

# WLUML / NEWSLETTER

## SUMMER 2010

عوانيت زير اش مسلم قوانين  
Women Living Under Muslim Laws  
النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين  
Femmes sous lois musulmanes

### SKSW CAMPAIGN IN NEW YORK AND GENEVA

Engaging with the UN human rights system is one of the key strategies of the Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women (SKSW Campaign), and this year the Campaign has connected our local partners with the UN human rights arenas both in New York and Geneva. The Campaign now operates under the slogan: Violence is Not Our Culture.

In March 2010, the Campaign attended the 54th UN Commission on the Status of Women, hosting two side-events at the NGO forum in New York. The panel discussion on violence against women and girls justified in the name of culture (CVAW), held on 3 March, presented an overview of the Campaign, focusing on the frontline work and expertise of our partners in their local contexts, which ranged from Malaysia and Indonesia to Nigeria and the Sudan. Three UN Special Rapporteurs also participated in the panel, opening up a dialogue which highlighted the diversity of contexts where CVAW occurs, and which reaffirmed the need to look at the intersections of culture, violence and discrimination. The event also served as a launch for the SKSW Campaign's Policy Briefing Series 1, on the issues of stoning and *zina* laws.

On 10 March, the Campaign held a forum introducing the Women Re-claiming and Redefining Cultures (WRRRC) programme and screened two video documentaries produced by SKSW partners on the issue of adultery laws and CVAW: *Mokarrameh*, about the sentencing of Mokarrameh Ibrahimi to death by stoning in Iran, and *Makkunrai Makkutana*, about the whipping of a young girl in Indonesia. The positive response from the audiences at



both events was truly motivating and the Campaign would like to thank everyone who attended for their continued support. The proceedings of the events, along with the Policy Briefing Series 1, can be downloaded from the SKSW website ([www.stop-stoning.org/node/930](http://www.stop-stoning.org/node/930)).

In July 2010, the Campaign attended the 17th Annual Meeting of Special Procedures Mandate Holders of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, which brought together the UN Special Procedures holders and country delegates, as well as NGO and civil society members. During the Civil Society Dialogue, the SKSW Campaign was able to address the Procedures holders, emphasizing that "while the roots of our campaign are largely in Muslim majority contexts, we operated under the banner of Violence is Not Our Culture, and we seek to make our campaign truly global, so that people in all communities can stand up and say that 'violence is not *my* culture'. Our campaign reaffirms the fact that forms of gender-based violence justified in the name of culture, tradition or religion exist the world over, and are never acceptable."

The Campaign also took the opportunity to welcome the new mandate on cultural rights, and the first report by the Independent Expert, which echoed the

sentiments of our global campaign in drawing a clear distinction between the need for cultural diversity, on the one hand, and on the other the risk of viewing cultures as static, singular, or solely defined by dominant voices in any given community.

The SKSW Campaign believes that collaboration between mandate holders and liaising with civil society is especially important in a climate where gender-based violence continues to go unpunished and where culturally relativist arguments are gaining ground at the local, national, regional and international levels. The Campaign will be returning to Geneva and the HRC in the coming months to strengthen its engagement.

To stay informed of upcoming events and activities, join the SKSW listserve by writing to:

[info@stop-stoning.org](mailto:info@stop-stoning.org)

Rima Athar

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**violence is not our culture**  
the global campaign to stop killing and stoning women

# EDITORIAL AND SOLIDARITY

## EDITORIAL

### SUMMER 2010

“To ban or not to ban the burqa” – that is a question in the European Union. Belgium and France banned it lately, so the debate continues at a high political level amongst many other member states, provoking contradictory responses across the world.

Meanwhile in Iran, a year after the disputed elections of 2009, the women’s movement faces growing suppression from the authorities. We feature an article by Leila Mouri, which examines the impact of the government crackdown on the status of women and their activism in Iran today. Also in Iran, we update events in the case of Sakineh Mohammadi-Ashtiani, whose death by stoning sentence, since ‘commuted’ to hanging, has received almost unprecedented attention from the international media over the last month.

WLUML welcomed the July 2010 announcement of a new UN agency to promote equality for women around the world. UN Women will have an estimated annual budget of \$500m for carrying out its remit of challenging governments on women’s rights.

Other international items include a report on the violence against the women of Hassi Messaoud, and the rapid response of women’s groups in Algeria and France. There are also updates from Senegal, Nigeria, Egypt and Iraqi radio producer and activist Farah Al-Dujaili, who interned at the WLUML ICO during the summer, gives a personal insight to women’s issues in her home country.

WLUML networkers Farida Shaheed and Rashida Manjoo submit their first reports to the Human Rights Council, and WLUML founding member, Marieme Hélie-Lucas, follows up some issues brought to light by Gita Sahgal’s parting of ways with Amnesty International, questioning the apolitical stance of human rights organizations.

#### Fatou Sow

Coordinator, WLUML International Coordination Office, London

## SOLIDARITY

### WEST ACEH, INDONESIA

#### New regulation forbidding the wearing of ‘tight clothing’ by women may be open to abuse

**June 2010:** The Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women and WLUML released a call to action expressing their concern about the issuance of a new regulation in the district of West Aceh, Indonesia, which strictly forbids Muslims, especially women, to wear tight clothes. The new regulation was issued on 27 May 2010 by the Head of the district of West Aceh. Non-Muslims who reside in West Aceh or are temporarily present in West Aceh are also required to respect and to adapt to the new regulation. This new regulation makes West Aceh the first district in the country to strictly implement an ‘Islamic’ dress code and if signed by the Provincial Governor would eventually be enforced in the entire province of Aceh.

[www.wluml.org/node/6380](http://www.wluml.org/node/6380)

## IRAN

#### Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh sentenced to two-and-a-half years in jail and 30 lashes for ‘acts against national security’

**June 2010:** WLUML and SKSW are deeply concerned by the sentencing meted out to our colleague and friend, Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh, in May 2010 by the Iranian Revolutionary Court for exercising her constitutional right to peaceful assembly. On 8 May, the Revolutionary Court in Iran sentenced Ms. Abbasgholizadeh, 52, to two-and-a-half years in jail and 30 lashes for “acts against national security through conspiracy and collusion intended to disrupt public security, disturbing public order and defiance against government officers”.

