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Woman in Jordan

According to Amnesty International reports, Jordan is the country with the best human rights record in the Middle-Eastern region.¹ Local and international human rights organizations are allowed to publish and disseminate critical reports of Jordan's policy towards obedience to human rights; and local groups—such as the Arab Organization for Human Rights (*Al-Munazzama al-'Arabiyya li-Ḥuqūq al-Insān*)—are officially registered in Jordan.² Jordan's active role in promoting political reforms in Arab League's forum and her level-headed approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict make Jordan a valuable partner in Middle-Eastern peace talks.

The most important goal of the present Jordanian authorities is to build a modern Arabic state with Muslim traditions—to reconcile Islam with modernity and democracy. In that context Jordan excels many other Arab countries.

As it is written in the 1952 Constitution of The Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan, all Jordanians are equal before law and there should be no discrimination between them on grounds of race, religion or language.³ The personal freedom⁴, the right to work⁵ and to own property⁶, the freedom of opinion⁷, of press and publications⁸ is guaranteed by law. The believers of other religions than Islam have the right to exercise forms of their worship and religious rites in accordance with the customs observed in Jordan.⁹ Jordani-

¹ <http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/resources5.htm>, 10.01.2007

² Ibid.

³ *Dustūr al-Mamlaka al-Urdunniyya al-Hāšimiyya*, al-faṣl at-tānī: “Ḥuqūq al-Urdunniyyīn wa-wāğībātuhum”, al-mādda 6, p. 6.

⁴ Ibid., al-mādda 7, p. 6.

⁵ Ibid., al-mādda 13, p. 7.,

⁶ Ibid., al-mādda 11, p. 7.

⁷ Ibid., al-mādda 13, p. 7.

⁸ Ibid., al-mādda 15, p. 8.

⁹ Ibid., al-mādda 14, p. 8.

ans are entitled to establish societies¹⁰ and political parties¹¹. All postal, telephonic and telegraphic communications are treated as secret.¹² There are also no restrictions imposed in Jordanian law on men's or women's dress. Science and medical services are on a very high level. Young Jordanians like to spend their free time in large shopping centres with several fashionable boutiques and Western restaurants. Shops are provided with products imported from all over the world and exclusive restaurants offer every type of meals—for example European or Asian.

Though the Jordanian society remains a Bedouin society, from appearance very developed and modern—but in respect of the customs still steeped in past and old traditions. Instead of the legal arbitration, “tribal justice” (*qānūn 'ašā'iri*) is more often applied.¹³ Every year statistics note down several cases of so-called honour crimes and despite appeals of human rights organizations from all over the world, Jordanian women's groups, or even the Royal Family, the percentage of murdered women doesn't seem to diminish. Above-mentioned facts show that Jordanian society is still attached to the immemorial tradition and related to it—often being in opposition to legal system and religion—customs, although the young ruler, King 'Abd Allāh II, has given his own wife wider public role and appears to fully understand that the 21st century is not a century where one can rule a country in the way his father or grandfather did and is engaged in a democratic experiment to empower women in their patriarchal systems, the attempts to achieve equality between sexes come only from the Jordanian leader instead of being a natural response to popular demands of an active society. In such societies, women have still a worse situation than men, because of their own strong perceptions that men are more efficient in public life. Furthermore, there is also fear that women's empowerment remains an un-Islamic value.¹⁴

One of the most important steps of the Jordanian democracy was the signing in December 1980 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified by Parliament in 1992. However, women still are not equal to men, and women's participation in public life is limited.

Although all Jordanians are equal before the law irrespective of race, religion or language, sex-based discrimination is not specifically mentioned

¹⁰ Ibid., al-mādda 16, p. 9.

¹¹ Ibid., al-mādda 16, p. 9.

¹² Ibid., al-mādda 18, p. 10.

¹³ *Applying the rule of law*, “The Jordan Times”, April 16, 2006.

