

الألفية



United Arab Emirates

## Women in the United Arab Emirates: A Portrait of Progress



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## Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is an example of a rapid and successful development story in the region, in terms of both the infrastructure and economy of the country and also the progress of its people. The UAE's achievement is perhaps best typified in the evolution and growing prominence of Emirati women as partners and contributors in this remarkable nation-building process. Women, who account for 49.3 percent of the national population, according to the 2005 Census, are today at the forefront of the workforce in the UAE in both the government sector as well as a growing number in the private sector. Aided by the government's commitment to empower women and provide them with equal opportunities, the status of women within the UAE has flourished in parallel with the country's growth since the federation was established in 1971. It is evident across the UAE that women today constitute a vital part of the nation's workforce and actively contribute to the country's government and economy.

This report, produced by the UAE Ministry of State for Federal National Council Affairs (MFNCA) outlines both the developments and challenges associated with women's progress in the country. The report stems out of a conviction that the women of the UAE are truly a success story to be celebrated. Despite the many preconceptions and stereotypes with regards to women in the Arab world, the lives of women in the UAE illustrate that such stereotypes do not necessarily apply in this country. The report aims to document, highlight and disseminate information on how the process of empowering women has evolved since the federation was established, the challenges encountered in this endeavor as well as plans for

how this development process could be taken forward. The report outlines the progress and achievements of UAE women in the education, workforce, and entrepreneurial as well as political arenas not only as an information tool but also to provide a baseline against which the UAE can measure future progress.

The information provided in this report demonstrates that the UAE continues to set new standards for the region in advocating change and development in line with its national interests, while maintaining its position as a committed and responsible member of the international community.

## Women in the UAE: An Overview

Traditionally, women have always been the backbone of family life and the social structure of the UAE and they continue to remain an integral part of maintaining the nation's Islamic heritage and national culture. Today, with the ongoing evolution of UAE society and the dynamic modernization process that has taken place over the last 36 years, the government's strategic vision for women is based on providing them with the necessary tools to achieve professional excellence. This strategy aims to energize and utilize women's role in public service as well as the private sector and to ensure that all career tracks remain open to them should they choose to pursue them. In essence, the UAE understands that it is a national imperative for women to contribute to the development process.

The commitment and enthusiasm from Emirati women themselves to benefit from these opportunities has complemented the government's policies and strategy on gender empowerment. As a result, some Emirati women have gone on to become pioneers in their fields. In the process, not only has the traditional role of women changed over the last two generations, but UAE society as a whole has been changed in numerous and positive ways, creating a bridge between the traditional and the modern without sacrificing the heritage and culture that defines this society's national identity.

The 2007 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) status report on Millennium Development Goals recognized the positive outcome of the UAE's target-oriented policies in a number of areas, including women's empowerment. It particularly noted that the state legislations in the UAE do not discriminate on the basis of gender with respect to education, employment or the quality of services provided. According to the findings of the report, educational indicators show that women's achievements in education have reached its targeted levels, and in some cases, exceeded that of men because of a strong desire amongst women to

become financially independent and professionally successful. Along with economic growth, the UAE has progressed in the social arena too. According to the UNDP's Gender-Related Development Index for 2007/2008, the UAE ranks 43rd among 177 countries and 29th in the world under the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which is the best rating in the Arab World.<sup>1</sup>

If education is the cornerstone of any successful society, UAE women have achieved outstanding progress accounting for over 70 percent of university graduates.<sup>2</sup> Women participate actively in the political sphere through representation in the Federal National Council (FNC), local consultative councils, as well as their participation in the formation and shaping of public policy through their active roles as ministers in the federal Cabinet, ministries and local government bodies.

Women's active status and achievements are a product of the far-sighted policies of the country's leaders, and have evolved as the norm and not an exception. Although UAE women have made great strides in a number of spheres, the Government views women's issues as a part of a larger 'work in progress' and is determined to continue supporting their empowerment.

