

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML)

International Solidarity Network



2014 Annual Report

'Strengthening Ourselves, Supporting Each Other'

This year at Women Living Under Muslim Laws WLUML

At the end of 2014, we would like to say a heart-felt “thank you” to all our supporters for their continued backing.

2014 was not an easy year. The number of atrocities committed in the name of religion and culture at times felt overwhelming. In this climate, women in general were hard hit, and feminists and women activists in particular experienced increased threats to their security and freedom. In Sudan, our friends at Salmah Women Resource Center endured the pain of having their organisation closed, while in Egypt the authoritarian government has unjustly put one of our networkers, Yara Sallam, behind bars.

Despite and because of the adversity facing our network, 2014 has also brought with it beautiful moments of solidarity. We joined the Bring Back Our Girls Campaign calling for the return of the kidnapped Chibok school girls, and supported Nigerian LGBT people against the criminalisation of homosexuality. We spoke out against gender inequality in Iran, the Maldives, and the UK among other places. 33 WLUML networkers from 15 countries came together to write messages of solidarity for Yara Sallam and her fellow detainees in Egypt. WLUML offers its congratulations to Kurdish women for their stance and fight for equal citizenship and rights, in peace and war and standing against ISIS. We were also among the sponsors and speakers at the momentous International Conference on "The Religious-Right, Secularism, and Civil Rights" held in London in October 2014.

In total, as part of the Women’s Empowerment and Leadership Development for Democratisation programme, we delivered feminist leadership training to over 140 women in 2014. Responding to the threatening climate facing women activists, the programme delivered tailor-made regional workshops teaching the integration of personal security and wellbeing techniques into Culturally justified Violence Against Women (CVAW) activism. We continued to train women activists on public and political participation to strengthen their capacity for change-making, and sent eight women to the Human Rights Council in Geneva to advocate at the international level.

In September we launched the WELDD leadership portal and blog space that will now act as a digital platform for the work and voices of these incredible women.

Some recent WLUML publications were e-published for the first time including ‘Women’s Charters and Declarations: Building a Better World’, and we produced a range of Farsi e-publications through the ‘Space for Human Rights, Women’s Rights and Citizenship in Iran’ programme, through which new solidarity and news-sharing network were also created. Our sister organisation Justice for Iran and co-hosted project, had resounding successes in production and dissemination of their reports, such as ‘Thirty-five years of Hijab’ which looked at forced and arbitrary hijab laws in Iran.

We thank FLOW, The Channel Foundation, Hivos and Hivos-KBF, Wallace Global Fund, and Funderbirds for the funding they provided for our work in 2014. We also extremely grateful for the vital contributions of individual donors, and for the time and effort given by our wonderful networkers, interns and volunteers, and our online followers.

We know that now more than ever our voice is needed to stand up for women's rights in a climate of rising fundamentalisms, shrinking civil society space, and heightened conflict. After beginning a strategic planning process in October to assess the changing environment, we continue and aim to be ready for 2015 with new ideas, re-vitalised direction, and continued dedication.

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.

Current Programmes

Women's Empowerment and Leadership Development for Democratisation (WELDD)



West Africa regional workshop - WELDD

In 2014 WLUML continued to deliver activities under the Women's Empowerment and Leadership Development for Democratisation programme (WELDD), a consortia programme with partners Shirkat Gah and the Institute for Women's Empowerment. The overarching goal of the programme is 'to build women's leadership by advancing equal rights and opportunities for women and girls'. Awarded the grant in 2011, the WELDD programme runs for four years and within it WLUML develops women's leadership in two areas:

1. Women's participation in public and political arenas – through trainings and building networks.
2. Combating culturally-justified violence against women (CVAW) – through capacity building and trainings.

