

**CHAPTER II**  
**THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, EMIRATI**  
**WOMEN**  
**AND THE ADVOCACY ACTORS INVOLVED**

In this chapter, the author would be discussing about the history of the actors involved in this topic's writing. The United Arab Emirates as a respective state as well as the home for more than two millions of female population within the UAE border, plays a prime role in enhancing the agenda of gender equality promotion within the Emirates border. The respective state's determination to such journey; to be the best shelter for its citizens, to best be the spacious land to a prosperous life, also to ensure that the Emiratis are well-protected and given their rights as equal as possible between men and women; should best be reflected on the UAE Constitution and provisions.

The history of Emirati women as the prime subject to this academic writing would also be the main discussion in this chapter. Women's history in the United Arab Emirates becomes the beginning for understanding how fundamental women's rights are, especially in politics. Women in the United Arab Emirates who are still in the need of finding the solutions for their own problem in politics—in which has them underrepresented, moreover alienated from the “male-dominated area”—are influenced by the historical journey. Thus, this chapter would also be the very beginning for the readers to reach an

understanding towards women's rights, one of the many ways is by empowering women in politics.

#### A. The History of United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) began their journey as a historical wealth ownership and the strong value of Islam since AD 630<sup>13</sup>. The Emirates located near Europe and the Far East had attracted the merchants from India and China, and it was recognised by Europeans, mainly Portuguese, Dutch and British. While Europeans sought control of the coasts, inland, the Bedouin made the deserts of Abu Dhabi and Dubai their home. The town of Abu Dhabi became an important center. In the 19th century, the British signed a series of agreements with individual Emirates that resulted in an area known as "*The Trucial States*". The Emirates fully agreed not to hand over any territory except to the United Kingdom and to refrain from engagement with any foreign government other than the United Kingdom without prior consent from Britain. In return, the British promised to protect the coast from all sea aggressions and to provide assistance in the event of an attack by land.

The pearling industry thrived in the 19th and early 20th centuries, provided income and employment to the people of the Gulf. Many inhabitants were semi-nomadic, pearling in the summer and tending date gardens in the

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<sup>13</sup>UAE Embassy for Washington DC. (n.d.). *Embassy of the United Arab Emirates Washington DC*. Retrieved April 2017, from About the UAE: History: <http://www.uae-embassy.org/about-uae/history>

winter. However, the economic depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s coupled with the Japanese invention of the cultured pearl irreparably damaged the pearling industry.

A new beginning of the rise of the Emirates was started when group of oil experts from a foreign company landed in Emirates for geological survey and invented the crude oil by 1930s. While, almost three decades, approximately in 1958, the invented crude oil came to commercial which four years after (1962), the very first crude oil was exported from Abu Dhabi through the load of Esso Dublin Oil Ship sailed on the land of Emirates. As the oil exports became the very vital revenue of the Emirates, His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan was appointed to be the ruler of Abu Dhabi in 1966. Under his administration, oil export revenues became steadily supported the Emirates' economy, resulting to the outstanding infrastructure of school, housings, hospitals and road throughout the Abu Dhabi.

One of Sheikh Zayed's early actions was to increase contributions to the Trucial States Development Fund, with Abu Dhabi becoming the Fund's largest donor. Meanwhile HH Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai since 1939, had replaced pearling revenues by becoming a part of the shipping industry. And, in 1969 as the Emirate of Dubai began exporting oil, Sheikh Rashid focused his attention on developing programs aimed at improving the quality of life of his people with the new oil revenues. In 1968, with the British announcement of its withdrawal from the Arabian Gulf, Sheikh Zayed stepped

into action to quickly establish closer ties among the Emirates. Together with Sheikh Rashid, Sheikh Zayed called for a federation that would include not only the seven Emirates that together made up the Trucial States, but also Qatar and Bahrain. However, both Qatar and Bahrain decided not to be the part of the federation due to separate international status<sup>14</sup> and the Emirates are still keeping the door opened for both countries, although, both eventually did not join.

