

Local

British Council Kuwait hosts lecture promoting efforts to abolish article 153

One in every three women is subjected to violence, according to 2019 study



KUWAIT: The speakers (from left) Almaha Almari - Board member of Women's Cultural and Social Society, Sundus Hussein - Founding member of Abolish 153, Mae Al-Hajjaj - President of Soroptimist Kuwait and Leanah Al-Awadhi - Founding Member of Mudhawiis. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis speaks during the lecture.

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The British Council Kuwait hosted a lecture on Wednesday titled 'Raising our Voices', calling on the Kuwaiti government to abolish article 153 of the Kuwait penal code that allegedly justifies honor killings of mothers, daughters, sisters and wives. The attendees agreed that Article 153 of the penal code denies an inherent right to women, which is considered one of the most important human rights, namely, the right to life.

The article states that "anyone who 'surprises' his wife in a state of adultery or 'surprises' his daughter or mother or sister in the presence of a man and kills her immediately or kills him or kills them together is punishable by imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years and a fine of not more than KD 225 or one of these two punishments".

The speakers at the event were from the Kuwaiti civil society, led by Sundus Hussein, Founding Member of Abolish 153, Mae Al-Hajjaj, President of Soroptimist Kuwait, Almaha Almari, Board Member of Women's Cultural and Social Society, and Founding Member of Mudhawiis Leanah Al-Awadhi, who acted as the moderator.

Before the program started, British Council Director Michael Gordon welcomed the speakers and guests, including British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis. "The British Council is committed to the principle of equality before the law, diversity

and inclusion. Equality means equal treatment and no discrimination on the basis of belonging to certain groups, which could be defined by gender, ethnicity, disabilities, religious affiliations, socioeconomic groups or sexual orientation or identity," Gordon said.

Ambassador Lewis recalled how lucky she was

“The road is long, but we have each other”

to be able to choose whatever she wanted in her life, but as time progressed, she realized she not only wanted to be lucky, but be equal to her peers, especially as she occupies the position as the representative and face of her country. "I saw the conditions attached to the fatwa on women who can join the armed forces in Kuwait. It's a step forward - there is freedom for women here. But there are still elements of control over their lives, like you can only join the army if your father agrees to it and if

you wear the hijab. The road is long, but we have each other to build more ideas and learn, and keep this conversation of equality, diversity and inclusion flowing," she said.

Several achievements

Sundus Hussein presented several achievements of Abolish 153, from the time it was founded in 2015 till date. "We want to abolish the law that basically allows a man to be the judge over women. We were originally many at the start, but the concept of honor killing is such a taboo, we ended up with only five founding members. But we are determined and lobbied for the law to be abolished from the Kuwait penal code," she said.

"We asked many Kuwaitis if they knew about article 153, but very few people did. This law is very discriminatory against women. We are talking about women in 2005 running for parliament and empowering women, but how can you empower women when there are laws against them. Article 153 is against the constitution and violates international conventions ratified by Kuwait, like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child," Hussein said.

According to Hussein, this violates the Kuwaiti constitution's articles 9, 29 and 34, which call for

protecting the family as the basis of society and promoting the values of equality between men and women in law and in public duties, in addition to ensuring a fair trial, where the accused is innocent until proven guilty in a legal trial in which the country provides the necessary guarantees to exercise the right of defense.

"One in every three women is subjected to violence based on a study made in Kuwait in 2019," Hussein pointed out, adding 63 percent of Kuwaitis don't support the law; however, 86 percent of Kuwaitis don't even know the law exists. "We have become more aggressive in our lobbying to abolish article 153. We have conducted a lot of community training, lectures and workshops. We have trained social police, advocates and first responders. We believe that if we train many people and educate them, they will be able to help us," she said.

Mae Al-Hajjaj presented the work of Soroptimist International, which she said has 80,000 members worldwide. Soroptimist Kuwait was launched in 2015. "We focus on five major areas related to women's issues - economic empowerment, health, education, environment and ending violence and discrimination against women," she said. "We collaborate with Abolish 153 - they are one of our major supporters. We want our world to be a better place for women and girls. We are out not to kill men, but to give justice to poor women in the society who are voiceless," she said.