[www.wluml.org/node/6306](http://www.wluml.org/node/6306)

## IRAN

#### Imprisoned activist Shiva Nazar-Ahari to go on trial for ‘acts against national security’

**May 2010:** WLUML calls on civil society organizations and UN member states to ask the head of the Judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Sadegh Larijanito, to address our grave human rights concerns and immediately release Shiva Nazar-Ahari. Ms. Nazar-Ahari’s trial, due to take place on 23 May 2010, has been postponed without a future date being set. Shortly after the contested June 2009 presidential elections in Iran, Ms. Nazar-Ahari was arrested. After spending more than 100 days in prison, she was released on a \$200,000 bail in September 2009. Ms. Nazar-Ahari was arrested once more on 20 December 2009 along with other members of CHRR when a bus taking several political and civil activists to Ayatollah Montazeri’s funeral in Qom was stopped by security forces in Tehran’s Enghelab Square.

[www.wluml.org/node/6310](http://www.wluml.org/node/6310)

## IRAN

#### Sakineh Mohammadi-Ashtiani still faces imminent death

**August 2010:** Since WLUML and SKSW issued our first update on Sakineh Mohammadi-Ashtiani’s case on 9 July 2010, SKSW received new information that she is still facing the imminent threat of being executed. We also received the news that her young son, Sajjad Qaderzadeh, who publicly expressed his concern on the plight of his mother has been summoned by the Iranian authorities for questioning about his activities. On 4 August we learned that Mohammad Mostafaei, a human rights defender and lawyer of Ms. Ashtiani had been arrested and detained by Turkish authorities, where he had fled after his wife, Fereshteh Halimi and brother-in-law, Farhad Halimi, were arrested on 24 July, and detained at Evin Prison in Tehran.

Please check our website for updates, and see page 7 for further details of the case.



## ALGERIA

### The women of Hassi Messaoud defend their right to employment and autonomy in the face of ongoing aggression

In April 2010, WLUML issued an action alert with their close allies, Secularism Is A Women's Issue (SIAWI) and Women's Initiative for Citizenship and Universal Rights (WICUR) ([www.wluml.org/node/6199](http://www.wluml.org/node/6199)) in response to the ongoing violence by gangs of youths against women – mostly migrant and living without a 'male guardian' – working in the industrial and economic sectors of the oil fields of Hassi Messaoud in the south of Algeria. We demanded that the Algerian authorities ensure that: violent attacks against the women workers were immediately stopped by all legal means, including by the mobilization of additional police forces; medical and psychological assistance was provided to the female victims of these attacks; their reintegration to their work was ensured after due recovery time; and, crucially, investigations were immediately undertaken and the perpetrators brought to justice.

WICUR's Samia Allalou is of the opinion that the large mobilization of women's groups and individual human rights defenders in the wake of these reported attacks – in street demonstrations in Paris and as a result of tireless networking between principally North African and European women's activists – has borne fruit: "The local police force are intervening more quickly and effectively." Nevertheless, Ms. Allalou adds, "the incidents of aggression and night incursions [into women's homes] seem to be continuing, according to local sources. The women dare not testify openly for fear that they will lose their jobs."

The Canadian journalist, Laura Julie Perreault, recently visited Hassi Messaoud and on 17 July published an article in French ([www.cyberpresse.ca/international/afrique/201007/16/01-4299041-leur-crime-etre-femme.php](http://www.cyberpresse.ca/international/afrique/201007/16/01-4299041-leur-crime-etre-femme.php)) that looks at the roots of almost a decade of violence against women in the town, conveying the palpable fear of its female workers.

In the words of two women: "Since 2001, you have to watch your back in Hassi Messaoud." It was in July 2001 that a local imam asked his congregation to rid the neighbourhood of 'corruption'. After prayers, the older men felt emboldened to speak to the 'promiscuous' women they believed had stolen their jobs. According to the account of one young man, the women had been warned, "but they were not afraid". The atmosphere of violence that hangs over the town since that night has one objective, says a cleaner for a foreign firm who goes by the pseudonym Samira: to force the women out of their jobs. But the women keep on migrating south and now account for half the population of the town – an extraordinary statistic given that in the country as a whole, women constitute only 17 per cent of the labour-force. In this social context, explains the historian Daho Djerbal, the women of Hassi Messaoud are a disturbing phenomenon for many: "Employed, independent, without the guardianship of a husband or father, they are defying – by their very presence – traditional roles not only in Algeria, but in a growing number of Muslim countries and the developing world."

In a book published in spring 2010, *Laissées pour mortes: Le lynchage des femmes de Hassi Messaoud* ('Left for

dead: The lynching of the women of Hassi Messaoud') by Fatiha Maamoura and Rahmouna Salah and co-authored by Nadia Kaci, Ms. Salah, now aged 43, recounts in detail the night of 13 July 2001, and nine years after the events is one of only two women who will speak openly of the suffering she endured. After a legal battle that Ms. Salah waged for five years, together with one other victim, only eight men were imprisoned, and the most severe sentence was eight years. "If people are not punished, you know what they do? They start again," she warns.

In Algiers, a feminist coalition has formed to demand a government enquiry into these crimes, but in the opinion of some members of the Algerian press, it is the women who are to blame: "If these women, that call themselves victims, want to be respected, then they should stop smoking in the street and receiving their boyfriends at home. Algeria is a Muslim society that has its limits." That these words were spoken by a woman journalist, Fadela Khalfa, is an indication that a century after Algerian Ouled Nail dancers were victims of a culture which despised and distrusted any woman who did not live under the jurisdiction of a husband or other male relative, cultural attitudes have changed little.

