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Women Living Under Muslim Laws
النساء في ظل قواٲٲٲ المٲٲٲٲٲ
Femmes sous lois musulmanes

International Solidarity Network



**Transnational Feminism and Inter-Generational Dialogues in Times
of Politics Backlash Against Globalization**

WLUML 2017 Annual Report

About WLUML

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) was established in 1984. It was formed in response to three urgent cases of women being denied rights, under laws said to be 'Muslim'. Today, the network spreads to over 70 countries.

WLUML was founded and is led by women's groups and individuals with mainly Muslim backgrounds in the Global South. Our purpose is to strengthen women's struggles for equality and to increase access to their rights, especially within Muslim contexts. It has played a critical role for women who either lack information regarding their official legal rights (e.g., those derived from personal status laws and civil codes), or have limited access to information that would let them challenge such laws. Deliberate policies of misinformation, exacerbated by existing monopolies over matters relating to Islam, leads to a knowledge gap that is often not only re-enforced but also widened. Under the rising threat posed by politico-religious fundamentalists, WLUML's support for women who resist gender inequality has become increasingly crucial.

We are a transnational network for information, solidarity and support. WLUML has nearly three decades of experience in bringing together women's collective strength and voices, and we continue to gather different analyses and strategies to advance gender equality within Muslim contexts. WLUML serves as a solidarity network, a think tank, and a campaign and a lobbying force for activists around the world.

Activities in 2017

WLUML started the year with Homa Hoodfar's message to networkers.



Dear Friends

Happy New Year. I wish you all a very joyful, peaceful, and healthy year ahead. I am sitting at Katayoon here and reflect on 2016 as a year for me, for WLUML, and for my family. It is now almost three month since I have been freed. I have been trying to get back to a more-or less-routine time but it has not yet happened. Despite my continuous smile and the headache

and fatigue has provide an impediment to me resuming normalcy in my life. Worse I had to get use to new set of digital programs and equipment's some of which I have by now but I am not yet learn to use them as now things have changed substantially since my last computer and phone and... so I guess it will be a long time before I will be able back to normal. This is one reason why I am late for writing to you and other WLUML friends late but it has also been difficult to find words that satisfactorily expresses my feelings.

While I was locked away in Evin, I had no idea of the huge campaign you and other friends launched to bring about my freedom. I also thought of being the first networker who has been imprisoned because of being a long-standing networker of the WLUML. I although we often talked of the dangers deep in my heart I never really thought that one could be so easily lucked up. Indeed, the hurtful experience of those seven months feels, even now, like a plot of a strange book I never intended to read, rather than a life I lived. The realization of the support I have received goes a long way to warm my heart and allows me to keep my smile despite the physical pain, the anger and disappointment I harbor within me.

I am grateful for all WLUML and WLUML sister organizations and particularly your efforts to keep my imprisonment in the media and keep the pressure on the regime up. Since the first week of my arrival to Montreal, in my mind, I have written many letters to you, expressing my appreciation for all you have done and the time you devoted to my case. Yet it has taking a very long time to start a new email and rebuild my contact list and follow the security advise I was given.

Yet me express my deep appreciation for your and WLUML generous support, which has brought me almost a permanent smile despite many physical pains and aches that refuse to leave me. I know not everybody was on board for the campaign and strategies adopted which is normal given the complex circumstances, but nonetheless I know everyone supported my cause. I am angry and frustrated with the contempt the regime has for democracy and popular demands and particularly the way the Revolutionary Guard and their intelligence services feel the country belongs to them only. Having experienced Evin, it is hard to bear the pain of knowing that I have left so many of the great minds and souls of our society trapped behind those bars, often subjected to mistreatment for the sin of caring for humanity and expressing their views. I feel that is where I like to invest my energy. Ironically as clearly the need for Network like WLUML is felt even more then years passed we are talking about winding the network down.

Warmly
Homa

Strategic Meeting – June 2017



Then WLUML began work on the long overdue strategic workshop which with the support of Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism (CHRLP) at McGill University. The strategic meeting was finally held on 6-9 June 2017. The meeting covered the strategic plan in light of the state of transnational women's movements in Muslim contexts. Twenty-seven women from 11 countries (India, Gambia, Canada, Iran, Pakistan, Canada, Egypt, Senegal, Afghanistan, Malaysia, US) and participants from several other feminist sister organizations such as Association for Women in Development (AWID), Canadian Council for Muslim Women (CCMW), Ikhtiyar, and Center for Secular Space took part.

Most of the participants were young activists, who brought with them a new energy and commitment and new ideas. Fatou Sow (Director of WLUMML) and Homa Hoodfar, watched with great pleasure how the younger activists took control and managed the meeting with lively discussions. The young activists discussed global restrictions and limitations, the adversity of issues that the transnational feminist movement was facing, and ways not only to keep the movement alive but also to expand it and make it relevant to new circumstances. They emphasized that it should be independent and multi-centered in order to strengthen it in the face of new challenges.



