

**Women and the People's Assembly**

**In**

**The Syrian Arab Republic**

**A research conducted in cooperation with UNIFEM & SCFA**

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## Chapter 1

### Women and political development in the Syrian Arab Republic

#### Introduction

Syria went through key political phases after its independence in 1946. After the massive public anger on the Arab governments following what is called in political literature “The Nakbeh” or calamity (the occupation of Palestine and the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948), a series of military coups took place in Syria started in 1949 and continued till 1954, after which the unification between Syrian and Egypt took place to be n aborted in 1961 by another military coup. The March 8<sup>th</sup> Revolution led by Al-Baath Party then came to power in 1963 to be followed by the Correctional Movement led by President Hafez al-Assad in 16/11/1970. After President Hafez al-Assad death in June 2000, President Bashar al-Assad became officially president of Syria on 17/7/2000.

When the late Hafez al-Assad became president in 1970, he set up a clear-cut political program that was convincing for many political parties and broad political and popular circles that joined in later on constituting a coalition called the National Progressive Front (NPF) that legitimized activities of the parties that signed the NPF charter. The establishment of that front was an indication of a new era of political stability in Syria based on constitutional legitimacy through the adoption of a permanent constitution setting up the basis for government and providing guarantees of general rights to the citizens.

## **1- Institutional thinking in the Syrian Arab Republic**

The institutional thinking of the existing system in Syria is based on the notion that Al Baath Arab Socialist Party is the leader of state and society pursuant to Article 8 of the constitution, and that the NPF represents the main factor in consolidating national unity. The NPF comprises 10 parties representing all the officially recognized political parties, in addition to representatives of 2 large popular organizations: the General Union of Workers Associations and the General Union of Farmers, and that is in harmony with Al Baath Party philosophy that considers workers and farmers its basic foundation. Al Baath Party leadership of society is manifested through the popular organizations it directly supervises (whose policies are formulated by it) and those are: General Union of Workers associations, General Union of Farmers, General Union of Women, Revolutionary Youth Union, Teachers Syndicate, Al Baath Vanguard Organization and other vocational organizations.

The General Union of Women, despite being the only recognized organization in Syria that represents women who constitute more than 49% of the population, is not represented in the NPF.

According to the conception of the existing institutional thinking, the NPF provides a formula for joint work and a channel of dialogue between those parties and organizations, and this formula is supposed to reinforce trust between them.

And since the NPF is the highest platform for joint work, it is entitled not only to tackle local and external political topics but also economic issues in order to achieve “the mobilization of all human and material forces and resources”<sup>1</sup>, and other daily life issues. The NPF was established as a result of a dialogue following the setting up of a committee (by virtue of Presidential Decision 35 of 1971) that comprised representatives of the relevant parties and leaderships who were 6 at the time.

In 2005, the number of those parties reached 10: Al Baath Arab Socialist Party, the Arab Socialist Union Party, the Syrian Communist Party (with its two sections each became a separate party one led by Wisal Farha Bagdash and the other by Yusef Faisal), the Socialist Unionists Party, the Arab Socialists Movement, the Unionist Socialist Democratic Party, the National Social Party, Al ‘Aahd Party and the Arab Democratic Union, provided that Al Baath Arab Socialist Party holds 51% of all NPF bodies and the rest is divided between the others.

The NPF charter was signed on 07.03.1971 after lengthy discussions and preparations that lasted almost a year.

The NPF is looked at from the perspective of the existing system’s institutional thinking as a form of political plurality that guarantees citizens the right of expression via the parties they became a member of, or via the two popular

organizations. In addition to its central leadership, the NPF has sub-leaderships in all governorates alongside its bureaus and specialized committees that provide it with studies and researches. The NPF Charter lays down its central leadership that comprises representatives of all parties and popular organizations and may include new bodies that abides by its charter and that any member (individual, body or party) who violates its charter or decisions may be expelled.

The preamble of the charter states that “the NPF is established to strengthen our progressive national struggle for the purpose of building the unified Arab socialist society and is a mean to rally around the progressive system in this country, consolidate its pillars and protect its political and socio- economic accomplishments”.<sup>2</sup>

It is fair to say that the NPF played a significant role during difficult times after its establishment. However, many believes that reviewing the future role of NPF in terms of performance, parties affiliated, the inclusion of other parties or organizations, the adoption of a new political party law to legitimize and organize political activity inside and outside NPF and activate the role of citizens (both males and females) in public life became a necessity, and this view is adopted by Al Baath Party during its June 2005 conference by endorsing a recommendation to issue a new political party law and activate NPF role.

The said phase attracted many groups to the human development process, which was previously marginalized, and that came as a result of a new thinking associated with this phase of political life which made the notion of greater participation by the general public expands horizontally and vertically nationwide, especially in the early years following the Correctional Movement motivated by the principles declared by the initiator of that new political program that came as the right answers to a number of unforeseen local and outside issues that required both a theory and a practical reply especially after the “June Setback”.

That phase introduced itself as a comprehensive program to face all critical issues including those dealing with freedom and democracy connected with a dialectical relationship related to public participation in government activity and decision-making.

According to the thinking of the political leadership at that phase: “A rule doesn’t become democratic by virtue of a law, but the people should practice democracy for a long time and that necessitates the existence of popular organizations and free elections...”<sup>3</sup>

According to that announcement, the first step began to establish the state’s democratic institutions including the People’s Assembly, NPF and the Local Administration, and to complete the establishment of the popular organizations, which are tools for what is called popular democracy (to be distinguished from

liberal democracy) and expand its representation basis to include all popular groups.

However, the experiment of providing the proper climate to practice popular democracy optimally was faced with by the following obstacles and shortcomings:

- a) Conditions resulted from the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights in 1967.
- b) Maturity level of social forces, their level of involvement in production and their sense of national solidarity and the necessity of assuming their historical responsibility in exercising control over state institutions.
- c) Tendency for extreme centralization at all levels and failure to complete the establishment of the proper tools for democratic practice such as political party law, press law and a new association law.
- d) Failure to implement fully the NPF Charter agreed on by all parties affiliated, especially in relation to freedom of political activity, opening of offices, issuance of party newspapers or NPF one.

All the above stressed the need to find the means to consolidate national unity in order to confront the occupiers (being the first obstacle), attempt to create a state of institutions and adopt the notion of local administration to overcome the second obstacle.

## 2- The environment surrounding women's activities.

The woman's cause should not be considered a special one but it should be looked at as a social issue related to the existing level of social progress affecting it and affected by it in a distinguished dialectical relationship. The whole issue is not merely a superficial juristic equality such as giving women the right of education and work because the problem lies in woman's awareness of her humanity. If the key focus of the current stage is still development as it was the case for decays, development doesn't just mean improvement of standard of living but also liberate the human being to be able to exercise his/her political, economic and social rights, otherwise there will be no human development. And as the human being is man and woman, awareness of woman's humanity by both is the first step forward, and woman we want is that one that who participates in development with all its consequences and positive effects.

Work and education surely represent significant values for women in the Arab World. All studies underline the importance of women's participation in the labor market (although this participation is still below ambition) and the increasing number of female school students. Yet, those studies confirmed that Arab societies in general including Syria have less literate women and less working women given the number of females in the population (the

percentage of female workers in the labor market has now reached around 20%). Syrian statistics indicate that the total female workforce grew during 1981-2001 as shown in table (1).

The number of female workers grew from 166,000 in 1981 to 804,000 in 2001 to reach around 900,000 in 2005 from a total workforce of 5 million, which means that females constitute less than 1/5 of the total workforce despite the fact that females constitute almost half of the total population which reached around 18 million, and this explains the disproportion in the number of job opportunities available to females compared to males, which is clearly unfair to women and this is due to the conditions of social environment which is in many cases frustrating to women when entering the labor market under various excuses, given that a considerable fraction of the population believes that women are born for childbearing and home keeping. In addition, the government has failed to draw up specific policies to overcome that disproportion and conduct programs aimed at bridging the gap between males and females in the workplace and in the type of jobs done by men and women.

**Table (1)**

**Female and male workforce and the population in 2001**

**(By thousands)**

Relation to workforce		Year	2001		
			Males	Females	Total
Workforce	Employed		3926	804	4730
	Unemployed		311	234	545
	Total		4237	1338	5275
Outside the workforce			851	2832	4683
Unemployed			588	4870	9958
Total			8552	6168	16720

Source: Abeer Haddad & Francois Francis: population, the workforce and unemployment in Syria, a diploma thesis under the supervision of Dr Samuel Abboud, Damascus, 2003, conducted by a research team based on the Syrian statistical collections of 2002, Central Bureau for Statistics, Damascus, tables page 80-84.

Article 45 of the permanent constitution stipulates: “the state shall guarantee women all the opportunities that enable them full and active participation in the political, social, cultural and economic life and shall remove all obstacles that hinder their development and participation in building the Arab socialist society”.

It is worth mentioning that the adoption of this Article was made during a heated debate where there was a substitute text proposed by Mrs. Souad al-Abdullah (woman MP at the 1971 People’s Assembly (parliament) containing an unequivocal text about full equality instead of active participation.

The Syrian constitution in its essence emphasizes on the equality in rights, gender and duties for all citizens and there shall be no discrimination based on gender, color, race or religion. Men and women are equally guaranteed rights of living, employment, learning ...etc. however, as soon as men and women begin to establish families together, and men are given more rights in the personal status law, penal law and naturalization law.

The legalization of such social practices makes women inferior to men while men are considered independent individuals having independent and respectable identity. This social perspective may be one of the most important reasons that require even from the educated or working women to see in men their safe haven.

