

EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO ASK A SCIENCE PRINCESS, AND MORE!!

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If I told you that a Muslim woman, Fatima El-Fehriya, donated her inheritance 1300 years ago to build the first university worldwide "al-Qarawiyeen University", still existing in the City of Fez, Morocco, what would be your reaction?

If I said that a Princess from the Royal Family of Iraq was a medical doctor and genetic scientist, what would be your reaction?

Laughter? A smile? An exclamatory sentence "Tell me more!"?

If you believe that in a globalized and twitter/ instagram world where we are all separated by 140 characters in a tweet, then I shall give you just a bit more food for thought.

The role of Fatima El-Fehriya was remarkable. This university helped in the transfer of sciences into Europe. And it is further worth it to mention that Pope Sylvester II studied at this university.

Anyone, man or woman, has the right today, if qualified, to hold any job or to pursue any career he/she wants.

Now, centuries after Fatima El-Fehriya left a legacy for all humanity, the international community has proclaimed through the United Nations General Assembly a resolution that recognizes February 11 each year as the Intl. Day of Women and Girls in Science.

This day honors the achievements of women in science and serves to encourage girls to enter any scientific field.

There is insufficient knowledge in academia and at healthcare, public- and policy-maker levels about sex- (i.e., biological) and gender- (i.e., socioeconomic) based disparities. Women who are scientists are now leading the way to address this insufficiency.

In my region of the world (I am from Iraq), societies need first to discuss the role of women in Islamic countries and the role of Muslim women in their societies around the world.

Discuss the many existing problems facing women and societies today, then determine the indispensable solutions, actions, policies and programs to overcome these problems and issues.

Fifteen years ago, the Royal Academy of Science International Trust collaborated with the Islamic Organization for Science, Education and Culture and under the Royal Patronage of the King of Morocco to hold the first international conference to discuss the rights of Muslim women and Muslim women in science for a better future.

Fifteen years later, in the Inaugural World Women's Health and Development Forum outcome document, participants indicated the urgent need for three actions.

First, to ensure sustainability of development for women and all of humanity.

Secondly, to achieve equality and full participation for women in science, in decision-making and in programs in economics, environment and social issue, in other words, the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Third, to build political and international support for the improvement of women's education, employment and health.

In practical terms, it is not acceptable that the illiteracy rate among Muslim women and girls is still at high rates. The first Message of God to the Prophet Mohammad was "READ". If Muslims do not respect this Message, who will?

The Holy Qura'an gave God equality for both men and women. And it is also unacceptable that in many Muslim countries, women, including those in science, are paid less than their male counterparts.

And this goes for ALL countries including United States and United Kingdom!

It is not acceptable that women in science are not well represented at all levels including in policy-making processes. National governments that often recognize only certain groups of women that are mainly related to the governments; whether in a direct way or an indirect way, do not help this situation.

You may ask: "Well, Science Princess, what are the strategies that women are employing on the ground to make a difference in their local communities?"

My reply goes not just to you, the reader, but to women and Muslim women as well. Many women are working independently of each other in their local communities and often without any strategy of cooperation. Competition is also surprisingly high.

This factor also affects the collaboration and partnership between women in different fields, particularly in drawing a strategy for their work to improve their collective situation.

Again, you may ask me: "What are the challenges women face in becoming community leaders?"

Challenges in Iraq, which I know very well, remain the lack of security, violence, terrorism and societal, including government recognition. But what are the challenges in other countries: Science Policy, Social Policy for Development, etc., the challenges have to be identified by women in science in their own countries.

The great Japanese writer and feminist, Raicho Hiratsuka, once famously wrote "In the beginning, woman was truly the sun. An authentic person."

Today, more than ever, the global strategy for health, education, economy, development and humanitarian outreach needs precisely this kind of radiant sun to provide light and nourishment. To provide healing to all of us. To dry out the swamps of poverty and unrest.

So I urge everyone -- all women and men of goodwill -- to dare to make the difference and support women in science. Women need to support women, and men need to support us as well, a "He for She" campaign and movement.

I promise you this: if you support women in science, you will not be disappointed. For when women in science shine like the sun, their radiance will be forever undimmed.