

SUDANESE WOMEN'S UNION: STRATEGIES FOR EMANCIPATION AND THE COUNTER MOVEMENT

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Background

Sudan is the largest country by area in Africa. In 1993, its population was estimated at 28.7 million. From 1821 until 1885, Sudan was under the rule of Turkish-Egyptian imperialism, and from 1898 until 1956, it was under British-Egyptian imperialism. During its stay in our country, British colonialism made all the arrangements necessary to ensure that its policies and economic interests were adopted and preserved long after its departure from Sudan. This was to ensure that our country would continue to be a cheap source of manpower, raw materials, and a market in which to sell Britain's manufactured output. They succeeded, and our country continued along this path and became even worse than before.

In particular, this affected women, who experienced repression and discrimination even before they were born. At the marriage celebration, guests and relatives of the newly-wed couple would sing a popular song in which they wished the groom a baby son as his first child. After marriage, discrimination against women became even more apparent at the family house, where the largest and most beautiful quarters of the house were usually reserved for the man and his guests. Men were usually given the best food, and women ate the leftovers, after the men had eaten. Girls were circumcised during their early childhood to control sexuality and to ensure virginity, intimating that it is an Islamic mode, although it is not. Young women were denied the right to choose their husbands and, in most cases, they were not even consulted about their marriage. Moreover, all family laws were designed in favor of men, to give them the maximum advantage. As mothers, women did not enjoy rights equal to those of the fathers, and yet they called, falsely, the house "the women's kingdom!!" The man had the right to marry more than one wife, and the right to divorce his wife or wives at any time; in the event of divorce, the "obedience law" forced the wife to go back to her husband if he changed his mind, irrespective of her interest and desire. Furthermore, family laws granted

the mother custody of her son up to the age of seven, and of her daughter up to the age of nine.

Until a few years back, there were no laws to make the father pay for the maintenance of his children after divorce. Ironically, even in the Southern region, where some of the population is Christian, men also married more than one wife because women represented an important economic force, and they provided valuable work in agricultural and food production. Thus the more wives the husband had, the greater was his wealth, and the larger was his number of children, which, in turn, gave him social status. This is an indication that Islam had not introduced polygamy, and that traditions and economic benefits are more persistent than religion.

At the level of society, women also faced discrimination. Women's illiteracy was still very high, and the number of schools for girls was less than half the number of schools for boys. The majority of women did not go out for work, except for a tiny minority, whose work was confined to nursing and education. Women used to get four-fifths of men's wages for the same kind of work and the same qualifications. Women were denied opportunities in training, promotion, pensionable service, and the right to a paid maternity leave. The monthly contract work arrangement in operation at that time forced women to quit their jobs after marriage, and made them susceptible to losing their jobs with short notice. In agricultural areas, women's work was considered as part of men's work, and they were not paid for the amount of work they carried out in the fields.

In Western Sudan, for example, women did all the agricultural work, while men did nothing. But after the harvest, the men took all the income and married another wife. This is why the percentage of wives killing their husbands was growing. This was the women's situation before independence was achieved from British rule, which lasted fifty eight years.

Foundation of the Sudanese Women's Union's (SWU)

In 1952, the Sudanese Women's Union (SWU) was founded. It is therefore the first and only grassroots organization in the whole of Sudan, with branches all over the country, including the Southern region and villages. Its small branches in the living areas of some towns

helped both to reach housewives in their homes, and to train young leaders in these areas. It had specialized committees for working women, students, education and culture, branches, information and propaganda, and finance. Immediately after its foundation, it started to make contacts and relationships with other women's organizations, nationally, regionally and internationally, in order to exchange experiences and foster solidarity. It became an executive member of The Pan-African Women's Federation, All-Arab Women's Union, and the International Women's Democratic Federation. It also made good relationships locally with students, youth organizations, trade unions, the media, singers and musicians, football teams, police and all non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The famous singers created songs about women's education, their roles in society, and their equality. They organized big parties, and gave the income to our Union. The biggest football teams also used to organize games twice a year for the same purpose. They helped our Union financially, and were a strong support to the women's question in general, and to our Union in particular, because music, singing and sports are more effective in reaching the masses than lectures and political speeches.

