

Women living under muslim laws
النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين
Femmes sous lois musulmanes

Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes

1998 & 1999 Reports

By Anissa Hélie

Istanbul, Turkey
September 14-26, 1998

Lagos, Nigeria
October 25-November 5, 1999

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This report was written by Anissa Hélie, based on handwritten notes, tapes and the careful documentation of flip charts by participants and resource persons. It owes a lot to the inputs of those who reviewed, commented, and contributed to the draft, especially, Charlotte Bunch, Lisa M. Clarke, Farida Shaheed and Cassandra Balchin.

Production: Lucy V. Vidal, in collaboration with the author.

Design: EGADS, Cranbury, NJ.

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Dedication to Hajara Usman

The Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes report (1998 & 1999) is dedicated to the memory of Hajara Usman. Hajara died on September 26, 1998, shortly after attending the first institute. The friends who spent the last days prior to her death with her in Istanbul, and the many around the world who knew and loved her, have been missing her presence ever since. A lecturer and a committed activist for women's rights, Hajara was a founding director of BAOBAB and national country coordinator of the WLUML "Women and Law in the Muslim World" project in Nigeria.

Involved in IRRRAG (International Reproductive Rights Research Action Group), Hajara was particularly concerned with reproductive rights. Hajara had often commented that NGOs help provide moral support, change public policy and create awareness in the media. But what they frequently cannot do is provide financial support to individuals in need, for instance in situations where a VVF (vasico-vaginal fistulae) repair operation has to be carried out, or when a young girl needs legal fees to fight an arranged marriage. In recognition of Hajara's work, the Hajara Usman Memorial Fund has been set up in her name through BAOBAB, to support individual women to assert their reproductive rights.

Acknowledgements

The Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes are the result of a collective effort involving the Center for Women's Global Leadership (Global Center) and the Women Living Under Muslim Laws International Solidarity Network (WLUML). The initial inspiration for the Institutes came from Mariémé Hélie Lucas, founder and international coordinator of the WLUML network, whose vision generated the enthusiasm needed to carry the project forward.

The planning and development phase of the Institutes was coordinated from the Global Center and owes much to the ongoing commitment of the staff, in particular to the dedication of its Executive Director, Charlotte Bunch. Anissa Hélie, the Institute Coordinator, who had worked previously with both WLUML and the Global Center, provided a concrete link between the two organizations. Special mention must be made of the help provided by other members of the Global Center staff: Jewel Daney, Diana Gerace, Catherine Pecoraro, Linda Posluszny and most of all, Lucy V. Vidal and Lisa M. Clarke, who provided invaluable on-site assistance at the Institutes.

In addition to the support given by the WLUML International Coordination office, a number of people from the network were indispensable: Lynn Freedman, from the Law and Policy Project at Columbia University; Farida Shaheed and Cassandra Balchin from Shirkat Gah; Ayesha Imam from BAOBAB; and Vahida Nainar from the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice at the International Criminal Court. We must also extend our gratitude to the resource persons who joined us in Istanbul and Lagos (their biographical profiles can be found in the Annexes). Several of them participated in preparatory meetings, helping us to think through the program, and their contribution enriched both the content and the atmosphere of the Institutes.

We are indebted, as well, to all those in the local organizations which took on the burden of hosting the Institutes in 1998 and 1999: the staff of Women for Women's Human Rights in Istanbul, Turkey, and of BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights in Lagos, Nigeria, as well as Sindi Médar-Gould of WISSEA in Kano, and Asma'u Joda of the Center for Women and Adolescent Empowerment in Yola.

Finally, we are grateful to the funders whose support made this work possible. In particular:

The Ford Foundation
The Global Fund for Women
The MacArthur Foundation
The Moriah Fund
Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation
(NOVIB)
The Open Society Institute
The Ruben & Elisabeth Rausing Trust

“Don’t walk in front of me
I may not follow

Don’t walk behind me
I may not lead

Walk beside me
and be my friend”

Quoted by a participant in the discussion about Networking.

1998 & 1999 Reports

Introduction

Co-organized by the Women Living Under Muslim Laws International Solidarity Network (WLUML) and the Center for Women’s Global Leadership (Global Center), the first two Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes took place in Istanbul, Turkey, in September 1998 and in Lagos, Nigeria, in October/November 1999.

Both the Global Center and WLUML are dedicated to the enhancement of women’s human rights and emphasize networking as a strategic tool for achieving effective mobilization¹ and the promotion of women’s equality. At the core of their common project lies the need to explore the issues of both feminism and human rights, and their relevance for women activists from Muslim countries and communities.

More specifically, since the inception of the network in 1984 one of WLUML’s aims has been to challenge the rhetoric of all those who claim that feminism is a Western issue, concept and project. Through the Institutes, the network sought to reclaim feminism by looking at the history of feminism in Muslim countries and communities and by focusing on often-forgotten historical feminist figures. In order to link past and present, it was equally important to show the wide scope of feminist initiatives that currently exist in the various contexts known as the Muslim world. By exploring the roots of feminist activities as well as the contemporary — and ongoing — struggles to bring about women’s equality, WLUML’s intent was to explore the ways in which women in Muslim countries and communities (including those who would not claim the label “feminist”) have coped with Muslim traditions, however diverse these may be.

Meanwhile, the Global Center has, since 1990, undertaken pioneer work in the area of women’s human rights — and the UN World Conferences in the 1990’s in Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing all reflect the usefulness of this approach for women. The Global Center’s efforts have focused in two major directions. Firstly, demanding that the international human rights community broaden and expand its definition of human rights to more effectively incorporate women’s understanding of their human rights. Secondly, strengthening women’s human rights advocacy efforts through training and leadership development, international mobilization campaigns and global education. The annual Women’s Global Leadership Institutes (WGLI), one of the Global Center’s key programs, have become internationally recognized fora for advancing women’s leadership in public policy, particularly in the area of human rights. The recognition they receive in feminist and human rights circles attests to the vitality of the Institute model in building global strategies and expanding international networks.

¹ For a detailed description of WLUML and Global Center objectives, see annexes 1 and 2, respectively.

Therefore, having identified the need of capacity building of WLUML and training of young women within the network, WLUML solicited the help of the Global Center in organizing leadership Institutes solely for the training of women active in the WLUML network. In 1997, the two organizations decided to merge their specific areas of expertise, and to focus jointly on the issue of women's human rights in the context of Muslim countries and communities.

The Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes drew on the Global Center's expertise in the area of leadership enhancement and human rights training while emphasizing WLUML's chosen themes: global solidarity and networking; the issues of diversity and commonalities within the Muslim world; and feminist organizing for human rights education in Muslim countries and communities. The Institutes were also a systematic way to introduce younger women active in the WLUML network to the principles that have guided the varied political choices and actions the network has taken over the years.

This report focuses on the two Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes held so far — the first in Istanbul, Turkey, (September 14-26, 1998) and the second in Lagos, Nigeria, (October 25-November 5, 1999). Instead of presenting a sequential description of each Institute, we chose to do a combined report, hence providing an overview of our work over the last couple of years.

This has been a dynamic process, and we point out in the narrative what remained similar (in terms of content, preparation, etc.) as well as some of the differences between the two Institutes. The following nine sections attempt to summarize the major topics and discussions of the Institutes, although we cannot hope to adequately reflect our long debates often extending late into the night. On the other hand, the photos reproduced throughout the report indicate the warmth of the feelings for each other and bear witness that doing "serious work" can also be fun.

The sections are organized around particular themes. They weave together the panels and presentations as well as the outcomes of the more specific discussions originating in working groups, which often brought new dimensions and perspectives back to the plenaries. The quotes from individuals, either from "resource persons" or participants — although we believe that all involved were able to learn from each other and were therefore "participants" in a group process — are transcribed from the tape recording of sessions. These excerpts however do not acknowledge everyone's participation as it would have made this report far too lengthy. To protect people's privacy we also did not include much of the personal introductions, which nevertheless represented a rich contribution to the Institutes.

The sections are uneven in terms of their length because the programs emphasized major themes — such as human rights or feminism in the Muslim world, issues which keep recurring throughout the agenda — while time constraints led us to limit other topics to only one session.

Finally, the report does not do justice to the enthusiasm and hard work of the resource persons who joined us in Istanbul or Lagos, and to the often innovative methodologies they brought to the Institutes. We hope nevertheless that this report does give a flavor of our exchanges and offers some ideas and inspiration for other women to borrow and adapt according to their own needs.

Background to the Institutes

Why a joint endeavor by Women Living Under Muslim Laws/Center for Women's Global Leadership?

The Center for Women's Global Leadership and Women Living Under Muslim Laws have a longstanding working relationship. WLUML was part of the Center's International Planning Meeting in 1990, which laid the groundwork for the Center's programs and since then has participated in many of its strategizing activities. The Global Center has consistently involved WLUML in the planning of a number of its activities, including the International Tribunals held during the UN World Conferences (Vienna, Cairo, Beijing) where WLUML played a key role. Since the first of the Women's Global Leadership Institutes (in 1991), WLUML has also systematically encouraged women in Muslim countries and communities to apply to participate. Over the years, many participants have been selected from groups linked through WLUML, giving them exposure to the varied ways in which women can work to support each others' initiatives. Meanwhile, the Global Center has developed links with a variety of groups or individuals in Muslim countries and communities.

The WLUML and Global Center's sustained collaboration has proven to be successful in many areas. The Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes provided another opportunity for a mutually enriching experience. More specifically, the Global Center was interested in exploring the validity of the women's human rights concept with partners sharing a more specific focus, while WLUML sought to strengthen the leadership and human rights skills of individuals connected to the network.

This initiative took place at a crucial time given the rise of extremist politico-religious movements worldwide. The growth of the "fundamentalist" phenomena reinforces the crucial need for WLUML to link women from Muslim communities and countries — who are otherwise isolated in each of their respective contexts. Since one of the main objectives of the network (formulated since its inception in 1984) is to break isolation and reinforce solidarity among activists and women at large, the Institutes are seen as a timely strategy in an increasingly threatening context.

From their inception, the Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes have been designed as a shared responsibility between two institutions devoted to women's human rights. The Institutes incorporated a few fundamental themes with each organization contributing various components. The Global Center was primarily responsible for those parts of the program centered on women's human rights concepts and practices, UN treaties and mechanisms as well as leadership and organizational skills. WLUML on the other hand was to articulate the principles and basic philosophy of the network and design the sessions related to feminism in the Muslim world and the rise of politico-religious movements.

The value of the Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes project is also linked to the fact that both organizations have become increasingly aware that leadership development is most useful when participants share common ground. One of the Global Center's projects has been to support leadership activities that draw on the work of its Women's Global Leadership Institutes.

This is part of the Global Center's vision of encouraging women, and especially young women leaders, to use the knowledge they acquire through the WGLI and to share these skills in their own particular contexts — elaborating on the Institute's model to focus on specific regional or thematic concerns. Similarly, the success of WLUML as an international network is due in part to its deliberate effort to bring together women from Muslim countries and communities who are dedicated to women's rights. Despite their diverse backgrounds

and standpoints, the fact that they share a similar goal allows for solidarity to develop and to strengthen links between activists.

Goals, Format and Methodology of the Institutes

Goals

The Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes were conceived of and developed as an international program where women from various Muslim countries and communities would come together, with their different perspectives. The main objective was to provide training for two groups of 20 to 24 young women leaders, as both individuals and activists involved in their own contexts. The institutes were designed to enhance the effectiveness of the participants' local organizations and — because they were connected to WLUMML — also to contribute to the capacity building of the network itself. The Institutes were therefore also meant to influence WLUMML's future as they hoped to encourage and enable a new generation of active networkers to further the work carried out over the past 15 years.

The organizers recognized as well the important role that the personal has played in the work of WLUMML, as well as in other women's networks. Hence, the Institutes valued the solidarity and active support networkers give to each other by way of personal links and ongoing exchange. We wished to offer a space in which friendships that simultaneously strengthen political and personal bonds can develop, giving individuals and groups an opportunity to learn, trust and gain confidence in working together.

Finally, we anticipated that some participants would be interested in organizing similar programs in their own countries/regions in the future. This multiplying effect is at the root of all the collective projects undertaken by the WLUMML network. The Global Center shares the same philosophy and has witnessed a similar ripple effect in many of its activities: from the many national and regional groups that have organized tribunals on women's human rights issues to the numerous women's organizations that are now interested in holding leadership Institutes.

(For example, the African Women's Leadership Institutes, inspired by the Global Center's and organized by several former WGLI participants, take place annually in Uganda since 1997.) Our hope is that the skills and knowledge gathered at the Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes will enable participants to organize regional institutes, at different levels, in their own countries and communities.

Format and Methodology

The two-week intensive residential Institutes included full group plenaries, small group discussions, personal introductions, workshops, skills sessions, panels (with outside resource people as well as participants) and meetings with local women's organizations. In order to truly benefit from the Institutes, participants were required to commit themselves to stay for the entire two-week period. This commitment was crucial to allow an in-depth cross cultural experience where people were able to build personal connections, learn from each other, and strengthen their links with the network as well as absorb the program in its entirety.

The methodology combined a variety of formats, from the more formal presentations to interactive sessions, in an effort to accommodate various — and sometimes conflicting — demands. We tried to balance the necessary adjustment to the formats that felt most appropriate to specific topics with the need to maximize the limited time we had to cover a large number of crucial issues.

Special efforts were also made to provide participants with written resources related to the network and to women's human rights concepts.² A large number of videos was also available — some of which were included as part of various sessions. Documentaries produced by women's organizations and human rights groups were a particularly useful tool not only for providing information, but also for initiating group discussions.

While the planning team had carefully designed the program, we also wished to maintain a certain level of flexibility to respond to the group's needs. A system of monitoring groups was therefore set up to enable participants to give us feedback throughout the Institutes. Each day, two participants were responsible for gathering reactions and suggestions from the group. Daily meetings with organizers, focusing on content as well as format, helped ensure that the proposed agenda met participants' needs and expectations.

Conceptual Background

The Institutes' program was primarily centered on the issues of human rights and feminism — within the Muslim world and globally. The specific history, philosophy and strategies of the WLUML network was another major component. Finally, the Institutes also offered concrete skills and organizational development sessions.

In identifying key conceptual issues, the organizers' choice was informed by the need to examine the links between the global and the specific — though diverse — location of women from Muslim countries and communities. We felt it was crucial to look at the global phenomena of women's oppression, and at the various forms it takes in different contexts as well as historically.

Connecting local and global

The two groups of experienced activists (in large majority already linked to the network) who took part in the Institutes constituted a rich, and diverse, pool of knowledge. But, in order to give participants a more complete picture of the global women's movement, there was a need to expose them to, or further their understanding of, strategies elaborated and used in other contexts. While we believe this approach to be beneficial to all involved, the international exposure and initiation to networking outside "natural" boundaries was particularly important for those women who have had few contacts outside their country and WLUML.

Network founders have always felt problems had to be addressed from within and strategies needed to be decided upon by the concerned women. At the same time, WLUML is committed to expanding the vision of its networkers and collaborating with women's organizations outside the Muslim world. Such a perspective is obvious in the solidarity campaigns launched over the past decade: WLUML has sought and received support both from women based in Muslim countries and communities and from progressive and feminist groups elsewhere. Similarly, the network has also widely circulated information and

² Key articles were sent in advance. In addition, an extensive collection of articles related to each theme addressed at the Institutes was distributed upon arrival. They were organized by topic enabling participants to pull out appropriate readings (every day, chair persons would indicate the most important documents to review for the next session). We hope this constituted a useful resource that participants could go back to in order to further inform their work once back home. There were also display tables with various publications from the Global Center and the WLUML network, as well as from other relevant organizations and the participants' organizations. In order to address the needs of those with little opportunity to access such documentation in their home countries, participants could request copies of the documents they felt were most useful while at the Institutes.

gathered support for cases of violations of women's human rights outside Muslim countries and communities. The various campaigns, activities and programs undertaken by the Global Center reflect a similar vision: the Global Center collaborates with a broad range of regional and international women's groups and has worked since its inception to help build an international women's human rights network.

Furthermore, when planning the Institutes, we also discussed the need to include perspectives from various progressive movements. To make the connection with other struggles would help highlight two crucial points. First, it was an acknowledgement that feminism is involved in a dynamic interaction with other social movements. Second, it recognized that emancipatory projects — emerging in different locations and time — are interrelated and complementary. We therefore draw inspiration from the human rights, environment, health, economic justice, anti racist, anti war and lesbian-gay movements. These approaches are not only inspiring, but also very relevant to the present legal and political situation of women in Muslim countries and communities. This is again as much linked to the Global Center's objective of advancing women's leadership by mobilizing globally as it is related to WLUMML's principle of working across differences — across ethnic or religious dichotomies, across cultural or class barriers.

The various components of the global women's movement have indeed developed and adopted countless strategies, adapted to the specific historical, political and social contexts they arose in. While selecting meaningful examples of struggles women have been engaged in all around the world over the last decades, we needed to keep a strong emphasis on the Muslim world.

Connecting past and present

Looking back at the roots of feminist activities in regions where Islam prevailed allowed us to maintain such a focus while at the same time establishing a link between pioneers and our contemporaries. Because mainstream history — everywhere — consistently fails to recognize women's agency and achievements, we had to bring back to life "our great ancestors." And acknowledge in the same process what those of us involved in the battle for equality in Muslim countries and communities owe to a feminist genealogy.

The sessions devoted to "Feminism and Feminists in the Muslim World" were to provide a glimpse of the diversity of the — past and present — issues women's rights advocates face and are organizing around. We also had to address the issue of "how to act now" — how to engage in strategy building work from where we stand at this moment in time.

Organizers therefore chose to privilege the network's history as a base for elaborating future strategies. To examine WLUMML's principles and strategies was also a way of acknowledging that WLUMML has made a significant contribution to the concepts of networking and internationalism in the women's movement. The panels and discussions in this area both reviewed different actions WLUMML has taken during its fifteen years of existence and considered potential new strategies.

To expand participants' understanding of the various realities of women from Muslim countries and communities, strategies from different regions represented within the network were shared. To complete the picture, we carefully chose strategies that have emerged in relation to a variety of situations and themes. In roundtables, discussions and working groups, these sessions built on participants' own experiences, allowing for brainstorming on the future alternatives open to the network. While insisting on the diversity within the Muslim world, facilitators underlined the role of specific (local) contexts in shaping adequate responses as well as the need to identify common goals and conceptual agendas.

Connecting women's struggles and human rights

An important aspect of the Institute was to present human rights as a conceptual framework that can advance women's rights and to provide participants with a better grasp of both human rights concepts and mechanisms. Crucially, we felt that we needed to stress the relationship between human rights and women's movements by examining how women's rights activists have used human rights tools and informed its discourse.