Participants suggested a new and more practical organizational structure, and developed overlapping and yet distinct areas of activities which would enable the network to be more effective in both its long-term and short-term responses to emerging situations. They also confirmed the earlier suggestion that WLUMML should work actively with Muslim communities in Europe and North America. Something, which in the history of WLUMML, before the age of internet and social networking, was not actively included in their programmes until 2004. It was suggested that networkers now actively try to work with these communities.

Participants proposed that WLUML's research publications, which have been a significant part of WLUML's activism, should continue, but to **change their format to become more easy-to-read and convert these into training manuals.** They also suggested that **it was essential to do a survey of wider active networkers, past and present, to ensure their voices and views are incorporated in the future planning.** It was necessary to do a stock-take of WLUML Rise-up listserv and gather information on its 425 members, a number that has grown exponentially since its inception.



The group also decided Homa Hoodfar, the chair of its publication division, document WLUML's institutional memory for the younger generations. Also in reviewing other publications, it was suggested that rather than bigger books it would best that publications were published more frequently, as they became available rather than waiting to make these as a conventional book lengths, because a smaller size makes downloading easier and as well as **publication becoming available to the activist faster.**

Their suggestions, subsequent interviews and research revealed that the area of Women in Public Spaces and Women and Politics should be a priority area. Particularly women in Public Spaces, a theme which intersects several other areas of WLUML focus - Eradication

of Violence against women, and impact of Militarization - including civil wars. The program should be developed through various networkers with a specific focus on the need in communities in question. Part of this focus is also documenting the various local initiatives that aim at reducing violence against women in Public Spaces and street harassments so that initiatives can be shared with various communities.

Communications:

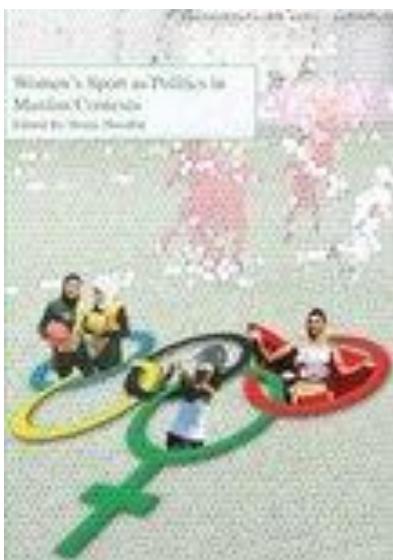
In 2017, the WLUML website received around 27 million views.

Uploads included WLUML networker Deeyah Khan's film, Islam's Non Believers, which was shortlisted for the Asian Media Awards in Investigative Journalism; and an article by Marieme Helie Lucas responding to a tweet by UNWomen on the hijab laws in France.

WLUML also circulated a call to action for the protection of human rights defender Sultana Kamal in Bangladesh, who was facing death threats from extremist groups.

Publications

In November 2017, Women's Sport as Politics in Muslim Contexts was formally launched with the support of Simone De Beauvoir Institute, Montreal, Canada that originally had intended to do it in May 2016 in November 2017. WLUML was introduced and there were TV and other reporters were present, the launch was reported in the Gazette Montreal and in Global TV in their Montreal studio.



This publication divulges the various ways women negotiate political and ideological boundaries, as they politicize and subvert spaces normally considered outside the realm of state politics in order to bring about gender equitable opportunities while at the same time redefining women's roles in society.

The book offers an analysis of the landscape of gender and sports in diverse Muslim contexts, covering Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Bangladesh, Europe, North America, and Senegal. This book offers a glimpse of the variety of ways

that **women** debunk exclusionary masculinist logics in sports that are justified by nationalism, religion, and modernism. In the process they also expose, unpack, and critique, the policies and tactics imposed by both international mega-sport organizations and Islamist regimes that objectify and sexualize women's bodies in their opposing perspectives. Case studies document the variety of ways that women in Muslim contexts have initiated strategies to contest their exclusion from the public sphere, is part of the WLUML's research and publication series on *Dress Codes and Modes: Politics of Women's Clothing in Muslim Contexts*.

Meetings

Arising from suggestions and agreement at the strategic meeting that WLUML should reach out to the Muslim diaspora communities in Europe and North America as well as elsewhere, Homa Hoodfar gave two talks on Women's Sport as Politics in Muslim contexts. Firstly at Dawson college, Montreal on the September 2017, where around 400 young people including a considerable number of Muslim youth attended. The second talk was in Douglas College, Vancouver in November, where 250 people, again with considerable number from Muslim background attended. At each talk the emphasis was on the importance of focusing young people's attention to the diversity of public sphere and building equality and access to public presence in every aspect of the public life for women.

Finance and Funding

Please see WLUML 2017 Independently Examined Annual Accounts.