¹⁴ *Progress in women's rights in Jordan a test run for region*, Rana Sabbagh-Gargour, “The Daily Star”, October 2006.

in the 1952 Constitution.¹⁵ Moreover, The Jordanian Penal Code does not protect women from discrimination and does not provide any punishment for violence against them.¹⁶ For equal rights in the society and public life Jordanian women have been struggling for more than sixty years through Jordanian women's groups and organizations, inspired with experience of feminists from other Arab countries, especially from Egypt.¹⁷ They aim at combating all forms of discrimination against Jordanian woman, raising her status, empowering her role in society and also try to help women to overcome economic, cultural and social difficulties, that hinder women in exercising their rights as citizens, workers and housewives on the basis of equality, justice, equal opportunities, participation and respect for human rights and dignity.¹⁸

According to the Article 6 of the 1952 Constitution, education from ages 6–16 is compulsory for boys and girls.¹⁹ Although Jordanians don't have to pay for children's education, it is generally known that it is associated with costs. Not all Jordanian parents can afford it. Human rights organisations report that, in case when it is not possible to send to school all the children, the schooling of daughters is sacrificed to schooling boys in the family. It is so, because in a patriarchal society such as Jordan social concepts hold that the man will support the family in the future, and woman will stay home to take care of the husband and children. In practice, the decision of sending children to school is left to the family, usually to the father who for the most part decides to educate only the sons.

In general, the level of Jordanian women's education has been rising over the past twenty years. Illiteracy rates among women were reduced from 49.5% in 1979 to 22% in 1991. But still the rate of illiterates among women is much higher than among men: in 1997 there were 9% Jordanian men who cannot read and 27% illiterates among women,²⁰ The argument, in the opin-

¹⁵ *Dustūr al-Mamlaka al-Urdunniyya al-Hāšimiyya*, op.cit., p. 6.

¹⁶ <http://iwwraw.igc.org/publications/countries/jordan.htm>, 10. 01. 2007.

¹⁷ Ewa Cylwik, *Sytuacja kobiety niezameżnej ('ānisa) w społeczeństwie muzułmańskim na tle działalności ruchów kobiecych i przemian społeczno-prawnych w Egipcie i Jordanii*, unpublished MA thesis, Oriental Institute, University of Warsaw, Warsaw 2000, p. 37.

¹⁸ Waleed Hammad, Huda Patricia Skinner, *Jordanian Women's Organizations and Sustainable Development*, translated by Sadeq Ibraheem Odeh and George A. Musleh, Al-Urdun Al-Jadid Research Centre, Sindbad Publishing House, Amman-Jordan 1999, p. 141.

¹⁹ *Dustūr al-Mamlaka al-Urdunniyya al-Hāšimiyya*, op.cit., al-mādda 6, p. 6.

²⁰ <http://iwwraw.igc.org/publications/countries/jordan.htm>, (statistics on the Queen Noor's website are different: regarding to them, in 1996 there were only 14% of women in Jordan that could not read and write, (in:) <http://www.go.com.jo/QNoorjo/main/womenjo.htm>), 10.01.2007.

ion of Jordanian activists, is always the same: men's education is still more valuable than women's, whose destiny is marriage, staying home and taking care of the family.

According to data produced by the Deputy Minister of Information and spokesman of the government and Mrs Asmā Ḥāḍir during a lecture "Jordanian Woman and the Political Activity" at the Jordanian University, 55% of the Jordan University's students are women.²¹ This information is very optimistic, because it shows, that the level of women's education has been rising over the last few years. Mrs Asmā Ḥāḍir said that Jordanian society gradually begins to appreciate woman and her political activity. Furthermore, the number of children per family is furthermore lower, so there are more chances to send all of them to school, and fathers realize, that schooling of daughters is as important as sending sons to school.²²