### I. Constitutional and Legal Protection

*"Equality, social justice, ensuring safety and security and equality of opportunity for all citizens shall be the pillars of the Society."*

#### **Article 14, UAE Constitution**

*"Society shall be responsible for protecting childhood and motherhood and shall protect minors and others unable to look after themselves for any reason, such as illness or incapacity or old age or forced unemployment. It shall be responsible for assisting them and enabling them*

to help themselves for their own benefit and that of the community.” **Article 16, UAE Constitution**

“All persons are equal before the law, without distinction between citizens of the Union in regard to race, nationality, religious belief or social status.” **Article 25, UAE Constitution**

The government’s belief that women are entitled to fulfill active roles in society and become effective partners in the development process is grounded in the UAE Constitution, which guarantees the principles of universal social justice, in accordance with the tenets of Islam. This vision originates from the very establishment of the federation and the promulgation of the UAE Constitution, a legacy of the UAE’s founding father, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, who once stated quite simply and decisively that “Women have the right to work everywhere.” Sheikh Zayed believed that women should work and contribute to society, but that this right would be based on merit and not favoritism, once stating that: “Like men, women deserve the right to occupy high positions according to their capabilities and qualifications.”

Under the Constitution, women enjoy the same legal status, claim to titles, access to education, healthcare and social welfare and the same right to practice professions as men. They are also guaranteed the same access to employment, health and family welfare facilities. In accordance with Islamic principles upon which the Constitution is based, the rights of women to inherit property are also guaranteed and ensured.

The guarantees enshrined in the Constitution have been implemented through legislation. Under the terms of the UAE Federal Labour Law (8) of 1980, for example, discrimination between men and women in

terms of equal pay for equal work is unconstitutional. As stated in Article 32: “A woman shall be paid the same wage as a man if she performs the same work.”

The Civil Service Law (Articles 55, 56) also allows for extensive maternity leave, and in 2005, civil service rules governing additional payments for children and housing were amended to eliminate any gender-based discrimination against employees. Employers in the UAE are prohibited from firing or threatening to fire a female employee on the basis of pregnancy, delivery, or parenting. Maternity leave in the public sector is two to six months. To address some of the issues that discourage some women from working, in 1999 the FNC revised the text of Article 55 to give women three months maternity leave with full pay and another six months at half pay. A woman is now entitled to five separate periods of maternity leave during her employment with the right to return to work at any time. A woman may also take one paid hour break from work per day for 18 months to nurse her baby.

A Personal Status Law has been approved by the UAE Cabinet incorporating new laws to tackle the issues related to the protection of women including: Family guidance, marriage, divorce, marital rights and compensations amongst other key areas. The law is pending review by the Federal National Council before final promulgation by the UAE President.

Women have protected rights of child custody that can be transferred to their mothers or direct female member of her family until the child reaches a certain age at which point the family courts will assess future custody. According to UAE Federal Law no. 6 of 2001 women who are divorced, widowed or supporting orphaned children are eligible for social welfare.

Aside from national legislation, the government has also committed to a number of international

<sup>1</sup> UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008 ([http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/data\\_sheets/cty\\_ds\\_ARE.html](http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_ARE.html))

<sup>2</sup> Office of Higher Education, Policy and Planning, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (2007)

agreements specifically relating to women and children, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), an international benchmark for high standards of non-discrimination. The UAE is also a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Beyond this legislative framework, the government continues to make the necessary efforts to mainstream and promote gender equality and justice in all government institutions, with a focus on raising awareness through the education system. The UAE continues to work on removing social and psychological barriers that impede the full integration of women into the workforce, especially in the private sector. Although great strides have been made, there is an awareness that our work has just begun and the Government is committed to improving its gender equality strategies.

## II. Political Participation

*“Public office shall be open to all citizens on a basis of equality of opportunity in accordance with the provisions of law. Public office shall be a national service entrusted to those who hold it. The public servant shall aim, in the execution of his duties, at the public interest alone.”* **Article 35, UAE Constitution**

*“The possibility of women joining the Federal National Council (FNC) and assuming a ministerial portfolio is no longer a distant dream but inevitable.”* **Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, 30 November, 2002**

*“A place without women is a place without spirit.”* **Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, 18 December, 2006**

The government views the empowerment of women as crucial to improving their level of political participation in the country. Women should be at the forefront of directing change in the region and gender-related policies are undoubtedly more effective when women have themselves contributed to the legislative process. The UAE has taken a lead in the region to empower women politically and, over the past few years, women have begun to more visibly contribute in the political arena.

A good example of the country’s success in this modernization process was demonstrated by the impressive role played by women in the historic FNC elections of December 2006, an important milestone in the history of the UAE. Through the election process, UAE women demonstrated their ability to move into the national political arena and compete as equals with men. Female candidates ran effective campaigns across the UAE on a number of wide ranging issues from health and social welfare to education, economy to demographics and jobs, transportation, local housing and other substantive issues.

