



Women Living Under Muslim Laws Annual Report

2019 - 2020

WLUML Annual Report 2019-2020

Written and compiled by Dana Kamour, with contributions from Homa Hoodfar, the WLUML Board, Council, Interns, and active networkers.

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wluml@wluml.org

www.wluml.org

Images and designs by:

- Olivier Ouimet
- Sally
- İpek Şaylı
- Shehzil Malik
- John Stanley

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LETTER TO NETWORKERS

Dear Friends,

The year, 2020, was a year like no other. It was a year in which the global community had to deal with a pandemic that spread fast and took away the normalcy from our lives. It was also a year that, more than any other time in humanity's history, emphasized that we are all part of the same community and connected in many visible and invisible ways. At the same time it underlined inequalities in the way no one, no state, and no organization, can escape. It was clear that in all societies people with fewer resources are the primary victims of the pandemic, despite the assumption that COVID-19 attacks indiscriminately.

It was also a year of deep worry and trepidation for many of us involved in feminist and human rights movements. We had questions such as, would the pandemic now mean that state forces can try to control us even more? Would it mean that we have to say goodbye to all the human rights achievements, particularly in the areas of privacy rights and political rights, that we had worked so hard to secure, and now surrender them to the state? And, how can we maintain contacts and solidarity under severe lockdowns?

We found hope...

However, what unravelled was very complex. While it brought death and devastation to many communities, in rich and poor countries, it also made it amply clear that civil society and the women's movements are strong and their roots are deep. The pandemic provided much-needed space for humanity to reflect on our effect on the environment. To reflect on the crime we have committed against our earth and, by implication, against future generations. Throughout 2019 and 2020, youth brought a new energy to the environmental movement, with leaders like Greta Thunberg; there was reduced travel by plane, train, and car; and reduced activity by polluting industries. A new life was given to nature, to the trees, to wildlife and in particular to the birds who celebrated the clean air with cheerful songs that proved that, indeed, human activity is responsible for the devastation of our environment.

In 2020 we also observed the rebirth of the Black Lives Matter Movement as it became a vibrant global struggle that took the world by storm, not only in the USA. It brought together people of different races, religions, and nationalities. The Black Lives Matter Movement has also acted as a mirror reflecting inequalities everywhere, from indigenous and ethnic groups, to sexual abuse, and discrimination against women. We have also seen the continuation and global transformation of The 'me too' Movement. The movement that understood the significance of sharing experiences of sexual violence in releasing the shame that envelops its survivors. Egypt and Iran's #MeToo moment came in 2020, later than in Pakistan and India. In Iran, one of the most censored countries, women journalists began sharing their experiences of sexual harassment and violence at the hands of powerful men. Their voices were joined by many more women on social media, challenging Iran's legal system which places a heavy burden on its survivors.

The effects on women...

Even before the pandemic, domestic violence was one of the most prominent dangers that women face, regardless of which country they live in, but the pandemic has made the situation even worse. The extent of the violence against women was such that many democratic states felt obliged to find some way of addressing it. In other contexts, it has been women's organizations and shelters that have tried to step up their efforts to support women. Though these measures

fall short of what needs to be done, at least the extent of the problem and **the gravity of the situation** have been formally recognized. Hopefully, states and international organizations will continue to address the problem in a much more meaningful manner than they have in the past.

While it is too early to have reliable statistics at hand, we know that violence against women in Muslim societies and communities, from Morocco to Indonesia, has taken a new turn for the worse. Historically, these governments have not made discrimination against women and domestic violence a priority, and in fact, in most cases, they have denied it as a social problem. Yet, the pandemic and lockdowns have cut women from traditional sources of support: friends, neighbours, families, or even being able to go to work and out of the confines of their home. It seems in some contexts, such as Iran where women are not just culturally but also legally the wards of their fathers and husbands, **'honour killings' and femicides have surged**. Despite the nationwide outcry, in Iran and elsewhere, Muslim majority states continues to deny the reality that violence against women is a serious social problem. And, to deny the link between the violence and the legally-promoted undemocratic household structure, which is presented as the 'Islamic family model'. In other contexts, conservative governments claim that the creation of shelters, to protect women facing abuse, is unIslamic, leaving women with no support and protection.

We have work to do...

Women advocates are pushing for a new global determination to deal with domestic violence, this dark and omnipresent threat to women and to societies. Let us all remember and remind others that any form of violence against women and girls is a direct violation of human rights, regardless of in which country, under which state, and in the name of which religion it takes place. Violence against women persists because it is rooted in misogynistic and long-lasting cultural and legal practices. Thus, to eradicate it, we need sophisticated multi-pronged and long-term policies that require the examination of all aspects of the cultural, social, religious, and legal institutions, from family laws to school curricula, to the legal and constitutional structures.

Thanks to digital technology, the various movements managed to stay largely connected during the pandemic, despite the unequal access to this technology. Women and civil society organizations connected across the globe and came together **to plan for a better, fairer and more women-friendly world**. Throughout 2019 and 2020 WLUML continued to devote our energy to achieving this goal, together with our allies and sister organizations. We began by reinventing our internal structure, reinvigorating several programmes including 'The Women's Movement' and 'Women Reclaiming Public Spaces', and introduced a new timely campaign, **'No Peace Without Women's Rights in Afghanistan'**. Here we began our support for Afghan women's demand to end the Taliban's terror and bring about peace, justice, and dignity for the people of Afghanistan. Moving into 2021, we will continue to aspire for a peaceful world by extending and focusing our support on the brave women's rights defenders.

*In peace and
sisterhood,*

Warmly,

Homa



Dr Homa Hoodfar
Board of Directors, WLUML

Photo Credit: Olivier Ouimet, Voltaic

ABOUT WLUML

Mission & Vision

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) is a transnational feminist network. We promote gender justice and equality for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned, or governed by laws or customs said to derive from Islam.

The transnational network provides information, solidarity, and support for women acting in their local contexts to advance gender equality. In doing so, WLUML acts as a solidarity network, a think tank, and a lobbying force for local feminist struggles.

Our Aims

WLUML has two main aims:

1. **To generate and share knowledge:** the organisation supports independent research investigating complex relationships between women's rights, customary practice, political agendas, and interpretations of Islamic law. The research is used to advocate for changes to the law and to influence policy direction.
2. **To break the isolation of women's groups around the world:** we do this by extending our network and mobilising to support local struggles.

Current Priorities

- To ensure women's inclusion in peace-building and resist militarisation
- To expose and challenge fundamentalism and preserve women's multiple identities
- To widen debate on women's mind and body autonomy
- To promote and protect women's equality in the law, society, and the family

Our History in Brief

WLUML was formed in 1984 in response to the adoption of laws denying women's rights. It was in response to three urgent cases, across different countries and communities, where women were being denied rights by reference to laws justified under patriarchal or authoritarian interpretations of Islam. Nine women from Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Iran, Mauritius, Tanzania, Bangladesh, and Pakistan came together to take urgent action. They realised the necessity to share their struggles and to connect transnationally. Today, WLUML is still led by women from a Muslim heritage, mainly from the Global South.

The history and development of WLUML is linked with attempts to mobilize international support for the just treatment of individuals, particularly women, by governments, non-state actors or other political groups...

WLUML HISTORY

Origins

In the early 1980s, the Algerian government initiated 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 family 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 a public discussion. Women activists, aware of the government's plan, managed to access 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 Helie-Lucas, at the time a sociology lecturer in Algeria, had to leave Algeria in 1982. While 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, still deeply concerned about the safety of the imprisoned women in Algeria, was inspired to act on their behalf. While Algerian activists 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 dismissed if not turned against us by our detractors', Marieme often explained. Marieme's initiative was a step towards building alliances and creating support between women from Muslim Majority countries and others from the Global South, especially through women's organizations.