**Eleanor Kilroy**



*Solidarity for the women of Hassi Messaoud: a street march in Paris, May 2010*

# CAMPAIGNS

## “ARE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS SO TOTALLY DEPOLITICIZED?”

**Marieme Hélie-Lucas asks the question, following Gita Sahgal's public exposing of Amnesty International's political alliances**

A couple of months ago, WLUML networkers were asked to support Gita Sahgal, the then Head of the Gender Unit of Amnesty International (AI), who went public and exposed in the media – after doing so internally in vain – the unholy alliance that this major human rights organization entertained with Muslim fundamentalists.

AI is far from being the only human rights organization to make this political mistake and this alarming breach of their human rights mandate. And Gita is far from being the only one to have confronted her hierarchy on this issue. All those who dared voice their dissent were fired or silenced (*Conscientious objection: AI persists in suppressing dissent*, [www.sabrang.com/cc/archive/2010/mar10/humanrights1.html](http://www.sabrang.com/cc/archive/2010/mar10/humanrights1.html)). In my personal experience, this policy has been going on for the past three decades at least.

As an example, throughout the 1990s in Algeria, AI and HRW reported nearly exclusively on the violations committed by state forces (see AI and HRW annual reports during this decade), while none or little was said about fundamentalist armed groups (GIA, AIS, etc.) who, incited by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) political party, were waging what we called ‘a war against civilians’ (as opposed to a ‘civil war’) that made an estimated number of 200,000 victims in 10 years ([www.sabrang.com/cc/comold/april98/world.htm](http://www.sabrang.com/cc/comold/april98/world.htm)).

During this period, while we desperately turned to human rights organizations for help, they kept on inviting fundamentalists and their lawyers and supporters to their venues, thus supporting and propagating their views. And they helped them be granted asylum in Europe, from where they raised funds and prepared more

violent actions to take place in Algeria.

Meanwhile the victims of fundamentalists were denied asylum and basic support, on the grounds that they were not persecuted by the state, but by non-state actors... Despite human rights organizations' claims not to take part in politics and not to have any political agenda, defining what constitutes a victim of human rights violations is never an objective, apolitical exercise, particularly when some victims are, at the same time, perpetrators.

It seems human rights organizations were stuck in the old ideological framework whose only focus was state accountability, which was designed some 50 years ago, at a time when states were powerful while non-state forces – as counter powers – did not exist on the scale they do today, and at a time when most conflicts took place between two armies of two nations while today most armed conflicts involve one or more non-state actors.

It also seems that human rights organizations could not handle the complexity of fundamentalists' double identity, both victims of state repression and perpetrators of the most grave violations against innocent people that they did not find ‘Muslim’ enough, who were branded ‘kafir’ [i.e., ‘unbelievers’] and subsequently executed.

And finally, it seems human rights organizations could not make a difference between defending the basic human rights of anyone, be he or she a criminal, and giving them a political platform.

Many years ago, Afghan women told me they had the same discussions – in vain, too – with human rights organizations who supported all-out the Northern Alliance fighting Soviet occupation, while these women, although not approving of occupation, were warning them that the ‘mujahiddin’ were dangerous for women and for human rights in general. I believe

that anti-Sovietism was the reason for supporting Muslim fundamentalists in Afghanistan – instead of just defending their fundamental human rights – regardless of their agenda on women and on society.

Both in Algeria and in Afghanistan, the stance taken by human rights organizations amounted to a hierarchy of rights in which women's rights came last, after religious rights, cultural rights, and minority rights. Moreover it also created a hierarchy among victims: on the one hand, victims of state repression were supported by human rights organizations and on the other hand, victims of attacks by non-state actors were left to their fate and hardly ever mentioned in annual reports of human rights organizations. This is a grave abandonment of the principle of defence of human rights for all.

This problem with the human rights organizations' de facto support of Muslim fundamentalists has also been raised within the Coalition of Women Human Rights Defenders, of which WLUML is a founding member and an active participant. Since its inception in December 2005, the issue was publicly raised at the consultation that took place in Colombo (*When women human rights defenders face political non state actors*, [www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/resources.php](http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/resources.php) and [www.human-rights-for-all.org/spip.php?article51](http://www.human-rights-for-all.org/spip.php?article51)). In June 2009, the Coalition held a Strategic Conversation, ‘Addressing Gaps at the Defense of Women Human Rights Defenders’, and one of the three thematic concerns was on the direct accountability of fundamentalist forces. In this workshop it was discussed how a limited understanding of the extensive and intimate links of fundamentalist forces, of their use of front charitable organizations, of their manipulation of humanitarian crises, and of the transnational nature of networks of fundamentalist groups in the UK and the US, as well as a state-centric human rights framework, have sanitized non-state actors like fundamentalist groups that violate women's rights and their defenders. The workshop stressed that this concern has been raised repeatedly.

In a recent (June 2010) open letter sent



to AI reviewers (see below), the Coalition wrote that this: “has been a cause of concern, particularly among women’s human rights organizations, because it undermines the extensive work that has been done on pinning accountability of religious fundamentalist forces behind the systematic discrimination against women and other genders. The controversy brings to fore the inadequacy of a Counter Terrorism with Justice campaign framed within the rubric of human rights, but which does not fully integrate women’s human rights and gender equality. If these rights were integrated fully, AI would not only be vigilant about the violation of civil and political rights, but would also be concerned not to defend these rights at the expense of condoning the negation of women’s human rights.”

However, in the weeks that followed Gita’s coming out, the General Secretary of AI stated publicly that “defensive jihad” was not “antithetical to human rights” (By Human Rights Alone, 4 April 2010, & Daily News and Analysis, Gita Sahgal, 18 April 2010), thus making explicit the organization’s political position.

Gita’s public unveiling in the media of AI’s nauseous politics was intended to lead to a public debate. The debate will not take place. AI decided to have an internal review of their processes regarding their forming alliances, instead of a public debate. And only selected parts of the final report will be released to the public.

Let us note in passing that the group of Algerians (*Statement by Algerians on the affair Gita Sahgal vs AI/Moazzam Begg*, [www.siawi.org/article1670.html](http://www.siawi.org/article1670.html)), all well known to AI headquarters, who immediately supported Gita’s action, were not approached by the reviewers... This does look like a ‘whitewash’, rather than showing any willingness to accept an honest and transparent debate with those of us who have called for it for decades.