In 1955, some of my colleagues and I started publishing the *Women's Voice Magazine*, to raise women's awareness. A majority of the executive members considered it a big risk and rejected our proposal for the magazine to be published by the Union.

Our Ways of Activities

Due to a lack of experience, the Union first started by promoting reformist and charity work. It was soon realized, however, that these kinds of activities would not solve women's problems, or eradicate illiteracy among them, or promote equality. Also, charity would never eradicate poverty. As a result, the Union introduced some changes to its tactics, by conducting a peaceful demand campaign to go side by side with the work it had already been doing, so as to put pressure on the government to change its policies and laws affecting women. Thus, a campaign to win women voting rights was launched in 1953, with the view of transforming women's votes into a political force, as all parties would compete to win their votes. The *Women's Voice Magazine* played a large role in that campaign by explaining the

goals of the Union, the real causes of women's discrimination, and ways to achieve equality. This helped both to raise women's awareness, and to gain the support of many groups within society. It explained the following issues:

- The main causes of women's discrimination.
- The real stand of Islam towards women's involvement in politics and their equality.
- Emancipation does not mean getting rid of our national, good traditions and values, or for us Sudanese women to become another copy of the Western woman-- It is emancipation from illiteracy, backwardness, disease, unemployment, poverty and discrimination in the home and in society.
- Equality does not mean for Sudanese women to become another copy of the man. It means for women to be completely equal to men in rights and decision-making at all levels.
- Men, as males are not responsible for discrimination against women. Most of them are also exploited and discriminated against. For this, women and men should work together to make social changes that preserve democracy, which is based on social justice and human rights.

Fight For Democracy

In 1958, two years after Independence, the Prime Minister of the civilian Umma party government handed over power to the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, General Ibrahim Abouud, to avoid the expected defeat in parliament over the issue of American aid to Sudan. This aid was rejected by all political parties, trade unions and our Union, on the ground that Sudan is a rich country and did not need it, and that our government should instead pursue a policy of self-reliance, to promote the country's local resources. On coming to power, the military government accepted the American aid, known as the "Eisenhower Scheme," then dissolved all political parties, trade unions, and our Union. Many American experts were sent to Sudan to plan our economic policies in particular and our government policy in general. This was an obvious indication that soon after we had achieved

our political independence in 1956, a new type of imperialism had found its way to our country in the form of economic advisors. Later on, it was revealed by Philip Agee, one of the CIA men, that the USA did have a main role in planning that military coup.¹ At that time, our economic situation started to deteriorate, and we became drowned in debt.

After it had been banned, our Union went underground, and started to organize women to take part in the struggle to overthrow the military regime. We used housewives' co-operative societies as a legal umbrella, and also used them to explain to women that policies and legislation executed by the government have direct control on the life of every citizen. Government policy affects the infant's milk in his mother's breast, the income of the family, standard of living, health care, education and even the love in the hearts of the youth. If they are jobless, homeless, illiterate, and poor, no one would love them. For all these reasons, we argued, women should be involved in politics in order to work with men to regain democracy, and be able to direct the government policy for the benefit of her children, family, and society. As a result of these efforts, in addition to the role played by the *Women's Voice Magazine*, women *en masse*, for the first time in our history, took part in the October 1964 revolution, which overthrew the military regime. Immediately, women gained the right to vote and to stand for elections. Two women stood for elections in 1965. One represented the Islamic Front, which is in power in Sudan now, and had previously opposed women's political rights under the name of Islam. The other candidate was me.

The result of these elections was a defeat for the Islamic Front representative, and I became the first Sudanese woman member of parliament (MP) in Sudan. Inside the parliament, I demanded and introduced drafts of acts for working women's equal rights. Outside the parliament the Union formed The Working Women's Equality Committee that included representatives of student and youth organizations, as well as trade unions. This committee organized a wide campaign supporting working women's equality to men. As a result, working women achieved the following rights in 1969:

¹Philip Agee, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* (Toronto, New York: Bantam Books, 1975), p. 82.