Marieme asked everyone she wrote to pass on the letter-writing request to other women's organisations 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 were received, many from influential Muslim intellectuals and women's organisations in other developing countries.

In light of Algeria's human rights record, no one had been too optimistic about the results of the letter-writing campaign. However, shortly after a small demonstration in front of the Algerian Embassy in the Hague and media coverage of the letter-writing campaign, the imprisoned women were released, albeit without explanation.

Reciprocal Solidarity

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

OUR STORY...

Algerian and other women from your women activist communities 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 to her under the Indian constitution were denied under the country's Muslim Personal Status Law. This is true in many of our countries, where 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. 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 cases). 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 breastfeeding. Women activists publicized the case. They wrote to women's organisations, human rights activists, feminists and intellectuals around the world, and particularly in Muslim majority 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 bringing to the attention of the international community the plight of many powerless immigrant workers by 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 labour. 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.

WLUML Recommends

- **‘WLUML Heart and Soul’ by Marieme Hélié-Lucas for more on the philosophy and history of WLUML**
- **‘Controlled or Autonomous: Identity and the Experience of the Network Women Living Under Muslim Laws’ (1994) by Farida Shaheed**

Building Civil Society

These and several other unexpectedly successful actions led to Marieme seriously consider creating an organization that would bring women from Muslim countries and communities in contact with each other. She discussed this with several other interested women from the Muslim heritage. In the light of major regressive political developments, the Iranian Islamic revolution that revived the stone

CONTINUED...

age legal system, the Islamisation in Pakistan and Sudan, and the looming civil war in Algeria, such an organization seemed to be much needed.

This was particularly important since Amnesty international, then the largest and most important human rights organisation, often refused to campaign for women activists who were arrested by their government. This was because they did not consider promoting women's rights 'political', and therefore, they argued that it fell outside their mandate. The women involved, all from Muslim societies and communities, recognised that in Muslim societies (but also in many other societies), issues of gender and inequality 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 majority countries, especially in relation to women's issues, each cultural group understood 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 some extent still is, despite the digital advancement) very limited due to social, economic 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 1950s, after the success of many anti-colonial movements.

Transnational Network

With this in mind, Marieme initiated a series of talks with women from Muslim countries, discussing the importance of contacts 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.



HOW WE WORK

How We Work

For more than 35 years WLUML has connected individual women and feminist organisations. We now connect women from South Africa to Uzbekistan, Senegal to Indonesia, and Brazil to France. WLUML holds a unique position as a transnational movement and has maintained an acute awareness of the unique political contexts that surround women of Muslim heritage.

We connect:

- Women living in countries or states where Islam is the state religion, women in secular states with Muslim majorities, women from Muslim communities governed by minority religious laws
- Women in secular states where political groups are demanding religious laws under Islam
- Women in migrant Muslim communities in Europe, the Americas, and the rest of the world
- Non-Muslim women who may have Muslim laws applied to them directly or through their children
- Women born into Muslim communities/families who are categorised by others as Muslim, but who may not define themselves as such, either because they are not believers or because they choose not to identify themselves in religious terms, preferring to prioritise other aspects of their identity such as political ideology, profession, sexual orientation, or other identities

The WLUML Network also works to challenge inaccurate representations of Islam and Muslims by the international media. We attempt to sensitise the public and raise awareness that the stereotypical image of Islam is simply one interpretation of the religion. Islam, like most other religions, is dominated by patriarchal notions and privileging such stereotypes often plays into hands of those wishing to suppress more democratic and equitable interpretations of Islam.

What We Do

Collective Projects:

Collective projects are topic-specific initiatives that arise from the shared needs and interests of networkers and sister organisations. Networking groups and individuals participate in the programmes' coordination and implementation according to their needs, expertise, and capacity. The time-frame of each programme also varies based on need, their duration ranges from a few months to several years. Collective projects often include training sessions, workshops, research for advocacy, and meetings and exchanges around specialised topics.

Networking & Information Services:

WLUML directly connects women and feminist groups to facilitate a non-hierarchical exchange of information, expertise, strategies, and experience. We document trends, generate new analysis, and support networker's participation in international events.

We also selectively respond to requests for information from academics, activists, media outlets, international agencies, and government institutions.

Capacity Building:

WLUML is consciously engaged in building the capacity of network groups and individuals. Our internships are designed to engage young networkers in the fields of research and advocacy. We also facilitate exchanges, training sessions, and leadership workshops.

Publications:

WLUML collects, analyses and circulates information regarding women's diverse experiences and strategies used to further gender equality and justice. Our publications are mainly in English with translation to other languages, including French and Arabic, where possible.

Past Projects, Campaigns, & Programmes Include...

- ★ Stop Violence Against Women (1984 - 1993)
- ★ Women's Rights Are Human Rights (1988 - 1993)
- ★ Exchange Programme (1988)
- ★ Qur'anic Interpretations (1990 - 2004)
- ★ Rape as a Weapon of War (1990 - 2008)
- ★ 16 Days Campaign – Together Against Gender-Based Violence (1991 - present)
- ★ Women and Law in the Muslim World Programme (1991 - 2004)
- ★ Women and Family Law Project (1991-2005)
- ★ Women's Role in Peacebuilding (1995 - 2000)
- ★ Gender and Displacement in Muslim Contexts, Afghanistan & Sri Lanka (1995 - 2005)
- ★ Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes (1998, 1999, 2007, 2009, 2013, 2015)
- ★ International Coalition Women Human Rights Defenders (2005 - present)
- ★ Feminist Dialogue (2006 - 2010)
- ★ Afghan Law Project (2007)
- ★ Stop Stoning and Killing Women (2007 - 2013)
- ★ Violence is Not our Culture (VNC) (2008 - 2012)
- ★ Women Reclaiming and Re-defining Cultures: Asserting rights over body, self and public spaces (WRRC) (2008 - 2012)
- ★ Women's Empowerment and Leadership Development for Democratisation (WELDD) (2012 - 2016)

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS

Our New International Board and Council Members

WLUML would like to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to our new Board Members Vrinda Narainm, Alex McCarthy, and Amal Elmohandes; and our new Council Members Amna Nasir, Maria Masha Kardashevskaya, Zarqa Yaftali and Camilla Gray. They have all been at the forefront, promoting women's human rights, working to end discrimination against women in the name of religion and culture, and striving towards a more equitable and peaceful world. We are delighted that they have accepted our invitation to join WLUML and we look forward to having many productive years working together to end discrimination against women in Muslim societies, Muslim communities, and globally.



Strategic Plan 2019

In 2019, WLUML reorganised our internal structure and developed our new strategic plan. Our Board and Council will continue to be at the heart of WLUML and the running of our network. They will guide the direction of our programmes, advise priorities based on the needs of our networkers on the ground, and steer WLUML's committees. Board and Council Members, active networkers, interns, and research fellows are then appointed to the different committees. At times we may call on members of the Board and Council to represent WLUML at international meetings or UN sessions based on their area of expertise and experience.

At present the committees are:

- Research & Publications
- Advocacy & Campaigns
- Social and Political Policy
 - Communications
 - Fundraising & Finance
- Network Building & Organizing
- General Administration/Coordination

Annual General Meetings

As a rule, WLUML's complete board will meet at least four times a year. The entire Board and Council will meet in person, or digitally, twice a year to guide the planning of the Network's activities for the year ahead.

WLUML's Transnational Feminist Institute

In 2020, due to the pandemic, WLUML was unable to hold our Transnational Feminist Institute. Instead, we took the opportunity to systematically design new programme modules. This follows on from the reorganization of the Institute in 2015 to make it more efficient and to reach out to more interested feminists. The changes were based on consultation with WLUML networkers and alumni of our previous Institutes. The original program was designed as a two-week intensive residential course, however, the new Institute is a more accessible three-level programme (national, regional, and international). The new programme is more flexible and able to accommodate young feminists who have work, family, or community commitments. We also endeavour to keep the costs low, meaning many more women are able to participate.