A study conducted in 2001 reached a noticeable conclusion that discrimination against women is not the result of the stance taken by previous generations because latest stats in the field of equality show that stance of the younger generations is not substantially different, and although women constitute 64% of the teaching staff in the elementary stage, 50% in higher stages and 20% in the academic stage, this significant participation in the upbringing of the country’s generations did not convey a message convincing the younger generation to adopt the principles of justice and equality.<sup>4</sup>

The school curricula up to recent times kept teaching students contents that reinforce differences between the woman staying at home and the man in the field or going to work. If the educational system played a significant role in enabling women to pursuit knowledge on a wider scale compared to the early period of independence, that system failed to create a new spirit and form new attitudes towards women and this is mainly due to the fact that society still considers marriage, childbearing and devotion to family duties the merits that determine the basic value of women.

Results obtained from the comprehensive Sociocultural survey conducted 1994-1995 showed that 66.5% of fathers and 65.5% of mothers prefer to marry their girls during the age of 16-20, and this is also something preferred by 50.3% of girls in fear of missing the train of marriage.



One of the strange things about this is that greater levels of education for men do not necessarily change man's attitude towards woman's work.

All that underlines failure of education, culture and media to show the civilized values that contradict this prejudiced attitude towards women. The academic education which is supposed to change views and attitudes and re-shape human character to be more compatible with modern concepts, but in reality, it failed to overcome prevailing traditions and conventions imposed by a conservative society.

It seems that some curricula and press create fake awareness of the woman's cause. The press for example concentrates on the traditional role of woman as mother, wife, housewife and student, and focuses on women's problems not as being key social issues but from a sympathetic perspective concerned with issues of divorce, personal status law, custody, alimony, dower and others.

It seems that politicians in the post-independence period were more enthusiastic to see women assume their right position in society than the politicians of today with their conservative views towards women backed by large sections of society as shown in an incident narrated by the national leader Sa'ad Allah al-Jabri<sup>5</sup>.

Women in Syria achieved scores of accomplishments throughout the years and gained their voting and election rights from early 1950s, which are significant accomplishments achieved during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the period after independence in 1946) whether in terms of social rights such as equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value, or political rights such as the right to vote and run for legislative assemblies, and that is through various constitutions and laws.

Syrian women have been holding portfolios since 1976, beginning with the portfolio of Culture, then the portfolios of Culture and Higher Education in the 1991 cabinet and the portfolios of Labor and Compatriots in the 2000 cabinet.

Women also joined some Baath Party's leadership at governorate level. In the last party conference, women became for the first time members in the Regional Leadership, and in 2005, a woman (Wisal Farha Bagdash) holds the position of the Syrian Communist Party's General Secretary succeeding her husband Khaled Bagdash, which underlines the effect of tribal fatherly mentality over political practice. In addition, a woman called Rahab Al Beetar is currently chairing an unlicensed political party recently founded. Women also work in the Syrian diplomatic corps, and they entered the judiciary as of 195 and also the police force, army, academic education, healthcare system...etc.

Moreover, women holds high ranking positions in all government & civil institutions, vocational unions, popular organizations and the doctors/pharmacists/lawyers/artists/teachers/workers/artisans/farmers\ unions but in unsatisfactory numbers.

Furthermore, various working-woman committees have been established in all public sector labor facilities and union organizations in order to promote the role of working women and remove the obstacles preventing their full participation in work and development. On the other hand, working women in the private sector remained deprived from such protection, especially in the light of weakness of labor unions in that sector and the fact that many private sector employers evaded enrolling their employees in social security.

The ratio of working women to the female population increased during 1980-1996, whereas in 1980 female workers constituted only 6.4% of the total male state workforce and 1.64 of the total female population (62004 female workers against a total of 330285 state employees). That figure rose to 229942 female workers in 1996, which constitutes almost 7.47% of the male state workforce and 3.22% of the total female population. It is noted that this percentage rose during the 1980s to stabilize during the 1990s to slightly rise again during the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, and despite the accomplishments achieved by women in the Syrian society, woman's social status contradicts her legal one, especially in relation to personal status law, penal law and naturalization law.

The Syrian naturalization law grants privileges to the father and deny mother those same privileges. Children of Syrian women married to non-Syrians are not considered Syrians even if they were born and lived in Syria, while children of Syrian men married to non-Syrians (even if the wife is foreigner and the children are born overseas) are considered Syrians.

As for the legality of marriages, women are not entitled to wed by themselves as adult males do even if they have reached the legal age because they are in that case considered minors and must have guardians.

In relation to the issue of guardianship in general, the man alone have the right to be a guardian and the right of divorce is also enjoyed by man alone. In addition, women do not have the right of custody over their children after the age of 13 for males and 15 for females, and in inheritance the female is entitled to half of what male inherits. All that is done despite the fact that the Syrian constitution, which is the basic code that all legislations must be harmonious with, treats all citizens equally in terms of rights and duties in all aspects of life and addresses the citizen in all its terms as being an entity of man and woman together and even stipulates in article 45 (mentioned earlier) that the state shall ensure equal opportunities for women. So if the promotion of women is a realistic goal, serious

efforts must be exerted within a comprehensive social framework since every individual is seeking a better social environment not only for women but for both genders.

Furthermore, and in addition to the existing incompatible laws, there is a heritage of traditions and backward interpretation of religious texts, incompetent development programs, and failure to implement the policies endorsed by the 9<sup>th</sup> 5-Year Plan in a special chapter pertaining to women's enablement aimed at promoting women as part of the national strategy for women in Syria.

In short, it is fair to say that what is achieved has not been reflected positively (as it should be) on women's life in general since there are serious shortcomings at all levels in regard to women's enablement and women are still far-off from the political, economic, administrative and social decision-making positions.

### **3- Determinants of political participation through the constitution and laws, especially women's right of voting and running for membership in the elected people's assemblies in Syria**

The new institutional thinking of the political leadership after the 1970s era was reflected not only in the political statements issued after the Correctional Movement of 1970 but also was confirmed in the permanent constitution issued on 12.03.1973 and adopted in a popular referendum. The letter and spirit of that constitution emphasized that popular democracy is the formula that guarantees citizens the right to exercise democracy and that democracy is not complete unless citizens are socio-economically free.

The preamble of the current Syrian constitution states: "freedom is a holy right", and popular democracy is the ideal formula that guarantees citizens the right to exercise their freedom making them decent people capable of giving, building and defending their country". Article 50 of the constitution stipulates: "the people's Assembly (parliament) shall assume the legislative power as stipulated in the constitution and its members shall be elected by a general, secret, direct and equal vote pursuant to the provisions of the election law".

Article 75 stipulates: "the said election law shall contain texts that guarantee voters the right to meet their representatives, soundness of the elections and the right of voters to monitor the election process and punish those who go against their will".

Article 26 stipulates: "every citizen has the right to contribute in the political, economic, social and cultural life".

Article 27 stipulates: "all citizens shall exercise their rights and enjoy their freedoms pursuant to the law".

Article 45 stipulates: "the state shall guarantee women all the opportunities that allow them full and effective participation in the political, social, cultural and economic life and seek to remove all obstacles that hinder their progress towards building the Arab socialist society".

Article 47 stipulates: "the state shall provide cultural, social and health services, especially in rural areas to develop them".

Articles 38 stipulate: "every citizen shall have the right to express his/her opinions freely and publicly in speech, in writing and in all other means of expression, and shall contribute in the control and constructive criticism to ensure the soundness of national and Arab structure. The state shall guarantee freedom of the press and publication pursuant to the law".

It is obvious that Syrian law makers emphasized through the said texts on the right of direct and indirect participation of citizens (without discriminating between man and woman) in the political and economic decision-making and the monitoring of its implementation.

Article 49 stipulates: "the popular organizations shall effectively participate in all sectors and assemblies specified by the law to achieve the following objectives:

1. Build the Arab socialist society and protect its system.
2. Plan and guide the national economy.
3. Develop working conditions, safety, health, culture and all the other conditions connected with the lives of members of society.
4. Achieve scientific and technological progress and develop methods of production.
5. Popular control over machinery of government".

It is obvious that the constitutional texts in Syria in themselves provide a considerable room for maneuver in the decision-making process within the framework of the said texts. However, the daily application in practice upon implementation of those texts remains subject to the roles some administrative bodies in charge of executing the law give to themselves under various justifications. Those justifications can, within the current view toward the state, lessen the strength of those texts and such problem could further escalate when the country in question has no powerful judiciary dedicated to strictly apply the law away from any influence, especially with the increased strength and effective role of bureaucracy associated with the slackening pace of separation of powers and the decline of the principles of respect of participation, dialogue and control over administration. In addition, and with the pressing need for laws regulating that practice of democracy such as a political party law (there hasn't been any political party law since 1953-1958), a new press law and a new association's law are needed since many articles of the constitutions end in the phrase "the

law shall regulate this". Therefore those rights become abstract unless the necessary laws are issued to regulate them.

The development of women's voting and election rights through the various constitutions from the 1<sup>st</sup> conference till the current constitution since 1973 may be briefly reviewed as follows:

The 1<sup>st</sup> Syrian conference of 1919 did not allow any participation for women. The French mandate afterwards made sure to maintain a form of parliamentary life, so Syria had a number of parliaments during the French colonial rule 1920-1946 as shown in table (2). However, women were deprived not only from representation in the parliaments established by the French colonial power during its stay in Syria but also from election right. Syrian women had to wait till after independence to gain their election right in 1949, and then the right to vote in 1953, but winning a seat in the People's Assembly only came after women were appointed at first in the legislative assemblies by a decision from the high authority.

