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Political Violence against Women: A Successful Campaign in Jordan

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Introduction

Political violence can be a silent killer for the presence of women in decision-making positions, as women find themselves as a direct or an indirect target for many acts of violence such as exclusion, negligence, harassment, bullying, attacks and accusations. As a Jordanian parliamentarian for three consecutive terms, who was elected for the first time in 2010 and was the youngest member, I was fully aware of how something like political violence can affect women's participation in decision-making. When I took my decision at the beginning of 2019 to break the wall of silence regarding political violence in Jordan, I was aware that it would not be easy, and that ready and anticipated charges would be pressed against me. It was a difficult decision, but it was necessary, not only for me, but It's my duty towards all Jordanian women and girls who were more than courageous in making the decision to participate in these affairs and in public life. Politics is not complete without the presence of women, because women bring to politics different values, opinions and visions. As well, they add more diverse standards in the decision-making process. There is a political, economic, and social loss for any country that does not try or exploit the competence of its women and girls fairly.

The road of a thousand miles begins with one step

We started to move to introduce the concept of political violence in Jordan, and that was in May 2019 and in partnership with the National Democratic Institute, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries to Combat Violence against Women. This was under the patronage of the Jordanian House of Representatives, which pledged to fulfill the recommendations of this initiative, and it later hosted all of our meetings and working sessions, taking into account that the percentage of women in the eighteenth parliament is 15.4%.¹ As for the current government, (Dr. Al-Razzaz's government), it started with a percentage of women that reached 25% and then decreased to 15%² taking into consideration that no woman in the history of Jordan has made it to head the House of Representatives or head the government. As for the governorate councils, the percentage of women is 13.4%.³ In municipal and local councils, women's representation reached 41%, without having any women in the position of a mayor or governorate council president in 2017 elections.⁴

In the beginning, the first reactions varied between the absolute denial of the matter, which I heard -for example- from some women parliamentarians; the fierce and cruel attack by some male politicians; the support and enthusiasm of some civil and feminist organizations; and also suspicion and uncertainty at times, and this is what I faced from some media outlets. However, soon the matter started to roll like a snowball until we reached today to achieve the following in Jordan:

1. Spreading national awareness of the concept and its forms until we were able to make a number of formal and informal organizations adopt specific forms of political violence such as cyber violence, electoral violence, social violence, media violence and others. A number of female politicians such as ministers and parliamentarians shared their experiences with political violence,

¹ IPU-UN WOMEN, Women in Politics Map 2020

² Economic and Social Council, The Status of The Country Report 2019, page 842.

³ "Sisterhood is Global Institute Jordan" statistics.

⁴ Ibid

which seriously contributed to breaking the barrier of silence on the practices that women politicians are exposed to in decision-making positions.

2. Spreading awareness of the concept at the local level and providing training on the “Guide on Combating Violence against Women in Politics” through a joint program between the Coalition of Women MPs and the National Democratic Institute. Specialized discussion sessions were held all over the 12 governorates of Jordan attended by people from different representational levels, from the media, and civil community to give the concept a national and local ownership. We came out with varying results of responses and interaction, but what is certain is that our direct listening, monitoring and documentation of many vivid testimonies spoken by women, especially members of municipal councils and decentralization, was an influential matter that gave what we propose a tangible real value.
3. The formation of a “National Advisory Team to Combat Political Violence against Women” of 17 volunteer experts divided into five main committees: legislative and legal aid, economic, academic, media, and the Cyber Violence Committee. An executive action plan was developed, and a coordinator was appointed to arrange for the team’s work and meetings. This in addition to allocating a hotline number (00962-77-5432292) to receive and deal with cases of political violence, and this information was distributed in all of the meetings that took place in the governorates and the team participated in them.
4. The publication of a “Guide on Combating Violence against Women” in Politics in both Arabic and English in cooperation between the Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries to Combat Violence against Women and the National Democratic Institute under the patronage of H.R.H Princess Basma Bint Talal. It constitutes a procedural framework and consists of 13 pages that deals with the definitions and characteristics of VAWP, who are the women targeted and affected by political violence, and who are those who cause political violence, whether men or women, and at the societal and political levels. It also includes, the forms of political violence, which included 1. Physical violence 2. Psychological or moral violence 3. Societal or clan violence 4. Economic violence 5. Cyber violence 6. Sexual violence 7. Legislative violence. The guide also dealt with the effects of political violence in the short and long terms, in addition to precautionary measures to address and prevent the phenomenon, as well as some therapeutic measures to deal with the cases on the ground.