In the 1952 Constitution we read that "work is the right of every citizen, and the State shall provide opportunities for work to all citizens by directing the national economy and raising its standards". In the Article 23 of the 1952 Constitution one can read that work is the right of every citizen and the State shall provide opportunities for work to all citizens by directing the national economy and raising its standards, and every worker shall receive wages commensurate with the quantity and quality of his work.²³ In spite of the increasing level of women's education and their participation in public life, the percentage of working Jordanian women was in the nineties one of the lowest in the world: in 1994 it was only 16%²⁴—today this percentage is not much higher. The most important cause is still the opinion in the society, that women should not work at all and that they should not occupy men's work places. In the opinion of Jordanian activists the Labor Law in the Kingdom lacks a clear statement regarding employment and wage equality between women and men. Wage discrimination is common especially in the private sector (in 1987 man's pay was 27.9% higher than that of woman with the equal education and experience and in the same age group).²⁵ Additionally, women seldom hold high posts. Most women in Jordan work as teachers in secondary schools, high schools and universities, or as medical personnel. The Jordan National Forum for Women (*Tağammu' Liğān al-Mar'a*

²¹ Information gathered during the lecture: "Jordanian Woman and Political Activity", Asmā Ḥāḍir, Language Center, Jordan University, Amman, 29.03.2006.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Dustūr al-Mamlaka al-Urdunniyya al-Hāšimiyya*, op.cit., al-mādda 23, p. 11.

²⁴ <http://www.go.com.jo/QNoorjo/main/womenjo.htm>, 10.01.2007.

²⁵ <http://iwwraw.igc.org/publications/countries/jordan.htm>, 11. 01. 2007.

al-Waṭani al-Urdunī), which was established in 1995 to encourage women to hold posts in the juridical sector²⁶, emphasizes that this sector is in Jordan still highly dominated by men: according to data from 2006, of 6915 lawyers there were only 1284 women, and of 630 judges only 35 are women.²⁷ In March 2006 in celebration of the International Women's Day at a dinner gala at the Gibson Hotel in London hosted by Cherie Blair, where Princess Basma Bint Ṭalāl was a guest of honour, both women in their speeches were talking of the importance of guaranteeing women equal economic and social rights, and women's active engagement in political life. "The strength of our nation is based on the ability of our citizens to live together harmoniously through a code of respect for the rights of others"—said Princess Basma.²⁸

For the right to vote and to run for general elections Jordanian women's organizations have been struggling for long years. Jordanian woman was given this right since 1974²⁹, but for a long time no woman has been successful in getting elected to Parliament. In 1989 twelve women ran for office, but none of them succeeded, in 1993 only three women ran for office, and one of them succeeded in becoming the only female-member of the Lower House of Parliament (with the total number of 80 members).³⁰ Two women were also appointed to the Senate in 1993. In 1997 elections, 17 women ran for Lower House of Parliament, but none of them succeeded. In the same year two women were appointed by the King to the Senate.³¹ By the 2003 Royal Decree, women have now been guaranteed 6 seats in the Lower House of Parliament. In 2006 there were also 6 female-members of Senate.³²

There are also only a few women in Jordanian Government. In the 1979 cabinet there was only one female-minister: the Minister of Social Development. It was the first woman to take up a ministerial post in Jordan.³³ In

²⁶ The first woman judge was appointed in May 1996.

²⁷ "The Jordan Times", June 30, 2006.

²⁸ *Princess Basma highlights importance of women's participation in politics*, "The Jordan Times", March 12, 2006.

²⁹ Cylwik, op. cit., p. 43.

³⁰ The first woman elected as a member of the Lower House, where she served from 1993 to 1997, was Tūḡān al-Fayṣal, Jordanian of the Circasian origin. In 2002 Al-Fayṣal was arrested following her public criticism of the Jordanian government. The sentence was 18 months imprisonment. In the prison she began a hunger strike to protest her arrest and was released for health reasons. Al-Fayṣal is one of the most important women rights activist in Jordan; <http://toujan.virtualactivism.net/arabic/jazeeralinks.htm>, 11.01.2007.