Website

In 2020 WLUML networkers began the development of a new WLUML website. The old website was in urgent need of updating to make it more user friendly and better organised. The new website was structured and designed to give more visibility to our current programmes and campaigns. It is also designed to encourage artists to share their art using WLUML's platform. The new website will be launched during the first trimester of 2021. The old website will remain available as an archive at <http://archive.wluml.org>.

MEET THE NEW LEADERS

WLUML would like to shine the spotlight on brave young feminist leaders who are trailing a path for future activists and activism. It is important that we recognise the courage of women activists, young and old, as part of our intergenerational feminist dialogue.



Vida Movahedi

In December 2017, Vida Movahedi, stood defiantly on a utility box on a busy crossroad on busy Revolution Street in Tehran, waving her white headscarf on a stick in an act of civil disobedience against Iran's mandatory hijab law. Her courageous action was a plea for greater freedom on behalf of tens of millions of women who seek the right to choose what they wear. She and other women well understand that not having freedom for these simple choices are indications of lack of rights in many other areas of their public and private lives. Her action landed her in prison and was followed by extensive harassment and repeated court cases against her for 'encouraging public corruption. Her courageous action, in the heart of Iran's repressive system, made headlines internationally. Nationally, her action sparked a home grown movement called 'Daughters of Revolution Street'. Women and men of all ages and classes took to the streets of Iran to peacefully demonstrate their opposition to repressive laws depriving women of their rights.

Fadia Khalaf

Fadia Khalaf is among the many young women giving a new face to Sudan. The unprecedented number of women at the forefront of the demonstrations, against the regime of Omar al-Bashir in 2019, led the media to dub the uprising, 'A Women's Revolution'. The world watched in amazement the 22-year-old student, Alaa Salah, in her symbolic white Tuba, cheering the demonstrators and inviting them to launch a revolution. She demanded peace, equality, justice, and an end to repression. While the rest of the world was surprised to see a sea of women, who at some pivotal times formed 70% of street demonstrators, according to Fadia, the Sudanese saw it as the explosion of bottled up repression. Indeed, women have played important roles at crucial moments in Sudan's history, both in fighting colonialism and in demanding the right to vote, yet each time they were largely excluded from the corridors of power.



“I see myself neither as a hero nor an icon but rather as a daughter of the revolution. The threats to my life may make me more careful but they cannot stop me or other young women leaders who want to change the culture of violence and impunity. We believe we can make a change. We will make our country and culture peaceful and peace-loving even if it takes time. We are ready for the long haul.”

- Fadia Khalaf



REMEMBERING WLUML

Remembering Dr. Suhaila Siddiqi

An icon who marked women's history in Afghanistan, stood up to the Taliban, and defied traditional gender roles

Dr. Sohaila Siddiqi, one of Afghanistan's most respected surgeons and the country's first female minister of health, died on December 4th, 2020, at the age of 72. Siddiqi was Afghanistan's only female lieutenant general and was known for her work defending the rights and saving the lives of her fellow Afghans. Former Afghan de facto Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah described Siddiqi's role in establishing a place for women in the fields of medicine, military, and in broader society as 'commendable and undeniable'.

Born to a royal Pashtun family in 1948 in Afghanistan's capital Kabul, Siddiqi studied medicine there and finished her medical training in Moscow before returning to Afghanistan to work as a doctor. Although many other wealthy Afghans fled the country, Siddiqi and her sister remained as a matter of pride, loyalty and commitment to their people. During the Soviet era, she rose to prominence as a widely respected lieutenant-general in the medical corps and spent decades saving lives in Kabul's Four Hundred Bed military hospital. Siddiqi was also known for regularly distributing her salary among her colleagues in need.



When the Taliban took control over Afghanistan in 1996, their austere version of Islamic laws imposed on the country barred women from education and employment. They installed their own followers in key positions, who were responsible for policing hospital wards for violations of gender apartheid and pressuring surgeons to carry out public amputations, the Taliban punishment for theft. After being banished to her home, Siddiqi was asked to return by the Taliban, who needed her indispensable surgical skills. Siddiqi agreed, but only on the condition that she and her sister did not have to wear the burka — the all-concealing shroud which the Taliban made mandatory for all Afghan women to wear. Under the Taliban, she insisted on working on her own terms and never retreated from her refusal to cover her face while working as the Director of the Women's Clinic.

After the fall of the Taliban, Siddiqi was one of two women ministers appointed to the country's post-Taliban government and oversaw widespread vaccination initiatives, training for female medical workers, and efforts with the UN Population Fund to improve the reproductive health of Afghan women. She also worked on rehiring hundreds of female doctors, nurses, and workers who lost their jobs when the Taliban imposed their rule.

Women Living Under Muslim Laws honors and remembers the life of Dr. Sohaila Siddiqi and hopes that her memory serves as an inspiration for women across the globe seeking to challenge traditional patriarchal structures and defend women's rights.

SOLIDARITY STATEMENTS

Purpose

Support and solidarity is a major pillar of WLUML activity and an important reason for its creation. Previously, human rights organisations did not recognise women advocates who were arrested or harassed by the state or non-state actors, nor did they recognise them as political actors and prisoners of conscience, so WLUML decided to step in and support women who endeavoured for gender equality. Today WLUML is happy to know that defending women advocates is very much part of all human rights organisations. We continue to support individual women, women's organisations, and to celebrate the advancement of women's human rights. All the while, we continue our mission to promote women's human rights and gender equality by mobilising others in support of women advocates.

WLUML Solidarity Statements 2019-2020

- WLUML condemned the cowardly attack on Fawzia Koofi, negotiator for the Afghan government in the Inter-Afghan peace talks, in August 2020. She is also a former Member of Parliament and a women's rights activist. This was the second attempt on her life. We called upon the government of Afghanistan to bring the perpetrators to justice and uphold their commitment to protect all citizens.
- WLUML's '[Letter to the Canadian Government in Support of Afghan Women's Demands](#)' was signed by prominent Canadian women's rights organisations and university affiliated institutions. They included: Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, The South-Asian Women's Community Centre, and Canadian Federation of University Women.
- We also wrote a letter to Dr. Yousef Bin Ahmad Bin Abdul Rahman Al-Othaimeen, Secretary-General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). We called on the OIC's to continue its proactive role and use its leverage to negotiate/ensure a ceasefire in Afghanistan.
- WLUML also received a letter of support assuring the UK Government's commitment to peace in Afghanistan from Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth & Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. As well as a statement of support from Baroness Hodgson of Abinger, of the Afghan Women's Support Forum and Co-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security.
- Letters of solidarity, calling European governments to support the Afghan peace process and ensure women's rights, were sent to the British, Spanish, French and German governments.
- WLUML showed its support for the 'Feminist Response to Covid-19' initiative <https://www.feministcovidresponse.com>
- And, shared the 'Joint Statement to the Human Rights Council: Let's Protect Women in Sudan' <https://whrdmena.org/2019/07/04/موقف-التحالف-من-السودان/>

PUBLICATIONS

About

WLUML publications aim to support the struggle for women's equality and autonomy and the promotion of women's human rights worldwide. We aspire to provide a collective, transnational, and intergenerational space to share experiences, strategies, analyses, and initiatives. And, the publications also intend to provide information about the lives, struggles, and strategies of women living in diverse Muslim communities and countries. With these publications WLUML hopes to contribute to future projects and activist works by making the knowledge and experience gained in the field of women's rights accessible.

WLUML has several regular, and other occasional, publications based either on collective research projects or that have been developed for training purposes. We also have publications that are developed to support the networkers' research and advocacy work. The WLUML Publications and Communications Committee is the main body who oversee WLUML publications based on the needs of the networkers. The Publications and Communications Team includes the publication committee, editorial board, review committee, various translation committees, as well as a multimedia communication committee. This team has two wings: the Print Publications Committee and the Media Committee. WLUML also invites researchers and communications experts to join us as research fellows. In this way, our research division acts as an open feminist think tank.