In 2014, the programme activities were organised by local partners in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and the coordination office in London. Participants from 21 countries: Iran, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sudan, Somalia, The Gambia, Senegal, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt engaged with the programme, and by the end, we saw encouraging results. Activities included the following:

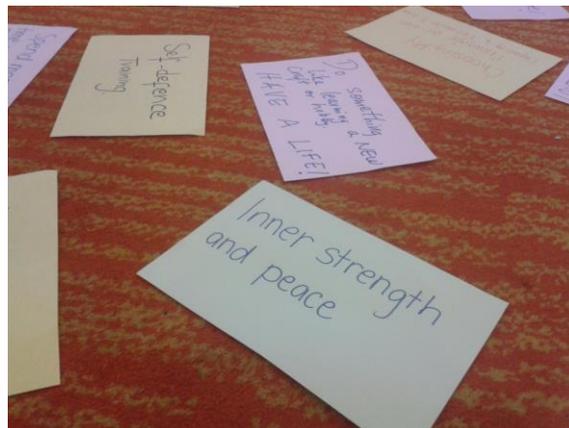
- Through a WELDD extension grant, we were able to run four extra leadership workshops in addition to the four previously delivered in MENA and West Africa Franco-phone regions; One on increasing political participation in Gambia – to an Anglo-phone audience; Three workshops on combating cultural violence against women (CVAW), maintaining security and promoting self care took place in Lebanon, Indonesia adding new country participants from the regions, and instead of the planned Sudan workshop which could not take place due to the government crackdown on civil society organisation, the host organisation Salmmah Women’s Centre in Darfur was replaced with a workshop in Senegal. 88 women from 15 countries participated in intensive five-day trainings in their regions, with overwhelmingly positive feedback.
- Our local partner in Senegal, GREFELS, built links with its associates to organise a youth rally on International Women’s Day and campaign against child marriage. 300 youths marched and presented a declaration to end child marriage to the local government minister.
- GREFELS’ local partners were successful in [intervening](#) and stopping child marriage
- Stakeholder meetings were organised by our local partner in Nigeria, Baobab for Women’s Human Rights, with associates in the Anka and Bungudu Districts in northern Nigeria’s State of Zamfara. (The sites of Baobab’s WELDD/WLUML project on child/forced marriage.) Project participants were also successful in intervening and stopping child marriage.
- In Afghanistan, our local partner Research Institute for Women, Peace, and Security (RIWPS), in partnership with the Kateb University Legal and Jurisprudence Department, conducted trainings titled “Women’s Rights from Islamic Perspective”, which taught 16 women from Ghazni, Badghis, Kunar and Kabul, to counter CVAW using religious arguments.
- In Aceh, Indonesia, our local partner Solidaritas Perempuan organised several capacity-building activities, and also trained women leaders in communities, universities, academies and local legislation. These activities centered on the growing number of repressive Shari’a laws and on increasing women’s public participation.
- In Kurdistan, Iraq, the Warvin Foundation for Women’s Issues convened focus groups and individual consultations to improve the situation of women fleeing domestic violence. This involved an assessment of the current provision of women’s shelters, provided by the authorities.
- Warvin’s consultations



WLUML networkers outside the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva as part of the training by ISHR, May 2014

- resulted in a draft of a law on women's shelters, now being jointly prepared by women's groups and relevant government agencies.
- Eight activists and young leaders were financed to attend two week long intensive training on engaging with the United Nations Human Rights mechanisms in Geneva by the International Service for Human Rights, to be exposed to the workings of the global institution and to meet Human Rights leaders from other parts of the world.
 - Participants in the WELDD programme took part in a blogging series as part of the 16 Days of Activism campaign by Rutgers University. 16 blogs from women's rights activists covered cases in Pakistan, the Philippines, Sudan, Somalia, Tunisia, Egypt and Indonesia, launched WELDD's blogspot, [Public Square](#) between November 25th and December 10th, 2014.

Every bit of news has deeply inspired us; women have increased knowledge, shown courage, and built resilience to enable them to continue their struggles to gain gender equality in their local situations.