³¹ <http://iwwraw.igc.org/publications/countries/jordan.htm>, 11.01.2007.

³² www.amman.polemb.net, 11.01.2007.

³³ <http://iwwraw.igc.org/publications/countries/jordan.htm>, 11.01.07.

1984 in the 25-member cabinet a woman became the Minister of Information.³⁴ During the next years until 1992 no woman succeeded in being appointed to a ministerial post. In 1993 in the 29-member cabinet one woman became the Minister of Trade and Industry.³⁵ In 1994 there were two female ministers: the Minister of Trade and Industry and the Minister of Social Development, and in 1996, 1997 and 1998 there was only one female-minister: the Minister of Planning. In 1999 the first woman in Jordan became the Deputy Prime Minister.³⁶

More successes Jordanian women achieved in elections to local councils. The first woman won a seat in the 12-member Amman Mayoral Council in 1980, and she was reelected in 1986.³⁷ In 1995, ten women were appointed to the municipal councils throughout Jordan, and one of them became the first female-mayor. In 1999 only three out of forty three succeeded in being elected for 2530-seat municipal councils.³⁸

The 1976 Family Code improved the situation of Jordanian women. Women have the right to get married without parents' when they turn eighteen³⁹ and also to break off the engagement. *Mahr* is the ownership of woman and husband is obliged to secure her home, medical services, clothes and food. In the case of divorce, the husband is obliged to pay alimony. In spite of giving women some privileges, the Family Code is far from being perfect, and women still do not have equal rights with men. The most important problem remains the question of divorce—Jordanian woman can sue for divorce only in specified cases: when the husband concealed his mental illness before they got married, or when the husband leaves home for more than a year.⁴⁰ According to the Jordanian law, a divorced woman loses custody of her legitimate children if she marries a man who is not related to the children.⁴¹ Discrimination in Jordanian law is also that women do not have a right to obtain a passport without permission of a male-protector: father or husband, and that children of a Jordanian woman and a non-Jordanian man, according to the law, do not have Jordan-

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ <http://www.go.com.jo/QNoorjo/main/womenjo.htm>, 11.01.2007.

³⁹ Aḥmad Sālim Maḥam, *Aṣ-Šarḥ at-taṭbīqī li-qānūn al-aḥwāl aš-šaḥṣiyya al-urdunnī*, Maktabat ar-risāla al-ḥadīṭa, 'Ammān, 1419 h. – 1998 m., at-ṭab'a al-ūlā, al-faṣl 1, p. 284.

⁴⁰ Maḥam, Aḥmad Sālim, op.cit., al-faṣl 12, pp. 306-315.

⁴¹ Ibid., al-faṣl 16, p. 317.

ian nationality, while men married to foreigners can pass on their Jordanian nationality to their children.⁴²

The most important problem in Jordan still remains violence against women.

In the case of rape, cultural and social traditions together with discriminating law hinder women to obtain legal and medical assistance. Furthermore, according to the Jordanian Penal Code, the prosecution can be dropped, if the perpetrator agrees to marry his victim—the raped woman⁴³. Perpetrators usually agree to marry the victim, and for women marriage in such cases becomes a means to cover up the scandal and avoid shame. Women in abusive relationships can seek help only from hotlines, when available, and many would leave home if they could, but are frightened of reprisals and have no safe place to go.

The biggest problem in Jordanian society is so-called “honour killings” (*ğarā'im aš-šaraf*). There are many basic sources of discrimination and violence against women in Jordan, one of them is dependency and restrictions based on tradition and customs, but also various provisions in the law reinforcing women's low social status and inequality. According to the report of International Women's Rights Action Watch, in 1996 there were 483 crimes committed against women: murder, attempted murder, injury, rape, kidnapping. The most often motive still remains family disputes.⁴⁴ Jordanian Penal Code still lacks law prohibiting aggression against women and violence within family, and Jordanian activists report that women in their country accept their secondary status in society and the men's right to abuse them.

