

Men must take a stand to stop violence against women

By Samar Fatany

ON the Nov. 25 of the world celebrates White Ribbon Day, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. A year has passed since our group of Saudi men and women from media and academia began an initiative to adopt the international White Ribbon Campaign to make men take a stance to stop the violence against women in our society.

Unfortunately, the group was viciously attacked and accused of spreading Western values that are un-Islamic which is far from the truth. Islam forbids any form of injustice or abuse against anyone and especially against women and children. The true Muslim man is compassionate to the women in his family and the Arab man is known for his chivalry and sense of responsibility to women in his society. In fact a Saudi White Ribbon Campaign can address the negative attitude to women in our society that is alien to our true Islamic and Arab culture.

The White Ribbon Ambassador program is a means for men to speak out and stop violence against women and to effectively challenge the attitudes and behavior of a minority of men who use or condone violence against women. The program recruits high profile men, such as religious scholars, community leaders and government officials to sign up as Ambassadors and spread the message that any violence against women is totally unacceptable.

The president of the Association for Family Protection in Jeddah outlined several reasons behind family violence, including mental illness, drug abuse, alcoholism, poverty, unemployment, lack of religious values and ignorance. Unfortunately, these problems are not properly addressed and are not given the attention they deserve. As a result they continue to threaten many Saudi families, leading to the creation of miserable wives and unhappy children. What is needed is a more effective campaign to raise awareness among the public and among the abusers themselves. Indeed many forms of violent behavior against women and children remain in the absence of an effective campaign to change the negative mindset.

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In Saudi Arabia, one in every six women is abused verbally, physically or emotionally every day, 90 percent of abusers are men, usually husbands or fathers. According to research conducted by the

National Family Safety Program, women are not aware of their rights and men violate religious teachings and follow aberrant customs and traditions.

Male-dominated families show no respect for the rights of women. Social norms and attitudes continue to deprive women of the privileges afforded to the menfolk in society. A large segment of our society still insists on holding on to the guardianship rule that treats women as minors. Many men steal and control the inheritance or business of the women in their families. They dictate their own rules thus depriving women of financial independence and the freedom to work and prosper.

Changing and shaping the attitudes and behavior of young people is critical to preventing violence against women in the future. Many men continue to exploit social norms for their own selfish egos. Their negative attitudes are the main reasons behind the rise in divorce cases and the number of broken homes. In order to enhance the quality of life in the Saudi family, there needs to be a change in the mindsets of men who have negative attitudes toward women. The ban on women driving and the absence of proper public transportation allows men to keep women captive in their own homes. Women are at the mercy of male family members who decide when they can be taken out for a breath of fresh air or a visit to family and friends.

The majority of Saudi men are nonviolent; however, they need to be encouraged to play a bigger role to protect women from the violence perpetrated by many men in Saudi society today. The voices of Saudi men can be an effective means for stopping violence and promoting nonviolence. It is time we involve Saudi men in a national plan to raise awareness among men and boys about the different roles they can play to prevent discrimination and violence against women in society.

Education is an important means that can help people develop and maintain nonviolent and respectful relationships. Boys should be educated at a young age to respect women. Schools can adopt educational programs to help children identify inappropriate sexual or violent behavior in order to protect women in society.

For more details, visit: <http://pakobserver.net/detailnews.asp?id=224741>.