

Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim

Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim was born in 1933 in Khartoum/Sudan. As a daughter of a school teacher she has had an educated and religious upbringing. Even her mother enjoyed a good school education during the British Colonial administration which was quite exceptional at that time. Fatima Ibrahim enrolled in the Umm Durman Secondary School, the sole school for girls at that time, passed the Cambridge Certificate Examination with excellence and was admitted to the University of Khartoum. But her father objected to her admission on the pretext that co-education would corrupt the girls students.

In 1952 Fatima Ibrahim contributed in the formation of the Women's Union and became a member of its executive committee. 1954 she joined the Communist party, into which she was initiated through her brother. It was the first party which opened its doors to women and moreover, it had the merit for the establishment of the first organization for women in the Sudan, e.g. the Women's League, in 1947. At first she had to overcome some resistance when in 1955 she proposed founding a magazine since women were at that time prohibited to enter the field of journalism, but in the end the first issue of the Women's Union's magazine Sawt al-mar'a appeared in 1955 of which Fatima Ibrahim was editor-in-chief. This journal played a pioneering role in the resistance of Abboud's military rule 1958-1964, which was a clear victory for women since after the October revolution in 1964 women were allowed to vote and nominate as candidates in parliamentary elections. As chairman of the Women's Union in the session of 1956 to 1957 Fatima Ibrahim was keen to preserve the independence of the union. This constituted the first step to transfer the democratic organization into a broad-base mass organization, despite its subjection to acts of suspension and impairment during the three military rules in the Sudan.

1965 Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim was the first woman to become a member of parliament not only in the Sudan, but in the Middle East and Africa. In 1968 the parliament passed most of the rights for women which her party demanded: The right to enter all fields of work, equal pay for equal work, the maternity paid leave, provision of nurseries and Kindergartens and the rights of girls for higher education and she worked on other demands such as protection against compulsory marriage, marriage of minors or polygamy.

In 1969 Fatima Ibrahim was married to al-Shafi', an influential trade unionist. She and her husband were decorated by Egypt's President Nasser who requested them to contribute with their experience in the field of the trade union's and women movement in Egypt.

However, after an-Numairi's coup d'etat in 1969 all political parties and institutions including the Women's Union were dissolved and substituted by a revolutionary commanding council, which shattered all hard-won reforms at an instant.

When Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim and her husband refused cooperation with an-Numairi, it eventually came to a brake of serious consequence. In 1971 her husband was tortured and executed. Fatima Ibrahim was detained in her house for two and a half years. Nonetheless, this painful experience convinced her ever more to continue her work. After her release she proceeded in her struggle against suppression until she got arrested again on her way for treatment in England at Khartoum airport. An-

Numairi threatened to sentence her to life imprisonment by a military emergency court which she escaped thanks to the outraged masses and protests worldwide.

1990 under the military rule of at-Turabi and al-Bashir she had planned to undergo an operation abroad. Again, the Women's Union - together with other political parties - was banned. Fatima Ibrahim prepared a memorandum and handed it out to al-Bashir's secretary. The next day she was arrested. Due to the intervention of Amnesty International she was released.

1990 Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim went into exile to London, where she continuously engaged herself in human rights. With other Sudanese she formed a group to confront violations like flogging girls-students of Ahfad-University, because they were unveiled, also the kidnapping of youth and students and sending them to the war fronts as well as other violations of human rights. A branch of the Women's Union in London was established.

In 1991 Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim was elected President of Women's International Democratic Federation.

She received many decorations among which in 1993 the UN Award for Outstanding Achievements in the Field of human rights.

2005 Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim went back to the Sudan, where she is now member of parliament.

Among many publications in Arabic she published "A roaring outcry to shake the world conscience" in English and is now working on a "Message to my son Ahmed and his generation" and a book on al-Shafi'.