

**Building Civil Societies : A Guide for Social and Political Activism**

Women Living Under Muslim Laws

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**And**

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For

Women Living Under Muslim Laws

## **Building Civil Societies: A Guide for Social and Political Activism**

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**Abbreviations**

ASK	Ain o salish kendra
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COAT	Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade
CCMW	Canadian Council of Muslim Women
FWB	First Women's Bank
ICHRDD	International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development
MWRAF	Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum
NPA	National Plan of Action
NGO	non-governmental organization
UAF	Union d'action feminine
UN	United Nations
RAWA	Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (Quetta, Pakistan)
SG	Shirkat Gah
SAGE	Students Against Genocide
WLUML	Women Living Under Muslim Laws
WWHR	Women for Women's Human Rights

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### **Introduction: Alerts for Action**

The "Alert for Action" is a tool - a call to mobilize individuals and groups to protest injustice, voice support for humanitarian and human rights causes, and work for social change. The network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) has been involved in initiating and circulating Alerts for Action since before its formal inception in 1984. Not surprisingly, given its links with many individuals and international organizations - particularly in countries and communities where Islam is the dominant religion, WLUML often receives questions regarding Alerts and other types of protest letters and initiatives for public mobilization. The questions range from wanting to know what Alerts for Action are and how they can be launched, to how effective they are given the limited time, resources, and energy activists have. How do we judge when a situation warrants issuing an Alert, and whether it should be circulated internationally, nationally, or locally? Similarly, and often in connection with the Alerts for Action, the Network also receives requests for information about preparing press releases, petitions, and postcard campaigns.

Clearly there are two sets of issues and queries to be addressed. First, there are the queries from those of us who are not too familiar with, or not fully convinced of, the effectiveness of this kind of political and social participation. Second are the questions from those of us who are convinced of the importance of taking action in times of human rights crises and who need direction in terms of organizing a protest campaign or providing effective support. In the past, given the wide political and cultural context in which the WLUML Network is active, it has done its best to respond to these requests on a case by case basis. However, as the number of active networkers has increased, and due to frequent requests for a brief guide to forms of public participation and specifically for a manual on preparing Alerts and initiating other types of political mobilization, the

WLUML Network has undertaken the publication of this general guide. Yet the WLUML stresses that there is no universal recipe for action, and often the particular social and political context must be examined and evaluated in order to determine appropriate strategies. Thus, this publication is intended to provide direction and practical ideas, rather than prescription, to anyone who is interested in helping to bring about change and social justice, specifically through “Alerts” and letter writing campaigns.

This guide is organized in two sections. In Part one we present the history of the WLUML Network, and examine and assess various forms and levels of public participation for upholding and expanding social justice. We discuss different levels of public action and give examples from different countries. Part Two reviews several methods used by social activists around the world, outlines basic principles for preparing and publicizing various forms of solidarity action, and evaluates the limitations and effectiveness of each.

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## **Part One: Raising Our Voices**

## **Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) and the Alerts for Action Initiatives:**

The history of WLUML is linked with attempts to mobilize international support for the just treatment of individuals, particularly women, by governments or other political groups. In 1982 Marieme Helie-Lucas, at the time a sociology lecturer in Algeria, had to leave the country. During this period, the Algerian government reinitiated the process of changing Algerian family law. An earlier attempt had failed in part because of strong objections from many women, themselves veterans of the Algerian independence movement. The law being pushed once again by the government would severely reduce the legal rights of women within marriage and this was unacceptable to women who had fought hard for the independence of their country. Aware of women's objections, the authorities tried to pass the bill quietly without launching public discussion. Women activists, aware of the government's plan, managed to get access to a draft of the law and circulated it among interested individuals. Three of the women who read and discussed the proposed family law within various women's groups were arrested and imprisoned without trial or charges, and kept incommunicado for several months. It was in this context of political tension that Marieme left Algeria.

Abroad Marieme met women activists from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and many other places, who shared their experiences of participating in successful national and international campaigns which had resulted in political and social change. Dowry death was one important issue around which Indian activists had mobilized, gaining widespread support from the public and forcing the Indian government to address the issue. Marieme, deeply concerned about the safety of the imprisoned women in Algeria, was inspired to act on their behalf. While Human Rights organizations organized protests in Paris, she decided to write to women's organizations and women activists across the world, particularly in

Muslim countries, asking them to write to the government of Algeria requesting the release of the imprisoned women. (Receiving support exclusively from the “west” is easily turned against us by our detractors. Marieme’s initiative was a step towards building alliances and creating support between Third World countries and Muslim countries, especially through women’s organizations). Marieme asked everyone she wrote to pass on the letter-writing request to other women’s organizations or individual activists, and that everyone send her a copy of each letter written to the Algerian government. (This was before the advent of fax machines and electronic mail, and all this communication was done through the post - given the usual shortage of funds among women’s organizations and activists, telex and telegrams were out of the question). Within a couple of months several hundred letters of support, many from the Muslim world and other developing countries, were received. In light of Algeria’s human rights record, no-one had been too optimistic about the results of the letter-writing campaign, but shortly after the bombardment of mail on their behalf the imprisoned women were released, albeit without explanation.

A few months later, Marieme received a letter from India which in essence said, ‘we signed and supported the liberation of the Algerian women in prison, could you now mobilize the Algerian women for the campaign we are launching in India.’ The letter referred to the case of a 24-year-old Sunni Muslim woman who dared to challenge the Supreme Court of India on the constitutionality of India’s Muslim Personal Status Law. The rights granted her under the Indian constitution were denied under the country’s Muslim Personal Status Law. This is true in many of our countries, where the family laws are often in sharp contradiction to the constitution. The Indian case was publicized in Muslim countries and communities, going far beyond Algerian women’s organizations, and generated much discussion among concerned women.

More cases kept coming up. The next one concerned the plight of a Sri Lankan migrant worker in Abu Dhabi who had become pregnant after being raped by her employer. The Abu Dhabi government was treating the case as adultery, since without witnesses the woman could not prove the rape. [In order for a woman to prove rape in Abu Dhabi, she must provide at least two male eye-witnesses - an impossibility in most rape situations]. The raped woman was sentenced to death by stoning, and was to be kept in prison until the birth of her child and two months of breast-feeding. Women activists publicized the case. They wrote to women's organizations, human rights activists, feminists and intellectuals around the world, and particularly in Muslim countries, explaining the gross injustice that was about to be carried out. They urged people to write to the government of Abu Dhabi asking for the immediate release of the woman. The campaign was successful. Not only was the woman released and sent back to her country along with her baby, but the whole process of the campaign contributed to bring to the attention of the international community the plight of many powerless immigrant workers, highlighting their economic exploitation and their lack of basic human rights. Since then, several programs have been set up to monitor and improve the situations of migrant workers, and the United Nations has devoted several sessions to examining the issue of migrant labor. Moreover the case drew attention to the absurdly unjust requirements to prove rape, and to the treatment of zina (sex outside marriage) which generally targets women as sexual criminals.

These and several other unexpectedly successful actions led some women activists to consider creating an organization that would bring women from Muslim countries and communities in contact with each other. The women involved, all from Muslim societies and communities, recognized that in Muslim societies (but also in many other societies) issues of gender and equity lay at the heart of many women's problems. Moreover, they were very aware that despite

the diversity of beliefs and practices in the Muslim world, especially in relation to women's issues, each cultural group understands their particular interpretation of Islam and Muslim Law to be the only one. This made it difficult for Muslims critical of women's lack of equity to raise their concerns, for fear any critique could be misconstrued as questioning the tenets of their religion. Moreover, communication among women in different Muslim societies was (and to a large extent still is) very limited due to social and legal difficulties; thus Muslim women rarely had the opportunity to become aware of the diversity of rules and norms imposed on women in the name of Islam. Ironically, the contacts that were made among women activists from various Muslim countries, linked through their fight against colonialism in the first half of the twentieth century, were greatly curtailed beginning in the 1950's after the success of many anti-colonial movements.

With this in mind, Marieme initiated a series of talks with women from Muslim countries, discussing the importance of contact and the political support that they could give each other, as well as the sharing of experiences and the exchange of ideas. This led to the formal creation of the Network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws in 1984, where women of diverse political orientations, and religious and cultural backgrounds, committed to building equitable and democratic societies, could support each other.

The idea of a solidarity network has been at the core of WLUML from its inception. Today, after more than 15 years in existence, in addition to solidarity work including "Alerts for Action" and letter-writing campaigns, the network is engaged in diverse activities, including supporting women's research and specifically research for action, and lobbying initiatives in areas that WLUML's active networkers deem important for the advancement of women in Muslim societies. The WLUML Network publishes the result of research carried out under its auspices as well other studies which promote social justice and equity

for women living in Muslim contexts. Supporting women in their social and political lobbying, and facilitating women's interaction on common concerns locally, regionally and nationally through meetings, exchanges, and conferences is also an important aspect of WLUML's work. As well, WLUML does its best to ensure that women from Muslim countries have a presence at international conferences organized by the federation of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other international organizations such as the United Nations. The WLUML Network works to challenge inaccurate representations of Islam and Muslims by the international media, attempting to sensitize the public and raise awareness that the stereotypical image of Islam is simply one interpretation in a religion, that, like most other religions, is dominated by patriarchal notions. Privileging such stereotypes often plays into hands of those wishing to suppress more democratic and equitable interpretations of Islam.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the philosophy and history of WLUML see Farida Shaheed, 1994 "Controlled or Autonomous : Identity and the Experience of the Network Women Living Under Muslim Laws " in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Vol. 19, number 4. Reprinted as Occasional Paper number 5: Women Living Under Muslim Laws.

### **Working to Create a Civil Society**

The conventional assumption has been that if citizens have the right to elect their government representatives, then they have a democratic society where ideals of social justice, based on notions of equality and fundamental rights, are the guiding principles. However, global realities at the threshold of the 21st century reveal the fallacy of such assumptions. It is evident that to insure the development of a democratic society, public accountability must be built into the political system, governing those in positions of power. Moreover, the notion of "political participation" has shifted substantially. Individual citizens have a larger role to play than casting a vote or even participating in the occasional demonstration. These are important, but building a just and equitable society requires more active participation in terms of voicing concerns and demanding change. It requires educating political leaders and representatives about injustices of all kinds, and demanding the fundamental reforms to create a better world. Without such participation, the creation of an equitable, inclusive, and just society is impossible.

Public participation does not necessarily mean creating or joining a political party; there are many forms of both individual and collective participation. Writing letters to elected representatives, voicing opinion regarding government policy, and encouraging others to do the same are significant political acts. Members of parliament concerned about the next election cannot afford to ignore thousands of letters from constituents requesting opposition to a bill which voters consider undemocratic or wrong. In countries where this form of pressure is not an option, writing to the national newspapers, radio stations, and other media outlets to voice dissatisfaction can be effective. Appeals to national and international human rights organizations are also constructive forms of public participation, given that most governments care about their international reputations. All these

activities are forms of "lobbying," that is to say efforts by individuals or groups to influence and mobilize public opinion, governments, policy-makers, and international communities to examine a social, legal, or political issue of concern.

Let us provide an example: In 1990 the Sri Lankan government decided to reform laws affecting marriage, divorce, and guardianship of children, allowing minority communities to be governed by their respective family codes. A new Muslim Family Code was to be introduced, as some 7.6 percent of the Sri Lankan population is Muslim. The government asked community leaders and some of the most conservative Sri Lankan and Middle Eastern Sunni religious authorities to assist in writing the new Muslim family code. Women activists in the Sri Lankan Muslim community, however, aware of the importance of family law and its implication for women, mobilized and, through Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum, lobbied for female representation on the council. Two women lawyers from MWRAF were invited, along with 14 men, to join the legal reform committee. MWRAF had already carried out research on Muslim family law in Sri Lanka and thus was aware of some of the women's and community's concerns. The women, knowing of the importance of family laws and practices in other Muslim societies, immediately mobilized their contacts and asked WLUMML to send documents on the entire range of family codes from different Muslim countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey, Iran and Malaysia. After studying these documents and considering their own culture, women activists prepared a draft document of recommendations and continued to lobby for their views. All but one of their recommendations were accepted. This informed intervention, supported by solid research and documentation, encouraged the authorities to invite representatives from women's groups and organizations on other occasions. While MWRAF and other women's organizations continue to lobby for further reform of women's legal and social position, they are well aware that if they hadn't taken steps to involve themselves at the early stages of the process

of drafting the new code, they would have faced a much greater task in trying to reform the established law later.<sup>2</sup>

However, political participation does not necessarily have to address formal decision-making processes and powerful officials or bureaucrats. There are many informal actions that can bring about social change. In 1995 a researcher conducting in-depth interviews on women's views of family planning in a low-income neighborhood of Tehran recorded the following case, in which a neighborhood woman managed to get the local mullah (religious leader), a man generally indifferent to women's affairs, to support women's right to freedom from domestic abuse. Through strategic involvement of the mullah - an influential personage - an ordinary neighborhood woman used the existing religious structure to achieve positive social change in her community.

