



Update for Wokingham District Council

Follow the Women –Women for Peace

Next month will see an extraordinary event, taking place in the Middle East. Over 200 women from 20 different countries will be taking part in a bicycle ride from Lebanon to Amman to protest for peace.

The Follow the Women Campaign began as the idea of Reading woman Detta Regan who felt that she wanted to do 'something' to help the situation in the Middle East and create awareness of the suffering experienced by the women of that area.

Word got round, literally by word of mouth, and now daily more and more women are pledging to join in the event. Some of these women live the other side of the world from the Middle East and have never been to the area. Others have seen the devastating effects of the conflict first hand. Some are experienced cyclists and some have never even sat on a bicycle before! Some are taking a week off high-flying jobs to take part while some are defying husbands and fathers to join the ride. Each woman taking part has their own story to tell as to how and why they want to be a part of the campaign.

This group of women will come together for a week from the 17th – 24th April 2004, with one purpose only – to promote peace for ALL women.

The whole project has really taken off:-

- We now have 220 women participating from Sweden, UK, France, Finland, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestinian Territories, Syria, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany, Netherlands. Greece, Poland, Cyprus, USA, Norway. More than half of the participants are from Muslim countries.
- We have gained support and sponsorship from :
 - Lebanon** Her Excellency Madame Andree Lahoud
 - Lebanese Post Office
 - All relevant Ministries
 - Progressive Youth Union
 - The British Council

Syria	Her Excellency Mrs Asma Al Assad 'Spacetel 'mobile phone company All relevant ministries The British Council
Jordan	HRH Princess Basma The Municipality of Amman Hashimite University All relevant Ministries The British Council

Follow the Women has caught the imagination of the National Media from all the countries. We will have many journalists and film crews with us, including Radio Four Woman's hour and Marie Clair Magazine. This project will be talked about as a positive 'Connection' of women in the Middle East and will have a far reaching effect across the world

It is also a fund raising event, the proceeds of which will go to the Palestinian Youth Union based in Ramallah, West Bank. This is a voluntary umbrella organisation for youth work in Gaza and the West Bank

- to set up sustainable projects in the West Bank to provide Counseling agencies for young people affected by the conflict
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- to set up opportunities for young women's involvement in Sport in the large towns but especially in the small villages---this will be an action from the bike ride and conference
- to provide vocational training for the girls in the small villages with partners from UK

"We hope that by doing this ride we will show the women of the Middle East that we care," says Detta. "Some people may say that is just a gesture and won't have any effect on the desperate situation, but I say that history has proved that incredible things can happen when women get together."

During the ten-day event the cyclists will meet politicians and famous faces of the region as well as being supported along their route by thousands of ordinary women (and men).

Detta Regan 30th March 2004