While women made up 17.7 percent of the Electoral College, 63 of the 452 candidates who contested the polls were women. The voter turnout among women was also extremely high across the UAE. Interaction with women ahead of the elections revealed that many of them were keen to participate because they were setting precedents for women’s political participation in the future.

Dr. Amal Al Qubaisi was the first woman in the UAE’s history to win a seat on the FNC, elected by the Abu Dhabi Electoral College. In order to ensure fair representation, the government nominated eight other women across the remaining six emirates to the 40-member FNC, which translates into a 22.5 percent share of the seats – way above the Arab world average of 9.3 percent and the world average of 17 percent. This affirmative action from government

to ensure women's representation in the FNC has enabled women to prove themselves within the public sphere.

At present, UAE women parliamentarians are active contributors to council meetings, contributing to the review of draft laws, debating issues of public concern and representing their constituents on the FNC committees. In future elections, women will undoubtedly see greater electoral successes as they build individual public profiles and professional experience. Although there are many challenges ahead, the will and the support of the government in ensuring that women play a strong role in the development and progress of the UAE, particularly in terms of contributing to the national policy debates was strongly demonstrated in the country's first election experience. Although the elections were a first step in a wider participatory process, they were an immediate gain for women. As one female parliamentarian noted:

*"In other countries, women have had to fight for their political rights, whereas women in the UAE have been granted these rights, so let us never take our rights for granted. We shall remember every right entails responsibilities and we will work hard to live up to the expectations of our leaders and our society."* **Najla Faisal Al Awadhi, June 2007<sup>3</sup>**

The government's serious commitment to ensure that women participate in decision-making at the highest levels was reinforced by the Cabinet reshuffle of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, in February 2008, increasing the number of female ministers to four.

## Government: Quick Facts 2008

### Female Members of the Cabinet:

- Minister of Foreign Trade: **Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi**
- Minister of Social Affairs: **Mariam Mohammed Khalfan Al Roumi**
- Minister of State: **Dr. Maitha Salem Al Shamsi**
- Minister of State: **Reem Ibrahim Al Hashimi**

### Female Members of the Federal National Council:

- Dr. Amal Al Qubaisi
- Dr. Fatma Al Mazroui
- Maissa Ghadeer
- Fatma Al Marri
- Najla Al Awadhi
- Dr. Aisha Al Roumi
- Alia Al Suwaidi
- Dr. Nidhal Al Tuneiji
- Rowwiyeh Al Sammahi

### Women Judges

- Kuloud Ahmed Juoan Al-Dhaheri

### Women Ambassadors

- Sheikha Najla Mohammad Al Qasimi, Ambassador to Sweden
- Hessa Al Otaiba, Ambassador to Spain

Women in the diplomatic service and higher posts of government amount to 30 percent of the UAE's civil service including diplomatic postings abroad and a total of 66 percent of the government sector is represented by women.

<sup>3</sup> *Gulf News*, 13 June, 2007, Dubai



### III. Women in the Workforce

*“Society shall esteem work as a cornerstone of its development. It shall endeavor to ensure that employment is available for citizens and to train them so that they are prepared for it.”*

**Article 20, UAE Constitution**

*“Every citizen shall be free to choose his occupation, trade or profession within the limits of law.”* **Article 34, UAE Constitution**

The open constitutional framework for work opportunities has given UAE women the chance to participate in the development of their society alongside men. The contribution of national women to the economy increased significantly from 9.6 percent in 1986 to 33.4 percent in 2007, which approximately represents a 3.5 percent average annual growth.<sup>4</sup> Today UAE women account for 59% of the national UAE labor force market in fields as diverse as engineering, science, healthcare, media, computer technology, law, commerce, university lecturers, government and the oil industry.<sup>5</sup> This positive development was not only the result of substantial enrolment by women in education, but also because of the open social attitudes towards women’s employment and the fact that work was increasingly being seen not merely as a source of income but as part of establishing a personal as well as professional identity. There is also no doubt that women role models are encouraging women to break away from traditional areas of employment.

According to 2005 figures from the UAE Businesswomen Council, about 40 percent of women work in the public sector, 18 percent in the private sector, 29 percent work as representatives of various organisations, 7.6 percent are self employed,

7.3 percent participate in partnership ventures, and six percent work in business. Entrepreneurship among women is also becoming increasingly popular and in fact, according to 2006 figures, the UAE has the largest number of businesswomen in the region.<sup>6</sup>

In some traditional areas, women employees are clearly dominant in both the national and expatriate communities. For example, 100 percent of nursery schoolteachers, 55 percent of primary schoolteachers and 65 percent of intermediate and secondary schoolteachers are women. UAE women comprise over 40 percent of all employees in education, at least 35 percent work in the health sector and approximately 20 percent in social affairs.<sup>7</sup> One out of every three doctors, pharmacists, technicians and administrators is a woman, as is over 80 percent of the nursing staff. Continuing this trend, the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at the Emirates University is attracting more female applicants than male.

