



# WLUML NEWSLETTER

## Issue 3

### Inside this issue

page:

**1** WLUML Plan of Action 2006

**2** WLUML Plan of Action 2006

**2** WLUML Dress Codes Exhibition

**3** WLUML Solidarity

**4** WLUML Publications

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

## WLUML Plan of Action 2006

In July 2006, Women Living Under Muslim Laws held a week-long Plan of Action (PoA) Meeting in Dakar, Senegal. Following our last PoA Meeting (1997), this meeting aimed to update WLUML's thematic priorities, strategies and organisational structure to ensure that they match the needs, concerns and capacities of our networkers. The resulting Plan of Action document will serve as the WLUML network's guiding document for the next five years.



Participants of the 2006 WLUML Plan of Action Meeting, July 2006, Dakar, Senegal  
Two additional participants from WLUML-ICO and Mali were not present for the photo

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The 2006 WLUML PoA Meeting was the largest and most diverse of all PoA meetings, providing a unique opportunity for both established and new WLUML networkers to share their analysis and concerns, and to establish new cross-regional networking links with a diverse selection of individuals and organisations.

Many of WLUML's newer active networkers are from Francophone West Africa and North Africa so, to ensure their input into the analysis and to aid two-way interaction between networkers, the 2006 Plan of Action meeting was the first WLUML PoA to provide simultaneous French/English translation.

The Plan of Action document will soon be available online for download at: [www.wluml.org](http://www.wluml.org)

## VOICES FROM THE REGION : PREPARING FOR THE WLUML PLAN OF ACTION

To ensure that as many networkers as possible had the opportunity to input into WLUML's Plan of Action, a series of regional meetings (termed 'Pre-PoA Meetings') were held prior to the July PoA meeting.

Participants identified the critical issues, contexts and needs faced by women in each region and proposed strategies through which WLUML, as a cross-boundary network, can address these.

The pre-PoA meetings were also a means for identifying networkers most likely to actively engage with WLUML in the coming years.

Reports from these regional meetings were translated into English, French and Arabic and presented by representatives invited to attend the Plan of Action meeting in Senegal.

Turn over for more information on the regional Plan of Action Meetings ....



## AFRICA PRE-POA MEETING

January 2006: Bamako, Mali

The Africa Regional Pre-PoA meeting was held in Mali from 24–28 January 2006 and coordinated by the WLUML Regional Coordination Office in Nigeria, BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights, in collaboration with Mali based networkers, Femmes et Droits Humains. A total of 33 participants attended from 14 African countries; Morocco, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Chad, Guinea, Cameroon, Nigeria, South Africa, Mali, Liberia, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Kenya and Ghana, along with the WLUML ICO MENA Programme Officer.

Networkers identified the continued rise of fundamentalisms, violence against women, globalisation, HIV-AIDs and reform of personal status laws as the predominant critical issues in the region.

## MENA PRE-POA MEETING

May 2006: Cairo, Egypt

The Middle East & North Africa Regional Pre-PoA meeting took place in Egypt on 22 – 23 May 2006. Hosted by CEWLA (The Centre for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance) and coordinated by WLUML-ICO. A total of 22 participants attended the meeting from 11 countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen, in addition to a WLUML PIC member and the WLUML ICO MENA Programme Officer.

The critical issues identified at the meeting were: the continued rise of fundamentalisms; the need for personal status law reform, violence against women and the need to lobby for adherence to international treaties, such as CEDAW.

## ASIA PRE-POA MEETINGS

June 2006: Colombo, Sri Lanka/Lahore, Pakistan

Meetings were held in Sri Lanka (1-4 June) and Pakistan (21-27 June). WLUML networkers from Uzbekistan, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan were invited. These meetings were coordinated by the WLUML Regional Coordination Office in Pakistan, Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre and by the Muslim Women's Research & Action Forum, Sri Lanka. In addition, networkers from Bangladesh developed a national analysis of Critical Issues.

Concerns that were raised during these meetings included: the social implications caused by increasing Islamization and conservatism within the region; growing poverty and unemployment, particularly among women; increased illiteracy; increased state violence and control over individuals and human rights organisations and increasing violence against women.

## UK PRE-POA MEETING

June 2006: London, England

The UK Pre-PoA meeting was held on 30 June 2006 in London hosted by WLUML ICO. The meeting concentrated on migrant communities from a Muslim background in the UK as well as academics working on similar issues internationally and some international groups based in the UK with which WLUML networks.

