



You are cordially invited to

Women and Democracy in the Greater Middle East
A Public Policy Conference

November 8, 2007 | 7:00 pm

Opening dinner featuring

The Baroness Caroline Cox, Life Peer and Deputy Speaker, House of Lords

November 9, 2007 | 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

May Chidiac, journalist, Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation
Antonella Caruso, associated researcher, Institut Montaigne; author, *Au Nom de L'Islam*
Susan E. Mayer, dean, The Harris School of Public Policy Studies, The University of Chicago
Khadiga Safwat, former director, Middle Eastern and African Research Centre

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[Jk speech at university of Chicago in London 2007](#)

Ladies and gentlemen and all the esteemed and distinguished guests, welcome to this conference on women and democracy in Iran. You have all done us a great honour by coming here today; I thank you all.

Please allow me first to thank Dean Mayer for making this possible. It has been a great pleasure working with her who took such a personal interest in bringing us together here.

And of course once again thank you all for coming here today to discuss together an issue which is not only close to all our hearts but of major importance to millions of women like myself and many of you here who come from the Middle East.

The question of encouraging democratic reforms in the Middle East has attracted increasing attention from the international community. Calls for reform have also been coming from within the region itself for many years. But no consideration about reforms in this region can fail to mention the cause of women's rights. Indeed we women know (as they say we can feel it more) that lack of women's empowerment is the major cause of a lot of backwardness in the world, including the Middle East.

It is therefore so apt that we have here such an amazing gathering of women from this region, from policy makers to academics, to discuss and shed light on the progress or lack of it so far.

As we all know, this issue can sometimes lend itself so resounding rhetorical statements in the West. It is for some people easier to say this than do the real thing! It can also in practice be translated into many small projects that are deemed not threatening by the current powers in the region. I hope we succeed in this conference to assess this together and find out how far has promoting women's rights really contributed to the democratization of the Middle East or indeed the rights of women themselves and to find out where to go next.

Thank you all