- The right to enter all professional spheres. Accordingly, women were able to enter the judiciary, and even became judges in Islamic law, as well as serving as diplomats, in the armed forces, police, and in hotels. They started to take part in public life, political parties, and all activities inside and outside Sudan.
- Equal pay for equal work, equal chances in training and promotion, and equal pensionable services.
- A fully paid maternity leave of eight weeks, plus feeding hours.
- The abolishment of the monthly contracted work, and new arrangements for women after marriage.

On the family laws front, the following resulted from our campaign:

- An act was issued giving girls the right to be consulted before marriage.
- Abolishment of the obedience law.
- Women were given the right to divorce in cases of proven abuse. Women could also divorce if they had no interest in living with their husbands, as long as he was given back the dowry.
- Mothers were allowed custody of their sons up to the age of seventeen, and of their daughters until marriage.
- In the case of divorce, children were given the right to maintenance by their fathers, provided that it did not exceed half the father's income.

In May 1969, Numeiri took power by a military coup. He drew a deal with our Union, promising to put all women's achievements into practice, in return for Union support for his regime. But in less than a year, he changed his mind and withdrew all that had been agreed upon. As a result, the Union withdrew its support from the government. The result of that episode was the banning of SWU activities in 1971. The Union went underground again and started to organize women to take part in the struggle to overthrow Numeiri's regime.

In 1983, the Islamic Front entered Numeiri's government and declared the application of Islamic law. According to the adultery law, a woman is guilty of the crime of adultery if she has merely been seen in

the company of a man from outside her immediate family, even if this meeting has taken place in public. The penalty for this offense is a fine of 100 Sudanese pounds, plus eighty lashes and a prison sentence of one year. Convictions of the innocent led to an increase in the number of suicides among women, especially as the accused were publicly shamed in the media. This law is against Islamic principles and laws. The hidden purpose of passing that law was to make families stop their daughters from going out, in order to protect the family's honor and reputation. Another law was passed which made it illegal for women to travel alone.

In 1985, a popular uprising took place and overthrew Numeiri's regime. Women took part in it. But in 1989, we had another *coup d'état*, and the Islamic Front regained power under the leadership of the officer Omer El Bashir. It seems that the foreign experts are accurately planning a military *coup d'état* for us, every four years (1965-1969), (1985-1989) after overthrowing the previous military regime. I do not blame them; our Sudanese rulers are the ones to be blamed.

The Islamic Front announced an Islamic state which is against Islamic principles. There is no state in Islam. This can be proven by the verses of Qur'an in which His Mighty God reminds the Prophet Mohamed, who brought Islam to earth, that he has no power over Muslims, and his only role is to give them the message of Islam. Also, it is a violation of human rights to apply Islam in a country where a third of the population is not Muslim. The Islamic Front government started the civil war again under the slogan of Islamic War, because the people in the South are not Muslim. This is also against Islamic principles, because in one of the verses of Qur'an, His Mighty God reminded His Prophet Mohamed that it is up to the people, and it is their right to either believe in God or not to believe. He has no right to force them.

Immediately after seizing power, this government banned all political parties, trade unions, our Union, and all democratic and other women's organizations except the Muslim sisters organization, The General Sudanese Women's Union. They imprisoned political leaders and dismissed tens of thousands of men and women from their jobs as well as all women judges, diplomats, army and police officers, and high civil servants. They imprisoned women's leaders. They abolished all achieved women's rights, especially in family law. They introduced a

new family law that deprived women of any rights within the family. For example, this law gave the father the right to get his daughter married, even if she is underage, and to stop his daughter's marriage through the courts, if he disagrees with it, irrespective of her desires and wishes. They made it compulsory for women to wear the *Hijab*. Those who were found not wearing it may be flogged in public, and be dismissed from their jobs or schools.

Three years ago, in 1994, they issued a law which considers the Sudanese women's costume *Toab* as not Islamic, and legislated that women should put on the Iranian costume, *Shador* instead. Our Union organized a campaign against the law, and issued a declaration in which it challenged the government to publish the verse of Qurran that considers the Iranian costume the official Islamic uniform. It also revealed the fact that Iran had given them tens of thousands of these costumes for free. They made *Shador* compulsory in order to make a profit from its sale.