According to the Article 340, point 1 of the Penal Code, a man after discovering that his wife or any of his female relatives had committed adultery, injured, wounded or killed her, the person fornicating with her or both of them, was exempted from any penalty. In the same Article, point 2 it was clearly written that: a man who discovered his wife or one of his female relatives in “an illegal bed” with another man, killed wounded or injured her, the person fornicating with her or both of them, enjoyed a privilege of a reduced sentence.⁴⁵ In an effort to make the Article 340 “gender-neutral,” in 2001 a clause was added granting female attackers the same reduction in penalty.⁴⁶ In December 2001, Article 340 was repealed

⁴² <http://hrw.org/reports/2004/jordan0404/2.htm>, 11.01.2007.

⁴³ Tāriq Šafīq Nabīl, *Mağmū'at at-tašrī'āt al-ğazā'iyya*, Al-Maktab al-Fannī, 'Ammān 1977, al-mādda 308, p. 185.

⁴⁴ <http://iwwaw.igc.org/publications/countries/jordan.htm>, 11.01.2007.

⁴⁵ Nabīl, Tāriq Šafīq, op.cit., al-mādda 340, p. 192.

⁴⁶ http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/jordan0404/4.htm#_Toc69798567, 12.01.2007.

and replaced with a provision that permits a reduction in penalty only if the murder is committed immediately on finding the victim in the act of committing adultery or “in an illegal bed.”⁴⁷

According to the Article 98 of the Penal Code, the “honour” killer may receive a reduced sentence, if he proves that he has committed the murder in the fit of fury.⁴⁸ Under the Article 99 of the Penal Code, the “honour killer” may receive a reduced sentence, if the judges find extenuating circumstances—for example if the victim’s family doesn’t file a complaint.⁴⁹ In most cases families decide to drop charges against their own fathers, brothers or cousins.

Jordanian activists has been struggling for many years for amending some articles in the Jordanian Penal Code referring to “honour crimes”, yet nothing much has been done about that. Meanwhile, “honour killings” still remain the most often cause of women’s deaths in Jordan – in 1997, 95 per cent of all killings were connected to “jeopardizing the family honour”.⁵⁰

One of the greatest human rights defenders in Jordan is the feminist and journalist of “The Jordan Times”, Ranā Ḥusaynī. This young journalist exposed the shame of Jordan, when she broke the silence and decided to describe this shameful procedure in the columns of a Jordanian daily newspaper. Between many other human rights defenders appeared a young Jordanian whose goal was to guarantee all Jordanian women the right to live, before even women’s organizations started the battle for other laws.

Ranā Ḥusaynī graduated from the Oklahoma City University in 1993⁵¹, and now, among other things, she is a member of The Jordan Press Association (*Wikālat al-anbā’ al-urdunniyya*, since 2005) and Jordanian National Committee to Eliminate so-called Honour Crimes (*Al-Lağna al-Urdunniyya li-Muḥārabat Ğara’im aš-Šaraf*, since 1999). In 2001 she was also a member of judges panel of Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism. For reporting about “honour killings” and her activism against violence against Jordanian women, she earned many international awards: European Union’s Med-Media Program’s prize—for the best article “Murder in the name of honour” (in 1995), Reebok Human Rights’ award (in 1998), Human Rights Watch Award (in 2000). In 2004 she became one of the “Marie Claire Top Ten Women of the World”.⁵²

⁴⁷ http://www.equalitynow.org/english/actions/action_1802_en.html, 12.01.2007.

⁴⁸ Ṭāriq Šafīq Nabil, op.cit., al-mādda 98, p. 133.

⁴⁹ Ibid., al-mādda 99, p. 133.