The last parliament elected under French mandate was the 1943 House of Representatives, which continued to exist in the midst of difficult conditions struggling for independence after World War II. The many changes after the war enabled Syria and Lebanon to gain real independence without any political, military or economic conditions. The role played by some Syrian parliamentarians was faced by a hostile reaction from some French circles who continued to exercise colonial domination and refused to assimilate Syria's insistence on independence till the last minute of French existence on Syrian soil resulting in those circles ordering the shelling of the Syrian parliament building on 29/5/1945 causing the death of many national guard personnel newly established as a protection force for the national authority that was preparing itself for independence. The national government of independence maintained the parliament elected at the last days of French colonial rule and held elections in 1947 one year after independence.

After the election law was revised and election held based on 1 category instead of 2 and the right to elect was given only to males over 20 years of age, the first house of representatives after independence was elected on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1947 but did not last long and was dissolved after the first military coup carried out by Husni al-Zaeem<sup>6</sup> in 1949, which opened the way for a series of military coups in which the army comes out of its barracks to return seemingly after changing the existing political regime and handing power to individuals it deems suitable to its national aspirations. Those coups continued till 16/10/1970 which is the date of staging the Correctional Movement by then lieutenant general Hafez al-Assad, after which the political situation remained stable till present date. After the appointed assembly of 1971 completed drafting the permanent constitution (which was adopted in 1973), parliamentary elections were decided to be held every 4 years and the level of women's participation and representation in the

People's Assembly evidently increased (given that the number of female members for the current legislative term is 30 out of 250, which makes up 12% of its members.)

Regardless of the issue of declining democracy and civil society and the interference of the military in civil life, the real situation on the ground indicates that every movement of change brings with it sometimes positive gains to organize the judiciary and parliamentary life.

In 1949, the military regime established by Husni al-Zaeem introduced a number of important laws such as the civil law that is still in force till present date, in addition to a new election law through which a constituent assembly was established and a committee set up to draft a new constitution that was considered by jurist circles at the time acceptable and better than the previous one.

As for the general election law and the extraordinary<sup>7</sup> amendments of 1949, Article 7 stipulates that every Syrian male or female who completed 18 years of age at the first of January of the year of election shall have the right to be an elector in the constituency he/she is registered in, provided that they enjoy their civil and political rights and not deprived from electoral capacity. However, this law laid down restrictions on women's practicing their election right by stipulating that they should possess at least elementary education and that separate polling centers should be dedicated to them, while stipulating that candidates should be only males, completed 30 years of age, are Syrian citizen for over 10 years at least and completed minimum 5<sup>th</sup> grade of elementary education.

The Syrian constitution issued in 1950 by the constituent assembly stipulates that the constituents are Syrian males and females who completed 18 years of age and that every Syrian citizen shall have the right to run for parliament if they meet election conditions: educated, completed 30 years of age and meeting the necessary conditions stipulated in the election law. The text implies that the right to be a candidate is restricted only to males.

The constitution issued after a subsequent military coup in 1953 (during the military rule of colonel Adeeab al-Shishakli regime) was more progressive and stipulated that male and female constituents are the citizens who completed 18 years of age at the first of January of the year of election and are registered in the civil registration records and meeting the conditions stipulated in the election law and that every person entitled to run for parliament should run for parliament<sup>8</sup>. At this stage, the age of those entitled to run for parliament was lowered to 25 years<sup>9</sup> and that they should meet the conditions stipulated in the election law, the most important of which is that a candidate should be educated<sup>10</sup>, but women at the time were unable to enter parliament due to the fact that no woman stood as a candidate for parliament during the said election period.

It is obvious that the 1953 constitution was the first Syrian constitution to grant women not only the right to vote but also the right to run for legislative assemblies just like men. However, no woman was able to do so at the time and this may be due to the fact that the conditions of the elections that were held under that constitution did not attract nationwide enthusiasm neither among women nor among men given the undemocratic nature of that regime<sup>11</sup>. In addition, no woman was member of the 1954 parliament (known as House of Representatives at the time), which came after the elections that followed the overthrow of the previous regime by the army via a military coup and the handing over of power to civilians. It worth mentioning here that the Syrian Communist Party mentions in its documents the women's votes played a significant role in carrying its candidate Khaled Bagdash to parliament, which indicates that women's participation in the election process was in good rates.

Yet, the first woman to be MP in a Syrian parliament was during the unification between Syria and Egypt (1958-1961) in which the unification parliament known as the "Nation's Assembly" comprised 600 members, 200 from the northern region (Syria) and 400 from the southern region (Egypt), and for the first time in Syrian history a woman became a member of a legislative assembly since two women named Jihan Al Mosli and Widad Haroun were members of the said Nation's Assembly. It is obvious here that women's entry to parliament in that case came by virtue of a decision by the high authority and not as a result of women's influence in the street or the constituents' decision to carry women into parliament via the ballot boxes.

The separation between Syrian and Egypt took place on 28/9/1961, and in the permanent constitution of the separation era<sup>12</sup>, women's political rights that were gained during unification and before suffered a setback. By virtue of the said constitution, women retained their right to vote but were denied candidacy right and the age of running for parliament became 30 and was restricted to males only as mentioned earlier.

The provisional constitution of the 1963 March 8<sup>th</sup> Revolution issued in 1964 changed the constitutional framework of the definition of the state. Article 1 of that constitution stipulates: "Syria is a sovereign socialist democratic popular republic and is part of the Arab nation", and article 31 stipulates: "the Revolutionary National Assembly shall assume the legislative power and shall control the work of the executive power". Article 32 determined the tasks of that Assembly: "to elect the Presidential Assembly, amend the permanent constitution and organize a nationwide referendum". Article 33 stipulates: "the Revolutionary National Assembly shall be formed from its current members (appointed), in addition to representatives from the people whose number and method of representation shall be determined by a law. Later on, the members of that Assembly were appointed on two stages, the first formation were appointed in 1965 where the Revolutionary National Assembly held a meeting (parliamentary meeting) on 1/9/1965 and comprised 8 women<sup>13</sup> out of 95 members, while the

second formation was appointed on 15/2/1966 by expanding the former Assembly and including new male and female members, which made the total number of members 134, 12 of which were women after 4 more women were included<sup>14</sup>. It seems that the last Assembly was not able to hold any session due to disagreements within the pyramid of power at the time, so a movement called the February 23 Movement seized power on 23/2/1966 (the Revolutionary National Assembly was cancelled few days earlier). A shift in the political course then took place at the hands of then lieutenant general Hafez al-Assad who seized power on 16/11/1970.

In 1972 an assembly called the People's Assembly in 1971 in which women held 4 seats. The said Assembly enacted the permanent constitution at the end of January 1973, which laid down the method of electing the coming assembly via a popular referendum. The first legislative term of the People's Assembly began on 9/6/1973 in which women were represented in various rates. The 7<sup>th</sup> term ended on 2/12/2002 at the rate of one term every 4 years. A new term began in 2003.

**Table (2)**

**Succession of legislative assemblies (parliaments) in Syria from the first independence in 1919 till the last legislative term of the current People's Assembly founded by virtue of the permanent constitution of 1973**

Serial No	Name of the assembly	year	Number of members	Term of the assembly			Political situation
				Year	month	day	
1	The First Syrian Conference	3/6/1919	90	1	6	1	<p>The first constituent assembly established in Syria to declare independence and draft a constitution. This assembly came after the revolution of Hussein ibn-Ali erupted in Al Hejaz and the consequent liberation of Damascus forcing the Ottoman army out of Syria by the Arab army under the leadership of prince Faisal Bin Al Hussein on 30/9/1918 and declaring him king.</p> <p>This conference held its first session on 3/6/1919 with a main objective of responding to Syria's aspiration of independence in its natural borders (current Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine), rejecting the Zionist immigration into Palestine and rejecting The Sykes-picot agreement that</p>



						contained the splitting of influence over Syria between Britain and France. The last session to be held was on 19/7/1920, after which the French forces occupied Damascus.	
2	The First house of representatives	1923	33	0	1	4	Elections were held under the French mandate putting into practice the Sykes-Picot agreement. Those elections were specific to Syria in its current political and geographical borders (with the exception of Iskandarona district that was separated from Syria and annexed to Turkey in 1938) and to natural Syria as all Arabs wished.
3	The Constituent Assembly	1928	67	0	8	27	Elections were held under the French mandate.
4	The Legislative Assembly	1923	70	0	7	12	Elections were held under the French mandate.
5	The House of Representatives	1936	85 then 104	2	6	17	Elections were held under the French mandate.
6	The House of Representatives	1943	124	3	9	24	Elections were held under the French mandate before 3 days of its end. The House continued to function after independence and the departure of French troops on 16/4/1946 from Syria in its current political borders.
7	The House of Representatives	1947	131	1	4	32	The first house of representatives elected after independence.
8	The Constituent Assembly & The House of Representatives	1949	113	0	10	4	Elected under the first military coup in Syria led by Husni al-Zaeem and it was later dissolved following another military coup.
9	The House of Representatives	1953	83	0	8	26	Elected during the military rule of colonel Adeeb al-Shishakli by virtue of the election law issued 30/7/1953, which is the amended version of the 1949 law. Voting age was determined as 18 and this right were given to males and females for the first time. Every Syrian citizen who completed 25 years of age and has been Syrian for over 10 years has the right to be a candidate and this is the first