A main concern was to convey an understanding of human rights as an evolving concept. In order to correct the misconception that human rights principles are a-historical, we highlighted the efforts of women to redefine mainstream human rights discourse as well as its practice. We therefore looked at the strategies women's human rights advocates have employed to transform the human rights system into a positive tool that addresses and improves the reality of women's lives.

Acknowledging women's attempts to expand the scope of human rights, however, should not lead to overlooking the work undertaken by other social actors. Historically, a number of progressive groups have drawn attention to the need to expand human rights mechanisms and called for improvements. From the civil rights movement in the USA to the anti-dictatorship movements in Latin America and Africa, many have appropriated and enriched the human rights framework. Acknowledging these struggles also allowed them to be linked to current and ongoing initiatives on human rights, such as the recent contributions to the issue of the rights of sexual minorities, the current advances in socio-economic rights, the call to protect human rights defenders worldwide or the recognition that the rights of the disabled are human rights.

Highlighting the emerging trends and contentious debates in the human rights field allowed us to show concretely that human rights practices and concepts are always evolving.

Finally, for participants to benefit concretely from the human rights component of the program, a practical overview of international human rights instruments was necessary. We needed to demystify the United Nations system and render it accessible in order for more women to take advantage of its provisions. Building on the expertise of participants who had worked with the human rights system and looking at the ways women around the world have been trying to enforce existing legislation, both locally and globally, provided inspiration to the group in strategy building sessions.

While the Institutes devoted several sessions to the human rights framework, organizers were careful not to present it as a panacea for every situation. Instead, the human rights approach was seen as a powerful tool available for women to use according to their specific needs and contexts.

Planning Process

Planning team

An early concern was to ensure the participation of individuals who could contribute to the planning of the Institutes. In addition to the initiators of the project — Mariémé Hélie Lucas, founder and international coordinator of the WLUML network, and Charlotte Bunch, executive director of the Global Center, the Institute coordinator contacted a number of key persons in the network, who agreed to take part in various planning meetings. Given that they were dispersed on four continents, opportunities for face-to-face interaction were mostly limited to encounters in places that planning team members had already arranged to visit on other business.

In order to establish regular contact the Institute coordinator set up an ongoing email discussion, where urgent conceptual and logistical issues could be addressed. Although the electronic format could not substitute for meetings in person, this formula proved effective for gathering suggestions and outlining initial plans.

For the second Institute, the team included all the WLUML individuals and Global Center staff members who had been involved the previous year — in order to build on their expertise. In addition, several of the 1998 participants were active in the preparatory process so we could incorporate perspectives and inputs from both organizers and participants. The 1999 planning team included a number of women based in the USA, Pakistan, France and Nigeria who contributed to this collective process through email.

Host groups: WWHR, BAOBAB

The location of the 1998 Institute was explored with various WLUML teams. Because of both availability and competence of the staff, Istanbul, Turkey, was the selected location for the first Institute. The group associated with WLUML in Istanbul, Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR), was set up in 1993 as a coordination focal point for the "Women and Law in the Muslim World" (W&L) program in the Turkish region. It later evolved into a research and outreach organization devoted to women's human rights in Turkey and internationally. Its coordinators, Pinar and Ipek Ilkcaracan, and other members of the team in Istanbul have designed, initiated and carried out research and data analysis as part of the W&L collective project and are now implementing its outreach programs in various regions of Turkey. The WWHR team had also shown its organizational capacities by organizing an international seminar in October 1996. Following several informal meetings with the Institute's planning team throughout 1997, it was decided that WWHR would work closely with the Institute coordinator and assist with logistics and on-site preparation for the September 1998 Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institute. The Institute coordinator moved to Turkey in late August 1998 for the final stage of the Institute preparation. The same pattern was kept in 1999 when the Institute coordinator moved to Nigeria.

In 1999 the organizers welcomed the offer of the organization BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights to host the second Institute in Lagos. BAOBAB has been involved since 1993 in the WLUML W&L Nigeria project and was formally established in 1996 as an organization focusing on women's legal rights issues under customary, statutory and religious laws in Nigeria. Since then, BAOBAB has become the regional coordination/focal point of WLUML for the Africa and Middle East region. BAOBAB also had the organizational base to undertake the challenge of hosting a two-week long international event. In addition to providing on-site and logistical support coordination, BAOBAB's founding director, Ayesha Imam, was part of the planning team for both Institutes.

Selection of participants

The goal was to strengthen the capacity of around 20 to 24 women at each Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institute. The selection of participants — for which WLUML was responsible — reflected two specific concerns. First, the network needed to ensure the regional and cultural diversity of the participants. Second, as in the Global Center's Women's Global Leadership Institutes, the capacity of these young women leaders to "bring home" the knowledge gained at the Institutes was also seen as crucial. Thus, participants were mostly to be chosen from among already experienced networkers linked to the network. While these essential criteria remained the same for both Institutes some changes were introduced in the selection process.

In 1998, in order to identify potential participants, WLUML started a preliminary discussion with key persons in the network, especially those who had taken major responsibilities in the

recent international cross cultural research/action W&L collective project.³ Some young leaders had already emerged through the W&L program, as national coordinators of W&L projects, and those leading W&L research and outreach. Many W&L national coordinators and team members had been sent outside their countries, to trainings — such as the Global Center’s Institutes, to international feminist conferences, and to the NGO fora and UN world conferences. These were the most likely participants to be involved in the Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes.

After internal consultation within WLUML, it was decided to choose two participants from about ten different African and Asian countries. Thus, for the first Institute, twenty-one women were nominated, who had undertaken network responsibilities at the local and regional levels. Their level of knowledge of and participation within the network was relatively homogenous — even though their background experiences and personal expertise were quite diverse.

A significant change introduced in 1999 in relation to the selection of participants was to require each potential participant to apply as an expression of their commitment. Once again, groups that are major players within the WLUML network were asked to propose individuals who they felt would benefit most from attending the Institute. This time, however, the focus was slightly different. We wished to expand or renew WLUML contacts

- (a) in regions where women have organized and expressed the need to make links with activists abroad because of changing political and social contexts (e.g. South Africa where the codification of Muslim marriages is hotly debated); and
- (b) with people who have not necessarily been heavily involved in the network’s recent activities but who expressed an interest in becoming more connected to WLUML.

Some fifty women from various regions of the Muslim world were sent application forms (instead of the nomination process adopted in 1998) and around forty completed applications were returned. The information received included details of the applicants’ work focus, their reasons for wanting to participate in the Institute, and the skills they wished to gain and exchange with other activists. Twenty participants were selected.

Although time consuming, especially the ongoing consultation with regional advisors, this more formal selection permitted a more informed choice. Also, the information gathered through this process was valuable in shaping the 1999 program. In particular it helped to better incorporate the participants’ needs into the second Institute’s agenda. Indeed, their needs were slightly different from those who attended the 1998 Institute. The women selected in 1999 were less directly connected to WLUML and, as a whole, were less exposed to global issues. Although all were very actively involved in their local contexts, comparatively fewer had experience at the global level.

Another difference between the first and second group of participants is linked to a more general issue: the fact that non-English speakers are too often excluded from both global feminist conferences and NGO participation in UN events. In an effort to address this

³ Launched by WLUML in 1991, the Women and Law program aims to “document existing customary practices, research legal trends, and unravel the linkages between customs, laws and politics from the perspectives of women’s lives.” The international program — carried out in about 15 countries — was also “designed to gather and share through strengthened linkages, the various strategies used by individuals and groups to increase women’s rights and space through legal cases, individual action or social movements.” (Shaheed, Akbar Warraich, Balchin and al., *Shaping Women’s Lives — Laws, Practices and Strategies in Pakistan*, Lahore: Shirkat Gah, 1998, p. xiii–introduction.)

problem, the Institutes organizers tried to involve committed activists who don't speak English. The most immediate need, given WLUML contacts in French-speaking Africa, was for translation into French. Although our efforts were not as successful as we had hoped we provided effective translation at the 1999 Institute, thus ensuring the participation of women from Mali and Senegal.

For the second Institute, the planning team reflected on what had made the first Institute a success. For example, as in 1998, several 1999 participants belonged to the same organizations. This choice reflected the organizers' awareness that "pairing" participants enhances their ability to implement the knowledge gathered at the Institute once back home. Ensuring peer support helps women to assist other individuals or women's groups to take a leadership role in their communities. Such a concern appeared even more crucial in the second Institute as participants generally had less of a long-term involvement with the network.

Another element of success in 1998 was the diversity among the participants and resource persons: a total of 11 countries were represented. The organizing team is convinced that this diversity provided an opportunity for all involved to access a rich pool of knowledge. It also felt crucial to try to recreate such variety in the second Institute. When choosing the participants of the 1999 Institute, organizers were therefore careful to again bring together a group of women from Muslim countries and communities that could highlight the range of activities undertaken by the feminist movement. At both Institutes, participants' backgrounds reflected the multiplicity of their experiences in terms of the focus of their work, the types of initiatives they were pursuing locally and the strategies they use.

Resource people

Our effort to invite participants involved in a range of activities was echoed by the choice of resource persons. Indeed, the organizers themselves brought a wealth of experience. But we also needed to go beyond the relative homogeneity of the group in terms of its focus on Muslim countries and communities.

Although WLUML's goal is to bring together women who have in common the fact that they live under 'Muslim laws', the network never intended to be a ghetto. On the contrary, the rise of fundamentalism in many Muslim countries and communities and around the world makes it increasingly clear that being isolated within one's national or communal context is detrimental to women's rights. WLUML and the Global Center are both committed to networking within one's own region, within one's own community, but also with like-minded groups elsewhere.

Therefore, the organizers deliberately chose as resource persons women who could and would bring in experiences from outside the Muslim world. Furthermore, to show concretely the strength of the global women's movements we selected resource persons to be as diverse as possible — both in terms of region and expertise. They brought a vision that highlighted the diversity of experiences, viewpoints and strategies of women committed to women's human rights around the world.

While WLUML looks at differences within the Muslim world, one of the strengths of the network is to build upon the similarities between the situations of networkers, derived from the common reference to Islam. In order to facilitate a greater awareness of the commonalities that women from Muslim countries and communities also share with women from other contexts, the resource persons invited to Istanbul and Lagos came from various continents: Latin America, Asia, the USA and Africa/African diaspora. This attempt was intended to be an eye-opener to others' realities and to potential for alliances.

It was also hoped that the 1998 resource people would be able to participate in the second Institute, taking advantage of their familiarity with both the WLUML network and the specific goals and format of the Institutes. Unfortunately, existing work commitments meant that not all were available to join us two years in a row.

Outside resource persons (for biographical profiles, see Annex 7) were asked to join the group several days prior to their own sessions to allow them to get a sense of the group and adapt their presentations accordingly. This also presented an opportunity for participants to discuss specific concerns more informally outside of the scheduled sessions. Such a format was well received by the group who often found that the experiences brought by resource persons were inspiring. Participants — especially those who usually do not have much chance to interact with activists from other regions — could better grasp the double and inter-related need for specific regional or thematic networks focusing on one's specific problems and the need to link one's specific work to the global women's movement. Our hope is that the Institutes helped insure that new ideas, models and comparisons brought by resource persons from different social movements, will be built into the network's future plans, activities and strategies.

In keeping with the previous Global Center Institutes and WLUML internal meetings, participants also functioned as resource persons for each other. In addition to the valuable exchange taking place independently of the formal agenda — an opportunity for sharing which must not be overlooked — participants were able to input in group discussions throughout the Institutes. A number of them were also asked to bring their experience into specific sessions (such as the ones related to fundamentalisms, CEDAW shadow reporting, etc.).

Overview of the Institutes

We highlighted earlier what main concepts guided the design of the Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes' program. In both Institutes, the chosen themes remained: feminist organizing in Muslim countries and communities; women's human rights, global solidarity and networking; and leadership and organizational skills. Within this framework the planning team tried to incorporate the issues prioritized in the latest WLUML Plan of Action (1997) more specifically: sexuality, fundamentalisms, and militarization.

While the focus of the 1998 and 1999 agenda remained similar, the second Institute was partly based on feedback from 1998 participants. The Institute coordinator summarized, in a lengthy document, the participants' written evaluations. This review process helped the planning team to evaluate how to benefit from the lessons of the first Institute in shaping the second one. Also taking into account the differences between the two groups of participants, we introduced changes at the level of both schedule and content (see Institutes agendas, Annexes 3 & 4).

A major change in the schedule was made in relation to the human rights component, which in 1998 constituted the initial phase of the program. In 1999 it was felt that participants needed to explore their own history before focusing on human rights tools. The sessions regarding human rights and international mechanisms were therefore scheduled during the second week.

In terms of content, we built on the sessions which were best received in 1998, but also updated the specifics of the first Institute themes in several areas. More specifically, the organizers felt they should:

- ❖ strengthen the session related to the history of the network in order to adjust to an audience which was less involved with WLUML,

- ❖ expand on the work prepared by some of the 1998 participants regarding the “feminist ancestors” they had identified in their own contexts, especially the examples provided by Asma’u Joda from Nigeria and Isatou Touray from the Gambia,
- ❖ propose a less theoretical approach to leadership and organizational skills and offer more practical skills workshops,
- ❖ enhance the purpose of meetings with local women’s groups. We wished to take advantage of on-site resources in order to expose participants to current debates and issues within the host country; and, also, to facilitate the interaction of local allies with an international group of activists,
- ❖ highlight how global trends (such as fundamentalisms or economic globalization) affect our contexts and our work,
- ❖ include issues which have arisen recently — in particular the negative trend of governments attempting to control NGOs, as in countries such as Pakistan, Palestine or Egypt where, over the last year, new laws have been passed or are under discussion which try to limit NGOs’ autonomy.

Participants

Forty-one participants attended the Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes (there were twenty-one participants in 1998 and twenty in 1999; for a list of participants and biographical information, see Annexes 5 & 6). They represented twenty different countries in total, more specifically:

Afghanistan, India, Palestine/Israel, Algeria, Iran, Senegal, Bangladesh, Malaysia, South Africa, Cameroon, Mali, Sri Lanka, Canada, Nigeria, Sudan, France, Pakistan, Turkey, The Gambia and Palestine

These women experience very diverse situations at home. Some live in a self-proclaimed 'Islamic' state, others in a secular context, or else in a nation where the state religion is not Islam. Some are part of the Muslim majority in their country (e.g. Pakistan, Malaysia or Algeria), others belong to an ethnic and cultural Muslim minority (e.g. South Africa, India or the Palestinian community in Israel). Some are non-Muslims in places increasingly affected by religious-political forces. In other words, the Institutes brought together women who, regardless of their specific location and personal beliefs, are all "women living under Muslim laws."

The fact that participants' social and political circumstances were so different could only enrich our debates. As the network witnessed on many occasions — and purposely encouraged — such diversity concretely informs how "Muslim laws" affect women in various ways, depending on which religious interpretation prevails.

Participants' experiences and fields of activism also constituted a rich pool of knowledge. They were active in issues ranging from domestic violence, to women's political participation to female genital mutilation, and were involved in various activities such as media/radio programs, gender training, etc. They were drawn from many fields — grass root activists, lawyers, university lecturers, researchers, journalists, etc.

In order for all involved to appreciate the heterogeneity within the group, it felt appropriate to devote substantial time to participants' (and resource persons') introductions. This was also meant to provide space in the Institutes for personal bonds to develop. Throughout the first week, daily "Getting-to-know-you" sessions gave each individual a chance to introduce herself to the others. A set of questions served as guidelines:

- ❖ How did you first get involved in women's issues/women's struggles?
- ❖ What was the political context in which you got involved?
- ❖ What challenges do you face in your activism now?

It is difficult to give here a true flavor of all the stories we heard and especially to convey the often touching anecdotes that we shared. They, however, provided a background that helped reveal both the similarities and the differences among us. Despite the singularity of each story there were, overall, recurrent themes — particularly in terms of the constraints women had to overcome.

For example, the pain to be born a girl in a context that only values male children could still be felt by many. The issue of formal education was another area that had been crucial to most women present at the Institutes. Because schooling was seen as key for individual growth, it was one where determination had played a great role at an early age. While access to education could be taken for granted by some, there were tales of struggles — such as the one from a Nigerian participant who as a seven-year old lobbied her teacher to let her attend school against her parents' will. Conflicts occurring within the family or the

larger community had taken many forms but their outcomes often testified to the strong will to become one's self.

In spite of varied political and historical backgrounds, the personal dimensions of the group's political involvement also reflected similar journeys. The circumstances in which our activism grew were often connected to progressive struggles that did not have a feminist agenda nor even necessarily a women focus. Commitment to women's rights was more likely to have arisen in the context of national liberation, opposition to military dictatorship, or when one was involved in the labor or the student movements. In the course of time, an awareness came — sometimes prompted by a disillusion with existing alternatives, whether the political parties or trade unions many had been associated with — of the need to truly address women's specific concerns.

Hence, participants becoming women's rights activists was often due to previous experiences, both positive and negative, with other social movements.

The commitment to women's equality brought its share of challenges — not unlike the ones faced by feminists from outside the Muslim world: difficulties in balancing personal life and political work, confronting the backlash in our communities, dealing with the issue of hierarchy and power sharing within our own organizations, securing enough funding to go forward.

Overall, participants felt that the "Getting-to-know-you" sessions offered a valuable space to share both our personal and political experiences: while one woman stressed that "it helped us respect and value different identities and get so close to one another," another pointed out that "it was not only interesting, but inspiring and motivating as it reaffirmed the mutuality of goals and struggles."

Women Living Under Muslim Laws International Solidarity Network's History and Principles

The presentations by Mariémé Hélie Lucas from Algeria and Farida Shaheed from Pakistan highlighted WLUML key strategic and conceptual principles. An analysis of the name of the network — Women Living Under Muslim Laws — provided an opportunity to share two important notions. Panelists first helped clarify the distinction between 'Muslim' and 'Islam.'

Ayesha Imam from Nigeria pointed out that there is often a "conflation between 'Islam' and 'Muslim.' Islam is the religion or faith, while Muslims are those who believe in Islam and attempt to practice it. Islam is an issue of theology. However, what Muslims (human fallible people) make of Islam is an arena open to social scientific inquiry."⁴ The network is concerned with Muslim laws rather than Islam: it does not focus on religion itself, but on the concrete realities resulting from different interpretations of religious texts.

Second, the network is primarily concerned with the effects of Muslim laws on women — including, but not exclusively Muslim women. In other words, WLUML addresses itself to all women affected by Muslim laws regardless of their individual identity or collective circumstances.

In order to provide a historical basis of WLUML development over the last 15 years, network founders addressed a number of specific questions, initially formulated as:

- ❖ Under which circumstances did the network emerged?

⁴ Ayesha Imam, "The Muslim Religious Right ('Fundamentalists') and Sexuality," WLUML Dossier 17, June 1997, p. 7.

