

Biography of H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly

H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa was elected President of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly on 8 June 2006. At the time, she was serving as Legal Adviser to the Royal Court in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Sheikha Haya brings to the post a long and distinguished legal career at both the national and international levels, spanning three decades. One of the first two women to practise law in her country, she has held many senior positions with leading legal organizations of the world including the International Bar Association, where from 1997 to 1999 she was vice-chairwoman of the arbitration and dispute resolution committee, the first woman from the Middle East to serve in this capacity. Her pioneering role in the legal sphere has been coupled more recently with prestigious diplomatic assignments as her country's Ambassador to France, from 2000 to 2004, and as non-resident Ambassador to Belgium, Switzerland and Spain. Over the same period she was the Kingdom's permanent representative to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). She also was a member of the World Intellectual Property Organization's Arbitration Centre Consultative Committee and became Bahrain's representative on the International Court of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce, an appointment that she still holds today.

A champion of women's rights, particularly in the legal sphere, Sheikha Haya has been an active participant in the movement to elevate the position of women in Bahrain before the Islamic sharia courts and is an advocate of a progressive interpretation of Islamic texts as they apply to women. She was a vice-president of the Bahrain Bar Society as well as a member of the Supreme Council of Culture, Art and Literature, and is currently a member of her country's Child Development Society and the Arab Women's Legal Network.

Sheikha Haya, who is trilingual in Arabic, English and French, has presented numerous papers at legal conferences across the United States, Europe and Asia, on diplomacy, international arbitration, dispute resolution and the status of women in the Middle East. She holds an LLB from the University of Kuwait and studied international public law at the University of Paris I: Panthéon-Sorbonne. She also holds postgraduate degrees in civil private law from Alexandria University and in comparative law from Ain Shams University in Egypt. She is only the third woman to serve as President of the United Nations General Assembly, and the first since the twenty-fourth session in 1969.