

Jordanian women face violence, misogyny

BY VALERIA SOSA
STAFF WRITER

The Multicultural Resource Center buzzed with conversation.

Then, as Associate Professor of English Diya Abdo arose, silenced enveloped the audience of students and faculty. A few latecomers filed into the crowded room and found their seats on the floor.

Abdo and Jorge Zaballos, director of diversity training and development, introduced the speaker for the night.

Enter Rula Quawas.

"It is a great honor to be here and to tell you about what is going on in Jordan," Quawas said.

Quawas is the director and founder of the Women's Studies Center at the University of Jordan. She also teaches English, making it a point of teaching every course in the English curriculum to ensure that students learn about female writers.

Her talk, "Voices of Young Jordanian Women: Speaking the Unspeakable," focused on three initiatives by young Jordanian activists to end violence and discrimination against women.

Quawas explained that — while activists have achieved some success in expanding political rights to women — misogyny, sexual harassment and honor crimes still plague Jordanian society.

"Like all cultures, Jordan is patriarchal," Abdo said in an email interview. "Tribalism also plays a role in exacerbating sexism and misogyny. So does Islamic fundamentalism."

Because of the patriarchal system, Quawas explained, women become the keepers of the family's honor. So when a girl is thought to have dishonored the family name, the consequences are unimaginable.

"A man is the protector and the guardian (of a woman), and he has to watch her like a dog to make sure that she is not going to commit a sin or make any mistake," said Quawas. "When she does, she is ... killed."

Women who are suspected of dishonoring the family undergo virginity tests to prove their chastity. For her virginity to be confirmed, a woman's hymen must be found intact. Ironically, families with enough money can sponsor hymen reconstructions.

According to Planned Parenthood, the presence of the hymen is no true indicator of a woman's virginity, as gymnastics, tampons or other nonsexual forms can stretch the hymen. Some women are born with so little hymen tissue that it is barely visible.

However, because sex is a taboo subject in much of Jordan,



Rula Quawas spoke about the treatment of Jordanian women. The patriarchal culture subjects them to violence and discrimination.

such findings are not often known or accepted in society.

"When I was appointed at UJ in 1996, I couldn't even say 'sex' in the classroom," said Quawas. "And when I had the audacity to say it — because it's my job to teach about feminist theory and sexuality — my students had downcast eyes."

"They were ashamed and shied away from sex."

To supposedly decrease the chance of promiscuity, many parents have forced their daughters to suffer female genital mutilation — a method not proven to decrease sexual desire but rather to cause pain and dangerous infections.

Because of the sexism and blatant objectification of women, Quawas explained, redefining concepts of honor has proved difficult.

"We live in a culture of fear, of silence," said Quawas. "It's either to the bedroom or to the kitchen."

Despite the horrors faced by women on a daily basis, Quawas made it clear that bringing an end to discrimination

and gender violence in Jordan is not impossible.

The starting point? The Qur'an.

"Some verses (of the Qur'an) are very misogynistic," said Quawas. "Religion should be progressive, not regressive. We need new translations of the Qur'an ... by women."

Also integral is education, for both men and women.

"The more men and women know their rights, whether in the Constitution or in Shari'a law, the more likely they are to understand their situation and effect change," said Abdo.

Quawas' talk served as an eye-opener.

"I thought it was incredible," said Meredith Hudson, first-year and attendee. "It was great learning about the perspective of someone who is actually from Jordan, and I honestly did not realize how bad the situation was."

"It made me realize what's going on in the world, and how ignorant and blind I've been to it," Hudson said. "Honestly, it makes me want to learn more about it and get more involved."

Toronto mayor Rob Ford caught with crack cocaine

BY OLIVIA WERNER
STAFF WRITER

As of Nov. 5, another government official has run afoul of the law: Toronto Mayor Rob Ford.

According to CBS News, after Canadian police allegedly recovered a video of Ford smoking crack cocaine, the mayor retorted that he was in a state of severe drunkenness.

But does his argument justify smoking crack as mayor?

"His justification was that (he smoked) in a blackout drunken state, but why was he in the context of accessible crack?" said senior Kaitlin Estill, whose father and sister are Canadian citizens. "That raises a lot of questions."

To the dismay of Canadian citizens, Ford's misdemeanors don't end with the crack cocaine incident.

"He has admitted to driving under the influence, and he's been seen acting belligerently while in council and in public,"

Toronto citizen Sébastien Lemieux told The Guilfordian in an email interview. "He clearly has an alcohol consumption problem, and he's been linked to people that are involved in suspected drug trafficking."

Ford denied all accusations of smoking crack until Toronto police reported the recovery of video footage.

"What bothers me about the situation is not so much that he smoked crack and that there are videos of him acting violently when very drunk circulating the Internet," Estill said. "It's the fact that, when the videos came out, that's when he owned up to it and made the public statement."

Toronto constituents are widely displeased with their mayor, not only for his personal actions but political decisions as well.

"He's been a horrible mayor," said Lemieux. "Unfortunately, he's got strong support from a very



Rob Ford is the mayor of Toronto.

conservative group called Ford Nation. He's been acting irresponsibly, been interested in very few social issues and does not represent the diversity and liberal views of Torontonians."

On Nov. 14, just one week after Ford admitted to smoking crack cocaine, Forum Research randomly surveyed 1,843 Canadians ages 18

or older.

The result: 69 percent concluded that Ford should resign.

"I think a lot of Canadians are ashamed by his actions and wish he would have resigned a long time ago," said Lemieux. "Unfortunately, there still seems to be group of misguided conservative(s) that support him."

Due to the Canadian law system, little can be done to remove Ford from office.

"The only way he would be removed from office would be if charges were brought against him by the police," said Lemieux. "The police have investigated him, but so far no charges have been brought up."

Although he cannot be removed from office, Ford's power can still be limited.

"He's still mayor, but his council won't work with him and has stripped him of most of his powers and budget," said Lemieux. The

question now remains: is the act of smoking crack cocaine in a drunken stupor forgivable?

In 1990, D.C. Mayor Marion Barry was also videotaped smoking crack cocaine. As a result, FBI officials arrested Barry and he served six months in a federal prison.

"Barry was not only a criminal but also a terrible politician," said senior and D.C. citizen James Rowe. "Ford's actions are very similar to (those of) Barry."

While little can be done to forcefully remove Ford from office, many Toronto citizens await the day his term comes to an end.

"They just want him gone," said senior Christopher Haswell-Henion.

Citizens hope that Ford will take responsibility for his actions and personally resign from his mayoral duties.

"It's time he does something selfless for a change and moves on," said Lemieux.