- ❖ How did the network evolve from an emergency Action Committee of Women Living Under Muslim Laws into the present network?
- ❖ Along which “lines” did WLUMML grow? Which ones were predictable and planned? Which ones were a result of adaptation to unforeseen circumstances?

This introductory overview was designed to highlight WLUMML’s emergence from a global women’s movement — for example the very fact that the founders took advantage of an international women’s gathering (the Health and Reproductive Rights conference held in Amsterdam, Netherlands in 1984) to initiate their first common actions. Far from being incidental, this course of events needed to be acknowledged as it reflects the network’s firm belief that women activists can find — and should seek whenever possible — support outside of the so-called “natural” boundaries of their own communities.

Networking locally and globally

WLUMML works to empower women in Muslim countries and communities to exercise their human rights by creating linkages both among women from the vastly different Muslim contexts that exist throughout the world as well as between women from Muslim communities and the broader international human rights, women’s rights, and feminist movements. Indeed the network also encourages women to challenge the boundaries that exist within their own contexts; especially in countries, such as Sri Lanka, India or Pakistan, where different religious and ethnic groups have unequal access to power. For example, a meaningful campaign was launched by WLUMML in 1994/1995 following the appeal by Pakistani feminists and human rights activists from the dominant Muslim community to support their fellow Christians accused of blasphemy and whose cases were brought before the Lahore High Court.

Discussions within the group evoked the real challenge this approach represents in many of our contexts. It was pointed out that in some instances the space available to initiate or sustain such links has been suppressed. Indeed, all participants were well aware that when they connect across narrowly defined lines of identity, they are often accused of betraying their “real” community, ethnic group, nation or religion. Nevertheless, to go beyond imposed — or even internalized — dichotomies, to challenge identity politics is beneficial to women from Muslim countries and communities as well as to their allies in the local and the broader women’s movement.

This standpoint is indeed an effective strategic approach, as a number of international campaigns launched by the network have proved successful thanks to the solidarity originating from both inside and outside the Muslim world. But it is also a political commitment at a time when fundamentalist discourses construct and promote a vision of the world divided between “those who belong” and the “Others.” (Calls for the “community of Muslims” to mobilize against “the West” find an equivalent in the West in the idea of the “free world” versus “the enemies of progress.”) WLUMML does not believe in such dichotomies — and rather builds bridges with like-minded human rights defenders across the world. As women activists we need to work for our global interests instead of letting sectarian categorizations blur the potential for alliances. The network’s commitment to international solidarity is finally a recognition that women’s rights are violated everywhere — under different disguises and through various means — and of the fact that when harm is inflicted upon specific individuals or groups, the effects are seen throughout the world community. Hence the need is to strengthen the interconnectivity of the various components of the women’s movement.

Plurality and autonomy

One of the key objectives of the network is to exchange information regarding the wide range of laws and customary practices, all purporting to be “Islamic,” which actually govern the lives of women in Muslim countries and communities. The purpose is to enable women to break their isolation and to witness the many possible ways that women live and struggle in Muslim societies throughout the world. In doing so, WLUML enhances women’s ability to resist and challenge the norms imposed on them in the name of religion, ethnicity and culture, and thus increase their ability to control and change their lives.

As a network, WLUML emphasizes links and communication among diverse individuals and organizations working to enhance the human rights of women, rather than imposing a particular ideology, a single set of political objectives, a “proper” strategy or a precise form of organization. WLUML aims at providing access to a wide range of standpoints therefore allowing women in each part of the Muslim world to define their priorities and work out the strategies they feel are the most appropriate to their own situations.

In their efforts to bring women’s equality forward women are engaged in a whole spectrum of different activities, many of which can be a source of inspiration for others. From this reality derives WLUML’s specific approach to networking. The key concepts here are pluralism and complementarity. The network forges a fluid connection with its allies: the links that emerge can be either one-time events or long term as WLUML believes in lending support when needed and not in claiming a political territory.

Recognizing differences, building on commonalities

The emphasis on the autonomy of individuals and/or groups linked to WLUML is also a principle that derives from an acknowledgment of the diversities within the Muslim world. WLUML has sought to show that there is no monolithic version of Islam but that its practices vary from region to region. This has been a core issue around which the network has defined itself and built its strategies. WLUML challenges the concept of an homogenous Muslim world as a “deliberate myth promoted by vested interests from within Muslim communities as well as from outside.”⁵

Far from being innocent, this myth limits women’s and people’s ability to evaluate what pertains to customs, law and religion and therefore undermines their potential to assert their rights. Increasingly, defining collective identities based on narrow, a-historical views of religion, culture or ethnicity is used as a divisive political tool to legitimize attacks on human rights and various expressions of civil society. Women, human rights defenders and other progressive groups are the most likely targets. While this trend is seen in various contexts, in Muslim countries and communities the role of women is constructed as essential to the definition of “Muslimness,” making it even more difficult for women to challenge these assertions in isolation.

In the network, recognizing — and valuing — diversity is translated into concrete terms in the fact that WLUML brings together women who want to work from within the framework of religion as well as others who adopt a secular approach, women living in Muslim societies with a faith other than Islam as well as non Muslim women directly affected by Muslim laws through their children or women from migrant Muslim minorities. While it makes the reality of networking much more complex and challenging, its inclusivity is definitely a strength of the network.

While respecting differences WLUML is careful not to essentialize them, thus avoiding what a number of extreme right or politico-religious movements — such as White supremacists as well as Nation of Islam in the USA, various racist political parties in Europe, the Hindutva in

⁵ Women Living Under Muslim Laws, Plan of Action–Dhaka 1997, 1999, p. 5.

India, etc. — do to exclude the “Others.” At the same time, the network recognizes, and builds upon, the commonalities that exist among women from Muslim countries and communities. The presentations at the Institutes conveyed one of WLUMML’s strong convictions — clearly articulated in the latest Plan of Action (Dhaka, 1997): “We draw inspiration from each other to meet the challenges [we face] since it is clear that despite the differences that distinguish our lives, inform our points of view, and shape our strategies, we do share a common goal and can lend strength to each other through networking.”

Solidarity and collective efforts

One of the strengths of the network is its ability to identify and articulate issues of common concerns. In its efforts to deal with such issues, WLUMML has undertaken a series of collective projects in the past 15 years: the Exchange Program in 1988 (held with the help of ISIS-WICCE in Geneva), the Qur’anic Interpretations by Women meeting in 1990, the Women and Law in the Muslim World Program from 1993 till 1999. The Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes is the latest of those collective projects.

Concretely, the evolving principles which guide WLUMML’s work, as well as the activities and projects undertaken by the network, have been articulated through a series of Plans of Action (1986, 1990, 1997.) The process of developing the Plans of Action provide a platform for active networkers to share experiences in their collective and personal lives; to discuss the socio-political trends affecting them in each of their particular contexts; to identify the most pressing issues and how the network can best address them; to define and articulate common strategies.

The decisions regarding WLUMML priority activities as a network are taken collectively according to the specific needs expressed by the active networkers — that is the individuals actively involved in the network on a regular basis.

In closing this overview of WLUMML’s principles, panelists re-emphasized the need for international solidarity and insisted on the essential differences between real expressions of solidarity — which is necessarily empowering for all involved — and the concept of “aid.” Before participants broke into small groups to discuss which of the network’s principles felt most relevant to or have the most impact on their local work, Ayesha Imam made a similar point by sharing a short poem:

“If you’ve come to help me,
You are wasting your time — and mine.
If you come because your liberation is linked to mine,
Then let’s join hands and start working together.”

History of Feminism and Feminists in the Muslim World: Reclaiming our Ancestors

It is the experience of the network that women in Muslim countries and communities struggle everywhere and in all areas of life, just as other women do around the world. Many women connected to WLUMML felt there was a need to communicate this knowledge in a more systematic way. Feminism in the Muslim world is a reality, which can be reclaimed both historically and currently, worldwide as well as locally, universally and in terms of specific areas of activities.

However, historical research focusing on the lives, experiences and roles of early feminists from Muslim countries and communities has not yet been carried out on a large scale. There are obvious political reasons for such a lack of recognition. The relatively poor documentation that remains also testifies to the fact that women are purposefully erased from mainstream history. Therefore, the Institutes devoted a key session to the basic

history of feminism in the Muslim world. While several well-known researchers — such as Margot Badran in Egypt, Fatima Mernissi in Morocco or Kumari Jayawardena in Sri Lanka — have documented a few individual cases, our contribution hoped to add an international dimension to these previous efforts. We believe that a compilation of feminist history from various Muslim countries and communities, especially if conceived as a bridge towards contemporary feminisms, can have a far-reaching impact on how young women perceive feminism.

To counter the image of the feminist movement as a 'western' imported ideology, participants in the first Institute were asked to bring stories of women/feminists from the past in their countries. At the second Institute, we presented examples of feminist figures from Muslim countries and communities in a "light and sound show" format.⁶ We also provided a resource package with extensive 'coverage' of the issue. Both historical and contemporary figures were highlighted, ranging from the 8th to the mid 20th century. Reclaiming this history, its actresses and landmarks, required collecting materials regarding well-known heroines as well as more humble women. The session itself not only provided a background history, but also revealed linkages with current areas of activism in Muslim countries and communities around the world.

The reactions from participants testify to their astonishment to "discover" women's rights heroines from their own regions who had been invisible before. The group as a whole felt empowered to be able to relate to powerful female figures and to identify potential role models who have emerged from their own cultures. Furthermore, participants felt they could trace the roots of their own activism, which they now perceived as connected to the efforts made by women in other centuries. For example, Louisa Ait-Hamou from Algeria, who initially felt she "did not believe in such an exercise," later told the group that "I have just been re-connected with my history."

The presentation was organized around three main themes. Firstly, it highlighted how individual women had struggled to establish their rights in marriage: by refusing to conform and marry to drafting their own marriage contracts, securing specific demands or filing for divorce in a context where oral repudiation (talak⁷) may have been the rule. Then came examples of women who engaged in cultural and intellectual activities and the struggles this entailed: women who managed to fulfill their desire to access education (at a time where it was a male and elitist privilege) and subsequently became teachers, celebrated poets or famous theologians. The last part focused on the issue of solidarity: women who had taken a stand on behalf of others or who made links with like-minded women's rights advocates in other regions.

Farida Shaheed, who took primary responsibility for the research and conceptualized the session, made three remarks regarding the selection of relevant "cases." First, she acknowledged that a large proportion of the women included in the presentation were from South Asia and the Middle East since that was the material she found most accessible. She had also chosen to include male voices that had promoted women's rights to show that some men had supported feminism in the past. Finally, she remarked that while there were many women who took individual action and struggled throughout history, it was less easy to find traces of a collective movement.

⁶ Slides of visual documents (drawings or portraits of women, etc.) accompanied the voices of several speakers. In turn, they told about the lives and deeds of dozens of early advocates of women's rights.

⁷ Talak refers to the male unilateral right to initiate divorce granted to men in a number of Muslim countries and communities.

There are, however, striking examples, such as the ribats, which flourished between the 11th and the 15th centuries from Syria to Egypt. It was often well-off women who set up ribats, in many cases appointing women administrators. While a number of people compare them to convents, this is inaccurate: ribats did provide a space for women scholars, but they were also open to old women, widows and single women. They were a sanctuary for women without any means of support and those abandoned by their husbands. Today, ribats would be called shelters. One of the most famous ribats was set up in Irak in 1285 in honor of Zainab bint Abu'l Barakat. Known as Al-Baghdadia, Zainab was a distinguished and well-known scholar. The ribat was active for more than 150 years.

Particularly inspiring, in terms of early networking, were the examples that highlighted international linkages. These began developing in the 19th century and were often connected to political movements of emancipation that arose in the broader context of anti-colonial or nationalist struggles.

Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947) was one such nationalist and feminist leader, whose activism grew out of her involvement in Egypt's independence struggle. She publicly unveiled in Cairo after attending a women's meeting in Rome in 1923, the same year she founded the Egyptian Feminist Union, among other women's organizations. A member of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, she became its vice-president in 1935 and pursued her career as an international feminist, giving speeches in Egypt, the Arab East, Turkey and Europe.

Several presentations demonstrated real solidarity and connections across cultures and continents. For example, Raden Adjeng Kartini (1879-1904), an upper class Javanese woman, advocated for women's rights and condemned the practices of polygamy, seclusion and forced marriage. She was critical of both the colonial rule and the class privileges of the Javanese aristocracy. Kartini communicated with and inspired radical Dutch feminists and socialists, even translating feminist literature from English into local languages. She developed links with Indian feminists as well. Because she perceived education as a liberating force for Indonesian women, she set up a girls school in 1904, the year she died in child birth.

Indeed, other examples could be highlighted, such as the connections between Arab and European feminists, or the fact that links with Egypt were most important to Palestinian women.

We needed to acknowledge also the support given by some European and American women to South Asian women in the 19th & 20th century. Several women actually went to India and joined the movement there — a fact brought to light by Kumari Jayawardena, who wrote of the "revelation" that came with unveiling the "presence in national liberation movements of a strong current of thought on women's rights and the role played by many foreign women in promoting political reform and social change."

One such woman was Canadian born Mary Rutnam (1873-1962) who arrived in Sri Lanka in 1896, having been recruited by Christian missionaries to work in the newly founded women's hospitals. A doctor, Rutnam became a "national figure as a proponent of social reform, health reform, health education, family planning, sex education and women's political rights."⁸ In 1909, she made the first public reference to women's rights in Sri Lanka. With a vision "that cut across race, religion and caste and operated in the local languages," Rutnam was an advocate of women's rights politically and became the first woman elected at the Colombo Municipal Council in 1937. She worked to develop solidarity between poor

⁸ Kumari Jayawardena, *Dr. Mary Rutnam, a Canadian Pioneer for Women's Rights in Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1993, p. 2.

women in rural areas and their more privileged urban counterparts and to strengthen links with the wider women's movement (she was instrumental in having Sri Lanka — the first Asian country to do so — host a Association of Country Women of the World (ACWW) meeting in 1958, which brought more than 500 delegates from 40 different countries).

Following the presentation on Reclaiming Feminist S/Heroes, the group discussed how feminists are labeled in their own contexts. In 1998, Isatou Touray from the Gambia formulated a question that had relevance for many: "'Feminism' is a highly polluted word — but who pollutes it?" Discussions followed on what are the local terms for feminism, what — often negative — values they carry and how to reclaim these in a positive sense.

In an effort to connect past and present struggles, participants at the second Institute, spent time exchanging stories about the women who had inspired them to join the feminist movement. Some became active as a reaction to witnessing close relatives being abused, silenced or ostracized in their communities — such as the example of a mother who had struggled through experiences of widowhood, polygamy, domestic violence or immigration. Others were inspired by a particularly strong figure they felt connected with in their childhood: a grand mother, a teacher, a nanny who may have encouraged them when they "behaved like a boy," a mother who conveyed her basic philosophy: "You don't have to be loud, you don't have to call for a lot of attention — you just have to know what you stand for." A number in the group also acknowledged the influence of an unknown woman about whom they heard or whose books they came across. Charmaine Pereira for example celebrated the "power of imagination of writers" stating that even though novels are not necessarily based on real life, for her "it was the word which gave me the inspiration."

Human Rights Framework and International Mechanisms

The inclusion of human rights concepts and mechanisms as a major theme of the Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes was a direct result of the success of similar sessions by the Global Center in the past. Former participants in the Women's Global Leadership Institutes have taken advantage of the human rights training provided by the Global Center to enhance their lobbying skills at the national level and/or to move their concerns into the international human rights advocacy arena. We decided not only to introduce the basic framework of human rights, but also to explore the history of human rights and its application nationally and regionally as well as internationally. Finally, the Institutes provided practical insight by a) exploring how to apply human rights principles in selected areas of concern, specifically in the fields of women's health and violence against women, and b) focusing on the issue of documentation of human rights violations.

Women's Rights as Human Rights: An Overview

Charlotte Bunch from the USA began her presentation by reminding the group about the principles that lie at the core of human rights: inalienability, universality, indivisibility and interconnectedness. She stressed the potential of using a human rights approach in all emancipatory movements, stating that "these are efforts to find common, ethical standards. The human rights language is very powerful, it spells out what people believe are the common points that underline our humanity."

Providing a brief history of human rights, she pointed out that "human rights evolve as the human community grows." The human rights framework is increasingly used by women's rights advocates worldwide to provide an effective context for demanding state accountability for the violations women experience. The decade of the 90's has seen women making tremendous advances in transforming the human rights framework so it can be used to address more fully the range of abuses that women experience. However, despite the fact that women have taken the lead, together with other progressive movements around the

world, in defining and advancing the human rights agenda, gender-related violations still receive comparatively little attention within the mainstream human rights organizations.

This relative invisibility of abuses perpetrated against women is the result of at least two factors. First, the legacy of a priority given to civil and political rights over social and economic rights. Even though women experience numerous civil violations in laws and customary practices that discriminate against women throughout the world, such abuses are often dismissed as trivial and outside the realm of “serious” human rights. Second, the traditional focus on “public” violations by the state has added to the dismissal of violations against women that often occur in the “private” sphere as reflected for example in the reluctance of a number of states to take action against crimes committed within the so-called private sphere such as wife battering, forced marriage and so forth.

Women using and redefining human rights

While acknowledging the gaps between theory and practice, we felt it particularly important to insist on the evolving nature of human rights concepts and on the efforts of the global women’s movement to promote a gender-equality perspective. We documented women’s responses to gender-based discrimination and explored the multiple ways women activists in different contexts have challenged, and enriched, the mainstream human rights discourse. The resource persons were able to convey a sense of the historical and current struggles involved in the feminist reconceptualization of human rights. Examples of strategies that have emerged both from within and outside the Muslim world were used to help make the connection between seemingly unconnected efforts as well as to highlight the need for global solidarity and transnational activism.

For example, Roxanna Carrillo from Peru reminded us of the crucial role played by Latin American women in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) and their successful efforts, together with Eleanor Roosevelt, to introduce the notion of non-discrimination on the basis of sex in the final text. She also stressed the strong tradition of human rights activism among Latin American women. Referring to the pacifists in Colombia and the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Carrillo evoked figures such as Bolivian labor activist Domitilia Chuagare, Guatemalan indigenous rights leader Rigoberta Menchu, Peruvian leader Maria-Elena Moyano and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo — the human rights advocates who in the 1970’s called for accountability of the generals in Argentina’s dirty war.

Not only have women used the human rights framework to address a variety of issues in the past, but they are still engaged in an effort to broaden the scope of human rights. As part of the ongoing redefinition of human rights, we highlighted a number of new initiatives, such as the Women 2000 World March Against Violence and Poverty (to start on March 8, 2000), which is being sponsored by 3,400 organizations in 146 countries. Another example is the case brought by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, currently before the Organization of American States (OAS), which aims to hold the USA accountable for economic human rights abuses being caused by downsizing and welfare reforms — whereby women are most affected by increased unemployment and poverty.