The problem involved a neighborhood man who regularly assaulted his wife. They lived in a rented room in a traditional-style house shared with several low-income families. All the neighbors were aware of the situation and frequently intervened to save the woman from her husband's blows. But despite trying, neither the neighbors nor her relatives - who finally suggested divorce - had any impact on the man's behavior. The abused wife had three young children and divorce would mean losing custody of her children to their father, since under Iranian Family Law, fathers automatically gain guardianship of their children. This law effectively discouraged her from seeking divorce, and her husband was well aware of this. An elderly woman in the neighborhood reproached the abusive husband, calling his behavior cruel, damaging to his children, and unforgivable in God's eyes. Although he politely heard her out, her speech had no impact on his

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<sup>2</sup> For further discussion and information on the reform of Muslim family Code in Sri Lanka see MWRAF & WLUML. 1999. Between Two worlds: Muslim Women in a Multi-Ethnic Society, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Chulani Kodikara. 1999. Muslim Family law in Sri Lanka. Colombo, Sri Lanka: MWRAF & WLUML.

behavior. Frustrated and angry, the respected elderly woman went to the local mullah. The elderly woman pointed out to the mullah that although according to custom men are the heads of their households, it is not Islamic for a man to beat his wife. She told the mullah that the men in the neighborhood did not take the counsel of elders such as herself seriously because religious leaders like the mullah neglected to remind them of their family and community responsibilities. She reminded the mullah that, as part of his Islamic office, it was his obligation to address this issue in his sermons. She also demanded that the mullah go and talk with the abusive husband. The mullah, knowing that the whole community was now aware of this visit, had little choice but to act.

His meeting was successful and the husband changed his behavior radically. The change was influenced by several factors. Traditionally, mullahs are seen as pious men of great religious learning, and are highly respected. Moreover, most men in low-income residential areas are laborers, and frequently need the support of their local mullah to obtain small loans from the mosque or to provide character references for a variety of purposes. They often need the mullah's help to find a job, or to sign their ration card and so on. Staying on good terms with the local mullah and being recognized as good Muslims by him is very important to the men, particularly in low-income neighborhoods.

In subsequent sermons, the mullah discussed domestic violence and advised the men that justice and fairness are the most important elements of Islam. If they fail to uphold these principles, he warned, especially within their families, then they invite the curse of God and his Prophet upon themselves. His words did not fall on deaf ears; women in particular paid careful attention and reminded their husbands of the mullah's words. The mullah's influence on the formerly abusive husband was noted by many women in the neighborhood, who went seeking his guidance and help for their own troubles. Moreover, they also gave him their

alms for distribution among the poor, which further enhanced his position in the community. In effect, the mullah became an informal family arbitrator. For women in the neighborhood, approaching him was much more practical and less intimidating than going to the formal court and trying to deal with unfamiliar procedures and strangers. The experience also made the mullah aware of a group of constituents - the women - and their concerns, which he had previously ignored. As he grew more familiar with the women and their concerns, his interpretation of their Islamic rights gradually became more liberal. This case illustrates how the actions of one ordinary woman, who refused to overlook an injustice, benefited an entire community in several ways.

In another case, in 1981 the father of a 17-year-old girl chose, in accordance with Pakistani tradition, to marry his daughter off to a man his daughter had never seen. Though the family lived in Manchester, England, where the adamantly unwilling bride-to-be was born and raised, her father insisted that as the head of the family he would decide when and whom she married, as was his customary - and he argued - Islamic duty.

The girl tried to enlist the support of her uncles, teachers, and other family members without success. When she approached some women's organizations for advice and support they advised her to leave her father's house and go to a shelter where they could then help her. She did not want to leave home, knowing the great grief it would cause her family, part of a tight-knit, traditional Pakistani community. Finally, she and several other Pakistani women went to the local mosque and told the mullah about the situation and asked him to intervene. The mullah, himself the father of two daughters and a traditional man, counseled the young woman and agreed to talk with her father.

Using the Holy Qur'an to support his position, the mullah reminded the unhappy girl's father that, contrary to traditional practices, it was in fact a sin to marry his daughter off without her consent, and to do so would condemn her to a sinful life in God's eyes, for a forced marriage is invalid from an Islamic point of view. The mullah left, saying the final decision was up to the girl's father. The father, considering the mullah's words and knowing the entire community was now aware of the situation, called off the marriage. This incident has since provided many young Muslim women in Britain and elsewhere with tools to resist forced marriages without alienating their families. Unjust traditional practices normally justified in the name of religion can often be resisted through an alternative interpretation of Islam. Though women cannot always use this strategy of gaining the support of the local religious authority, the two aforementioned examples illustrate how informal strategies which take advantage of local institutions (including religion) can help overturn harmful practices.

Informal strategies are not only useful for personal reasons; in many cases, they can be effective for national issues as well. In February 1998, Ghulam Mussen Karbaschi, the mayor of Tehran, Iran, whose liberal ideas and effective management of the city had won him unprecedented popularity -especially among women – was arrested. Conservative clerics, outraged at his increasing popularity and his role in promoting the election of liberal-minded president Mohammed Khatami in May 1997, charged Karbaschi with the abuse of public funds.

Since Iran's judiciary, police, and army are controlled by the conservative spiritual leader, and not the government, the mayor's situation seemed hopeless and his safety in jeopardy. While many people campaigned for international support from human rights organizations, Iranian women took a different approach. During the mayor's detention, women showered his residence with flowers each day to

express their support for him. The mountain of flowers drew increasing numbers of spectators to the mayor's house.

Fearful of public anger and a potential uprising, the extremists were forced to release Karbaschi on bail, which they had previously refused, and allow him to prepare for his trial. In Iran's current political context, where the police, courts, and media are controlled by conservative religious forces whose power and authority are above the government, and who for the last two decades have felt no need to explain their actions to the people, this was a significant victory for the public. It clearly demonstrated to Iranians their power as a collective, when an action as innocuous as taking flowers to the mayor's home permeated the political arena and influenced a judicial decision.

Although the idea of challenging government actions can be daunting for individuals, and understandably few take such steps, in many instances there are existing channels that citizens can use to protest and prevent policies or actions they are in disagreement with. The story of how a coalition of women's organizations and women activists saved the Pakistan First Women's Bank from privatization is a case in point. It is important however, to note that this type of action requires careful planning and great commitment.

The First Women's Bank (FWB), was set up by Benazir Bhutto during her first term as prime minister in 1989. Pakistani women had for some time been demanding a bank where women of limited finances and education, who found it difficult to obtain loans or indeed even deal with bank officials, could have access to financing on fair terms. The Women's Bank combined the functions of a commercial bank with the approach of a development institution, to encourage women's economic activities. The only bank of its kind in the world, the FWB is run exclusively by women professionals, with some male subordinate staff, and

extends credit to women, to institutions and enterprises at least fifty percent owned by women, and to companies where all the employees are women. The FWB also runs a micro-credit program, granting small loans to women without collateral. By 1997 the FWB had 35 branches throughout the country.

In 1997 the government of Pakistan decided to privatize all public banks, including the First Women's Bank. Realizing that such a move would in effect mean the end of the Women's Bank in terms of its employment and loans policies, rendering it a financial institution like any other, women activists launched a petition to exempt the bank from privatization. As the sell date approached, representatives from women's organizations went to court to get an injunction against the privatization, arguing that unlike commercial banks the FWB is an affirmative action initiative with a mandate to provide women access to loans and economic support. Though the government argued that the FWB was a commercial bank like any other, to the surprise of everyone involved, the judge agreed to grant an injunction and allow the women a few days to prepare an argument and prove their case.

Between Friday and Monday the women and their organizations mobilized their networks, collected documents, attracted the media to cover the story, prepared their arguments, and, most significantly, acquired a copy of the minutes of the original government cabinet meeting where the FWB was chartered and its loan and employment policies laid out, as well as a copy of a letter from then Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to the bank's first president reaffirming these policies.

The documents were submitted to the court and only hours before the signing of the transfer of the bank into private hands, the court ruled that while the government could privatize the bank, the new owner could not change the bank's policies. The court ruled that the original mandate of the bank prevailed, and this

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ruling was to be read out at the time of the bidding, which was also broadcast live on national television. Needless to say, there were no private interests willing to run such an enterprise and the bank remains a public institution.

### **Lobbying for Legal Reform**

We often underestimate how much a small group of interested, committed people can accomplish with persistence and the right strategies. The above are examples of people taking action at a local level, making use of local resources to generate change. In the following, we review some examples of more formal, large-scale lobbies for reform.

In 1991, the WLUML Plan of Action conceived a broad research agenda to map out the formal and informal legal structures affecting women's lives in diverse Muslim societies and communities. Given the varied social contexts, different research teams focused on particular themes as their starting points. The coordinators for Turkey concentrated on domestic violence, which their earlier research had identified as a grave problem for women and their children in the face of rapid social change. After a thorough review of the existing data on domestic violence in Turkey and the relevant laws and official institutions, the two researchers did an extensive study of domestic violence and women's views on how the issue should be tackled.

The investigators published a book on their findings, The Myth of a Warm Home: Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse in the Family written in very accessible language. They also produced a documentary video, Time to Say 'No', which they promoted heavily. They lobbied newspapers and magazines to report on domestic violence and wrote several articles based on their research findings for different popular magazines and newspapers.

In their articles they suggested strategies and legal interventions accessible to women experiencing abuse, as alternatives to the criminal process that often does not work for women in the context of Turkish society. They recommended

various protective measures based on their extensive field research and their review of research findings in other Muslim societies.

Once the topic had received a fair amount of public interest, the researchers met with an official from the ministry responsible for women's affairs, where they discussed the urgent need to address the issue of domestic violence. They explained that their survey indicated Turkish women typically did not want to get divorced, did not want their husbands jailed, and were not comfortable with the idea of shelters for battered women. What women wanted was a law that protected them while giving them time to decide their future. The researchers left copies of all their documentation with the ministry official.

During this period the Islamist Welfare Party had come to power, and given the party's conservative stance on women's issues, many women had little hope of positive reform. Nonetheless, the researchers, who helped form a small organization, "Women for Women's Human Rights" (WWHR), felt that there was nothing to lose by continued lobbying. WWHR director Pinar Ilkcaracan contacted ministry officials and politely raised her concerns, providing a copy of The Myth of a Warm Home and the various articles that had appeared in popular Turkish magazines on the topic of domestic violence. Shortly thereafter, and to her great surprises, she was contacted by the ministry for further consultation regarding government action on domestic violence. It appeared that the governing party believed that dealing with domestic violence provided them with an opportunity to challenge the popular view that the government was indifferent to women's concerns. Further, the secular nationalist government that preceded the Welfare Party had cut funds to the few shelters and organizations that dealt specifically with domestic violence, and this was a chance for the new government to enhance its image.

Soon, Pinar Ilkcaracan and her small organization found themselves helping to prepare a bill dealing with domestic violence to be presented to the Parliamentary Committee before being submitted to Parliament for approval. They also contacted all 21 members of the Parliamentary Justice Commission, the first body to act in the process of any legislative changes in Turkey. They provided copies of The Myth of a Warm Home and other documents to every member of the Commission, recognizing that the officials were unlikely to be familiar with the data on domestic violence. They also met with interested members of the Committee to discuss details of the data.

While the Committee was reviewing the proposed bill, opponents began complaining that implementing laws to deal with domestic violence was a Western idea without any Islamic basis, disregarding the fact that Turkish law is secular. They also objected to a section of the bill which would ban an abusive husband from his home as non-Islamic. Supporters of the bill argued that the research data showed that banning an abusive husband from his house would allow a cooling-off period for the family and help avoid an escalation of domestic violence. They argued that this measure was designed to save marriages and promote a more harmonious family life. They further argued that the intent of the bill was in accordance with the principles of Islam, and pointed out that the Muslim-majority country of Malaysia had introduced a similar law, recognizing the devastating social impacts of domestic violence.

Finally in January 1998 a new law on domestic violence was approved by the Turkish Parliament. In short, the bill recognized that domestic violence was a social problem with terrible consequences for the family as a whole. The research findings and cases recorded by several shelters in Turkey clearly indicated that women would only consider divorce under very severe circumstances because of the consequences of divorce for women and children.

Women wanted protection, and public policy preventing men from getting away with violence against their families. The central clause of the new legislation allowed for an immediate injunction following a formal complaint, prohibiting a husband and his kin from coming near the complainant or her residence. The bill included provisions for establishing procedures to try and bring the parties together, whereas previously Turkish courts settled cases of domestic violence using general family law, and often months would pass before a legal hearing, at which point the situation had usually escalated. The ineffective process left most women reluctant to take legal action, a situation husbands exploited, imposing demands and using force with impunity. The new law provided protection for women and a safer environment in which a couple could reflect and attempt to resolve their differences.

It is unquestionable that the enactment of this important law owed much to the activism of many women. They approached the issue responsibly and effectively, first arming themselves with extensive research based on broad and detailed investigation and discussion with Turkish women of diverse backgrounds. They looked for precedents in other Muslim and non-Muslim societies where the issue of domestic violence was being addressed. In the process they brought the issue into the public arena, gaining the interest of social critics, journalists, lawyers, Islamist women's groups and the Welfare Party's women's wing, which also held group discussions and wrote articles on domestic violence and its implications for the larger society. However, the WWHR does not view its work as complete:

Our efforts are now geared towards the wide-spread dissemination of information about this new law through our outreach activities such as the WWHR legal literacy initiative. We also continue with our media campaign and talk about all the options that are open to women. Moreover we

monitor the way police handle these cases because many of the officers may not know the new law.

Clearly, it is important to monitor legal reforms once they have entered the books. New and better laws are of no use if they are not implemented!

The following cases from Iran and Bangladesh illustrate how, in very different contexts, individuals, women's groups, and organizations have joined forces to demonstrate that society can not tolerate crimes committed against women.

In 1995 in Iran, a young man angered by a rejection of his marriage proposal paid two men to throw acid in the face of the 17-year-old woman he had wanted to marry and her 9-year-old sister. The three men were arrested but received very minor sentences, particularly the rejected suitor who had plotted the act.

