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Final Report

QATAR

**December 1998
Training for Women Candidates
1999 Central Municipal Council Elections**

report prepared by

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**Respectfully Submitted to
the Preparatory Committee for the Municipal Elections
Doha, Qatar**

January 1999

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International Foundation
for Election Systems ^{4/00}
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I. Introduction

From December 5 to 12, 1998, the International Foundation for Election Systems ("IFES") conducted a comprehensive training program in Doha, Qatar for women candidates running for office in the March 8, 1999 municipal council election in Qatar.

The training was requested by, funded and carried out under the supervision of the Preparatory Committee for the Municipal Elections. The United States Information Agency also generously provided financial support for the project, in the form of airfares, accommodations and per diem for the IFES Program Officer and Trainer. USIS/Doha also provided critical programmatic support to IFES. The Preparatory Committee, whose members include many of Qatar's leading women and is chaired by Sheikha Aisha Bint Khalifa al-Thani, during 1998 conducted numerous awareness and educational activities in advance of the election. The Committee has focused on encouraging the participation of Qatari women, as voters and as candidates. As testimony to its successful efforts, nearly 45% of the registered voters for this election are women, a remarkably high percentage in the Arab world.¹ The Committee appears to be unique in the region: IFES is not aware of a similar committee in any other Arab country.

IFES is a non-profit, non-partisan organization, based in Washington, DC, which supports the development of democratic institutions and practices worldwide. IFES provides training and technical assistance in all areas of democratic development, with a special expertise in the organization of elections. Since its founding in 1987, IFES has worked in more than 90 countries. In the Arab world, IFES has conducted projects in the Palestinian Territories, Yemen, Morocco, and Qatar, as well as projects with Arab non-governmental organizations throughout the region.

II. Background to the Municipal Elections

The Municipal Council election will be the first national elections held in Qatar, and the first elections in an Arabian Gulf monarchy in which the law grants the right of full direct suffrage and the right to candidacy to both male and female citizens. The Qatari elections will therefore be an event of great domestic and regional significance. The Election Decree and the Municipal Council Law, promulgated by the Amir Sheikh Hamad ibn Khalifa al-Thani in 1998, provide the legal framework for the election process and for the functioning of the Council.

The Council will have twenty-nine members, each representing one of the twenty-nine election districts including cities, villages and regions of Qatar.

The Council's role is to advise the Ministry of Municipalities and Agricultural Affairs on its

¹ The Ministry of Interior's statistics on registration show that 44 percent of registered voters (10,130 of 23,093 registered) are women. Registration took place in October 1998.

implementation of municipal services and to provide other related guidance. According to the Municipal Council Law, the Council "expresses its opinions in the form of recommendations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture."

The Ministry of the Interior has the leading role in organizing the election. The Ministry of Municipalities and Agricultural Affairs also plays a role.

Women's Participation in the Electoral Process

The Election Decree states that all male and female Qataris ("*kull qatari wa qatariyya*") who are natural-born citizens or who have held Qatari citizenship for 15 years or more, who are 18 years or older (25 years old for candidates), who have not been convicted of a crime of honor, who are residents of the electoral constituencies in which they wish to vote or run, and who are not members of the armed forces or the police are eligible to vote or to run for office. Prospective candidates were required to submit a written application for candidacy between December 5, 1998 and January 5, 1999.

III. Background to the Training Program

The groundwork for the training program was laid in June 1998, when IFES Program Officer Amy Hawthorne visited Doha. During her visit, which was sponsored by the United States Information Agency, Ms. Hawthorne met the members of the Preparatory Committee and learned about the municipal election process and the Committee's planned awareness and motivation activities. During this visit, several members of the Committee told Ms. Hawthorne that training of women candidates was an important area on which they hoped to focus.

In October 1998, the Committee contacted IFES about conducting training for women candidates. Ms. Hawthorne then held detailed discussions with the Chairperson of the Committee, Sheikha Aisha bint Khalifa al-Thani, about the timing and structure of the training program. By mid-November, the arrangements were finalized and the Committee had selected a trainer, Dr. Amal Sedky Winter. Dr. Winter, an Egyptian-American, has run for office in California three times. She has also trained women candidates in Jordan and Palestine. Dr. Winter's knowledge of the Arabic language and culture, and her practical experience in running for office made her an excellent choice.

Before departing for Qatar, Dr. Winter and Ms. Hawthorne prepared an agenda for the training and detailed Arabic training materials. Afaf Ghandour, a translator in Washington, DC, translated the materials into Arabic, and Howaida Nadim of the United States Information Service mission in Doha provided editorial assistance. At the request of the Committee, IFES sent all materials to the Committee for review approximately one week before the training. This review was important to ensure that the materials were accurate, appropriate for the Qatari cultural context, and comprehensive.

