

Yemen

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Yemen

MEMORANDUM

To: Melanne Verveer
From: Stephenie Foster
Date: May 27, 1999
Re: Yemen

This memo sets forth (1) a brief synopsis of the role of women in Yemeni electoral politics, (2) examples of programmatic work ongoing in Yemen, focusing on the role of women in politics, and (3) key contacts in Yemen.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN YEMENI ELECTORAL POLITICS

Women in Yemen have the right to vote and to run for office. Since Yemeni unification in 1990, two elections have been held for the 301 seat parliament -- one in 1993 and one in 1997. In both elections, two women were elected to Parliament, although the circumstances differed in each election.

In 1993, only 18% of registered voters in Yemen were women.¹ Women's participation was low, with approximately 15% of women registered actually voting. Of the 3,181 candidates for Parliament, only 44 were women. Only two women -- both from the former South Yemen -- were elected to Parliament. Both were nominated by the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), which boycotted the 1997 elections. The party receiving the majority of women's votes, however, was the Islah Party, which is widely seen as the most conservative of Yemeni's three major parties on social issues.

Leading up to the 1997 elections, Islah's success in motivating women voters led to a larger emphasis overall on registering women for the 1997 elections. An additional 825,984 women were added to voter lists in 1996 in preparation for the 1997 election. As a result, in 1997, women made up 28% of those registered to vote.² Approximately 60% of registered voters actually voted in 1997.

However, the number of women running for Parliament decreased in 1997. Of the approximately 2,000 candidates, only 23 were women. The General People's Congress (GPC), Yemen's ruling party, was the only major party to nominate women candidates, and both of its candidates won. Again, both were from the former South Yemen.

¹ The total number of registered voters in 1993 was 2,694,877, of which 2,216,311 were men and 478,566 were women.

² The total number of registered voters in 1997 was 4,637,728, of which 3,333,178 were men and 1,304,550 were women.

In both elections, the majority of women candidates were independents. While Islah made major efforts to register women, it put forth no women candidates in either election.³

PROGRAMMATIC WORK ENCOURAGING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Numerous NGOs are working throughout Yemen on programs designed to increase women's participation. This memo is not intended to catalogue all of those programs; I am sure that you will hear about many of them in your preparation for Mrs. Clinton's trip. Instead, I will summarize my experiences in Yemen, which I believe provide a good snapshot of the types of work ongoing there.

Since March 1997, I have participated in three programs in Yemen, two sponsored by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and one sponsored by the Arab Democratic Institute (ADI), a group formed by Yemenis in March 1996 to work towards building democracy and civil society in Yemen. ADI's activities have included election monitoring, promoting women's participation and voter education.

March 1997 Training for Women Parliamentary Candidates: In July 1996, ADI began a women's program, under the leadership of Dr. Raufa Hassan and Mr. Jamal Adimi with the goal of increasing women's participation in Yemeni politics and elections. Specifically, ADI hoped to encourage more women to vote and to increase the number of women in the Parliament. This program was funded by the European Union.

ADI recruited, hired and trained approximately 70 women to serve as geographically based coordinators, with the responsibility to organize discussions with women about the upcoming 1997 election, the importance of voting and their electoral rights. ADI targeted 63 districts (or constituencies) where less than 500 women registered in 1993. The program reached thousands of women.

A second focus was to promote women candidates for Parliament. In late March 1997, ADI hosted a three-day training program for all women candidates and their campaign managers -- regardless of political party. All of the major parties and the Yemeni government participated in the program. I was the main trainer for the three-day session.

I was asked to participate in this program because ADI was very impressed with the role that women voters played in the 1996 re-election of President Clinton and Vice President Gore. Raufa Hassan was interested in having the participants hear about my role as the National Director of Women's Outreach for the campaign, which she had learned from NDI.

I structured the training to focus on:

³ While the GPC and the YSP have nominated women candidates, the Islah Party has never done so. However, for the first time, Islah recently nominated seven women to its party central committee.

- (1) how to develop a message,
- (2) how to organize a campaign, and
- (3) how to marshal resources.

An important outgrowth of the training session was the development of a Women Candidate Support Fund -- supported primarily by the Yemeni government -- to provide women candidates with much needed resources. During the March 1997 session, the participants developed a model budget for a campaign, and that was used as the basis for the Women Candidate Support Fund. The Fund covered the purchase of campaign materials and subsidized the cost of related expenses for women candidates. A group, comprised of representatives of the major parties, as well as Dr. Hassan, served as the Fund's steering committee.

An additional benefit of the March 1997 training program was the heightened media attention to women's participation because of my visit. I did numerous media interviews, in which I spoke about the importance of women voters. In addition, I was asked to meet with President Saleh, and I used that meeting as an opportunity to talk about the importance of increased women's participation.

Under Tab 1, I attach the program for the session and a Wall Street Journal profile of Dr. Hassan.