The Tunisian model of legislation

The legislative path in most countries of the world, including Arab countries, goes to passing national laws or legislation that protect women from family or domestic violence. The Jordanian legislator went for this path and was the first Arab country to legislate a Law on the Protection from Domestic Violence in 2008 and after that came the law in force now, which is the Law of Protection from Domestic Violence No. (15) of 2017. Whereas, Tunisia took a different legislative approach by approving Organic Law No. 58 of 2017 related to the elimination of violence against women, in an unprecedented step that placed the best interest of women and protecting them from all forms of violence and discrimination as a fundamental priority. In article one of the third chapter of the general provisions the definition of (political violence) came as:

"Every act or practice whose perpetrator aims to deprive or impede women from practicing any political, partisan, NGOs-related activity, or from any right or entitlement in the "basic rights and freedoms" and is based on discrimination between the two sexes."

Also, there is a definition of (discrimination against women) which came as

"Any distinction, exclusion or restriction which results or aims at undermining the recognition of human rights and freedoms for women on the basis of complete and effective equality in the fields of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, or revoking the recognition of these rights, enjoying them, or practicing them by women regardless of color, race, religion, ideology, age, nationality, economic and social conditions, civil or health status, or language or disability."

Article 11 of the law stipulates that:

"Public and private media are responsible for raising awareness on the dangers of violence against women, methods of combating and preventing it, and train media workers to deal with violence against women in light of respect for professional ethics, human rights, and equality. It is forbidden to publicize and broadcast media materials that contain stereotypical images, scenes, words or actions that are offensive to the image of women, or which are devoted to violence against them, or diminish the danger of violence against them, by all means and media"

Article 18 of the same law states:

"Every perpetrator of political violence shall be punished with a fine of one thousand dinars, and in case of recidivism, the penalty is increased to six months imprisonment."

The efforts of the Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries to Combat Violence against Women (CVAW Arab)

The Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries to Combat Violence against Women launched in December 2016, and in cooperation with the League of Arab States the first draft of the "Arab Convention to Combat Violence against Women and Girls and Domestic Violence". It was the first regional convention referring to the concepts of political violence and discrimination based on political rights, and it has eleven chapters and 55 articles. In the first chapter which contains the general provisions, article (1/a) states that the term violence against women and girls should be understood as:

"any violent act -or abstention from doing it- that would result in violence instigated by sexism, and causes or is likely to result in harm, or the suffering of women and girls physically, sexually, psychologically, economically, socially, culturally or politically, including the threat of such acts or coercion or arbitrary deprivation of rights and freedoms, whether this occurs in public or private life, and violence against women and girls is considered a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against them."⁵

Article (1/c) states that:

⁵ Arab Convention to Combat Violence against Women and Girls and Domestic Violence, Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries to Combat Violence against Women documents.

“Discrimination against women is any discrimination, exclusion, or restriction that is made on the basis of sex and which results in, or aims at, undermining the recognition of women equality with men in human rights, or affecting their enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and any other rights, or revoking the recognition of these rights, their enjoyment and practicing them by women regardless of their social and health status, including disability.”

The coalition launched an email dedicated to receiving and dealing with any cases of political violence: CVAW_Arab@outlook.com.

Preventive and therapeutic measures for political violence:

UN Women, as one of the mechanisms approved for the United Nations, should adopt a convention against all forms of violence against women, including political violence, as this effort will facilitate the process of adopting legislation and policies to combat violence against women in all member states.

All women are subject to political violence. For that actions taken to combat political violence must be on several levels:

At the National Level

1. Urging states and governments to abide by the incorporation of international conventions on the rights of women or preventing discrimination against them and additional protocols in national policies and legislation, as well as urging states to explicitly stipulate the place of international agreements and treaties within the national legislative sequence.
2. Encouraging states and governments to pay attention to the 2030 sustainable development agenda, especially the fifth goal on gender equality, and the target related to ending all forms of violence against women and girls.
3. Supporting and stimulating awareness programs and campaigns and instilling concepts of the importance of everyone's participation.
4. The periodic and continuous review of school curricula to consolidate the concepts of human rights and women's rights, in order to ensure the creation of generations that adopt the concepts of gender equality in society and the participation of all in decision-making.
5. Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, security and peace, as the resolution urges states to take the necessary measures in matters related to women's participation in decision-making, negotiations and peace processes. As well, the integration of gender in training, peacekeeping, protecting women, and developing and implementing national plans for the resolutions in all countries.
6. Allocating budgets to support programs that enhance the participation of women in political and public life and the development of women's leadership skills.
7. Developing a special system to assist women who are subjected to political violence and creating practical mechanisms to support and advocate for women defending women's rights.
8. Legislative protection by stipulating in the constitution or in relevant laws the compulsory representation of women in specific percentages in representational and leadership positions

