

Rabab Sadr: Women Empowerment is Key to Justice

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me first to congratulate the Saint Joseph University for launching this initiative to celebrate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reflects the essence, message and vision of this distinguished academic institution. We, in the Middle East, need to think about human rights every second of every day. Only then, perhaps, would we cleanse our record from the horrific violations of rights and freedoms which some among us have perpetrated.

My brief introduction serves to postpone the inevitable and impossible mission that the organizers of this exceptional event have tasked me with: Introducing to you, ladies and gentlemen, a remarkable woman. For how can I introduce my own mother objectively, as a researcher or a neutral observer? How can I, one of four siblings who have spent a lifetime with a woman like her as our mother, or indeed competing with thousands of people that she loved and cared for as children of hers, succeed at this daunting task?

Rabab Sadr is the daughter of the famous scholar Sayed Sadreddine Sadr and the sister of Imam Moussa Sadr. She was raised in a family who sought to affect change in order to achieve justice among people. This commitment, however,

was not without sacrifice: Every member of our family had to pay a high price for it, enduring innumerable hardships in the form of persecution, threats, kidnapping and assassination. For to demand justice is, effectively, to become a target for tyrants. One tragic and persisting outcome of this trajectory is the disappearance of Imam Moussa Sadr forty years ago. And yet here we are today, celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Rabab Sadr is married to Hussein Charafeddine, an accomplished educator, historian and literary figure. She has recently obtained her Ph.D in philosophy from the Lebanese University. Her dissertation topic being “The practical philosophy of the disappeared Imam Moussa Sadr and its impact in terms of affecting social change”. In fact, since her youth, and with the support and encouragement of both her brother and her husband, Rabab Sadr has worked on a number of pressing social issues. Early on in her life, she pursued social work with the aim of empowering vulnerable groups with special focus on Lebanon.

Currently, Rabab Sadr is the Chair of the Board of the Imam Sadr Foundation. She has succeeded in leading this noble Foundation despite the harsh challenges that have faced Lebanon throughout the past decades and despite the immense shock that the disappearance of her brother, Imam Moussa Sadr, in 1978 had caused her. But these obstacles did not stop Rabab Sadr from striving to realize her brother’s social vision, regardless of political crises, financial setbacks and security risks. She has faced every challenge along the way with infinite courage and resolve. Under the leadership of Rabab Sadr, the Foundation has been able to lay the groundwork for social change and justice at the grassroots level, in cooperation with local organizations in Lebanon working in the fields of health, education and empowerment. As a result of these achievements, Rabab Sadr came to be renowned as a pioneering humanitarian figure calling for dialogue and the bridging of gaps.

Rabab Sadr set out to achieve a noble cause: empowering the vulnerable and the less fortunate. She has consistently defended the rights of these groups and strived to provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to become independent and productive members of the community and active contributors to sustainable development. By focusing on rural communities and women, Rabab Sadr has managed to form an extensive and multi-disciplinary work team, who has empowered thousands of women and young people, including orphaned girls and children with additional or special needs.

Rabab Sadr continues to expand her activities by reaching out to numerous countries including the USA, Canada, Africa, Europe and the Arab and Islamic World. She has also successfully increased the number of strategic partnerships with many local, national and international organizations and agencies. Imam Sadr Foundation has been accredited the Special Consultative Status at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), in addition to being the parent institution of many affiliated organizations, particularly the Lebanese Women’s League, the Sadr Foundation – USA and the numerous alumni associations.

Rabab Sadr has also founded the Imam Moussa Sadr Center for Research and Studies, with the aim of preserving the Imam’s thought and making it

accessible for researchers. The Center has successfully organized a series of conferences entitled "Kalimat Sawa" (Common Word), tackling various contemporary challenging issues including freedom, reform, human rights, human development, dialogue, family and the roles and rights of women.

As a token of appreciation for her generous efforts and her numerous achievements, Rabab Sadr was granted numerous recognitions and awards, including:

- National Order of the Cedar (Rank: Knight) given by the late President of the Republic Elias Hrawi.
- Cross Pro Merito Melitensi, awarded to her by the Order of Malta.
- Grande Médaille d'or avec croix et cordon, by the French Awards Committee for Humanitarian Work and Charitable Action.
- Certificate of Appreciation by the former Secretary-General of the United Nations Mr. Kofi Annan, recognizing her for her contributions in the field of human development and world peace.
- Honoris Causa in Human Letter from the Lebanese American University.

In conclusion, as we are gathered here today to celebrate the granting of a new award to both Rabab Sadr and the Imam Sadr Foundation, I cannot help but think that the relationship between this remarkable woman and this noble Foundation now dates back to more than 55 years. Throughout my lifetime, I have never looked in my mother's eyes and not seen the twinkle of youth and energy. I see it today as her eyes shine with thankfulness and satisfaction, and I will no doubt see it tomorrow as she looks proudly at the girls, colleagues and women she loves so dearly – those whose voice has always been the closest to her heart and whose success is her most valuable medal.

Lastly, to withhold my feelings and emotions towards my beloved mother presenting her in an academic light is the impossibility itself.

Thank you.