Observer Delegation to the April 1997 Parliamentary Elections: I was a member of NDI's observer delegation for the 1997 elections. As I am sure you will read in depth elsewhere, there was increased participation by women voters, pollworkers and election monitors. The delegation also found that much work remained to be done to solidify women's role, particularly with respect to increasing the number of women candidates. Under Tab 2, I attach a Washington Post piece on the role of Yemeni women in the 1997 election.

Trainer in May 1998 NDI Political Party Training Sessions: In May 1998, former Manitoba Prime Minister Howard Pawley and I conducted two political party training sessions for NDI in Yemen:

- (1) one for the Islah Party entitled "The Development of an Effective Party Caucus," and
- (2) one for the General People's Congress entitled "Increasing the Role of Women in the Party."

Each session lasted two days, and was attended by members of Parliament, party leaders and activists. Each session had been specifically requested by the political party attending.

The goal of the Islah program was to give party leaders tools to become a more effective opposition party and to help the party strengthen the relationship between its Parliamentary caucus and its party's leadership. The objectives were (1) to give concrete examples of how opposition parties in established democracies have used legislative proposals -- even if unsuccessful -- to their party's political benefit electorally, and (2) to assist the Islah party

develop skills. Prime Minister Pawley and I conducted workshops to help Islah develop its message and to translate that message into legislative proposals. I used examples from the Democratic Party's experience as the minority party in Congress, and from the 1996 Clinton/Gore campaign.

The goal of the GPC program was to give party leaders the tools to maximize women's participation in the GPC. The objectives of the session were (1) to give GPC leaders concrete examples of how increasing the involvement of women in the political process has been beneficial, and (2) conversely how not involving (or speaking) to women voters can have negative consequences electorally. During this program, Prime Minister Pawley and I conducted workshops to help the GPC leaders develop concrete plans for involving more women in the party, and also strategies for implementing those plans.

Needless to say, these programs heightened interest in women's participation in Yemeni politics, and Prime Minister Pawley and I were interviewed on this subject. The Prime Minister and I also met with President Saleh. During that meeting, we discussed the important signal that Yemen could send to the international community by appointing a woman to a diplomatic posting on behalf of Yemen.

KEY CONTACTS

Each of these people are themselves good contacts, and also can put you in contact with other key women leaders.

Ambassador Abdulwahab Al-Hajjri
Yemeni Ambassador to the United States
2600 Virginia Ave., NW, #705
Washington, DC 20037
(202) 965-4760

The Ambassador has been very helpful to NDI, and other NGOs, in their work in Yemen.

Dr. Raufa Hassan
Professor, Sana'a University
967-1-264245

Prominent woman activist in Yemen. Founder of the Women's Center at Sana'a University. Co-founder of ADI, and director of the women's participation program. Has a very good network of women who have worked with her over many years. Has worked extensively with NDI and other NGOs. In 1993, ran unsuccessfully for Parliament as a GPC candidate. A Wall Street Journal profile is under Tab 1.

Dr. Oras Sultan Naji
Member of Parliament (Aden)
P.O. Box 352 Al-Tahreer
Sana'a
967-1-242765 (office); 967-2-232218 (home)

By training a medical doctor. Was one of the two GPC candidates who won election in 1997. Was a very active participant in the March 1997 ADI training program for women candidates. In 1998, visited the United States on a USIA trip.

Hon. Ammat Al-Aleem Alsoswa
Deputy Minister of Information
Yemen

Highest ranking woman in the Yemeni government. In 1997-8, the Ministry of Information produced a good statistical report on the status of women in Yemen.

Shada Nasser Mahamed
Assistant General Secretary, Election Monitoring Committee
Al-Zubairi Street (near International Bank of Yemen)
Sana'a
967-1-412700/280390.

Prominent woman attorney in Yemen, who is active in The Election Monitoring Committee, a domestic election monitoring group. Has worked with NDI.

Shahedah Tabet Ali Nasher
967-2-232594

One of four women civic coordinators working with NDI, responsible for (1) organizing discussion groups of women in three districts in Aden to discuss issues important to women and (2) working with members of Parliament on how to more effectively address women's concerns. (The member of Parliament in this case is Dr. Oras.) Has also worked with ADI. Will also have contact information for the other three civic coordinators.

Raqia Humaidan
Aden
967-2-232520/253824

Prominent woman attorney; was a judge in South Yemen before unification. Was recently selected by the Yemeni government as one of 10 defense attorneys representing British citizens accused of plots to kill foreign tourists (was the only women attorney selected). Has served as an NDI trainer.

Radia Shamsher Ali
Aden
967-2-232727

Prominent woman attorney, who has been active in various civic efforts in the country. Active in NDI programs.