							significant gain for women in election laws. However, no woman reached the House since no one stood as candidate.
10	The house of Representatives	1954	134	3	4	3	<p>The previous House was dissolved after the overthrow of the military regime by another coup that handed over power to civilians. A new House was elected (no woman was represented in it) and continued to function till the beginning of the unification era in 1958.</p> <p>The new House held on 17/11/1957 a joint session with the Egyptian House of Representatives, after which the unification between Syria and Egypt was declared via an announcement signed by members of the two Houses. Putting into effect the minutes of the meeting held by the two governments on 2/1/1957 that contained unification steps such as the meeting between presidents of the two countries to declare the unification jointly, the legislative assemblies of both countries met to issue a number of decisions: official declaration of unification, nominate the new president, authorize the new president to issue a provisional constitution, hold a popular referendum on the items endorsed, especially approving the nominated president and the provisional constitution. This House held its last meeting on 5/2/1985 after issuing the legislations related to the aforesaid issues and nominated Jamal Abdel Naser for presidency.</p>
11	The Nation's Assembly (the Assembly of unification between Syria and Egypt)	1958	600	1	2	7	<p>Members are distributed as follows: 200 from the northern region; Syria (2 of which are females for the first time), and 400 from the southern region; Egypt.</p> <p>Pursuant to referendum results by which Gamal Abdul Nasser</p>

							was selected president and the provisional constitution approved, members of the Nation's Assembly were nominated for the two regions. For the first time in parliamentary history in Syria, two women became members of this Assembly, which continued to function till the separation on 28/9/1961.
12	The House of Representatives	1961	173	0	9	19	(no female members)  The military seized power again and declared the separation between Syria and Egypt, issued a provisional constitution and then election were held to set up a constituent assembly in order to draft a new constitution within a period of 6 months and then transform that assembly into a house of representatives.
13	The National Assembly	1965	95	0	6	0	Members of this assembly were at first 95 including 8 women then became 134 including 12 women. The period 1963-1970 was full of conflicts and political developments, which began with the March 8 <sup>th</sup> Revolution in 1963.  A decree issued 9/6/1963 stipulated the jurisdictions and tasks of the Revolutionary National Assembly (considering it a legislative assembly) and was formed by virtue of a law issued 23/8/1965 determining the number of its members to be 95 including 8 women with an aim of drafting a constitution for the country. A decree was issued then on 14/2/1966 expanding the Assembly's membership to 134 including 12 women, but this last assembly only lasted few days and was dissolve by virtue of decision 1 dated 23/2/1966 issued by the Al Baath Party's Temporary Regional Leadership nullifying the constitution at the same time. Many events then followed in the region following the defeat of the June 5 1967, which affected the internal stage

						causing many crises, and the situation remained tense till 16/10/1970
14	The People's Assembly (appointed assembly)	1970	173	3 5 0		The number of female members is 4.  The Assembly is an appointed one and has a basic function of drafting a constitution.
15	The People's Assembly (1 <sup>st</sup> term)	9/6/1973 to 8/6/1977	186	4 years		The number of female members is 4.  Elections were held pursuant to the new constitution which gave women the right to vote and stand as a candidate equally with men. Elections have being held in the manner stipulated by the constitution regularly every 4 years.
16	The People's Assembly (2 <sup>nd</sup> term)	18/8/1977 to 17/8/1981	195	4 years		The number of female members is 6.
17	The People's Assembly (3 <sup>rd</sup> term)	16/11/1981 to 15/11/1985	195	4 years		Number of female members 13.
18	The People's Assembly (4 <sup>th</sup> term)	27/2/1986 to 27/2/1990	195	4 years		Number of female members 16.
19	The People's Assembly (5 <sup>th</sup> term)	11/6/1990 to 10/6/1994	250	4 years		Number of female members 21.
20	The People's Assembly (6 <sup>th</sup> term)	10/9/1994 to	250	4 years		Number of female members 24.

		9/91998			
21	The People's Assembly (7 <sup>th</sup> term)	3/12/1998 to 2002	250	4 years	Number of female members 26.
22	The People's Assembly (8 <sup>th</sup> term)	9/3/2002 to / /2007	250		The first Assembly after President Bashar al-Assad assuming power and after the inaugural speech that was greatly counted on by the people.

Women maintained a growing representation rate in the appointed or elected assemblies after the issuance of the 1973 constitution. So women's presence witnessed a steady increased with each new term of the People's Assembly as shown below.

**Table (3)**

Legislative term/date					Number of members		
					Males	Females	Total
1 <sup>st</sup> .	from	09/06/1973	to	08/06/1977	182	4	186
2 <sup>nd</sup> .	from	18/08/1977	to	17/08/1981	189	6	195
3 <sup>rd</sup> .	from	16/11/1981	to	15/11/1985	182	13	195
4 <sup>th</sup> .	from	27/02/1986	to	27/02/1990	179	16	195
5 <sup>th</sup> .	from	11/06/1990	to	10/06/1994	229	21	250
6 <sup>th</sup> .	from	10/09/1994	to	09/09/1998	226	24	250
7 <sup>th</sup> .	from	03/12/1998	to	02/12/2002	224	26	250
8 <sup>th</sup> .	from	09/03/2003	to	/ /2007	220	30	250

#### **4- Decision-Making Participation through parliament in Syria (historic overview):**

Participation in decision-making in Syria is attained through electing policy-formulators who are supposed to represent the electors at both local and national levels.

Therefore citizens are not directly involved in decision-making and implementations through public referendums but through whom they deputize to do that, as if every citizen chooses someone to take part in decision-making or policy formulation on his behalf.

Theoretically speaking, it is like a social contract in which citizens deputize their representatives, through the ballot boxes, to manage their affairs and decide on what is good for them without consulting them all the time, provided that confidence in this social contract will be reviewed after a definite period of time as of the date of the previous electoral deputizing according to the provisions of the constitution and the relevant regulations.

It is obvious that such a theoretical assumption necessitates a free process of authorization without having any party imposing its will on the other within an atmosphere of absolute freedom without any kind of enforcement or pressure.

Citizens should have the chance to reevaluate their choices after a definite period of time in order to decide on whether their choices have been correct or they should change by looking for alternatives; such a process is known as rotation of power through polls etc.

One form of participation in Syria pursuant to the 1973 Constitution is the People's Assembly's (parliament) elections.

Over a long history of its political life, Syria adopted popular representation as an indirect kind of popular participation that was rooted traditionally in the country's political scene since its independence through the parliamentary representation. So, even governments that were labeled reactionary in political publications used to reactivate this type of representation each time it was suspended, irrespective of reasons.

The People's Assembly is considered the representative institution of all social classes, in charge of legislating and monitoring government activities by means of holding discussions on the Cabinet's policy and approving the state general budget. The Assembly has the right to withdraw confidence from the cabinet as a whole or from one minister.

Article 50 of the Syrian Constitution stipulates that all MPs should be elected through public, secret, direct and equitable elections. Articles 51 and 52 stipulate that "The People's Assembly's term is four years, and that the term may only be extended in case of war and by virtue of a law".

This means that the legislator wants to survey citizens about their representatives every four years as MPs represent the whole society and their representation cannot be restricted by a condition or reservation"

In order to secure a definite number of MPs representing workers and peasants, the legislator stipulated that the MPs of the (A) group representing them should

not be less than 50% of the MPs totaling 250 as of the 5<sup>th</sup> legislative term (11/6/1994-10/6/1998), whereas the (B) group represents the rest of social classes.

In its 4<sup>th</sup> legislative term (1986-1990), the People's Assembly witnessed a known precedent when it used its right to monitor government performance, so that MPs interventions and discussions led to withdraw confidence from some ministers, even though, as some thinks, such a result may be attributed to an agreement with the high executive authority.

Despite the popular indifference towards the People's Assembly's elections as citizens thought that the elected MPs are chosen on a basis of agreement between the government and NPF parties, and that their participation would not make any difference, the subsequent elections, however, especially after the 4<sup>th</sup> legislative term (1986), started to witness an ever increasing competition to win the seats not allocated to the NPF, especially in the recent years. The number of voters that amounted to 61.18% in 1994 of those entitled to vote is relatively good compared with their participation in the local councils' elections that were held to implement the administrative decentralization principle.

The actual number of voters increased also in the 1998 elections to reach 77.5% of people entitled to vote, and 82% of the holders of election cards, the use of which started for the first time in those elections (as they were not given to all people entitled to vote).

Competition among candidates reached a high point particularly for the seats not allocated for the government-backed NPF<sup>15</sup>. As of the 1994 elections when the middle class began to retreat and a widespread scramble to enter the parliament came to the surface among the so called "transit class" of the newly rich looking for political glory in this way.

Some of them, in fact, spent a lot of money on electioneering. Many people think that those groups are trying to take part in the administrative influence and make decisions in their favor.

The competition became greater in the last two electoral terms that pushed one of the NPF newspapers to write about the great emerging influence of capital; as it reported that after the elections of 1991 any review of the winners' lists (outside NPF parties) in terms of the social classes they represent makes it clear that the social classes smallest in number and greater in wealth in the city of Damascus for example were capable of making their candidates enter the People's Assembly, though most of them didn't have any platform.

The newspaper mentioned, as well, several loopholes in the Elections Law that allowed the millionaires to hold all the Damascus seats dedicated for independent candidates (with the exception of two names not mentioned in the newspaper). So, only those who financed their electoral campaign with millions of SYL won.

The newspaper objected to the Elections Law itself because it considered Damascus as one constituency, so that citizens from remote quarters in this

large city of 3 million people would not know the candidates in the other quarters'.

In fact, the role of money in the electoral publicity can be considered a pressure factor on public will and a distortion of the principle of participation itself. When a minority of candidates use their money to surpass other candidates of no similar financial capacity by means of electioneering campaigns not available for others, and when this minority exerts financial and moral pressure on a large number of electors offering them financial incentives or promises of intervention to solve their problems with the administrative authorities, all that will give certain candidates the opportunity to win, which is something otherwise not possible if the electors were free of those pressures.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, 82% of the election card holders have voted in the 1998 elections, for example, (the cards were not given to all of those entitled to vote); the registered number of those entitled to vote totaled 8,071,000, whereas the number of the election card holders was only 6,691,323 and the number of actual voters (with or without a card) reached 5,501,940.

