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Kuwait News**'Very few women at top posts shows nation's lack of confidence in them'**

KUWAIT CITY, May 4: Only 23 Kuwaiti women have been appointed to various leadership posts, including ministers and undersecretaries — a clear indication of the country's lack of confidence in women as decision makers, Dr Salwa Al-Jassar said during the 'Women in Business' conference at the American University in Kuwait Saturday.

Al-Jassar, chairperson of Women Empowerment Center and candidate from the Second Constituency, explained there are four types of women in terms of their contributions to the business sector - the employed who receive regular salaries in accordance with the financial or economic condition of the state, businesswomen, private sector workers, and the disabled who work from home or adequately equipped organizations. Citing the demographic report published in January 2009, Al-Jassar said there are 1.250 million Kuwaitis out of the 3.3 million total population in the country, and Kuwaiti women constitute around 56 percent of the entire workforce. She added women make up 37 percent of the private sector workforce and 57 percent in the public sector, indicating most of these jobs are educational and administrative in nature.

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Al-Jassar pointed out most Kuwaiti women prefer to work in the public sector due to lesser work hours, higher salaries, more secure work conditions, flexible annual leaves, and guaranteed pensions, while the private sector is known for appreciating and rewarding competent employees, honing the skills of employees, and providing more opportunities for external activities.

As for the disadvantages of the public sector, Al-Jassar mentioned nepotism, mismanagement, outright violation of resolutions and laws, failure to reward outstanding employees, masked unemployment, and slow progress. "Women think the private sector is taxing due to longer work hours, lack of job guarantee, fewer vacation leaves, gender discrimination, and tough duties," she opined.

Al-Jassar is currently conducting a study for Al-Kawthar Center on the obstacles that GCC women are facing in the business arena, as well as initiatives taken by different government and private institutions to support women. She said Kuwaiti women have to overcome a myriad of challenges to be recognized as a tough competitor in the business world.

Talking about the social obstacles, Al-Jassar affirmed Article 41 of the Constitution stipulates gender equality, yet gender discrimination still widespread in the private sector. She said women have limited options in the private sector as they have been restricted to certain jobs, thereby, discouraging Kuwaiti women to work in private companies. She added the general belief that work hinders mothers from performing their household duties efficiently is another obstacle. "These impediments led to the prevalence of social and financial dependence on men among families, instead of a healthier partnership. We should not also forget the administrative obstacles to women's quest for leadership posts due to lack of trust in their abilities. Kuwait University consists of around 30 faculties, only two of which are run by female deans," stated Al-Jassar.


About the personality-related hindrances, Al-Jassar mentioned lack of self-esteem among women, which prevents them from overcoming their fears and facing challenges. She said the lack of training and preparatory courses for women have also put them one step behind their male counterparts in terms of qualifications and expertise.


On the financial obstacles, Al-Jassar revealed the Middle Eastern societies still frown upon women running their own business due to lack of trust in their abilities, social norms and the 'consumption' mindset of women.

"Rapid technological developments made it even harder for women to find a niche in the private sector as computers can now perform functions previously done by humans," Al-Jassar lamented. She admitted women had a difficult time keeping up

with the rapid technological changes; hence, men have been given more privileges than women. "Our educational system falls short in teaching young women to give them a competitive edge in the labor market," she concluded.

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