(government, parliament, parties, elected councils, unions ... etc.) and criminalizing all forms of violence, including political violence

9. Encouraging the formation of national alliances and networks in support of women involved in public affairs to patronize them.
10. Building the capacities of law enforcement officials to confront violence against women in political life in a way that ensures their ability to implement laws.
11. Conducting periodic surveys on the phenomenon, improving monitoring mechanisms and providing indicators at the level of governmental and non-governmental institutions
12. Activating the role of educational and legal institutions to raise the awareness on the concept of political violence.
13. States should ensure that departments concerned with the protection of women and the family take all necessary measures to protect women from physical, sexual and moral violence.⁶

At the Parliaments Level:

1. The inclusion of the protection of women from political violence in the Parliament's internal bylaws and codes of conduct and in the agendas of parliamentary conduct committees, and encouraging parliaments to adopt codes of conduct or codes of ethics and link them to parliamentary committees concerned with monitoring their implementation
2. Work to gain support from parliament, parties, men, women and the media, in order to protect women from political violence, emphasize the effective role of women in politics, and build a woman-friendly political culture.
3. Building supportive mechanisms such as: the affiliation to political parties and blocs in the parliament.
4. Defining and creating credible mechanisms within the parliament, easily accessible by individuals, to file complaints and investigate them in an impartial manner. Procedures should include due consideration of complaints of harassment, abuse, bullying, sexual harassment, and violent behaviors.
5. Amending legislation regarding political parties, the election law (quota), domestic violence, the labor law, the general budget law, the penal code, and the constitution to provide a safe and fair environment for women to participate in public life.
6. Building a bloc or a caucus for women politicians to contribute to confronting smear campaigns at all levels.
7. Finding medical and psychological assistance and support services and ensuring confidentiality.
8. Providing legal aid services and facilitating access to justice.
9. Creating a gender-sensitive policy within parliaments, and then training and educating parliamentarians and employees to deal with these policies.
10. Building a specific accountability system and determining deterrent penalties.
11. Developing parliamentary evidence to eliminate harassment and bullying in the workplace.

⁶ Guide on Combating Violence against Women in Politics, NDI and Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries documents.

12. Strengthening the role of civil society institutions and the media in monitoring cases of political violence in the parliament⁷

At the Political Parties Level:

1. Passing internal regulations explicitly prohibiting violent behaviors by members, with clear and enforceable penalties for those who violate them.
2. Conducting an internal audit to assess where internal procedures and practices overtly or inadvertently create disadvantages for or discrimination against women.
3. Educating members on the importance of the role of women and protecting them from violence
4. Allocating a portion of party funds to be used by women members to resource the personal protection plans they will need to remain safe and active in politics.
5. Strengthening the political capabilities of women, including negotiation and campaigning skills.
6. Taking into consider the party needs of women when approving their programs and budgets.
7. Allocating leadership seats for women during elections and inside parties.
8. Allocating a specific mechanism for women's affairs within the party.⁸

At the Civil Society Level

1. Determining what actions society views as political violence against women.
2. Spreading awareness among civil society organizations and individuals about the effects of political violence
3. Adopting a mechanism to monitor and address the effects of political violence whether in elections, parties, government work, and the media.
4. Taking into account political violence by monitoring legislation related to political action.
5. Identifying specific actions that can be taken at the national, parliamentary and political party level and organize an effective advocacy campaign to push for these measures to be adopted and fully implemented.
6. Establishing psychological support networks at the local level. Politically abused or fearful people can turn to these networks to obtain appropriate counseling and guidance.
7. Establishing clubs and groups that train women and build their capabilities to provide them with the tools and skills needed to confront the forms of political violence.⁹

At the Media Level

1. Changing the stereotype of women and clarifying actions that are political violence against women and strengthening the image of the importance of women's political participation.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