The (A) group of MPs was 127, and the (B) group of MPs was 123.

The majority of votes were strongly in favor of NPF candidates who represent the Syrian society's mosaic (ethnically and sectarian) for many considerations; they compete in solidarity on one list with a co-platform including political, economic and social goals. The votes they get however differ in terms of number according to the social influence of each of them and the party they represent. Their success is also largely attributed to the support they get from the government and media.

It is worth mentioning that the situation needs some sort of development based on a comprehensive review to modify and update a lot of legislations regarding the existing institutions and laws in order to allow development opportunities in general, and human development in particular, which is one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's requirements to optimize our capabilities by all means possible.

It is necessary in this context to concentrate on the type habilitation that meets the current development requirements in life, science and administration, and to work on getting a better management of natural, financial, military and political resources in order to push the country forward.

Such a development requires more legislative initiatives by current and future MPs who should have high qualifications as there are big issues to be tackled such as accelerating the economic and social development, enhancing the economic reform by means of providing support and habilitation to the government sector, creating a suitable environment for more investment in the private sector, following up administrative modernization and renovation in order to expand the developmental remunerative activities and to work on combating unemployment, creating new job opportunities for the ever increasing number of university graduates and jobless people, giving the opportunity to qualified people who are capable of assuming development and distinguished



administration and moving steadily towards the cancellation of all kinds of discrimination against women.

A review of the Assembly's activities in its previous terms until the seventh one shows that they were not up to the expectations and the qualifications it has, as it has mostly been driven by reactions to the government legal suggestions and amendments. It has made no suggestions in relations to laws of labor and rent, laws including discriminating articles against women, Investment Law, Taxation Laws and many other laws that citizens have been complaining of for a long time.

In some of its studies, the press criticized the Assembly for lacking a creative role and dealing only with issues submitted by the executive power that seemed to be the only one to have the information and initiative to prepare and draft laws.

The relevant studies criticized, as well, the Assembly's giving up to practice and impose its monitoring power and its failure to recover the (Central Body for Financial Monitoring) that was disengaged from the Assembly in 1963 (under the name of Accountability Bureau) whose head used to be assigned by the Assembly itself. Now it is subordinate to the Minister of Finance.

Some researchers criticize the fact that (the Central Body for Monitoring and Inspection) is subordinate to the Cabinet, while it should be linked to the People's Assembly whose representative tasks include monitoring.

If the circumstances of the groups excluded from participation have necessitated at a time a legal tolerance regarding the elected representatives' competence, binding the candidate's competence to his ability to read and write, entering the new century requires strict conditions regarding their educational status as they are supposed to prepare legislations concerning the present and future life of their electors.

The MPs should have good expertise and sufficient database and should be able to use consultants and experts to help them in their great job in order to make their legislative initiatives based on an in-depth knowledge of the addressed issues. They should also have offices that are open to all citizens at any time without any red tape as it is their responsibility to make their electors' voice reach the Assembly's halls realizing the principle of participation on behalf of the electors.

## Chapter (2)

### 8<sup>th</sup> Legislative Term Elections

#### **Nomination for the last elections:**

The number of candidates in the last elections exceeded 41 times the required number; nominations of 10405 candidates were approved; only 849 of them (8%) were women.

This number however declined to 1490 when the NPF's lists were published at all electoral districts.

That is related to the mechanism of selecting the NPF's candidates (men/women) as the ruling party's leadership asks a large number of people to nominate themselves during the nomination period; at the same time the party bodies keep withdrawal applications for all candidates; so that when the party's leadership choose its final candidates, all the others should withdraw as they don't have the right to nominate themselves as independent while they have a party commitment. Though they are free to choose according to the Elections Law, most of them choose to abide by the party order.

The Syrian minister of the interior's statement<sup>16</sup> on the results of elections revealed that 30 women won seats in the 8<sup>th</sup> term of the people's assembly, 22 of them from the sector of laborers and peasants, and 8 from the rest social classes, surpassing their number in the previous term by 4 members.

The women-winners' distribution in terms of parties was as follows: 27 from Al-Ba'ath (the ruling party), 1 from the Socialist Union Party (a NPF's party), 1 from the Syrian National Social Party (represented for the first time on the lists of the NPF that it joined later), and 1 independent MP.

Their educational qualifications were as follows:

26 MPs holding university degrees at least = 86.6%.

1 MP holding a secondary school certificate =3.3%

3 MPs holding basic education certificate 10%.

#### **Women MPs previous work:**

15 MPs were teachers, school directors or specialized principals.

5 MPs were employees.

10 MPs worked in various fields.

### Women MPs ages:

8 MPs over 50.

17 MPs between 40-50.

5 MPs under 40.

Among them there were 20 new women members as 10 women members at the 8<sup>th</sup> term were also members at the 7<sup>th</sup> one (9 of whom belong to Al-Ba'ath Party, and 1 independent) = 33.3%.

### Women MPs distribution in electoral districts:

Governorate	No	Total no. (men-women)	proportion
Damascus	4	29	13.7%
Rural Damascus	3	19	15.7%
Homs	3	23	13%
Hama	3	22	13%
Aleppo	1	20	5%
Rural Aleppo	3	32	9.3%
Idleb	2	18	11.1%
Latakia	2	17	11.7%
Tartous	4	13	30.7%
Al Raqqa	1	8	12.5%
Deir Ezzour	1	14	7.1%
Al-Hasaka	1	14	7.1%
Daraa	1	10	10%
Al-Sweida	1	6	16.6%
Quneitra	-	5	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>12%</b>

Even though the national strategy for women after Beijing has targeted increasing women's participation in decision-making positions to 30%, and the government 9<sup>th</sup> 5-Y Plan has adopted that as well, the proportion of women MPs after increase has not exceeded 12%.

In the electoral districts this proportion ranged between 0% in AlQuneitra and 30.7% in Tartous. The poor women representation (5%) in Aleppo city district was surprising as it is the governorate center and has a lot of qualified women working in all sectors. It is worth mentioning that Al-Ba'ath Party's 10<sup>th</sup> Conference (May 2005) has recommended raising percentage of women's participation in decision-making positions to 25% in the General Elections.

### 2- The Electoral Process:

The Syrian Arab Republic is divided into 14 governorates, but it has 15 electoral stricts as there are two stricts in Aleppo: one of them for the city (20 representatives) and the other for the regions (32 representatives).

Every strict includes many electoral centers for: males, females, and both. The local authorities are entitled to create centers during the process of elections if needed. The number of centers increased in the latest elections from 8527 to 10388; most of them were located in Aleppo regions strict /1124/ and the lowest number was in Al Quneitra /153/ centers.

The number of electors above 18 was 10817821 in the civil registers including the electors abroad, military and policemen who don't have the right to vote according to the Public Elections Law in addition to electors who are deprived from voting right due to juridical sentences.

The number of the election card holders –by which they vote- was 7181206 of whom 4556475 did actually vote that equals 63.45%.

According to the Elections Law special schedules are prepared for the electors in which personal data about them is written down such as the elector's name, his parents' names, his date of birth and his election card number. The cards are then sealed in a way indicating the type of elections (legislative, local administration). No one can vote in a strict other than the one that issued his card unless he 1- applies to have his electoral address changed. 2- is appointed by a candidate as his agent, in that case he can vote in that candidate's strict.

Once the period of casting votes is over, the votes are counted in the presence of the candidates or their agents who should register their proxies at the electoral center and the committee of the numbered box (the proxy includes the name of the strict, the center and the box's number).

When the ballot box is opened (sealed with wax) the envelopes are counted, if they are no more than 5% more or less than the total number of voters, the voting will be considered valid, otherwise it will be repealed and repeated on the following day.

When counting votes is finished and signed by the committee members, the results are sent to the central administration in the governorate's headquarter.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> term's elections the results were directly shown on an electronic screen controlled by elections data providers in an open session for all candidates (men/women) as a government step towards transparency.

On Thursday evening 6/3/2003 the minister of the interior general Ali Hammoud declared the results of the elections in a press conference held in the Ministry of the Interior, Damascus<sup>17</sup>. On the same day the Presidential Decree 78 dated 6/3/2003<sup>18</sup> was issued according to which the winners of the elections held on 2/3/2003 were nominated as MPs for the 8<sup>th</sup> term. The Presidential Decree 79 dated 6/3/2003<sup>19</sup> was issued as well in which the President called the People's Assembly to convene for the first time on 9/3/2003.

The People's Assembly convened under the chairmanship of its oldest MP with its youngest two ones as secretaries<sup>20</sup>.

The session chairman invited the MPs to take the oath individually, after that they started electing the Assembly's Office that includes: Chairman, deputy chairman, secretary and two observers and for the first time a woman was elected in the Assembly's Office; it was Mrs. Ena'am Abbas who was elected as a secretary and reelected in 2004-2005 (the Assembly's Office is re-elected every year)

### **3- Party nomination of women:**

A review of the Syrian Elections Law shows that the nomination for the People's Assembly is done on individual bases rather than party ones as the candidates would compete regardless their party commitments that may be exposed just in a general way as a candidate nominated by the NPF or an independent one.

It has been common however for some of the NPF's parties to make electoral platforms expressing their candidates in addition to their adherence to the NPF's platform.

The following party platforms were made in the last elections

The NPF's, the Syrian Communist Party's<sup>21</sup> (Faisal), the Syrian Communist Party (Bokdash), the Socialist Union's and the Syrian National Social Party's.

The platform of the Syrian Communist Party (Faisal) considered: "paying attention to women's role in the society and working on putting an end to all kinds of discrimination against them in the family, society, laws and practical experience" an urgent task in the field of developing and expanding democracy (the party's platform 19/2/2003)

Whereas the other platforms have not include any specific items on women since they are human beings/citizens (according to the parties we asked), so that they had only general speeches.

