

Women at the heart of forum

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The New Arab Woman Forum on Leadership and Social Responsibility will look at women's roles in politics, business, education, media and management.

The seminar will be held at Jumeirah Emirates Towers on October 21 and 22 under the patronage of Princess Haya bint Al Hussein, wife of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai.

More than 500 delegates from 30 countries will gather for the two days of debate, including Waddad Babsaer, First Lady of Sudan, and UAE Federal National Council members Dr Amal Qobeissi and Najla Al Awadi.

At a press conference yesterday to launch the forum, Muna Abu Sulayman, the first Saudi woman to appear on Arab satellite television, said: "People in general still see the Arab woman as a relatively weak and inconsequential force, incapable of actively participating in the development of society.

"Our women have often been cheated out of their roles, and deemed unworthy of their rights and responsibilities as worthy individuals in society.

"Nevertheless, Arab women have responded wonderfully by working diligently to prove otherwise," Muna Abu Sulayman said.

A LONG JOURNEY

- Women's economic activity in the Arab region, 29 per cent in 2000, is one of the lowest in the world
- Between 1990 and 2002, the adult literacy rate of Arab women rose from 35 to 49.6 per cent. In the UAE, it was 80.7 per cent in 2003
- The number of professional women working in the media in the UAE doubled between 1980 and 1994
- In the Arab region, women represent two-fifth of the agricultural labour force, one-tenth of the industrial sector, and 70 per cent of the services sector
- The number of Arab women represented in national parliaments is the lowest in the world, at 8.2 per cent (UAE has one woman, or five per cent)

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At the forum, discussions will include Arab Women: The Road Ahead; Motherhood: Same Fight, Different Weapons; Women and Money; and Women and Beauty.

The forum will be chaired by Nadine Abou Zaki, editor-in-chief of *Al Hasnaa* magazine, who said: "We made sure the topics discussed are vital and important issues. A duty remains with the Arab woman, however, and this is to know how to develop and act accordingly."

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