

The Brave Women

ANNOUNCER: What makes a better world? A better world is a world where all human beings can thrive. A more tolerant, caring, harmonious world. A world where every action counts. Where women and girls can share their vision and achieve their dreams. A world where they can thrive. Because when women thrive, humanity thrives. The Women's Pavilion...

NOON SALEH: This is the message you hear as you walk through the women's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. The first women's pavilion at a World Expo in the 21st century. So...why is it important, now, to dedicate a space for women?

HIND AL OWAIS: This principle of women being equal partners in nation building has seeped into everything that we do. It's in our cultural practices now, it's in the way that we build businesses and the way that we have built this country. And so when building Expo, it was only natural that we would have something that would focus on the contributions of women on how important they are.

NOON SALEH: This is Hind Al Owais, Senior Vice President of Participants Management, and the Women's Pavilion, at Expo 2020 Dubai who we will hear from again a little later in the episode. But first, we go back in time to find out how the first Women's Pavilion came to be.

It's the story of a group of women who banded together to build the "Women's Section" at the 1876 World Expo, and how their collective efforts laid the groundwork for women's representation on the world's largest stage.

I'm Noon Salih – and this is Inside Expo, an official podcast of Expo 2020 Dubai, where history is being made.

[INTRO STING]

NOON SALEH: Our story begins in Philadelphia, USA in the spring of 1873, where the country is busy preparing for the first World Expo to ever be held on US soil in 1876. This Centennial Exposition would mark the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

On this occasion, Elizabeth Duane Gillespie and the Women's Centennial Executive Committee were tasked with raising funds for numerous festivities that would mark the occasion.

Dr. DOLORES PFEUFFER -SCHERER: A lot of the women involved in the committee had been active in some way during the civil war on behalf of the union, the Northern states. Whether it was raising funds, whether it was volunteering at hospitals, and they put their efforts into creating their part of the exhibition.

NOON SALEH: This is Dr Dolores Pfeuffer-Scherer, a historian who has written a dissertation on the women behind the first Expo in the United States.

Dr. DOLORES PFEUFFER -SCHERER: So Gillespie and her cohort. They were tapped to help raise funds to get the Centennial going. And again, these women were well connected. They traveled in elite social circles and because of their efforts, the United States Centennial Commission was able to raise much more money than they would have had they not tapped these women.

NOON SALEH: And they did a fantastic job fundraising for the Centennial celebration. They threw Centennial teas - parties where they served tea, sold tea cups, played music, displayed art, and honored the founding mothers of America. In her autobiography, Gillespie writes that just one of those teas raised nearly \$3,000 - that's almost \$75,000 in today's money.

Dr. DOLORES PFEUFFER -SCHERER: And there, you know, the praise is lavished upon them. The organizers of the fair, they had promised the women a spot, a place to put an exhibition together in the main hall.

And then boom, they turned around after they raised all this money and said, no, we don't have room for you. Sorry.

There was a lot of shock and disappointment because Gillespie promised the women who were fundraising and working with her that they were going to be featured, that this wasn't just them supporting the men, that the women would have a showcase to highlight women's progress and achievements.

So she approached the male Centennial Executive Board and said, all right. What if we build our own pavilion and we do it and they said, sure, okay, you can do that. But the funding and everything is on you, you have to figure this out.

NOON SALEH: Disappointed but determined, the Women's Centennial Executive Committee led by Gillespie went back to the drawing board and began to raise funds to make the "Women's Section" a reality.

Dr. DOLORES PFEUFFER -SCHERER: They made it a patriotic effort by women for women. So if you're an upper-class woman and you want to come to a tea and

you want to donate - well, you're doing that for the good of your country and for the good of other women.

NOON SALEH: And once again, they succeed in raising the funds needed to build and run their own “Women’s Section” - now its own separate building. It’s important to note that it was designed by a male architect and built by men - although, funny enough, Gillespie admitted that hiring a male architect was the Centennial Committee’s “first great mistake.”

Dr. DOLORES PFEUFFER -SCHERER: But from that point on, I feel the women just took over. And they designed, if you will, spaces in it to reflect various ways women contributed to the society and the world.

They understood women produced in the home as well as out of the home, women were makers, women were workers. They had displays of embroidery. They had displays of homemade quilts. The people whose work they were displaying ranged from a quilt from a woman in Alabama to embroidery made by Queen Victoria, if you can imagine. They had artwork featured by women sculptors, painters. They had a section on women physicians. It was from this exhibition that kindergarten, as a grade in school, came to the United States. They set up a model kindergarten and they had a teacher and people would come and see the children learning. And that gave the spark to the idea that well, children can come to school for kindergarten before first grade. I mean, it's amazing, isn't it?

NOON SALEH: Of course, the Women’s Section had its critics - men and women alike - who dismissed what was on display as not being special or radical.

Dr. DOLORES PFEUFFER -SCHERER: There were men who wrote reviews on the pavilion who, who said, you know, oh, a quilt from somebody in Alabama. That's

ridiculous. That's not work. That's, you know, why should we be impressed? Things like that. I would call that criticism selective because of featuring women as teachers, featuring women as engineers, featuring women as physicians.