When asked about their participation in the electoral platforms drafting the candidates (men/women) said that the party's leadership is the one to decide on such a platform as it reveals the party's orientation rather than that of the candidates who just have to support it on the basis of their party commitment except for those in the decision-making positions in their parties.

It should be pointed out here that some women candidates from Al-Ba'ath Party delivered speeches in electoral festivals, that were considered electoral platforms, mostly concentrated on supporting the modernization and development march and the importance of participation in the electoral process.

Women members in political parties had no chance to be nominated except in the following parties: Al-Ba'ath Party /27/, Socialist Union /1/, Syrian National Social Party /1/, whereas there were no women candidates from other seven parties though they had old participation in those parties whose leadership bodies contain women, but in poor percentages, and the same for their intermediate and upper intermediate leaderships.

Some parties claim that women nomination is hindered by the low number of seats allocated for them and distributed among a number of electoral districts that diminishes the chances for women in the face of the hard competition of men with administrative experiences attained through their government leading positions.

As for independent women candidates, two platforms only were found in line with the general speech without any specifications, the rest however didn't keep their platforms, which reveals their assessment of the experience they were through and indicates their unwillingness to repeat it.

It may be attributed to the low number of votes they got, the high costs they sustained in vain or to a mistrust of their success as there was only one independent women candidate to win a seat in the People's Assembly against 82 independent men winners representing commercial and industrial economic activities or ethnic or religious personalities.

None of the appeals submitted before the People's Assembly was made by a woman candidate though some of them who had got a number of votes close to that of winners were skeptical of the results in some centers.

Some independent women candidates made use of a good electioneering policy based on family, friends and some political forces support. As they had electoral campaigns similar to those of men in terms of building guest pavilions, receiving delegates and holding meetings. In addition to their serious attempts to make agreements with other candidates, visit party centers to ask for their support, nominate agents at many centers<sup>22</sup>.

### **Women MPs performance in the last term:**

The People's Assembly in its current 8<sup>th</sup> term has a lot of tasks to perform as it is the first one elected after President Bashar Al-Assad came in power<sup>23</sup> following a declaration for Modernization & Development in a new political speech that had characterized the speech of taking oath.

In a speech delivered in the first session, the first normal round of the 8<sup>th</sup> term President Bashar Al-Assad confirmed that "honest representation of people requires and obligates you to fulfill your responsibilities to meet this trust and what it requires in order to realize the citizens' interests and follow up our homeland issues in general... not only the traditional Assembly's tasks such as passing laws, monitoring executive organs, correcting mistakes and calling for account for failure...but raise them to the level of contribution to the development through innovative and creative ideas<sup>24</sup>.

That is why voters had expected a lot from this people's assembly as a group of important laws were transferred to it (State Workers' Basic Law, Agrarian Relations, Custody) in addition to approving new economic policies such as the

social market economy and the transformations they require (private banks, stock market) that leads to great economic and social transformations.

An observer of the Assembly's course of action concludes that the legislative power continued waiting for draft laws to be transferred by the executive power without any initiatives to propose new laws but in very few cases<sup>25</sup>.

The red tapes in those rare cases however were a big barrier to get any positive development to be reflected on the Assembly's performance in a way giving the members the feeling of effectiveness and success.

Some MPs however made some sever interpositions that led to radical changes to some proposed drafts<sup>26</sup> even if those interpositions were governed by party decision that changed the majority to minority from one session to another.

As for the women MPs performance<sup>27</sup> in the last term, a review of the first and second normal rounds proceedings<sup>27</sup> leads to the following conclusions:

Women MPs interpositions were 2.33 for each on the average; two of them made 11 interpositions for each, and one of them made no interposition, no question and no absence.

**Interpositions average in terms of age:**

Above 50	3 interpositions
40-50	2.24 interpositions
Under 40	4.2 interpositions

**Women interpositions in terms of their parties:**

Authority	Interpositions
Al-Ba'ath Party	86
Syrian National Social Party	1
Socialist Union	-
Independent	1

Average women MPs absence: 3.5 session for each, 8 women MPs had full attendance, 1 woman MP had 14 absences, another woman MP had 14 absences from 28 sessions.

**Women representation in the Assembly's 12 permanent committees:**

All women MPs participated in a committee or more.

Permanent committees	Members No.	Women No.	Women tasks

Constitutional & legislative affairs committee	30	3	-
Budget & auditing committee	30	5	Reporter
Financial laws committee	30	2	-
Arab & foreign affairs committee	30	6	-
Guidance committee	30	9	Reporter
Production & planning committee	30	3	-
Service committee	30	3	-
National security committee	30	1	-
Internal affairs & local administration committee	30	1	-
Grievance & appeals committee	30	2	Reporter
Agriculture & irrigation committee	30	2	-
Environment & population activities committee	30	10	-

It is a clear evidence of women poor representation in committee leaderships, though some of them are highly qualified.

It would be difficult to judge the Assembly's performance through those two rounds as the first ordinary one required eight sessions three of which without any discussion (opening, permanent committees formation and voting for committees' offices) and a session for the speech of the President of the Republic, whereas the second ordinary round that included 20 sessions had a whole session for the government statement and another one to read some long agreements taking into consideration that all laws transferred to the People's Assembly should be read during the session that allows a short time for discussion.

Therefore it is not easy to precisely evaluate women MPs role, so the following evaluation is based on inadequate data.

The attached charts show that we are primarily speaking about Al-Ba'ath Party women members as there are only three out of thirty women MPs members in parties other than Al- Ba'ath Party. One of them is a member of a party of the NPF's, the second to a semi-recognized party (recently joined the NPF) and an independent one.



Ba'athist women interpositions make 97.7% out of 88 women's interpositions, with only two contributions by the other three women MPs.

Based on the attached charts all women MPs are members in one or more of the Assembly's permanent committees (that study laws and submit reports to the Assembly). Only three women however were members of committee offices (permanent committees leading bodies) as reporters, which is the third position of three: office chairman, deputy office chairman, and reporter. Only one woman assumed a leading position at the Office as one of the two secretaries (people's assembly president, deputy people's assembly president, two secretaries, two observers).

The main women representation in the people's assembly's permanent committees was in two committees: the environment & population activities committee (10) and the guidance committee (9) whereas it was a poor representation in the national security and the internal affairs & local administration committees with one women in each.

### **Women's role in public issues:**

The attached charts show high truancy rates among women in people's assembly sessions ranging between 14 absences for a woman MP (including the leaves) and the full attendance of 8 women MPs.

In the beginning of every session the number of absentees is registered but they may come late without registering them as attendants. Checking out the registrations however proved that most of women registered as absentees didn't come late to sessions.

Women interpositions in the first two ordinary rounds were similar to those of most of the MPs (men/women) in that they didn't go into details as they were confined to deprecating questions particularly during the prolonged discussion of the government statement in eight sessions.

The IDs issuance Law could hardly be considered the most important law discussed in terms of mechanisms and depth; most of which however focused on mechanisms only such as the duty imposed on citizens to get IDs, without discussing crucial questions such as the reason behind making citizens subject to punishments if they don't apply to change their IDs when their data are changed, and not getting those data changed by the government according to the national numbers without changing the IDs.

That can be applied to the government statement discussion that drew praising opinions comprising compositional comments and criticizing opinions containing deprecating questions. The statement was hardly discussed on the basis of supporting or opposing numbers or information.

It is recognized that women MPs interpositions raised general citizens issues in relatively long discussions of different matters. They remained however

characterized by questions and wishes without discussing reasons, reality, mechanisms or the like such as the interest rates of the youth houses loans, pensioners rights, the Agrarian Bank's interest rates, late salaries of a general company's workers and techno electricity-related issues.

It is also recognized that no discussion had dealt with the internal and external policies in both rounds (inaccurate comment due to the lack of minutes) except for discussing a suggested statement on the American threats to Iraq before occupying it (that is applied to men and women MPs)

### **Women's role in issues related to children, family and women:**

Interpositions in this regard were confined to calling for greater attention to such issues with references to the necessity to amend women and family-related laws without an in-depth discussion of the situation and its requirements.

A lack of connection is obvious between comments made in this regard on the government statement and the Syrian women national strategy and the 9<sup>th</sup> 5-Y Plan.

One interposition has defined laws related to (personal status, custody age, penalties on using family planning materials) and another one referred to women political empowerment.

Women participation in the people's assembly face the same problems of all the other MPs in terms of the mechanism of work that leads to a waste of time resulting from the prolonged reading of laws in particular and not having the texts distributed in time as some MPs may say.

Therefore we may say that women's interpositions were very modest in number and characterized by addressing deprecating questions rather than discussing numbers and facts and that's why many discussions were centered on the government statement within a relatively short time given to some MPs only.

Little attention was also paid to women, family and children issues particularly as the government statement included no clear or detailed items from the five-year plan of women although it was approved by the people's assembly in its previous term and represents a government commitment for which the government may be called to account if it is neither fulfilled nor developed or enriched with further suggestions.

Only six interpositions brought up women issues in a simple and inconsistent way in the form of headlines such as: integrate the gender in government institutions, allocate a part of the government budget for developing women reality<sup>28</sup>, cancel curricula containing traditional images, raise the age of custody<sup>29</sup>, pay attention to rural women<sup>30</sup>, amend Personal Statute and Penal Laws (Articles on family planning materials without referring to crimes of honor) and women loans<sup>31</sup>, enhance women role in development, a question about the

continuation of assigning women in typical decision-making positions<sup>32</sup>, demand maternal leaves for temporary women workers rather than mere medical report<sup>33</sup>.

