

## SPECIAL REPORT



Lulwa Al-Rasheed, 9 years old, Triathlon



Haya Al-Aiban, 8 years old, Basketball



Salma Al-Houti, 6 years old, Ballet



Maryam Malallah, 16 years old, Track and Field

## 'Be Strong' bid to achieve gender equality

## GIRLS ... GO FOR IT

KUWAIT CITY, Oct 30: The world annually celebrates the International Day of the Girl since 2011. The day, which falls on October 11, belongs to a list of official days selected by the United Nations, each to help unite global efforts over selected topics. On October 11, the world focuses its attention on female issues pertaining to girls below the age of eighteen. Each year, a new headline is announced that further narrows down concerns. This year, the focal point is gender equality in various fields. Countries, communities, governments, organizations, institutions, and individuals working around the world are expected to organize developmental programs and initiatives with long-term visions that would help realize this year's goal, and to formulate evaluative systems that would ensure and maintain desired outcomes afterward.

In tandem with the International Day of the Girl, 2016, Kuwaiti champion fencer, Balsam Al-Ayoub, launched her sports awareness and cultural campaign, Be Strong, which strives to achieve gender equality through sports. Be Strong is a globally recognized developmental program that utilizes sports as a main instrument of empowerment for young girls. Through building their characters and by spreading awareness, Be Strong aims to tackle the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which aim to transform the world in 2030. Furthermore, the campaign hopes to develop future leaders and to introduce girls to a variety of cultures through an array of athletic programs.

Although Kuwait is one of the leading Arab countries in terms of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, when it pertains to athletics there remains a gap between opportunities to practice various sports and merit that tends to favor male athletes over their female counterparts. This gap exists at the club level and spreads into government-sponsored sports centers. In addition, the salient gap effects competitions, as it impacts administrative choices over qualifications and sponsorships – or in other words, it impacts who is allowed to become a champion in his or her field and who is ostracized through a series of administrative decisions. Despite the Kuwaiti government's persistent support of women and girls' rights, men's dominance over the decision-making process tends to marginalize the welfare of female athletes. Patriarchal choices have led to a decline in female participation in sports centers all over the country. Only a limited number of female athletes are prospering as a

result of these decisions, and this minuscule amount does not match the number of female athletes practicing various sports today. Nor do these decisions equal the amount of opportunities currently available for male athletes.

In August 2015, the United Nations declared in its final report of the Advisory Committee on the Human Rights Council ways in which sports could be utilized to spread human rights. The Olympic Games were hailed as a primary example for the advancement of rights for everyone. Last year, the report mentioned several key terms or concepts, the most important of which were sports, development, peace, the battle against all forms of discrimination and racism, and the creation of equal opportunities and gender equality. The report also elaborated on the effective role of sports in achieving these lofty goals.

Be Strong is supported by Kuwait Sports Club, the Public Diplomacy Division of the Cultural Office at the US Embassy in Kuwait, and the United Nations Office in the State of Kuwait. It seeks to create a partnership between government and private sectors in order to reach the largest segment of female participants in the country.

The Kuwaiti champion Balsam Al-Ayoub has stated that Be Strong for Girls' staff were keen on conducting thorough research prior to launching the program and this is the reason the program had been delayed. Staff members poured over large quantities of reports, studies, and international recommendations, and specifically combed the United Nations' requirements to ensure that Be Strong fulfills the suggestions postulated by the UN in their SDG, while simultaneously respecting local customs, traditions, and social norms. "We strive for gender equality and girls' empowerment through sports while respecting, at the same time, social norms and traditions."

She added that Be Strong for Girls is a developmental program that conforms to global standards. While she hopes to concentrate her efforts on sports, she explains that effort needs to be expended in other areas as well if the target of gender equality and girls' empowerment is to be met. She mentions, for instance, culture, social development, and civil awareness. Balsam also spoke about the necessity of educating young boys and girls about healthy lifestyles, which include obesity and other illnesses that could be combated through active participation in sports.

She mentioned that Be Strong for Girls will include a photo exhibition that will be open to the public in the beginning of November. It will be followed by a six-month program replete with sports activities, training courses, and awareness campaigns for girls. This program will also be announced in the beginning of November.