Taking into consideration the achievements of human rights advocates over the past 50 years, participants felt they needed to share the difficulties they still face in terms of implementation of international standards. We discussed the fact that governments and governmental bodies are at times directly implicated in gross violations of women’s rights, either because they fail to protect their female citizens or specifically target women in their attempt to secure political power or even call for assaults on women. We noted that it has taken massive-scale crimes such as those which occurred in the former-Yugoslavia for the international community to recognize that forced impregnation is no longer a “side” consequence of conflict — some sort of “collateral damage” — but truly a systematic

strategy. But again, the classification of rape as a war crime has been primarily the result of sustained efforts from a global women's human rights movement. In other words, even though human rights bodies can provide tools and can be transformed in order to truly help eradicate gender-specific abuses, this process still requires long-term lobbying and strategizing.

Using the human rights framework — challenges and concerns

While examining the range of achievements of women's human rights advocacy, discussion also focused on some of the limitations linked to the use of human rights. The way Muslim contexts are constructed often adds a particular dimension to women's human rights issues. It was noted that when violations occur within the Muslim world, there is often a tendency either to justify those in the name of respect for cultural diversity or to demonize "Muslims." Mariémé Hélie Lucas pointed to the hypocrisy and double standards that sometimes, unfortunately, blind human rights opponents and proponents alike: many "would consider without a blink the amputation of a thief's hand as a barbarian act while gladly referring to the removal of a woman's clitoris as an — implicitly acceptable — expression of cultural tradition."

On the other hand, human rights are often criticized for being a hegemonic tool used by Western powers in an attempt to impose their values onto the rest of the world (a recent example is Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir calling for the redrafting of the UDHR "according to Asian values"). While panelists strongly denounced the selective morality of international bodies and superpowers when it comes to addressing human rights abuses perpetrated by their political allies, it was felt crucial to reaffirm the universality of human rights principles.

This is especially important as a number of countries in which Islam is the state religion have consistently refused to abide by human rights conventions in the name of 'culture' or religion. Various examples were cited which showed that invoking culture, religion and tradition often masks a lack of political will to bring about positive change. The group pointed out that even those countries which did sign, for example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) do not necessarily intend to comply with the treaty's provisions nor take responsibility for the necessary social and legal changes it calls for. Indeed, demanding state accountability is a core issue, which requires ongoing work.

Some participants also voiced their concern that adopting the human rights framework may cause feminism to lose its edge. One response was that if human rights were not such a powerful tool, most world leaders surely would not bother proclaiming their respect for human rights. The fact that even some of those who are guilty of human rights abuses still pretend to abide by international standards is in itself a proof of the radical potential of the human rights discourse.

Other responses highlighted more concretely what the global movement has gained by using human rights. Roxanna Carrillo stressed that "the use of human rights has given women a significant amount of power in the way women's issues are defined. The use of human rights concepts to articulate women's demands has transformed women's struggles from the concerns of a 'special interest group' into universal claims. In the process, we have moved from specificity to universality." She added that "articulating women's issues as human rights — and therefore as part of international law — has helped to add legal weight to women's claims and has allowed us to see women's issues and the realization of women's rights as legally enforceable."

Human rights can also offer benefits beyond legitimizing feminist demands and institutionalizing the processes of implementation of women's rights. For Farida Shaheed, it also facilitates networking: "human rights help make the link with other social movements (with children's rights, workers' rights and others) both nationally, in Pakistan, and internationally." In addition, Shaheed stressed the strategic importance of UN conference follow-up. She explained, for example, how recent preparatory meetings for the upcoming five year review of the Beijing Platform for Action provided a forum for activists to strategize at the regional level as well. For example, in the fall of 1999, the Asia-Pacific Forum brought together representatives of more than 300 NGOs. Participating organizations, Shaheed said, were able to exchange their perspectives on the gains made since the 1995 Beijing World Conference, the gaps that remain to be addressed and the challenges lying ahead. Participants also identified the commonalities they share in terms of the problems affecting their region: "structural adjustment programs, backlash against NGOs, the use of religion/culture and other forms of identity for political purposes, the lack of will of our governments and the issue of accountability of transnational corporations are problems which impact us all in the region." The Institute participants agreed that one of the remaining battles is to hold not just governments, but also non-state actors (such as multinational corporations, opposition forces, etc.) accountable for actions that violate human rights.

Such examples provided the basis for an exploration of how women from Muslim countries and communities can adapt and make use of the human rights framework locally, nationally, regionally, and at the international level — and thus corroborated the importance of the adoption of a human rights approach by feminists.

International mechanisms

Intense lobbying by women globally has led to the introduction of mechanisms at the UN level that specifically address women's human rights abuses. A review of existing processes and international tools available clearly revealed the advances women have made in this respect — especially since the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, when the UN officially recognized women's rights as human rights. Sunila Abeysekera from Sri Lanka talked about her experience as a feminist lobbying around the issues of human rights abuses in her country at the Commission on Human Rights. She also gave a clear overview of the mission of the Special Rapporteur Against Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences. She guided the group through the ways women activists can both support and have input into the Special Rapporteur's work.

In order to provide participants with practical knowledge they could use in their own work, we also built on the group's expertise. At both Institutes, women who had participated in the process of NGO alternative reporting to CEDAW (or "shadow reports") related their experiences. Their contributions focused mainly on the processes involved in the drafting of an NGO document, on the impact it had on their local work (including how to bring CEDAW provisions home) and on whether it had been a useful way to bring their concerns to the international arena. Although the ensuing discussion brought up the issue of backlash, many women insisted on the positive consequences of being involved in "shadow reporting."

For example, Ipek Ilkcaracan from Turkey remarked that her organization's involvement at the CEDAW Committee sessions in New York "contributed to improving our negotiating power for advocacy and lobbying back home. Our recommendations were integrated into the final report of the Commission for publication by the Ministry of Human Rights. Our outreach activities also benefited from using CEDAW: we designed a program focused on 'Legal Literacy and Human Rights Training for Women' which since 1998 has expanded through a collaboration with national social services — it is now being implemented by social service workers of Community Centers in five regions of Turkey."

At the second Institute, a whole day was devoted to CEDAW and the 5-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action (June 2000). The sessions, designed to bring together Institute participants and local Nigerian women's organizations, were successful as all involved exchanged accounts of strategies instigated to pressure states either to endorse or further implement CEDAW. Participants who worked on preparation of non governmental, shadow reports told about their experiences in Algeria, South Africa, Nigeria, Turkey and the Palestinian minority in Israel, hence ensuring that others in the group were exposed to different approaches.

Ensuing discussions on ratification of CEDAW also brought up a major issue of concern: the "reservations" that sometimes contradict the very spirit of the convention.⁹ To argue for the importance of internationally binding human rights treaties such as CEDAW as superseding national laws remains one of the main challenges facing women activists from Muslim countries and communities as well as the women's global movement as a whole. Several other major challenges were identified — such as the danger of cooptation of the human right discourse by extreme right political movements and the need to ensure non-state actors' accountability.

Using the human rights framework to address specific issues

In addition to debating the theoretical and practical implications of using the human rights system and exploring the issue of local implementation of CEDAW, the group focused on human rights strategy around specific issues. The Institute organizers identified a wide range of issues that would offer the group relevant case studies in terms of applying human rights to concrete situations, but we emphasized the themes of violence against women and health as specific examples of areas which human rights concepts and international mechanisms can be applied.

⁹ Ann Elizabeth Mayer points out that "it is permissible to ratify international treaties subject to reservations, but the reservations are not supposed to be incompatible with the object of the treaty or convention involved. (é) Although few Muslim countries have ratified CEDAW, among those that have, all have entered reservations to its substantive provisions, several on religious grounds. Bangladesh, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia have invoked 'Islam' as the reason for making reservations. (é) When in 1996, concerned countries wanted the Secretary General of the United Nations to survey the parties to CEDAW as to their respective views on what reservations would be incompatible with the object of the convention, the proposal was denounced by some delegations as being anti-Islamic or amounting to a Western attack on Third World countries. (é) Muslim countries asserted that the proposal of the CEDAW committee constituted religious intolerance and cultural imperialism. (é) Implicitly, the UN acquiesced to the cultural relativist position on women's rights in the Middle East, allowing parties to CEDAW to invoke Islam and their culture as the defense for their noncompliance with the terms of the convention. This was paradoxical, since CEDAW Article 5 calls on parties to 'modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.' Middle Eastern governments [have exploited] Western stereotypes of Islam. Western supporters of cultural relativist approaches seem disposed to believe that non-Western cultures are monolithic and immutable. In reality, intense conflicts and debates on rights issues rage within the Muslim countries from Africa to Asia, particularly regarding the rights of women." Ann Elizabeth Mayer, "Cultural Particularism as a Bar to Women's Rights: Reflections on the Middle Eastern Experience," WLUML Dossier 16, November 1996, pp. 21-32.

Violence against women as a human rights issue

Over the last decades, ongoing efforts by the global feminist movement have led to a number of steps being taken at the international level. For example in 1989, the CEDAW Committee issued Recommendation 19, which defined violence against women as a form of discrimination that seriously “inhibits women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedom on a basis of equality with men.”

More recently, the UN World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993 stated that gender-based violence is a human rights violation. Later that year the UN passed a Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. It serves as the outline of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women — a position created in 1994. In it violence against women is defined to include:

- ❖ Violence in the family (including domestic violence, traditional practices, infanticide, incest, etc.);
- ❖ Violence in the community (including rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, commercialized violence, labour exploitation, etc.);
- ❖ Violence by the State (including violence in detention and custody, as well as in situations of armed conflict and against refugee women).

Gladys Acosta from Peru began her presentation by stressing that “violence is not a ‘theme’ — it is not to be seen as one theme among the various ones the women’s human rights framework tries to address. In fact, violence against women appears everywhere: violence is at the heart of the lack of dignity women face.” Furthermore, violence against women “crosses national, class, racial, age, and ethnic lines. At the same time, it illustrates how these factors are intertwined with the subordination of women and it intersects with almost every other concern, such as militarism, racism, economic exploitation, the health crisis, etc.”¹⁰

Our discussions regarding the various forms violence takes in different contexts highlighted both the pervasive and systematic nature of the abuses women face. We discussed the question of asylum seekers and refugees: the group felt strongly about the need for governments to include violence against women, gender-based persecution and gender discrimination as a legitimate basis upon which to claim a well-founded fear of persecution, hence responding to victims’ legitimate claims for protection.

The examples provided by the group actually constituted an endless list of diverse, and sometimes extreme, human rights violations. While acknowledging cultural specifics, Charlotte Bunch pointed out the common nature of seemingly unrelated facts that occur throughout the world. Taking the control of women’s sexuality as an example, she made the link between the various types of abuses faced by women who are seen as ‘deviant’ in their societies. More specifically, she compared the so-called ‘honor crimes’ perpetrated against women by their families in the Middle East and Asia to the numerous cases of young lesbians forced by their families to undergo psychiatric “treatment” or incarcerated by them in mental hospitals in the USA.

At both Institutes, the participants highlighted a whole range of abuses they encounter in their own countries. One issue identified was trafficking: Caroline Brac de la Périerre from Algeria shared information about the abduction and sale of young, migrant women from

¹⁰ Center for Women’s Global Leadership, Women, Violence and Human Rights: 1991 Women’s Leadership Institute Report, New Brunswick, NJ, 1992, p. 8.

Maghreb for the purpose of marriage (the women's European nationality makes it possible for their husbands to immigrate.)

The question of bodily integrity was also debated. For example, Hajara Usman from Nigeria gave an overview of the dramatic physical and social consequences of widowhood practices. Others evoked issues of sterilization, incest, child marriages, compulsory virginity tests, enforced heterosexuality, sexual coercion within marriage, enforced pregnancy, 'honor' crimes (with its varied manifestations, e.g. acid throwing, stoning, etc.) A participant from Sudan explained how some women in her country deal with marital rape by using a provision in the shari'a that condemns "aggressive sex" and considers it as a ground for divorce.

The notion of freedom of movement was brought up as well, especially in relation to forced segregation, forced seclusion, control of mobility, imposition of dress code, etc. Aisha Gazdar from Pakistan referred to the impact of social pressure on women (such as public condemnation by community members, verbal abuse or threats by religious leaders) and connected its acceptance with wider issues linked to the culture of violence we can witness in our societies.

Apart from those violations, which dramatically enough occur in "normal" circumstances, the group also discussed how violence against women increases in situations of war and conflict. Several of the resource people and organizations are involved in the preparation of the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery, to be held in Tokyo in December 2000, and both WLUML and the Global Center have circulated information related to those issues within their networks. The group was therefore well aware of the conclusions of a recent international report¹¹ which points to the fact that "in recent years, mass rape of women during periods of internal strife or armed conflicts have been documented in war-torn countries around the world (...) Mass rapes and other sexual assaults have been reported in Bangladesh, Burundi, Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia and Uganda. More recently, about 20,000 women and young girls were raped in the first few months following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1992."

At the time of the Hague Appeal for Peace (May 11-15, 1999), 36 conflicts were taking place around the world. Indeed, because wars affect so many regions, some participants had first-hand accounts of similar systematic violence against women occurring in their own countries. In Algeria, for example, the rape and forced impregnation of women and adolescents girls by "fundamentalist" underground forces and armed groups reached such a level that the Islamic Council granted victims access to abortion, a service which is otherwise outlawed.

While the group shared various examples of violations of women's human rights in conflict situations, the need for documentation of such abuses — as well as of the more everyday violations — was evident. At the same time, discussion brought up the issue of inequity regarding the treatment of conflicts. The coverage — and therefore the actions it triggers internationally — is not necessarily related to the scale of atrocities taking place, but also appears motivated by geo-political concerns. The media (and even also, at times, some human rights groups) seem to focus on conflicts of specific "strategic" importance, leading one participant to ask: "Is there such a thing as a 'war with sex-appeal'?" Obviously, the women raped in all regions of the former Yugoslavia needed all the solidarity they could get — but so do victims of other "forgotten" wars, especially in Africa.

¹¹ Naomi Neft and Ann D. Levine, *Where Women Stand—An International Report on the Status of Women in 140 Countries, 1997-1998*, New York: Random House, 1997, p. 158. See also *Common Ground: Violence Against Women in War and Armed Conflict Situations*, Philippines, Asian Center for Women's Human Rights (ASCENT), 1998, 358 pp.

Strategy discussions

Strategy discussions then focused on the efforts participants were engaged in to end the impunity often granted to perpetrators of violence against women. Although we looked at many innovative responses women activists design to curb violence within the family as well as in society at large, we only refer here to two examples. Specifically, the issues of female genital mutilation and of wife battering provide meaningful cases of how to put pressure on one's government or community to comply with international human rights standards. The diverse strategies adopted help us keep in mind that how human rights instruments are used depend on the social and political circumstances.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

The group focused primarily on the question of how to ensure girl's bodily integrity in countries where female genital mutilation¹² affects the large majority of girls. For those involved in this battle, the risk is to be accused of betraying one's own culture — a threat that informs the strategic choices one makes about how to address it. Some examples of approaches participants shared include the following:

Gambia: Amie Bojang-Sissoho spoke about the efficiency of radio to reach rural and illiterate women. A journalist, Bojang-Sissoho denounces in her programs the complicity of the state using human rights concepts to counter its justification of the practice of FGM. Another strategy carried out by the Committee Against Harmful Traditional Practices aim at training traditional birth attendants/midwives, health workers, youth, community leaders, religious leaders, parliamentarians, and government officials on the harmful aspects of this practice. Reference to human rights concepts and instruments is channeled to the communities via locally based organizations as part of this process.

Sri Lanka: Radio has proven successful in Sri Lanka as well, Ann Jabbar said — even though its impact can only be assessed on a case by case basis. Her colleague, Zulfica Ismail, pointed out that the need to avoid sensationalism and the difficulty of opening a large public debate in a country where over 90% of women are symbolically circumcised led activists to operate in a low-key fashion. They found it was most effective to keep themselves informed of other strategies that could be adapted to the Sri Lankan context and to continue networking through WLUML.

Sudan: In a context where open networking and attempting to create new spaces is dangerous, activists are taking advantage of informal women's spaces (e.g. marriage and circumcision ceremonies, etc.) to spread their message. After undertaking research on the various types of FGM practiced in different countries, women are actually using the seclusion of women's spaces to reach their audience and try to promote a less harmful alternative; for example, Tohour, practiced in Tunisia, is a "cleaning" of genitalia with simple salty water rather than cutting.

¹² "Some divide the practice into three and others into four types. The first and the least severe form is called ritualistic circumcision, where the clitoris is merely nicked. The second form is called circumcision or sunna. This involves the removal of the clitoral prepuce—the outer layer of the skin over the clitoris, sometimes called the "hood;" the gland and the body of the clitoris remain intact. Clitoridectomy or excision, a third variety, involves removal of the entire clitoris and most of the adjacent parts. Lastly, the infibulation or pharaonic circumcision includes clitoridectomy and sewing of the vulva." Rehana Ghadially "All for Izzat: the Practice of Female Circumcision among Bohra Muslims in India," WLUML Dossier 16, November 1996, p. 13-20, p. 20.

Domestic violence

Almost all the participants had some experience of working with groups that address domestic violence either directly or indirectly. Some of the strategies shared included:

Pakistan: Insha Hamdani spoke about a semi-official/semi-formal strategy they use. After collecting information from both sides (the victim and the batterer), feminists groups such as Shirkat Gah approach community based organizations' members who are supportive of women's rights and ask them to intervene. Acting as mediators, the agreement they try to reach is to get the husband to sign a document stating he won't beat his wife any longer — utilizing the community as a witness that can monitor his future actions.

Nigeria: Asm'au Joda explained that a similar strategy — actually an old practice currently being revived — is used in the Nigerian context, except that it involves local women's solidarity rather than the intervention of authority figures. "Sitting on a man," as the practice is called, means female neighbors and relatives go to the husband's house and shame the man publicly. While the outcome cannot be guaranteed, the silence is broken and witnesses are present.

Malaysia: Here women have used more formal channels and a Domestic Violence Act was passed in 1994, as the result of years of lobbying by women's human rights advocates. They set up the first "one stop shelter" in Penang (now in several other cities). Having successfully involved the state's resources and support, women now benefit from this model where victims of violence can find services, such as psychologists, police, medical checkup and referral for legal assistance, all within one physical space. This model of one-stop centers is being developed in a number of countries.

Health as a human rights issue

Within the broad field of human rights and health, presentations and discussions revolved around several themes. Lynn Freedman from the USA began the session by insisting on the need to link issues that affect the individual with structural issues affecting society at large. She pointed out that "health is deeply, unavoidably, political. A women's health is inextricably connected to the economic, social, cultural, political context in which she lives. Indeed it has a biological dimension, but that biology is embedded in and linked to social and cultural conditions."