The WHRD Coalition and WLUML have been and are still calling for a public debate in the presence of Gita and other AI activists who have been sanctioned in the past for raising the issue.

## AFRICA / CAMPAIGNS AGAINST FGM

In April 2010, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) withdrew its 2010 policy statement on female genital mutilation (FGM) that endorsed pediatricians’ “nicking” of girls’ genitalia, following the launch of a global campaign by Equality Now. In the words of Equality Now’s Executive Director in the US, Taina Bien-Aimé, “The work of the African anti-FGM grassroots movement has finally reached our shores.”

Without discounting the recent minor progress made by campaigners against FGM in Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan, for example the ‘fatwa’ issued by the Association of Islamic Clerics in Kurdistan ([www.wluml.org/node/6502](http://www.wluml.org/node/6502)), and news that a new anti-FGM Iran team intends to visit the provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan and Kermanshah, this brief report will highlight the efforts of two women’s organizations on the African continent. It is estimated that over 130 million girls and women in Africa have undergone some form of FGM, according to Dr Comfort Momoh. Dr Momoh, who received the Florence Nightingale Scholarship/Travel Award 2007 to carry out a comparative research in Africa looking at the sexual health of women who have undergone FGM, shared with WLUML this quote of a young woman: “FGM is like a seed which has been planted in our hearts and manifests in our limbs and pollutes our minds. Now the practice is as strong as a tree though we try our best to cut



*Hubbie Hussein Al-Haji of Womankind, Fatou Sow of the WLUML ICO, and Isatou Touray, Director of GAMCOTRAP and WLUML Board Member*

this tree the roots runs deep in our veins. So we must start from the grass root of the problem and this is the lack of males’ involvement in eradicating such acts.”

In the December 2009 report of the Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (GAMCOTRAP), the Committee identified the target groups – members of the security forces, women leaders, and religious and community leaders – that were reached through their project to empower women. At workshops, the need for a law on FGM was emphasized and those women present attested to the reality of violence against women in their communities, noting ignorance as the main cause of the subordination of women. During the course of the trainings, they expressed their commitment to protect their daughters. The debate on FGM often centred on religion: circumcisers are of the belief that FGM is part of the religious obligations of women, and as a result whole communities are engaging in the harmful practice. To deal with these misconceptions, GAMCOTRAP invited religious leaders to lead discussions on Qur’anic verses, the authentic Ahadith and other religious arguments which are related to ‘cleanliness, chastity and purification for women’. Imam Baba Leigh, Saikou Fayinke and Muhammad Sanuwo exposed misinterpretations of verses of the Qur’an on male circumcision that were used by some religious leaders as justification for FGM.

Womankind is a local NGO based in Garissa, Kenya. A focus of their advocacy work is creating awareness and educating women and men on the harmful effects of FGM. In an exclusive interview with WLUML, Hubbie Hussein Al-Haji talks to WLUML about the substantial material and cultural challenges her organization faces. You can listen to the audio interview on the Our Voices Section of the WLUML website:

[www.wluml.org/node/6309](http://www.wluml.org/node/6309)

# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND ACTIVISM

## FIRST REPORTS TO HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**Report by Rashida Manjoo, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences**

Submitted in April 2010, this is the first thematic report to the Human Rights Council by Rashida Manjoo since her appointment in June 2009. As well as giving an overview of the Special Rapporteur's activities, the report focuses on the topic of reparations to women who have been subjected to violence in contexts of both peace and post-conflict.

The report looks at conceptual challenges that prevail when placing the question of gender-sensitive reparations on national and international agendas. It also analyses procedural and substantive considerations emerging in reparations initiatives responding to violence in conflict, post-conflict and authoritarian settings. The report then examines reparations to women and girls in contexts of "peace" or consolidated democracies, by looking at discriminatory practices against certain groups of women, and by highlighting recent landmark cases in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights.

The full report can be downloaded at: [www.wluml.org/node/6532](http://www.wluml.org/node/6532)



### CULTURAL RIGHTS

**Report by Farida Shaheed, UN Independent Expert in the field of cultural rights**

In this first report to the Human Rights Council, submitted in March 2010 pursuant to resolution 10/23 of the Human Rights Council, Farida Shaheed develops preliminary views on the conceptual and legal framework of her mandate. Focusing on the challenges regarding the scope and content of cultural rights, she reviews the relevant existing provisions in UN human rights instruments, and develops her initial thoughts on the interaction among the principle of universality of human rights, the recognition and implementation of cultural rights and the need to respect cultural diversity.

Aware that many other UN mechanisms have received mandates which relate to cultural rights, Ms. Shaheed has committed to coordinating with other mechanisms. She has also selected a list of priority issues she proposes to address, relating to two main topics: cultural rights, globalization of exchanges and of information, and development processes; and participation, access and contribution to cultural life, without any discrimination.

The full report can be downloaded at: [www.wluml.org/node/6533](http://www.wluml.org/node/6533)



## LAUNCH

### UN WOMEN

**General Assembly votes unanimously to launch agency to promote equality for women**

Some 65 years after it was founded, and after decades of reports on every species of sex discrimination and its wasteful effects, the United Nations has decided to set up a single, powerful body to promote equality for women around the world.

The General Assembly voted unanimously on 2 July 2010 to launch a new agency called UN Women. It will begin its work in January, have a high-level leader, probably twice the \$250m annual budget now allocated to gender issues, and will be tasked with challenging governments on women's plights and rights.

UN Women will press hard for women to have a more widespread and prominent role in politics, and also try to reduce discriminations including lack of access to health and education, forced marriages, rape, female circumcision, and trafficking.

Although the UN has in the last two decades gone some way to being less dominated by socially conservative men, progress has been fitful. A 1995 agreement by 189 nations in Beijing to work towards equality put down a marker, but women's issues were split between different UN agencies of varying effectiveness.

Then, four years ago, a push for a UN body for women was launched as the Gear Campaign. Eventually numbering more than 300 groups, and led by the European Union, it agitated for a single, dedicated agency which would have a high-powered leader, a greatly increased budget and some real clout. This has now been won, with diplomats at the Assembly greeting news of the new body with spontaneous applause as the decision was announced.