NOON SALEH: Despite these obstacles, the brave women persevered. In a way, it actually all worked out in their favor.

Dr. DOLORES PFEUFFER -SCHERER: I will say that the pavilion ended up being better than a space in the main hall, which they all acknowledged. It's just the process of getting there was hard, but once that was instituted, that then became part of other fairs and expositions.

NOON SALEH: This Expo indeed led to expanding the role women had at Expos going forward. And by the Chicago Expo of 1893, there was a so-called Board of Lady Managers, who were in charge of organizing and managing a Women's Pavilion, all built and run by women.

At a time where women often were in the shadow of men, Women's Pavilions offered a space where women could prove their entrepreneurial skills and creative spirit. Eventually, the participation of women was no longer limited to a specific pavilion, however. They managed National Pavilions and ran Expos - like Hessa Al-Ossaily, who was the first female Commissioner-General of an Arab Pavilion - the UAE Pavilion - at the Seville Expo in 1992.

This brings us to today, to Expo 2020 Dubai, led by Her Excellency Reem Al Hashimy. Over 50% of this Expo's staff are women - and this year, the decision was made to bring back the Women's Pavilion, decades after its last appearance.

Dr. DOLORES PFEUFFER -SCHERER: Just as much as they needed a space in 1876, we definitely need that today. I think that women's voices are increasingly being heard and yet diminished at the same time. So I think having a pavilion now is vital.

NOON SALEH: The Women's Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai looks to shift perspectives on what women bring to the table and to project a wider message to the world that it's time to work against gender inequalities that still exist today.

HIND AL QWAIS: And I think that's what makes our pavilion special –

NOON SALEH: Here is Hind Al Owais again.

HIND AL QWAIS:- and different is that we're very much anchored in sharing with the world why the issue of women's empowerment and why that whole movement is part and parcel of us creating a better world today.

NOON SALEH: If you remember at the beginning of the episode you heard a voice saying "When women thrive, humanity thrives!" This is actually the theme behind the pavilion.

HIND AL OWAIS: And it's simple, right? It is this idea that you empower women, you empower the world. We need to recognize that gender equality and women's empowerment as an agenda is not only the right thing to do. It is the smart thing to do.

If we are not able to truly put women at the center of everything we do, our road to progress to sustainability, to ending poverty will not be successful.

NOON SALEH: The pavilion is presented in collaboration with Cartier, the international luxury goods brand. Shaping the Pavilion's footprint and impact at the

Expo are Hind and Sophie Doireau, Managing Director at Cartier Middle East. Their partnership is not only well-aligned in terms of their values and goals, but also stands as a testament to the importance of collaboration when it comes to the fight for gender equality.

SOPHIE DOIREAU: We also acknowledge the fact that we are not there yet. Many things have improved in terms of women's empowerment, in terms of amazing women that have marked history, but some key challenges are really remaining.

HIND AL OWAIS: Recently we have recognized that the private sector also has a role to play because we are all in this together. And so when this possibility of partnering with Cartier came about, it was something that we felt should be emulated by others. We have to adopt a more rigorous multi-stakeholder approach to enable us to deal with our issues more effectively because the issues don't have a border. They don't affect one group of people, especially when you look at gender equality and women's empowerment, no country in the world has been able to close all its gender gaps. And this is a great example of different stakeholders coming together and working together.

NOON SALEH: So we asked Hind & Sophie to describe to you what the experience of visiting this pavilion is like.

HIND: As you take a journey through the exhibit, It's a very beautiful space, but there's also a lot of learning.

So the content curation was jointly done by Expo and by Cartier, we - our teams work together, hand in hand, to decide what stories we want to tell. We took reference from the UN women's agenda. We took reference from the sustainable development goals. We looked at what these frameworks were talking about, what challenges the world was facing now and where women's roles, uh, were.

NOON SALEH: For context, the aim of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals are to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for everyone by 2030. And so far Expo has managed to implement these goals by curating programming with the 192 participating countries on a daily and weekly basis.

Let's go back to our tour of the pavilion...

SOPHIE: So we have four artists that embarked the journey a long time ago and we have three women and one man.

The first one is Laura Gonzalez. She's a French architect and she has worked with a collective of women to work on a beautiful facade. So made of, uh, uh, Mashrabiya as well as Cartier bracelets. So, so it's very refined. You don't see it at first lens, but it's really beautiful...

NOON SALEH: One way to describe this is if you were to witness it yourself particularly at night, the exterior façade is brought to life with a light show that looks like a thousand twinkling stars. The lighting is accented by beautiful calligraphy that surrounds the building with messages of hope and peace created by French Tunisian Artist el Seed - who used poetry from a woman activist in Nepal as his inspiration.

ANNOUNCER: This room is known as immersive room. In this room, you'll be going through a short film by....

SOPHIE DOIREAU: So you enter, this is the first room where we just explained that we want to give this new perspective on the topic to be inclusive all together, both men and women, to speak about a women's pavilion and the women's empowerment at large.