Publications 2019-2020

- [Chic Resistance: Women, Fashion, and Politics in Iran \(2019\)](#)

Future Publications – Books in the Making:

- Rebel with Rhythm, Shatter with Words: Female Rappers smashing the prescribed image of the 'Muslim Women' (2021)
 - Love as Politics in Muslim Contexts (2021)
 - Women Making Constitutions (TBC)



CURRENT PROJECTS, PROGRAMMES, & CAMPAIGNS

Volunteer Project

In 2020 the Volunteer Project was launched to reimagine the internship and fellowship programme at a much larger scale than at our previous office in London. The aim of the Volunteer Project is to develop young women's research skills and encourage them to write, connect transnationally, and take action.

Networking Project

The WLUMML Networking Project aims to create a transnational European network of Muslim women's organizations. This network will bring together female activists from different communities, facilitate the sharing of experiences, and encourage political and policy dialogue.

Women Reclaiming Public Spaces: Confronting Rising Sexual Harassment and Violence

In many societies, public spaces are assumed as male and, sometimes, intentionally made hostile and unsafe for women. But, women are mobilising to take up space in actual and virtual arenas and demand the enjoyment of rights promised in law. WLUMML launched this programme to research and document these initiatives, to understand their successes and setbacks, and to facilitate the sharing of experiences between women taking action to increase safe access to public arenas, free from harassment.

Bodily Autonomy, Integrity, and Sexual Rights

Muslim majority states are becoming increasingly conservative, yet feminist and progressive movements continue to organise and challenge conservative

interpretations and the policing of sexual morality. WLUMML's Bodily Autonomy programme supports and makes visible feminist narratives, tactics, and demands from across Muslim societies for bodily autonomy.

Love as Politics Project

This project, under 'Bodily Autonomy...', considers love as a political act, and investigates how women are resisting the suppression of their autonomy through acts of everyday politics.

Feminism and Art in Muslim Contexts

After years praising the importance of art in the feminist struggle, WLUMML has finally launched the 'Feminist Art in Muslim Contexts' programme. This programme explores how female artists, in diverse Muslim contexts, use art as a powerful tool. How female painters, writers, musicians, and filmmakers increase the visibility of women in their industries and challenge expectations of womanhood. WLUMML also hopes to give a platform to female artists and inspire activism through art.

Women and Politics

This programme supports feminist activism for greater female representation, free from intimidation and harassment. We are developing a comparative study of women's political roles and rights in various Muslim countries, and aim to identify the specific forms of violence directed towards women in the public sphere.

Constitutionalising Women's Rights Project

This project falls under 'Women and Politics'. It will examine how constitutions are shaped by women's rights advocates.



CONTINUED...

And, through a comparative approach, provide a framework for the analysis of constitutional norms and strategies used to promote gender equality. There will be a focus on Afghanistan, India, Iran, Sudan and Egypt, countries which are currently facing political upheaval and transition.

No Peace Without Women's Rights in Afghanistan

Following the US-Taliban agreement and the inclusion of the Taliban in the inter-Afghan peace negotiations, WLUML launched this campaign based on requests by Afghan women leaders. They asked WLUML to mobilise its network in support of their campaign demands to ensure women's rights throughout the peace process.

Transformative Feminist Leadership Institute

Following the Beijing Conference 1995, WLUML developed its Transformative Feminist Leadership Institute with the support of Rutgers University's Centre for Women's Global Leadership. The Institute, which began in 1997, was conceived of as an international programme where women from various Muslim countries and communities would come together and share their different perspectives. The main objective was to provide training for groups of young women leaders, as both individuals and activists, involved in their own contexts promoting women's human rights. The institute is designed to enhance the effectiveness of the participants' local organizations and to contribute to their capacity building, and the capacity building of the network, by sharing their

experiences. The Institute's goal has been to promote networking and to encourage and enable a new generation of active networkers. In the light of the new digital innovation, the institute is now re-organising its pedagogy to be able to reach a greater number of feminist activists advocates.

The Women's Movement

The Programme

In 2018 WLUML relaunched the 'Women's Movement Series'. It is WLUML's attempt to document the transnational history of women's rights movements in Muslim majority countries. It is also an attempt to correct the narrative that feminist struggles are a Western invention and demonstrate the rich history of local and independent feminist movements.

Regions in Focus

The regions in focus, 2019-2020, were Bosnia and Uzbekistan. Both research papers will become available in 2021. The Bosnia study, by Ifeta Lihic, explores the historical legacy from the Soviet era, how feminism today is still negatively associated with communism. The Uzbekistan study, conducted by Niginakhon Uralova, focuses on the women's movement for the right to work.

VOLUNTEER PROJECT

The Project

Since 2016 WLUMML has operated from a 'virtual office'. The decision was made to scale down the administrative side of WLUMML that was based at the International Coordination Office in London. We feel this has been a positive, if at times challenging, change that is suited to the nature of our international work. Under the new Volunteer Project we have expanded the remote volunteer opportunities, the roles available to WLUMML interns.

In 2020 the project was relaunched to reimagine the internship programme at a much larger scale than we had previously in the London office. This project will allow us to truly operate transnationally and take advantage of advancements in digital technology. WLUMML will connect volunteers to other organisations and individuals with similar interests, and provide training to support them in reaching their professional/personal goals. The aim of the Volunteer Project is to develop the capacity of young networkers and encourage them to write, connect transnationally, and take action. It is also one of our major channels for intergenerational feminist connection.

The Volunteer Project will house at least three different categories of volunteers:

1. Women connected to feminist and human rights organisations
2. Individual women committed to women's rights
3. Student and graduates interested in research

Internships

An internship with WLUMML means:

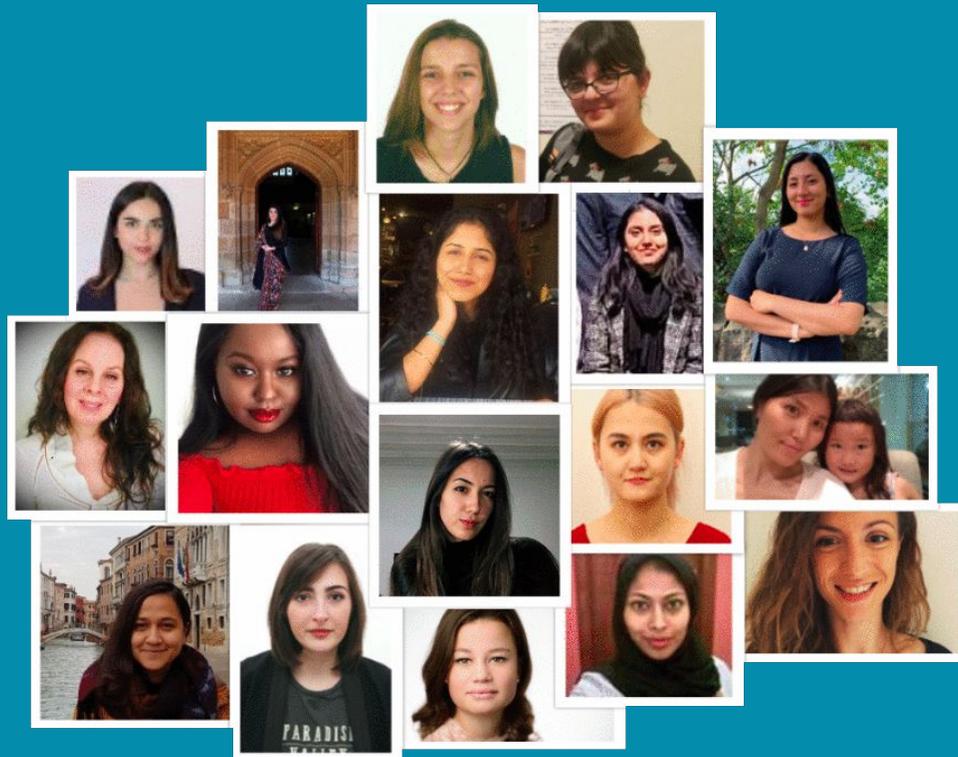
- Engaging with and learning from leading feminists, human rights defenders, academics, journalists and other civil society organisations who have a long history of pursuing women's rights and gender advocacy
- Undertaking research projects under supervision focusing on women's individual and collective struggles for equality and rights, especially, but not limited, to Muslim contexts