Astonishingly, two symposiums received media coverage: the Francophone MPs Conference<sup>34</sup> held in Sharlot Town, Canada in which several issues were discussed primarily the francophone women's role enhancement, in the presence of a parliamentary delegation not including any woman, and a symposium on the Arab Women Role Activation (Beirut/ February 2005) whose concluding statement didn't include any interposition by Syrian women MPs and in which a Syrian male MP chaired a session called the Legislative Process and Critical Gender Equation<sup>35</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that although some male MPs comments demanded judicial reforms or amendments to laws, they didn't raise laws biased against women as they just referred to the Penal Law and articles related to family planning materials users<sup>36</sup>.

Male MPs made only two comments in relation to women affairs; One of them demanded a secondary school for girls in Idleb<sup>37</sup>, while the other one asked for equitable treatment to husbands and wives regarding the share of inheritance from the other spouse's retirement salary<sup>38</sup>.

### **The Field Research:**

The research team distributed a questionnaire to the ladies members of the People's Assembly containing many questions to put light on some major aspects of habilitating the female MPs to perform their duties, their opinions about women representation level, how to increase it and develop their role in it. Only 9 female members of 30 answered to the questionnaire; the main results concluded are:

- All the female MPs are members in the women organization: the General Women Union.
- 50% of them made speeches in electoral festivals –they called them manifests- containing general talking emphasizing on participation in the elections, supporting the reform march without any demands or commitments to work for in future, except for one manifest that concentrated on amending some anti-women discriminating laws.
- 75% of the ladies faced no difficulties during the candidature or the electoral process, while the difficulties faced by the others were social, economic or political but at low levels, perhaps because they are originally members of the Ba'ath Party and nominated under the Front's name.
- All the ladies who answered the questionnaire said that they had acquainted the international documents related to women rights; CEDAW, the Universal Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and Beijing Platform for Action while half of them only acquainted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two International Covenants.

- Percentage of acquainting the national laws containing discriminating articles against women (the questionnaire has not mentioned that they are discriminating) and the government commitment to bridge the gender gap, including the National Plan and the 9<sup>th</sup> 5-Y Plan that have never been mentioned in the interpositions, was 75 – 100%.
- Opinions of the female MPs about the People's Assembly bylaw were: one of them considered it good, eight thought that it needed amendment, seven approved the quota system, one rejected it and the others gave no opinion.
- Eight female MPs considered that the women representation percentage is medium, while only one considered it good. Eight women have considered representation in the committees as members medium and weak as chairwomen, while only one considered it good for the first case and medium for the second one.
- Seven women assured that the female MPs should concentrate on women affairs, while two thought that that is not necessary.
- Three of the women considered that the Assembly membership affected their family conditions positively; six considered that it had no effects.

Proposals regarding the increase of the number of women in the People's Assembly were as follows:

- Women education.
- Enlighten women and men about the importance of women political participation.
- Enlighten men in the decision-making positions.
- Women percentage should be 20 – 50%.
- Active women and working in policy, organizations and syndicates should be nominated.
- Women holding high licenses should be among the representatives.
- The parties and organizations should hold symposiums to explain the women role and the importance of their representation.
- All the Front parties should support women nomination.
- Encourage the government and non-government organizations to nominate their members.
- Hold plenty of symposiums about the importance of women membership in the Assembly.
- Adopt the quota system as well as other criteria ensuring the women representation validity.
- Encourage women to nominate themselves.
- Party and political support to women.
- Increase the percentage of women presentation on the Front lists and support the competent independent women.
- A reliable study should be conducted by the political leaderships, the popular organizations and the Family Commission for the female candidates' files, in addition to their social activities; they should be leading women.
- The political will.

- Enhance the media means role to explain the woman role as a partner.
- Change the typical image of the course.
- Educate women how to direct an electoral campaign and enable them from doing that; this proposal has been mentioned in one form only.

Proposals of activating the women role in the Assembly were:

- Persuade the People's Assembly chairman of women representation in the parliamentary delegations, fair distribution of men and women in that and taking competence into consideration.
- Having a permanent committee in the Assembly under the name of Woman Committee.
- Women should take part in more than one committee's chairmanship.
- There should be chairwoman of outgoing delegations.
- They should participate in all outgoing delegations.
- A woman can be a deputy chairman of the People's Assembly and even a chairwoman, in future.
- The best women for nomination should be selected from among the women who have practiced many jobs and who have good personality, education and knowledge and well known in the society.
- All female MPs should participate in the national conferences (family affairs; woman, children, orphans and the handicapped rights) to have experience and to use that experience in modernizing the legislations.
- Active participation in the permanent committees and in law studies.
- Brave discussion of issues.
- Increase the number of women in the Assembly's Office.
- More participation in the Assembly's committees.
- More participation in organizations' and the Family Commission's activities.
- Follow legal, health and social courses specialized for female MPs.
- Assign them as chairwomen of friendship association.
- Take part in all local and foreign symposiums in an actual direct, not only formal, way.
- Improve dialogue mechanisms with the male MPs to gain their approvals.

It is noticeable that though the male MPs have understanding of some basic legal, universal and national information and government commitments, the handling of women issues has not matched that understanding.

The proposals have not mentioned the necessity of consulting women NGOs or even making consultation with the female MPs themselves but through proposing a committee formation, while concentration has been to a big extent on the Assembly's female MPs' personal characteristics, giving more opportunities to women to participate in the delegations and committees chairmanship and on the role that the political leaderships can play in nominating women to the Assembly's membership. Two important proposals mentioned in the same form can be indicated here: the first one concentrated on enabling the nominated

woman to direct the electoral campaign; the second was about improving the dialogue skills to gain the male MPs' support during the discussions.

## Chapter (3)

### Obstacles hampering Women's Participation in the Parliament

We can introduce this part of the research through four levels:

**First level:** The clannishness is still affecting the individuals' private and public lives and tribal allegiance is effective as community mentality. In spite of the gradual transmission towards the atomic family type, the values and relationships of the functionally expanded family are still prevailing, which means that the patriarchal domination is still prevailing; further on, the tribe or the sect still affects the individual public choices such as the political ones. That is clear in elections or voting process, which is first in favor of relatives, then neighbors of the same street or village, then the tribe or the sect.

**Second level:** Undeveloped electoral publicity that depends on pictures, guesthouses and exaggeration of money spending rather than on defined electoral platforms and dialogues with the electors or with social movements in a way promoting the candidate to win the elections.

**Third level:** the electoral system basing mainly on the National Progressive Front's lists creates a case of indifference among the citizens in general and makes the independents hopeless in advance about any possibility of winning the elections, especially the women of which a very big number is still far from political activity in an environment of "no legislations" in this field.

**Fourth level:** In line with the internationally increasing concentration on women issues and adopting them by the UN organizations, the government and non-government interest in those issues increased and that expressed itself through the national strategy for woman in Syria after Beijing and specializing an item for woman empowerment in the 9<sup>th</sup> 5-Y Plan. The proposed policies and procedures, however, have not been reflected on reality and the actual results have not been as desired. This situation activated the feminist movement in Syria to propose amending many laws by the People's Assembly, the case that created public enthusiasm about women issues, but that was hindered by the Associations Law that did not license many organizations acting on land in spite of the government efforts to overcome this obstacle, such as the proposal made by the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs about a new Associations Law and its cooperation with many unlicensed associations. In addition to that the non government women associations lack information about the People's Assembly's work mechanisms and that deprives them of the chance to affect the MPs in a way persuading them to adopt the women movement demands.

Basing on those levels, we come to the challenges facing the Syrian women participation in public affairs, especially the political life:

### **The economic level:**

In spite of the developments taking place in the country aiming at empowering women through allocating a proportion of the public budget (0.25% of 2005 budget), setting up government bodies (Syrian Commission for Family Affairs) and civil associations for women empowerment economically (FIRDOS, MAWRED, Businesswomen Committees at the chambers of industry and commerce), training women on leadership and decision-making by civil associations (Syrian Women's League) and the UN organizations' activities aiming at training and habilitating women (UNDP, UNFPA, UNIFEM, FAO), we find that the women percentage of the labor force still around 1/5 (19.8% of the low wages workers), unemployment percentage among women is 2.5 times its percentage among men and 63% of women labor force is still registered as housekeepers.

Finally, women are still far from the economic decision-making positions as women employment has concentrated in the last years in the social services sector far from the productive process. They have not made a lot of progress in decision-making positions of the state administrations, which would have helped them to have self confidence, developed their leading talents and motivate initiative environment.

This review proves to the economic researcher that the women economic status hinders women participation in development and that definitely affects their participation in the political life, in general, and the parliamentary participation, in particular, in line with the increasing levels of lavishness in the electoral campaigns.

### **The Legal level:**

The discriminating articles in some national laws (personal law, penal law and nationality) are considered part of the challenges hindering the participation of Syrian women who are still considered by the law under-competent. Divorce is a husband right, not a wife's one; she does not have the right to take her share of family properties that she has contributed to, in case of separation or husband death; the man has the right to get married to more than one woman; women do not have the right of custody over themselves or their children; females inherit half share compared with males and in the majority of the rural and urban areas women do not even inherit that half due to the traditions' influence and this forms a big challenge in front of women freedom of movement and activity. This discrimination puts the basis of a community view considering women of low competence; this situation puts limits to their participation in public life and it lessens the community approval of assigning women in decision-making positions including the People's Assembly's membership.

### **The information level:**



We notice a positive development during the last few years of the women image in the Syrian information media, especially in the drama, but this is not enough to change the typical image of women in the community mentality of both men and women; such a thing requires gender information policies targeting all people working in this field, in addition to training and habilitating women and men in all information media to pay attention to the concept of gender in their messages, dramas and in everything that is broadcasted, read or transmitted in the information media.