Ms Xenia Paganini, the Cultural Attaché of the US Embassy in Kuwait, stated that the Public Diplomacy Division focuses on the importance of sports and the role it plays in developing communities and empowering women and girls. She has also expressed her joy at working with Balsam and indicated that Be Strong is a unique program with humanitarian dimensions, that touches on development, healthcare, education, culture and diplomacy. In addition, the program ascribed to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals that the world is busily trying to accomplish. Moreover, Ms Xenia Paganini thus highly supports the athletic initiative of Balsam Al-Ayoub because it highlights peace and girls' empowerment. This program is consistent with the Public Diplomacy Division's aspirations to spread and actualize these lofty goals. Ms Xenia Paganini strongly believes in gender equality, and sees athleticism as a wonderful and effective vehicle to accomplish this goal. Finally, the champion Balsam Al-Ayoub was hailed as a positive image of a sporting role model and a young leader that Ms Xenia Paganini and the Public Diplomacy Division would like to see multiply throughout communities. She also expressed her desire to work with individuals and civil organizations and to support meaningful initiatives and their young leaders in the state of Kuwait as part of their social cooperation endeavors.

Kuwaiti champion Balsam Al-Ayoub thanked Kuwait Sport Club, the US Embassy of Kuwait, represented by the Public Diplomacy Division of the Cultural Office at the US Embassy in Kuwait, in addition to Be Strong's amazing staff, Shaima Bin Hussain, the Kuwaiti writer and performance poet Nada Faris, and the Kuwaiti photographer and filmmaker Faisal Duwaisan. The team has done a great job thus far and they look forward to sifting through the desired results. Finally, Balsam would like to offer a special word of gratitude to Kuwait Sports Club and Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors Khalid Ali Al-Ghanim for their cooperation and unlimited support.

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International Day of the Girl Child  
October 11th 2016SUSTAINABLE GOALS  
WOMENSPORTS AS A TOOL FOR  
GENDER EQUALITYSports as a Tool for  
Gender Equality

## 'Kuwait attaches great importance to voluntary, humanitarian activities of the youth'

## AMF honors eleven winners of Youth Initiatives Award

KUWAIT, Oct 30, (KUNA): In presence of Kuwaiti Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Al-Sabah the Arab Media Forum (AMF) honored on Saturday evening 11 winners of Youth Initiatives Award – the Voluntary and Humanitarian.

Kuwait hosting of this competition stems from the country's commitment to serving the humanitarian and voluntary issues around the globe, Sheikh Salman said in a speech at the prize giving ceremony.

"Kuwait, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah – the Humanitarian Leader, is the center of

humanitarian action.

"Kuwait attaches great importance to the voluntary and humanitarian activities of the youth," the minister said, noting that the strategy of the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs was developed in a way that translates the vision of His Highness the Amir.

"Kuwait made big strides in the field of care for youth, which promoted the country's rating from 110th to the 56th position in the last three years among the 183 countries covered by the Commonwealth Youth Development Index (YDI)," Sheikh Salman pointed out.

He affirmed that the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs, as a strategic

partner of the AMF, will continue supporting the Forum's youth initiative for voluntary and humanitarian action.

The minister voiced joy for the participation of 125 voluntary teams from across the Arab world in the completion for this year's AMF Youth Initiatives Award.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Mohammad Al Thani, General Manager and CEO of Ooredoo Kuwait, said the Group, a co-sponsor of the Forum, believes in the central role of youth in the development of their societies.

Ooredoo Group is always keen on harnessing the voluntary and humanitarian initiatives of the youth, he said, citing the "No'een and Nata'awan"

(we support and cooperate) as an example of the efforts to help youth network in philanthropic action in the holy month of Ramadan.

On his part, AMF Secretary-General Madhi Abdullah Al-Khamees said Kuwait has always been a global center for humanitarian action and "today's event testifies to this fact."

"The main aim of the AMF is to foster the talents of the youth and provide them with an opportunity to network," he said, noting that this year's contest drew 640 initiatives out of who 125 were deemed qualified to vie for the awards and 11 initiatives were winning.

The top award was given to the Bahraini initiative of "society free of

corruption," the second to Kuwait's "pay KD two and win the KD two," the third to Egypt's "exchange your book," the fourth to Oman's Adam – city without boundaries," the fifth to the Jordanian "bread for education." The sixth award was given to the Saudi initiative "crown of voluntary work," the seventh to Qatar's "gift," the eighth to Jordan's "in Arabic – supporting science with language," the ninth to Oman's "together we build," the 10th to Qatar's "ambition for managing voluntary action," and the 11th to Kuwait's "media outreach (Wisal Al-I'elamiya)." The event saw the honoring of Arab figures who made notable achievement in the voluntary

action such as late Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Sumait, Sheikhha Amthal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Najib Al-Zamel – the honorary president of the Arab Federation for Voluntary Action (AFVA).

The honored also include outstanding charities such as Egyptian Food Bank (EFB), the Emirates Foundation for Youth Development, Qatar Voluntary center, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), Saudi Arabia's Prince Mohammad bin Salman Al-Saud Charity Foundation, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR also known as the UN Refugee Agency), and Egypt's fund-raising agency Ahl Masr.