The meeting discussed social exclusion of people from Muslim communities in Britain, and identified critical issues, such as: the continued erosion of secular spaces and the emergence of new practices labelled 'traditional'; the debate over dress codes for Muslim schoolgirls; the absence of alternative forums to engage youth in Muslim communities; and the continued pressure for a parallel legal system for Muslims.

## WLUML TRAVELLING EXHIBITION IN CANADA

The WLUML exhibition, "*Dress Codes and Modes: Women's dress in some Muslim communities and countries*" is currently on display in Canada, under the care of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan and Rights & Democracy. The exhibition presents the history and politics of women's clothing in Muslim communities spanning three continents and explores both the myriad differences and similarities between dress codes and styles in Muslim communities as diverse as Egypt, Iran, Nigeria, South Asia and Turkey.

With over 250 images include paintings, drawings and photographs illustrating the wealth of diverse cultures within and across Muslim communities, the exhibition questions the very notion of a homogenous 'Muslim world.' A wealth of historical quotations and original analysis support the images in exploring the experiences of women in these varying regions and historical periods who have been subject to imposed dress codes. But throughout the exhibit, the pictures and text highlight how political control, social status, gender, fashion and personal creativity are just as much responsible for influencing a person's dress. In doing so, it shatters the notion that there is any single, uniform "Islamic" code of dress for women or men, and raises increasingly relevant questions about the political motivations that continue to give life to such notions.

The exhibition was first displayed at UBC Robson Square Campus in Vancouver before moving on to the YMCA in Montréal where it was on display throughout August. In September the exhibition will be moved to the University Environmental Design Gallery, Calgary and then finally on to Winnipeg in October.



## Defending Women's Rights - IRAN

In response to the violent attacks and arrests of women rights activists, women's groups and human rights defenders in Tehran on and following International Women's Day (March 8, 2006), WLUML issued an international Call for Action, urging the Iranian authorities to ensure the safety and immediate and unconditional release of those arrested, along with assurances that such an unprovoked and violent response will not be repeated.

WLUML also issued a Call for Action in June 2006, urging individuals and organisations to support the peaceful protest of Iranian women demanding equal rights set to take place on June 12th 2006. The protest was set exactly a year on from an identical protest held in front of Tehran University which led to many women being called in for questioning by security forces, interrogated, repeatedly harassed and some organizations being denied permits of operation.

In reaction, Iranian women's rights activists initiated a wide campaign in August 2006 to collect one million signatures demanding an end to legal discrimination against women in Iranian law. The campaign is not limited to Tehran, with groups and individuals based in the provinces being encouraged to voluntarily take part in campaign activities and workshops, and Iranians based outside Iran to make donations and submit signatures of support by mail or email.

For further information on these Calls for Action, please see: [www.wluml.org/english/actions.shtml](http://www.wluml.org/english/actions.shtml)

## Supporting Ms. Ashraf Kalhori - IRAN

In August 2006, WLUML received a request for solidarity from an Iranian networker voluntarily representing Ms. Ashraf Kalhori, a 37 year old mother of four awaiting execution by stoning for having an extramarital affair, despite her earlier request for a divorce being denied. WLUML circulated a letter to the Iranian authorities requesting her sentence to be changed and an immediate removal of death by stoning from the Iranian constitution. Three days later we were extremely happy to hear that the Head of Judiciary, Ayatollah Shahroudi had issued a stay of execution. The lawyer representing Ashraf, and WLUML networker, Ms. Shadi Sadr, writes:

*"On her behalf, I sincerely thank every one of you for signing the petition and helping to save her life.... The petition included the signatures of more than a hundred Iranian women rights activists and over four thousand signatures collected online. It is a wonderful feeling to see people coming together to save the life of another human being..."*

However, her fate is not yet clear and we urge you to continue writing to the Iranian authorities on her behalf and to demand a change in the law making stoning illegal.

For further information please see: [www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf156\]=i-156-541421](http://www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf156]=i-156-541421)

## Continued Access to Abortion - KYRGYZSTAN

On behalf of the Forum of Women's NGO's, WLUML circulated a Call for Action in June requesting support in the protest against initiatives proposed by the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic to introduce a criminal liability for women and medical workers terminating 12-22 weeks pregnancy under social indications. Such action would break fundamental human rights and contradict both national and international legislation, such as CEDAW and the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Reproductive Rights.

Women's NGO's believe that these measures would lead to a deterioration of reproductive rights and human security, causing an increase in illegal abortions, abandoned and slaughtered children and destroyed families, not to mention the economic impact of the increased maintenance of orphanages, prisons, rehabilitation of victims of street abortions and additional losses of workforce.