From a wellbeing session at our workshop in Jakarta, August 2014

Space for Human Rights, Women's Rights and Citizenship in Iran

From 2012 to June 2014, WLUML was part of a consortia programme organised by HIVOS, titled 'Space for Human Rights, Women's Rights and Citizenship in Iran'.

This programme aimed to develop the interactive space where citizens and governments work and communicate. WLUML carried out work amongst the Iranian Diaspora community, focusing mainly on women, and has seen very positive results.

Key outcome from this programme included the following:

- A Farsi news and discussion group was created on Facebook, amassing over 2000 members by the end of 2014. Three groups were set up; two special interest ones, focusing on research, translation and publications, and the third as a study group. The WLUML Farsi website was updated regularly with news and stories and received around 700,000 visits in a twelve month period (May 2013 to June 2014). The WLUML Farsi site also issued a number of urgent actions against the unjustified imprisonment of a number of Iranian human rights defenders.
- More written resources on Farsi human rights and women's rights were made available as we invested in these publications. . Our e-publications included Gender Equality and Food Security; Women's Empowerment as a Tool Against Hunger; Untying the Knot: Exploring Early Marriage in Fragile States, and a short guide to understanding female genital cutting. Our Musawah Articles included Towards Gender Equality; Islamic Family Laws and Sharia (Ziba Mir Hosseini); Family Laws: Sharia and Personal Laws (Amira Alazhari Sonbol); Islam Beyond Patriarchy.

We are proud to say that through this consortia programme, we created links where there were none before. Let's wait and see what 2015 brings as a result!

Networks and Partnerships

WELDD Partners:

Thanks to the WELDD programme, WLUML awarded sub-grants in 2014 to 7 local partners in, Warvin Iraq, Sudan, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Senegal, and the Iranian Diaspora These partners had engaged in strategies to end child marriage, stoning and other human rights abuses that have been justified in the name of culture or religion.

Through our partners, the WELDD programme has raised awareness about these harmful practices to over 600 people in local communities. These have included both local and federal governments, NGO workers, legal professionals, religious and community leaders, youth groups, teachers and schoolchildren. In some cases where democratic structures exist, networks have lobbied for policy change – new networkers who were trained in writing policy documents have lobbied governments as well as raising awareness, and local governments in Indonesia, Iraq and Senegal have made commitments to amend relevant laws in favour of basic human and women's rights.

Awareness, once seeded, is a partly a self-reliant process that multiplies itself with time, but we are keenly aware the right environment and support to nurse and grow awareness until it is strong, is required – this is we believe where WELDD will need to go forward.

Currently we hope that the 600 people now conscious of these inhumane culturally-justified practises actively continue to strive for change, and, like those in Indonesia, Iraq and Senegal, make steps towards victories.

WELDD Partners

Baobab for Women's Rights – Nigeria
GREFELS – Senegal
Saalmah Women's Resource Center – Sudan
Foundation for Solidarity and Justice – Afghanistan
Justice for Iran – Iran
Research Institute for Women, Peace & Security – Afghanistan
Solidaritas Perempuan (Aceh) – Indonesia
Organisation of Women's Freedom – Iraq
Warvin Foundation for Women's Issues – Iraq
Saalmah Women's Resource Center – Sudan
Aid Center for Advocacy and Legal Consultation (ACAL) – Sudan

Justice for Iran

Since 2011, WLUML has worked with sister organisation Justice for Iran (JFI) and has hosted a research programme with them. This programme has culminated in a number of publications, analysis and reports, which include:

- Thirty-Five Years of Forced Hijab: The Widespread and Systematic Violation of Women's Rights in Iran. Through wide media coverage, this report helped inform thousands of people about the shared problems affecting more than half of Iran's population, all of whom have been impacted by forced and arbitrary hijab laws.
- Following Iranian Supreme Leader's statements in 2013 to double the country's population as soon as possible, the parliament initiated two bills on family planning. JFI then submitted a legal analysis on the new bills to different international bodies such as Commission on the Status of Women and the International Labour Organisation. It requested them to urge the Iranian government to withdraw these bills as they discriminated against women's rights to work, education and health.
- In response to their calls, JFI submitted a report titled "Discriminatory Laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Family Life" to the United Nations Working Group. This report focused on discrimination against women in law and in practice. They also submitted another on gender-related killings of women and girls as issued by the UNODC Justice Section in 2014. These are all available on the UN website as a reference.