Internship structure:

- WLUMML asks for a commitment of around 10 hours a week
- The internship is expected to last between 4 to 6 months, renewable for another term
- Internships are generally unpaid but WLUMML will endeavour to cover any expenses
- The internship must be mutually beneficial, we want our interns to develop new skills and gain valuable experience in their area of interest
- The positions are individualised, the interns may be asked to: deliver a research project under supervision, support the running of the organisation through administrative tasks, contribute to advocacy campaigns, and/or contribute to WLUMML publications

Thank you to our 2020 Interns!

WLUML is extremely appreciative of our group of 2020 interns who gave their time and expertise to drive forward WLUML's projects. Our organisation is reliant on dedicated volunteers and their support allows us to maintain our independence. They also bring an invaluable positive energy to the running of the organisation.



Niginakhon Uralova Chirchik - Zainab Shumail - Munirah Eskander - Ifeta Lihic - Anita Mureithi - Ada Romero - Caroline Brandt - Valentine Hahhard - Kimberley Rush-Duyguler - Hilal Işık - Kalin Pak - Amna Nasir - Bagus Wibadsu Sosroseno - Iqra Saleem Khan - Simmi Sharma - Raafia Shahid - Fibha Nazim - Yasmin Khan - Masha Kardashevskaya

Research Projects

WLUML invites students and graduates, with research interests in line with WLUML's mission, to conduct a specialised research project. The aim is to design a project that supports WLUML's research goals, builds the research capacity of young networkers through experienced supervision, and, if applicable, helps the students meet their university commitments.

To do this we have reinvigorated a tested methodology, used for the Women and Family Law Programme (1991-2005), carried out in 28 countries and communities. This methodology makes participation in research projects easy for individuals and organisations. They are given access to supervision, training, guidance, and connected to other WLUML networkers. In doing so we all increase our knowledge and effectively engage newcomers in women's rights activism.

NETWORKING PROJECT

The Project

The WLUML Montreal Meeting 2017 continues to influence the direction of our projects. WLUML networkers and participants from The Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism (CHRLP), McGill University, made a number of suggestions adopted by the WLUML Board.

One recommendation was for WLUML to begin engagement with Muslim minority communities in Europe and North America. Firstly, because women from Muslim minority communities face unique challenges. Often they demand greater gender equality within their communities at the same time as facing discrimination and lack of recognition from wider society. Secondly, because the communities are well placed to both understand and sympathise with national struggles and, given the complexity of international relations and geopolitics, to effectively lobby Western governments. Our ambition is to assist women of Muslim heritage become more involved in national politics in Western states, to see themselves as actors within the nation and the sociopolitical life of the country they live in. With advances in digital technology, and access to it, we believe these women can act as a link connecting local issues to the global by remaining engaged and concerned about women's human rights globally and in Muslim contexts.

The WLUML Networking Project aims to create a transnational European network of Muslim women's organisations. This network will bring together female activists from different communities, facilitate the sharing of experiences, and encourage political and policy dialogue. The network will address marginalisation and discrimination by wider society, marriage and divorce, access to labour markets, and women's education.

First Steps

The first stage of this project, which was to map the community organisations, was completed in 2020 by a dedicated group of WLUML interns. They successfully researched the history of Muslim minority organisations, created a map of organisations engaged in feminist issues, and identified core issues for future political engagement. However, we were unable to conduct the intended face to face interviews as in many places, given the unexpected global Pandemic, it was not possible to travel. Moreover, we feel a second round of mapping is needed to add more details about the organisations and their community leaders. Some of the organisations and active communities did not have very detailed websites or social media pages. We also have identified the need for national figures to participate in and promote the network.

The next phase of the project in 2021 is to connect and grow the European network and hold the first joint conference.

WLUML Recommends

[Walking a Tightrope: Women and Veiling in the United Kingdom by Ayesha Salma Kariapper](#)

Kariapper examines the ways in which public debates over the headscarf and the full-face veil have shaped the strategies of women from Muslim communities, strategies developed to deal with the limitations imposed on them in the name of religion, culture, tradition and identity within the community, and with racism and exclusion from mainstream society.

“...Society expects you, as a woman, to act like a doll... looking for opportunities to play with you as they wish.

In addition to the point of view that tries to suppress you by putting forward religious arguments and claims, to have a say about your life, your future, your choices....

you have to fight with the other part who sees you as voiceless... who is willing to ‘liberate’ you but will also play with you like a doll.”

– Hilal Işık

Rebel with Rhythm, Shatter with Words (2021)

WOMEN RECLAIMING PUBLIC SPACES:

Confronting Rising Sexual Harassment and Violence

The Programme

Women's presence in public spaces is an indicator of a society's openness, democratisation, and their recognition of a woman's full citizenship. Yet, in many societies, public spaces are assumed as male and, sometimes, intentionally made hostile and unsafe for women.

Conservative voices and political Islamists from Algeria to Egypt, Nigeria, and Iran claim religion dictates the exclusion of women from public spaces and the imposition of restrictive dress codes and gender roles. This is also increasingly true for Indonesia and Malaysia, where women have historically enjoyed significant access to the public sphere.

In response, women have devised strategies to enforce their right to use public transport, to drive or cycle on public roads, to participate in and watch sport, to join political rallies and to run in elections. Women are mobilising to take up space in actual and virtual arenas and to demand the enjoyment of rights promised in law.

In 2018 WLUMML launched a programme to research and document these initiatives, to understand their successes and setbacks, and to facilitate the sharing of experiences between women taking action to increase safe access to public arenas, free from harassment.

Programme Methodology

The methodology for this programme is based on WLUMML's Women and Family Law Programme (1991-2005). This is a tried and tested methodology which facilitated research projects carried out in 28 countries and communities. WLUMML has created a 'mother project' which defines an area of research or activist engagement. We then invite individual interns and feminist organisations to develop their own project tailored to their interests, expertise, or fields of engagement. WLUMML then provides supervision, training, guidance, and network contacts to support the research project or active engagement. This approach facilitates the engagement of newcomers to women's rights activism and provides significant freedom for organisations to develop their own projects. This methodology also delivers WLUMML's two key aims to generate and share knowledge as well as connect women actively engaged in fighting exclusion from public spaces.



The 'Girls at Dhabas' Project

WLUMML networkers Ifra Asad, Zainab Shumail, and Mackenzie Nelson completed their 'Girls at Dhabas' project in 2019, under the WLUMML Public Spaces programme.

Their project documented the ‘Girls at Dhabas’ movement in Pakistan which politicised the use of male dominated roadside restaurants by women. The movement coordinators used social media platforms to spark discussions and share images of women exerting their right to be present in public spaces, women eating at cafés, sitting in parks, or riding their bicycles and motorcycles. Women participated in demonstrations by riding their bike in public and on mass. The movement encouraged these many small acts of direct action, encouraging women to exercise their legal rights.