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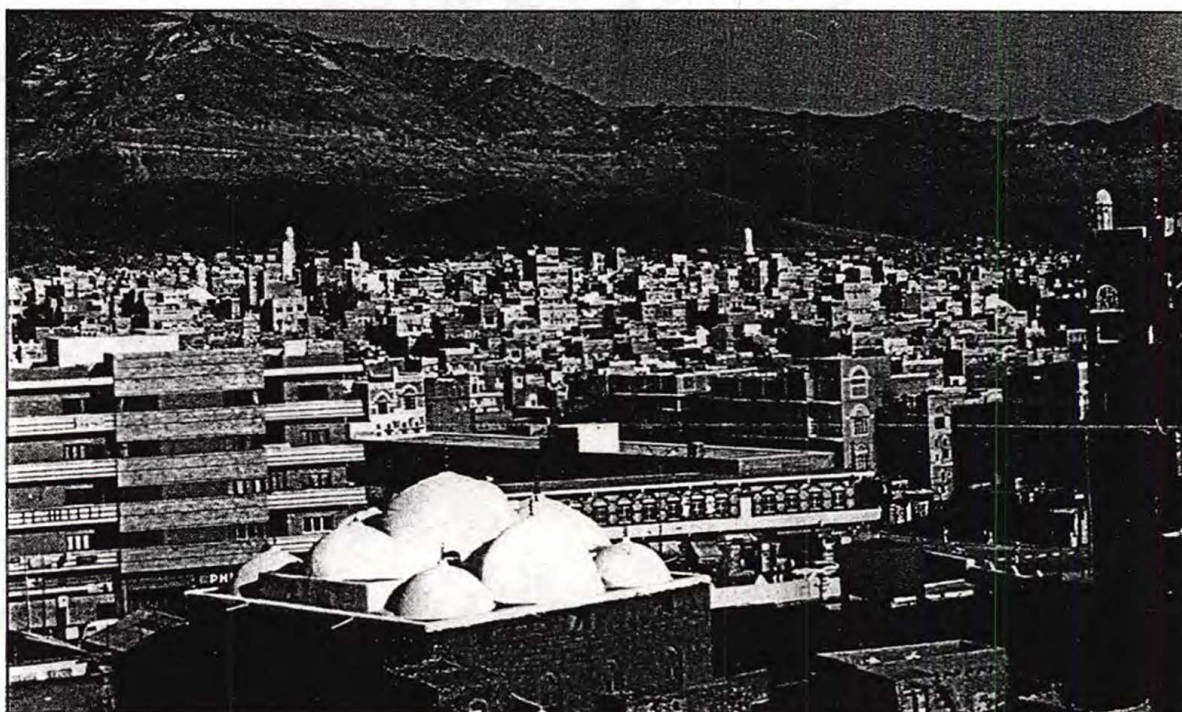
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GONFERENCE

" Challenges of the xxlst Century to Women and Democracy"

Sana'a 27 - 29 May 1997



List of the Candidates (1993 - 1997)

No.	Name	No.	Name	No.	Name
1	Samia Alahmadi	9	Fathia Al-Hethami	17	Waheeba Shaher
2	Mona Basharaheel	10	Faheema Al-Eryani	18	Fatma Al-Awlaqi
3	Amat Al-Razaq Jahaf	11	Narjes Obaad H. Ali	19	Iredal Dearia
4	Lebnan Saadoon	12	Nadia Al-Aghbari	20	Afraha Saleh
5	Intisar Saeed Ali	13	Afraha Al-Shana	21	Dr. Rawfa Hassan
6	Anisa Al-Herwi	14	Thuria Ahmed Ali	22	Lebnan Shalan
7	Dr. Balqis Al-Hadrani	15	Radia Shamsheeri	23	Wafaa Obaid
8	Khawla Sharaf	16	Taiba Barkat	24	Najeeba Haddad

List of the Participants in the Second Women Candidates Workshop (April 5-7, 1997)

No.	Name	No.	Name	No.	Name
1	Aluf Ba - Hubeira	9	Halimah Abdulqawi	17	Oras Sultan Naji
2	Kifah Abdullah	10	Samira Abdulkelq	18	Samia Al-Kuraidi
3	Marwa Said-M. Saleh	11	Mahlia Arumi	19	Bilquis Al-Hadhrani
4	Widad Al-Rumeima	12	Nabila Al-Amri	20	Anisa Al-Harwi
5	Fathia Heithami	13	Kifah Al-Saqqaf	21	Fathia Al-Qudsi
6	Salwa Ajlan	14	Fatma Al-Ashabi	22	Nadia Al-Agbary
7	Fatma Shui Zeila	15	Amal Ali M. Heidar	23	Afraha Al-Sheena
8	Nabila Al-Basir	16	Muna Basharaheel		

List of Governorate Coordinators

No.	Name	Governorate
1	Manal Ahmed Noaman	Sana'a
2	Amat Al-Rahim Amir Al-Din Al-Huthi	Sana'a
3	Najjat Al-Saqqaf	Sana'a
4	Samira Kassim Sallam	Taizz
5	Najjat Al-Sheibani	Al-Hodeidah
6	Wafa Abdullah Obeid	Dhamar
7	Amria Abdullah Taizzi	Ibb
8	Ilham Al-Kibsi	Ibb
9	Amat Al-Sallam Jahhaf	Hajja
10	Naziha Al-Surmi	Mahweet
11	Um Hani Mohammed Sharif	Al-Jawff
12	Hadija Feisal	Sa'ada
13	Ahlam Ali Al-Wasai	Marib