⁵⁰ <http://iwraw.igc.org/publications/countries/jordan.htm>, 11.01.2007.

⁵¹ <http://www.ranahusseini.com>, 12.01.2007.

⁵² Ibid.

After returning to Jordan in 1993, Ḥusaynī joined the “Jordan Times” editorial staff. At the beginning of her career, Ḥusaynī used to write about different social issues, such as car accidents, robberies, fires. Then, after about four or five months, she focused on the problem of violence against women in Jordan, especially on crimes committed “in the name of honour”. The first murder case she discovered was a brutal killing of a sixteen-year-old girl, Kifāya, by her family only because she was raped by her own brother.⁵³ When Ḥusaynī went to investigate the crime, she decided to meet with the family of the killed girl. The girl’s two uncles started to assure the journalist, that their niece “was not a good girl”. Ḥusaynī’s question was: why did they kill the girl, if she was raped by her brother and why didn’t they punish him—and not her? The uncles looked at each other and one of them said to the other: “What do you think? Do you think we killed the wrong person?”—but the other replied quickly: “No, no. Don’t worry. She seduced her brother.”⁵⁴ The men said, their niece had tarnished the family honour, and both of them started to comment on the journalist’s dress and asked her why she was not married, why she had studied in USA. At the end they inferred that Ḥusaynī was not a good girl as well.⁵⁵

From then on, the journalist has covered many other brutal murder cases and everyone can read about it almost every week in “The Jordan Times”. Although Ḥusaynī has underlined many times that honour killings are part of culture, not religion, and that not all Jordanian women are threatened in this way, the public started to accuse Ḥusaynī of encouraging adultery and premarital sex. One man started to threaten that, if she didn’t stop writing, he would “visit” her personally at “The Jordan Times”.⁵⁶

But things have started to change for the better. In consequence of engaging the United Nations in the problem of honour killings in Jordan, the Ministry of Justice took a decision to modernize the Penal Code, especially Articles related to honour crimes and King ‘Abd Allāh asked the prime minister to amend all the laws that discriminate against woman.

Ranā Ḥusaynī has been awarded several times for her reporting about violence against Jordanian women. She has been featured in four books: Queen Noor’s book *Leap of Faith. Memories of an Unexpected Life*⁵⁷,

⁵³ <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/1321/context/journalistofthemoth>, 12.01.2007.

⁵⁴ <http://www.pbs.org/speaktruthtopower/rana.html>, 12.01.2007.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Królowa Noor, *Autobiografia. Opowieść o nieoczekiwanym życiu*, transl. into Polish by Barbara Cendrowska, Wyd. A. Kuryłowicz, Warszawa 2003.

Notable Muslims: Profiles of Muslim Builders of World Civilization and Culture by Natana J. DeLong-Bas⁵⁸. In April 2007 Ḥusaynī's own book *Murder in the Name of Honour* will appear in print.⁵⁹

The youngest generation of Jordanian women is not afraid of talking about honor crimes committed in their country. Some girls are conscious that murders in the name of honour are unfortunately still the part of their culture and take place not only in villages among uneducated traditional societies, but also in big Jordanian cities. Some other young women claim they don't know what exactly "the honour killing" means. But almost all of them claim, there is always a kind of punishment for a girl who jeopardizes her family's reputation, because the girl's reputation is her family's reputation, and for a girl in the Middle-Eastern society reputation still remains the most important thing she possesses. Girls tell about many different ways of punishment in case of jeopardizing the family's honour: ban of leaving home and going to school (or university), taking off some enjoyments—like pocket-money or using the cell-phone. There can be also a psychical punishment, like ceasing to talk to a daughter, that hurts her more than beating or screaming, in opinion of the girls. But they talk also about much more brutal ways of showing a girl she did something wrong in the opinion of the family: members of her family can beat her or marry her to the strange man to cover up the scandal and avoid shame. Situations in which a girl can jeopardize the honour of the family are very different: so-called 'urfī marriage (the marriage in secret)⁶⁰ and many other kinds of marriage that are not conformable to the Islamic law, girl's flight with a boy, adultery (that, according to Islamic law, means premarital sex) or pregnancy of an unmarried woman. But it is often said, that the family decided to punish the girl only on the grounds of some rumours: a husband suspects his wife of having sexual relationship with a man, or that his wife bore not his baby. Sometimes girls are punished because they were caught talking to a strange man. But the most tragic is the execution of the raped girl—especially, when she becomes victim of rape