The appalling act of throwing acid and the court's light treatment of the criminals angered many people, especially women, who came together to initiate a letter-writing campaign targeting newspapers and legal offices. Women activists of all political backgrounds joined in protest. Others lobbied the magazines and newspapers to publish such letters frequently and to give them prominence. Under the pressure of public opinion, the court was forced to re-open the case and the three men were then given severe sentences. The campaign had several important outcomes: it raised social awareness; it sent a signal to the authorities that they were accountable; it showed the perpetrators of such crimes that they would face severe punishment, and finally, it communicated to women and other groups experiencing oppression the power of raising their voices to demand justice.

In Bangladesh over the last decade some local mullahs, particularly in the small villages, have started to assume extra-legal powers. There have been occasions where citizens, and particularly women, have been greatly abused in the name of religion. Women have been the primary victims of these illegal judgements (called *fatwas*), condemning them to lashes or death by stoning. The fatwas are often issued in revenge by local mullahs when women or their families reject marital proposals or sexual advances of the mullahs or their associates. These mullahs have no legal jurisdiction to set themselves up as judges and impose such sentences. Not surprisingly, they do present any sort of proof along with their accusations.

It is important to note that a fatwa is a religious decree issued by a religious authority. In some Middle Eastern countries only a religious leader of the highest authority may issue a fatwa, an ordinary judgements, regardless of the religious official's legal authority, are not referred to as fatwas. However, in Bangladesh and some other Muslim countries, the fatwa is used much more cursorily. The misuse of the term fatwa is disingenuous - that is, it is used cleverly and intentionally by those pronouncing fatwas - as the term resonates for believers as a carefully scrutinized and rendered opinion by a very learned religious leader.

In October 1993, the family of Nurjahan, a 22-year-old woman who had been orally divorced by her husband, arranged for her second marriage. The oral repudiation of women by their husbands is a common practice of divorce in Bangladesh and is problematic in that it often unjustly puts women in very vulnerable positions. (This form of divorce is no longer recognized by law which requires the giving notice both to the wife and appropriate authority and has instituted a 90 days period before which the divorce could be finalized.) At this point the mullah (the local Imam) of the village decided that Nurjahan's first marriage was still valid and that therefore she and her new husband had

committed adultery. He ordered the people of the village to bury Nurjahan to her chest in the ground and stone her to death. Her parents were condemned to 100 lashes for arranging the supposedly illegal second marriage. Nurjahan survived the stoning but committed suicide in utter despair at the inhumane treatment she received at the hands of supposedly religious people.

Nurjahan's was one in a series of similar stories. To put an end to these tragic abuses of human rights in the name of religion, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, a Bangladesh women's rights organization filed a suit against the mullah. Sultana Kamal, a human rights activist who works closely with WLUML and with Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a Bangladeshi non-governmental organization promoting legal awareness and human rights, supported the case along with other women activists and so forced the state to take on the case rather than turn a blind eye to the victimization of women. Kamal and her colleagues wrote a book, Fatwas against Women in Bangladesh, which WLUML published, produced the video Eclipse, and presented the issue both nationally and internationally.

Beside writing and giving talks on the subject, the Mahila Parishad, other organizations, sultana Kamal, and her colleagues organized national demonstrations to increase pressure on the government to take action. ASK also mobilized international support through Alerts for Action. The following is a copy of the Alert that was issued in support of Nurjahan by Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). The Alert was subsequently reissued by WLUML and generated much international support, particularly within the Muslim world.

Report: Protest against Imam for indicting a woman in a village salish for adultery, contrary to the law of Bangladesh.

Compiled by: Ain O Salish Kendra, 55 Inner Circular Road, Shantinagar, Dhaka 1217

In Bangladesh the laws of personal status derive from an individual's religion; these laws apply only to determine rights and obligations between parties. Any breach of law is subject to the ordinary civil law. Extra-marital sexual activity is not a crime. Further there is no organized clergy in Islam. Nor does any religious elder have any jurisdiction, civil or criminal, over citizens. Yet on 10 January, 1993, Nurjahan, a 22-year-old woman and her husband Malek were forced to stand in a waist deep ditch and subjected to stoning 100 times. Her elderly parents also were subjected to 100 lashes.

Despite her protests, Nurjahan and her husband were forced into a newly dug, waist-deep ditch, and pebbles were thrown at them. In response to the appeals of some of the villagers, the stones were reduced to clay pebbles. Nurjahan and her family were very poor; they lived in a forest area, where Nurjahan's work was to collect twigs and branches for sale. Most of the villagers are very poor and ignorant, and are dominated by the sardars who lease the forest wood. Nurjahan had earlier been divorced by her first husband. Subsequently her father arranged her marriage with her present husband, but before doing so he obtained the Imam's verdict that the divorce was valid. The Imam had done so after extracting a fee of TK 200 from the father.

It was alleged that one of the sardars had quarrelled with Nurjahan's second husband; there were also reports that the Imam had acted out of vengeance because he had wanted to marry Nurjahan. Whatever the reason, subsequent to her marriage, the Imam and the sardars formed a salish (a village council, which

has no legal jurisdiction) and convicted Nurjahan and her husband of zina (extra marital sexual relations), in accordance with some Islamic practice. This has no validity in Bangladesh.

After the incident one of the sardars reportedly came to Nurjahan and told her: "You should kill yourself rather than live with this shame." She swallowed some poison and did precisely that.

The police failed to come to the village in time to investigate the case. Subsequently, a women's rights organization (Bangladesh Mahila Parishad) investigated the incident and have filed a case with the police for abatement in suicide under section 109. The Imam and sardars were arrested and have been refused bail.

The stoning and suicide of Nurjahan have aroused considerable public concern, and anger amongst women's organizations. They have organized public meetings, disseminated information through the media, and lobbied the government. This is not a simple law-and-order problem; there is considerable apprehension that the political licence given to Imams and religious parties has revived their traditional influence. They have been encouraged to impose their own arbitrary laws, which violate human rights and are contrary to the law of the land. Nurjahan's case cannot be taken as an isolated incident. It is symptomatic of the violence against women perpetrated by obscurantist forces.

It is important that you demonstrate your solidarity for Nurjahan and her family by writing in support of the trial of the accused Imam and 3 sardars;

- A. For exemplary punishment for those who instigated Nurjahan's death;
- B. For the proper application of the penal code;
- C. For affirmation of the principle to determine the limits of the salish jurisdiction, which does not and should not extend to criminal offences.

Please write to:

\*D. Begum Khaleda Zia, The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

\*A. Mirza Ghulam Hafiz, Minister of Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

\*B. Sheikh Razzaque Ali, Speaker, National Parliament of Bangladesh

Sultana Kamal's tireless efforts to improve the condition of women and to insure human rights have brought her national and international recognition and awards. In 1995, she received the John Humphrey Freedom Award from the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD), to further her human rights work.

### **Participating In International Affairs**

In our global village, where the human community is more integrated and interconnected than ever before, our responsibility for public participation extends beyond local and national borders. With increasingly apparent human rights violations, our responsibility and the scope of our action become more essential. While the obligation to inform ourselves about events and issues within our own communities is vital, we must also voice our opposition to conditions, actions, and policies which violate the most basic standards of human rights, wherever they occur. At times events may seem too far away, and beyond our capacity to help. However, simply raising public awareness about an issue, exposing human rights violations, and joining in protest are effective starting points for bringing about social change. The following examples illustrate how issues around the world can affect all of us, and how we can help influence the course of events.

In 1995, the international Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade (COAT) issued an alert to expose France's violation of its promise to "exercise utmost restraint" in testing nuclear weapons. The alert condemned the decision of the French government to test its nuclear weapons in the South Pacific and requested that people oppose the nuclear testing through a world-wide boycott of French products. The alert read:



On June 13, France announced its decision to resume nuclear explosions in the South Pacific. Jacques Chirac, the new president of France, made this announcement only a few weeks after the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (N.P.T.). In the N.P.T., France agreed to "exercise utmost restraint" in testing nuclear weapons. France's decision betrays the commitments made by nuclear weapons powers to implement the N.P.T. It also undermines worldwide hopes for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. France's resumption of nuclear testing is especially insensitive because 1995 is the fiftieth anniversary of the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. France says it will explode eight nuclear bombs at the Mururoa Atoll (French Polynesia) in the South Pacific between September 1995 and May 1996. Each test will release energy amounting about 150 kilotons – eight times the power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Their decision may encourage other nuclear weapons states to resume their own nuclear weapons tests.

With this introduction, the International Peace Bureau, which has member organizations and active supporters in 46 countries, called for an international boycott of French products. Besides nuclear explosions, some of the more common French exports are wine, cheese, cosmetics, and bottled water, consumed in considerable quantities, particularly in wealthier countries where supporters of the International Peace Bureau are very active. The boycott sent a shock wave through French business and export groups who had remained silent over the nuclear testing.

**Insert the announcement.**

By raising the issue of French nuclear testing in the South Pacific and requesting a boycott of French products, the International Peace Bureau forced the French business community to pressure their government not to break international law. It worked; the French government, conceding the political and economic consequences of the nuclear testing, was forced to cease its nuclear tests before their completion. This sent a clear message to other governments that citizens of the global village can indeed exert considerable influence using the appropriate strategies.

Public action has even been harnessed by organizations, including women's groups, to prevent war. In February 1998, the government of Iraq came under attack from the world for blocking the UN inspection of its palaces, where the government was believed to be storing biological and chemical weapons. The government of the United States and its allies were prepared to launch an air strike to destroy the sites. The clock was ticking and the US army was ready to attack as UN officials pulled out of Iraq.

However, a world-wide public action changed the course of events. The US government became isolated in its decision as the American public, mobilized by diverse human rights and pro-peace organizations, refused to support another air strike on Iraq. Around the world rallies were organized, petitions and protest letters sent out, and newspaper articles written denouncing the US decision to attack Iraq in order to force the Iraqi government to allow UN inspection of the sites. Many human rights and women's organizations, having observed the impact of the Gulf War on Iraqi civilians, urged dialogue rather than military force as a way of solving the crisis. The attack, which would have devastated the defenseless people of Iraq, was halted (temporarily, as it unfortunately turned out) only minutes before the air strikes were to begin. Women in Black, a

Yugoslav pro-peace women's organization that has been active since 1992, organized public protests and issued the following letter:

Saddam Hussein is a ruthless dictator in possession of dangerous weapons. But he is the last person Western bombing will hurt. Nor will it damage his elite troops. He is removing the Republican Guard from target sites. Instead, he is putting new recruits into uniform, enlisting women and putting them in the line of fire. As in the 1991 Gulf War, many so-called smart bombs will miss their targets and kill civilians. Collateral damage means women and children dead and maimed. Iraqi women are already suffering disproportionately from seven years of the most severe sanctions regime in world history. UNICEF says 567,000 children have died since 1991, more than in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. If the Iraqi chemical and biological weapons capability is hit, it may spill poisons into the atmosphere. If it is not, what is the point? The US has no support from most Arab countries. An attack will seriously damage relations between the West and the Arab World. Fundamentalist forces will be strengthened in the region, leading to a climate in which women's rights are curtailed. There is an alternative. Negotiate. It's the only way forward. Persist in inspection and controlled dismantling of chemical and biological weapons. End sanctions that hurt ordinary people, embargo imports for government and military. Ban the world trade in arms, in which Britain and the US are leading actors. Support Kofi Annan and strengthen the UN. Isolate Saddam, instead of making him a hero and martyr to imperialism. DEMONSTRATE IN SILENT VIGIL WITH **WOMEN IN BLACK**, TRAFALGAR SQUARE, LONDON, 6 PM WEDNESDAY FEB. 18, 25 AND MARCH 4, 1998.

A similar international campaign initially succeeded in preventing the bombing of Iraq during October-November 1998, and Kofi Annan, the UN secretary, managed to negotiate an agreement with the Iraqi government. However, a

month later on December 16, 1998, when the public's attention was no longer focused on the potential conflict in Iraq, the American President, on the verge of impeachment, used Saddam Hussein's lack of cooperation with UN inspectors as an excuse to bomb Iraq. The U.S. action, though supported by Britain, brought waves of condemnation from the international community and many governments around the world. Many activists also criticized themselves for not keeping up the pressure against U.S. strikes and turning their attentions elsewhere. Nonetheless, while efforts ultimately failed to prevent the attack, the widespread campaign against the U.S. strikes raised public awareness of the situation and provided the public with a condemning view of the American government's bullying, aggressive approach in the international arena.

Public action can also help restore peace to troubled regions. In May 1998 when India tested several atomic bombs, neighboring Pakistan followed suit. Human rights organizations around the world called on the international community to stop the dangerous bomb-testing game that threatened the fragile peace in the region. The world community was outraged at India for initiating the atomic bomb tests, and equally condemned the action of Pakistan. They joined with pro-peace forces in both countries to try and stop the testing and expose the military one-upmanship that threatened the entire region and the world at large.

In spite of restricted movement across their shared border, the pro-peace movements in both countries have tried to find means to unite against destruction. One important initiative of a peace worker was to set up email networks and websites during the crisis and circulate news and information to several thousand people. In this way he bypassed the geopolitical boundaries between the two countries. The 'South Asians Against Nukes' website, launched by one individual with conviction, drew thousands of people after the BBC World Service (on May 19, 1998; 8 days following the first Indian nuclear test) gave a

Alert Section 1: 11/25/00 7:12 PM

prominent description and listed it as one of the five most important sites on Asia's nuclear crisis the world. Such cases once again stress the importance of individual action for generating and mobilizing others to make a better world.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In this section we have tried to demonstrate the importance of social and political participation at local, national, and international levels, to make the world a better place for ourselves and for our children. To do this we have tried to demystify the meaning of social and political participation, and convince you that political participation does not need to be initiated formally, or at official levels by high-ranking individuals, or justified with cumbersome words. Raising our voices about issues of concern; about injustices; about things we feel are wrong in our society, can be realized through the simple act of writing a letter to a local newspaper or to the local member of parliament, or in actions as innocuous as sending flowers, as the women of Tehran did in support of their imprisoned mayor. These forms of participation are the bases for the creation and promotion of a lasting civil society.