NOON: In this first room, you are invited to view a film that reimagines an equal world through children's eyes - a film directed by none other than Oscar-nominated film director Nadine Labaki and the Pavilion's third key artist. Here's a snippet of her speaking on what she wants her film, "Children of Wonder," to achieve:

Archive

NADINE LABAKI: When I got the opportunity to start working on this film, I thought I want to search in the world for women, young women, who have initiated some kind of change. And so this film is about them - these women who are trying to change the world. For me...

NOON SALEH: We then move on to the achievements room.

SOPHIE DOIREAU: You discover from women who have led countries from the goddesses, women warriors, queens from all over the world from different times in the history, then you move also to the women who are running their country today.

HIND AL OWAIS: The idea was always to tell the story that women have always been a part of it. Women have always been driving progress. Women have always been leading nations, protecting their people, going to war for their lands. And it is due to them that ceilings have been broken and that we have accomplished the things that we enjoy today, but somehow, somewhere along the way, all of these contributions were forgotten. And women became marginalized. And so this room is really to remind us of all the amazing things that women have done.

NOON SALEH: Achievements are often accompanied by challenges, the focus of the next room in the journey.

HIND AL OWAIS: We're not trying to paint simply a rosy picture, you know, uh, not anchored in the reality that women face. When you look at access to resources, women have to walk 200 million hours per day, all over the world to get water. When you think about people facing hunger, there's 690 million of them. 60% of those are women because women want to feed their families first. And so they get left behind. When you think about poverty, 70% of the world's poor are women.

And the challenges, you know, are too great for us to encapsulate in one space. So what we have tried is to take you through, but not overwhelm you and not leave you feeling depressed - because the picture can be depressing - but we take you through the challenges just as a reminder, before we get to the solutions room where we tell you that we can work together to end the inequality and here is a beautiful room...

ANNOUNCER: Hayakom. Welcome to solutions room...

NOON SALEH: The fourth room, the solutions room, is a space dedicated to demonstrating that global issues are women's issues and women's issues are global issues. The goal here is to inspire visitors and empower them to take a pledge and make a change - whether that is at the individual, organizational or global level.

SOPHIE DOIREAU: I can tell you, I came with my kids and many friends of them. We did the tour and they were very surprised because they didn't know...it's education and I can tell you that for kids it's educational, as well as for adults, we

had lots of ministers, delegation, and they were amazed by all this knowledge that you have in the room, because when you put that all together, you realize, wow. In fact, yes, it's true that women are really part of the world and we need women for this world to be sustainable.

NOON SALEH: The Women's Pavilion's display and pursuit of solutions is not just limited to this room, however. Across the six months of Expo 2020, the Women's Pavilion will host an array of events, programming and dialogues that will not only enhance knowledge and understanding of gender equality and women's empowerment, but also drive tangible, collaborative action that can be shared with the world. These include a Women's World Majlis to address the role of women in creating a cleaner, safer, healthier world, and the 'Women in Arabia and Islam' series, highlighting real-life stories of women who have led the way throughout history, inspiring other women from across the world to reach new heights. But perhaps the largest and most important role for the pavilion is to launch a dialogue on International Women's Day on March 8th 2022 by hosting a global forum under the theme of "Creating New Perspectives".

SOPHIE DOIREAU: And for us, this is really the starting point of programs and initiatives that will be launched on that day. So this is a very important moment. We are working, we are working a lot on, very hard to make it happen in five months. And, and for us, this is a great occasion to launch and to continue this journey of women empowerment.

NOON SALEH: So what happens when the expo ends, or what if you aren't physically here to commit to taking a stance on gender inequality? Hind explains how you can still be a part of this movement.

HIND AL OWAIS: We've built a space online where you could sign up to become a friend of the Women's Pavilion, and we want hear your questions. We want to hear your thoughts. We want to really engage with the world as a whole.

NOON SALEH: Our journey in the Women's Pavilion, however, is not over just yet.

SOPHIE DOIREAU: And we have our last room, which is our tribute room. And we invite people to commit for and to pledge for, for pledges that we have from UN women.

NOON SALEH: Visitors are finally invited to the second floor of the pavilion where French actress, screenwriter and director Mélanie Laurent, the fourth artist collaborating with the Pavilion - created an immersive exhibition showcasing stories of women from all over the world. These women navigate through their diverse and rich experiences - experiences that speak to why the pavilion is just as important now as it was all the way back in 1876.

HIND AL OWAIS: When women take a seat at the table, they change the name of the game.

SOPHIE DOIREAU: Everybody has to acknowledge that and to realize that, and we cannot live in a world where half of its population is overlooked. It's not sustainable anymore.

NOON SALEH: I thought I'd end with the pledge that you would read at the end of the journey, in the tribute room, to allow you, the listener, to understand what is at stake here. You can repeat after me:

1. I will share the care.
2. I will educate girls for the future.
3. I will respect her choices.
4. I will demand an equal work culture.
5. I will teach girls their worth.
6. I will use my voice to drive change.

NOON SALEH: Inside Expo takes you behind the scenes at Expo 2020 Dubai, sharing our stories and others across the 170-year history of this global event. Learn more by visiting [VirtualExpoDubai.com](https://virtualexpodubai.com).

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