Women in the Southern region of our country and in the Nuba Mountains in Western Sudan are suffering the most. They are facing, with their children: death, disaster, diseases, famine, and displacement because of the civil war. In the Nuba Mountains, women are suffering from ethnic cleansing and the slave trade. As a result of the policy of this dictatorship, the Sudanese people are suffering from inflation, famine, lack of necessities and even bread, lack of medicine, health care, electricity, water and social services.

For the first time in the history of our country, about seven million people have fled to seek asylum in other countries. On top of all that, the government has fully implemented the IMF structural adjustment program. The Sudanese pound, which was equal to three US dollars in 1976, now trades at twenty-five hundred to one US dollar (2500:1) as a result of both structural adjustment and regular devaluation of the local currency. This has caused complete economic destruction. Consequently, big changes have taken place in our society, which still has a semi-primitive agricultural economy. A wealthy parasitic capitalist minority class has been created from the billionaire leaders of the ruling regime. Our wide middle class has disappeared and the vast majority of our population live in complete poverty, particularly women and children.

Despite all these sufferings and difficulties, our Union succeeded in uniting all groups of women to work together to mobilize and organize the mass of women to take part with the opposition in the fight against the regime in order to regain democracy and peace.

The Expensive Cost Of Resistance

As I mentioned before, when Numeiri came to power in 1969, he drew a deal with our Union to put all women's achieved rights into practice in return for SWU support for his regime. But in less than one year, he changed his mind, and instead, offered to make me Minister of Women and Social Affairs. I refused his offer. Also my husband, who was the Secretary General of the Trade Unions Federation, refused his offer to become the Minister of Labor. The result of that episode was the banning of Union activities in 1971. In July of the same year, Numeiri executed my husband after torturing him. They arrested me on the same day, and I was imprisoned for two and a half years.

After I was released, I filed a case in the supreme court against Numeiri and his Minister, Abul Gasim Ibrahim who tortured my husband. The next day they sent me to a prison outside Khartoum and kept me in the same room with male criminals for three days without food and water. The criminals were very polite to me, and refused to eat or drink, expressing their solidarity with me. After that, I asked for a judge, who came, got very angry and ordered that I be sent to the hospital. The lawyer's trade union organized a silent march to the supreme court and handed a protesting memorandum.

In 1983, Numeiri sent me to an emergency military court. But before arriving at the court, he announced by all official media that I should be beaten and sent to prison for the rest of my life. Thousands of people surrounded the court. The government was compelled to release me. They pretended that I was insane after pulling me out of the plane on my way to London for medical treatment, because I attacked and accused the president and his family of being corrupt in front of passengers at the airport.

In 1976, they sent a large group of our Union members to prison in the same place with the female criminals. We organized them, kept the prison very clean, arranged literacy classes, and helped them to go on a hunger strike to both improve their nasty food and to have

the right to be medically treated in a hospital instead of in the prison clinic by the nurse. When they decided to release us, the women prisoners insisted on celebrating that occasion and made a song for us saying: "Oh, Fatima and colleagues, we love you a lot because you helped us a lot. You changed the hell of prison into a paradise. We pray to God to bring you back to us again." We went back other times.

For these achievements, the UN awarded our Union the UN Human Rights Prize in 1993. Thus the Sudanese's Women's Union became the first, and until now, the only women's NGO to be awarded this prize.

Women's Worldwide Inequality

It is well known that women in all developing countries suffer from discrimination, at home and in society, irrespective of their religion or race. In addition, women in the developed countries, which claim to be civilized, democratic, and defenders of human rights, are still unequal to men in rights and decision making. This is reflected in UN statistics:

1. Economic Activities in the USA (1994): Unpaid Family Workers-- Women 76%
2. Working Time per week for women and men: U.K. Women 44, Men 38; Germany Women 45, Men 42; Italy Women 46, Men 36
3. Wages: USA-- Women receive 68% of men's salaries, in the U.K. 68%. The highest is Sweden-- 89%.
4. Maternity leave in USA is 12 weeks, unpaid
5. % of women ministers (government) in USA 14%
6. % of women deputy ministers (government) in USA 26%

The highest percentage of women in ministerial levels of government is in Belgium with 35% of ministers and 49% of deputy ministers. These statistics reflect the fact that the Western capitalist regimes consider the value of women as less than half the value of men. Accordingly, western women are far from equal to men in all fields, despite the fact that the women's movement started in western countries in the 17th century.