A recent example from Afghanistan made obvious the impact of 'fundamentalist' policies on women's health. The Taleban's edicts, such as preventing women from working outside the home and the closing of public baths, have had a direct consequence on the health of women and children. By forbidding women doctors and nurses, among others, from exercising their professions and by depriving the population of the means to maintain hygienic conditions, the Taleban have dramatically increased the incidence of infection and death among women, especially gynecological diseases and (due to a lack of sun) skin diseases and vitamin deficiency.

The viewing of a video, *Something Like a War*, provided another example of how politics directly affects women's health. This documentary on mass sterilization campaigns in India in the 1970-80 period reminded us that it is women's reproductive health, particularly, which is the focus of governments' interventions. Many governments throughout the world have imposed their agenda on women in the name of national "population control." Furthermore, they have often done so selectively by, for example, conducting forced sterilization programs or allowing foreign pharmaceutical industries to test new contraceptives on the most vulnerable women. In India, the Hindu majority state has specifically targeted rural women, women from the slums or from the Muslim minority.

Following the video, participants gathered in small groups to review the major health concerns in their different contexts and discussed appropriate strategies. Working groups also explored the question of health services, including how human rights can support women's claims for more adequate services. Several participants (from Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh) had been involved in one of the network's current projects, the South Asian Shelters Exchange Program. They exchanged their experiences in visiting existing shelter facilities in the region and in witnessing the different approaches designed by activists. Zarizana Abdul Aziz from Malaysia explained in detail the process and results of efforts by women activists to develop guidelines to ensure that health care professionals are trained to respond to violence against women in the context of human rights.

In conclusion, Lynn Freedman reminded the group that, as activists, we need to adopt a conceptual framework, which includes "a politics of the body" (requiring individual autonomy, bodily integrity, security of person, etc.), as well as "a politics of social justice" (requiring the elimination of discrimination, racism, class injustice, poverty, etc.).

Documentation of human rights violations

Given the contexts from which many of the women at the Institutes came, monitoring and documenting human rights violations was a particularly important issue. A large number of women from the Muslim world live under circumstances in which their human rights are violated — due to undemocratic regimes, civil conflicts, discriminatory laws and cultural practices. Many in the group had first hand experience of such human rights abuses. Therefore, facilitators Lynn Freedman and Sunila Abeyesekera adopted a concrete approach to discussion on documentation basing it on WLUML's work.

An initial brainstorming session reviewed the three steps involved in any documentation process (monitoring, documenting, acting) and helped clarify preliminary conceptual issues that needed to be addressed prior to undertaking such work — particularly regarding its purpose, the audience it is directed to and the expected outcomes. We then focused on a more practical exercise involving specific cases.

Participants were asked to examine two of the network's efforts to publicize violations of women's human rights in Muslim communities. First the group viewed Eclipse, an award-winning video produced in 1994 by Ain O Salish Kandra (ASK is a legal organization based in Dhaka and working with WLUML.) This video documents the increasing number of fatwas¹³ against women in the mid-nineties in Bangladesh. Based primarily on interviews with women activists and relatives of the victims, the documentary denounced a dangerous trend whereby village councils (called salish) which customarily resolved disputes, but had no legal authority to pronounce verdicts or sentences, had began to do so. These village councils are now pronouncing 'religious' edicts resulting in the death of women who, for one reason or the other, did not 'behave properly.' The second concrete example was a poorly written 'Alert for Action' drafted and circulated by WLUML (the Alerts are one of the means through which the network disseminates information regarding specific cases requiring immediate solidarity). Both the visual and the written documents were critically analyzed, with participants noting their strong and weak points and discussing how to improve them.

¹³ A fatwa is an opinion on a point of law rendered by a "competent legal scholar" (such as an imam or a mufti) in response to factual questions submitted to him. Traditionally, the fatwa was/is essentially private and consultative and therefore not legally binding: it did/does not have the force of law. However, self-appointed givers of fatwas — who are not necessarily scholars in any field — are increasingly justifying acts of violence against women on the basis of fatwas and remain unchallenged by the authorities.

The need to document abuses women suffer was obvious to most at the Institutes, and the debate centered on a number of crucial themes — such as ethics, confidentiality, accuracy, sensationalism, risk of manipulation, especially if dealing with the media, etc. Facilitators highlighted the political dimension of documentation work, warning the group about possible distortion of the findings once they are made public and the need to be aware of whose agenda one may accidentally feed into. They also stressed the difficult task of having to prioritize which cases will be presented according to their ‘strategic’ importance in a specific context. This is particularly challenging, as one is aware that an issue of equal importance may not be brought to the forefront. Finally, they made the link between documentation of human rights violations and security issues, pointing to the crucial need not to endanger the victims or the researchers. To keep in mind the best interest of the person abused, and to inform her of the potential danger she may face if testifying, is a prerequisite to any such endeavor.

Some Global Trends: “Fundamentalisms” and Attacks on NGOs

As discussed in the previous session, activists involved in documentation work face risks that need to be taken seriously. Further, human rights defenders, as a group, are also subjected to threats from their political opponents — whether these operate from within a governmental system or are part of an active opposition. Intimidation practices and effective violence can come from both the state and politico-religious movements (indeed, these are not always distinct entities as there are “fundamentalist” states, or there are often connections between “fundamentalist” forces and governments which claim to be democratic, but nevertheless abide to “fundamentalist” pressure).

“Fundamentalisms”

One focus of the Institutes was to address the rise of extremist politico-religious groups (“fundamentalisms”), the forms these movements have taken historically in various continents, and the strategies democratic forces have devised in their efforts to respond and push forward progressive agendas. While emphasizing the fact that “fundamentalist” movements are growing in all major religions, the Institutes focused on the broad political context of women — and men — in Muslim countries and communities, and especially women linked to the WLUML network.

First we looked at the question of definition and what we mean when we refer to the “fundamentalist” phenomena. This issue has been discussed within the network, as the last Plan of Action (Dhaka, 1997) points out: “The use of the term “fundamentalism” has been debated within WLUML for many years. [Although] we are in agreement about the broad nature of the phenomenon (...) some of us do not use the term [while] others find that it is the most widely understood and least objectionable term to name the phenomenon being addressed.” As we understand it, fundamentalist movements are extreme-right forces or politico-religious groups seeking to obtain, or maintain, political power through manipulation of religion and religious beliefs. We also broadened such a definition by including not only the use of religion, but also of “other ethnic, culturally based identities.”

The need to be clear about what we define as “fundamentalist” is enhanced by the fact that the term itself is often manipulated. It is manipulated by extreme right movements, which would like the world to believe that their political discourse and policies are dictated by a return to the “fundamentals” of a given religion. It is also taken advantage of by some of those claiming opposition to fundamentalist politics: self-proclaimed advocates of democracy may adopt varying definitions of who is truly “fundamentalist,” depending on their current political or economic interests. From a geo-strategic point of view, the label “fundamentalist” then becomes a tool to exclude “others.” Among others, the example of the Taliban is

edifying in that respect: these Afghan fighters were seen as potential allies by the USA, and treated as such as long as they were rebelling against the USSR; having been trained by the CIA, the Taleban are now denounced by their former supporters as the worse kind of “fundamentalists.” From the point of view of people whose vision is not blurred by strategic preoccupations, the Taleban were clearly detrimental to democracy and women’s rights long before they gained power in Kabul.

One important point that the network and other women’s human rights groups have repeatedly highlighted is the global dimension of the fundamentalist trend. At both the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development and at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 fundamentalists linked forces across faiths as the Vatican and right-wing Muslim forces closed ranks to counter the assertions of women’s reproductive rights as human rights.

Within the Muslim world itself, collaboration between various proponents of the fundamentalist ideology is also evident in the aid they provide at the international level in areas ranging from massive economic support, military training or arms supplies to less obvious measures — certainly no less detrimental to women’s rights — such as the imposition of “Islamic” dress code in Malaysia or Sri Lanka, or the importation of Mut’a¹⁴ in Algeria.

While some channels are difficult to unveil (especially, the financial support extended by various states to emerging fundamentalist movements in other countries), other types of international connections are well-known facts. The group discussed for example the role of Saudi Arabian Osama Ben Laden in recruiting for jihad. His successful efforts to enroll and train terrorist political groups brought him to Afghanistan, to Algeria as early as 1983, then to Iran and now Bangladesh.

The rise of fundamentalism in one given community often inspires a fundamentalist backlash in the ‘other’ as well. In other words, when an extreme right-wing movement gains power, it triggers other communities to also use religion to organize along the lines of identity. A recent example highlighted such a trend: with the implementation of shari’a in Zamfara state, one of the northern federal states of Nigeria, right-wing Christians immediately called for implementation of “Christian laws” in the South of the country.

The link was made between the rise of fundamentalist forces and the economic dimension. As several in the group pointed out, in many instances the ability of extremist movements to expand is enhanced by economic deprivation and poverty. Anissa Hélie gave the example of the 1991 pre-municipal election period in Algeria in which the Islamic Salvation Front (F.I.S.) confirmed itself as a prominent, and skilled, campaigner. Taking advantage of both the high unemployment rate among the male urban poor and the major housing problems in the cities, the F.I.S. turned the streets of poor neighborhoods into open air forums. Carpets were thrown on the sidewalks and videos were shown till late into the night — the videotaped speeches of extremist leaders providing a “distraction” to those young men who would rather avoid their crowded homes and didn’t have to get up the next day for lack of a job.

In addition, these groups build on the legitimate resentment of people who suffer from the failure of states to attend to their citizens’ basic needs. This opens an alternative space for fundamentalist groups under the guise of philanthropic activities. By supplementing services at the neighborhood level, they build their constituency and promote their political agenda

¹⁴ A Shia tradition, the practice of “temporary marriage” (mut’a) allows men to take wives for as long or as short a time as they wish (in effect, the period of “marriage” is frequently only as long as the time needed for sexual intercourse).

very effectively. At both Institutes, the group shared stories, which although seemingly disconnected, nevertheless showed the global pattern of expansion of extreme right-wing groups. From the “free” distribution of hijabs to deprived school girls in Sri Lanka (and subsequent impact of enforced “Islamic” dress code), to alternative loans accessible to the urban poor in Egypt, to “Muslim” schools with no tuition fees in India, free medical care in Pakistan, or even vote buying practices in Algeria — each contributes to building of a fundamentalist web, nationally and internationally.

Presentations by several participants provided first hand accounts of the impact of extreme right religious policies on women’s rights. In 1998, the cases of Algeria, Pakistan and Sudan were highlighted and, in 1999, the cases of Algeria, Sri Lanka and Sudan provided a way to put the fundamentalist phenomena in concrete terms.

While it is clear how religious political movements operate and gain popular support, many among the participants were still puzzled regarding the reasons why some women join fundamentalist groups, even though their agenda stands diametrically opposed to gender equity. At both Institutes, time was spent discussing women’s participation in extremist right-wing movements. But in 1999, we were all enlightened by the experience of a participant from South Asia. Now a women’s rights activist, Sakina (not her real name) gave us an insight into her reasons for joining fundamentalists groups as a sixteen year-old.

“Basically — she said — I did it because I was a teenager: I needed a cause and wanted to rebel against my parents” Once part of an all female group whose aim was to read and study the Koran, Sakina found her new community very fulfilling: “it was like finding sisterhood: we were so close to one another; it was like building a loving family in which I had a real voice.” Her commitment grew as she felt trusted and having inherited a mission: “In fact the man who had initially approached my group of friends monitored us for maybe the first ten meetings, then left us alone and we never saw him again. He said we were just supposed to spread: each of us created our own group and recruited other young girls. Now it has spread not only in the capital city, but all over the country.” Intense study of religious texts not only gave Sakina a strong sense of belonging, but also led her to isolate herself from her family and high school friends: “it gave me a sense of superiority over the other young people my age — because of my knowledge of the Koran. It gave me a sense of arrogance even; at some point I was beyond everybody: I did not respect anyone and used to pray a hundred times a day.” Indeed, when after several years of active involvement Sakina grew “disillusioned” she felt it very difficult to take distance.

First, she did not feel safe: “when you are used to wearing the hijab, once you give it up you feel as if there is a man waiting to rape you at every corner.” And then, she was harassed by her former friends and labeled a traitor: “the pressure became worse when they learned I was getting engaged. The day I married, they had my picture on the front page of their newspaper with a headline denouncing me as someone who had left the hijab only to secure my material needs. It was very hard.”

While we were debating strategies for an alternative, appealing model to offer those who find themselves faced with choosing between supporting an undemocratic regime or the fundamentalist opposition, a real life “case study” emerged. On October 27, 1999 (only a few days after the second Institute started), one of the northern states of Nigeria announced it was implementing shari’a law. Within one week, Zamfara state had introduced sex-segregation in public transports and compulsory closing of all shops and government buildings every afternoon for two hours to “allow for prayers;” a couple of days later came the introduction of Arabic classes in all primary schools and discussion in the local press regarding the cutting off of thieves’ hands. By the time we left Lagos, those people who had dared voice their disagreement in the name of equality of citizens before the constitution were accused of betraying Islam.

Furthermore, communal violence has since risen dramatically and by February 2000 had already caused the death of at least a thousand people in the Kaduna district. This development is a sad illustration of a recent debate in the network regarding how fundamentalist ideologies and movements can transform themselves from a mere presence in society — appearing as but one of the many “options” for religious observance or affiliation — into a source of compulsion and, ultimately, violation of other’s options.

Attacks on NGOs

Obviously, the rise of politico-religious parties and movements limits the expression of progressive civil society and puts human rights defenders at risk. But the silencing of democratic elements is not only due to the direct pressure imposed by fundamentalist forces: some governments are also trying to limit NGOs’ autonomy in their countries. While it is not new for authoritarian states to launch public campaigns against, or physically intimidate, their opponents, what seems to constitute a new trend is the fact that new laws are passed, or are currently in discussion, which curtail the space available to voice any disagreement.

Farida Shaheed and Lynn Freedman began the session on “Attacks on NGOs” by giving a political overview of the changes in state-civil society relations in the last decades. They noted the growth in the number of NGOs worldwide and the fact that many NGOs are dependent on state/government funding. In the early 1970’s, North-based NGOs received only 1.5% of their budget from governments; by the mid 1990’s the average had increase to 30%. While there are no global figures for South-based NGOs, estimates are up to 80% and more. Because developing countries usually lack funds to support NGOs’ initiatives, NGOs have had to rely more on external sources. In the very nationalist climate of many of our countries, reliance on foreign funds is often equated with betrayal of one’s national identity. Such an argument is used by states to denounce the NGOs that are considered threatening — even if those organizations struggle to assert their autonomy and do the work they feel is relevant without compliance to donors’ agendas.

Confronting our own experiences in this domain invalidated the accusation that NGOs are agents of foreign power and highlighted the dangerous tendency of a number of states to control independent voices. Presentations by several participants showed the commonalities in this regard between countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Nigeria and Sudan. We compared the various legislation currently enforced to reduce NGOs autonomy and stressed how these emerge in a context characterized by a growing authoritarianism and increasing restrictions on rights and freedom of speech.

In Pakistan for example, the backlash against NGOs began as a response to the turmoil created in the human rights community by the state’s attempt to pass the “15th amendment” to the Constitution (also called the “shari’a bill,” it gives unlimited and arbitrary power to the federal government). Subsequent protests by progressive NGOs in September and October 1998 were dismissed by the authorities: faced by growing discontent and demonstrations, the Pakistani government stated in November that it “will never tolerate staging protests by some young girls against national decisions.” In December, the state announced its intention to act against all NGOs who were “anti-state, anti-government, anti-religious” and whose main purpose was to “brainwash young women.” A few months later, in May 1999, four of the main human rights and feminist organizations were criticized in the media for being “anti-state” and concerned mainly with “spreading hatred and misleading Muslims.” By that time, 2945 NGOs (out of 6136) were threatened with potential de-registration.

Many in the group had witnessed, or directly experienced, government-sponsored campaigns of harassment against human right defenders — ranging from phone tapping to intimidation by government agencies, public denigration, arrests and so forth. Discussions showed that the independent press, human rights groups as well as women's rights organizations are often primary targets. Activists with a truly internationalist perspective, especially, who have built links with like-minded groups around the world see their legitimacy threatened by accusations of being "sold to the West." It became clear that authoritarian governments are engaged in a battle that aims at silencing potential opposition by attempting to supervise NGOs activities, control their funding and monitor the linkages they establish.

In this critical political context it is crucial to equip women activists with skills that can help them enhance their capacity and to promote a vision of leadership which both reflects and sustains a feminist perspective.

Leadership and Organizational Development

It was important to devote time to the issue of leadership — partly because of the often uneasy relationship between feminist organizations and the concept itself. One starting point is to recognize that women's lack of institutional power undermines their contribution to society at large. The main problem emphasized in the Global Center's first Women's Global Leadership Institute report (Women, Violence and Human Rights) still appears as crucial as when it was spelt out in 1991: "Women leaders are obstructed in their efforts to effectively advance their agendas in the public policy sphere." To advance women's leadership — individually and collectively — is therefore geared towards assisting "women in their efforts to overcome this structural injustice." Crucially, the Global Center aims at facilitating women's voices to be heard on all global issues, not just on "women's issues."

Not only are women, as a group, systematically discouraged from taking leadership roles in the public sphere, but our societies are also biased in terms of recognizing the leadership qualities of women as individuals. While women leaders are often criticized for displaying what is seen as an 'aggressive' behavior, their male counterparts acting in a similar fashion are much more likely to be complimented for their 'assertiveness'. On the other hand, the ability of a mother to manage a tight family budget is hardly ever identified with leadership skills. Because women's leadership is usually confined to the private sphere, it is consequently not valued.

The prevalence of such double standards — both historically and globally — should encourage all concerned human beings to support women's leadership as a means to achieve gender equality. As women activists we also need to address the issue of power, including within our own organizations. Thus an effort was made to provide at the Institutes a) a space in which to explore the concept of leadership and problems of power and b) workshops focusing on leadership and organizational development skills building.

The process began by examining the meaning of leadership within the group: What is the notion of leadership associated with? What does one expect from a leader? How do our various experiences shape our own definitions of leaders and leadership?

Not surprisingly, many of the problems associated with the practice of leadership appeared to be connected to issues of power over — whereby one individual concentrates and hijacks all prerogatives associated with the authority, status, etc. s/he enjoys as a leader. Charlotte Bunch — who led these sessions at the Institutes — pointed out that such an understanding stems from mainstream definitions of leadership, from the restrictive models society tends to offer us. More specifically, it stems from references to the patriarchal model, in which a "strong leader" is the one who embodies authority, in other words who dominates and

controls others. The other frame of reference available is the star-system in which leaders appear to be superior to the rest of us and are therefore expected to perform at all times — and perform well.

