

Report: Speaker Iman Elkadi program - Women's Empowerment

In the framework of the State Department speaker programs, PAS Abidjan welcomed Iman A. Elkadi from June 21 to 25, 2010 for a series of activities on gender-based issues.

1 - Visit to legal aid "clinic"

Prior to the conference on the '*Role and mission of religious women in the society*', speaker Iman Elkadi, accompanied by PAO Sita Liane Chakrawarti, visited the '*Clinique Juridique des Femmes*' for a working session with the cabinet members. This is an institution that fights against violence against women, where victims are welcomed to report and to be assisted.

2 - Role and mission of religious women in society

The conference held in the Embassy premises attracted more than 90 participants from miscellaneous religious communities and leaders, NGOs, youth, journalists, and the general public. The panel was composed of Iman Elkadi; Dr. Eliane Ekra, teacher at the West African Catholic University; Mrs. Elyse Gnagne, member of the Board of Administrators of the Methodist Church; and Mrs. Aminata Kane, a radio presenter at the National Islamic Radio. PAO Sita Liane Chakrawarti in her welcome address stressed the relevance of the subject, encouraging the participants to engage in a productive discussion. The panelists in turn demonstrated that, in general, the religious views of women's role and mission in the society do not profoundly differ from one religion to another. As a divine creature, she is dedicated to accomplish a divine mission. This goes beyond her role as mother, wife, and household to embrace social, economic, and professional responsibilities. Therefore, her daily behaviour should reflect her religious faith as religion advocates for moral virtues such as honesty, justice, sacrifice, diligence, patience, loyalty, and humility. As these are the same values and responsibilities enjoined on men, all of the speakers made the case for equality of gender in religion, which should be practiced in all aspects of life, including the workplace.

2 - Violence against women - Abidjan

As a result of the political and social conflict in Cote d'Ivoire, a significant number of girls and women have been victims of sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. And between 2007 and 2008, the number of reported cases of such violence increased dramatically. So, the conference delivered by speaker Iman Elkadi on '*Violence against women*' was relevant and timely in Abidjan and in the North, the former rebel-occupied region.

The conference in Abidjan attracted about one hundred participants, including high ranking officials from the Ministry of Family, Women and Social Affairs, medical doctors and supportive medical services practitioners, lawyers, the police, human rights activists, women's associations, NGOs, the Ivorian Bar association, media professionals, and youth.

The panel composed of Mrs. Iman Elkadi and Mrs. Nathalie Kouakou, Coordinator of the Women's Network of the Ivorian section of Amnesty International began by defining many forms of violence against women and girls that include physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Mrs. Elkadi shared moving experiences as a social worker and counselor of victims of domestic violence. She also shared the United States approach of fighting against the issue by

providing legal assistance, shelters, and child care. The ensuing discussion focused on the difficulty in recognizing, acknowledging, and assisting victims of abuse, as well as on the need to educate the public, the police, religious leaders, and youth about what constitutes abuse and how to fight it, hopefully paving the way for a future generation that does not accept violence against women as an acceptable mode of behavior.

3 - Violence Against Women - Bouake

PAS Abidjan reached out to hundreds of northern Ivorians during a trip to Bouake with Speaker Iman Elkadi. She met government officials, educational leaders, media professionals, representatives of nongovernmental and international organizations, including UN organizations.. Mrs. Konan-Metthy, a former International Visitor and a women's NGO leader, contributed to the success of this program in rallying more than 300 participants for the conference. Iman Elkadi specified the different aspects of domestic violence including physical aggression, sexual and emotional abuse, and intimidation. She also provided strategies for efficient working sessions with domestic violence victims. She recommended community mobilization and sensitization campaigns that urge individuals to speak out against sexual violence. She encouraged the spirit of solidarity and cooperation to reinforce the impact of women participation to the reconstruction process in Bouake. The PAO emphasized that such education needs to start with children and must include men; she also pointed out that the work of healing, reconciliation, and reducing violence is the responsibility of every member of society and that all persons have the same right to dignity, respect, and freedom from violence. The local representatives of UNFPA and the coordinator of the UN violence against women project in Cote d'Ivoire seized the occasion to cite centers and expertise available in Bouake and surrounding towns to provide support and care for victims of violence. For a stronger impact, the conference was interpreted in the most widely spoken languages in the region: *Baoule* and *Dioula*.

4 - African Muslim Women's Network - Cote d'Ivoire

Mrs. Elkadi and the Ivorian section of the African Muslim Women's Network met for a working session during which the speaker shared the United States experience of Islamic schools, families, and Muslim women's role in society. The PAO placed Mrs. Elkadi's experiences in the context of how communities, the educational system, and government in the US work. Prof Toure, the moderator and representative of the Ivorian group also shared insights on their activities, including their efforts to have women trained by the local preachers' association enable to do Muslim preaching. As in the interfaith conference, all agreed both that religion does not preclude women's equality and that all members of society must work for its development, which includes education on the rights and responsibilities of each person. The session ended with a visit to the headquarters of the newly established Ivorian section of the African Muslim Women Network.

Mrs. Iman Alkadi's experiences and presentations were well-matched to the target audiences. The participants at each program were well satisfied. They unanimously extended their

appreciation to the United States Mission in Cote d'Ivoire which never fails to reinforce mutual understanding and promote human rights and democracy through relevant programs and activities. These particular programs increased the participants' awareness of gender issues and met the MSP goals of human rights, women empowerment and interfaith dialogue. The program received abundant, positive, media coverage.