Return to 'Plan A': England lifts...

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looming "tidal wave" of Omicron. Facemasks were required in all enclosed spaces and people were told to work remotely. Vaccine documentation to enter places such as nightclubs, football grounds and large-scale events was also controversially required.

In the British capital, public transport was busier after the restrictions were lifted at midnight. There were mixed feelings about the end to restrictions, which comes after more than 37 million people had booster jabs. "It's strange, I feel like it's a little bit too soon," said Jess Kelly, 22, who works for the state-run National Health Service. "I'm from Edinburgh and we still wear masks, so it is a bit odd to see people not wearing masks in London."

James Hughes, 57, said he would still wear a mask when needed. "I don't think it's back to normal," he told AFP. He saw the move as linked to fury at lockdown-breaking parties at Johnson's Downing Street office. "I think our beloved prime minister is trying to save his skin and he's trying to get the support of his MPs, his backbenchers and I think this is something they wanted to see, and not necessarily the British public." Jessie Wright, 19, said lifting the restrictions was "a bit scary" but "a massive relief because it's been nearly two years, and being trapped inside or being restricted outside has just

been exhausting".

England had lifted restrictions on July 19 last year but then re-introduced them as the Omicron wave hit. Limits on access to care homes in England will also be scrapped from next week, with residents able to have unlimited visits from family and friends. Businesses will still be able to impose restrictions but they will no longer be a legal requirement.

On public transport in London, for example, face coverings are still mandatory. But secondary school students will no longer have to wear masks. US holidaymaker Ethan Letson, 24, agreed with London Mayor Sadiq Khan's decision to keep face coverings as a condition of travel. "I still wear the mask on public transport. I will wear it in very crowded areas like the Underground. It's so tight down there, you could get sick at any time," he said.

Unlike Scotland and Wales, which set their own health policy, England kept nightclubs and bars open over the festive period. But businesses still took a heavy hit as people stayed at home. Hospitality workers in the business district around St Paul's said things had only just started to improve. "The last week, business has started to pick up again. Around Christmas it was dead," said bartender Lewis Colby, 39. "People aren't so scared anymore, trains are busier coming into work, people are starting to drink more."

Despite the lifting of restrictions, those who test positive for coronavirus must still self-isolate for a minimum of five days. Johnson said he also hopes to scrap those rules when they expire on March 24. — AFP

laboration between our countries is possible only because of the strong bonds that have been built together over the decades, forged in war and strengthened in peace. We have strong defense ties, and Kuwait has long hosted US forces. Our militaries work together in many ways, including by conducting exercises and training together."

On economic relations, Blinken said: "We have strong economic ties. Our bilateral trade relationship now amounts to more than \$4.5 billion a year. And we hope this figure will grow even more in the years ahead, as we find new opportunities to work together in areas like sustainable infrastructure and renewable energy."

"And finally, the beating heart of the relationship is our people-to-people ties - nearly 10,000 Kuwaitis choose to study in the US at universities and English language institutes every single year. Thousands of other Kuwaitis live in the United States, and tens of thousands of Americans live in Kuwait," Blinken said, noting, "Cultural educational ties are invaluable to us. And I know to the people of Kuwait as well. Since the liberation of Kuwait, the friendship between the United States has only grown stronger," he added. — KUNA

Houthi drones pose challenge for UAE

DUBAI: Domestically assembled drones that can fly hundreds of kilometers are proving a security headache for the United Arab Emirates after consecutive attacks by Yemen's rebel warriors. The low-tech weapons, which use over-the-counter parts, were deployed in two attacks on the wealthy Gulf state, a member of the Saudi-led coalition, the Iran-backed rebels said.

Three Asian oil workers died in a drone-and-missile assault on Abu Dhabi on Jan 17 and on Monday, US forces based in the city fired Patriot interceptors to help shoot down two ballistic missiles. Drones were also used in the attack, the rebels said. The attacks, in response to a series of rebel defeats by a UAE-trained militia, pit the Houthis' home-grown weaponry against the Emirates' billion-dollar missile defense capabilities.