This is at the national level and we know that the world through the information media became a small village, so presenting the image of a coquettish, beautiful, submissive woman or the one that have a typical role (teacher, nurse, secretary) has a very bad effect; for that we think that UNIFEM project forms a step towards unifying the efforts of governments, civil society and the private sector “the three partners” to lessen the effect of the destructive information on our societies’ mentality.

### **The political parties and women level:**

In the research, we raised the issue of the percentage of women nominated by their parties, which shows that those parties, apart from their ideologies (Marxism, nationalism or religious) have not considered women issue part of their priorities; women right to be in decision-making positions is forgotten by those parties. From this point we can penetrate directly to the masculine mentality which is a general texture in the society including the parties; it expresses the community mentality adopted by the males and females in our society; this challenge should be classified within the research’s priorities for further work, especially that the Front’s mechanisms/lists in Syria enhance women opportunities to be MPs representing the Front’s parties.

It is worth mentioning that the partisan commitment sometimes prevents women from raising their issues as those issues are not priorities on the political parties’ platforms. So the public issues are given the priority to the special ones with no mechanism to bind them together in a constructive dialectic relationship.

It is noticeable that the fundamentalists do not nominate any women, but they use women as voters, this is clear in the voting centers, especially in the areas of religious nature (rural areas and some Syrian governorates). It is also noticeable that there are two parties’ chairwomen: Wesal Farhah (Syrian Communist Party, Front) and Rohab Al-Bitar (Free Democratic Gathering, new opposition), but a party chaired by a woman has not nominated a woman for the elections.

### **Associations level and women movement:**

For years, communication between women movements and their popular basis was weak due to the work mechanisms of some that depended on the political decisions and what they are used to allow or prevent; this part was satisfied by making memos or recommendations and that make the bureaucratic work overcome the mass work; some could not get the legal license to secure their

decision independency and adopt the valid institutional mechanisms without melting into the existing political movements and that weakened the communication between the movement and the women and weakened their role of introducing women cadres and adopting the necessary pressure mechanisms to realize the minimum limit of their platforms.

Lacking an Associations Law legalizing the formation of women associations hindered women engagement in public affairs through those associations and securing a safe environment supporting women participation.

## **Chapter (4)**

### **Methods of Overcoming Obstacles**

In the beginning we might be in need for some rapid procedures that help raising the percentage of women participation in the decision-making positions and in improving the quality of this participation, as well. Those procedures are hoped to create understanding at the male MPs and voters of gender issues.

1. Provide a database about the active and leading women of the women movement in an objective way.
2. Prepare training and empowerment program for those women about campaign management, negotiations, communication, etc.
3. Nominate the working women of the first category to administrative development courses and assign the competent women in medium leading positions.
4. Develop communication mechanisms between the women in the decision-making positions and women movement.
5. Project women role in all information media, community enlightenment through programs specialized for that and support them in the electoral campaigns.
6. Develop the elections law in a way securing equivalent opportunities to all candidates apart from their parties or sex..
7. Set up services centers to provide the active women and candidates with legal advices.
8. Adopt the relative quota system in all elections and appointments in the decision-making centers.
9. Carry out training courses for the MPs (men and women) about the gender concept and leadership skills for decision-making.
10. Set up formal parliaments for children, women and youth as a training participation mechanism.
11. Enlighten the women movement associations with the People's Assembly's work mechanisms to be able to communicate with its members in a way serving making positive changes in women lives.

That requires an environment of deep and necessary democratic relief so that those procedures will express the women and social progress forces real desire to achieve a real change in women conditions.

## **Chapter (5)**

### **Future Overview**

After reviewing the challenges facing the Syrian women participation in the electoral process and proposing the successful and assisting ways to overcome those obstacles, we can define a future vision starting from a basic principle:

“Women should enjoy a position equal to men position by the constitution and law in all life aspects” which requires:

- Review all laws in order to amend, delete or add articles securing equity in rights and duties among women and men in both private and public life.
- Incorporate the gender concept in all national strategies.
- Adopt specific mechanisms helping women to occupy decision-making positions on all aspects (social, economic and political)
- Increase the government expenditure on education, training and habilitation and adopt encouraging mechanisms to increase girls and women joining those courses.
- Include articles protecting women from exploitation, especially sexual molestation in work places, in the laws, especially labor laws; this create a safe and suitable environment for women engagement in the development process as a broad gate for them to occupy decision-making positions.
- Encourage the civil society to set up non-government developmental associations to increase women participation in the sustainable development process.
- Set up national anti-illiteracy campaigns in which the three sectors (government, civil and private) participate.
- Cleanse the educational and information courses completely from the typical images of men and women, replace that with spouses partnership in the family affairs management, bind women rights to human rights in the curricula and enhance the partnership principle in roles, responsibilities according to the gender criteria.
- Modernize the laws related to participation principle, especially the Associations Law, to give women the chance of participation, training and habilitation in order to create women community leaders.
- Empower women of cooperative and electoral work mechanisms.
- Support the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs by all stakeholders to carry out its project of realizing the principle of partnership with the civil society institutions and the government to achieve its aim of developing the Syrian family conditions, including the Syrian woman.
- Carry out many social surveys to observe all aspects of living reality and define the woman actual position in family life.
- Develop a comprehensive database containing woman/ownership relationship and woman work in the informal sector.

- Raise women awareness and understanding of their rights, abilities and capabilities, develop their citizenship sense and train them to leadership, management, decision-making, planning, negotiations, communications, oratory and ability to affect.
- Review the laws, amend the discriminating articles, adapt our national legislations with the ratified international agreements to secure equity in rights and duties in both public and private life.
- Increase government expenditure on woman empowerment programs.
- Empower women economically to increase their participation in the sustainable development, adopt specific policies to make them active part of the productive process and direct them towards non-traditional professions.

## Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup>Yousef Mreish “National Progressive Front and political plurality in Syria” Dar An-ne’emeh, Damascus, first edition, 1993

<sup>2</sup> The previous source

<sup>3</sup> The previous source

<sup>4</sup> A paper prepared by Dr. Najwa Kassab Hasan, Dr. Buthaina Sha’aban, Lamia’a Assi under the title of “The cultural and social determinants of the population problem” submitted to the National Conference for Population held in Damascus 10-12/11/2001

<sup>5</sup> An attitude of the national leader Sa’adallah Al-Jabri, quoted from an essay of the Syrian writer Adel Abu Shanab, published in Qasyoon Newspapers, issue 197 dated 15/5/2003

<sup>6</sup> Zaeem (=leader) here is a military rank

<sup>7</sup> Published in the Official Gazette issue 21/145, P.163, dated 1949

<sup>8</sup> Article /39/ of 1953 Constitution

<sup>9</sup> Article /44/ of 1953 Constitution

<sup>10</sup> “educated” means the one who knows how to write and read; the Election Law stipulated the conditions of proving that

<sup>11</sup> The elections were made within the framework of a party created by the military government departments (Liberation Movement Party) as the authority party

<sup>12</sup> Published in the Official Gazette on 13/9/1962

<sup>13</sup> Their names: Wasimah Safarjalani, Souad Al-Abdullah, A’ishal Ad-dabbagh, Hayat Ad-dawalibi, Furat Tlemat, Shukriah Abdul Ghani, Nabila Al-Razzaz, Najah Sa’ati

<sup>14</sup> The added names: Adelah Baiham, Omayah Al-KHayer, Louris A’azar, Jacqueline Bittar

<sup>15</sup> Qasyoon Newspaper, issue /146/, January 1998

<sup>16</sup> Al-Ba’ath Newspaper, issue /7/, March 2003

<sup>17</sup> The previous source

<sup>18</sup> The previous source

<sup>19</sup> The previous source

<sup>20</sup> Proceedings of the first session of the People’s Assembly’s first normal round of the 8<sup>th</sup> Legislative Term

<sup>21</sup> Up till 1986, the Syrian Communist Party was one party then it was split into two, they are distinguished by the names of their general secretaries

<sup>22</sup> An example of that, the candidate Dr. Georgette Attyia, well known personality, who has got more than 30,000 votes

<sup>23</sup> He became officially in charge on 17/7/2000, when he swore the oath before the previous People’s Assembly

<sup>24</sup> Proceedings of the first session

<sup>25</sup> 35 MPs proposed amending the Nationality Law according to the Syrian Women’s League

<sup>26</sup> The intervention that occurred at ratifying the amendment of the Workers Basic Law, especially Article /138/ that gave the government administration the right to dismiss a worker without giving any reasons depriving him from his right to take the case to the court

<sup>27</sup> The Assembly’s library has the proceedings of those two rounds only

<sup>28</sup> Mrs. Nebal Al-Moa’alem interposition (discussion of the Cabinet Statement)

<sup>29</sup> Mrs. Ibtisam As-Smadi interposition (discussion of the Cabinet Statement)

<sup>30</sup> Mrs. Dr. Mai Mahayni interposition (discussion of the Cabinet Statement)

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- <sup>31</sup> Mrs. Souad Bakkor interposition (discussion of the Cabinet Statement)
- <sup>32</sup> Mrs. Elizabeth Malki interposition (discussion of the Cabinet Statement)
- <sup>33</sup> Mrs. Sabah Hammodeh interposition (discussion of the Cabinet Statement)
- <sup>34</sup> All 4 Syria e-bulletin 10/7/2004
- <sup>35</sup> Arab Parliamentary Union' website – news (Feb.2005f)
- <sup>36</sup> Mr. Ismail Hajjo interposition in which he demanded a comprehensive legal reform, starting with repealing the exceptional judiciary to the Panal Law's articles about using family planning tools (discussion of the Cabinet Statement)
- <sup>37</sup> Mr. Marwan Al-Bunni interposition (discussion of the Cabinet Statement)
- <sup>38</sup> A question from Mr. Muhammad Akram Al-Jundi