As the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai called for federation and gained a positive reaction, the six emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Umm al-Quwain, Fujairah and Ajman) came to an agreement, signed in 2 December 1971 and declared a newborn federation state of United Arab Emirates or in Arabic is mentioned as *Al-Imārāt al-‘Arabiyyah al-Muttaḥidah*. Though, Ras al-Khaimah joined the unification in the following year, 1972. After the unification of the seven emirates, United Arab Emirates has its political system designed to ensure the country’s heritage is well-maintained by combining traditional and modern values. Nowadays, the United Arab Emirates has been a popular home amongst the expats. The respective state has been resided by more than 50 per cents of expats.

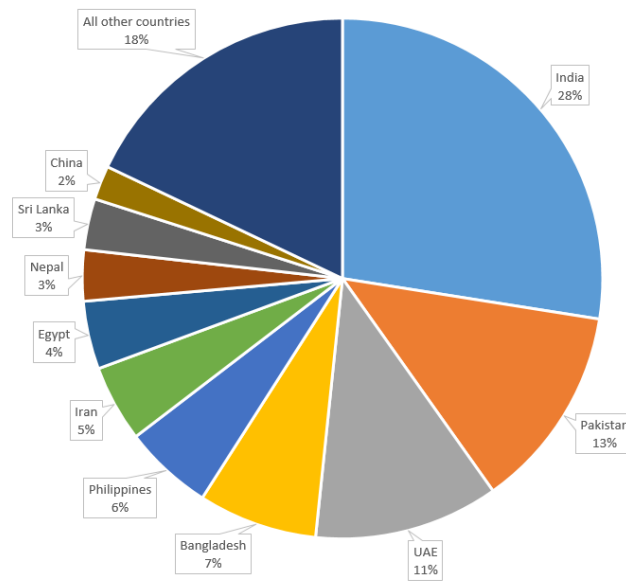
Referring to the statistic on Abu Dhabi Portal official website for UAE Population by Nationality 2016, most of the citizens are coming from the South Asian Countries; India 28 per cents, Pakistan covers up 13 per cents, Bangladesh

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<sup>14</sup>Ibrahim Abed, Peter Hellyer. (2001). *United Arab Emirates: A New Perspectives*. Abu Dhabi: Trident Press.

with 7 per cents, also Nepal and Sri Lanka who shared the same 3 per cents each. (AbuDhabi 2, 2016) Emiratis themselves filled merely the 11 per cents from its total percentage, as shown in a pie diagram below

*Figure 2.1 UAE Population in 2016 taken from Abu Dhabi Portal*



Regardless from the nationality, the United Arab Emirates has reached 9,378,948 population since 1950s until 2017 and still counting (Worldometers, 2017)

### 1. UAE Political System

United Arab Emirates is ran by seven Rulers of each emirate, in which all of the rulers are on the Federal Supreme Council, the highest executive and legislative body. The UAE that has a unique sense of collaborating the tradition and modernity as the basic of running the Federate State also lead the country to build its own political system. The United Arab Emirates adopted both the Sharia

Law and Civil Law at the same time that it drives the country to separate the religious value to adopt to its political system. The UAE's political system which is defined to be the traditional patriarchal style of leadership that is comprised of political loyalties structured around the country's various tribal elements<sup>15</sup> causes an unspoken democracy within the United Arab Emirates.

In United Arab Emirates, there are five Federal Councils<sup>16</sup> in which each carried out their own objectives and tasks:

*a. Federal Supreme Council*

On the federal level, the Supreme Council (comprised of the rulers of each emirate) is the highest executive and legislative authority, "***exercising supreme control upon the affairs of Union in general***" —***Article 49 of the UAE Constitution***<sup>17</sup>. The country's head of state is the ruler of Abu Dhabi, the largest among the seven emirates, in which becomes the central of the government affairs. The other six emirates, however, retain a certain amount of input in the decision-making process. The Federal Supreme Council appointed the head of state for a five-year term of administration.