The number of professional women in the media has risen sharply since Federal institutions such as Zayed University and the Higher Colleges of Technology introduced dedicated communication courses in an effort to equip more women for professions in the communications and media industry.

Women are also deeply involved in environmental initiatives, with two environmental NGOs in the UAE headed by Emirati women. A leading UAE University has recently introduced a master’s degree in environmental sciences, and its first graduates were women, providing an important future source of UAE professionals who are interested in the UAE’s sustainable development strategy.

Women leaders have also emerged in non-traditional careers and sectors traditionally dominated by men. In September 2008, the UAE Cabinet approved,

<sup>4</sup> Presentation by Raja Al Gurg, President of Dubai Women’s Business Council “UAE Women in Business: An Overview of the past, present and future,” 2006

<sup>5</sup> United Arab Emirates 2008 Yearbook, Trident Press, London, 2008

for the first time, the appointment of two women ambassadors to its missions in Sweden and Spain. The first female Emirati pilot at the General Civil Aviation Authority, the first female Emirati judge in the history of the UAE and the first Army Brigadier are role models for Emirati women. Recent changes in the UAE's judiciary law to encompass women's equal opportunity rights are in line with the government's commitment to promote more women to the highest posts in the judiciary.

Women are now active members of the military establishment. The UAE established the first Women's Army College in the Gulf region and is unique among the Gulf countries in permitting women to join the armed forces and police. This breakthrough was achieved during the second Gulf War when the women of the country expressed interest in undergoing basic military training in order to be equipped to defend their homeland. Today, women work alongside their male compatriots in the military in every position, except those involving front-line combat. The first batch of women graduated in 1992 from the Khawla bint Al Azwar Training College, forming the basis for the creation of the special Women's Corps, which now includes hundreds of members. And, as part of the police forces, they perform a variety of jobs ranging from criminal investigation to customs control.

In the field of arts and culture, women have also begun making rapid and impressive strides in mediums such as the arts, film, design, literature, media and much more. Women are members of the cultural authorities and boards directing government strategy in the fields of culture, arts and music and are actively involved and recognized for their contribution to cultural growth in the UAE.

## IV. Education

The stimulus for UAE women's development has largely been access to education, in which women have excelled, both in the local universities and also internationally under UAE government scholarship programs.

Women in the UAE are in fact outperforming males at every educational level. According to a PricewaterhouseCoopers report, at 77 percent, *"the UAE is registering the highest rate of females in higher education in the entire world."*<sup>8</sup> The United Nations also recognizes the UAE to be among the most developed nations in educating women.

From rudimentary beginnings, when educational opportunities were minimal, the percentage of girls enrolled in primary education has grown rapidly. There were just 19,000 registered schoolgirls in 1972-73. In contrast, the 1975 census listed 3,005 women with their first university degree or equivalent. Women literacy rates match those of men as of 2007. Nearly half the students registered in over 1,250 schools across the UAE are girls; about 75 percent of all students in the UAE University are women; and, three out of every five students in the public higher education system are women. On average, 62 percent of students enrolled in higher education and 70.4 percent of total graduates are women.<sup>9</sup>

Of the 278 national students graduating from overseas universities in 2007/2008, 46 percent were women. 48 percent of bachelor students, 38.3 percent of masters and 55 percent of PhD holders from universities abroad are female.<sup>10</sup> In 2005, the female illiteracy rate in the UAE was a low 2.4 percent, compared to 10 percent among males and

<sup>6</sup> Presentation by Raja Al Gurg, President of Dubai Women's Business Council "UAE Women in Business: An Overview of the past, present and future," 2006

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> PricewaterHouseCoopers uses a study by Al Mishkat Centre for Research and Training, Egypt, "Higher Education In Arab Countries: Human Development And Labour Market Requirements" by Dr Nader Fergany, 2005

the average in the Arab World of over 50 percent. With only 2.1 percent of females dropping out of educational institutions during 2006-2007, women are attaining the necessary education to enter and excel in the job market. According to a survey by Tanmia, the UAE's National Human Resources and Development Authority, women at the UAE University have enrolled in a variety of specializations including the faculties of humanities and social sciences, education, sciences, medical and health science, information technology, business and economics, as well as food systems.