To move to another point concerning women's discrimination, I would like to review two Arabic poems which reflect women's situation in two different societies. One of them says that: "Women are devils created for us, men, we pray for God to protect us from them." This poem reflects feudalist concepts that consider women as snakes and devils, thus denying the fact that they are human beings and have any rights. On top of that, they are created only for men, and not as part of the society, in which they do not have any role. During that period, religions were interpreted by males only.

The other Arabic poem says: "Women are aromatic plants, which are created for us, men, to smell and enjoy, and of course, all of us men love their sweet smell." This poem reflects the concept and theory of the bourgeois class. In western capitalist societies, the mass media and movies concentrate on women as a sex, and on their beauty and bodies. They use beautiful women for commercial advertisement, sexy films, beauty competitions and fashion shows. But rarely do they concentrate on their equality or their equal role in society. So, despite the fact that western countries are developed and claim to be civilized, democratic, and defenders of human rights, women, half the population, are not equal to men. They are neither equal in terms of rights, or in decision-making, as is proven by the UN statistics.

Reasons for Inequality

It is very important to discover the reasons for women's inequality. There are different analyses and views about the causes of women's worldwide inequality to men. Some of these views will be discussed next.

1. Some views relate this inequality to women's physical weakness and supposed lower standard of intelligence.
2. Other views relate it to the selfishness of the man and consider men as enemies of women.
3. Some Islamic groups say that Islam prefers men to women and does not acknowledge women's equality to men.
4. Another view says that the political ruling bodies and regimes responsible for the structure of constitutions, laws and policies did

not grant women equal rights and deny them the chance to contribute to decision-making.

These differences of opinions and views led to the continuation of the status of disparities and oppression throughout the world, with minor differences from one place to another. These differences also led to the dispersion of women's own opinions which subsequently led women's organizations to take different directions. This, however, has hindered their efforts and weakened their capabilities to change this dark status. For these reasons, the first step is to find out the real reasons and causes of women's inequality throughout the world. The next step is to unite women intellectually and theoretically around these causes. Hence, all opinions and interpretations must be discussed logically and factually.

With respect to the earlier-mentioned weak physical and mental structure of women, it has been practically and scientifically proven incorrect. Neither are all men physically well-built, nor are all women necessarily physically weak. Otherwise the wrestling and karate champions should have the priority of occupying powerful positions. The matter of intellectuality has nothing to do with the individual's sex, but, rather, varies from one person to another, and even varies within the same family, and this is related to many factors.

The argument that relates women's oppression to men's selfishness is also untrue for the fact that, among men, there are those who are themselves suffering from oppression, and others who respect and advocate women's equality. The slogan that says man is the woman's enemy is a dangerous one, and would, wrongfully, divert the conflict against men, which will not have a positive outcome. Rather, we should direct all of our efforts to activate governments to change their policies and constitutions in order to achieve equality.

With reference to Islam's position regarding women's rights and equality, it should be known that Islam did not deny her rights, and does not oppose her equality, and this can be proven from the Qur'anic verses. Even polygamy, the Qur'an does not acknowledge.

The above analysis thus supports the number four view above, that the political ruling regimes led and controlled by men politicians everywhere, lay the policies, laws and constitutions that suppress and control women as well as all people's lives. All the problems facing

women and other world's nationals are engineered by those occupying power seats throughout the world.

This persecution of women, however, has a historical root which goes back to the time when women were prevented from participation in production and jobs outside the house, when the slave class was formed, and slaves were in farming and pasture. The woman's role then was confined to child care and man's enjoyment. They became financially dependent on men. In that way women's society was formed in Europe, in the medieval countries, as Lewis Henry Morgan, the American anthropologist has proven in his studies.