The Sammad-3 drones - named after the insurgents' former second-in-command Saleh Al-

Sammad, who was killed in a coalition air raid in 2018 - have a range of about 1,500 km, rebels and analysts say. They have frequently targeted Saudi Arabia, which neighbors Yemen, killing and injuring civilians, and damaging infrastructure, including oil facilities and airports.

"It is notoriously difficult to counter drone and missile attacks, especially when used in a 'swarm tactic' where multiple weapons are sent at once to overwhelm existing defenses," said James Rogers, an associate fellow at the London School of Economics. Experts stress the cost-effectiveness of a strategy also adopted by the Hamas movement in Gaza against the Zionist entity as well as Shiite militants targeting US forces in Iraq. Drones have long been used by conventional forces, including the Americans in the assassination of senior Iranian commander General Qassem Soleimani at Baghdad airport in 2020.

Rogers said the Houthis have been using attack drones and medium-range missiles "at low altitude and low speed so they are hard for conventional radar to detect". Saudi Arabia and the United States have repeatedly accused Iran of supplying the Houthis with drones, missiles and other weapons, a charge Tehran denies. — AFP

Rare Mideast snow brings joy...

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The Zionist entity's meteorological service reported that between 15 and 25 cm of snow had fallen overnight. It took until midday for snow ploughs to reopen the main highways leading into Jerusalem from the north, south and west. Schools in Jerusalem and the northern Zionist entity were closed, leaving children free to play in the snow, which was not expected to last as temperatures rose and rain fell.

The Zionist Electric Company reported that power consumption reached an all-time high overnight as people switched on the heating. Snow also covered higher ground in the occupied West Bank, where the Palestinian Authority closed schools and some public services. In neighboring Jordan, heavy snowfall closed roads in the capital Amman and made driving conditions treacherous across much of the country.

Jordan's Meteorological Department forecast more snowfall on higher ground with temperatures expected to fall below freezing again on Thursday night. Egypt recorded its coldest winter in a decade, with temperatures as much as seven to eight degrees below the seasonal average. The storm whipped up waves of nearly six meters, dis-

rupting shipping in the eastern Mediterranean, the meteorological office said.

In Syria, days of heavy snowfall blanketed displaced persons' camps in the rebel-held northwest where families huddled together under canvas in temperatures well below zero Celsius. "We've been trapped in the snow for four days," said Abu Hussan, who lives with his family in a makeshift camp outside the city of Jisr Al-Shughur. "We have no shoes. We are soaked with water. The children are sick and walk barefoot. They have nothing."

The UN humanitarian agency OCHA said this week that at least 227 displacement sites across the northwest have been hit by severe winter weather since Jan 18. "545 tents have been reported destroyed and 9,125 tents damaged by snowfall, floods and winds, along with belongings of displaced people," it said.

In crisis-hit Lebanon, refugees and Lebanese alike struggled to secure fuel for heating as severe weather blocked mountain roads and left Syrian refugees shivering in flimsy tents. In the small Mediterranean country, where economic crisis has driven more than 80 percent of the population into poverty, fuel prices have skyrocketed after the cash-strapped government lifted subsidies last year.

Conditions have been particularly severe in the town of Aarsal, high in the mountains on the Syrian border, where Lebanese families and some 70,000 Syrian refugees have been struggling to cope with the cold. "Most of the people can't afford fuel for heating," Aarsal mayor Basel Hujjeiri said. — AFP

Kuwait FM appreciates US...

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Meanwhile, Blinken said the United States and Kuwait signed a memorandum of understanding to prevent, detect and prepare for outbreaks caused by dangerous pathogens. "Under this partnership, Kuwait's ministry of health and the United States will share technical information and best practices on disease surveillance," he revealed.

"We'll meet regularly along with other participating GCC countries to share this knowledge more widely in the region. So that collectively, we're better prepared to respond to future pandemics. These efforts build on the work our countries are already doing to stop this pandemic. And I want to thank Kuwait again for the vital role that it's been playing in the COVID-19 response," Blinken pointed out.

On defense cooperation, he said: "This level of col-