Resounding Effects

Our activities effects have reached far and wide, empowering women in otherwise restrictive regions. The following are some concrete examples:

- At the end of the Geneva training, participants attended the 26th session of the Human Rights Council. They spent their final days of training in meetings they had arranged with UN

officials. They lobbied on human rights concerns in their respective countries of Pakistan, Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria and Iran.

- Solidaritas Perempuan - Aceh Indonesia: women leaders obtained a commitment from the Unit for Women's Empowerment – Badan Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak Aceh (BP3A) – to show more dedication in promoting women's leadership and involvement in decision-making.

- WARVIN – Iraq: a stakeholder group (comprising of the government and local NGO's) was established to improve the protection of survivors in domestic violence shelters. As a result of the project, a new law is being jointly drafted by



Participants at our workshop in Beirut support the Bring Back Our Girls Campaign.

the government and Civil Society Organisations to bring these shelters up to international standards and especially to keep gender-sensitivity in view.

- By the end of 2014, the WELDD web portal was working as the online home for the programme, and attracting blogs from participants. Between September 2014 and the end of the year, the web portal counted 3,023 users in total. Facebook content spreading information about the WELDD programme reached 38, 285 people.

- Younger networkers led mobilizations for [Bring Back Our Girls](#)

WLUML Publications

Research for action and Publication continues to be an important mission of the Women living under Muslim laws. As a transnational organization that intends to be at the service of Civil society, we are committed to generate and mobilize knowledge in the area of women's rights. We have a very active research and publication committee including lawyers, sociologists, anthropologist, political scientists, public health experts, economist, historians and journalists, which is chaired by Dr. Homa Hoodfar. The publication committee also has a French division which is chaired by Dr. Fatou Sow. It also as an active Arabic wing under chaired by Doaa Abdelaal that oversees our Arabic website as well as guiding WLUML translation and adoption

material for local use and passing important Arabic resources that can be translated and made available to networker in other non-Arabic speaking contexts. The Farsi site which is Chaired by Shadi Sadr and with the support of Nasrin Afzali also been very active this year, as noted earlier in the report.

WLUML circulated a number of publications this year, both electronically and in print. These included:

- [Women's Charters and Declarations: Building another World](#), e-published in June 2014. This book reviews women's charters and is a companion to two of WLUML's earlier publications on the gender equity. This work was prepared by Rashida Manjoo, a longtime WLUML networker and Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (2009-2015). This publication was part WLUML Gender Equality Program directed by Dr. Homa Hoodfar which was launched in 2006. This book is companion of our two earlier publications were *Dossier 29 on Women's Machinery*, edited by Rashida Manjoo (2008), and *Electoral Politics: Making Gender Quotas Work for Women*, edited by Homa Hoodfar and Mona Tajali (2011). These publications were developed in response to demands by the networkers who were engaged in the mobilization of the public and lobbying governments to have more women in decision making positions especially in national and local political electoral representation. These publications are being translated into Arabic and Farsi at the request of our networkers.
- [Dossier 30-31: The struggle for Secularism in Europe and North America](#), printed in hardback and made available at the [Secular Conference](#) 2014. Three WLUML representatives were panel speakers at this conference. The hard copy is available via Amazon.
- [Dossier 32-33: Sexuality, Culture and Society in Muslim Contexts](#), e-published on the WLUML website July 2014 (hard copy available via Amazon). This double issue Dossier was edited by Dr. Anissa Helie, a historian and committed Human rights researcher and activists. The Journal includes 15 articles and offers an insight into the huge variety of issues related to sexuality that activists are engaged with. Amongst other themes, the authors look at the need to tackle cultural factors in HIV/AIDS prevention; the phenomenon of 'bride kidnapping'; the link between female political leadership and dress codes; and women's perceptions of abortion. The diversity of content is matched by diversity in style, which ranges from legal and political approaches to a highly personal contribution 'Letter to Mama', where a Palestinian author recounts her experience of stigma and violence after early marriage and divorce.