This means that discrimination against women started with and is linked to race discrimination. Slaves' work was unpaid, women's work at home or in the field is unpaid, and considered part of the man's work, as is reflected in the UN statistics presented earlier. For instance, in the USA, 76% of unpaid family workers are women. Here I also take you back to our Sudanese folk-song, which I mentioned at the beginning of this article, in which they wish the groom a baby son as his first child to help him financially. That folk-song reflects discrimination, while at the same time, explaining that men are preferred, not because they are males, but because they work, earn money and support the family.

This same fact has been indicated since the seventh century by verses in Qurran, and before Morgan's studies. For instance, verse number 34 of Women's *Sura* says: "Men are supervisors of women on account of the qualities, with which the Mighty God hath gifted some of them above the others, and on the outlay they make from their subsistence for them." Here I have to mention the fact that, before Islam, people in the Arabian peninsula used to kill their infant daughters immediately after their birth to avoid paying for their living because women at that time did not go out for work. Islam stopped that, and ordered men to pay for the living of women in their families. At the same time, it gave women the right to work. Looking at the wording of that verse, we notice that the word "supervisor" has been used.

Secondly, even this supervision; which is given to the man is not based on his male status, but on the condition that he has Islamic qualities and values, which are demanded from women and men equally. The verse did not stop at that point, but continues to confirm that the man is the supervisor because he pays for her living. Hence, it

is the same fact proven by Morgan's studies and reflected in our folk-song.

Therefore, what is practiced in all Muslim societies is the interpretation of these Islamic leaders and not the original Islam. This is why I do not call them fundamentalists, because this word means original, and what they are applying is not the original Islam. They are fanatics, extremists, and that is against Islamic principles. For this, at the Sudanese Women's Union, we adopted the strategy of using Islam itself against them, to reveal the contradiction between what they say and implement and the real Islam. We also used this strategy to illustrate the contradiction between what they say and their practices, and to defend women's rights.

Western Women's Continuing Inequality

It is very important to find out the causes of women's continuing inequality in the west, in order to make use of it in our strategies. In my opinion the reasons are:

- Women in the west have achieved their personal freedom to do what they like to do, the same as men. This did not help them, however, to achieve equality with men, nor did it protect them from violence at home and within society. At the same time, it misled the majority to believe that they are liberated, while they are not.
- They gave women full freedom of sexual relations, but this did not help them to achieve their equality, nor protect them from rape, which has a very high percentage in western societies. On top, it did not satisfy the appetite of some western civilized men, who turned the rape of children into a phenomenon. This needs to be addressed, and was tackled at a large conference in Belgium some months ago.
- A number of women's organizations, consider men, as a sex, responsible for women's discrimination. Therefore, they do not cooperate with them, and consider them their enemies.
- Some groups of women think that to be another copy of the man is a kind of equality. Of course it is their right to be what they like to be, and that right should be protected. But it is a private personal issue, and has nothing to do with women's equality. The western

- mass media gives them more attention than it does to discrimination against women.
- A large number of women's organizations concentrate on violence and rape. These problems are results and symptoms, and not the causes of discrimination. It is well known that concentrating on symptoms of the disease, and not the disease, will not cure illness and the symptoms will continue.
 - Family and social links are broken and replaced by individualism. This has affected the women's movement, and as a result, most of the women's organizations are "upper" organizations and have no links with women at the grassroots level.
 - The Gender Studies Centers in universities produce a large amount of research on gender issues. But most of these researchers have no direct contact and links with the mass of ordinary women, who also have no access to these researchers.
 - The vast majority of western women are not involved in politics. The male ruling class is very keen to keep women out of it, because this helps to limit the competition from getting into power.

Politics are the way to power, and power is the shortest way to wealth. They only need women in their parties, to help in encouraging other women, at the election, to vote for their leaders to get into power. Then they may be generous to appoint some women ministers, but not equal in numbers to men ministers. Of course, they have to be committed to their ruling party's policy. This is why they have made no changes in the women's situation in their countries. For instance, the US government did not ratify the UN Convention on Women. Neither women ministers nor women's organizations made any effort to convince the government to ratify and sign this important convention.