Governments, politicians, and elites often create the false impression that only they are qualified for political and social participation, and that ordinary people have little to contribute. Such attitudes have silenced many voices from expressing concern. This silence is often presented by despotic rulers as proof that “their people are not ready for democracy and political participation.” But ordinary people interested in their communities, along with grassroots activists and intellectuals, are working together to change and expand the conventional understanding of political participation. Refusing to accept injustice against ourselves and others, even when injustice is legitimized under banners of culture and tradition, is an important form of social participation. We hope we demonstrated that in our interconnected world we do not have to stand in despair as international events unfold. We can, through local actions, take part in building a better world of communities.

**Part II: Social and Political Participation in Practice**

## **Public Participation: Effective Techniques and Strategies**

Being convinced of the importance of political and social action is the first step; political and social change requires techniques and strategies as well as passionate and committed participation. Given the variety of social and historical contexts, there is no single prescription for effective intervention, but there are basic guidelines which can serve as a starting point. In this section, we will discuss various forms of participation used by the WLUML Network and other groups and organizations, drawing on years of experience in initiating and supporting different forms of public participation. We also provide a detailed outline for writing and circulating requests for solidarity (Alerts for Action) and support letters, and give examples of each. But, first two essential points to consider when getting involved in any form of public participation.

**Prioritizing issues:** The first step in any political/social action is deciding which issues and platforms are most important and pressing, given limited resources (time, skill, knowledge, political will, finances, available materials and so on). Taking on more than you can handle usually yields poor results and consequently disappointment and loss of interest.

**Setting clear, feasible goals:** Once the priorities are identified, it is crucial to distinguish between short-term, achievable goals and ideal goals. (For instance, while we may wish to work for global peace and a world without armies, we may have to decide that our energies are best invested in working to resolve or avert specific military or civil conflicts, albeit without losing sight of our ideals.) Once long-term goals are established, the various steps needed to ultimately reach those goals have to be identified. Taking action without first considering the long-term vision can waste time and energy, and result in extreme frustration.

**Forms of public action:** Organizing huge demonstrations and rallies has traditionally been perceived as an effective way of lobbying for a cause or protesting against injustices. While still effective, this form of action has its limitations. Concerned people may be unable to travel to the protest site because of distance, cost, or other demands and commitments. Furthermore, many of us live under the rule of governments that discourage or even prohibit public demonstrations. For these reasons and many more, it is imperative to develop and use other forms of public participation, including letter-writing campaigns, poster and postcard campaigns, Alerts for Action campaigns, circulating petitions, and direct lobbying.

### **Taking Action: Planning a Time Frame**

Many variables shape how political activists design their strategies, and timing is perhaps the most crucial element in planning for effective action. Activists generally operate within three time frames: immediate response to crisis situations, exploiting opportune moments, and long-term efforts towards structural change.

**Crisis situations:** These situations demand immediate action - delays may have fatal consequences, as evidenced in the case of the Sri Lankan migrant worker in Abu Dhabi, documented in section 1 (**page CSX**). Similarly, when a second American military strike on Iraq seemed imminent, individuals and organizations had to act quickly to express their opposition to the American decision to use force. Of course such cases should be given priority over other activities. Often this means that attention and resources must be temporarily diverted from other projects and activities. However, the challenge is to respond to crises without losing sight of long-term goals and initiatives.

**Opportune moments:** Occasionally forces combine to provide opportune moments for concerted effort towards social change. These windows of opportunity beg our immediate attention. For example, Moroccan women launched their 'One Million Signatures' campaign to reform Moroccan personal status law (which will be discussed later in detail) as their government claimed a new liberal and democratic image. Confronted with evidence of public support for the women's campaign, the government felt obliged to take action. Another example, presented in the first section of this volume (**PP??**), notes the unexpected public outrage against the Iranian government's handling of criminals who had thrown acid on young women. The public reaction took the Iranian judiciary by surprise and activists took the opportunity to criticize the courts for treating women as lesser citizens in the name of Islamic justice. This not only forced the judiciary to take steps to address the problem but also raised public awareness of the issue. Similarly, as discussed in the case of Sri Lanka's attempt to reform Muslim family law (**PP??**), women activists intervened at a crucial moment in the reformulating of the Muslim Family Code. Seizing such moments requires a rigorous but flexible organization that can accommodate such opportunities as they arise.

**Long-term structural change:** Bringing about fundamental, structural social and political change demands careful, long-term planning. Often this requires in-depth research to fully understand the issues in their specific context, as well as the implications of change for all social groups. The next step is to communicate to the public both the criticisms of the existing situation and the positive impacts of change. At the same time, the groups/organizations/coalitions advocating change must lobby appropriate offices and officials, government bodies, influential public personalities, and lawmakers.

The activities of the Women for Women's Human Rights(WWHR) campaigns in Turkey to reform the domestic violence law, discussed in the first section (**pp??**), are a good example of this type of long-term action. Similarly, Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), an NGO working to improve access to and understanding of the legal/justice system in Bangladesh, not only fights cases of injustice as they arise, but has introduced the Gender Justice Program. ASK works with rural leaders to prevent unfair trials of women by *salish* (village council), and to increase awareness of human rights and gender justice generally. Their most common strategy is to arrange meetings with local representatives and judiciary bodies to speak about gender-related justice issues, using local examples and concerns to help raise awareness about problems and possible reforms. Frequently in conjunction with these meetings, they organize workshops for local activists and organizations working on related topics, and invite local leaders to inaugurate the workshops and give opening speeches, if not participate in the entire workshop. In this manner ASK raises local awareness, educates and places issues on the local political agenda.

In Algeria, where reform of the family code remains a contentious issue, a coalition of Algerian women's organizations has begun a new awareness campaign to generate discussion, and is planning a signature campaign similar to the Moroccan initiative which we will describe shortly. This is, in part, a strategy to reinforce a collective position among women and generate solidarity between women's organizations. Each of these cases demands different lobbying and campaigning strategies, but all share basic common elements in terms of organization and procedure.

### **Responding to Crisis Situations: Alerts for Action**

Crises require swift action to galvanize support and generate immediate reaction. It is essential to have decided on the most effective form of action, whether demonstrations, Alerts for Action, postcard campaigns, media events, or a combination of activities. The choice of one or a combination of these strategies is influenced by the subject matter and the political context. Disseminating information, mobilizing the public, and attracting the media should occur simultaneously. Campaign organizers should prepare short, factual briefs, which include sources of information where possible. They must also **clearly outline exactly what they expect supporters and sympathizers to do** and explain why their support is essential. The **Alert for Action**, which is **essentially a written invitation to join a letter-writing campaign**, is increasingly one of the more effective and widely used ways of responding to crisis situations, so we will briefly review the basic guidelines for preparing an Alert for Action and sustaining an effective letter-writing campaign.

The Alert for Action is a simple way of mobilizing people by requesting their support through the political act of writing their own letters to authorities. An Alert for Action achieves several functions simultaneously. Firstly, the letters written in support of the Alert provide evidence that many citizens of the international community are concerned about the case, thus gaining the attention of the local authority. Secondly, an Alert raises general awareness about a particular problem, and may draw many more people into participating in achieving political and legal solutions to an unjust situation. Alerts are particularly effective because they allow individuals to take action without having to co-ordinate with others, as opposed to, for example, participating in demonstrations. Thirdly, an Alert disseminates information even among those who may not take action. Therefore, it is not surprising that Alerts for Action have become one of the most popular forms of galvanizing the public.

**An Alert for Action is generally a one or two-page letter that describes the case/situation and provides factual information. It requests that individuals and organizations write letters of support and send them to the indicated addresses of authorities or designated offices.** It is simply common sense that an Alert for Action, requesting public support, should be politely and respectfully worded. Whether writing to request the action and support of others, or responding to a request from an individual or group to endorse a cause or object to a particular injustice, there are basic guidelines to follow. In the following we present some of the WLUML Network's experiences in writing and circulating Alerts for Action.

**Basic Guidelines for preparing and issuing an Alert for Action:**

The procedure used by the WLUML Network in preparing and circulating Alerts is simple and effective. Although these steps are developed for issuance of an international Alert for Action, it is important to refer carefully to these steps even for local campaigns. Generally, an individual or group at risk asks WLUML to launch an Alert; the exception being cases where individuals are incapacitated (for instance women who have been kidnapped and held against their will) and can not speak for themselves. Once WLUML's solidarity committee decides that a case might warrant an Alert the Network contacts a wider circle of informed individuals and groups to ensure that external support will not be counterproductive to the case. WLUML also tries to ensure, through consultation with its allied organizations and contacts, that the support generated through issuing an Alert will be channeled to maximum effect in the targeted community. WLUML also considers whether the network and all others involving themselves in the campaign are aware of, and prepared for the possible backlash resulting from an Alert. Alerts for Action and other types of campaigns demand time and resources; it is crucial that WLUML and those who

support the initiative through letter-writing recognize and be prepared to deal with all foreseeable potential consequences and demands of this action.

Next, it is crucial to check the accuracy of all information and get the detailed background on the particular situation. This usually entails contacting various individuals and organizations familiar with the situation, to gain a sense of the issue and its urgency. If a decision is then made to issue an Alert, preparation involves the following steps:

a) **Ensuring accuracy:** Alerts for Action or any form of protest must be based on accurate information. People are not necessarily familiar with the context or details of a particular situation, especially if you are appealing for international support. Provide a short fact-sheet, written in clear, simple and accessible language, including a summary of the details of the case and relevant background information. (As the WLUML Network operates internationally, they often issue Alerts in several languages, however the procedure remains the same.) Always support any accusations, descriptions, and positions with solid, incontestable facts. Provide the sources of your information where possible and when it does not endanger the source.

b) **Specifying demands:** The next step is to identify what form of support the specific situation demands, and what is needed from the public. This must be stated in very clear language, so that readers know exactly what is requested of them. State what form of response you are seeking from supporters (such as faxes, emails, letters, or telephone calls).

c) **Directing the campaign:** Lead sympathizers to pressure the most appropriate institutions, individuals and officials, so that their efforts have maximum effectiveness. For instance, we recommend that people write to both the

government, including members of parliament and government ministers, and to the local judge, when requesting the immediate release of illegally held prisoners or convicts, or to stop certain laws and procedures that contravene international human rights conventions.

d) **Directing public support:** Provide accurate addresses and email addresses, fax and telephone numbers for those institutions and individuals identified to receive protest messages. Their titles and positions must be clearly indicated in the Alert. Though a decade ago most appeals of this sort were sent out through ordinary mail, increasingly fax messages and email are preferred for cost effectiveness and speed of delivery.

e) **Justifying the call for action:** It is very helpful when an Alert for Action identifies the national or international legal grounds for protest. When a law or international agreement has been broken and someone's life or well-being is in danger, we ask that the government take measures to bring the situation into compliance with the laws of the land. However, when local or national law has been respected but the situation nonetheless violates basic, international human rights, the situation is challenged under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or other UN treaties. This is even more effective when the particular government being targeted is a signatory to the convention. This type of Alert is usually directed at both the particular government and the international community. For example, when the Chinese government crushed the student demonstration in Tiananmen Square in May 1989, many democratic organizations around the world successfully pressured their governments to suspend economic and diplomatic relations with China until its human rights record improved.

f) **Spreading the word:** Specify whether supporters you are contacting through an Alert should circulate the Alert among other groups and organizations with whom they have contact.

g) **Requesting copies:** If you are asking supporters to send you copies of their letters as well, give your reasons. Explain that your group will be following up on the case and copies of letters of support in the case file provide additional ammunition in the fight for justice. However, keep in mind that, in politically repressive situations, people may wish to act anonymously. While they may be willing to write a letter of protest to officials, they may not want to be publicly linked to a specific organization.

h) **Security issues:** Some circumstances require great concern for safety. When a request for letters of support is circulated, it is very important to specify whether supporters should mention the name of the person or organization that requested the Alert. In some cases, identifying individuals or organizations may threaten their security. If this is the case, the phrase "**please DO NOT mention our name**" should figure prominently in the Alert. A common mistake of many who write letters of support is that **while they do not mention the name** of the organization or individual who issued the **Alert in their letter**, if a copy is being sent to the issuer, **inadvertently the issuing organization's address appears** (Cc.: xxx), giving away their identity. If you are sending your protest letter by email, and safety requires anonymity for the originator of the Alert, **send distinct copies to each recipient rather than using multiple addresses in the "To:" or "Cc:" fields**. Many email programs have a 'Bcc' option which makes the forwarding name/address invisible.

i) **Model letters:** Where possible, provide samples of the kind of letters you wish your supporters to write. This is particularly helpful if the Alert is issued internationally.

j) **Date the Alert:** Always note the date of issue as well as a deadline for sending support or protest letters.

k) **Networking:** If you are circulating other organizations' Alerts, verify all information before sending it on. Prominently note in the Alert that you have received this request for support and believe it warrants action, and thus you are asking your members and supporters for their participation.

l) **Address bank:** It is essential for social solidarity activists to build a bank of names and addresses of supportive individuals and organizations, and to file information which will help identify potential supporters for relevant cases. This ensures that you send Alerts to the appropriate places, and increases the number of positive responses generated by the Alert. However, it is also very important to protect the address bank and not make it available to unknown sources.

m) **Providing updates:** Update all those who write letters of support or help mobilize support as a case evolves. Whenever possible, send a congratulatory note to the participants when a mobilization has been successful. This encourages people to take their political participation seriously, and recognizes the impact of their actions.

n) **Writing style:** As in any letter-writing campaign, Alerts for Action require writing that is straight-forward, free of slogans, and respectfully outlines the situation and what is needed. It is vitally important to request that supporters' letters do the same. Keep Alerts and letters short and to the point, with clear sentences explaining the issue. Keep to the basic facts - a cluttered letter is difficult to read - but provide all the essential information as concisely as possible; you cannot assume readers are familiar with the particular case. If you use abbreviations or acronyms, make sure to write them out in full at least once before using the short form, and try to avoid using

them when encouraging an international response. It is crucial to be clear about what you expect others to do - both those whose active support you are requesting and those in power to whom you are directing your demands.