List of Constituency Coordinators

No.	Name	No.	Name	No.	Name
1	Amal Ali Mohammed	32	Fatma Ali Salah Jashman	63	Ifrah Mohammed Faia
2	Amat Al-Malik Ahmed	33	Fatma M. Al-Sadi	64	Bilquis Nasser Futeini
3	Amat Al-Haliq Al-Hauri	34	Afrah Ghalib Al-Thari	65	Bahia Ahmed Al-Wasabi
4	Iptisam Al-Marwani	35	Afrah Hizam Wahban	66	Badria Ahmed Abdullah
5	Iman Al -Nashery	36	Ghania Hamoud Abdullah	67	Taqia Mohammed Salah
6	Iman Abdul-Rahman	37	Huda Ahmed Al-Hadi	68	Jamila G. Al-Kawkabani
7	Ikram A. Al-Masawi	38	Afrah Mohammed Said	69	Hadidja Al-Ammari
8	Dhikra Salah Hanash	39	Iman Mahmoud Al-Sanani	70	Hadidja Al-Dais
9	Bushra Ali Al-Hamdani	40	Hana'a Abdullah Saleh	71	Rahma Ahmed Abdullah
10	Bushra Ali M. Al-Kadri	41	Warda S. K. Al-Ragdan	72	Rasmia Shua'a Arjaf
11	Hahan S. Abdul-Wahab	42	Nobila H. S. Al-Jumali	73	Salwa M. Al-Sheibani
12	Najjat A. Al-Muhtadi	43	Intisar M. Al-Moudh	74	Salam M. Makin
13	Mahia A. Kassim Khalil	44	Qaima H. Al-Arsha'a	75	Samah Ali Al-Zamani
14	Saida Ahmed Mohammed	45	Bushra Ali Al-Aqar	76	Suad Salam Kadab
15	Samira A. Sinan	46	Fathia Y. Hussein	77	Alima Ali Salah
16	Mariam Ali Ahmed Said	47	Sina Hamoud Al-Ulafi	78	Aisha Mahdi Ammar
17	Abida Abdullah Qadab	48	Sheikha Sabai	79	Abeer Salah Mohmmmed
18	Amat Al-Rahim Abbasi	49	Najjat Al-Baidani	80	Fauzca Yahhya Al-Kamdi
19	Fatma Mohammed Hufan	50	Hiyam A.H.Al-Fadhali	81	Fatma Abdullah Sagir
20	Huda Darham Salah	51	Kamila A. Mohammed	82	Shafa'a Hamoud Dahan
21	Najjat Mansour Al-Waji	52	Haifa H. Al-Shami	83	Nowal Ghaleb Ismail
22	Nada Yahhya Al-Madari	53	Latifa M. H. Sharif	84	Nobila Mouqbel
23	Safia Ali Al-Namari	54	Iman Ali S. Al-Bashari	85	Najla Ahmed Salah
24	Hadidja Salah Omar	55	Feiruz Said Hussein	86	Najwa Al-Banus
25	Fatma Ali Hussein	56	Fatma Ali Hajjar	87	Najeeba M. Al-Shami
26	Shoukia M. Ismael	57	Intisar M. Al-Sah'abi	88	Nadhira Ali Auth
27	Fauzea Salah Jiash	58	Iman Abdo Seif M.	89	Intisar Abdul-Karim K.
28	Iptisam Feisal Al-Sharif	59	Amat Al-Lla Wasal	90	Fatima Mohammed Najjar
29	Amat Al-Malik A.Rahman	60	Amat Al-Latif Al-Masri	91	Samah Salah Hadrash
30	Bilquis Hassan	61	Asia M. H. Dammaj	92	Bushra Mohammed Ghaleb
31	Huda Abdullah	62	Ifrah Nasser Al-Futeini	93	Aisha Ali Mudahar
				94	Ifrah Ali Saleh

Conference "Challenges of the XXIst Century to Women and Democracy"

Women's Programme Overview

Arab Democratic Institutes (ADI)

The Arab democratic Institute is a non-government, non-profit making organization and it does not affiliate with any political party.

The ADI was established in March 1993 as a elections monitoring committee aimed to promote democracy and civil society in Yemen. Since then it has been functioning as a democratic institution, first of its kind in Yemen. ADI has been authorized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on March 23 , 1996 by license no. 60.

In June 1996 the ADI has launched a major programme aiming to introduce internationally recognized

democratic practices to Yemeni electoral procedures, to modify the existing elections law and to reactivate domestic electoral monitoring. Throughout 1996 - 1997 the ADI has developed and implemented four main projects in connection with 1997 Parliamentary elections; the Project for Support and Increase of Women's Participation Rate and the Project for Civic Education. Also the ADI issues a monthly newsletter "Democratic Forum" aimed to promote voter education and to serve as an intellectual forum for political parties and outstanding personalities.

Project for Support and Increase of Women's Participation Rate In the Yemeni Elections

The project is headed by Dr. Raufa Hassan Al-Sharki (Vice-President of the ADI).

