

LIFTING THE VEIL

As part of the series of Special Briefings sponsored by SABB, the RGBB were thrilled to host an evening with Lubna Hussein. It was standing-room only on the night when she ran through a series of observations and anecdotes.



Ms Hussein said that she was delighted to have been invited to speak to the group but actually quite terrified to address such a large audience. Her goal for the evening was to shed some light on many of the misperceptions about Saudi women.

She certainly exploded many of the myths often run in the western media that all Saudi women were "All cloaked up with nowhere to go".

With a series of slides she showed how wrong people can be when they say "They all look the same", and mentioning the 'hijab' specifically, she showed slides of other non-moslem women who wore something similar. Indeed although the term 'hijab' is often used to describe the scarf that many muslim women use to cover their hair, the term actually refers to the whole dress code of being modestly covered.

Another 'misconception' she exposed was the oft quoted statement that muslim women were only created for the sole purpose of pleasing men.

In an open and frank discussion, covering everything from marriage to driving, Lubna also asked the audience to discriminate between what were often cultural values rather than religious ones.

One joke enjoyed by all was the old chestnut about two Saudi's emerging from a restaurant who walked past a Rolls Royce showroom. When one of them said how much he liked the car, the other replied "OK, I'll pop in and buy you one - you got lunch".

In a fascinating delivery, the audience were presented with a list of women in history who have commanded armies and have played important parts in politics as well. She reminded the listeners that it was only within the last century that women in the UK and America had achieved the vote; and that in the states less than 50 years ago women graduates could not get jobs.



Quoting a Swiss politician she said "Votes for women - what a ridiculous idea! Their brains are smaller than mens which proves they are less intelligent. They are prone to bouts of extremism and would go out campaigning without asking for their husbands permission... and if women were actually elected, this would be a source of humiliation for their husbands... they would be forced into cooking!" It was 1971 before women were given the right to vote in Switzerland!

Before closing her presentation Ms Hussein discussed the many changes in the Kingdom in recent years and named many of the women in business in Saudi Arabia today. In a frank discussion, she made refernce to the future challenges faced by men and women not only within the Kingdom but around the world.

The RGBB are hoping to arrange a return visit when those who missed the first evening may have a second opportunity.