### **Alerts for Action: Some examples**

In October 1995, a Chadian journalist, Zara Yacoub, received a death fatwa (death threat based on a religious judgement) from the Chadian religious establishment, following the showing of her video on female genital mutilation. A group of Senegalese women brought the issue to the attention of the WLUML Network and other international organizations. The Network immediately mobilized to check the details through its contacts in the country and, ascertaining that Yacoub did want international support, an Alert for Action was issued.

The following Alert was issued by the WLUML office in Senegal with the support of the international office. This Alert highlights the importance of networking and building solidarity at an international level.

#### **Alert for Action**

Appeal for Urgent Action

Dakar, 29 October 1995

Fatwa Against Zara Mahamat Yacoub

Dear Friends,

We have just learnt that a fatwa has been pronounced against Zara Mahamat Yacoub, after the showing of her film *Dilemme au Feminin* (Feminine Dilemma). This film was made in November 1994. After its great success in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and Montreal (Canada), the Chadian High Council of Communication

authorized its showing via a letter addressed to the administration of television in Chad.

On Friday October 13, 1995, 13 days after the film was shown, by order of The High Council of Islamic Affairs and the Imam of the Grand Mosque of Ndjamena, the 15 mosques of the town of Ndjamena cursed, excommunicated and condemned Zara Yacoub in their sermons.

For showing a scene of an excision (i.e. the amputation of a female clitoris, and hence nudity) and an interview with the Chief Imam in her film, she is accused of an offence against the Muslim religion and of tarnishing the image of Chadian Muslims for having shown the film abroad.

We note that a fatwa is a verdict, usually by a high religious authority, who may or may not have official judicial powers, considering various issues of relevance to the Muslim community.

In a letter addressed to the Chadian people, an association calling itself the Union of Young Chadian Muslims has declared that the film is against good morals, human values and divine law. They have demanded that severe administrative sanctions be taken against Zara, and against the Director of the Television in Chad.

At present, Zara is receiving anonymous telephone calls and death threats. The principal actor in the film, a little girl aged 10, has also been threatened and her schooling interrupted.

Despite the gravity of the situation, there has been no official action taken.

We ask you to react as soon as possible by writing to:

His Excellency Monsieur Idris Deby

President of the Republic of Chad

B P 74, Ndjamena, Chad

Fax: 235 51 45 01

235 51 46 53

Monsieur Noudjalbaye

Minister of Public Security of Republic of Chad

Fax: 235 52 58 85

Monsieur Maldome Bada Abass

Minister of Justice of the Republic of Chad

Fax: 235 52 58 85

Asking for the annulment of the fatwa against Zara by the High Council of Islamic Affairs, and official protection for Zara and the principal actress and others involved in the film or its diffusion. Pointing out that Zara has committed no offence, but has merely exercised her right to freedom of expression, one of the fundamental human rights recognized by the United Nation and the Constitution of the Republic of Chad. Pointing out also the importance of her work in protecting the rights of young girls and women against the painful and unnecessary brutality of female genital excision.

Asking for assurance that no sanctions will be administered against Zara or the authorities of the Chadian television.

And send copies to WLUML, BP 5339, Dakar Fann, Senegal or to [wluml@mnet.fr](mailto:wluml@mnet.fr)

Would you also write to Zara, indicating your support for her at Post Box [-], Ndjamena, Chad, Fax: [- ]<sup>3</sup>

Hundreds of individuals and human rights organizations around the world and in particular from Muslim countries wrote to the Chadian government and the president of Chad demanding intervention and an end to such illegal harassment by conservative forces. President Deby was pressured to use his influence to have the case dropped and Zara Yacoub's life was saved. A year later the Network received a letter in which she wrote:

If you hadn't stepped in, there would have been no reaction, and God knows what would have happened to me by now...Your action has been very effective, there was no official reaction but the letters and faxes sent to the Chadian authorities after your call for action led the President of the Republic to tell the Imam to calm down and forget this case... Peoples' attitude have improved a lot, but there are still suspicious looks...The situation is now calm. The hardest is past, I have stopped taking [security] precautions and am trying to regain confidence...**It is time to say thank you to all the people who helped. I am still receiving support letters.**

In an interview with a Senegalese newspaper in March 1996, Yacoub described the situation she was facing when world-wide support began reaching her as result of the lobbying campaign - in part organized by Women Living Under Muslim Laws and other women's organizations.

Q: So, as you say, after a month, salvation came from Senegal?

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<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this book the actual details of address were removed to protect Zara Yacoub's privacy.

A: Indeed, one day I received a phone call, during which I was told you are not wrong, you are not alone, we will do our best to help you, explaining that they would send me a fax explaining what actions could be taken in my defense.

Q: Did you know them?

A: I have never known them. Today there are names that stay with me, that I will never forget. I try to put faces to them. When my family is asked who released Zara from "prison," they talk of these Senegalese women. I am very grateful to them, and I would like to go to Senegal to show my gratitude in person.

Q: How did they act?

A: They called into play the international networks of women's or human rights associations of which they were part or of which they knew, to put pressure on the Chadian authorities. Thus I received letters of support, and as so did the Chadian authorities, in which they were asked to put an end to the persecutions I was victim of. The letters came from Africa, Europe, USA, from everywhere. They were sent to the President and the Ministry of Justice to tell them they were responsible for my safety. People in the Presidency have told me that, seeing all this, the President called in the Imam, and asked him to stop because the affair was getting out of hand.

Q: How do you feel about this support?

A: You cannot imagine... All this came at a time when I could not hold on any longer. I was close to cracking up. If I am here today in Accra talking about it, I know to whom I owe it. Once at a conference in Bangkok I had received leaflets concerning this association WLUML, which launched all this. But I didn't pay any more attention to it than to any other leaflet. Today I am convinced that the struggle for women's rights is an issue beyond national boundaries.

Since its inception in 1984, the Network has initiated and circulated hundreds of Alerts. Some have been very successful, others less so. However, the "failures" have had positive impacts in the sense that even where Alerts have failed to generate support, they have increased awareness of various situations and issues, serving as tools for raising consciousness. Alerts also demonstrate to governments or organizations in breach of human rights that the international community is aware of these breaches. This in itself can work as a deterrent. For instance, despite the failure of the international effort described next to save the life of Filipino migrant worker Flor Contemplacion, who was sentenced to death in Singapore, it did create momentum for change. The protest received extensive coverage in the media, raising local, national and international awareness of the situation, and forcing the government of Singapore to explain its action. It also served to reinforce the efforts of both international and national organizations committed to empower migrant workers, and increased the commitment of the United Nations to improve the lot of such workers, considered by many social critics to be the slaves of the twentieth century. Here is a summary of the details of Flor Contemplacion's case.

In 1995, a death sentence was carried out in Singapore in a murder case involving a domestic worker from the Philippines, Flor Contemplacion.

Contemplacion, a 42-year-old mother of four, was charged with the double-murder of another Filipino domestic worker named Maga, and the 3-year-old son of Maga's employer, in May 1991. Since the final judgement, new witnesses have testified that Contemplacion was innocent. Another domestic worker named Frenilla testified that she overheard a conversation indicating that Maga's employer strangled her for neglecting his son, Nicholas. Nicholas had banged his head on the tub and died after an epileptic seizure. Flor Contemplacion was visiting Maga when the incident occurred. When the employer realized that Flor had witnessed his assault on Maga, he threatened to kill her. Contemplacion fled back to the Philippines for safety, but was later returned to Singapore to stand trial for murder. Frenilla, back in the Philippines, expressed willingness to return

to Singapore and testify in a retrial. Human rights organizations, including WLUMML, expressed their discontent with the handling of the case and the international community sent hundred of letters to the Singaporean authorities. However, they refused to hear new testimony and Contemplacion's sentence was carried out without any further investigation or retrial.

### **Soliciting Support and Solidarity Campaigns:**

Writing letters to solicit national or international support from influential individuals or organizations for a local or regional cause requires particular attention. Such letters must familiarize the recipient with the case, its context and background, while conforming to the guidelines for writing Alerts noted earlier. The first paragraph must identify the writer and their request. The body provides details of the case, while the next paragraph points out how the case contravenes the law or basic human rights. The following paragraph should emphasize the importance of the reader's support and indicate that further information is available upon request. Here is a brief sketch of a particular case, followed by an example of such a letter.

In 1997 the Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran passed a bill segregating male and female medical facilities. This bill outraged many women activists as well as much of the medical community, because Iran had neither the financial nor professional resources to support two parallel medical systems. It was feared the bill would result in inadequate health services for women. A group of women issued the following letter to international women's organizations asking for the mobilization of international support to stop the bill.

TO: International Coordinator, Women Living Under Muslim Laws, International Office
FROM: Women's Health Committee, Tehran, Iran.
SUBJECT: Bill to segregate medical facilities for men and women.

Date: 12 May, 1998

Dear International Coordinator, **(It is best to find out the name of the person if you can)**

We are an ad hoc committee made up of medical doctors, lawyers, teachers, and sociologists who are trying to stop a new bill intended to segregate male and female medical facilities. We are writing to enlist your support and help to bring international pressure to bear on the Iranian government, the parliament and judiciary body to abort this unacceptable bill.

The parliament of the Islamic Republic has introduced a bill to Islamicize the country's medical facilities, which would mean total segregation, including separate hospitals for men and women. Please note that the hospital wards are already segregated and to the extent possible same-sex doctors and nurses are employed. The new bill would mean no female nurses in male facilities as well as no male doctors for female facilities. Given the fact that Iran does not currently have the medical resources to serve its population and lacks adequate hospital beds and equipment, as well as medical professionals, the implementation of such a bill would compromise the healthcare of all Iranians, and especially women, given the strong male bias of Iranian society as evidenced by various legal and other institutional inequities, including needing two female witnesses in a court of law to provide the equivalent testimony of one male witness.

In support of our letter and request we are enclosing a copy of the bill, and several articles and letters of protest from the Iranian medical community and other professionals. We are also enclosing summaries of the main points of each document in English and would be glad to translate full documents should you need them.

We would like to enlist your help in publicizing our concerns internationally and in writing letters of support for our cause. These should be addressed to the speaker of the Iranian Parliament, Mr. Netegh Noury; to the spiritual leaders Ayatollah Khamenei; the president, Ayatollah Khatami; and Ayatollah Yazdi, the head of judiciary, asking them not to support this bill. Enclosed you will find all the necessary addresses and fax numbers. We would be pleased to provide you with any further information that you may require. <sup>4</sup>

We hope you will support our cause.

In Sisterhood!

Iranian Women's Health Committee

Remember, it is crucial to provide documentation in support of your request, as well as providing the names, titles and co-ordinates of the officials whom should be addressed.

### **Responding to Alerts: Letters to Governments and Officials**

Writing to the government or members of parliament is a simple way of pressuring authorities, who, as representatives of society, have a responsibility to fulfil. Such letters need not demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of complex global issues, nor need they be long and meticulously detailed; however, they should have just enough information to demonstrate a basic understanding of the issue being addressed. Avoid political jargon and flowery language. All we need to do is to

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<sup>4</sup> WLUML and other organizations, in response to these requests for solidarity, issued Alerts for Action publicizing the case and asking the international community to write to all relevant officials. The pressure from the international community added weight to the thousands of letters from within the country clearly demonstrating unpopularity of such law. Despite the bill passing in the conservative dominated parliament, it never passed the other processes to qualify as law.

express our concern about the situation that demands action and make that concern and request clear, in courteous and straightforward language. Being polite and respectful is generally more productive than hostility. Rude or confrontational letters are more easily dismissed. While signed letters are normally more effective, in politically oppressive or otherwise dangerous or threatening situations, anonymity is sometimes unavoidable as a security precaution.

It is useful to include other relevant information and supporting documents as a separate attachment to the letter. It is often effective to provide summaries of each document on the first page. Cases involving breach of human rights require, when possible, brief references to relevant articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or other international statutes and conventions. We suggest these forms of address for government officials, based on a guide by Amnesty International:

**If you are writing to:**

**start your letter:**

Heads of State

Your Excellency,  
Mr./Madam President

Kings, queens, and other monarchs

Your Majesty

Prime Ministers

Dear/Honorable Prime Minister

Other Ministers

Dear Minister,

Ambassadors

Your Excellency, or  
Dear Mr./ Madame Ambassador

Chief Justice

Dear Mr./Madame Justice

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Judges

Your Honor

All letters can be signed "Yours Truly," "Sincerely," or  
"Respectfully."

Protest letters should be strongly worded without being offensive, threatening, or accusatory. Here are a few simple phrases that can help to start a letter.

I am deeply grieved by the injustice suffered by ...",

We are distressed by the circumstances surrounding ..."

I am gravely concerned by ..." or "The situation of ... is alarming... The urgency of this situation cannot be overstated...