Goals of the Project:

1. To increase women's electoral participation through voters civic education and encouragement women to practice their political rights.
2. To support women candidates, combining all efforts to ensure women's success by means of cooperation with political parties and civil society.

To implement these goals, the ADI recruited and trained 13 governorate and 63 constituency coordinators to work in the constituencies with the lowest figures of female participation registered in 1993. Also special training and campaigning have been organized for women candidates of 1997. Different seminars and workshops have been conducted in the framework of the Project, including "Quota System" workshop, "Women's political and Electoral Rights in Islamic Legislation" seminar and other activities.

Women Candidates' Fund (WCF)

Women Candidates' Fund (WCF) has been established during the first women candidates workshop, it is financially independent body, aimed at:

1. Technical and financial support of women candidates.
2. Training of campaigning teams.
3. Design and printing of electioneering materials and elections guides.
4. Documentation of the experience.

Women candidates fund is headed by the executive committee, composed of:

Dr. Amat Al-Razzaq Jahhaf - head of the PGC women's section
Amat Al-Sallam Ali Rajja - head of the "Islah" women's section.
Amat Al-Alim Al-susuwa - chairperson of National Women Committee
Dr. Raufa Hassan Al-Sharki - head of the ADI women's project

WCF Exhibition

WCF Exhibition will be open during the whole period of the conference. Exhibition is to illustrate the role of women in the society and their electoral participation.

The exhibition will display and offer for sale: Works of Yemeni female artists, handicrafts and embroidery of Yemeni women, audio-cassettes of Yemeni female singers, video-cassettes about electoral activities, pieces of applied and fine arts created by Yemeni women.

All funds raised from the exhibition items fair will be transferred to the WCF.

Goals of the Conference

- I. Evaluation of the Project for Support and Increase of Women's Participation Rate in the Yemeni elections.
- II. Discussion of the problem faced by women candidates in 1993/1997 Elections.
- III. Working out action - plan for women candidates empowerment in 2001 Parliament.

Future Prospects

The conference is to lay the foundation for the activities during the coming four-year period till the next Parliamentary elections. Participants of the conference will produce final report and major programme for the next stage of the electoral programme aimed to secure women's equality in the field of political and electoral participation. Different aspects of this programme will be drawn by three main groups of the participants: experts, candidates and coordinators. The conference will issue guidelines for design of civic education programme, women candidates training and means of support of future women candidates.

PROGRAMME OF THE CONFERENCE

First day - May 27, 1997

Opening Ceremony
WCF Exhibition Inauguration
Evaluation of the current Project and related activities (General and group sessions)
Discussion of the group work findings
Report Drafting

Second day - May 28, 1997

Work-plan till 2001: objectives and outlines (General and group sessions)
Women candidates' empowerment for 2001 elections (group work)
Legal aspects: quota system and open constituencies (group work)
Debate on the action plan for the coming period

Third day - May 29, 1997

Plenary meeting: finalizing of the action-plan till 2001
Closing Ceremony
Certificates of Merit award

Voting Rites

Women Steers a Path Toward Democracy, With Some Surprises

Islamist Party Buses Women To the Polls, and Sheiks Back Suffrage Movement

But Men Retain the Clout

By DANIEL PEARL

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
HAJJAH, Yemen—Ask most Arab lead-
ers about the obstacles to democracy, and
they will mention tribalism, Islamic funda-
mentalism and the thorny question of
whether women should be allowed to
vote.

But consider what happens when Raufa
Hassan, Yemen's most outspoken femi-
nist, organizes get-out-the-vote meetings
among women in the most backward parts
of this conservative Arab country. Local
tribal leaders give enthusiastic support.
Yemen's Islamist party, Islah, praises her
and sends its own female activists hiking
on jagged mountainsides in full veil to
reach the benefits of voting to goatherd-
ing women.

"Everybody is helping us. For now, we
have common goals," says Dr. Hassan, a
38-year-old university professor who
has achieved renown in the 1970s
delivering television news broad-
casts without a veil. "Islamist democ-
rats do not work within the system,
but it's their stake."

Yemen is ahead of most of its neigh-
bors in moving toward democracy,
and the preparations for the country's
second parliamentary elections next
month show how democracy might really
work in the Arab world. Tribes, rather
than resisting elections, adapt to them by
forming like Western-style pressure groups.
Islamists embrace women's voting
rights—if doing so increases their clout. At
the same time, women rarely challenge
male ascendancy when they vote.



Raufa Hassan

though. Dr. Hassan is training her young
charges to take part in tribal affairs;
currently, it is considered unusual for a
woman even to enter the sitting rooms
where sheiks make decisions for their
tribes. The nonpartisan Arab Democratic
Institute, which she helped start, plans to
bankroll seven women candidates for the
301-seat Parliament, which has two
women, and Dr. Hassan is trying to con-
vince the Islah party to run a woman.

It wouldn't be the first unusual occur-
rence in Yemen, a land where ancient
mud skyscrapers rise inexplicably to the
sky, where the Arabic word for "OK"
means "no" and where the biggest natural
resource isn't oil but an intoxicating plant
called qat.