A feminist vision of leadership ought to be different from those mainstream definitions. A crucial question, then, is how do we transform those models? We need to both demystify the concept and transform leadership into a tool that truly reflects our ideals and serves our agenda. Feminist leadership, at the theoretical level as well as in practice, should aim at being inclusive, democratic and accountable.

To deal with the feminist movement's tendency to avoid discussing leadership, Charlotte Bunch proposed a definition that caught the group's attention: leadership is "that process which makes things happen." Such an approach allows to relate the notion of leadership more closely to women's experiences and to acknowledge the various ways one can make a contribution to a common cause. Further, it grounds feminist leadership in women's lives and consequently allows us to value the various efforts in which women are already engaged.

The group discussed various issues related to how hierarchy and authority affects — negatively or positively — one's work. Participants brought up specific concerns such as how to deal with power sharing within our organizations or networks, and exchanged about the strategies they felt were successful in this regard. Taking into account the varied experiences of women at the Institutes (for example, their involvement as volunteer or 'professional' activists; their being part of an all-female staff or of a mixed group; their belonging to organizations ranging from feminist to mainstream human rights groups, governmental bodies or universities, etc.), we debated about which forms of organizations offer most flexibility to address the question of power. We also explored how to overcome the divisions that may arise (as a result, for example, of conflicts between new staff/senior staff, between activists and academics, volunteer staff/paid staff, inter-generational gap, etc.)

One of the questions that arose in the course of the discussion was whether leaders were born as such or "made" by circumstances? Obviously, leadership is not an abstract concept: it occurs in concrete circumstances, takes culturally specific forms and is also framed according to issues (since one develops leadership skills while pursuing goals one cares about.) Charlotte Bunch pointed out that while leadership qualities are inherent to some individuals, such traits can actually, at times, be acquired and need to be nurtured. Indeed, supportive surroundings are key for people to gain confidence, endorse responsibilities and carry them on; or, as a former 1998 Global Center Institute participant, Alejandra Sarda from Argentina, put it: "how truthful it is that if you truly believe that people have skills, by your very belief you create the environment in which people can flower and effectively show those skills."

We therefore brainstormed about how to create the conditions to effectively support women's leadership in our work — within our own organizations and at a larger public level:

- ❖ Appreciate the positive aspect of power: leadership can be seen as a power to enable, energize and "make it happen" rather than "power over" others.
- ❖ Abandon the expectation of perfection of leaders, as it removes their humanity. To restore their connection with 'normal' people, we should rather support those in leadership position, therefore enabling them to enhance their capabilities and achievements. However, in valuing leaders we must be careful to not devalue others.

- ❖ Acknowledge that “leadership happens everywhere, and all the time.” This standpoint calls for the recognition of the efforts made by all women committed to women’s rights — no matter whether they are deemed ‘leaders’ or not. Cassandra Balchin from Pakistan expressed how the session helped her “value the work everyone does which collectively contributes to the success of the organization; it was a lesson to remember in my work.” In other words, we should value and celebrate leaders at all levels.
- ❖ Recognize that there are different types of leaders, i.e. individuals who are gifted in various ways; (e.g. some have the ability to organize and plan, others to inspire people and sustain their motivation, others again to initiate projects, etc.).
- ❖ Admit that one should not and need not be a leader at all times, but can rather move “in and out” of leadership, depending on the situation.
- ❖ Promote a responsible use of power by developing shared leadership and encouraging team decision making. Teams of leaders develop the ability to work together, therefore helping to avoid a concentration of power in one person.
- ❖ Provide opportunities for all involved to take responsibilities by building an environment where individuals can trust their own and their colleagues’ capabilities.
- ❖ Encourage feedback and find ways to develop accountability.
- ❖ Cultivate training and teaching skills as they are crucial to ensure transfer of knowledge and responsibility within a team.

The Institutes’ organizers were also committed to addressing the issue of women’s leadership from a concrete standpoint. In terms of organizational skills, the Global Center had experience with organizing workshops in a number of areas (such as conflict resolution, leadership development, fundraising skills, etc.) The Institute coordinator worked with participants in advance to determine which themes would be most helpful for local groups in their work and would assist them in promoting their work at the regional or international levels.

As a result, we held skills workshops on the following topics: advocacy campaigns; public speaking; program planning; fundraising; politics and practice of donors relations; organizational assessment; conflict resolution and stress management; and monitoring and documenting human rights violations.

These workshops were led by a variety of resource people and participants. In addition to teaching some of the skills sessions, Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi from Akina Mama wa Africa brought in her unique experience with the African Women Leadership Institute, held yearly since 1997.

Diversity and Sexuality Diversity

These two workshops were highlights of the Institutes. In addition to the creative methodology used by Betty Powell from the USA who served as the resource person, the sessions were particularly enriching as they led us to explore the various identities being imposed upon, or claimed by, each individual.¹⁵ To acknowledge non-obvious aspects of

¹⁵ A number of the exercises used in these sessions can be found in Chapters 1 and 2 of the human rights education manual published by the Center for Women’s Global Leadership with

identities provided an overall sense of solidarity since — as one participant said — “it helped us connect with each other.” To address commonalities and differences within the group allowed for looking at the potential for alliances from an ever changing perspective, depending on which aspects of one’s identity was put forward.

The objectives of the diversity workshop were: to experience and discuss the issues of difference that confronts us in our work and in our lives; to identify the intersections of culture, difference and social power; and to exchange skills and strategies for taking action and building alliances across our differences to realize human rights for all people.

In order to identify issues that were relevant to the group, a series of questions were discussed:

- ❖ What factors enable you to discriminate against others?
- ❖ What factors enable others to discriminate/oppress you?
- ❖ To what extent are these factors embedded in society?
- ❖ To what extent are these within your control?

The discussions that followed were revealing, particularly around the issue of “privilege.” Participants talked about how institutions and resources benefit or deprive different classes of people and how one can take advantage of her/his privileges for the benefit of others.

The workshop also made clear how debates like these were crucial for the WLUML network. The network, in its very definition, is a space where working across boundaries of identities is put into practice: women associated with WLUML have designed strategies of resistance across borders. However, despite this reality, we felt it crucial to further explore the issue of difference, both as it informs our work and directly affects us as individuals. We needed to examine our own biases. A discussion on what prevents one from valuing differences or the difficulties in doing so brought up concrete examples such as “if a war occurs between different religious or ethnic groups, what would our reactions be and how can we counter them?” One woman stressed that exploring the issue of diversity was valuable “both at the personal and the networking levels.” Another participant acknowledged that throughout the session, she could feel herself “moving from tolerance to accepting and then valuing differences.”

Sexuality

Discussions around sexuality also proved to be highly participatory and enlightening. The session began with Ayesha Imam exploring the notion that heterosexuality is a socially constructed ideology. The example of early marriages and enforced virginity were used to raise the issue of violations and introduce the concept of ‘sexual rights’. Charlotte Bunch gave a historical introduction highlighting how women activists have moved from addressing the question of ‘health’ to ‘reproductive health’, and then evolved from ‘reproductive rights’ to ‘sexuality’ and ‘sexual rights’. We then spoke about the need to understand that the definition of sexual rights goes beyond the gay/lesbian dimension and also includes issues such as sexuality, right to pleasure, polygamy and monogamy, etc.

In addressing questions related to homosexuality and lesbianism, participants were curious to know when and how did this issue emerge. The discussion that evolved illustrated how this is a history of labeling rather than an issue of when did homosexual relations ‘begin’. The session also made the link between the social pressure and violence faced by lesbians

the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) — Local Action/Global Change: Learning About the Human Rights of Women and Girls, Julie Mertus with Nancy Flowers and Mallika Dutt, New York, 1999, 254 pp.

and those faced by women daring to be different in other ways. For example, participants talked about who is ostracized in their culture for being different: literate women? women fighting female genital mutilation? women fighting in the political arena? single women?, etc. The group also discussed common critiques addressed to both feminists and lesbians:

1. sexual rights/feminism is a foreign imported ideology;
2. sexual rights/feminism is not a crucial (i.e., a life and death) issue; and
3. sexual rights/feminism is a white, middle class issue.

Most importantly, we looked at sexual rights as a part of the issue of human rights and made the link between the persecution of gays and lesbians and other acts of fundamentalism. The group discussed whether there was a gay/lesbian movement in their country and if they knew of persecutions based on sexual orientation. The session ended with thoughts on what we could do in our own organizations and in the network to advance sexual rights for all people.

Conclusion

The Institutes were a pivotal opportunity for the two groups of participants, as well as for the resource persons, to compare their experiences and knowledge and exchange strategies. Participants' final evaluations highlighted the fact that the two-week residential program provided a concrete forum in which to experience the diversity of women's backgrounds and experiences.

Participants also made positive comments regarding the opportunity to clarify a number of concepts useful to their work and how these provided openings for action. Particularly, the human rights approach and the discussions regarding how women's rights are affected by the links between culture, tradition and religion were seen as full of potential to inform their local work. They also felt they had learned many organizational skills that could strengthen their work.

Finally, participants clearly perceived the benefit they could gain from interacting with one another and with the resource people. They particularly appreciated being able to strengthen personal links, especially with those from other regions. Most found the experience enlightening and believed it brought them together in spite of diversity. As one woman said, "We realized the struggle is the same everywhere."

A common complaint, however, was that the schedule was rather heavy and should allow more free time for participants to exchange on a personal basis. This call for more interaction attests to the need to make more room in the Institutes program, but also points out the crucial need for more spaces such as the ones the Institutes have provided.

In terms of outcomes, a number of women have started networking together after the Institutes ended. They have also taken advantage of the knowledge gathered at the Institutes to involve their colleagues back home in what they learned in a number of ways. For example, the participant from Mali already started hosting trainings on CEDAW. Many participants felt that the Institutes model was a valuable one and several expressed an interest in organizing regional institutes (for example, one focusing on female genital mutilation in the Gambia.) In addition, the organizers are considering hosting a third Institute once they have analyzed the impact and outcomes of these two gatherings.

Annexes

ANNEX 1:

Women Living Under Muslim Laws International Solidarity Network– Goals And Objectives

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) was formed in response to situations which required urgent action during the years 1984-85 and has evolved into the present network. WLUML is a network of women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws, both written and unwritten, drawn from interpretations of the Qur'an, and tied up with local traditions.

WLUML addresses itself to:

- ❖ women living where Islam is the religion of the State, as well as to women who belong to Muslim communities ruled by minority religious laws;
- ❖ women in secular states where Islam is rapidly expanding and where fundamentalists demand a minority religious law;
- ❖ women from immigrant Muslim communities in Europe and the Americas; and,
- ❖ non Muslim women, either nationals or foreigners, living in Muslim countries and communities, where Muslim laws are applied to them and to their children.

The women to whom WLUML addresses itself reflect the diversity of women's positions, status and experiences within the Muslim world. While challenging the stereotypical assumption that Islam is homogenous in its practices, WLUML takes action, through the solidarity campaigns and common projects, to highlight the various commonalities that women from Muslim countries and communities face in each of their particular contexts.

WLUML's four main areas of activity are: networking, solidarity, publications/documentation and collective projects. The first three collective projects were: from 1988-89, the Exchange Program in collaboration with ISIS-Geneva; in 1990, the Qur'anic Interpretations by Women; and from 1993-1999, the Women and Law in the Muslim World Program.

The objectives of Women Living Under Muslim Laws are to:

- ❖ create links amongst women and women's groups (including those prevented from organizing or facing repression if they attempt to do so) within Muslim countries and communities;
- ❖ increase women's knowledge about both their common and diverse situations;
- ❖ strengthen their struggles; and,
- ❖ create the means to support them internationally from within the Muslim world and outside.

WLUML aims at providing information for women and women's groups from Muslim countries and communities. Because women are often isolated in their national or community settings, it is crucial to disseminate information about their lives, current concerns and strategies to other women from Muslim countries and communities. This exchange of information helps to support their struggles from within and provides a channel of communication amongst women from Muslim countries and communities. It is equally important to make these

struggles known to the outside world, hence to promote a two-way solidarity flow and build links that transcend class, ethnic, national and religious boundaries.

These objectives are fulfilled through: building a network of information and solidarity; disseminating information through various resources materials and publications (in particular the "Dossiers"); facilitating interaction and contact between women from Muslim countries and communities, and between them and progressive and feminist groups at large; and facilitating exchanges of women from one geographical area to another in the Muslim world.

These linkages are forged through a set of activities, including: (1) documentation and publications; (2) solidarity actions such as international Alerts; (3) networking and coordination; and (4) collective projects.

In addition to the network's ongoing activities, it is important to point out that WLUML, in its own name as an international network, is playing a very active role in women's movement organizing internationally.

Since 1984, WLUML has built an extensive international network, which is composed of women's groups as well as progressive individuals, both scholars and grass-root activists. WLUML has shown its commitment to bring together a wide range of experiences and standpoints engaged in and working for greater autonomy of women living in Muslim contexts. The Network disseminates information from the broadest possible strands of opinion and initiatives emerging from, or existing within, varied movements.

ANNEX 2

Center For Women's Global Leadership–Goals And Objectives

The Center for Women's Global Leadership (Global Center) develops and facilitates women's global leadership toward a women's human rights vision of social justice worldwide. The Center's programs promote the leadership of women and advance feminist perspectives in policy-making processes in local, national and international arenas.

The Center for Women's Global Leadership has been a key player in building and sustaining an international network on women's human rights. In all of its activities the Center collaborates with a broad range of local, national, regional and international women's groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UN agencies and others. Such activities include leadership development, public policy and strategic planning, implementation of women's human rights, global and human rights education, and international collaboration and mobilization.

In all its endeavors, the Global Center seeks to develop an understanding of the ways in which gender—as it interacts with race, class, culture, sexuality and geography—affects the exercise of power and the conduct of public policy globally. Historically, women have been excluded from the creation and implementation of policies affecting them, their communities, and international relations. In order to remedy this situation, the Center's programs aim to:

- ❖ promote the effectiveness and visibility of women who are taking policy leadership at all levels through leadership development activities;
- ❖ develop international linkages among women in order to enhance their capacities, expand their global consciousness, and build coordinated strategies for action;
- ❖ increase and make equitable women's participation in national and international governing bodies and processes;
- ❖ legitimize feminist perspectives in public policy decision-making and implementation around the world through international mobilization campaigns and public education; and,
- ❖ deepen an understanding of the impact of global forces among women in the USA and build greater linkages between women in the USA and in other parts of the world.

Since 1990, the Global Center has pursued these objectives through programs that have played a pivotal role in transforming the human rights framework to take greater account of gender and women's concerns. These efforts have had a powerful impact on global public policy, particularly where human rights addresses violence against women, reproductive health and sexuality. One of the key programs through which the Global Center has fostered women's leadership on human rights has been its women's global leadership Institutes.

These annual Institutes have become internationally-recognized venues for advancing women's leadership in public policy, particularly in the area of human rights. In consultation with a group of international advisors, participants are chosen from among hundreds of applications. A primary selection criterion is their potential for multiplying the experience gained from participating in their regions, thus enhancing women's NGO activity at the grass roots.

Graduates of the Institutes have emerged as key players in advancing women's human rights at local, national, regional and international fora. Critical new thinking has developed in these Institutes around human rights and its links to violence, health and economic justice. In addition, the Institutes have been the source of ideas for activities that have comprised the highly successful Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights, such as the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign, the Petition to the United Nations and the series of hearings and tribunals, From Vienna to Beijing: Building Accountability for Women's Human Rights.

ANNEX 3

1998 Institute Agenda

Monday, September 14

- 9:00–10:30 Welcome from Women for Women’s Human Rights (Pinar Ilkkaracan)
Institute Goals and Introduction to the Global Center (Charlotte Bunch)
Review of the Agenda, Participants’ Expectations, Logistical Information
(Anissa Hélie)
- 11:15–12:50 Participants’ Introductions
- 12:50–1:30 Getting to Know You
- 2:30–4:45 WLUML’s History and Principles (Mariémé Hélie Lucas with Ayesha Imam,
Farida Shaheed, Lynn Freedman)
Group Discussion around “What principles of the network are most/less useful
in our own work?”
- 5:00–6:00 Getting to Know You
- 6:00–6:20 Monitoring Group Report

Tuesday, September 15

- 9:00–1:00 Women’s Struggles/Feminisms in the Muslim World (Farida Shaheed)
Group Discussions around three sets of questions:
1. Identify our commonalities
 2. What do we understand by “feminism,” “women’s struggles,” and “women’s movement?” and,
 3. What is it we are trying/hoping to achieve through our initiatives, through our organizations, through our personal interventions?
- 11:00–1:00 Plenary: Reports from Groups Discussions
- 2:30–4:30 Feminisms in the Muslim World: Reclaiming our Past–Sharing our History/ies
(Ayesha Imam)
- 4:45–6:15 Getting To Know You
- 6:15–6:45 Monitoring Group Report
- 9:00–11:00 Video: Four Women in Egypt

Wednesday, September 16

- 9:00–10:00 Getting to Know You
- 10:00–11:00 Video: Vienna Tribunal: Women’s Rights are Human Rights!
- 11:15–1:00 Women’s Rights Movement(s) and Human Rights (Charlotte Bunch with
Roxanna Carrillo, Lynn Freedman, Farida Shaheed, Ayesha Imam)

- 1:00–1:15 Plenary Discussion
 2:30–4:00 Group Discussions around three sets of questions:
- ❖ What potential or use does the Human Rights framework have in your own situation?
 - ❖ What problems or challenges does it pose for you?
 - ❖ What conflicts or questions arise, in your situation, between women’s human rights and culture and religion?
- 4:15–4:45 Plenary: Report from the Working Groups
 6:00–6:45 Getting to Know You
 6:45–7:15 Monitoring Group Report
 9:00–10:00 Video: Who Will Cast the First Stone? (Hudood Ordinances in Pakistan)

Thursday, September 17

- 9:00–10:00 Getting to Know You
 10:00–11:00 Violence Against Women in the Human Rights Context—a Framework for Analysis (Gladys Acosta with Charlotte Bunch, Roxanna Carrillo)
 11:15–1:00 Types of Violence Against Women We Work on Within the Network (Pinar Ilkcaracan, violence in the family; Caroline Brac de la Périère, violence of political persecution, and plenary discussion)
 2:30–4:20 Group Discussions around Strategies to Address Different Types of Violence
 4:40–5:40 Plenary: Report from Group Discussions
 Introduction to the UNIFEM Trust Fund (Roxanna Carrillo)
 5:45–7:00 Getting to Know You
 7:00–7:20 Monitoring Group Report
 9:00–10:15 Video: Something Like a War (forced sterilization campaigns in India)

