty-two and a half points out of 100 points.

In Al-Anbaa newspaper^[8] there was a report on women’s right to housing, which consisted of interviews with a number of women as well as men to comment on the issue and to demand the housing rights of Kuwaiti women and the right of their children to employment in accordance with the law and the constitution that guaranteed equality between all citizens and did not differentiate between a male citizen and a female citizen. Further, the report focused on the housing rights that must be granted to Kuwaiti women in all their categories (married to a non-Kuwaiti - divorced - single - widowed), provided that the Public Authority for Housing Welfare provides adequate housing in the same way as male citizens, according to the equal treatment of citizens without discrimination between men and women, which allows

[7] Al Jarida newspaper May 14, 2020, link: <https://www.aljarida.com/articles/1589376542366399800/>

[8] Al-Anbaa newspaper June 20, 2020, link: <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/kuwait-news/975713/20-06-2020-%D8%AD%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%83%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%89%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1>

the Payment of a rental allowance for Kuwaiti women, similar to men.

The newspaper also covered issues of gender equality by discussing a number of issues, the most important of which is the women's access to justice^[9].

Furthermore, Al-Qabas addressed this issue, "women's access to justice" through a number of press materials in a variety of styles in terms of articles^[10], reports^[11], interviews^[12], and news^[13].

[9] Report: Women's Activities for «Alanba»: Women are judges a deserved dream... Our confidence in their success is absolute. Al-Anbaa Newspaper, June 10, 2020, link: <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/kuwait-news/973421/10-06-2020-%D9%81%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%A9-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%82-%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A9>

[10] Article: "The Kuwaiti Judge" the "Brotherhood" drops into the trap of religion and politics, for more: <https://alqabas.com/article/5783655> Al-Qabas Newspaper, 30 June 2020

[11] Report of Attorney General to «Al-Qabas»: We continue the Kuwaitization plan, a historic event ... 8 Kuwaiti women judges, for more: <https://alqabas.com/article/5783441>

[12] Welcomed Activists and human rights activists to «Al-Qabas»: a long-awaited dream finally come true, for more: <https://alqabas.com/article/5783635> Al-Qabas Newspaper, 30 June 2020

[13] News: Secretary of the Writers Association for «Al-Qabas»: Kuwaiti women will achieve a breakthrough in the judiciary. More: <https://alqabas.com/article/5777958> Al-Qabas Newspaper 10 June 2020.

Conclusion

By observing the statements published during the reporting period, women as a human resource are supposed to be presented as leaders of the movement for economic change and not only as practitioners of the societal role or participants in the political life., as they play an important role for the purpose of reaching the summit of success leading the sustainable development which is the essential motive for the progress of the work entity and then the country's economy.

The media discourse must deal with women's issues more deeply in addition to discussing the societal culture that limits women's ability to move and limits them to performing a job, whether a job inside the home or an administrative position in a government body. The women's energy are so required in the development process, thus we believe that it is important to address all challenges and obstacles facing women by setting societal culture to debate and determining whether it is correct or not, as well as addressing the legislators to modify laws and decisions and amend them in a way that serves gender equality in line with the Index of Women, Business and the Law of the World Bank.

It is worth noting that the National Development Plan of the State of Kuwait 2015-2020 included a set of sustainable development goals, including the fifth goal that aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, so that the State of Kuwait aspires to match the seven pillars of the new Kuwait vision 2035 with the national development plans.

Recommendations

Gender equality is not limited to the presence of women within limited positions, but rather an integrative process that begins with policies until they turn into practices. These policies cannot take place if the media remain dependent in their coverage on showing the activities of public benefit associations' events.

In the media, the working woman shall not be specialized in the stereotypical women's issues such as cooking and fashion, but she is interested in the political and social issues so she must get out of her stereotypical framework, present her comprehensive message that touches the reality of people and society and carry a plan for real change based on clear foundations.

The media should make greater efforts to host feminist models that have a stock of knowledge, community work, or express ideological opinions, in order to encourage more women to present themselves boldly and forcefully and to contribute to removing women from the stereotypes that many of them work to confine themselves to.

The media in their various reports and whenever possible, shall host women to present their point of view on the topic discussed just as they do with the men.

Celebrating events related to women is not the role of Public Benefit Associations or activists on social media only but the mass media should highlight and promote these important days for women.

Public Benefit Associations should take advantage of the media's reliance on their activities and provide women models and feminists to give awareness messages about the added value of women's work, and to work more seriously to portray meaningful stories and valuable coverage for women working in various sectors.

Companies that use women as promoters of commodities and services in advertisements should not fall into the trap of exploiting women, and there must be an advertising code of honor in the electronic media to set specific controls and standards for advertising companies, agencies or companies producing advertisements so that the advertisement receives general acceptance among individuals and families and not to appear women as if they were only bodies.

It is the responsibility of websites and electronic newspapers not to share pictures of women in order to attract visitors or interact with the tweet, since women should be respected and dealt with humanity and dignity.



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