



March 5, 2019

Canadian embassy and BWIT hold ‘Women Empowerment’ symposium



In recognition of International Women's Day, the Embassy of Canada, in collaboration with Canada's Business Women in International Trade (BWIT) program, organized an event on 'Women Empowerment' on 4 March at the Radisson Blu Hotel.

The event was opened with welcoming remarks by Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait, H.E. Louis-Pierre Emond, followed by a statement by Secretary General of the General Secretariat of the Kuwait Supreme Council for Planning & Development H.E. Dr. Khaled Mahdi.

In his address to the audience, Canadian Ambassador Emond underscored that the empowerment of women and girls, and the realization of their human rights are key Canadian priorities, both in Canada and abroad.

He stated, "Canada is proud to proclaim its government feminist and to advance these values throughout its diplomatic, trade and international development initiatives. Canada has intensified its long-standing commitment to the human rights of women and girls with the affirmation of feminist values as core to its foreign policy efforts and launch of its Feminist International Assistance Policy in June 2017. The policy places achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the heart of its efforts."

Dr. Khaled Mahdi, Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, stressed that the issue of women's empowerment was a crucial subject in Kuwait's National Development Plan.

He recalled that he found few public policies in place towards empowering women when he came into office. "Only 12% of decision-makers in the government and 15% of decision makers in the private sector are women. Our target is 35% and this is an ambitious target but it is doable", he said, though it falls short of the United Nations prescribed goal of 50%.

He stressed, "We don't need to go from a masculine empowered society to a feminine empowered society. We need balance. Competency should be an agent for change rather than gender."

Drawing from his personal experience, he remarked that the best university students were female and the best decision makers and managers in the private and public sector were women. "I can proudly state that female Arabs should be the leaders of today and tomorrow," he added.

He went on to mention how the presence of women in decision making positions contribute greatly to productivity, some claim a 35% increase, others even higher. Owing to their distinct perspective, they provide insight different from men, and are good at multitasking.

He noted that female academics often provided better feedback in the complicated processes involved in public policy. He disclosed that Kuwait has been a member of the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women since 1994, and has continued to sign treaties in that sphere. He further added that the Kuwaiti government was itself empowered by its Constitution in 1961. In 2015, Kuwait signed the SDG agenda 2030 which states as one of its major role, gender equality and women empowerment. He encouraged attendees to focus on self-empowerment, stating, "It is crucial for our young girls and to all women of all ages. From my personal experience of raising five daughters, I know that if you just give them room to grow and flourish they will empower themselves. Our women are our future achievers."

As part of the evening's program, Canadian BWIT Champion Speaker, Diane Craig, Kuwaiti Speaker Alia Al-Khaled and another Canadian speaker, Amy Johnson delivered presentations on pertinent topics with regards to Women's issues. The BWIT program is part of the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service (TCS) and provides targeted products and services to help Canadian women entrepreneurs internationalize.

Ms. Craig, the President and founder of Corporate Class Incorporated, facilitates customized executive and leadership presence coaching, workshops and seminars to organizations around the world, from Europe to the Gulf Region, Asia, South Africa and across the Americas- North, Central and South.

During her presentation, Ms. Craig addressed businesswomen in Kuwait as well as businessmen supporting women's empowerment in the country which is a stated priority for the Government of Kuwait. Her keynote message focused on how today's leaders can help advance this key initiative to help all citizens prosper politically, economically and socially.

An interactive discussion followed on the gender equality perspective of business integrity, as well as business ethics in Kuwait.

The event helped to promote potential partnerships between Canadian Businesswomen and local Kuwait organizations that support and deliver business opportunities for women entrepreneurs and exporters. This initiative helped to enhance awareness in Kuwait of the Canadian women entrepreneurship ecosystem and the Government of Canada's inclusive approach to Trade.

Next, Kuwaiti woman speaker Alia Al-Khaled, Development Affairs Researcher and General Manager of two companies in Kuwait – Edarat for Management Consulting and Wartung Building Contracting Co., shared her experiences from her recent participation in a FemParl event organized by the Government of Canada, and which took place in Cairo and Beirut in early February 2019.

FemParl MENA, a 4-day, 2-city learning and networking event, brought together a number of female Parliamentarians and activists from across the Middle East and North Africa region for a productive and intense program of knowledge sharing, leadership, training, networking and social media advocacy.

During her presentation, Ms. Alia focused on her participation in the FemParl initiative and the outcomes which resulted from this valuable experience.

The third speaker, Amy Johnson, an award-winning executive with over 15 years of international experience, currently works as Director of Community Engagement at Qatar Foundation. In her presentation, Johnson talked about 'women empowering women' and its importance. She also spoke about Canadian women in business in the region, and internationally as well as offered her perspective on the topic.

Finally, she shared her experience working as Community Engagement Director in a leading women empowering organization in the region, Qatar Foundation.

The session was followed by a panel discussion that explored different perspectives on gender equality before concluding with a networking lunch.