The WLUML project was supervised by WLUML Board Member and anthropologist Dr Homa Hoodfar PhD and Jeremy Braverman, Media and Visual Education specialist at the Central European University School of Public Policy (CEU SPP). They obtained funding from the CEU to produce a film using their field research and interviews with the coordinators. The film explored the origins of the movement, societal barriers preventing women in Pakistan from accessing public spaces, and the backlash and achievements of the movement.

The first screening of the film was held in April 2019 at the CEU. The making of the film has had a double purpose: to claim public spaces for women, and to present the different strategies and phases of the women’s movement, framing constructive dialogue between younger and older stages of the women’s movement in Pakistan.



The Pink Rickshaw Project

Following the conclusion of the ‘Girls at Dhabas’ Project, WLUML submitted an invitation for new research contributors in May 2020. As a result, WLUML intern Yasmin Khan developed an individual research project investigating the female-only tuk-tuks in Lahore, Pakistan. Khan will present her findings next year as part of the Agnes Scott College virtual conference, ‘Women, Religion and Politics in the Middle East and Beyond: Negotiation Marginalisation and Representation’.



Women & Sport

WLUML’s Women & Sport project falls under women’s access to public space as well as women’s bodily autonomy. Following the publication of **‘Women’s Sport as Politics in Muslim Contexts’ (2015)**, WLUML continues to research and record women’s strategies to resist exclusion and negotiate political and ideological boundaries preventing women participating in and enjoying sport.

This year WLUML was contacted by sportswomen who had heard about our project and were interested in contributing. Next year, following this exchange, we will launch a systematic research project into how women from a Muslim background are actively engaged in promoting female participation and establishing women’s rights through sport.

BODILY AUTONOMY, INTEGRITY, & SEXUAL RIGHTS

The Programme

Women's bodily autonomy has been a central concern for the organisation since WLUML's conception in the 1980s. WLUML co-founder, Farida Shaheed, summarises that the '...imposition of a particular dress code on women is a way of saying to a woman that her body belongs not to her but to her community including state and non-state actors... She is just a carrier of the body but does not own it and cannot claim it' (Women's Sport as Politics, 2015).

WLUML understands that how a woman dresses is political, and that the same can be said for how a woman behaves, who she chooses to love, or how she expresses her sexuality.

Today, we see several Muslim majority states becoming increasingly conservative. Yet, feminist and progressive movements continue to organise and challenge conservative interpretations and the policing of sexual morality. WLUML's Bodily Autonomy programme supports and makes visible feminist narratives, tactics, and demands from across Muslim societies for bodily autonomy.



Chic Resistance: Women, Fashion, and Politics in Iran



In 2019, WLUML published Shirin Abdmolaei's '[Chic Resistance: Women, Fashion, and Politics in Iran](#)'. Abdmolaei is a doctoral Candidate in the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario and co-author of 'Women, Islam, and Education in Iran' (2019).

Abdmolaei considers the politics of women's clothing and women's rights through a historical and transnational lens. She exposes readers to women's struggles with dress codes in Europe and North America and guides us meaningfully through the history of dress reform in the Middle East and other Muslim contexts. Next, she addresses the politics of compulsory veiling in Iran. Since 1979, Iranian women have resisted through street protests to sit-ins, they have insistently gnawed away at the idea of the veil as modest dressing, they have adopted fashionably worn and colourful veils, and other alternative fashions in the insistence of their right to bodily autonomy.



Love as Politics in Muslim Contexts



In 2020 WLUML began the 'Love as Politics' project. WLUML networkers conducted research investigating love as a political act and how women are resisting the suppression of their autonomy through acts of everyday politics.

The transnational study will be published as a book in 2021. There are contributions: analysing how love is political in Muslim contexts; considering 'love jihad', marriage between religions, in India; the expression of Valentines Day in Malaysia, Pakistan, and Indonesia; and, how women are taking ownership of their emotional and sexual interests through 'boyfriend activism' in Iran.

“As women have pushed to change legal orders which have worked to socially, economically, and politically subordinate and marginalize them, they have managed to also reflect these evolutions of change aesthetically...

It is for this reason that we have to pay much attention to the significance of this symbolic yet politically threatening utilization of alternative fashion in Iran.”

– Shirin Abdmolaei

CHIC RESISTANCE

Women, Fashion, and Politics in Iran

Shirin Abdmolaei



FEMINISM AND ART IN MUSLIM CONTEXTS

The Programme

In the struggle to gain recognition and a place in society, women use different strategies and different tools. Art is one of these tools. As in most fields, art is male dominated and women are overlooked, their existence in these spaces are in question. With the emergence of the feminist art movement in the late 1960s, female voices have become louder and louder, challenging male domination in the art industry. Today, many female artists reflect their struggles into their works, use art as an activist tool, and oppose roles of 'womanhood' assigned to them by society through their art.

After years of talk, and reminding each other of the importance of art forms like cinema, painting, and literature in the feminist struggle, WLUMML has finally introduced this long delayed programme to our activities. As a newly launched programme, 'Feminism and Art in Muslim Contexts' takes a closer look at the works of female artists in diverse Muslim communities and countries. A complex image emerges when attempting to combine consideration of artforms, such as music, painting, and cinema, under the same headings as 'Islam', and 'women'. But, this in itself is a clear indication that the subject deserves greater attention. This programme was developed to discuss how female artists, whose acts are not receiving the attention that they deserve, use art as a powerful tool within the framework of Muslim contexts. The programme will focus on how these artists increase the visibility of women in the field of art, how they transform art, and how they transform with art. They rebel against discriminatory systems trying to control female existence, exclude them from public life, or label them as poor, passive possessions by putting forward arguments under religion, tradition, or morality. This programme aims to inspire new discussions and activist-works through publications on many different artists and their works.



Rebel with Rhythm, Shatter with Words: Female Rappers smashing the prescribed image of the 'Muslim Women'

The first book under the programme is about Muslim female musicians' use of rap music as a way to rebel against the role prescribed to them. In a man's world, in an industry where male dominance is strong, it takes a lot of energy and courage as female rappers, to occupy a space and to tell their own stories. And, things get even more complicated when Muslim contexts are involved. The book focuses on the motivation of these musicians, the subjects they touch, and the styles they adopt. Hilal Işık takes a narrative approach and divides her analysis under two main headings, Muslim majority and Muslim minority countries. Işık writes from a very personal perspective and strengthens her discourse with lyrics from their rap songs and quotations from interviews with the musicians. Designs by İpek Şaylı have transformed the book itself into a work of art.

Rebel with Rhythm, Shatter with Words:

Female Rappers smashing
the prescribed image of the
"Muslim woman"

Hilal Işık



Social Media



In June 2020 journalist Amna Nasar joined WLUML and, amongst other projects, reinvigorated WLUML's social media presence. Since then the number of followers on WLUML's Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have increased exponentially. WLUML now posts regularly, keeping followers up to date with current feminist trends and issues that align with WLUML's principles.

As part of 'Feminism and Art in Muslim Contexts', WLUML posts recommendations under **#feministartday** and **#feministbookday** twice weekly. So far they have been a hit with followers. These posts exhibit pioneering transnational feminist artists and their artworks, including: Pakistani graphic designer and illustrator Shehzil Malik, Afghan graffiti artist and fine arts lecturer Shamsia Hassani, and Yemeni-American photographer, filmmaker, and writer Yumna al-Arashi.



– Shehzil Malik

WOMEN AND POLITICS

The Programme

The WLUML 'Women and Politics' programme is the result of several earlier initiatives. WLUML's research into electoral politics and female representation began in 2008, the work is documented in several publications which were then used to deliver training workshops.

WLUML Recommends

- [Dossier 29: Human Rights & Gender Equality \(2008\)](#)
- [Electoral Politics: making Quotas work for Women \(2012\)](#)
- [Women's Charters and Declarations: Building Another World \(2014\)](#)

It became clear that we needed to adapt our research following feedback from the 'Women's Empowerment and Leadership Development for Democratization programme' (WELDD 2012-2015). WLUML recognised that while many women in Muslim contexts now have the legal right to hold positions of power, they face harassment which severely inhibits their ability to safely benefit from these laws.