⁵⁸ DeLong-Bas, Natana, *Notable Muslims: Profiles of Muslim Builders of World Civilization and Culture*, Oneworld Publications, 2006.

⁵⁹ <http://www.forefrontleaders.org/partners/middle-east/rana-husseini>, 12.01.2007.

⁶⁰ Marriage, which is conducted outside the law, undocumented or unregistered in a šari'a court and whose ceremony is not held in public. Jordanian religious scholars and lawyers maintain that such a union is against Islamic law. Article 17 of the Personal Status Law specifically prohibits 'urfī marriage. The Article 17 imposes prison sentences of one to six months and a fine not exceeding JD100 on those who take part in such marriage; Malḥam, Aḥmad Sālim, *Aš-Šarḥ at-taṭbīqī li-qānūn al-aḥwāl aš-šaḥṣiyya al-urdunnī*, Maktabat ar-Risāla al-Ḥadīṭa, 'Ammān, 1419 h. – 1998 m., aṭ-ṭab'a al-ūlā, al-mādda 17, p. 286.

within her own family. Among executors of the punishment the first place is usually the brother of the victim, then the father and uncle. The ways of killing are very different, family can shoot a woman, poison her, beat her to death or even burn her alive. Families that decide to solve the problem this way are usually convinced, that the society expects them to kill “the guilty one” and that this is the only way to remove the shame and recover the good reputation: blood cleanses honour. If you asked any of those men, who committed the murder of a female-member of their families, they would surely say: of course, I love her, for she’s my sister, but it is a duty. We have to realize then, the killer becomes somehow a victim as well, for there is a very high pressure on him from his whole family: if you don’t kill, you will be responsible for jeopardizing the family’s honour! If you kill, you’ll become a hero and everyone will be proud of you.

There is no law in Jordan that allows anyone to kill a woman, who was suspected of jeopardizing the family’s reputation, however, verdicts for those who committed such kind of murder were till now so little, that it almost gave permission for killing women. Women still are killed by their brothers, fathers, husbands and cousins, but with every year the situation becomes a little better: the authorities step-by-step change some laws that clearly discriminate against women, women rights groups struggle to change incorrect social practices against women, try to encourage them to use their rights in public and private lives and how to become less dependent on men, and the youngest generation of Jordanian women claim they are satisfied with the rights and duties they are entitled to in the society. They realize, the status of women is still not equal to men’s status, but in their opinion, men begin to treat them in the same way they treat themselves, they gave women rights, but also duties, so women can feel needed members of the society, beside that, women feel that men finally started listening to them and to their opinion in every sphere of private and public life.

On January 14th, a one-day “High Level Policy Forum on Gender” was organised by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation in cooperation with the World Bank under patronage of Queen Ranyā ‘Abd Allāh.⁶¹ The participants—senior Jordanian officials, policy-makers from several countries and international organizations, senior representatives from the private sector and civil society—talked about revising all laws that discriminate against women as part of its efforts to empower women and enhance their role in the national development process. The Jordanian Prime

⁶¹ Rana Husseini, *PM reiterates gov’t commitment to revise discriminatory laws*, “The Jordan Times”, January 15, 2006.