2. Issuing directives to all governmental and private media and film producers to use all available media platforms and focus them towards the achievement of women in public and private work. As well, changing the stereotype of women.
3. Build communication with media professionals who cover political activities in Parliament and the government on gender sensitivity and hold training workshops on this topic.¹⁰

Cyber Violence:

As a result of the spread of the phenomenon of cyber violence and bullying against women leaders and politicians on social media, I decided to devote part of this paper to the topic of cyber violence because of its importance in Jordan. Cyber violence is a very prevalent phenomenon, as reports indicate that nearly three quarters of women using the Internet have experienced some form of violence. Online presence through social media can be described as a double-edged sword for women politicians and it is a unique and very useful tool for direct communication with constituencies and the masses. It helps mobilize support and participation and provides a platform on which violence and impunity can spread. Cyber ¹¹ violence takes the following forms:

1. Bullying and attacking women politicians based on their gender and detached from “the right to expression”
2. Piracy or hacking, which targets and penetrates the pages and accounts of political women.
3. Stalking, which is following political women on all social media and public pages in a manner intended to harm women involved in public affairs¹².

In a study by the “World of Letters”, which aimed to analyze the electronic content of a number of current and former political women in Jordan, they found that the five most important types of cyber violence are:

1. Character assassination, defamation and allegations of incompetence
2. Offensive comments based on gender
3. Insults and the release of offensive names and titles
4. Threats of violence and physical assault
5. Sexual notes and comments ¹³

How to face cyber violence:

Best practice should be based on 3 ‘S’s – (Sensitization, Safeguards and Sanctions)

At the Sensitization level: Prevent cyber VAWG through changes in social attitudes:

1. Society to prevent all forms of cyber VAWG through training, learning, campaigning, and community development

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² World of Letters documents

¹³ Ibid

2. Justice and security/police to integrate cyber VAWG concerns into all criminal and cyber-security training¹⁴
3. Working with influencers in the media, technical influencers, and influencers on social media, to enhance the political role of women.
4. Training women involved in political work and public life on methods of personal protection and maintaining and defending personal reputation.¹⁵

At the safeguards level: Oversight & monitoring to minimize risks for women & girls

1. Industry to maintain responsible Internet infrastructure & customer care practices
2. Development of technical solutions
3. Promote due diligence & duty to report abuse¹⁶

At the sanctions level: Adapt & apply laws & regulations

1. Develop laws, regulations and governance mechanisms
2. Courts and legal systems to enforce compliance and effective punitive consequences for perpetrators
3. Consultations on a cyber civil rights agenda¹⁷
4. Monitoring and controlling social media and taking the necessary measures against the users of these means in the event of political violence against women.¹⁸

Tips to avoid cyber violence:¹⁹

1. Ignoring
2. Blocking abusive followers
3. Filter all comments, as any comment containing bad content will be deleted and hidden automatically. This is feasible by Facebook for example.
4. Reporting to the social media companies of any comment or message containing abuse, harassment or bullying.
5. Taking legal measures against abusers, such as using the Jordanian Cybercrime Law No. 27 of 2015, where several articles were mentioned that can be relied upon to provide legal protection from cyber violence:

¹⁴ UNESCO documents, 'Combatting Online Violence against Women and Girls: A Worldwide Wake-Up Call.' launched by the Broadband Commission Working Group on Gender, <https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/highlightdocumentenglish.pdf> , last visited October 3, 2020.

¹⁵Guide on Combating Violence against Women in Politics, NDI and Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries documents.

¹⁶ UNESCO documents, 'Combatting Online Violence Against Women and Girls: A Worldwide Wake-Up Call.' launched by the Broadband Commission Working Group on Gender, <https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/highlightdocumentenglish.pdf> , last visited October 3, 2020.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Guide on Combating Violence against Women in Politics, NDI and Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries documents.

¹⁹ World of Letters Organization Documents.

- Article (9 / a), which is the article that punishes every person who publishes all that is audible, legible, or visible acts related to sexual exploitation with imprisonment from 3 months to a year and a fine of 300 to 5000 Jordanian dinars
- Article 13: Anyone who publishes or broadcasts, intentionally and badly, false rumors against any natural or legal person shall be punished by imprisonment for a period of not less than 3 months and not exceeding two years and a fine of not less than 1000 dinars and not more than 2000 dinars.
- Article 11: Any person who publishes or re-publishes information or data containing defamation, slander and demeaning is punished with at least 3 months imprisonment and a fine of 100 to 2000 Jordanian dinars.