In order to develop overall educational standards in the country, the government has allocated nearly 25 percent of the federal budget for 2007 to the education sector, which translates into 6.98 billion dirhams (US\$1.9 billion), a five-fold increase from the 1.7 billion dirhams in 1994. This figure does not include local government spending which also makes substantial contributions to private sector education.

## V. Businesswomen and Entrepreneurs

*"Women in the UAE enjoy equal opportunities, like men, for work and investment, financial and logistic facilities to conduct their own businesses and private projects in all fields. More than ten thousand business women in the country own and run their own businesses. The capital managed by women amounts to Dh12. 5 billion (about US\$3.17 billion) invested in various fields, including trade, industry finance, real estate, tourism, fairs and exhibitions, construction and services."* **Minister of Social Affairs, Mariam Mohammed Khalfan Al Roumi at the UN General Assembly Debate, March 8 2007, New York**

The government has encouraged women's participation in economic development amid a rapid growth in the number of businesswomen in the region. According to the Ministry of Economy, about half of the small-to-medium enterprise sector in the UAE is handled by women; further, 48 percent of women business-owners are also the sole owners of their firms.

The UAE Businesswomen Council, a nationwide network of business, professional and academic women, was set up in 2002, supported by the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry. The Council has almost 12,000 members, growing at around two percent annually between 2002 and 2006, and running investments worth more than 25 billion dirhams (US\$6.81 billion) in various fields, including trade, industry, finance, real estate, tourism, fairs and exhibitions, construction and services.<sup>11</sup> In the Abu Dhabi Securities Market, for example, 43 percent of the investors are women, which reflect their ambition to be part of the UAE's vibrant economic activity.<sup>12</sup>

In order to focus on the role of women in development, the Council, with the support of the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, organised the Women's Global Economic Forum in Abu Dhabi during November 2007. Close to 1,000 women participated in the forum from various diverse sectors including businesswomen and representatives of ministries, governmental departments, private sector, chambers of commerce and industry, business councils, as well as women's associations and national committees on women in the member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other Arab countries. A number of conferences and workshops are also held annually across the UAE on a range of gender related topics, energizing and reinforcing the promotion of women in all sectors.

<sup>9</sup> Ministries of Education and Higher Education, UAE

<sup>10</sup> Commission for Academic Accreditation, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

One such forthcoming event is the Second Arab Women's Summit, which will be hosted by the UAE in Abu Dhabi November 2008 under the presidency of H.H. Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak. All the First Ladies of the Arab countries will be invited to attend the summit.

The Abu Dhabi Businesswomen Group is implementing a number of major training initiatives in cooperation with trading and educational partners to provide valuable work experience for women and encourage female entrepreneurship. The Dubai Business Women Council is providing women entrepreneurs in the UAE with assistance for small and medium ventures – from compiling feasibility studies to consultancy in all areas, from setting up businesses to making financing and resources available.

Furthermore, a research project has recently been launched by the Ministry of Foreign Trade in May 2008 under the direction of HE Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi, Minister of Foreign Trade, entitled: "The Emergence of UAE Women as an Economic Force." The publication will aim to illustrate and showcase the achievements of women in the UAE as a source of national pride and will include in-depth portraits of leading figures and female role models in different sectors.

## VI. Women's Organizations

There are a number of organizations dedicated to representing the interests of women in the UAE.

### General Women's Union

The constructive and vital role played by the General Women's Union (GWU), which was established in 1975 under the leadership of HH Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, wife of late President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, only a few years after the

establishment of the UAE federation remains crucial to women's empowerment. The GWU has been a key player in the government's strategy to create a supportive environment for women. Established with the aim of bringing together all the women's societies in the country under one umbrella, HH Sheikha Fatima is a pioneer figure for women in the UAE and continues to lead the development process.

Since its formation, the government-funded GWU has brought to the fore many inter-related issues of concern for women, children and the family, and has been instrumental in introducing literacy programmes throughout the UAE. The GWU has a number of committees that provide vocational training, job placement services, and family mediation services and continues to play a major role in facilitating economic independence through the establishment of small businesses. Simultaneously, it has an active community calendar of social, cultural and sporting activities.