Ms. Hawthorne and Dr. Winter arrived in Doha on December 1 and spent December 2, 3 and 4

meeting with the Committee, finalizing the training agenda and materials, and preparing for the training. These three days also gave Dr. Winter an opportunity to familiarize herself with the issues affecting women's campaigning in Qatar.

IV. The Training

Training was held at the Shaqqab Institute for Girls in Doha, space kindly provided by the Committee (its offices are located there). The group training lasted for five days, from December 5 to 9. The training was scheduled for late afternoon (4-7 pm) so that participants could arrive after work. Each day's schedule included one break for prayer and refreshments. Dr. Winter conducted the training in Arabic. This was very important: not only did the training go more smoothly without a translator, but it allowed Dr. Winter to establish a good rapport with all the participants.

The Preparatory Committee made all the logistical arrangements for the training. This included inviting participants, arranging the training site and providing refreshments, and providing equipment such as an overhead projector and a microphone. Committee members also gave helpful feedback to Dr. Winter and Ms. Hawthorne during the training. This excellent support was crucial to making the training a success.

Participants

Five declared candidates took part in the training. These were: Nasra al-Nubi, Turfa al-Sada, Dr. Wadha al-Suwaidi, Dr. Fawziya al-Nuaimi, and Moza al-Malki. Each candidate brought with her a number of women who were planning to work on her campaign (campaign staff). Members of the Preparatory Committee attended every session and participated along with the others. In addition, a number of other women who were interested in the topic also took part. Not every participant was able to come every day, but the majority of participants attended the full five-day training program. Attendance for each day averaged about 35 to 40 women, a very encouraging figure.

The training curriculum focused on practical skills and techniques for running for office as a woman. It drew upon basic principles of women's campaigning and from Dr. Winter's own experience as a candidate in the United States, but the material was also carefully designed to be relevant in Qatar. The advance preparation of materials by IFES and its close consultations with the Committee were essential in this regard. The schedule was as follows. A detailed handout covering the each day's topic was given to participants at the beginning of each session (see the appendix for all the handouts, which together form a "manual" in how to run for office).

Schedule

Day One

Preliminary Planning: understanding the office you want to run for; understanding your qualifications for that office; understanding the voters in your district; understanding the resources

you need to win.

Day Two

Undertaking an Election Campaign: planning your campaign; the goals of a campaign plan; researching your district; evaluating yourself in relation to the other candidates; the campaign message.

Day Three

The Campaign Plan: forming a good team; the most important members of your team and their roles; the three stages of your campaign plan; detailed schedule for your entire campaign; using volunteers.

Day Four

Campaign Strategies and Techniques: basic techniques for reaching the voters --where women can meet other women; campaign funding and fund-raising; mailings; brochures; the basic campaign speech

Day Five

Campaign Strategies and Techniques, Continued: using the broadcast media; using the press; personal contact with voters (telephones, house visits).

Public Speaking

The training included practical training in public speaking for the candidates. The training was also designed to benefit the other women present, so they could watch and learn by example. On the first day of the training, each candidate was asked to introduce herself and give a brief presentation of why she was running for the municipal council. On the second day, a (female) reporter from Qatari radio attended the training. She interviewed each candidate about her qualifications and her campaign platform, and asked each a series of challenging questions about her role in the election (such as "How is a woman candidate different than a male candidate?") designed to give practice answering difficult questions before the media in a diplomatic style. A tape recording of each interview was provided to each candidate so she could review and improve her speaking style. On Day Four, Dr. Winter gave a brief lecture on "the basic campaign speech" that every candidate should develop, and then delivered a sample speech to the audience (text included in appendix). She then had participants work on developing their own basic campaign speeches. On the final day, a female Qatari newspaper journalist interviewed each the candidate again in the front of the group.

Individual Consultations

Beginning on Day Three of the group training (December 9) and continuing through December 12, Dr. Winter met individually with each candidate and her staff in three-hour long individual consultations. During these consultations, the candidates had an opportunity speak candidly (away from the other candidates and the rest of the group) to Dr. Winter about their concerns and for her to offer advice tailored to their specific needs. The consultations focused on campaign

planning based on the challenges of each candidate's district and on developing each candidate's campaign message.

V. Evaluation

This was the first time such a training had taken place in Qatar and all participants were aware of the historic significance of women running for public office for the first time in their country. The participants were justifiably proud of this distinction and were concerned to look their best in the eyes of Qatari society, the Gulf countries and the world. The atmosphere during the training was very positive. Group participation was excellent, with both candidates and others asking good questions and making excellent observations. A spirit of camaraderie developed among the participants during the five days, and it was encouraging to observe all the women supporting one another with practical advice and suggestions.

