

Moroccan Women: Women in Morocco live in a country that is 99% Muslim and women in the United States live in a country that is 0.8% Muslim. Still, women in government in both these countries do not navigate as freely as did the merchant ships of colonial days under the oldest, unbroken peace treaty in U.S. history between their two countries.

The 1786 Moroccan-American Treaty of Friendship signed by Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Sultan Mohammed III who declared that merchant ships sailing the Atlantic Ocean from the new U.S. nation would be under the protection of the sultanate from Barbary Pirates and could enjoy safe passage. Women's passage into politics in both these countries occurred centuries hence.

The earliest Moroccan women's political organizations did not take shape until 1944 with the Women's Section of the Istiqlal Party, the Union of Moroccan Women and in 1946, the Akhawwat al-Safaa. Two women of note in the 40's are Malika al-Fassi, the only woman to sign the Manifesto of Independence and Lalla Radia Ouzzani Chafdi, who helped educate, fund, and build a Fez-based high school for poor women, albeit herself illiterate.

Between the years 1956-70, a state feminism emerged creating a "friendly" relationship between the state and women concerning women's rights to education, political participation, and work. Mohamed V established a commission of male Ulama headed by Allal al-Fassi to codify the Personal Status Code that was "outrageously disadvantageous to women, particularly in matters relating to marriage, divorce and inheritance."

In the 1980s, women's voices appeared in two women's movements. One promoted social equity through party politics and another pointed up the gender issue and the singularity of women's demands. Out of these emerged pioneering women's associations such as L'Association Marocaine des Femmes Democrates, L'Action Feminine, and Jossour. In 1983, the first feminist journals came out seriously addressing gender issues.

These not-for-profits of the 80's actually began to take shape in the 1970's. Similar in the United States when women's studies first appeared as college courses and the groundbreaking Title IX was passed in 1972. But not so similar in that the genesis for U.S. women's organizations began not a decade, but a century earlier, i.e., AAUW, which began with 17 women in 1881 Boston, now with a nationwide membership of 100,000.

Since the 1990s there has been a dramatic increase in women's civil-societal activism directed towards legal and protective rights, combating illiteracy (particularly in rural areas), and promoting awareness to women's issues. One million signatures collected by L'Action Feminine resulted in the 1992 amendment of the Family Code by King Hassan II. The European Commission, World Bank, and UNESCO, have funded numerous seminars and workshops on issues like domestic violence, fund-raising, illiteracy and information technology to empower women.

Also in 1992, two women were elected members of parliament. In 1997, in a thirty-member cabinet, 4 women were designated Secretaries of States by the late Hassan II. In 2000 the first woman minister was designated to be responsible for Women's Issues, Childhood and the Handicapped. Also that year, an unprecedented three women received ambassador assignments.

September 2002 saw three women named to government posts of Family, Immigration and, Illiteracy and Non-Formal Education. That October, a gender quota system in parliamentary elections was implemented. Accordingly, thirty women were elected in the legislatures, plus five more directly elected. And in 2003, 6,024 women announced their candidacies in municipal elections. Though 127 were elected, in a total of 22,816 positions, women constituted a mere 0.55%. The 2007 parliamentary elections conformed to the quota system of thirty seats for women. Four more women were directly elected and 7 women were appointed ministers.

On 19 October 2008: The Monarch called on both the government and parliament to constructively cooperate to put forward sensible mechanisms to ensure that a larger number of women would stand as candidates and be elected to local councils. The principal purpose, the King remarked, "is to make sure women are fairly represented in local governments, and to enable local councils to benefit from the contributions of competent Moroccan women known for their integrity, pragmatism, and concern for social well-being." That year on 28 October: Moroccan women MPs called for the elaboration of a bill to strengthen women's political participation and safeguard the right to equality, "proposing" that the bill should amend the electoral code so that women constitute one third of seats in the 2009 municipal elections.

As it was in colonial days, friendship between these two countries was similar in 2001. Morocco was amongst the first Arab and Islamic states to denounce the 9/11 terrorist attacks and to declare solidarity with the American people in fighting terrorism.

As it was naught in colonial days for women in government in these two countries, so it is similar and next to naught for these women now as well. The 111th U.S. Congress politically navigates with 17% American women and the Moroccan Parliament, after the 2007 elections, politically navigates with 10% Moroccan women.

Sources: Women & Politics in Morocco, Fatima Sadiqi - University of Fez

<http://chartsbin.com/view/r80>

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5431.htm>

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