[www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)



## IRAN / ONE YEAR ON

Many women were involved in the uprising and played a central role in the mobilization of the Green Movement. A more recognizable symbol of women's participation in the protests was the young university student Neda Agha-Soltan, whose shooting and gruesome death in Tehran on 20 June 2009 became an international rallying cry against the heavy-handed tactics of the Iranian government. Agha-Soltan became a symbol not only of the Green Movement, but of all Iranians killed for opposing the regime. In a heavily patriarchal society, her ordeal was a reminder of the crucial status of women in the social and political life of Iran.

Agha-Soltan and Shiva Nazar-Ahari (see Solidarity, page 2) are members of a new generation of politically active Iranian women, born and raised after the 1979 Revolution. Their struggle against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic has been well documented, but their situation has become especially harrowing over the last year.

In the wake of the 2009 protests, and under the pretext of maintaining order and protecting national security, the Iranian regime has escalated its suppression of the women's movement. Many women activists have been arrested, tortured and sentenced to long prison terms; others have left the country in fear of their safety. As a result, there has been a decline in the activities and influence of the women's movement, which some observers have considered to be the most potent agent for change in the country.

The government's persistent attacks of the past year against feminists and the women's movement were mostly aimed at reinforcing the Islamic Republic's grip on public behaviour. Much more so than in previous years, the Islamic Republic strove to characterize feminism and feminist activists as agents of Western countries. The government has produced numerous articles, reports, speeches

and TV programmes targeting women's "un-Islamic attire and behaviors" and discussing ways in which they should be punished, diminished and disciplined.

As a result of these attacks, criticisms, and arrests, a considerable number of women activists have fled the country during last year. Despite the difficulties of life in exile, they have continued their advocacy on women's issues in collaboration with international human rights organizations. Activists in Iran are also trying to move forward their work, albeit on a limited scale, and are forming new alliances with other activist groups within the country. One cannot ignore, however, the damaging impact of government suppression, exemplified by the meticulous surveillance of activists and heavy prison sentences issued against them. These measures have effectively sidelined some of the women's movement's most prominent members.

Considering all these developments, the future of Iran's women's movement heavily depends on the relationship between members inside Iran and those who have left the country, as well as finding unity between its various branches. One positive development in this regard was the emergence of Zahra Rahnvard, the wife of presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, and her ability to bridge the gap between generations of women activists in the run-up to the 2009 election. Widely recognized as a conservative, and with no particular interest in feminism, she has become a vociferous critic of the regime and an advocate for reform. Strengthening the connection between secular, younger Iranian women and the religious older generation may be crucial to the future success of the women's movement in Iran and the key to realizing equality for the country's women and girls.

### Leila Mouri

This is an excerpt from an article originally published in digital magazine *Muftah*. Please see the original for a more comprehensive discussion on the issues presented above:

<http://muftah.org/?p=221>

## SAKINEH MOHAMMADI- ASHTIANI

**04/08/10:** The case of Sakineh Mohammadi-Ashtiani, sentenced to death by stoning in Iran, has captured global attention over the past month. The 43-year-old mother of two was convicted of adultery with two men, after the death of her husband in 2006, and sentenced to 99 lashes, which was carried out at that time. Later that year, charges were brought against one of the men for involvement in the murder of Ashtiani's husband, and Ashtiani was again brought before the court and convicted of adultery (during marriage) and sentenced to death by stoning.

As her sentence was to be carried out in July 2010, Ashtiani's children launched an international appeal to bring attention to their mother's case and save her life. Although this campaign successfully pushed the Iranian authorities to change her stoning sentence, she is still slated for execution by other means.

A media blackout has been imposed on Ashtiani's case across Iran, and her lawyer, Mohammad Mostafaei, has been forced into hiding. Mostafaei is a prominent human rights attorney who has defended many political prisoners and women sentenced to stoning for adultery. His wife and brother-in-law were arrested in an apparent attempt to hold them as ransom until Mostafaei turns himself in to the authorities. On 4 August 2010, it was discovered that Mostafaei had escaped to Turkey, but (at time of writing) has been arrested by the Turkish authorities and is at imminent risk of extradition.

In a surprise move, President Lula of Brazil offered Ashtiani political asylum. Although Brazil is a key ally for the Iranian government, this offer was summarily dismissed. Sakineh Mohammadi-Ashtiani's life, and that of her attorney, is still at imminent risk.

# NEWS FROM NETWORKERS

## SENEGAL / PARLIAMENT PASSES LAW ON ABSOLUTE GENDER PARITY

In May 2010, Senegal adopted a law on gender parity in electoral functions. This means that all the candidates at the next national and local elections will have to obey the rules of absolute parity. This is without doubt the result of a long struggle by Senegalese women who, in the 1970s, made the quota system (25%) a primary demand of women involved in the Socialist Party, the only party at the time.

Why is this measure so important? The rate of women's political participation signifies women's social position and testifies to their gains in the struggle for equal rights. Their political advancement can be measured in terms of their representation in national parliaments, governments and community agencies such as regional, municipal and rural councils. Other measures are the rates of their participation and their position in civil society associations, political parties or trade unions.

Therefore, the parity law would constitute a degree of democratic progress, when one examines the figures on the political representation of women in Senegal, since independence in 1960. The multi-party government of Senegal became a one-party state from 1962 to 1974. The first female member of parliament was elected in 1963, followed by four others in

1973, and by 2003 there were 19 women out of 144 MPs. They occupied 23% of parliamentary seats at the last election in 2007. However in 2010, their progress in politics remains limited in other political functions of government (10%), regional councils (12.97%), municipal councils (20.03%), and rural communities (27.32%).

Despite the hopes raised among women, the new law has met with many reservations in public opinion, of women as well as men. For most of its opponents, this law discriminates in favour of women, not because they are able, but because they are... women. For others, the law will only be effective if there are accompanying measures: removing the persistent cultural prejudices against the political and public representation of women; and preparing them to take on these new roles. In reality, cultural and religious prejudices remain strong. A liberal MP says that "This parity law promotes the domination of one sex over another," while others complain that it is in contradiction to religion.