Unification and War

Democracy had unusual roots here.
Conservative north Yemen and socialist
south Yemen warred for decades before
uniting in 1990. Allowing multiple parties,
with women voting, was a way to bring
southerners on board. That effort hasn't
always been a success. After the first
elections in 1993, southern separatists tried
to break away, but were routed by the
north in a brief civil war. Many south-
erners now complain bitterly about domi-
nance by the tribal north, where women
had much less freedom. And the southern
Yemen Socialist Party is boycotting next
month's elections.

The elections haven't helped the gov-
ernment assert much control over tribes,
either. Tribal representatives won most of
the parliamentary seats in 1993. Highways
near the capital, Sana'a, are dotted with
homemade traffic barriers where Kalash-
nikov-wielding tribesmen sometimes stop
government cars. Tribal areas have their
own court systems: The sheik and the
families often work out compensation for a
murder. Sheiks typically collect taxes and
recruit soldiers. Some tribes kidnap West-
erners when they want to pressure the
government to reroute a highway or fund a
water project.

Nor have elections threatened Ali Ab-
dullah Saleh's two-decade-long hold on the
presidency. He was elected by the new
Parliament in 1994, and his People's Gen-
eral Congress party controls Yemen's tele-
vision and radio stations and army. He has
had little trouble imposing wrenching
economic reforms on Yemen.

A Feminist's Role

But the rival Islah party, which seeks
stricter application of Islamic law, did win
62 seats in Parliament in 1993. Islah did so
in part by busing women to the polls, and
last summer, during voter registration for
the April 27 election, Islah was the most
active party in signing women up to vote.
"They assume they'll vote like their hus-
bands," says Renaud Detalle of the French
Center for Yemeni Studies in Sana'a.

One of the unsuccessful independent
candidates in 1993 was Dr. Hassan, a
liberal professor from a family of tradi-
tional Islamic judges. At 12 years old, the
age her mother had conceived her, Raufa
Hassan was giving literacy lessons to the
elderly under the guidance of an early
Yemeni feminist. At 30, she was earning a
doctorate in social communications from
the University of Paris by spending

Yemen Steers Toward Democracy

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months in remote tribal villages to study the effects of television. Between starting Sana'a University's Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center and running a host of nonprofit groups, she says she hasn't had time to get married.

To Dr. Hassan, the key issue is giving women more political power. Tribal government works fine, she says, except for excluding women, and she espouses democracy largely because it helps her build support from Westerners. She ran for Parliament in part to write a book about her experiences. One that stood out was a campaign rally in which a veiled woman started charging up from the back, shouting that "the voice of woman is haram"—or forbidden. Dr. Hassan handed her a microphone to amplify the irony.

The 1993 elections inspired a new cadre of democracy advocates. Thousands of volunteers monitored the elections, though the government declined to sanction official monitors. Afterward, Dr. Hassan joined with the group's leaders — including a traditional Islamic lawyer and an American-educated businessman — to form the Arab Democratic Institute, or ADI.

Dr. Hassan proved a wily fund-raiser,

to the point that other Yemeni women gripe about her monopolizing foreign contributions. As part of a successful bid for Dutch funding to expand her women's center, she had students occupy her office to make it so cramped, the Dutch ambassador had nowhere to sit during a visit. ADI's proposal for a women's voting project was about to be rejected by the European Union when Dr. Hassan made a long telephone appeal to a female EU official she had never met. The EU gave the project \$500,000.

"I'm getting everyone to support me, but I'm not focusing that much on the elections," Dr. Hassan says. "I want to create women leaders in little villages."

ADI placed radio advertisements that made no mention of the elections, merely touting good pay for educated women who were willing to travel. The 11 women selected became regional organizers and fanned out across the country to hire local women as "constituency coordinators" at \$200 a month.

Many of the 79 coordinators who arrived in Sana'a for the first meeting had never eaten in a restaurant or used a flush toilet, let alone spoken publicly. As fathers and husbands took care of babies in an adjacent room, the women walked through imaginary election discussions with strangers. To get her regional organizers used to dealing with men, Dr. Hassan had them sit in alternating seats for a televised ceremony so male dignitaries had no choice but to mingle when they arrived.

First, Get Permission

Meeting with village women can be hazardous without men's approval, ADI coordinators soon found. One coordinator says she relied on a local woman to set up a meeting in a eastern Yemen village, but the woman's father found out, stormed into the meeting and beat his daughter in front of everybody. Other coordinators hold meetings by inviting women to soda parties, or sneaking some time at village weddings.

More often than not, though, sheiks have given their support. Khadija Saleh Ali Oman and her husband, Abdul Mohammad

Al Gofli, knocked on the door of one sheik and were invited in for lunch. She explained the project, and the sheik immediately rounded up some women for a meeting. The sheik later explained that the support of women voters could help if his son wanted to run for office. Also, a high voter turnout could help the region win more food benefits or schools.