Friday, September 18

- 9:00–9:45 Getting to Know You
 9:45–11:00 Using the Human Rights System and International Mechanisms (Roxanna Carrillo, Sunila Abeyesekera)
 11:15–1:30 Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (Gladys Acosta)
 CEDAW Committee/Monitoring the Women’s Convention/Shadow Reports (Roxanna Carrillo, Hajara Usman for Nigeria, Ipek Ilkcaracan for Turkey)
 Plenary Discussion
 Upcoming UN Events: Review of Vienna in fall 1998, Review of Cairo in spring 1999, Review of Beijing’s Platform for Action in June 2000, International Criminal Court (Charlotte Bunch)
 3:00–3:15 Getting to Know You

- 3:15–3:45 Monitoring and Documenting Human Rights Violations (Lynn Freedman, Sunila Abeyesekera)
- 3:50–4:30 Video: Eclipse (Fatwas against women in Bangladesh)
- 4:45–5:15 Group Discussions on WLUML “Alert for Action”
- 5:30–6:30 Plenary: Report of Group Discussions
- 6:30–7:15 Getting to Know You
- 7:15–7:45 Monitoring Group Report

Saturday, September 19

- 9:00–1:00 Diversity/Identity Workshop (Betty Powell)

Afternoon Half day off

Sunday, September 20

- 9:00–1:00 Sexuality and Sexual Rights (Betty Powell with Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, Ayesha Imam, Sunila Abeyesekera)

Afternoon Half day off

Monday, September 21

- 9:30–10:15 Getting to Know You
- 10:15–1:30 Organizational Development (Charlotte Bunch, Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi)
- 3:00–5:30 Organizational Development Skills Workshops
 - ❖ Presentation Skills
 - ❖ Managing Stress/Conflict resolution

- 5:45–6:15 Monitoring Group Report

- 8:30–9:15 Presentation of the African Women’s Leadership Institute (Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi)

Tuesday, September 22

- 9:00–10:15 Getting to Know You
- 10:15–1:45 Networking (Gladys Acosta, Mariémé Hélie Lucas)
- 1:45–2:05 Monitoring Group Report
- 5:00–8:00 Reception with Istanbul-based Women’s Groups

Wednesday, September 23

- 9:00–1:30 Roundtable on Leadership and Organizational Skills (Charlotte Bunch, Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi)
- 1:30–1:50 Monitoring Group Report
- 3:30–7:30 Visiting Local Turkish Women’s Organizations:
- ❖ Purple Roof Foundation (independent shelter)
 - ❖ Kader (women’s political participation)

Thursday, September 24

- 9:00–1:30 The Politics and Practice of Donor Relations (Lynn Freedman, Farida Shaheed)
- 3:00–3.30 Case Studies: The Rise of Politico-Religious Movements/Fundamentalisms
- 3:30–4:15 Algeria
- 4:14–5:15 15th Amendment in Pakistan
- 5:15–5:45 Monitoring Group Report

Friday, September 25

- 9:30–12:30 Institute Evaluations (written and oral)
- 12:30–1:00 Monitoring Group Report
- Afternoon Half day off

ANNEX 4

1999 Institute Agenda

Monday, October 25

9:00–11:00 Welcome from Baobab/WLUML-AME (Africa and Middle East) (Ayesha Iman)
Institute Goals (Farida Shaheed, Anissa Hélie)
Introduction to the Global Center (Charlotte Bunch)
Participants' Introductions

11:30–12:00 Review of the Agenda, Participants' Expectations of the Institute (Anissa Hélie)

12:00–12:15 Logistical Introduction

12:15–1:00 Getting to Know You

2:00–3:30 History and Principles of the WLUML International Solidarity Network (Farida Shaheed, Ayesha Imam, Anissa Hélie, Lynn Freedman)

4:00–6:00 Working Together

6:00–6:20 Monitoring Group Report

Tuesday, October 26

9:00–9:45 Getting to Know You

9:45–10:45 Feminisms in the Muslim World: Sharing our History (Farida Shaheed, Asma' u Joda, Anissa Hélie, Lynn Freedman, Ayesha Imam)

11:00–12:00 Plenary Discussion

12:00–1:00 Claiming an Ancestor and Continuing the Struggle

2:00–3:30 Understanding our Struggles–Women's Struggles, Women's Movements, Feminisms (Ayesha Imam) (plenary and working groups)

4:00–5:00 Report back and Synthesis

5:00–6:00 Getting to Know You

6:00–6:20 Monitoring Group Report

9:00–11:00 Video viewing and Discussion: Four Women in Egypt

Wednesday, October 27

9:00–9:45 Getting to Know You

9:45–11:30 Case Studies: Fundamentalisms
(Farida Shaheed, Participants)

11:45–1:30 Case Studies: Attacks on NGOs
(Farida Shaheed, Tolulope Lewis, Participants)

- 2:30–4:30 Issues Arising in Participants' Work
- ❖ Strategies to Prevent Violence Against Women: Law Reform (Zarizana Abdul Aziz)
 - ❖ Converting Research into Tools for Mobilizing (Charmaine Pereira)
 - ❖ Promoting Legal Change through Gender Training (Chulani Tania Kodikara)

4:45–5:45 Getting to Know You

5:45–6:05 Monitoring Group Report

Thursday, October 28

9:00–9:30 Getting to Know You

9:30–11:30 Roundtable on Leadership (Charlotte Bunch)

12:00–1:30 Presentation of the African Women's Leadership Institute (Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi)

2:30–4:30 Leadership and Organizational Skills Workshops

5:00–6:00 Getting to Know You

6:00–6:20 Monitoring Group Report

Friday, October 29

9:00–9:45 Getting to Know You

9:45–11:00 Organizational Assessment (Betty Powell)

11:30–1:15 Leadership and Organizational Skills Workshops

2:15–5:00 Linking Local Issues and Global Trends
(Charlotte Bunch, Ayesha Imam, Farida Shaheed)

5:00–6:00 Getting to Know You

6:00–6:20 Monitoring Group Report

Saturday, October 30

9:00–1:00 Diversity/Identity Workshop (Betty Powell)

Afternoon Half day off

Sunday, October 31

9:00–1:00 Sexuality and Sexual Rights
(Betty Powell, Ayesha Imam, Sindi Médar-Gould)

Afternoon Half day off

Monday, November 1

9:00–9:45 Getting to Know You

- 9:45–11:15 Video: Vienna Tribunal: Women’s Rights are Human Rights!
- 11:30–1:30 Dialogue on Women’s Rights movement(s) and Human Rights (Charlotte Bunch, Roxanna Carrillo, Farida Shaheed, Ayesha Imam, Lynn Freedman)
- 2:30–4:00 Small Group Discussion
- 4:30–6:30 Overview of the UN system
- 6:30–6:50 Monitoring Group Report

Tuesday, November 2

- 9:00–1:00 Applying Human Rights to the Issues of Women’s Health and Violence Against Women (Charlotte Bunch, Roxanna Carrillo, Lynn Freedman, Oby Nwankwo)
- 2:00–5:00 Strategizing from a Human Rights Perspective on Issues Related to Violence Against Women and Health (Working groups)
- 5:00–5:15 Monitoring Group Report
- 6:30–8:30 Reception at BAOBAB with Nigerian Women’s Groups and Donors

Wednesday, November 3

- 9:00–11:00 Joint Meeting with Nigerian Women’s Groups: Bringing Beijing + 5 and CEDAW Home
Using the Human Rights System and International Mechanisms: CEDAW and “Shadow Reports” (Roxanna Carrillo, Tolulope Lewis, Louisa Ait Hamou, Najma Moosa, Hoda Rouhana)
- 11:30–1:00 Using the Human Rights System and International Mechanisms: Beijing + 5 (Charlotte Bunch, Farida Shaheed)
- 2:30–6:00 Working Groups with Nigerian Women’s Groups: Beijing + 5, CEDAW, and Human Rights Education
- 6:00–6:20 Monitoring Group Report

Thursday, November 4

- 9:00–11:00 Monitoring/Documenting Human Rights Violations (Lynn Freedman)
- 2:00–6:00 Working Across Differences
- 6:00–6:20 Monitoring Group Report

Friday, November 5

- 9:00–1:00 The Politics and Practice of Donor Relations (Lynn Freedman, Farida Shaheed)
- 2:00–6:00 Institute Evaluation (written and oral)
- 6:00–6:20 Monitoring Group Report

ANNEX 5

List Of 1998 Participants And Biographical Notes

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS*

Zarizana Abdul Aziz
(Malaysia)
Louisa Ait-Hamou
(Algeria)
Naheed Amtul
(Pakistan)
Yasmin Begum
(Pakistan)
Fatima Isa Abubakar
(Nigeria)
Suntu Jawara
(The Gambia)
Chulani Tania Kodikara
(Sri Lanka)
Djingarey Maiga
(Mali)
Rashida Manjoo
(South Africa)
Najma Moosa
(South Africa)
Deena Munier
(Bangladesh)
Nelofer Pazira
(Afghanistan)
Charmaine Pereira
(Nigeria)
Marwa Qassem
(Palestine)
Hoda Rouhana
(Palestine/Israel)
Fahima Sahabdeen
(Sri Lanka)
Shahira Shalabi
(Palestine/Israel)
Fatou Thiam
(Senegal)

PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIONS

Cassandra Balchin (Pakistan)

Ms. Balchin is the coordinator of publications for Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre, which includes conceptualizing, budgeting, editing, overseeing and designing. She is also a member of the WLUML Publications Steering Committee. A mother of two, Ms. Balchin moonlights as a freelance journalist and is also a member of the Council of The Network (Association for the Promotion of the Rational Use of Drugs in Pakistan). Her interests include men, women, children, anti-racism, developing written/visual materials (manuals, information kits, pamphlets, and posters), providing activists the tools for change, ending exploitation of people's health needs by the multinationals, and grassroots health consumers activism.

Caroline Brac de la Périère (France)

Ms. Brac de la Périère is the former director of Women Living Under Muslim Laws International coordination office. She was the director for two and a half years, after having fled from Algeria. Her work was for the most part, management, and because she is from Algiers, she networked primarily with Maghreb. Her areas of interest are feminism, women's rights in Maghreb, especially, how to get rid of cultural relativism and the struggle against capitalism. Since the Institute, Ms. Brac de la Perriere has left the WLUML office and is now focusing on the issue of women in conflict situations.

Aisha Gazdar (Pakistan)

Ms. Gazdar has a Masters in International Relations. She has always been fascinated by the world of journalism and her interest grew in 1998 when she joined an evening paper. After graduation, Ms. Gazdar joined Newsline magazine (the first monthly magazine in the country which is owned and managed by a group of journalists, all of whom except one are women and from where she learned a lot) and IUCN. She has experience in documentaries and dramas. Working with Shirkat Gah since 1996, her work is divided between Publications and the Paralegal section, which involves documentation and research on laws and writing to some extent. Ms. Gazdar's interests are in the area of human rights and feminisms in the Muslim world and at the grassroots level. She also enjoys writing, history, and travel.

Insha Hamdani (Pakistan)

Ms. Hamdani has a Masters in English literature. She has six years teaching and administrative experience with Lahore Grammar School. Ms. Hamdani has been with Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre since 1996 working with the Women, Law and Status program (responsible for correspondence, arrangement of workshops) and Publications. Interests developed since include domestic violence, shelters (comparative with national and international/government vs. private), sexual rights, abortion, and female genital mutilation. She also enjoys literature, stage plays and writing.

Ipek Ilkcaracan (Turkey)

Ms. Ilkcaracan is coordinator of Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR) and is about to receive a Ph.D. in Economics. Before joining WWHR in 1996, she worked with NGOs and agencies in other countries such as UNIFEM, the International Women's Tribune Center, and the Intermediate Technology Group. At WWHR, Ms. Ilkcaracan has been coordinating the Women and Law action-research in the Marmara region, the legal literacy program for Women in the southeastern region of Turkey, as well as editing the Legal Literacy manual soon to be published, and proposal writing/fundraising activities. She has also volunteered to compile the Women and Law volume on "Women and Economics" and editing the WLUML Special Dossier on "Women in the Labor Market."

Shahnaz Iqbal (Pakistan)

Ms. Iqbal has a Masters in History. She has ten years working experience in women and development. For five years, she was a project officer with the Business & Professional Women's Association where she ran an income generation programme for women. Ms. Iqbal also spent five years with Shirkat Gah as a programme officer in the Women Law and Status Outreach programme. Currently at Shirkat Gah, her responsibilities are to develop rapport and networking with community based organizations, organize/conduct trainings on legal awareness and also arrange/conduct other relevant trainings, e.g. theater, communication and DALOS (Documentation, Accounts, Leadership, and Organizational Systems). The objective of the aforementioned activities is to strengthen and empower women by providing them with information, enhancing their skills, and creating links with existing resources.

Zulfica Ismail (Sri Lanka)

Ms. Ismail has a B.Sc. degree and a Masters in Education and is currently a project coordinator at the National Institute of Education. She is a member of the coordinating

committee of Muslim Women Research and Action Front (MWRAF) based in Colombo. In addition to being a gender trainer, Ms. Ismail is the key coordinator of the Women and Law Outreach programme. She is a poet, has published many collections and is a regular writer to the newspapers on varying socio-political issues. She is also actively engaged in panel discussions on TV and radio and continues being involved in lobbying and advocacy efforts. She conducts all Tamil workshops of MWRAF and has represented MWRAF at local, national and international fora.

Ann Jabbar (Sri Lanka)

Ms. Jabbar worked as a teacher before her involvement with Muslim Women Research and Action Front (MWRAF) in 1992 when she joined the Women and Law Outreach programme. She has a multi-cultural background which has enhanced her work and involvement with MWRAF. Ms. Jabbar has steered MWRAF through the formative years, coordinating its evolution and development. She is currently working full time at MWRAF as Programme Coordinator cum Coordinator Finance and Administration and is also involved in publications and networking.

Vahida Nainar (India)

Ms. Nainar works in the areas of awareness raising, legal aid and helping women in crisis. As an activist, she has worked with the women's group Aawaaz-e-Niswaan (AeN) for over three years organizing Muslim women in a predominantly Muslim area of Bombay against gender oppression in the name of laws and religion. In April 1993, she founded the Women's Research and Action Group (WRAG) whose objectives include conducting research on different issues concerning Muslim women, reaching out to Muslim women in different parts of India, organizing training programs on gender and legal issues for Muslim women, and putting Muslim women's issues on the agenda of the women's movement and policy makers alike. Ms. Nainar holds a B.A. in Economics, an LL.B. and a Masters on Women and Development from the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Netherlands. Since the Institute she has moved to the USA to become executive director of the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice in the International Criminal Court.

Gulsah Seral (Turkey)

Ms. Seral is a psychologist by training and is finishing her Masters in Preschool Education and Development. She works on most of the Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR) projects, and has recently helped coordinate the Women's Peace Petition, which WWHR co-sponsored in Turkey (along with the International Peace Bureau, the World Council of Churches, and the International Women's Tribune Center). Ms. Seral handles international correspondence and distribution of WWHR materials.

Isatou Touray (The Gambia)

Ms. Touray is a trainer by profession and a women's rights activist. She has been involved in the women's movement for over ten years. She is currently the coordinator of the gender and management programs of the Management Development Institute (MDI), a governmental institution involved in human resource development. She also works as secretary general of a feminist, grassroots NGO dealing with the rights of women and the girl-child. Through her work in GAMCOTRAP, she is a strong advocate for the elimination of female genital mutilation in the Gambia and on the continent. She is coordinator of the Women and Law Project (Gambia) for WLUML.

Hajara Usman (Nigeria)

Ms. Usman is the country coordinator for the Women and Laws Project (Nigeria). She is a Research Fellow with Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, working full time assisting with WLUML Region West Coordination, which is based in Baobab. Ms. Usman is a political scientist with a specialization in International Relations. She has a special interest in reproductive health and rights issues and violence against women. Ms. Usman has been an activist for almost ten

years. She was the National Secretary General of Women in Nigeria for four years. She is concerned with redressing the gender imbalance that exists in our society, as well as creating solidarity and links between women within and outside Nigeria. She believes very much in the phrase "think globally, act locally."

ANNEX 6

List Of 1999 Participants And Biographical Notes

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS*

Zarizana Abdul Aziz
(Malaysia)
Louisa Ait-Hamou
(Algeria)
Naheed Amtul
(Pakistan)
Yasmin Begum
(Pakistan)
Fatima Isa Abubakar
(Nigeria)
Suntu Jawara
(The Gambia)
Chulani Tania Kodikara
(Sri Lanka)
Djingarey Maiga
(Mali)
Rashida Manjoo
(South Africa)
Najma Moosa
(South Africa)
Deena Munier
(Bangladesh)
Nelofer Pazira
(Afghanistan)
Charmaine Pereira
(Nigeria)
Marwa Qassem
(Palestine)
Hoda Rouhana
(Palestine/Israel)
Fahima Sahabdeen
(Sri Lanka)
Shahira Shalabi
(Palestine/Israel)
Fatou Thiam
(Senegal)

PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIONS

Zarizana Abdul Aziz (Malaysia)

Ms. Abdul Aziz is a lawyer and the current president of the Women's Crisis Centre (WCC), Penang. She has been involved with WCC since 1992 and is also the current chairperson of the WCC Law Reform Sub-committee. In December 1998, WCC sent a memorandum to the government to amend and revise the Domestic Violence Act. Currently the Sub-committee has been granted permission by the High Court of Malaya in Penang to conduct a research into its files pertaining to divorce, custody and maintenance.

Louisa Ait-Hamou (Algeria)

Ms. Ait-Hamou is a university lecturer teaching African literature and a women's rights and human rights activist since the late 1970's. She has contributed to the development of an

autonomous women's movement in Algeria, which has given birth to many women's groups today. She was an active member of the Algerian women's organization in 1989 and acted as the general secretary of a grassroots women's group, which started the first shelter for women "Femmes en Détresse" (Women in Distress). She is presently part of the Research Group on Family Violence Against Women.

Naheed Amtul (Pakistan)

Ms. Amtul has worked with Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre (SG) for the last 10 years. SG is the Asian coordinator of the International Solidarity Network WLUML and very active in the women's rights movement at the local, national and international level. She has a Masters in History and is a researcher by profession. She has been involved in the various researches conducted by SG in the area of women in the industrial labor force, women and religion and social change, women and politics, and others. Ms. Amtul joined the Women Law and Status programme of SG in 1993, initiated the WLS Outreach Programme and is still working there. As a Programme Officer at SG, she conducts trainings for the activists of community based organizations and rural women on the subjects of women's legal rights, the role of customs in their lives, violence against women, legal procedures and relevant institutions, women's rights movements and the United Nations system.

Yasmin Begum (Pakistan)

Ms. Begum is a Programme Officer for Shirkat Gah. Throughout her years as a student, she experienced many years of gender-based discrimination. She conducts legal awareness sessions for male and female community based organizations. An advocate by profession, she works to solve women's problems with the help of the legal system.