Amongst its many duties, the GWU is responsible for suggesting new laws and amendments to existing laws in order to benefit women. The GWU pursues policy research related to women's issues and makes recommendations to the relevant ministries and government departments based on their findings. The GWU was in fact instrumental in the realization of the new civil service law of 2001 extending maternity leave, as well as the law establishing the Supreme Council for Mother and Child in 2003 which is directly affiliated to the Office of the President. The GWU also played a key part in reviewing the country's draft social status law governing family relations.

In addition, the GWU plays a significant role in women's affairs at regional and international levels. It maintains particularly strong Arab and international links with women's organizations and is affiliated to the Arab Women's Federation, International Women's Federation and International Family Organisation.

<sup>11</sup> *United Arab Emirates 2008 Yearbook, Trident Press, London, 2008*

<sup>12</sup> *Abu Dhabi Businesswomen Council Directory (2005)*

The GWU has participated in all the UN-sponsored world conferences on women over the last few decades, culminating in Beijing in 1995, the largest conference in the history of the United Nations. Subsequently, the GWU focused on bringing about the necessary measures to activate CEDAW and to implement the recommendations of the Beijing Declaration.

In this context, the GWU was intimately involved in the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women, a joint initiative with the UNDP, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, a number of local government agencies and NGOs. The strategy aimed to activate the role of women and their positive participation in education, economy, information, social work, health, legislature and environment, and political and executive fields.

The GWU has also been instrumental in assisting women to set up small businesses. In 2007, for example, it launched a programme funded by “Women in Technology” in the United States, that offers training to aspiring businesswomen.

### **Family Development Foundation**

HH Sheikha Fatima is also Chairperson of the Family Development Foundation, established in 2006, which acts in cooperation with local and federal entities and specialized NGOs to:

- Promote the holistic development of families, women and children
- Develop means and mechanisms to more effectively integrate public work and social welfare
- Coordinate with relevant domestic and international organizations and experts to exchange information and expertise

The Family Development Foundation operates through an extensive network of branches to achieve its goals.

### **Dubai Women Establishment (DWE)**

Other organizations have also been active in promoting gender equality in the UAE and within the GCC States, an example being the recently launched Dubai Women Establishment which was initiated in November 2006 under the presidency of HH Sheikha Manal bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. The mission statement of the DWE encapsulates its goals and objectives, which is *“To contribute to the policy making of economic, human and social development that aims at creating opportunities to engage UAE women in the country’s development process.”*

Amongst several initiatives since its launch, the DWE has notably launched a “UAE Women Leadership Programme” to formulate a custom-made program for training and developing potential Emirati women leaders. In recognition that accurate data is extremely important for measuring the development and growth of women in society and quantifying the impact of governmental policies, the DWE has also teamed up with the Dubai Statistics Center in a joint agreement to initiate gender-centric data collation and surveys.

In another move, the Dubai Women’s Establishment announced a five-year strategic plan in February 2008 to enhance women’s contribution to the economy. Part of the strategy includes lobbying for new legislations to support UAE women in all fields. The Dubai Women Establishment is run by an all women board with wide-ranging experience in the government and private sector.

## **VII. Protecting Women**

In addition to promoting their participation in the public and private sector, the government’s holistic approach to women’s issues has also resulted in new measures to assist women who are victims of domestic violence, family neglect or abuse. Since September 2007, the Dubai Shelter for

Women and Children has been providing support and psychological care to such victims from all nationalities and backgrounds including victims of domestic violence, abuse or crimes such as human trafficking. Other organisations offering similar social service are the Social Support Center affiliated to Abu Dhabi Police and Human Rights Care Department managed by Dubai Police.

The government also supported the establishment of a new shelter for victims of human trafficking in Abu Dhabi in January 2008, a collaborative effort between the Red Crescent Authority and the UAE National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking. These shelters will act as a prototype for other shelters across the country. Both the Dubai and Abu Dhabi shelters are headed and managed by UAE women with several years of experience in both the government and private sector.

## Next Steps

Having made significant progress, the UAE does not intend to stagnate with regards to its women's empowerment policies but rather to continue and develop along the strategies outlined in this report. In partnership with the private sector, which is being encouraged to promote women, based on merit, into front-line organizational positions, the UAE intends to establish a new benchmark for gender empowerment in the region.

Although no formal quota system exists in the UAE in either the government or public sector, the UAE leadership believes that positive discrimination towards women and active encouragement for their entry into previously male dominated fields is an essential first step towards an equal society. In order to prove themselves in their chosen careers, women must first be given the platform to achieve.