*b. President and his Deputy*

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<sup>15</sup>Kirdar, S. (2010). *United Arab Emirates*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>16</sup>All of the Five Federal Authorities data is taken from the United Arab Emirates Official website. <https://government.ae/about-the-uae/the-uae-government/the-uae-cabinet>

<sup>17</sup>Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2016). *United Arab Emirates Country Report*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.

Based on Article 45 of the UAE Constitution, President is the second of the five federal authorities. Following power of the President is to manage a meeting in the Federal Supreme Council. More powers of the President are basically to become the director of general meetings, either within the Supreme Council, meeting with The Federal Cabinet (if necessary), to sign any agreements, provisions, letter of diplomatic representation, also state regulations endorsed by the Supreme Council. Should a President appoint the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Diplomatic Representative for the foreign countries.

*c. Council of Ministers or the Cabinet*

The Cabinet is the executive branch of the federation. It executes all internal and external affairs of the Federation as per the provisions of both UAE Constitution and the federal laws. It works under the supervision of the President and the Federal Supreme Council. The Cabinet consists of Prime Minister, two Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers of the UAE, one active Secretary General with numbers or personal to assist the conduct of its work. Currently, there are 29 members of The Cabinet, in which 8 of them are women. The average age of Cabinet Members is 38 years old, with the youngest age is 22 (Shamma bint Sohail Faris AlMazrui - Minister of State for Youth Affairs)

*d. Federal National Council*

The Federal National Council (FNC) is the consultative council, the parliamentary body of the UAE. The FNC is a member of the International Parliamentary Union

(IPU), as well as the Arab Parliamentary Union (APU). It was formed as per the provisions of the UAE's Constitution. Its main functions as per Articles 89 to 92 include:

- 1) passing, amending or rejecting federal draft laws including financial bills
- 2) examining the Annual General Budget draft law and the draft law of the final accounts
- 3) discussing international treaties and agreements
- 4) discussing general subject pertaining to the affairs of the Federation and offering recommendations

FNC is now having 40 members, in which proportionate seats; Abu Dhabi and Dubai with 8; Sharjah and Ra's Al Khaimah with 6; Umm al-Quwain, Fujairah and Ajman with 4 seats.

*e. Federal Judiciary*

The independence of the Emirati judiciary supports the country's stability and wellbeing. The UAE judiciary is entirely independent and judges are subject to no authority other than the rule of law and their conscience. Cases are handled by the UAE courts fairly and without interference from any power whatsoever. The UAE's Constitution and the President guarantee the value of the mission of justice and respect for judges and judicial bodies.



***“Justice is the basis of rule. In performing their duties, judges shall be independent and shall not be subject to any authority but the law and their own conscience.”***

***Article 94 of the UAE Constitution***

United Arab Emirates is a constitutional country in which explains the rules of political and constitutional organisation in the country. The Constitution demonstrates the main purpose of the establishment of the federation and its objectives at the local and regional levels. The UAE Constitution guarantee all UAE citizens the equal rights and opportunities, safety and security, also social justice.

There are 152 articles in the UAE Consitution in which encompass ten basic areas; the Federation, its constituencies and principal aims; The fundamental social and economic basis of the federation; The fundamental social and economic basis; Public freedom, rights and duties; The federal authorities; Federal legislations, decrees and authorities in charge; The emirates; Allocation of legislative, executive and international jurisdiction between the federation and the emirates; Financial affairs of the federation; Armed forces and security forces; also Final and transitional provision. However, the significant points from the articles related to the politics focus on the Fundamental Social and Economic Basis, as well as The Federal Authorities.

The election in the United Arab Emirates was held notably twice, in 2006 and 2011. The FNC 2006 election, with the forming of the 'Electoral College' had become the platform of the Emiratis' political participation. The Electoral College allows the UAE citizens to vote for their candidates to won seat(s) in the parliament, however, the amount of voters are also selected by the *Emirs*. As a result, not all of the UAE citizens could participate the general election. It also implies to the numbers of candidates chosen in 2006 election which allowed 20 candidates to be elected by the Electoral College (in which involving public's participation / the selected UAE citizens), while the other 20 candidates are under the recommendation of the Supreme Council (in which consists of the *Emirs*) from the total 40 members of the Federal National Council (FNC).