Fatima Isa Abubakar (Nigeria)

Ms. Isa Abubakar is the coordinator of research and outreach for the Women and Laws Project in Taraba State at BAOBAB, an NGO concerned particularly with women's human rights and the legal system. She is also active in projects organized by Women in Independence, Self-Sufficiency and Economic Advancement (WISSEA), aimed at enhancing women's rights in society and seeking to build gender awareness and sensitivity. She is interested in all activities that provide the most direct means of reaching the poor and disadvantaged, that contribute to social development and perform excellent service delivery function within the local communities, addressing social inequalities and alleviating mass poverty and hostility to autonomous democratic movements.

Suntu Jawara (The Gambia)

Ms. Jawara has been involved in Gambia women's rights activism for the past three years. She is currently involved in a women's organization called the Forum for the Advancement of Gambia Women and Children (FAGWAC). She has also advocated for young people's rights in Gambia. Ms. Jawara belongs to a community-based organization of which she is president. She is also assistant secretary general of the National Youth Network of the Sub-region and a member of the Task Force Committee of the National Youth Council in the Gambia. She is associated with numerous initiatives and organizations at national and regional levels with a human rights perspective. Her work has widened to include lobbying, advocacy and building networks among young people and female activists.

Chulani Tania Kodikara (Sri Lanka)

Since graduating in law in 1994 from the University of Colombo, Ms. Kodikara has been involved in human rights and women's rights work both in the government and non-government sectors. Presently, she works at the Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum (MWRAF) on networking, documentation and legal counselling. She is also a researcher at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, on a project which is looking at the issue of women and governance in the South Asia Region. She loves reading and traveling and has a keen interest in traditional hand-woven textiles.

Djingarey Maiga (Mali)

Ms. Maiga has been involved in the women's rights movement for six years. She has taken part in many meetings about women's rights and her main area of interest is female genital mutilation, women's political participation and local implementation of human rights treaties. Ms. Maiga is also involved in weekly radio programs focusing on violence against women.

Rashida Manjoo (South Africa)

Ms. Manjoo is a lawyer based in South Africa. Her area of specialty is family law—with an in-depth focus on domestic violence. She is an independent consultant who works with different NGOs on a pro bono basis. She handles individual cases and conducts workshops for NGOs, community based organizations, law students, social work students, paralegals, etc. She also conducts and supervises research and works on judicial education.

Najma Moosa (South Africa)

Ms. Moosa is an advocate of the High Court of South Africa and associate professor in law at the University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa. She has opted for an academic career in law instead of a practical one and has been teaching "disadvantaged" students for the past 10 years. She herself was a product of an apartheid era into which she was born. She considers herself very fortunate that change in South Africa came about at an opportune time in her career and in 1993 she was given the opportunity of an international research fellowship which gave her insights into a whole new understanding of her religion and the status of women. In 1994, Ms. Moosa made her first contact with WLUML at a workshop in Pakistan. She has been working towards the improvement of the status of Muslim women and children ever since and is currently one of two female members of a reconvened South African Law Commission dealing with the recognition of Muslim marriages and related matters.

Deena Munier (Bangladesh)

Ms. Munier is currently working on a Masters in Development Studies, specializing on Women and Development at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Holland. Previously, she worked with Ain o Salish Kendra (literal meaning, Law and Alternative Dispute Resolution Centre) in Bangladesh. She is interested in issues related to women and religion. The topic of her current research is "Fundamentalism and Violence Against Women—Salish in Bangladesh" and she focuses particularly on how it discriminates against women and how it has contributed in increasing violence against women in the guise of religion.

Nelofer Pazira (Afghanistan)

Ms. Pazira is a Canadian of Afghan origin born in Hyderabad, India. She completed her primary education in Kabul, Afghanistan while the country was under Russian occupation. She lived in Pakistan for one year as a refugee and immigrated to Canada in 1990. She has received her high school diploma and Bachelor of Journalism and English degree in Canada. Currently, she is working on her MA thesis in an interdisciplinary program at Concordia University, Canada. Since 1992, Ms. Pazira has organized campaigns, lectures and lobbying groups regarding the war in Bosnia, Palestinians' right to self-determination, women's rights in Afghanistan and critical issues in the Muslim world such as democracy and human rights. In 1996, she travelled to Iran to document the socio-economic condition of the country. In the summer of 1998, she returned to Iran to film a documentary about the family court in Iran and women's struggle at the legal and social fronts.

Charmaine Pereira (Nigeria)

Ms. Pereira was born in Kenya and has also lived in Uganda, Brazil and the United Kingdom. She has been a lecturer and researcher in universities in the U.K. and Nigeria, and has also been active in women's organisations in these countries. Ms. Pereira is one of ten founding members of the Centre for Research and Documentation in Kano. She is also a founding

member of the Network for Women's Studies in Nigeria—a national network, which engages in capacity building for teaching and research in gender and women's studies. She is presently its national coordinator. She was one of the coordinators of the Women and Law Project in Nigeria, carried out under the auspices of the international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Laws. Her areas of research and interest are women's organizing, relations between state and civil society, culture and militarism.

Marwa Qassem (Palestine)

Ms. Qassem works as a women's rights advocate at Mashriqiyat. Mashriqiyat is a research and advocacy organization devoted to promoting women's rights and issues throughout Palestine. It grew out of a successful two-year project of the Palestinian Model Parliament on Women and Legislation (PMPWL) in 1998. Mashriqiyat's goal is to continue and broaden the work initiated by the PMPWL.

Hoda Rouhana (Palestine/Israel)

Ms. Rouhana is a Palestinian woman citizen of Israel. She has been involved with Palestinian feminist organizations in Israel since 1992. She worked for two years in Haifa at an emergency shelter for battered women and volunteered at the rape crisis center, Essiwar—the Arab Feminist Movement in Supporting Victims of Sexual Violence, in Haifa for five years. She has also volunteered with Elabdil—the Coalition Against Honor Crimes and with the personal status coalition. Ms. Rouhana was an intern at BAOBAB and at the WLUML international coordination office in France. She is currently working to initiate a Women & Law project for Palestinian women throughout Israel, both at the national and grassroots level.

Fahima Sahabdeen (Sri Lanka)

Ms. Sahabdeen is a writer and student, currently taking a course at the Open University on Social Science and English. She is married with two boys aged 6 and 10. She has been involved in the Muslim Women Research and Action Front (MWRAF) for the past 10 years and assists in publishing the biannual newsletter. She writes short stories and is also involved in radio programmes and dramas.

Shahira Shalabi (Palestine/Israel)

Ms. Shalabi works with Kayan, a feminist organization created by Palestinian women. She was a founding member of the Palestinian volunteers at the Haifa Rape Crisis Center in 1988, and created services specifically for Arab women at the Haifa Battered Women's Hotline in 1991. She has extensive experience as a group facilitator. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work and a certificate in group facilitation. Ms. Shalabi is active in the struggle to change social and economic rights for Palestinian women throughout Israel, both at the national and grassroots level.

Fatou Thiam (Senegal)

Ms. Thiam teaches Italian literature. She has been involved in the women's rights movement through her advocacy and activism. She is currently the treasurer of Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois au Sénégal (GREFLS), the Senegalese group affiliated with WLUML. GREFLS is a research and action project on women and laws that seeks to enable women in Senegal to both understand and analyse laws, local traditions and interpretations of religious principals that shape their existence, in order to give them ways and means to control their own lives. She is also an active member of the Senegalese Committee on Violence Against Women (CLVF).

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RESOURCE PERSON DESCRIPTIONS

Sunila Abeysekera

Ms. Abeysekera is executive director of INFORM in Sri Lanka, a human rights monitoring and advocacy agency. She has been an activist for almost 30 years, focusing mainly on women's rights, armed conflict and conflict resolution. Ms. Abeysekera is also a trainer for Forum-Asia, for IWRAP Asia-Pacific and other women's and human rights groups, focusing on the methodology of documenting human rights violations, on preparing lobbying and advocacy for the United Nations human rights system, regional and international networking and on conceptual clarity regarding human rights, women's rights and other related issues. In December 1998, she received one of six United Nations Prizes in the Field of Human Rights.

Gladys Acosta

Ms. Acosta is a lawyer and a founding member of the Centro de la Mujer Peruana "Flora Tristan." She is affiliated with the Concertacion de Mujeres Activistas para los Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres (CIMA). From 1993 to 1996, she was director of the Gender and Power Program at the Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Legales Alternativos (ILSA) — a regional human rights and legal research NGO based in Colombia. She has served as an advisor on gender issues for the Consejer'a en Proyectos para los Refugiados Latinoamericanos — an international consortium of NGOs concerned with the situation of refugees and displaced peoples. She is currently the gender officer in UNICEF's Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean in Bogotá, Colombia.

Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi

Ms. Adeleye-Fayemi is originally from Nigeria, and is currently the Director of Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA) a non-governmental development organization for African women based in the UK/Africa with a regional office in Kampala, Uganda. She is also the International Coordinator of the African Women's Leadership Institute, a program of AMwA. Ms. Adeleye-Fayemi has experience as a journalist, researcher, lecturer and trainer. Her areas of expertise are leadership development, international networking and resource mobilization.

Charlotte Bunch

Ms. Bunch is the founder and executive director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership (Global Center) and has been an activist, author and organizer in the women's and civil rights movement for over three decades. She has edited seven anthologies, and co-authored *Demanding Accountability: The Global Campaign and Vienna Tribunal for Women's*

Human Rights. Her contributions to networking and organizing for women's human rights have been recognized by many and include her induction into the National Women's Hall of Fame in October 1996 and President Clinton's selection of Ms. Bunch as a recipient of the Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights in December 1999. She is currently a Professor in the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University.

Roxanna Carrillo

Ms. Carrillo directs the Women's Human Rights Programme at UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) and manages the organization's Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women. Before joining UNIFEM, she was one of the founders of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, an international advocacy organization working for women's human rights, and of Centro de la Mujer Peruana "Flora Tristan," a leading women's NGO in Latin America. She is the author of *Battered Dreams: Violence Against Women as an Obstacle to Development*.

Lynn Freedman

Ms. Freedman is an Associate Professor at Columbia University School of Public Health and Director of the Law & Policy Project. She is a former practicing litigation attorney who then trained in public health. Broadly stated, her work has concentrated on the links between women's status (including, but not limited to, their legal rights) and their health. This focus has led to her involvement in both the reproductive health movement and in the women's human rights movement. She has undertaken many responsibilities in the WLUML network for a number of years and is a member of WLUML's Core Group.

Anissa Hélie

Ms. Hélie is a consultant to the Global Center. She holds two Masters' degrees—one in women's history and one in women and development from the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Holland. She is currently finalizing a Ph.D. from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, France. Ms. Hélie is an activist who has been involved in the women's human rights movement for over 15 years. She is a member of the Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) International Solidarity Network's Coordination Group and has consulted with women's organizations in a variety of countries. A 1992 Women's Global Leadership Institute (WGLI) graduate, she joined the Global Center staff in 1997 as the WGLI coordinator. She is now the coordinator of the Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes.

Mariémé Hélie Lucas

Ms. Hélie Lucas is the founder and international coordinator of the International Solidarity Network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML). She was born in Algeria and has dedicated most of her life to a political vision that has inspired many women around the world. Now living in exile in France, she has devoted the last 15 years to creating and building the WLUML network. As a result, WLUML has become a widely recognized voice within the global movement for women's human rights. Ms. Hélie Lucas has traveled extensively to denounce the rise of fundamentalist movements, their increasing visibility and political influence around the world. Her commitment to global issues affecting women from Muslim countries and communities around the world does not impair her remaining involved with the issues prevailing in Algeria.

Ayesha Imam

Ms. Imam is founding director of BAOBAB for women's human rights in Nigeria. BAOBAB has been involved since 1993 in the WLUML Women and Law Programme Nigeria project and was formally established in 1996 as an organization focusing on women's legal rights issues under customary, statutory and religious laws in Nigeria. BAOBAB has since become the regional coordination/focal point of WLUML for the Africa and Middle East region. Ms. Imam has been a woman's activist for nearly two decades—until recently on voluntary basis. Before

working full-time for WLUML, Ms. Imam was a lecturer and researcher in women's studies and gender and analysis at universities and research institutes in Nigeria, UK, Canada and Senegal. She has also worked on gender training for activists in NGOs, for mid-level planners and functionaries, and for researchers.

Pinar Ilkcaracan

Ms. Ilkcaracan has an M.A. in Psychological Counseling. Ms. Ilkcaracan has worked for years in women's shelters in Germany as an activist, therapist and coordinator. The WWHR coordinator since 1993, she is responsible for management and long-term policy/vision building. She carried out the first WWHR legal literacy group in 1995 working with women from Umraniye Women's Center, co-directed a documentary film on domestic violence called "It's time to say No!," and as a country coordinator for the WLUML Women and Law Project, has been involved in action-research in the eastern and southeastern regions of Turkey. Ms. Ilkcaracan has also been working hard towards advocacy and lobbying the government to pass the draft law pertaining to protection orders for women subjected to domestic violence. She has also volunteered to undertake the coordination of the WLUML literature review/research on sexuality.

Asma'u Joda

Ms. Joda is currently coordinating the Centre for Women and Adolescent Empowerment, in Yola, Adamawa State of Nigeria. She is also the coordinator of Adamawa State BAOBAB Outreach Team and the northeast zonal coordinator. The Centre works with the community in order to bring about positive social change for women and adolescents, towards a more fulfilling life. The Centre at the moment is engaged in trying to make the community aware of the dangers of early marriage to teenage girls, both physical and psychological. Other community driven activities includes issues of violence against women, i.e. forced marriage, men thinking they have the right to refuse to give divorce to women, anti-rape advocacy, etc.

Sindi Médar-Gould

Ms. Médar-Gould currently lives in Nigeria and is originally from St. Lucia in the West Indies. She is the acting executive director of BAOBAB and the executive director of WISSEA, Kano. Her work at WISSEA is primarily on reproductive rights and women's health and sexuality. Ms. Médar-Gould is running a program on reproductive health in three local government areas of Kano State for traditional birth attendants and menopausal women in matters of reproductive health. She conducts trainings on team building, conflict management and resolution, gender, sexuality, and leadership.

Oby Nwankwo

A chief magistrate, Ms. Nwankwo has been involved in the women's rights movement for the past 17 years. She is currently the project coordinator at the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA)-Nigeria Chapter, which provides free legal education and services to women and children. She is also the founder and executive director of CIRDDOC Nigeria—an NGO involved with promoting and protecting the human rights of women. She recently initiated Nigeria's first Tribunal project, which exposed violations and sought positive changes in harmful traditional customs and practices.

Betty Powell

Ms. Powell is the founder and director of Betty Powell Associates and has been an educator and human rights activist for over three decades. As director of Betty Powell Associates, she has assisted a broad range of organizations across the USA to become more inclusive and highly functioning diverse institutions. She was a founding member of the Astraea Foundation, a national fund for women's and girl's projects, and has been significantly involved since 1995 in organizing and training leaders in the global women's human rights movement, both abroad and in the United States. Ms. Powell received her B.A. in French

language and literature from the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota and her M.A. in the same field from Fordham University in New York. She has done extensive graduate and doctoral work in urban education and coursework in human and organizational development.

Karin Ronge

Ms. Ronge is a special pedagogue by training, and an activist with experience working in women's shelters in Germany. Since August 1996, she has been keeping all the WWHR accounts in order, preparing financial reports and organizing cash flow, as well as sharing with the team knowledge about women's networking and issues related to the rights of the girl-child.

Farida Shaheed

Ms. Shaheed, a sociologist by training and activist by choice, is a Coordinator at Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre in Pakistan. Shirkat Gah works to increase women's autonomy, access to information and resources, skills and decision making in each of its programmes. Ms. Shaheed is responsible for the Women, Law & Status programme that includes research and documentation, outreach and advocacy, training and publications. In addition to policy-level interventions, the WLS programme runs an extensive field-based capacity building programme focused on legal consciousness with legal awareness and paralegal training. It addresses violations of women's rights through international campaigns and through direct intervention in individual women's cases. Shirkat Gah Lahore is the Asia Region Coordination point for WLUML. Ms. Shaheed is also a founding member of Women's Action Forum, a national women's lobby group.

ANNEX 8

Declaration by Institute Participants in Lagos, November 1999: Women from Muslim Countries and Communities Speak on "Islamisation" of Zamfara State

We, women from Muslim countries and communities across the world (including Afghanistan, Algeria, the Arab community in Israel, Bangladesh, Cameroon, the Caribbean, the Gambia, India, Iran, Kenya, Malaysia, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Sudan) gathered here in Nigeria, are worried at the potential consequences of measures that purport to be Shari'a or Muslim laws in Zamfara state, in northern Nigeria.

We are deeply concerned at the apparent disregard of due process of law, and women's rights as enshrined in the constitution. We would like to point out that prohibiting women and men from traveling in the same public conveyance will deny women's rights to movement and mobility, particularly poor women in rural and urban areas. Will this measure mean that wives will not be allowed to travel with their husbands, or mothers with their sons? It will certainly prevent women from getting to their jobs every day. Thus the proposed measure will therefore make it even harder for women to feed and care for their families.

We fear that the proposed policy in Zamfara state may be the first step towards abusing women's human and constitutional rights. We have already seen this happen in Afghanistan, where in the name of Islam and segregation of the sexes, women and girls no longer have access to education, health care services, jobs and other means of gaining an economic livelihood, or the right to freedom of movement. Similarly, those who claim to be the flag-bearers have attacked girls' right to education and women's rights to mobility in Algeria, Bangladesh and elsewhere.

We are alarmed that these abuses are being implemented under the guise of Islam. Sani, the governor of Zamfara state correctly said (as reported in *The Vanguard*, October 28, 1999, page 2), "there is no compulsion in religion." Why then is segregation in transport compulsorily introduced? When women and men are expected to fulfill the 5th Islamic principle of pilgrimage together and without segregation, how is it Islamic for women to be removed from the public sphere?

It is even more worrying that in so many of our countries and communities the very mention of the word Shari'a, silences all comment or criticism about even so grave a denial of rights. We believe that focusing attention on issues such as segregation of the sexes diverts attention from the real issues—for example, combating poverty, and ignorance, providing basic amenities such as water, electricity, health care, education, and sewage disposal.

Clearly, the compulsory introduction of the so-called Shari'a, whilst failing to discharge the above duties, would not address the social vices that Governor Sani mentions (*Post Express*, October 28, 1999, page 1). The problems of prostitution, gambling, theft, drug addiction and armed robbery cannot be solved by removing women from the public sphere. Denying women their freedom of mobility is an abuse of women's human rights as human beings.

In view of the seriousness of the situation, we urge the government of Nigeria to immediately protect the rights of women in Zamfara and in every other state of the country, as guaranteed under the constitution without delay.

Finally, we call upon all our governments, including the Nigerian government, to fulfill their state obligation to ensure the well-being, security and full rights of all their citizens.