By studying the situation and experience of western women, we could deduce the valuable following findings:

- Islam and other religions are not responsible for discrimination against women.
- Political regimes are fully responsible for discrimination against women and inequality because they introduce policies, constitutions, laws and then execute them. Democracy, which is

based on party pluralism and individual freedom is artificial, as is proven by the western societies, in that it does not eradicate class, race, and gender discrimination. Real democracy should be based on social justice and human rights.

- Western women are still discriminated against because capitalist societies still practice class and race discrimination. This means that women will never be equal to men in a society where a man is not equal to a woman because women's issues and problems are connected with men's and society's problems. It is linked with democracy, human rights, peace and social justice. Accordingly, women should work together with men to make social changes in order to achieve real democracy which eradicates all kinds of discrimination (class, race, gender and religion).

Our Strategies for Emancipation

With all this knowledge and information, it was very clear to us how difficult it would be to emancipate women in our semi-primitive society, where the vast majority of women were illiterate and unaware of their problems and situation. Thus, we decided to start with the following:

- To build a grassroots movement with branches to reach women's sectors in towns and villages in all regions of Sudan. In some towns we succeeded in forming committees in the living areas that helped us to reach housewives at their homes. At the same time, it helped in training young leaders from these living areas, who better knew the local women, and their interests and needs. To build a branch in a village was a bit sensitive, so we first used to approach the chief of the village and important men and women personalities. When we convened the big conference for Khartoum's suburb branches in 1970, men were also invited and discussions included all of the village's problems.
- To train as many young leaders as possible, and give them a full chance in practicing leadership, alongside the old leaders.
- To cooperate with trade unions in achieving working women's equal rights.

- To involve the mass of women in politics and in the struggle for the social changes to preserve democracy, peace, social justice, and human rights.
- To unite the efforts of women from all regions of Sudan for achieving these goals.

New Tactics

I have attended all the UN conferences on women's issues and have also attended many women's conferences, regionally and internationally. I noticed that women delegates repeat the same problems, without offering any solutions. If we continue in the same way, we will never be able to solve women's problems or eradicate discrimination. In my opinion, it is high time for us to change our tactics.

There is an important fact to put into our consideration. Not all men are against women's equality, nor are all women for their equality. So it is wrong to put all men in one basket: "Divide and conquer." Up until now, men who support women's equality do it verbally, because some of them think it is women's personal issues and problems, and that women have to solve it alone. Some find it difficult to cooperate or join women's organizations.

So I think it is high time for us women to change our tactics, bearing in mind that the women's movement which started in the west during the seventeenth century, has failed, up to now, to achieve women's equality. In addition, women's organizations are instruments and not aims in themselves. On top of that, and as I have mentioned before, the woman question is linked with the man's and society's issues. Therefore, it is necessary to bring men who support our cause beside us and get them involved in the struggle for achieving women's equality.

We have already started this tactic, by founding the Democratic Front for Peace, Women's Equality and Environment. It opened its membership to women and men, to work together from a common platform for all these goals. The headquarters are in London, where I live as a political refugee. It will form branches wherever there are Sudanese women and men.

At the international level, I think the shortest way for all women in the world to gain their equality is to organize themselves around the UN Convention Ending the Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This convention contains all women's rights from protection from violence and rape to inclusion in decision-making. So I propose a plan of action aiming for the implementation of the Convention. It starts with a network locally, regionally and internationally. Its goals would be to unite the efforts of women's organizations, plus all other NGOs, trade unions, and other groups focusing on human rights, peace, students, youth, children, lawyers, etc.. This regional and international network of similar organizations would launch a campaign to demand the implementation of CEDAW, and for the governments which did not sign it, to do so. It would contact women members of parliament everywhere, seek the support of male members of parliament, and ask that they introduce this demand in their parliaments. In this, the role of the mass media is very important. It would also encourage and mobilize as many organizations and individuals as possible to send faxes, telegrams and messages to the UN General Assembly, demanding the implementation of the Convention, and calling for those governments which did not ratify it to do so.