## 2. Women in the United Arab Emirates

From the feminists' point of view, men who are becoming the gender's champions, had been receiving the privileges to have more opportunities in almost every field. Higher positions in the workforce, for example, that are occupied by men has added to the equality issues in the employment sphere. Companies often paid men higher than women, offer them prestigious position, while women have to get along with their own struggles as a "woman". Other arenas such as government sector, education, and socio-culture, where men are still quite victorious are just adding to that. The circumstances, however, had driven the importance of advocacy towards women to be taken into consideration seriously.

Such circumstances did not make women from the other parts of the world took things for granted. The inequality that is experienced by women for a long time, in order to maintain the traditional value and national culture, has been successfully motivating them to strengthen their agitation to take women's life to a new level. Women who were in difficulties to hand themselves equality started questioning their rights. To define their rights that should be equal with the other gender; men; has been considered the right thing to do.

Being under the patriarchal rules delivers the status of women in the respective state, United Arab Emirates, into quite a question. As a matter of fact, Emirati women have been long ago becoming the backbone of their family; to master the daily menus starting from breakfast to dinner, to do the chores, to nurture their children while waiting their husbands to be home from works, any activities inside the house are likely to become the responsibility of women. The Emirati women were almost likely experiencing crisis of alternative to get themselves out of their nutshells. Emirati women back then were the prominent actors to maintain the religious value, traditional value and national culture altogether within the country, in which, it provides them not as much as opportunities that of men to pursue their dreams and generate their passions. The unspoken discriminatory provisions towards women in this country only added up to the equality issues back then.

The situation that turned the United Arab Emirates upside down in a good way saw that since the respective state's federation in 1971, UAE Government

had been aware of the contribution of women for the country. The UAE that has been developing along with the women's contribution in the workforce and the private sectors, helps women's status in the United Arab Emirates to be under the process for recognition. The UAE government believed that there should be a way to build an understanding amongst the Emiratis that gender inequality does not simply apply in their country. In fact, Emirati women had taken their first steps in 1975, when the first UAE Women Federation was established by Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak<sup>18</sup>. One of the women federation's aims is to encourage the Emirati women to take their education as one of many ways to own better and more meaningful life. Also to convince that women could be more than what they are taught as a woman, that their roles would be very much significant for their national development. As the result of Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak's dedication for Emirati women, Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak had successfully influenced the generation (particularly women) to become leaders in the Arab World.

As the positive outcome from the women federation, women the respective state United Arab Emirates had been much aware and all prepared to stand for recognition of their roles and capacity within their home country. The UAE Women Federation has been creating an opportunity for UAE women to generate their passions, one of them is the passion in political sphere. By

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<sup>18</sup>Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak is the wife of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founder and also the first president of the United Arab Emirates. Known as her influence to encourage Emirati women in particular, and women of the Arab World in general, to be the leaders in almost all aspects, as a road map to the independency of women in the respective state, United Arab Emirates.

continuing the important mission of gender equality promotion in the whole world, including the Arab World, UN WOMEN arose in the surface as the only supranational and the most influential organization whose concern towards the related issue; to advocate the positive endeavors by the United Arab Emirates in empowering women. Through a sincere and dedicative advocacy, UN WOMEN had prepared all it takes to put its advocacy towards the respective state's top priority, which is women empowerment, into a process. However, the involvement of other women institutions nor organisations is also inevitable.

According to the latest update of the UAE WPC<sup>19</sup>, female population in the respected state by 2017 reaches the number 2,892,207 in which owns only around 30.5% from total percentage. Women in the UAE had very impressive performance in education, business, and government sector. The World Economic Forum 2014 on The Global Gender Gap was one of the good examples of the achievement of UAE, as the forum ranked the United Arab Emirates as one of the top leader in the Arab World for gender equality promotion in the region. Emirati women also leaped its target for the literacy rate, proven by the percentage of women in the universities and graduates:

- 95% of Emirati girls enroll for higher education
- 71.6% are counted as women who are in tertiary level of the government institutions

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<sup>19</sup>World Population Clock is an online website which provides the information related to the population number from each country. Since it has a literal ticking-clock on its site, the number of population might change every time.