"The sheiks are under pressure because people say 'They're not doing anything for us,'" says Abdo Ali Othman, a Sana'a University sociologist who studies tribes. So sheiks are becoming more open to outside help.

The women can be a bigger challenge, coordinators found. Only one of 10 rural women in Yemen can read or write, partly because men don't want to send teenage daughters to school with boys. In the afternoons, while many rural men chat and chew qat, women carry water, herd cattle and grind wheat. Bearing more than a dozen children is considered a reasonable life goal. Many women had no idea their members of Parliament were elected, ADI coordinators reported.

'We Are Like Animals'

In one report from Hajjah, Ms. Ali Oman describes meeting 25 women of various ages, all listing their occupation as "housewife." Those who were registered to vote said their husbands were holding the registration certificates, because the women might lose them. One woman said, "How can we take part in the elections when we are like animals, not able to read and write?" Ms. Ali Oman told them they had a right to vote and could even use party symbols, like a flower or a sword, if they could write the names of candidates.

Tribesmen in Hajjah see no danger the women will demand changes in their status if they vote. "No way. I dare them to demand it," says Abdullah Mohammed Ishaak, a village sheik, resting his hand on a ceremonial dagger and his head on a sitting-room cushion. Mr. Ishaak continues: "This is the reality here: If a husband or brother tells a wife to go and register to vote, they'll go and do it. And if he says: don't do it, she won't do it."

But in one district visited by ADI, women are organizing a candidates' debate. Sitting beside Mr. Ishaak is Ahmed Abdulrahman Jahaf, whose daughter, an ADI coordinator, has been encouraged to

run for Parliament. He says he doesn't object, but worries how "backward" villagers would react. Also, an educated girl is more attractive as a bride, but a girl who is working commands a smaller dowry, he says. "The nature of women leads us to the conclusion that a woman's right place is home," Mr. Jahaf says.

The Islah party also has mixed feelings about women as candidates. Islah recently allowed the head of its women's division to give a brief speech at the party conference — then had her escorted back to a separate room. And it presented a paper at an ADI seminar saying women could be elected to any position — except president. Still, that represented a "major change in attitude," according to Jamal Al-Adimi, an Islamic lawyer who is directing ADI's women's project.

Mr. Adimi's sister is among Islah's new crop of female activists in the city of Hodeidah. But when asked if they will consider running for Parliament this year, she and her colleagues glance at their male bosses and say the time isn't right. "Allah did not prohibit women to be voters, or to be candidates," explains Mohammad Qah-tan, Islah's political director. But "there is another point of view within the Islah that still rejects such a change."

The ruling People's General Congress also has been tentative. One month ago, during a conference in Sana'a, party leaders promised to work for at least 20 women in Parliament. "They said the same things five years ago. I swear it makes me so sleepy," Dr. Hassan commented, half-listening to a speech from the back row. Sure enough, this week only two women appeared on the ruling party's list of 221 candidates. Confronted by Dr. Hassan at a dinner reception Tuesday, party official Mohamed Al Tayeb told her there weren't enough qualified women to choose from.

The change of heart is, in a way, a sign of Yemen's budding democracy. The top parties recently had an agreement not to compete with each other this year in most districts. But now that agreement is breaking down. "We do not want to lose anywhere," Mr. Tayeb says.

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The Washington Post

SATURDAY, APRIL 26, 1997

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Feminists on the March in Traditional Yemen

By John Lancaster

Washington Post Foreign Service

ARHAB AL HINA, Yemen—It is hard to imagine a more unlikely outpost of women's political activism than this tiny village of crude stone houses and hand-tilled fields, lying in a narrow valley almost two hours by four-wheel-drive vehicle from the nearest paved road.

There is no school, no electricity, no television. Most residents can neither read nor write. The main legal authority is not the central government but the local tribal leader, who adjudi-

cates land disputes and criminal cases in the manner of a feudal lord.

For the last several months, however, women here have been subjected to tireless proselytizing on the meaning of democracy by Warda Ghaylan, a 25-year-old mother of three and one of the few village women with any formal education. Ghaylan is a foot soldier in a nationwide effort to boost women's participation in Sunday's national parliamentary elections, the second since North and South Yemen were merged in 1990 after decades of warfare.

"I tell them, 'Your vote is the key to the future

of your children,'" said Ghaylan, a graceful woman in a floral-print robe, her gleaming white teeth contrasting vividly with her black head scarf. "Yes, they listen to me, but sometimes when they hear that I've come to talk to them about the elections, they hide. They think people will come in big cars and take them away to vote in a faraway place."

Notwithstanding such challenges, a beguiling experiment in representative government has begun in this tradition-bound Muslim country of 14 million people—an isolated, otherworldly

See YEMEN, A20, Col. 1

Women in Remote Villages Urged to Vote in Tradition-Bound Yemen

YEMEN, From A1

place where men while away afternoons chewing a mildly narcotic plant called khat and rarely appear in public without a curved dagger strapped to their waists.