WLUML Communications

In 2014, we issued eight position statements. We spoke out against [Nigeria's](#) 'culturally-justified' homophobic laws, denounced legally-endorsed marital rape in the [Maldives](#), denounced Iran's sentencing of a former [child bride](#) to death by hanging, and issued a statement and letter-writing campaign against the [UK Law Society's](#) problematic practice note on Shari'a inheritance. On the latter issues, we were pleased to have been part of a campaign which led the Law Society to

[withdraw](#) the practice note. In addition, we produced five statements in collaboration with partners, and reposted eleven statements and calls for action from our partners/allies.

In 2014, there were 152 news stories, 33 resources, and 48 Our Voices stories uploaded in English, and 14 uploads in French. During November 2014 to March 2015, we posted 24 news-stories, publications and toolkits in Arabic, 56 items on the Farsi Facebook page in Farsi, and 18 items on Farsi web-pages. In total, there were 345 new stories and resources to the WLUML website.

During 2014, our social media presence continued to grow. We gained 1,311 new Facebook likes, totalling 4,168 likes by the end of the year. The WLUML email discussion group 'Rise Up' increased to 400 members by the end of 2014.



We received a staggering nearly 13 million hits to the WLUML website, www.wluml.org.

WELDD Web-Portal

The WELDD portal, www.weldd.org, was launched in September 2014. Between September 2014 and the end of the year, the web portal counted 3,023 users total. Most visitors came to the portal as referrals through social media. WELDD-related Facebook activity reached 38, 285 people.

By the end of 2014, the 'Our Voices' section of the site was populated by articles from WELDD projects, and from participants in our leadership workshop. These articles included opinion pieces from individual WELDD women, moving success stories from WELDD projects, reflections on importance of WELDD workshops, and updates on partners' activities. The WELDD portal is available in English, Arabic, Urdu and Bahasa Indonesia.

The 'Public Square' section of the portal saw a burst of blog entries-- sixteen during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (Nov

25-Dec 10). WELDD women from projects and workshops were heartily invited to contribute.

Highlights from the blogging series included "Facing Closures and Clampdowns... We are Sudan's WHRDs", "The Military and Violence Against Women: The Aceh Experience, Part 2", and "The Midnight Email"

In December 2014, the WELDD Facebook group had 118 members from the following countries: Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, Sudan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Tunisia, Libya, Iran, Egypt, Afghanistan, Gambia, Senegal, Yemen, Somalia, Nigeria, and Lebanon. This group is a lively, multilingual space where people debate current affairs, contribute information on gender and human rights issues and share opportunities. It has also been useful for sharing news of scholarships and funding opportunities that might be of interest to workshop attendees, and has also introduced participants to new networks such as the Building Bridges Foundation, World Social Forum, AWID, and African Feminist Dialogue.

16 Days of Activism 2014

To commemorate the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in 2015, WLUML coordinated a blogging series by women activists and hosted it under the 'Public Square' blogspot of the WELDD web portal. This was a way to launch the blogspot, and to give the young women involved in the WELDD programme a chance to put out thoughts about their lives, their countries, and their work into writing. It also amplified their voices to an international audience, and bloggers came from Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, Tunisia, Sudan, the Philippines, and Somalia.