The 'Women and Politics' Project was therefore designed to: support feminist activism for greater representation free from intimidation and harassment, to develop a comparative study of women's political roles and rights in various Muslim countries, and to identify the specific forms of violence directed towards women in the public sphere.

In this regard, WLUML is documenting the kinds of violence that women in Muslim contexts experience, and its impact on their

decision to enter to the politics. WLUML also documents various strategies that women have adopted to deal with the harassment, particularly when it is directed against the family and her reputation. We recognise the significant impact of social media, which has made it easy to harass female public figures. WLUML also hopes to empower women to fight back by sharing some of these strategies. And, to suggest legal remedies, making participation in the politics safer, based on the data generated from experiences of women elsewhere in the world.

Research

In 2020 WLUML Board Member, Mona Tajali, began the supervision of a research project into forms of violence and harassment experienced by women running for public office. Three interns began the collection of data in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh as a preliminary study to determine the direction of a larger transnational project. Tajali and Munirah Eskander also conducted a study analysing the systemic ways that women in Saudi Arabia are marginalised from key formal posts despite the recent measures to recognise women's political rights. The results from the study will be presented during a WLUML sponsored conference in early 2021.

Webinars

WLUML and Agnes Scott College organised and sponsored three webinars in 2020. The seminars were moved online due to restrictions during the global COVID-19 pandemic. We obtained funding from the college to turn the papers presented in this series into a book. This book will then be used to deliver training workshops to WLUML networkers and as part of the 'No Peace Without Women's Rights in Afghanistan' campaign.

22 September 2020

Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University, Mona Lena Krook, presented her new book 'Violence Against Women in Politics: A Global Phenomenon' (2020). Her seminal study 'Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide' (2009) has made a lasting contribution to the literature on representation and electoral systems. Her current research explores the global diffusion and impact of electoral quotas for women, as well as the rising global phenomenon of violence against women in politics.

22 September 2020



Ensuring Women's Rights in Post-Crisis Efforts and Constitutions: Strategies from the Local to the Transnational

Co-sponsored public event by Agnes Scott College

The first panel discussion was composed of experts and practitioners in the areas of post-conflict reconstruction and constitutional reform in the Middle East and Africa. They presented a comparative analysis of local and transnational strategies for protecting women's political rights during times of revolution and political upheaval. The speakers were:

- Aili Mari Tripp, Wangari Maathai Professor of Political Science and Gender and Women's Studies, University of Wisconsin--Madison
- Palwasha Kakar, Senior Program Officer, Religion and Inclusive Societies, United States Institute of Peace
- Hekma Yagoub, Human Rights Lawyer, Sudan and UK

29 September 2020



History of Women's Constitutional Rights in the Muslim World

Co-sponsored public event by Agnes Scott College

The second panel discussion offered a comparative discussion on the constitutional contexts of Afghanistan, India, and Iran. It uncovered how women's inequality and subordination are constructed and framed in supposedly objective laws. The speakers were:

- Vrinda Narain, Faculty of Law, McGill University
- Homa Hoodfar, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, Concordia University
- Fatemeh Sadeghi, Faculty of Law, McGill University

CONSTITUTIONALISING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The Project

The Women and Politics Programme has also expanded to continue Rhonda Copeland's mission to re-conceptualise human rights through the integration of gender and the inclusion of women's issues. This project will assess constitutional practices used to embolden women's rights and gender equality.



Why Constitutions?

Constitutions matter and they matter fundamentally. They have the potential to play a significant role in processes of change. They do so by way of their symbolic resonance, but also by entrenching basic rights and thus offering real avenues for contestations of power. Constitutions have a special status within the legal order: they are the supreme law and as such take precedence over ordinary legislation. The recognition of women's rights and interests at the constitutional level therefore carries greater weight and is less vulnerable to the vagaries of majoritarian law making.

Constitutions are also about power: laying out its distribution, exercise and limits, imposing obligations, as well as granting rights. Inclusion in constitutional politics will give women more power to unsettle long-standing patriarchal hierarchies in the constitutional order. Their involvement in decision making about the design of constitutional structures of power will also afford them the opportunity to reshape those structures in a more inclusive manner, not just for women, but potentially for other previously marginalised groups in society.



Our Approach

The project will examine how constitutions shape and are re-shaped by women's rights

advocates. Taking a comparative constitutional approach, we will explore the promise and pitfalls of constitutional norms and strategies for promoting gender equality.



Why the Middle East and Asia?

Many countries in the region are going through political upheaval, civil war and transition. This project intends to understand and assess the best practices in terms of enabling women's right and gender equality, and generally human rights and equality of citizens and status, as substantive matters.



States and Rights in Focus

In the context of Afghanistan we will focus on women and inclusion in the peace process and constitutional drafting. In the Indian context, we will examine the potential of constitutionalizing women's equality rights: mediating the tension between constitutional rights and religious personal law. Finally, in the context of Iran we will evaluate the place of women in constitutional norm setting and political participation in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution

We will focus on constitutional rights in the areas of social diversity, gender and religion, equality rights, women's rights within the family, international human rights and participatory constitution-making. The purpose is to uncover how women's inequality and subordination are constructed and framed in law; to reveal the ideological presuppositions of that inequality while understanding how differently situated women may be by virtue of other important aspects of their identity; and to develop understandings of justice that will improve the lived lives of women and move them further towards equality.

NO PEACE WITHOUT WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN

The Campaign

The campaign 'No Peace without Women's Rights in Afghanistan' was born from conversations between the WLUML Board of Directors and 15 Afghan women leaders associated with the Afghan Women's Network.

The women leaders are concerned by the US-Taliban peace agreement, an agreement by the US to withdraw international forces and to release Taliban prisoners. In the subsequent Inter-Afghan peace talks, the Taliban were elevated to equal negotiators with the Afghan government. The same Taliban whose regime 1996-2001 deprived Afghan citizens, particularly women, of their basic human rights.

WLUML launched its campaign in 2020 based on the requests of the Afghan women. They have asked WLUML to:

- Support the formulation of campaign demands
- Mobilise its network in support of their campaign demands to ensure women's rights throughout the peace process
- Reach out to Islamic scholars to help them articulate progressive Islamic arguments in support of women's rights
- Conduct comparative research into women's rights and constitutional reform in Muslim majority countries

So far WLUML has assisted in the formulation of campaign demands and mobilised its network to advocate in support of these demands. The worldwide petition to the Government of Afghanistan, created by WLUML to support the Afghan women's demands, has so far received over 2,000 signatures.

Proposed Activities

- **Webinars** - on various aspect of women and peacemaking
- **Interviews** - with experts and women's movement leaders
- **Publications** - on constitution making and constitutionalizing women's rights
- **Social Media Campaigns**
- **Media engagement**
- **Reflections by women leaders** and public figures
- **National and global-level lobbying**
- **Inviting progressive scholars of Islam** to comment on the position of Taliban on women's rights



Campaign Flyer

Mission Statement

“Together with the women of Afghanistan and feminist organizations and global and regional partners and supporters, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) is launching a campaign: No Peace without Women's Rights in Afghanistan. The campaign support's women's demand for meaningful engagement in the process of peace talks with the Taliban...



...while engaging in peace talks based on justice and respect for human rights is key to a long-lasting peace, WLUML believes the minimum symbolic representation of women and the UN from peace talks with the Taliban is part of a disturbing trend, creating a precedent of an even broader exclusion of

women's equality advocates across the region. As there is no evidence that the Taliban have reassessed their extreme approach to the rights of women, girls and minorities, the Taliban's return to power may also have severe consequences for all women living in Muslim contexts, as fundamentalists elsewhere may see this as a vindication of their regressive gender ideologies.