This democratic step will not represent a real advancement unless the process of democratization itself makes sustainable progress and anchors this new societal venture in Senegalese society.

**Fatou Sow**

## NIGERIA / THE SENATOR YERIMA CASE

In July 2010, The Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria extended its lawsuit to the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other Related Matters (NAPTIP) for its investigation of Nigerian Senator Yerima's 'marriage' to an under-age Egyptian girl, 13, who had been illegally trafficked into Nigeria. In May Yerima was questioned by the NAPTIP, but after three hours of interrogation, he was released on a bail. The lawful age of marriage in both Nigeria and Egypt is 18 and he faces five years in jail if convicted.

The sharia council had sued the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), asking the court to declare that Yerima's fundamental human rights had been breached by the organizations' decision to investigate the 'marriage'. They argued that Yerima had the right to marry up to four wives under Muslim laws, and that the National Assembly had no right to interfere with such 'marriages'. Yerima himself justified his purchasing of the under-age girl as following the example of the Prophet Muhammad who married Aisha when she was nine years old, and rejected any laws regarding the criminalization of the marriage of minors under the age of 18, claiming that these laws are contrary to Muslim laws.

In Egypt, the State's silence on the violation of its own marriage laws caused frustration amongst feminists. The news provoked anger in women's rights groups in Nigeria who demanded an investigation because it was not the first time the ex-governor of Zemafrá state had used sharia law as a cover for sexual exploitation. WLUML networkers in Egypt worked together with their Nigerian allies to bring the case of Yerima to the attention of Egyptian media and civil society. There are plans for further cooperation with Nigeria, and a number of Egyptian NGOs hope to hold an event after Ramadan to discuss the issue of trafficking in Egypt.

## NOTIFICATION OF PUBLICATION

*Remembering the Other's Others: Theorizing the Approach of International Law to Muslim Fundamentalism* by WLUML Council member Karima Bennoune, Professor of Law and Arthur L. Dickson Scholar, Rutgers School of Law – Newark, has been published in the *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* (Vol. 41.2, Winter 2010), a journal dedicated to the analysis and discussion of human rights and civil liberties under both domestic and international law.

An abstract of the paper is available at:

[http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1626026](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1626026)

The full paper will be available at:

[www3.law.columbia.edu/hrlr/journal.php](http://www3.law.columbia.edu/hrlr/journal.php)

## EU / 'ACTION ON BURQA' PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

On 27 May 2010 in Paris, the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly held a meeting about moving a resolution on "Burqa – is action needed?". According to the Assembly's report *Islam, Islamism and Islamophobia in Europe*, Muslim women are "victims" of prejudices as foreigners and of Islamophobia in Europe and face cultural constraints within their own communities. The veil is at the centre of political and legal disputes in several EU countries.

Several speakers regarded the veil as a matter of religious freedom of choice: a ban would restrict this freedom, argued N. Akbulut, a (veiled) Turkish sociologist; Jill Marshall, a UK law lecturer, stated that the freedom of wearing the veil does not preclude gender equality. In opposition, André Gérin and other parliamentarians condemned the veil as a "walking coffin" for women and a way "to impose Sharia laws in the [French] societies and in the public sphere". Most participants were clearly apprehensive of full body veiling, but could not decide whether to accept or ban it. They feared a greater exclusion of women, and political tensions among communities. Although nobody mentioned terrorist acts, they were in many people's mind. People only agreed on "an informed choice" for women to wear the burqa.

My main intervention was on the critical need to secure a secular space for "Muslim" women to exert their rights in Europe. Before being Muslim, women are residents and citizens of an EU in which "democratic standards require a separation of the state and its organs from religions and religious organizations" (Recommendation 1804, 2007). Their bodies cannot continue to be the site of political power struggles. As Shadi Sadr reminded us in her article ([www.wluml.org/node/6318](http://www.wluml.org/node/6318)), are they lesser citizens in Europe?

**Fatou Sow**

## SENEGAL / GIRLS AND WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

Disability is a condition and not an intrinsic quality. In Senegal and other African countries, disability is surrounded by prejudice. These prejudices are such that girls with disabilities are victims of rape and forced into early marriage, often without a dowry. Parents think they are 'supernatural creatures' and that by marrying them, for example, to wise, old men they will be saved from hell! These girls, often subjected to early sexual experiences, with little protection, resulting in early pregnancy, are exposed to serious sexual infections (fistula, sexually transmitted diseases) and, worse, to maternal and infant mortality.

In Casamance, in the south of Senegal, the armed conflict is a source of violence and has increased the number of disabled people; they are the victims of knife- and gun-crime, and anti-personnel mines planted in the region's fields and rice paddies. According to Handicap International (HI), there have been 433 land mine victims – 95 of whom have died – between 1988 and the end of 1999. These statistics do not identify the percentage of female victims. The vast majority of these incidents occurred in the second half of the 1990s. Only HI and, to a lesser extent, UNICEF have a presence on the ground in Casamance; the former provides technical assistance for the handicapped, and the latter focuses on the protection and education of child landmine victims and supports women in a work reintegration program.

Girls and women with disabilities are the most vulnerable of people; they are handicapped not only due to their physical or mental disability, but also by virtue of being women. They are often the subjects of ridicule, without the protection of their families or the state, which has failed to put in place facilities for their protection and integration into society. They are the easiest targets of violence and sexual abuse.

According to the WHO, more than 100 million girls and women in over 28 African countries could be considered disabled as a result of FGM. In terms of general health, women with disabilities have never been given real consideration in our societies, and even less so when it comes to sexual health. One would think that women with disabilities are not entitled to health services, as hospitals, clinics, etc. have neither adequate access ramps nor appropriate care facilities; therefore, they are often afraid to visit such institutions.

In the suburbs of Dakar, many girls living with disabilities are not enrolled in school; they remain at home and do the difficult domestic work. Often alone, these vulnerable children are victims of sexual abuse by their immediate family members, as well as those guided by traditional beliefs.