Heads of state and ministers often state their commitment to human rights, democracy and promotion of civil society in general, but don't always put their words into action. We can politely remind them that such statements seem hypocritical and ask them to put their words into action. For example you can write:

"I know of your personal statements on behalf of women's equality and dignity, as well as your country's participation in CEDAW, and hence I believe that you must share my deep concern for the well-being of Ms X. I urgently request that you initiate a full inquiry into her arrest and take prompt action to ensure her health and well-being..."

We sometimes find that a government, bowing to international pressure, will sign a convention on human rights, and may even issue periodic statements in support of, for instance, women's human rights, but not act to support its rhetoric. Or it may be that the current political situation is not as supportive of democracy as it once was. Here is one example of approaching such a case:

Your government has signed [CEDAW, Charter of Human Rights, etc.] in demonstration of its commitment to the preservation of the dignity of all men and women. That is why I am asking that you...

As a general rule, keep a record of all letters that are sent. Such a file enables further communication in the event of a reply. A reply requires immediate and courteous acknowledgement. If there is no response within a reasonable period of time, a polite query following up on the first letter is in order.

Here are some sample letters addressed to government officials. Note the difference in style and approach of each letter. The first letter is lengthy. The writer is a member of a human rights group - Amnesty International - who refers to the organization in order to clarify her/his position regarding the issue. The second letter is brief and is an example of the kind of letter that might be written by any individual in any community. The third letter was written by a group of women from Senegal concerning the death threat against Zara Yacoub, the journalist from Chad mentioned earlier. Although each letter has its own approach, in all three the relevant facts are presented with politeness, simplicity, and clarity, regardless of style.

**Letter #1:**

A letter written by a teacher in one country to the president of a second country.

Address

Date

Your Excellency,

I am a teacher of history at our local school and a member of Amnesty International, an independent organization working world-wide for the release of prisoners of conscience, fair trials for political prisoners, and the abolition of torture and executions. Amnesty International takes no stand for or against any government or political system, but is concerned only with human rights. Today, I write to you out of concern for ----- a prisoner held under the Internal Security Act.

In my profession, I have the pleasure of often reading about your country, and have - I hope - gained some understanding of its current problems. According to reports in our national newspapers, your officials have given no reason for the detention of -----, who has never been charged with any crime. As you know, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which your government is a signatory, insists upon the fundamental right of every person to a fair and prompt trial.

I urge you to take a personal interest in this case. Will you please assure the international community that -----will be either charged and tried fairly or released from detention immediately?

I look forward to hearing from you about this important matter.

Yours faithfully

Name-----

Signature

This letter (#1) is fairly long - it could be shortened and still make its point.

**Letter #2:**

Honorable Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif  
Prime Minister's Secretariat  
Islamabad, Pakistan  
18 March, 1993

Dear Honorable Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif:

As coordinator of the Montreal Muslim women's study group, and a university professor I am writing to express our dismay concerning the case that has been brought against Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan.

Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan has been a shining example of devotion and faith to Muslims everywhere, and is recognized world-wide for his grand effort to fight poverty and homelessness in slums of Pakistan. Your government must act with justice to ensure that this case is dropped immediately and Dr. Khan's personal liberty and security are guaranteed.

The flimsy base of the legal suit against Dr. Akhtar Khan has already been recognized by the Federal Investigation Agency's report, which stated that the cases were false and motivated and should not be pursued. We ask you to see that this injustice is repaired without further delay, not only for the sake of Dr. Khan but also for the good of the international Muslim community whose reputation is sullied by such acts of prejudice and outrage. After a lifetime of service to the people of his country, he deserves to be honoured and lauded and not forced to stand trial on false charges.

I trust that you will act in all fairness to undo the harm that has been done to the esteemed Dr. Akhtar Khan.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Akhtar Khan who at the time of the case was 80 years old and in bad health, has frequently been described as a legend and enjoys both national and international recognition. He had devoted his life to fight poverty and homelessness among the poor of Karachi. He himself has said that his lifework is religiously inspired by his in-depth study of Islam. However, some individuals with political motives, including a person with a history of embezzlement, accused him of blasphemy and launched a legal suit against him. This outraged the community, and many charity and non-governmental organizations nationally and internationally mobilized in his support. The case was dropped but it has raised questions about the nature of laws that allow such injustices to be inflicted. Dr. Khan is also known for his Islamic knowledge and profound scholarship of classical Islam. He is well versed in Arabic, Persian and his dedication to the poor, which is rooted in his Islamic perspective, is profound. He was much loved and respected in the communities he worked in.

Respectfully

.....

Coordinator of Muslim Women's Study Group  
Montreal  
(Return address)

**Letter# 3**

Dear Prime Minister:

Many people in our community are worried about a newspaper story we have read. We enclose a copy in this envelope.

It says that ten trade unionists were arrested in the capital city last week without any charges. Their whereabouts is not known. Police and security forces have refused to provide information to their families and the international community. We request that your office take appropriate action to ensure their safety and their right to an open, fair trial, should they be charged. However, if they are held without reason, we hope your office will facilitate their immediate release.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

The Middle East Study Group  
Ottawa, Canada  
Signature

**Letter # 4**

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Dr. Jack Lightstone  
Provost, Vice-Rector, Academic  
Concordia University

13 February, 1997

Dear Dr. Lightstone:

I was astonished to hear that the Simone de Beauvoir Institute is in danger of being closed by the university as a dubious strategy to save money. The Simone de Beauvoir Institute is an internationally recognized women's studies center and, as the first such institute to be established in North America (and one of the first in the world) it has historical significance. Although I had the opportunity to go to many other universities, I came as a fellow to Concordia University with my Population Council fellowship because I had read about the Simone de Beauvoir Institute and its reputation. Today, the Institute is home to many internationally-known scholars who contribute to the academic life of the university (within and without the women's studies program), as well as enriching the life of the community as a whole by sharing their academic and research findings.

It is a pity that while the Institute has generated international recognition, the university has failed to appreciate the enormous value of the Institute to the university community, and has not provided adequate moral or financial support, while other women's studies programs all over North America have flourished and have attracted thousands of students and researchers who contribute financially and in terms of academic profile to university development. A decision to close the Institute would be an irreversible mistake and reflect badly on

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Concordia as well as its sense of priorities. I strongly recommend that this proposal be reconsidered.<sup>6</sup>

Sincerely,

Homa Hoodfar

Associate Professor of Anthropology

Cc.: Dean, Arts and Sciences

Vice-Rector, International Relations

Interim Principal, Simone de Beauvoir Institute

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<sup>6</sup> This letter was written in response to Concordia University's attempt to save money by closing some departments, including the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, which runs one of the lowest-cost programs at the University and has brought in many students within a short period of time. Over 600 letters in support of the institute were sent to the rector and the influential London Times Educational Supplement printed a full-page article on the institute. Consequently the rector withdrew his proposal and realizing the support for the institute allocated it more resources.

**Letter #5:**

H.E. Ong Teng Cheong  
Office of the President  
Istana, Orchard Road  
Republic of Singapore 0922  
March 16, 1995

**Reference:**

New evidence in the case of Mrs. Flor R. Contemplacion sentenced to hang in Singapore on March 17, 1995, for alleged double-murder.

Your Excellency,

It has come to our attention that new evidence has recently been put forth by two witnesses in the Philippines, which throws serious doubt on the judgement in the case of Mrs. Flor Contemplacion, a domestic worker from the Philippines, aged 42, and mother of four children.

Because of this new evidence, we respectfully request that there should be a stay of execution and a re-trial, so that the truth will be revealed. We trust that Your Excellency and the Singapore government will do all that is necessary to ensure that due course of justice will be upheld by the Singapore courts.

Yours respectfully

## **Petitions and Signature Campaigns**

Signature campaigns or petitions are also effective methods of informing and mobilizing people. Not only can they be used in crisis situations, they are important tools in helping to initiate and reinforce long-term changes. Petitions and signature campaigns generally involve a larger segment of society than do Alerts for Action and letter-writing campaigns, thus they are particularly effective in countries where the government is concerned with its image and popularity. An elected government wanting to promote stability might more likely address the collective demand of a large group, articulated in the form of a petition, than respond to individual letters demanding change. A government concerned with popular support may honor a petition in order to appease its supporters, while governments which rule by force, and are not necessarily worried about their accountability to their citizens, will likely be less responsive to such popular petitions. Consider such factors before embarking on a petition campaign that could be time and energy consuming. There are no universal recipes for activism; each and every situation must be weighed according to specific factors and context.

A petition is a brief statement of appeal that bears, ideally, a large number of signatures as the mark of public support. It is a collective demand, which is presented to authorities to draw their attention to a particular issue. A petition is an easy way for people to voice their concerns, and the simple act of signing a petition can be the first step leading to long-term involvement in social change. Petitions, like other forms of solidarity action, also help raise public awareness, especially when the number of signatures is so large it attracts media attention. We will look at the Moroccan women's **One Million Signatures** campaign as an example.

**The Moroccan women's "One Million Signatures" campaign:**

In 1992 the UAF (Union d'action feminine), quickly joined by many other women's organizations, trade unions, and some political parties as well as human rights organizations, launched a campaign to amend Moroccan family law and ensure the rights of women. A petition was circulated calling for a wide range of reforms relating to women's right to divorce, banning of polygamy, changes in inheritance, the guardianship of children, and so on. These issues had been periodically discussed by the government, which acknowledged the need for reform, but a lack of political will precluded any changes. Women activists believed that public pressure, evidenced by the signatures of large numbers of people, would show the government how strongly the public desired such changes.

In 1992, the Moroccan government was engaged in promoting itself as increasingly liberal, accountable, and responsive. There was talk of change and reform. The UAF recognized an opportune moment to press for reform of the Personal Status Law. The 1995 United Nation's fourth women's conference was approaching and many governments were eager to show they were taking steps to improve women's overall status in society. It was in this context that the UAF decided to launch a petition campaign and collect one million signatures. Through the petition, and by holding meetings, writing to newspapers and engaging the media, they hoped to mobilize the public behind their demands. With the support of other organizations and many activists, one million signatures were collected. The government acted quickly to open the debate on family law. Although the reform fell short of the demands of women's organizations, the campaign did result in some changes to personal status law and family law, after decades of government neglect of the matter.

While Moroccan women's organizations find the reforms less than satisfactory, and are campaigning for more profound changes, the most important outcome of the

One Million Signature campaign has been the revitalization of the women's movement in Morocco and the mobilization of large numbers of women, and of the public in general, behind women's rights issues.

The successful collection of one million signatures has been empowering and inspiring for other women's organizations around the world, but especially for activists in the Muslim world, who share many similar concerns and face similar limitations. On March 8, 1997, the Inter-Associative Work Group, an Algerian-based umbrella women's organization, launched a similar national petition campaign with the slogan "A million signatures for women's rights in the family." Although the situation of civil war in Algeria has posed problems and impeded the collection of signatures, the initiative has pushed the family law debate to the forefront of the public agenda.

**Preparing a petition:**

Here are some simple guidelines for launching a petition campaign.

- a)** The major demand(s) of a petition should appear at the top of the page, with space for signatures (and other information if needed) below. The page should be copied and distributed.
  
- b)** A return address must be included so that the petition may be forwarded back to the organizers when it is full.
  
- c)** It is important to provide a separate sheet including facts and arguments concerning the demands of the petition for those who may want to know more.

**d)** Design and layout are important - make sure to leave sufficient space for signatures and related information.

**e)** A petition should be written clearly and simply so that the average person can easily understand it. Avoid academic language, rhetoric, political jargon and confusing language. Keep the message short so that people walking in a shopping center or any crowded public space find it easy to read and sign. People are less likely to take the time to read a lengthy explanation of the issue.

You may come across individuals who support the cause but won't sign because they don't agree with the wording of the petition. It may be useful to ask them to write their own version of the petition or to write a letter directly to authority concerned. There are contexts where individuals are not comfortable providing signatures or personal information such as addresses or telephone numbers, which are sometimes required along with a signature. This is more common under non-democratic conditions, and campaigners must be sensitive to this. The ultimate goal of social activism is to enable people to exercise choice, not to impose participation, regardless of how well-justified one may think such involvement is.

### Sample Petitions

#### **TO THE ATTENTION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE TURKISH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND THE JUSTICE COMMISSION**

Despite the proclamation of the Turkish Constitution guaranteeing women equal rights with men, the Turkish Civil Code contains articles which discriminate against women and which violate their rights.

A proposal to change these discriminatory laws has been "under consideration" by the Turkish National Assembly since 1984, and has yet to be approved. Most recently, a petition containing over 100,000 signatures was presented to the President of the National Assembly, Mr. Cindoruk, on February 17, 1994, urging the Justice Commission and the National Assembly to pass this proposal. Yet, the proposal is still being held up and there has been no discernible move to have it ratified and implemented.

In addition, the discriminatory articles of the Turkish Civil Code are in blatant contradiction with paragraphs 15 and 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which Turkey signed and ratified on July 24 1985. As is the case globally, the significant role that women play in Turkey's social, economic and political development cannot be denied. We therefore urge you to accept and implement, without further delay, the legal changes addressing the laws, which prevent women from fully contributing to, as well as benefiting from, this development process.

NAME	ADDRESS	OCCUPATION	SIGN
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Please Return To:

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At the height of the Bosnian crisis, a number of student activists at Stanford University formed a group called Students Against Genocide (SAGE). To mark the second anniversary of the war in Bosnia, SAGE launched an international signature campaign asking university and college students, staff and faculty world-wide to mark the day and sign the following petition. The petition was drafted to both articulate the demand of the group - which was to end the genocide - and to raise awareness about the atrocities being committed in Bosnia.