- 50.1% are registered as students in private higher education

The UAE government in facilitating women in government sector was started by the establishment of the UAE Gender Balance Council in 2015. The Federal National Council (FNC) had ended its all-male members by 2003. The FNC 2006 election had involved its women as the council's members. Moreover, it was the year for the first elected woman Speaker for the FNC, Dr. Amal AlQubaisi (since 18 November 2015). Adding to the achievement of women in the United Arab Emirates, the youngest State's Minister was at her 22 when she was given the authority. It was Shamma Sohail Faris AlMazrui, serving her country as the Minister of State for Youth Affairs. Another positive outcome from the respective state's commitment to empower women is that 20% of diplomatic corporation is brought by UAE female ambassadors.

#### B. UN Women in the United Arab Emirates

In order to perform an advocacy, particularly on women empowerment, surely many are involved. An advocacy requires recognition towards the issue from the external parties widely. Should the institution, organisation nor any parties build their own partnership with the targeted advocates so that the promoted issue experience an ease to be brought to the surface. As it is known, partnership might be varied, therefore, this chapter will emphasize the partnership

done by the UN WOMEN and other organisations as a form of advocacy towards women empowerment in the United Arab Emirates.

Similar with gender equality promotion, building a partnership means striving for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in which United Nations had designed, along with the participation and consent of more than one hundred countries, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The United Arab Emirates is an example of a rapid and successful development in the entire region, in terms of both infrastructure and economy, also the progress of its people. The respective state's achievement is probably best symbolized in the growing prominence of Emirati women as partners and actors who contribute in the nation-building process.

As the positive outcome from the UAE Women's Federation, women in the respective state United Arab Emirates had been much aware and all prepared to stand for recognition of their roles and capacity within their home country. The UAE Women Federation has been creating an opportunity for UAE women to generate their passions, one of them is the passion in political sphere. By continuing the important mission of gender equality promotion in the whole world, including the Arab World, UN WOMEN arose in the surface as the only supranational and the most influential organization whose concern towards the related issue; to advocate the positive endeavors by the United Arab Emirates in empowering women. Through a sincere and dedicative advocacy, UN WOMEN had prepared all it takes to put its advocacy towards the respective state's top

priority, which is women empowerment, into a process. However, the involvement of other women institutions nor organisations is also inevitable.

The least step to perform an advocacy is to recognize the idea that is brought to the surface as a good matter to support. Therefore, UN WOMEN proves its support towards UAE women empowerment by recognizing the positive endeavours for women within the border. To conduct a research regarding the gender issues in the Arab Worlds, particularly the United Arab Emirates, UN WOMEN was then able to generate its advocacy to the level of spreading the issues worldwide. To process the data obtained and to transform it into a comprehensive information had proved the capability of UN WOMEN to advocate and facilitate the UAE's mission to abolish the gender inequality. Reciprocal UAE had also owned the United Arab Emirates Permanent Missions for the United Nations, showing the proactive efforts from the respective states to empower their sovereign state in global level.

#### C. UAE's General Women's Union (GWU)

The General Women's Union was established under the leadership of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak on 27 August 1975 under Federal Law No. (6) of 1974, which is the national mechanism for the advancement, empowerment and leadership of women in the United Arab Emirates. The United Arab Emirates and aims to ensure that women serve in various local, regional and international forums. Members of women's associations include Al Nahda



Women Association, Women Union Association, Um El Moameneen Association, Women Association of Umm AlQuwain, and Association for the Advancement of Women.

According to the *Women in the United Arab Emirates: Portrait and Progress*, General Women's Union has been engaging with all UN-sponsored agendas. 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.