Thus, disabled women are seen as either sources of evil or good luck; they are thought to have the ability to improve the financial and social position of their husbands through their imaginary mystical powers. When they don't bring success they are rejected by their power-hungry spouse. Some think that to have forced or consensual sex with albino, virgin girls brings good luck; other communities firmly believe that anyone who meets a woman with disabilities in the morning will have a day marked by misfortune and it is out of the question to have any kind of union with her. Finally, they are, for various reasons, forced into illegal prostitution.

At the state level, no development, structural or legal, has been conducted in compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has been signed but not yet ratified by Senegal. Women parliamentarians and lawyers, following a training session on advocacy for the protection of sexual and reproductive rights of girls and women living with disabilities (hosted by WLUML and the Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women), support associations of women with disabilities; they advocate for the state to meet its obligations, especially with regards to providing health services fit for human beings.

**Aissatou Cissé**

# NEWS

# FROM NETWORKERS

## EGYPT / ARAB WOMEN THINK TANK

On 22–23 June the Swedish Institute in Alexandria, Egypt hosted the second meeting of the Arab Women Think Tank. Academics, activists and researchers from a number of Arab countries including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, the Palestinian territories, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates attended the meeting to share ideas and exchange experiences on the formulation of the think tank.

The think tank aims to build a body of scholarship that can be a platform for advocacy and sharing of strategies on emerging issues that bolster women's participation in different walks of life. The think tank also aims to help define the main important emerging issues related to women's empowerment and gender equality in the Arab region through brainstorming, reflection, discussion and networking.

This network will be composed of scholars, activists and researchers as well as young women in the media and the arts who are concerned with achieving women's empowerment and gender equality in the region. Some will represent themselves and others will represent the institutions they belong to. The group will be composed of interdisciplinary experts from different Arab countries as well as artists, making sure to include young women and men.

WLUML was invited to present its long and outstanding experience in establishing a well known and influential network defending women's rights. The think tank is currently hosted by El-Karama ([www.el-karama.org](http://www.el-karama.org)) regional movement in Cairo and is preparing to launch its website as a platform for communication with its members.

**Doaa Abdelaal**

## WLUML ICO / SUMMER INTERNSHIP

**Farah Al-Dujaili is a media practitioner with interests in human rights, culture and communications. She interned with WLUML in June and July 2010, and tells us about her experiences**

I am a producer for a women's program at a radio station, Radio Al-Nas, in Iraq. The program broadcasts twice a week for 20 minutes. I engage with different essential issues: educational, social and political. My message is that we need to work together, women and men, to rebuild and improve our countries. I also emphasize that women's issues are society's issues – we cannot categorize them as separate.

### Activism

As a human rights activist, I work with Al-Nas Organization for Media and Culture, an NGO which is part of the Iraqi Democratic Future Network (IDFN). Our activities relate to raising awareness by organizing workshops and conferences, and addressing the media. We run programs on women's issues, human rights in general, and reconciliation. We also produce publications.

I am also involved with campaigning. For example, a number of activists and I are organizing a counter-campaign against the recent 'Campaign of reforming the Hijab' in Baghdad, in which extremists are presenting women who don't cover their hair as ugly. We aim to address the media



and progressive religious leaders to stop such propaganda.

### WLUML internship

I had the chance to meet people from different countries, sharing experiences and realizing that women are often facing the same challenges all over the world. The experience has broadened my knowledge and perspective. It's given me an exposure to how the rest of the world lives and how much we have to do in Iraq to catch up.

I've also gained technical skills by attending a four-day course at the London Academy for Media and Film Production, which I'll use in my daily work at the radio station.

### Women in Iraq today

The main challenge for women in Iraq is violence, which is demonstrated in different ways. The domination of patriarchal culture and tradition in society causes practices such as 'honour' crimes and FGM. Until now we've had the attitude that man is a first class citizen while woman is a second class citizen. Some religious factions are trying to keep this backwardness in society, spreading their fanatic ideas, which aim to keep women subservient to men in the name of religion and tradition.

There is a lack of laws that guarantee rights for women, e.g. laws that protect women from sexual harassment or 'honour killings'. Furthermore, the personal status code has not passed through parliament yet, as there is a huge debate surrounding it with some religious parties standing against it.

Women in different spheres of life are still stereotyped – socially, politically, economically and even in the media. We have women in leading posts such as in parliament and government but they are still harassed and controlled in their positions.

### Networking

Networking is important for: sharing the experiences and challenges that our societies face, understanding our differences and learning from each other. This will be useful to women's rights movements and women's solidarity all over the world. It will promote better responses to violations happening against human rights in general and women's rights in particular.



# REVIEWS

## FILM

### THE GLASS HOUSE

**Directed by Hamid Rahmanian  
2008, 92 min**

In 2001, Iranian anthropologist and feminist Ziba Mir-Hosseini produced a feature-length documentary with Kim Longinotto entitled *Runaway*. The award-winning film charts the stories of a group of young runaway girls who are taken to a women's shelter in Tehran, most of whom were escaping domestic violence at the hands of their male relatives.

The film was an inspiration for Marjaneh Halati to found the Omid Foundations in 2004, which are established in Iran, the UK and the US. Her vision is of a distinctive holistic approach to helping vulnerable young female clients achieve self-awareness, self-determination and self-sufficiency in contemporary Iranian society. The Omid Centre in Tehran currently takes in girls between the ages of 15 and 25, and 10 special cases are considered each year for girls in exceptional circumstances. Many organizations focus on children and others on returning the girls to their families, but the Omid-e-Mehr fills a gap by providing services to adolescents. Moreover, their programme goes beyond providing a safe space, by actively empowering the girls to make choices about their own lives.

