

Alexis Cruz
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Women in the Middle East event

A group of 16 Drake students and community members came together to discuss the topic of Women in the Middle East on Thursday, October 27 in the Medbury Honors Lounge.

Called Women in the Middle East, the event was co-hosted by the Students for Gender Equality and the Middle East Peace and Prosperity Alliance.

“I believe there is a large area of overlap and misunderstanding in the discussion [of Women and the Middle East],” the president of SAGE and MEPPA, Mollie Clark, said. “This event is a collaborative initiative to correct misunderstandings that arise from the portrayal of these issues.”

The event consisted of two speakers, Julie Brown, and Rezhia Fakhir.

Brown is a member of the Des Moines Catholic Worker and recently returned from Iraqi Kurdistan and has been with Christian Peacemaker Teams for the past year. She has also done human rights work in Palestine in the past. Fakhir is a human rights worker from Iraqi Kurdistan who has also been working with CPT for the past year.

Leading up to the event various members of SAGE and MEPPA posted articles and videos on their respective Facebook pages in order to generate topics for discussion and help with the framework.

The event began with the speakers introducing themselves and showing a video.

The video, FGM: the film that changed the law in Kurdistan. The video had the audience focused from the beginning and set the first topic of the night.

“The small size was nice,” Clio Cullison, a junior MEPPA and SAGE member, said. “The speakers and the video was very powerful, I didn’t know the severity of FGM in the Middle East till this discussion.”

Other topics discussed were the American media portrayal of women in the Middle East, the impact that media portrayal has, how conflict and violence in general play into the image of women and if women rights were human rights, the way women are affected by war.

“It was a good discussion to have,” Kate Gordon, a junior and member of both MEPPA and SAGE, who helped to organize the night, said, “It is important that we understand, especially in the West how narrow our view of Women in the Middle east is.”

Most it seemed were hesitant to partake in the discussion. The same people were talking and Clark was asking most of the question.

However with the final topic of the night, “If we want to help women in the Middle East how do we help,” the group became livelier.

“The changes have to come from within, just imposing one’s own culture is a violation, Brown said. “In the CPT, we do a lot of talking, the first thing we do is ask ‘What do you need.’”

Nods of understanding and murmurs of agreement were seen around the room.

“We have been going backward not forward,” Fakhir said. “The wars need to stop, really we need a lot of advocacy.”

MEPPA and SAGE will be hosting a similar event in the spring semester.