**PETITION TO COMMEMORATE THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE WAR  
IN BOSNIA**

We are students, faculty and staff at colleges and universities worldwide, and other concerned individuals. We have gathered here today to commemorate the second anniversary of the siege of Sarajevo and the brutal, Serb nationalist campaign of ethnic cleansing and rape as a means of genocide. We sign this petition to condemn the continuing genocide being committed against the people of Bosnia, to deplore the complicity of the United Nation and our political leaders in these crimes, and to insist our world leaders finally end the atrocities and bring a just peace to the Bosnian people. Only justice will bring durable peace to Bosnia.

Students Against Genocide (SAGE).

**NAME**

**SIGNATURE**

**ADDRESS**

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**RETURN TO: STUDENT AGAINST GENOCIDE - P.O. BOX 9248, STANFORD,  
CA 94309 USA**

## **Postcard Campaigns**

Like signature campaigns, postcard campaigns are effective means of raising awareness and gathering support. Successful postcard campaigns demonstrate widespread support for a cause, as bureaucrats and officials are inundated with stacks of mail. Postcards use graphics, images, and cartoons to convey ideas, and more easily draw people to their message than the printed word. Thus, attracting people to pick up a postcard and support a cause is often easier than getting them to sign a petition.

### **Guidelines for launching a postcard campaign:**

Provide information and contacts alongside the postcards for those wishing to learn more about the case or the situation. Because postcards take little time to read and sign, they are effective for demonstrating broad public awareness and support for your cause. For some, the cost of mailing a postcard may be too high, while others may simply keep the card because they like the picture. Nonetheless, postcard campaigns are effective for involving large numbers of people in public participation.

Petitions and postcard campaigns enable those who can't participate in rallies and meetings due to geographical or time constraints to express their views. Petitions and postcard campaigns are particularly effective at the international level.

There are various ways of organizing postcard campaigns. Generally, a postcard bearing an image, graphic or other visual message representing the issue is distributed to be signed and mailed by supporters. The postcard has already been addressed. Alternatively, an organization or individual simply publicizes an issue of great importance and asks others (national or international) to send them a postcard supporting their position. The collected postcards are then presented to the appropriate politician, administrator, business leader or policy-maker. This sends a

powerful message that many members of the public are monitoring and assessing the actions and decisions of those in positions of power and influence.

### **The postcard campaign for women's rights in Afghanistan:**

In 1997, when the Taliban military forces captured the Afghan capital city of Kabul, women of that country lost all their basic rights, including health care and education; furthermore, women were restricted in many ways from participating in public life. Women have been unable to leave their homes unless accompanied by a male family member, cannot attend school, go to work, or even use public bathhouses. The Action Group for Afghan Women, a non-profit organization based in Canada, launched a postcard campaign demanding the international community's help to end this crisis. The campaign began in March 1998 and within two months the group had gathered hundreds of thousands of postcards from around the world. Many of the cards were sent to the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights in Geneva, which has officially acknowledged this massive lobby for the rights of women in Afghanistan. The campaign continues to raise awareness about the plight of Afghan women, and has also helped keep the issue on the international political agenda.

### **Example of postcard for women of Afghanistan**

**[scanned the post card]**

### **Campaign of Conscience for the Iraqi Children:**

The 'One Million Postcards' campaign to lift economic sanctions imposed on Iraq by the US and the United Nations also exemplifies the postcard strategy. Marwa and Kouthar Al-Rawi are daughters of an Iraqi father and an American mother who

explained to them, in 1997, that sanctions imposed following the 1991 Gulf War to allegedly punish Iraqi leader Saddam Hussien, in reality brought suffering to ordinary people and children in Iraq. Amidst all the other hardships, 4000 Iraqi children die each month due to lack of medicine. The two young girls (11 and 7) wanted to do something for the Iraqi children. They painted a picture and sent it to U.S. First Lady Hilary Clinton, explaining that they did not think the economic sanctions were the best or most peaceful way to deal with the situation. Then they asked other children to do the same. Ultimately they decided to ask children all over the world to join their campaign, requesting that everyone send them a postcard, preferably home-made and including a message, and they would present the collection of postcards to the White House. They arranged for a post office box. They also bought postcards for people to sign and mail. To raise funds for the project, they collected empty bottles to recycle, and secondhand clothes and goods and with the help of their mother organized garage sales. They asked their teachers and other adults to help them to set up a website and scanned some of the postcards. They kept a tally on the website of how many cards they received. They used an email address posted on the site to receive correspondence from other children and interested individuals. They decided to hold an exhibit of the children's postcards and messages before presenting them to the White House. They were invited to the local radio station and talked about what children can do to help to make the world better. Finally the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization, asked award-winning documentary film-maker Joan Mandell to make a short film about the girls' efforts. These two children have demonstrated that youth is no obstacle to taking action and making a difference. Drawing in many children from around the globe to speak out against injustice, two small girls have shown the power of young voices to be heard on important issues.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> To contact the sisters write to: Al-rawi, PO Box 1141, Sanperdro, CA 90733 USA. To send them an email write to [iraqikids@aol.com](mailto:iraqikids@aol.com); to visit their website go to

**Scan one of the post card**

**Campaign to end the Civil War in the Sudan:**

Many peace loving people across the world are concerned that Sudan's civil war is being ignored by the international community. It is the bloodiest and longest in Africa's recorded history, with more than two million deaths and four million forced from their homes. There is concern, as well, that the income from international oil companies and other multi-nationals active in the Sudan has served to finance the military and thus prolong the war. The international NGO community launched a post card campaign to bring pressure on their own governments and, through them, on the international companies, to close down this funding of the Sudanese military. It was hoped that this would force the military to negotiate a peace agreement and stop the human tragedy. In Canada, it was Alternatives that took the initiative and launched the campaign.<sup>8</sup>

**Insert both side of the post card.**

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<http://www.members.aol.com/hamzaha/iraqichildren>. You can also reach them via [askaboutiraq@afsc.org](mailto:askaboutiraq@afsc.org)

<sup>8</sup> Alternatives, Action and communication Network for International Development, 3720 Parc Avenue, Suite 300, Montreal, Quebec, H2X 2J1, Canada. Toll-Free telephone 1-800-982-6646, Fax (514)982-6122, Website: WWW.alternatives.ca .

### **An environmental postcard campaign: The Group of 21**

When a group of concerned citizens, NGOs, and environmentalists realized the lack of commitment on the part of industrialized nations to sign the recommended agreement to reduce CO2 emissions, a major cause of pollution, by 20% by the year 2005, they initiated a project, **The Group of 21**, and launched a post card campaign from Kyoto, Japan.<sup>9</sup> Through letters, a website, and networking, the project mobilized people internationally to demonstrate support by sending postcards, to be presented to Climate Conference delegates meeting in December 1997 in Kyoto. The intent was to pressure government delegates to the Third Conference on Climate Change to finalize the CO2 reduction agreement. Thousands of post cards from 51 countries were sent to the project, which were presented to delegates by 21 people, from infants to age 21, from all over the world. These young activists reminded delegates that the decisions they were about to make would effect the futures and lives of young people and the lives of future generations. The campaign was well covered by the media, in part because the youth of the participants attracted attention. The goal of the project was to educate the public as well as officials about a grave environmental issue, and especially to demonstrate to youth world-wide that the future of our home, our planet, lies in their hands.

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<sup>9</sup> The Group of 21 is a project, not an organisation. It is non-profit and has no political, religious or corporate affiliations. The members of the group have volunteered their abilities, time and money toward achieving the project's stated goals. The activities of the group are limited to the Kyoto COP3 conference with the hope that these activities will have a positive effect on world thought and responsibilities reaching far beyond the conference. Their website address is <http://www.envirolink.org>.

The initiative was fairly successful and was widely supported. An important aspect of its success was the simplicity of the project design. The goals and message were clear, the address to send the post card to was prominent and easy to read, and participants could send any postcard they chose, in contrast to most postcard campaigns which pay for and provide a specific postcard, which requires printing and distribution. While conventional postcard campaigns educate the public and raise consciousness, they are costly and international distribution requires an extensive network to be in place.

## **Working with Mass Media**

### **Addressing the media:**

Engaging media attention for your cause is crucial; the media are part of almost everyone's daily life. The mass media are key to raising awareness about an issue and to mobilizing the public. Addressing the media effectively, and writing for media consumption require special attention; generally we are dealing with sharply limited amounts of time and space, as well as a widely varied audience. Here we briefly present some of the basic guidelines.

### **Writing to local/national newspapers - practical points:**

Here we are drawing on a short guide put out by the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), a non-profit organization primarily concerned with issues of misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims in North America. However, many of the suggestions are applicable to other social and geographical contexts.

Most letters to the editor do not get published because they are either too long or their message is unclear. To increase your chances of publication:

- a)** Keep your letter to no more than 150-200 words. Time and space are at a premium in the mass media. Writing a brief but powerful letter is much more challenging than writing a long one, and always requires enormous editing to finally arrive at a concise and effective version of your position or your main concerns.
- b)** Pick one main idea and resist the temptation to include other points. Since the letter must be short, you can't touch on every issue, regardless of how important they may be. Chose what you think is the most strategic one and concentrate on it.

- c)** Address your letter to the Letters Editor, which at least gets your message directly to the person who will ultimately decide whether it gets published. Your chances increase if your letter actually makes it to this editor's desk. However, do send copies to others at the media outlet, particularly if you name them.
- d)** Be passionate or even controversial, but avoid rhetoric and defamation. Rhetoric and slogans detract from the impact and credibility of your letter.
- e)** State the **PURPOSE** of the letter in the first sentence, in 25 words or less. The reader - including the editor - has to get your point right away or may lose interest in reading your letter altogether.
- f )** Give minimal but essential background information so that the reader can make sense of your letter.
- g)** Cite impartial sources. It is of utmost importance to back your claims with evidence, although this does not necessarily mean statistical or other "scientific" data. Your experiences and observations, properly contextualized, can be quite acceptable.
- h)** Offer a solution. There is no point in simply reviewing an obvious problem. Your letter should offer constructive criticism or possible solutions and useful suggestions. Here are some examples:

**Sample letters:**

Address

Date

Dear Editor,

Last issue's piece "The Middle East: Problems and Crisis," (date) by (name of the writer, reporter) depicts all Muslims as being terrorists. Such generalization is not only shoddy journalism, it is racist. It harms the large North American Muslim population and undermines inter-community understanding. As members of the Ottawa Muslim Association, we demand a public apology from the article's author. We further urge the newsletter to respect its readership, which is comprised in large part of Muslims. It is essential that your publication pay attention to the nuances and subtleties of the issues and exercise great caution so that there are no further distorted portrayals of any group or issue.

The Ottawa Muslim Association

Return Address

Dear Editor,

As a Canadian citizen and university student, I was dismayed to read the article about Palestine you published on (date). The article depicts all Palestinians as terrorists. As a regular reader of your paper I generally find your coverage fair and accurate; however in this instance I was appalled to read that "(use quote if applicable)." You and the author owe all your readers an apology. Racist comments and portrayals cannot be tolerated in the media or elsewhere, and your paper has a grave responsibility to present unbiased coverage, as such inflammatory comments can have grave implications for all members of society.

Yours Truly,

(name & signature)

Return address

**Addressing radio and television:**

Access to radio and television is often limited, especially where government or a few corporations have a media monopoly. However, where access is possible, radio and television are important channels for reaching a large public. Strategic actions sometimes result in even the most closed or highly controlled system being forced to respond to, or reflect, the political and social concerns of the population.

In 1995 the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) organized a workshop on media as part of its annual conference examining the concerns of Muslim women in the Canadian and international context. The CCMW has urged Muslims to respond to the gross misrepresentation of Islam and Muslim communities that frequently results in negative, public misperception. The workshop discussed ways of addressing local and national media portrayal of Muslims. The following points, presented during the workshop, are helpful directions for informing local and national broadcasters of your concerns. A member of the Council who is a journalist with an insider's view on how individuals and organizations can use media to mobilize support or promote a cause provided these guidelines.

**a)** It is preferable to appoint one person to act as your media liaison. This is important for cultivating a relationship between your organization and the media, and building a network of helpful media contacts. As reporters and editors get to know your organization's representative, they are more likely to be receptive to your proposals and initiatives.

**b)** It is critical to find out which programs are most appropriate showcases for your organization's interests. It is also very helpful to find out which reporters cover which issues - contacting a sports reporter to cover a demonstration for healthcare reforms will not likely have great results. A file noting which journalist covers each beat -

social affairs, health, environment - makes it easier to contact the appropriate journalist before sending him/her your material.

**c)** Remember that often your press release or clip will be cut to fit the time available. Your message must be very brief and clear, and not easily twisted or manipulated. Be aware, reporters generally do not decide which issues get covered. Reporters suggest stories, while editors make the final decisions as to what gets covered. Thus it is important to learn the names of the producers and editors and send your material directly to them as well.

**d)** Clearly indicate who you are, who you represent or what your affiliation is; if you don't clearly define yourself, the media will define you. Clearly state your goals, particularly if you represent an advocacy group, information service, or counseling program. Develop and articulate clear positions on what your group stands for, not what it stands against.

**e)** It is very important to try and understand the media's mentality and constraints. Be engaging and persuasive, and don't consider rejection as the end of any potential media interest. Continue to contact and inform them. Remember the media is fickle, and media attention shifts quickly. They may not be interested in you this week, but may call three weeks later. While the media may not have the freedom to advocate a cause, they have a responsibility to be aware.

**f)** Respect media deadlines - always ask the reporter what her/his deadline is. Television newsrooms usually have a daily deadline, while radio reporters have hourly deadlines. Missing their deadline means you have missed the opportunity to air your view. It can also tarnish the reputation of your organization as unreliable and ineffective.