WLUML and its partners believe that the active presence of women's human rights defenders in the peace process is crucial to prevent these deep threats to women's and girls' human rights, and to protect hard-won gains for gender justice."

Objectives of the Campaign

1. In partnership, **build capacity of women's human rights organizations and activists in Afghanistan involved in the peace process** on i) progressive religious interpretations/approaches supportive of women's human rights; and ii) a human rights based comparative analysis of the draft Taliban-proposed constitution in order to support their negotiations for a new constitution which ensures women's human rights
2. **Lobby key state officials** from Canada, Indonesia, Norway, Sweden, Tunisia, the United States, and other relevant countries to pressure the negotiating parties (Taliban, Afghanistan, U.S.) to ensure meaningful and substantial participation of women in Afghanistan and civil society in the peace process and to ensure women and girls' human rights are protected in the current constitution and in the peace process.
1. **Increase public pressure on the negotiating parties to full campaign demands** by mobilising feminist and women's rights networks and organizations worldwide - particularly those based in Muslim contexts, in the Central & South Asia region - through sensitisation and awareness-raising on the broader historical and transnational context of fundamentalisms and women's human rights, and through amplification of women's demands and calls for transnational solidarity.
2. **Engage with key UN mechanisms** (particularly the Security Council, Human Rights Council and Special Procedures) to improve participation of women in Afghanistan in peace talks, and to ensure their human rights are upheld within an international setting. We aim to promote the UN's role in overseeing negotiations to increase multilateral pressure on negotiating parties to enhance compliance with campaign demands.





Campaign Demands

1 Immediate and complete ceasefire prior to peace talks.

3 Women's citizens' rights already enshrined in the current Afghanistan constitution, as well as laws protecting women's rights (e.g. Elimination of Violence against Women Law) **will not be negated, repealed or rendered unenforceable or unimplementable.**

5 The United Nations, including gender experts, **must be involved in the peace talks** to ensure a process that is in line with international law.

7 Continuous and **unequivocal government support for the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA)** including adequate funding should be part of the peace agreement.

10 The peace agreement must establish an appropriate **Truth and Reconciliation Forum** with the goal of cultivating and promoting peace and reversing the culture of violence and intolerance.

2 **Meaningful and substantive participation of women in Afghanistan** representing diverse women's interests in the peace talks must be ensured by the government of Afghanistan and the international community, as essential to establishing lasting peace and in accordance with UN Resolution 1325.

4 Women's human rights – including the right to education, health, freedom of movement and employment, right to political participation, right to be free of gender-based violence, and the right to own and inherit property **must not be reversed in this process.**

6 **Autonomy of and support for the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)** must be ensured by the national government and the peace agreement.

8 The continuous autonomy and **freedom of civil society organizations, including women's rights and feminist groups, must be ensured** and made part of the peace agreement, and the national government must ensure and earmark adequate allocation of funds to Ministry of Women's Affairs.

9 The peace agreement must reiterate that **all citizens** regardless of their gender, ethnicity and religion **are equal** before the law.



CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT



UK



WLUML networker, Anniesa Hussain, wrote to the British Government and public figures in the UK in support of the Afghan women's demands. Amongst the signatories were:

- The late Lord Judd, House of Lords and Human Rights Defender
- Mandy Sanghera, Founder and Director Mandy Sanghera Foundation
- Rahela Sidiqi, Founder and Director Farkhunda's Trust for Afghan Women's Education
- Naheeda Hassani, Chair Afghan Women Association (AWA)
- Fahima Zahin, Director Afghan Association Paiwand
- Rouhi Shafii, International Coalition Against Violence in Iran (ICAVI)

WLUML also received a letter of support ensuring the UK Government's commitment to peace in Afghanistan from Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth & Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. As well as a statement of support from Baroness Hodgson of Abinger, of the Afghan Women's Support Forum and Co-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security.



Spain



WLUML networkers in Spain, Ada Romero and Sara López, started to build a campaign and network around WLUML that supports women's participation in the Afghan peace process. They asked for signatures for the 'Letter to the Organization for Islamic Cooperation' in November 2020. Since then, the contact list has progressively grown, eventually drafting an extensive list of contacts and communicating with more than 400 individuals and 450 organizations.

A letter was sent to the Government of Spain in support of the Afghan women's demands, emphasising Spain's contribution to peacekeeping in Afghanistan and the far-reaching consequences of the peace talks for women's rights globally. The letter was sent to organisations of Muslim heritage, feminist associations, human rights organizations, migration forums, public figures, feminist and human rights activists, and journalists. More than 30 public figures and organizations have signed the letter, including the Spanish Feminist Party, USO Trade Union, Amnesty International activists, and politicians in the national assembly.

The team also created personal social media accounts to share translated WLUML's official publications and further the diffusion of content to Spanish speaking communities. In particular, the Twitter account '@romeroada98' has proven its effectiveness in partnering with other organisations including Mujeres con Voz Valencia, a signatory platform willing to give visibility to the campaign among its associates. Similarly, the Facebook account 'Sara López' has participated in feminist groups and Muslim heritage forums sharing campaign literature.



Canada



In addition the letter to the Canadian Government (see Solidarity Statements), WLUML Board Member, Homa Hoodfar, met with Jacqueline O'Neill the Canadian Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security. They discussed support for Afghan women during the peace negotiations.

WEBINARS

In 2020 WLUML hosted two webinars to launch the campaign and begin discussions on women's engagement in the Afghan peace process.

23 June 2020



No Peace without Women's Rights

WLUML, in partnership with McGill Center for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism, hosted a webinar on women's role in the peace process in Afghanistan. The speakers were renowned human rights advocates, Dr. Sima Samar and Dr. Sally Armstrong.

A Nobel Peace Prize nominee Dr. Sima Samar has dedicated her life to public service, humanitarian work and women's empowerment. Since 2002 she has been the Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) which holds human rights violators accountable and sets the human rights agenda in Afghanistan.

Dr. Sally Armstrong is a Human rights activist, journalist and award-winning author. She has covered stories about women in conflict zones from Bosnia to Somalia, South Sudan and Afghanistan. Her eyewitness reports have earned her several awards including the Amnesty International Canada Media Award in 2000, 2002, 2011 and again in 2017.

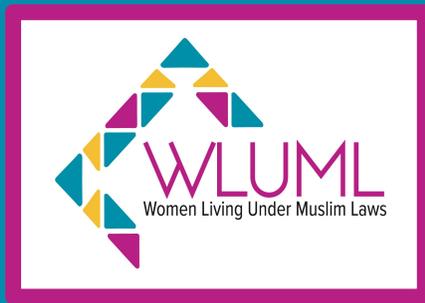
20 August 2020



Women's Engagement in Sustainable Peace Building in Afghanistan: The Potential of UN Resolution 1325

WLUML and the McGill Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism welcomed Zarin Hamid to discuss women's engagement in sustainable peacebuilding in Afghanistan. There was a particular focus on the potential of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Zarin Hamid is the Manager of the Women, Peace and Security Programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in New York. She has also worked with the Afghan Women's Network (AWN), Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) and the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP). Hamid has served as the civil society committee representative on the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, managed by UN Women. And, engaged with UN country teams in Nepal, Afghanistan, and Jordan on the implementation of UNSCR 1325.



Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) is a transnational feminist network which promotes gender justice and equality for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned, or governed by laws or customs said to derive from Islam.

The transnational network provides information, solidarity, and support for women acting in their local contexts to advance gender equality. In doing so, WLUM acts as a solidarity network, a think tank, and a lobbying force for local feminist struggles.

Written and compiled by Dana Kamour, with contributions from Homa Hoodfar, the WLUML Board, Council, Interns, and active networkers.

Images and designs by:

- Olivier Ouimet
- Sally
- İpek Şaylı
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- John Stanley

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