On 14 June 2006, the signatures and letters of support for abortion rights in response to the Call for Action were submitted to the Members of Parliament and high state officials. The Ombudsman did not appear at the hearing but representatives from women's groups were visible. All state officials, including the Minister for Health and the Minister for Internal Affairs, were in strong opposition to the Ombudsman's proposal to limit abortion rights.

For further information please see: [www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf156\]=i-156-538562](http://www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf156]=i-156-538562)



## WLUML NETWORKERS

## Morocco: The Women's Caravan for Full Equality, Citizenship and Development in Rural Areas

By Najlah Atannah of *Alssiwar*, a Palestinian women's group based in Haifa

Organised by *Yatto*, a women's group in Morocco that provides support for women victims of violence, the Caravan visited villages in South East Morocco to work with local communities on issues relating to equality, citizenship and development. With the help of local community groups the Caravan organized a number of workshops in these villages on health, environment, women's rights, human rights and family laws, etc. The Caravan also provided counselling and legal advice to women on family laws and violence against women. *Yatto* was linked with *Alssiwar* through WLUML, and invited them to participate in the Caravan in order to share their experiences with women's groups in Africa and the Middle East.

To read the full article, please go to: [www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf157fx=157-542710](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf157fx=157-542710)

## WLUML PUBLICATIONS

### WLUML PUBLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE AT:

<http://www.wluml-pic.org/shop>

### NEW PUBLICATION

#### **Knowing Our Rights: Women, family, laws and customs in the Muslim world (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)**

WLUML (September 2006)

The latest edition of this Handbook has been updated to include all recent changes to relevant laws in several countries. The Handbook covers 26 topics relevant to marriage and divorce, including the status of children (paternity and adoption) and child custody and guardianship.

Not only is it unique in providing a user-friendly, cross-comparative analysis of the diversities and commonalities of laws and customs across the Muslim world. It is also the first handbook to attempt to rank laws in Muslim communities in terms of whether they are more or less option-giving for women, analysed from a rights perspective and the realities of women's lives.

Please contact [pubs@wluml.org](mailto:pubs@wluml.org) to order a copy

#### **Documenting Women's Rights Violations by Non-state Actors**

*Jan Bauer and Anissa Hélie (May 2006)*

This manual, specifically addressed to groups and individuals not well versed in legal matters, provides tools to human rights activists and defenders who investigate violence perpetrated against women by non-state actors. Its goal is to offer guidance with regard to the legal definitions and human rights protection mechanisms that may help them compel States to fulfil their obligation to protect. It presents concrete examples of particular forms of violence committed against women by non-state actors and models of strategies that have been used effectively, particularly in Muslim communities.

[www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87i=i-87-532328](http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87i=i-87-532328)

#### **Moving Forward Together: Emotional Well-being After Disasters – A Manual for Relief Workers**

*Shirkat Gah (August 2006)*

This manual provides relief workers with useful and practical approaches for addressing the countless problems confronting disaster survivors, warns of the dangers of the 'burnout syndrome' and how to avoid it and finally, the manual suggests ways of mobilizing the community to participate in their recovery.

[www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87i=i-87-541560](http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87i=i-87-541560)

#### **Sultana's Dream (in Farsi)**

*Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain, translated by Behdokht Roshdiyeh (2000)*

The first Feminist utopia to be published in the sub-continent this novel, which was first published in 1905 in Bangla, uses gender role reversal to highlight the absurdity of the position of women in society.

[www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87i=i-87-3029](http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87i=i-87-3029)

#### **Rising from the Rubble**

*Shirkat Gah/WLUML (July 2006)*

On October 8, 2005, a massive earthquake, measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale jolted the mountain ranges straddling Pakistan and India. This is a Special Bulletin on the 2005 earthquake with a particular focus on women's survival, safety and rights.

[www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87i=i-87-541146](http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87i=i-87-541146)

## WLUML Publications Catalogue

Since 1985, a wide range of publications and resource materials have been produced by the WLUML Network. This catalogue collates of these publications in English and French, giving a short summary of the contents of each. For the users ease, the catalogue has been indexed according to theme, region and title.

If you wish to order a copy of the WLUML catalogue or brochure, please contact: [pubs@wluml.org](mailto:pubs@wluml.org) or download it from: [www.wluml.org/english/pubs/pdf/wluml-pubs-catalogue.pdf](http://www.wluml.org/english/pubs/pdf/wluml-pubs-catalogue.pdf)