**A basic guide to writing press releases:**

A press release is a brief statement prepared for newspapers and other media describing an event or newsworthy situation. Press or news releases are a cheap and easy way of getting information about a development, concern, or public event to the media. The human rights group Amnesty International cites the following points for preparing an effective press release in its member's handbook:

- a) The text should be brief - usually no more than two pages, and the style should be clear. A long, complicated document may be thrown away, or may be rewritten so much that the message will be lost.
- b) Present the most important point in the opening sentence.
- c) Emphasize the local angle. Mention any colorful event or prominent personality that may figure in the story.
- d) Type and double-space the news release.
- e) Make sure to include the name and telephone number of a contact person who is well informed about the subject of the press release and can answer any questions a reporter might have.
- f) Continuously update your file of media contacts.

The following is an example of a press release issued by Shirkat Gah, a women's resource center in Pakistan. This was in response to a wave of opportunistic, negative sentiment expressed by **Qazi Hussain Ahmed**, a leader of Jamaat-e-Islami, a conservative and deeply patriarchal political group, directed at Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) which have been defending and promoting equity for women.

Shirkat Gah takes strong exception to the misleading and misinformed statements of Amir Jamaat-e-Islami **Qazi Hussein Ahmed**, in his on-going campaign against

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NGOs which are making a significant and positive contribution to national development. The Jamaat Amir has now inexplicably singled out Shirkat Gah for a direct attack.

Contrary to his understanding, the Beijing platform for Action was signed by the government of Pakistan which has adopted a National Plan of Action (NPA) as the official blueprint for the implementation of the commitments it made at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The NPA was drawn-up through a broad-based national consultative process involving hundreds of individuals and organizations, of which Shirkat Gah was only one.

Following is an example of a press release issued by Amnesty International:

**Amnesty International News Release**

For release: (date)

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GROUP SETS UP CHINESE 'WALL  
NEWSPAPER'**

The local group of Amnesty International, the worldwide human rights movement, will set up a Chinese "wall newspaper" in front of City Hall this Saturday to mark the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

In China, newspapers, radio, and television are controlled by the state. Events not covered by mainstream Chinese media, and information not seen as acceptable to print, were formerly made public through "wall newspapers" - notices posted on walls. They became an important means of communication for the Chinese Pro-Democracy Movement. These "wall newspapers" are now illegal.

Amnesty International's "wall newspaper" will display the names of hundreds of people imprisoned or executed by the Chinese authorities since 1989. Between 10:00 am and 6:00 p.m., local members of the organization will be at City Hall to circulate petitions and to distribute materials about the human rights situation in China.

For more information please contact:

Name and telephone

#faxnumber

#email address

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## Direct Lobbying

Although what has been discussed so far could all be classified as lobbying, there is a specific form of public participation referred to as lobbying, whereby delegates from an organization or group meet with government officials to discuss an issue of concern. The group requests a meeting after extensive research, and presents its position armed with excellent data to support its position. Research and collection of factual information is essential for effective lobbying. A successful lobby rests on the art of convincing those in power of the accuracy and importance of your position. Limiting the discussion to a few focused points helps. Lobbyists must be able to field questions as well as articulate their position. Effective listening is key here. It is essential to have several pre-meetings within your organization to discuss and debate the subject prior to actually meeting with officials. To save time and work more efficiently, a prepared agenda or point summary should be circulated ahead of the meeting.

It is important that the issue and position lobbyists are promoting have gained sufficient support to convey their importance to the decision-makers. Lobbyists must be diplomatic and persuasive, with a firm grasp of protocol and an ability to network. It is always appropriate to send a thank-you note after the meeting, as a courtesy and a reminder of the issue. The work of Women for Women's Human Rights in Turkey, which as we discussed earlier (pp.xx) helped change Turkish law pertinent to domestic violence, and the participation of the Sri Lankan Women's Action and Research Group in the process of reforming the Muslim family code (pp. xx) are good examples of lobbying.

Lobbying works within the existing framework of a society to bring about long-term reform. Often, even after a goal is accomplished, the work of the lobby group

continues, as the lobbyists monitor the reforms or continue to push for other changes. The work of a lobby group is more effective when it is able to build a network of supporters among ordinary citizens as well as among influential groups, organizations and personalities who will support its demands. Lobbying demands continued effort and a constant presence on public platforms as well as regular meetings with authorities and official bodies. Direct lobbying can be tedious and requires patience and perseverance, as change happens slowly.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Selected Centers Promoting Human Rights Including Women's Rights and Democracy**

Please note that this is only a selected list and does not reflect the considerable number and diversity of organizations that are active in one form or the other in promoting "Human Rights", democracy, gender equity, and peace. Many of the organizations listed here, can provide information and publications to those interested. As well, they are usually helpful in putting individuals in need of support in contact with relevant organizations.

#### **Selected Addresses:**

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,  
Office of the United Nations,  
CH 1211, Geneva 10,  
Switzerland; Tel: (41) 22-917-9000;  
Email: [webadmin.hchr@unog.ch](mailto:webadmin.hchr@unog.ch)

UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)  
12th Floor DC-2  
2 United Nations Plaza  
United Nations  
New York, NY 10017, USA  
T: 212-963-8766 ... F: 212-963-3463  
Email: [daw@undp.org](mailto:daw@undp.org)  
Website: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw>

United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)  
304 East 45th Street, 6th Floor  
New York, NY 10017, USA  
Tel: 212-906-6400  
Fax: 212-906-6705  
Email: [unifem@undp.org](mailto:unifem@undp.org)  
Website: <http://www.unifem.undp.org>

International Center For Human Rights and Democratic Development  
63, Rue De Bresoles

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Montreal, Quebec  
Canada, H2Y, IV7  
Tel: (514) 283-6073  
Fax: (514)283-3792  
Email: [ichrdd@ichrdd.ca](mailto:ichrdd@ichrdd.ca)  
Website: <http://www.ichrdd.ca>

Women Living Under Muslim Laws

BP 20023,  
84791 Grabels Cedex  
France

Tel: 33-467-109166

Fax : 33-467-109167

Email: [wluml@mnet.fr](mailto:wluml@mnet.fr) **I have to provide a new address later**

Web: [WWW.wluml.org](http://WWW.wluml.org)

Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Center/ Women Living Under Muslim Laws  
68 Tipu Block  
New Garden Town  
Lahore, Pakistan

Tel: 92-42-583-6554/583-8815/5832448

Fax: 92-42-586-0185

Email: [sgah@lhr.comsats.net.pk](mailto:sgah@lhr.comsats.net.pk) &  
[sgah@sgah.brain.net.pk](mailto:sgah@sgah.brain.net.pk)

BAOBAB/ Women Living Under Muslim Laws

Flat 1, 25 Musa Yar Adua Street

P.O. Box 73630, Victoria Island

Lagos, Nigeria

Tel/Fax: 234-1-baob.com.ng

Email:[baobab@baobab.com.ng](mailto:baobab@baobab.com.ng)

Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum

21/25, Polhengoda Gardens

Colombo-5

Sri Lanka

Tel./Fax :074-405902

Email: [mwraf@pan.lk](mailto:mwraf@pan.lk)

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Ain O Salish Kendra (Ask)  
26/3 Purana Paltan Line  
Dhaka, Bangladesh 1000  
Tel: 8802-835851  
Fax: 8802-838561

WOMEN FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS/ NEW WAYS  
Inonu Cad. No: 37 /6 Saadet apt.  
Gumussuyu 80090 Istanbul - TURKEY  
Tel: (90) 212 - 251 0029  
Fax: (90) 212 - 251 0065  
Email: [wwhrist@superonline.com](mailto:wwhrist@superonline.com)

International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia-Pacific (IWRAP Asia-Pacific)  
2nd Floor, Block F  
Anjung Felda  
Jalan Maktab  
5400 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
Tel: 603-291-3292  
Fax: 603-292-9958  
Email: [iwraw@po.jaring.my](mailto:iwraw@po.jaring.my)

Isis International, Manila  
PO Box 1837  
Quezon City Main  
Quezon City 1100, Philippines  
Tel/Fax: (632) 435-3408  
Email: [isis@mnl.sequel.net](mailto:isis@mnl.sequel.net)

ISIS Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE)  
P.O. Box 4934 Kampala  
Uganda, East Africa  
Tel: 256-41-266007/8  
F: 256-41-268676  
Email: [isis@starcom.co.ug](mailto:isis@starcom.co.ug)

Human Rights Watch  
350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor  
New York, NY 10108-3299, USA  
Tel: 212-290-4700  
Fax: 212-736-1300  
Email: [hrwnyc@hrw.org](mailto:hrwnyc@hrw.org)  
Website: <http://www.hrw.org>

International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC)  
777 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017, USA  
Tel.: 212-687-8633  
Fax: 212-661-2704  
Email: [iwtc@igc.apc.org](mailto:iwtc@igc.apc.org)

Amnesty International USA (Headquarters)  
322 8th Avenue  
New York, NY 10001, USA  
Tel: 212-633-4200  
Fax: 212-463-9193  
Website: <http://www.amnesty.org>

Or  
304 Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20003, USA  
Tel: 202-544-0200  
Fax: 202-546-7142

Or  
International Secretariat  
1 Easton Street  
London WC1X 8DJ, United Kingdom  
Tel: (44 171) 413-5500  
Fax: (44 171) 956-1157  
E-Mails:  
International Secretariat: [amnestyis@amnesty.org](mailto:amnestyis@amnesty.org)  
USA: [admin-us@aiusa.org](mailto:admin-us@aiusa.org)  
Palestine: [amnestypal@hotmail.com](mailto:amnestypal@hotmail.com)  
Bangladesh: [admin-bd@amnesty.org](mailto:admin-bd@amnesty.org)  
Pakistan: [amnesty@cyber.net.pk](mailto:amnesty@cyber.net.pk)

Women for women international  
733 15<sup>th</sup> Street NW11, Suite 310  
Washington, DC 2005  
Phone: (202)737-7705  
Phone: (202)737-7709  
[Info@womenforwomen.org](mailto:Info@womenforwomen.org)

All Women's Action Society  
11 Jalan 7/2, Jalan Bulit Menteri Selatan, 46050

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Petaling Jaya  
Selangor, Malaysia  
Fax: 603-7573312

Sisterhood Is Global Institute - Jordan (SIGI/J)  
5 Nadim Al-Mallah Street  
Jebel El-Lweibdeh  
Amman, Jordan  
Tel/Fax: 962-6-462-3773  
Email: [sigi@firstnet.com.jo](mailto:sigi@firstnet.com.jo)  
Web: <http://www.sigi.org/Programs/KPP/kppjordn.htm>

Sisterhood is Global (canada, International office)  
1200 Atwater #2  
Montreal, Quebec,  
Canada H3Z 1X4  
Tel.: (514)846,9366  
Fax: (514)846,9066  
Email: [Sigi@qc.abin.com](mailto:Sigi@qc.abin.com)  
Web.: [www.sigi.org](http://www.sigi.org)

Feminist Majority Foundation  
1600 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 801  
Arlington, Virginia, 22209  
USA  
Tel: (703) 522-2214  
Fax: (703) 522-2219  
[femmaj@feminist.org](mailto:femmaj@feminist.org)

Asian Centre for Women's Human Rights (ASCENT)  
Suite 306 MJB Building  
220 Tomas Morato Avenue  
Quezon City, Philippines  
Tel: (63-2) 928-4973  
Fax: (63-2) 911-0513  
Telefax: (63-2) 533-0452  
Email: [ascent@mnl.cyberspace.com.ph](mailto:ascent@mnl.cyberspace.com.ph)

Association for Community Development  
H-41 Sagarpara  
Rajshahi, Bangladesh  
Forum Against Oppression of Women

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29, Bhatia Bhavan  
Babrekar Marg  
Dadar, Bombay 400028  
India  
Tel: 91-22-422-2436  
Email: [admin@faow.ilbom.ernet.in](mailto:admin@faow.ilbom.ernet.in)  
[swatiya@faow.ilbom.ernet.in](mailto:swatiya@faow.ilbom.ernet.in)

Simorgh Women's Resource and Publication Centre  
P.O. Box 3328, Gulberg - II  
Lahore, Pakistan  
T: 92-42-575-7195

Sisters in Islam  
JKR No. 851  
Jalan Lapangan Terbang Lama  
50460 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
T/F: (603) 242-6121  
Email: [sis@sisfora.po.my](mailto:sis@sisfora.po.my)

Women in Need (WIN)  
No. 7 Alfred House Avenue  
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka

Women's Aid Organization  
PO Box 493 Jalan Sultan  
46760 Petaling Jaya  
Selangor, Malaysia  
Tel: 60-3-7563488, 603-7554426  
Fax: 60-3-7563237  
Email: [wao@po.jaring.my](mailto:wao@po.jaring.my)

Human Rights Forum for Women's Rights  
PO Box 921687  
Amman, Jordan  
Telefax: 859873

Jordanian Women's Union  
PO Box 960723  
Amman, Jordan  
Fax: 96-2-66-87-061

The Legal Research and Resource Center for Human Rights

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7 Al Higaz Street, Roxi Heliopolis  
Cairo, Egypt  
Tel: 011-202-259-6622  
Fax: 011-202-452-0977  
Email: [lrrc@frco.eun.eg](mailto:lrrc@frco.eun.eg)  
Website: <http://www.geocities.com/~lrrc/>

The Permanent Arab Court To Resist Violence Against Women  
League of Lebanese Women's Rights  
Wata Mousseitbe  
Beirut, Lebanon  
P.O. Box 14/5140  
Tel/Fax: 961-1-817820

Yemeni Federation of Women's Organizations  
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Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of  
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