The blogs were on the theme "From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Let's Challenge Militarism and End Gender-Based Violence", and covered topics from the situation of women human rights defenders in Sudan, fieldwork in Indonesia's conflicted communities, and the impact of military spending on Pakistani society. The blogging series was a success in raising the profile of the blog spot, and in reaching a wider audience of transnational women's movements. It was also a success in encouraging activists who had never written before to contribute blogs. Over the 16 Days period, we gained over a 100 new Facebook likes and 65 new Twitter followers. Our daily Facebook reach spiked during the 16 Days to over 7,000 people, our highest in 2014.

As well as the blogging series, WLUML took part in the 16 Days Twitter Teach-in – a means of spreading awareness on our chosen topic of Culturally-Justified Violence against Women (CVAW). Especially pleasing to see was that the Teach-In participation brought interaction from Twitter users that do not usually engage with us, showing that it had enabled us to cast our net further than usual.

2014 has proven that our network only continues to grow, and these rewarding, fulfilling statistics strongly enforce our determination to keep going!



Governance and structure

WLUML is a registered charitable organisation (in England and Wales) (charity number: 1144519). WLUML is also a limited-by-guarantee 'not-for-profit' company (registered company number: 04117440).

There are currently seven board members, all of whom serve in a voluntary capacity. The Board is responsible for the network's oversight and governance. The board is assisted by an advisory group, the International Advisory Council, drawn from women's rights activists across the Global South. The International Advisory Council has a current membership of 17 women, along with the Board they are the formal members of the network.

2014 Board Members:

Djingarey Maiga (Mali)
Doaa Abdelaal (Egypt)
Codou Bop (Senegal)
Ariane Brunet (Canada)
Isatou Touray (Gambia)
Karima Bennoune (Algeria/ USA)
Najia Haneefi (Afghanistan/ Canada)
Fatou Sow – International Director – Honorary (Senegal)

Katayoon Hoodfar - Company Secretary (Iran/United Kingdom)

WLUML's regular services, advocacy, and communications are run from the International Coordination Office (ICO) in London. The ICO provides coordination and resource support for global and multinational campaigns and programmes.

Finances/funding

Income and Expenditure Overview

WLUML's main sources of income in 2014 are from the FLOW Fund, Wallace Global Fund, Justice for Iran, HIVOS and Funderbirds. Of these, only Funderbirds was strictly for core funding, the others are restricted funds.

Income received during the period was £400,728 that includes both actual receipts as well as income recognised in 2014. Out of this total, project funding was £367,464 (approximately 92%) with the balance being core funding. Other income inclusive of donations amounted to £850.

Expenditure to 31 December 2014 was £432,434. Of this, project expenditure was £375,506 while core expenditure was £56,928. Expenditure directly attributed to project activities make up approximately 87% of total expenditure in the year.

Funding Received in 2013

Restricted Funds

FLOW Fund

Project name: "Women's Empowerment and Leadership Development for Democratisation" (WELDD). This is a 3-year joint programme of Shirkat Gah, WLUML and IWE that commenced in January 2012. We received a total of £189,634 from FLOW Fund in 2013.

We also received an additional £133,704 to carry out 4 workshops under our Culturally Justified Violence against Women (CVAW) work in Africa, MENA region and South-East Asia.

Justice for Iran

Project name: "Crimes without Punishment".

We received the sum of £40,564 for the Iran Coordinator's salary and core costs.

HIVOS/KBF

This was the last year of our project: “Space for Human Rights, Women’s Rights and Citizenship in Iran”. We received £3,562.

Unrestricted Funds

Funderbirds

This is a UK-based funder that supports organisations that work for women’s rights and well-being both in the UK and world-wide. We received £5,000 towards core costs.

Donations

We received £850 this year from individual donations.

Others

We received £27,414 from Wallace Global Fund in 2013, but it was recognised in 2014.

Please see 2014 Audited Accounts on WLUML website.