It is an experiment, moreover, in which women are playing a prominent role. Yemeni feminists in veils and billowy black robes are organizing voter registration drives, fielding female candidates and even cutting political deals with conservative tribal chiefs and the country's largest Islamic party, the Yemeni Islah Party.

The outcome could reverberate well beyond Yemen's borders. In a region where political life is dominated by dictators, monarchs and Islamic fundamentalists, democracy advocates look to Yemen as a potential bright spot. Saudi Arabia and other autocratic neighbors, meanwhile, see it as a bad example that could weaken their grip on power.

"I think we are having a unique experience in the Arab world," said Abdel-Karim Iryani, a Yale-educated biogeneticist and computer aficionado—he is especially fond of Yemen's home page on the World Wide Web—who serves as the country's foreign minister.

Situated on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula at the entrance to the Red Sea, Yemen seems closer in spirit to Mogadishu than Monticello. One of the poorest Arab countries, Yemen is famously anarchic, to the point where government officials sometimes have to seek permission from local sheiks when crossing tribal boundaries. Many tribes consider the taking of hostages, including Western tourists, an honorable way of settling disputes with the government.

Only three years ago, the former South Yemen tried to secede from the north, bombarding the capital city, Sanaa, with Scud missiles in a month-long civil war. Relations between north and south are still so strained that the largest southern opposition party, the Yemeni Socialist Party, is boycotting Sunday's election.

Nor is the central government a model of political enlightenment. The government of President Ali Abdallah Salih, who has ruled for



BY ALI JAREKI

One of the few women running for a seat in parliament in Yemen applauds at a campaign rally in Sanaa.

nearly 20 years, stands accused of numerous human rights abuses.

Women face their own problems. Roughly 80 percent of Yemeni women are illiterate, compared with 35 percent of men; the country's limited supply of secondary schools is largely reserved for boys.

Such disparities are reflected in political life. Just two of 301 members of parliament are women. During the last elections in 1993, the 43 female candidates encountered so much hostility that only three have chosen to run again. This year, only 16 of more than 2,000 candidates are women; most of them are running as independents because major parties refuse to back them.

None of that deters Raufa Hassan, 38, a university professor who directs a voter-education project for the Arab Democratic Institute in Sanaa with backing from the European Union.

For Hassan, who holds a doctorate in communication from the University of Paris, the trick is to focus on the long term. "We tell them, 'Even though voting isn't going to get you anywhere ... it's going to be good for your kids,'" she said.

Yemen's experiment with democracy happened almost by chance. The unification of the conservative north and the socialist south left Salih and his ruling party, the General People's Congress, on top. So the northern leaders sought to placate the south by granting more power to opposition parties. Tribal leaders, meanwhile, have begun to learn the art of ward politics, promising to deliver votes in exchange for roads, schools and water projects.

Despite weak representation in parliament, women are not entirely powerless. Earlier this month, for example, the highest-ranking woman in Yemen's government, Undersec-

retary of Information Amat Aleem Sosowa, was horrified to learn that parliament had passed legislation lifting the ban on marriage for girls under 15. So she contacted the legal adviser to Salih, who obligingly sent the law back to parliament without his signature.

Even the Islah party, whose extremist wing has barred the use of Western musical instruments in its campaign jingles, has been signing up women voters in its strongholds—betting that most of them will vote as their husbands do.

Saudi Arabia has taken a dim view of the democratic goings-on next door. At a January meeting in Tunisia, the Saudi interior minister, Prince Nayef, urged his Yemeni counterpart to cancel the parliamentary elections as a threat to stability in the region, according to a senior Yemeni official and Western diplomats.

The involvement of women in politics is especially disturbing to Saudi Arabia—a country so conservative that it does not permit women to drive—and other autocratic states on the Arabian Peninsula.

The center of the get-out-the-vote effort in Yemen is the Arab Democratic Institute, Hassan's organization, which has dispatched women field coordinators to the 83 voting districts with the lowest turnout by women in the 1993 elections.

One such coordinator is Nabila Hassan Saleh, who works out of her village near Taiz, a bustling mountain city about 100 miles south of Sanaa. Draped from head to toe in black cloth, Saleh meets regularly with local women to explain the basics of democracy.

Saleh and another, similarly attired coordinator, Samira Khassem Salem, recently invited a foreign visitor to sit in on a session under the watchful eye of Saleh's elderly father in Saleh's house.

At first, the listeners expressed befuddlement. "We are goatherds and women," said Fatemah Gorham, a 35-year-old mother of eight in a bright red head scarf. "How can we vote? We can't read and write."

But the two women patiently pressed on. "You say you're a goatherd, but you are human," Salem told Gorham. "Do you have any demands?"

"I want cheap sugar, I want low prices," Gorham replied, warming to the topic. "I have a hundred demands—water, electricity, education."

"The man you vote for, ask him, 'What will you do for me when you go to parliament?'" Salem urged.

But another woman was doubtful as she recalled her experience during the last parliamentary election. "They told us they would give us sugar and wheat," she said, cradling a sleeping toddler. "We were so pleased that I took my daughters and we voted. But we didn't even get soap."