Minister, Ma'rouf Bakhit, emphasized, that the laws that discriminate against women in Jordan are: the civil and personal status, labour, social security, and civil and military retirement laws.⁶² In the opinion of the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Suhayr al-'Alī, one of the most important ways to empower women is to work on altering negative cultural attitudes towards them that are limiting their participation capabilities in various sectors.⁶³ According to the official statistics, women's presence in the judiciary branch is only 3% and 8% in political party boards, while unemployment among females in Jordan is 26%, and women's economic participation does not exceed 13%.⁶⁴

There are active many human rights organizations and women rights groups in Jordan, which struggle to improve the situation of every Jordanian woman. There are also many different programs for women, such as: "Women-in-Development" (created in 1986). A prototype "Women-in-Development" project was initiated to accelerate the integration, participation and representation of low-income women in national socio-economic development.⁶⁵ The program was supported at the beginning by UNFPA—an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, every man and every child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.⁶⁶ Thanks to the "Women-in-Development" program, Jordanian women became more aware of their rights and possibilities, that stand before them. The program empowered women to become active participants in their own development, informed decision-makers in their homes and communities and trained income earners in their society. It also trained women's groups in the management, supervision and implementation of small-scale, self-employment business schemes for needy women.⁶⁷

Also established in 1986 in Aqaba, was a Sharifa Haya Abdullah Development Center (*Markaz aš-Šarīfa Hayā al-'Abd Allāh li-t-Taṭwīr*), which offers educational, social and cultural services to young Jordanian women.⁶⁸ The Center organizes, among other things, courses for unemployed women with

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ <http://www.go.com.jo/QNoorjo/main/womenjo.htm>, 15.01.2007.

⁶⁶ <http://www.unfpa.org/about/index.htm>, 15.01.07.

⁶⁷ <http://www.go.com.jo/QNoorjo/main/womenjo.htm>, 15.01.2007.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

secondary school education from Aqaba in the production of marketable tourist items, such as: sports and swim wear, home furnishing, as well as handicrafts. The Center also offers courses in the maintenance and repair of domestic electrical appliances, basic home safety, computer literacy and marketing, and serves as a cultural, social and recreational club for young women.⁶⁹

The number of NGOs in Jordan has doubled since 1989. In 1995 there were 655 Non-Governmental Organizations—led by members of the Royal family or by volunteers (but members of the Royal family may head their boards).⁷⁰ Some of the most important women's organization (led by members of the Royal family) are: The Jordanian National Committee for Women (JNCW, established in 1992), The Jordanian National Forum for Women (JNFW or "Forum", established in 1995), The Princess Basma Women's Resource Center (PBWRC, established in 1996), Office of Women's Affairs, The Queen Alia Fund for Social Development (QAF, found in 1978)—all of them are headed by Princess Basma—and The Noor el Hussein Foundation (NHF, established in 1985). Among NGOs led by different volunteers are: The General Federation of Jordanian Women (GFJW, found in 1981), Arab Women Organization (AWO, established in 1970), The Jordanian Women's Union (JWU, established in 1945, dissolved in 1975 and 1981, and finally reestablished in 1987), The Business and Professional Women's Club (BPWC, established in 1976). There are also many much smaller organisations, but also very important Non-Governmental Organizations for women in Jordan, such as: The Human Forum for Women's Rights (with only 31 members and 11 board members) or The Wehdat Credit Society (hosted in UNRWA Wehdat Center), that, among other things, provides trainings in accounting or financial management.⁷¹

There is still much to do in the sphere of women's rights in Jordan and there are many challenges to overcome, so that Jordanian women could possess the same social and economical status as men, but this small country in the Middle East seems to be a catalyst for change in the right direction for other Islamic states in the region. "History has shown that to succeed, we need to work together. The commitment is there and I'm hoping with your support we can foster the change"—the Queen Ranyā said during the one-day "High Level Policy Forum on Gender".⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/pubs/jordan_0198.pdf, 15.01.2007.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Rana Husseini, *PM reiterates gov't commitment to revise discriminatory laws*, op.cit.