*The Glass House*, directed by Hamid Rahmanian and produced by Melissa Hibbard, is a feature-length documentary which follows four teenage girls enrolled in the programme at the Omid Centre in Tehran. We meet Sussan: jailed as a minor after being raped by her brothers (one of whom is a drug addict still living in the family home), who endures a series of abusive *sigheh* marriages [temporary marriages] and fears for the safety of her young sister. After being abandoned by her mother, Mitra became the 'mother' of her siblings at the age of 13; she eloquently captures her sorrows through creative writing, a skill for which she received training at the Omid Centre. Samira, 14, was found unconscious on the street and smiles sweetly as she talks about being forced to take ecstasy and crystal meth by her mother. Nazila (pictured below) and her friends sneak out of home to record rap music in music studios, making connections between their personal circumstances and other narratives of oppression.

*The Glass House* offers a view into modern Iranian society which often remains opaque. Despite its often distressing subject matter, the documentary is infused with a sense of hope and the possibility for long-term change that the Omid Foundation has set into motion.

*The Glass House* is available on DVD and 20 per cent of all sales go to Omid-e-Mehr Centre. To find out more, please visit: [www.omid-e-mehr.org/theglasshouse.html](http://www.omid-e-mehr.org/theglasshouse.html) and [www.fictionvillestudio.com](http://www.fictionvillestudio.com)

**Aisha Shaheed**

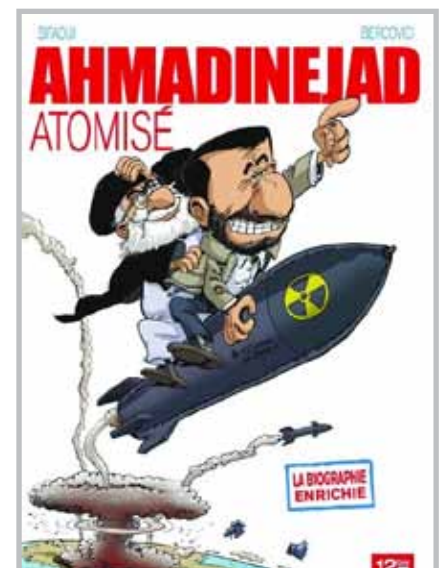
## BOOK

### AHMADINEJAD ATOMISÉ: LA BIOGRAPHIE ENRICHIE

**Mohamed Sifaoui and Philippe Bercovici (12bis, 2010)**

Mohamed Sifaoui, an Algerian journalist exiled in France, has authored with the Belgian cartoonist Philippe Bercovici an 'unauthorized' biography of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. This biography, told as a comic strip, is both a strong condemnation of the Iranian regime led by the "religious, without faith or law" and a tribute to the resistance of numerous victims of this dictatorship: women, religious minorities, homosexuals, young people, and opponents. Sifaoui uses political satire to describe the 'obscure' life of the man in charge of Iran, set against the background of an analysis of the country's recent history. Can one 'atomize' or 'nuke' Ahmadinejad with humour and derision? It's a challenge that Sifaoui and Bercovici have taken up with great intelligence.

**Fatou Sow**



# EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## REPOLITICIZING SEXUAL HEALTH AND RIGHTS CONFERENCE

The editorial committee of *Reproductive Health Matters* journal, edited by Marge Berer, organized a conference entitled 'Repoliticizing Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights: A Transformative Framework: Beyond ICPD and the MDGs' in Langkawi, Malaysia on 3–6 August 2010. Hosted by the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), based in Kuala Lumpur, the aim of the conference is to propose a transformative agenda for moving beyond ICPD and the MDGs to repoliticize the analysis of and work on sexual and reproductive health and rights. It is based on the recognition that, to inform advocacy, action and activism, a solid, well-informed, theoretically-sound analysis and position are required.

WLUML former and current Council members and networkers attended the conference: Pinar Ilkcaracan, Gita Sahgal, Anissa Hélie, Khawar Mumtaz, and Fatou Sow, the International Coordinator; as well as Sylvia Tamale (African Feminist Forum) and Adrienne Germaine (International Women's Health Coalition).

## WLUML ICO NEWS

We are pleased to announce that two ICO staff members have recently given birth: welcome to Anthonia Onwordi's son Joshua, born 10 November 2009, and Johanna Heden's son Milo, born 15 July 2010.

Nandita Dutta joined the WLUML ICO in July 2010 as Publications Officer. Please contact her regarding any publications matters at:

[nandita@wluuml.org](mailto:nandita@wluuml.org)

## MIGRATION AND WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE

The Women In Development Europe (WIDE) Annual Conference 2010, entitled 'Migration in the Context of Globalisation: Women's Human Rights at Risk?', was held in Bucharest on 3–5 June 2010.

WLUML networker Samia Allalou attended on behalf of WLUML, joining over 200 gender advocates, activists, migrant women, journalists and gender experts from around the world. Presentations on migration in the global economic context of crises and the threat to women's human rights; policies and their impacts; exposing, resisting and developing alternatives; and putting alternatives into practice were followed by facilitated discussions and workshops.

[www.wide-network.org](http://www.wide-network.org)

## LAUNCH OF YOUNG ARAB FEMINIST NETWORK

A group of young Arab women have come together to build a support network for young Arab activists in the region. They recognize that young Arab women face particular challenges and experiences of sexism, and also the fragmentation and elitism of women's rights work in Arab societies.

The group believes that an organized network uniting young women activists working on a range of women's rights issues and coming from various perspectives and backgrounds is the ideal way to push forward the organizing of women's rights in the region.

[www.yafn.org](http://www.yafn.org)

## LAUNCH OF KURDISH WOMEN'S WEBSITE

Roj Women is an umbrella site publicizing the work of Roj Women's Association, a women's charity working on community development in the UK, and of its political branch, Roj Women's Assembly, which campaigns for far-reaching legal and political reforms in Turkey. Roj Women strives to give Kurdish women, whether in their countries of origin or in the diaspora, a voice to publicize the gender and racial discrimination they face. Beyond raising awareness, Roj Women campaigns for change and offers services to support Kurdish women and child victims of male and military violence. You can stay informed of Kurdish women's struggles in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran by visiting:

[www.rojwomen.com](http://www.rojwomen.com)

## WLUML

We would be happy to receive your comments, suggestions or feedback. Please write to [pubs@wluuml.org](mailto:pubs@wluuml.org)

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WLUML is an international solidarity network that provides information, solidarity and support for all women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam.

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