IFES Evaluation

In IFES' opinion, the training achieved the following goals:

1. The candidates gained a practical understanding of the roles and functions of the position for which they planned to run -member of the municipal council-, and began to make a connection between that position and their own skills and experience. This accomplishment should not be underestimated. Several candidates began the training with absolutely no understanding, or an inaccurate understanding, of both the role of the municipal council and their roles as council members. The training conveyed the need for candidates to become familiar with the election law, the municipal council law, and the election regulations.
2. The candidates and their staff learned the components of a campaign plan, and by the end of the training were able to apply these skills and information to design their own plans. This is significant because, while some candidates had been exposed to some information in the awareness seminars organized by the Preparatory Committee, none of them had much information about the practical aspects of organizing a campaign in Qatar.
3. The candidates began to take personal ownership of their campaigns. They began the training as the recipients of encouragement and direction from the Preparatory Committee, and completed it with greater confidence and their own sense of direction. This is a crucial shift in thinking--one that will allow further democratic thinking and participation.
4. All the candidates (and the other participants) learned specific and practical ways to encourage the participation of their staff and volunteers in the election. This had the result of inspiring others to become active in building future democratic institutions in Qatar.
5. The non-candidate participants benefitted from the training by learning basic skills and techniques for running for office. In this way, the training raised awareness among a larger

group than just the candidates themselves. Several participants told IFES that as a result of the training, they had gained knowledge and self-confidence that made them consider running for office themselves in the future.

In IFES' opinion, the following goals were not achieved:

1. Despite the training's focus on the importance of developing a campaign message, the candidates were not able to develop passionate campaign messages, of the kind used in American campaigns to mobilize people to vote for a particular candidate. The basic problem was that participants did not express any relevant municipal issues about which they felt passionate and which were within the purview of the municipal council. This lack of passion seems to reflect the general sentiment of the electorate. Dr. Winter's attempts to encourage candidates to express issue-oriented reasons for running for office --rather than participating simply for the sake of participation-- raised much animated discussion, but did not sharpen their focus. This is probably because this is the first election of its kind in Qatar. Nonetheless, developing a compelling campaign message that attracts the voters is crucial to any successful election campaign.

2. The candidates did not have sufficient exposure to exemplary public speaking skills nor opportunity to develop these skills. This appears to be the area in which they need the most practice. In retrospect, an entire separate session could have been devoted just to this topic. Candidates would have benefitted from additional feedback on their speaking skills from the other participants. The idea of videotaping candidates speeches and then discussing how speaking skills could be improved was proposed, but unfortunately time did not permit. This would be a good practical technique for future trainings.

Participants' Evaluations

IFES distributed an evaluation form to participants on the last day of training. The evaluations indicated that participants were generally pleased with the training, and all expressed their appreciation to the Preparatory Committee for sponsoring it. Some excerpts from the evaluations include:

"This was a wonderful step noted in Qatari history and we hope to live up to it!"

"The training covered vital issues for candidates and gave us practical skills."

"This training cleared the path for Qatari women."

"The training was useful, complete, organized."

"The training was a good 'ice breaker' that decreased the candidates' intimidation."

"It was useful for candidates and others --this is our first time to know about elections."

"Dr. Amal Winter was an excellent choice."

"The written materials were clear, concise, and complete."

"This training opened for us new gates of knowledge in the electoral field."

Suggestions

The evaluations also included several useful suggestions for how the training could have been improved. These included:

"The training should have included role plays so candidates could practice meeting the voters."

"We needed more training in public speaking!"

"The training should have been open to even more people."

"An additional day was necessary --to learn more about the election process itself."

"We needed more information about the election experience of other countries [not just Jordan and the United States, the examples Dr. Winter used the most]."

"A video showing the election campaign process in other countries would have been useful."

"We needed more time to practice with radio and television announcers."

"There was too much attention to detail."

"You should have photographed the candidates to help her work on their public appearances."

"A role play to act out the process of telephoning voters to get their support would have been helpful."

VI. Conclusion

IFES thanks the Preparatory Committee, and especially its chairperson Sheikha Aisha bint Khalifa al-Thani, as well as all the participants in the training, for providing us with such a positive and memorable training experience in Qatar. The training could not have gone as well as it did without the support of the Committee and the enthusiasm of all the participants. This project was a pleasure for us.

It is clear to IFES that there is a core, and growing, group of Qatari women who have the skills and confidence to make a major positive contribution to Qatar's new election process. Equally, there are women standing behind them who support them. In addition, it is clear that the women

candidates with whom we worked are serious and committed, although they are not unrealistic about their chances of winning. It is certainly possible that no women will be elected this time. But in the long run, far more important than winning or losing in this election is that fact that Qatar is fortunate to have women who can clearly become leaders in the future without sacrificing their identity as Qatari women. In this first election, it is clear to IFES that a seed has been planted that will take root and blossom in the years to come. Qatar's leaders should continue to make every effort to support and nourish Qatari women's expanding role in public life. Running for office is an excellent place to start.