



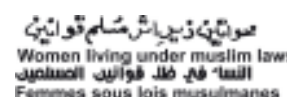
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News from around the world, WLUML is an international network that provides information, solidarity and support for all women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam.

RELEASE OF MOKARRAMEH EBRAHIMI IN IRAN



Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts
 gender, poverty and democratisation from the inside out

The Global Campaign *Stop Killing and Stoning Women!* (SKSW!) and the Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) network welcome the news of the release of Mokarrameh Ebrahimi and her son Ali from Choobin Prison, in Takistan, Qazvin, in Iran, where she had been awaiting execution by stoning for adultery for the past ten years.

On 17 March 2008 Mokarrameh Ebrahimi and her 4-year-old son were released from prison by the Iranian authorities in Tehran. Mokarrameh was sentenced to be stoned to death ten years ago, along with her partner, Jafar Kiani, who met his death on 5 July 2007. While in prison, she gave birth to their son Ali who remained in custody with his mother.

Mokarrameh's release was the result of a long and difficult struggle by the *Stop Stoning Forever* (SSF) campaign in Iran, the commitment of her lawyer, Shadi Sadr (also a WLUML networker and Council member), and increasing pressure put upon the Iranian government by the international community. Another factor in Mokarrameh's amnesty verdict may have been the *fatwas* (religious opinions) issued by three significant *ayatollahs* (clerics) in recent months. These *fatwas* all stated that stoning Mokarrameh to death would be against the shari'a.

Her case, along with others who face the same fate having been sentenced to death by stoning, has inspired the formation of this global campaign last November, hosted by the Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) international solidarity network. The SKSW! campaign has been working closely with the *Stop Stoning Forever* campaign in Iran who were responsible in bringing the case of Mokarrameh and others in Iran to world attention from 2006.

Stoning, or lapidation, refers to a method of execution in which an organized group throws stones or rocks at the person they wish to execute. Although it takes many different forms, stoning has been used throughout history and in many religious and cultural traditions as a type of community justice or capital punishment.

In Iran, as in the Sudan, stoning is codified into law for adultery. Although the Head of the Judiciary of Iran, Ayatollah Shahroudi, decreed in 2002 that stoning would no longer be practiced in Iran, the laws were never officially removed from the penal code and stoning sentences continue to be handed down by lower judges today. Although there are no official statistics, there are at least 8 women and 1 man who remain in prison in Iran, currently facing execution by stoning.

Stoning to death is a particular, but not exclusive focus of the Global Campaign *Stop Killing and Stoning Women!* We seek to end the relentless misuse of religion and culture to justify killing women as punishment for violating the imposed 'norms' of sexual behavior around the world. The killing of women – under any pretext – is unacceptable and is a grave and serious violation of international human rights law.

For more information about Mokarrameh Ebrahimi, the Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women! and the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign, please visit the following sites:

- <http://www.stop-stoning.org> / <http://www.stop-killing.org>
- <http://www.wluml.org>
- [http://www.wemc.com.hk/web/culture and VAW.htm](http://www.wemc.com.hk/web/culture_and_VAW.htm)
- <http://www.meydaan.com> (Farsi)
- <http://www.meydaan.com/english/default.aspx> (English)

or write to wluml@wluml.org



EDITORIAL & SOLIDARITY

Solidarity

Algeria: Abrupt dismissal of human rights defender Cherifa Kheddar
23/05/2008: We have been informed of the unfair and abrupt dismissal of Ms. Cherifa Kheddar, the president of the Djazairouna association, which defends the rights of victims of terrorism. On 17 May 2008, when Ms. Kheddar went to work, she learned that the municipal authorities had put an end to her work, after 12 years of her dedicated human rights activism. These actions limit human rights work and seek to deprive activists and their organizations of their resources

<http://www.wluml.org/french/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B155%5D=i-155-561711>

Iran: More women's rights defenders sentenced

12/05/2008: Four women's rights activists, Nasrin Afzali, Nahid Jafari, Zeinab Peighambar-zadeh, and Minou Mortazi, have been given suspended sentences of whipping (10 lashes) and six months imprisonment. They have been given this harsh sentence for having been part of a small group of people who gathered outside the Revolutionary Court in March, 2007 to register their objections to the trial of five other women activists earlier charged for taking part in a peaceful demonstration in 2006 to demand the removal of laws discriminating against women.

<http://www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B156%5D=i-156-561595>

Iran: Stop the Stoning to Death of Zohreh and Azar Kabiri!

4/02/2008: The Women Living Under Muslim Laws international solidarity network, and the Global Campaign *Stop Killing and Stoning Women!* urges all concerned citizens to immediately contact the Iranian officials to request them to stop the scheduled stoning to death of Zohreh and Azar Kabiri in Iran.

<http://www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B156%5D=i-156-560142>

Nicaragua: Legal attacks and harassment of women's human rights defenders

11/01/2008: The so called National Association for Human Rights (ANPDH), which has legal registration even though their activities and headquarters are unknown, is an organization sponsored by the Catholic right wing and the Secretary of the Episcopal Conference of the country. They filed a case against Nicaraguan women activists of the National Network of Women against Violence, for their coverage of rape cases, including their support of Zoilamérica Narváez who was sexually abused by her step-father, the current President of the Republic.

<http://www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B156%5D=i-156-559749>

Japan: Okinawan women speak out against two cases of rape by American GIs

25/02/2008: Within 10 days, two separate incidents of rape have been reported. One victim was a 14-year-old girl, the other a Filipino woman attacked in a hotel.

<http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B157%5D=x-157-560771>

Congo: UN and civil society urges action against sexual violence in the Congo

2/02/2008: Every day, 40 women are raped in the Eastern Congo. It is a well-known reality that has been documented and reported by media, NGOs, international institutions and States but nothing changes and sexual violence is still widespread. So what more can be done? Visit the website of the Congolese Women's Campaign Against Sexual Violence in the DRC, a coalition of Congolese women's groups with the support of Rights & Democracy (Canada) and sign their petition:

<http://www.rdcviolencesexuelle.org/site/en/node/58>.

<http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B157%5D=x-157-560113>

Editorial

We are delighted to present the sixth issue of the Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) Newsletter!

I am Fatou Sow, a retired Professor of Sociology in Senegal and France, and the new ICO Coordinator. As a co-founding member of GREFELS (Senegal), I have been an active networker in WLUML, for more than a decade. A former council member, I am currently on the Board of Directors. I am taking over from Prof Homa Hoodfar. We express our gratitude to Homa for her sterling work in organising the ICO (2007).



Fatou with Mahecor, her grandson

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome some new staff members at the International Coordination Office: Chiara Maurilio (Publications Officer) and Anthonia Onwardi (Finance and Admin Officer).

In this issue we cover new developments in the Global Campaign *Stop Killing and Stoning Women!*, including the release of Mokarrameh Ebrahimi, who had been sentenced to be stoned to death in Iran, and our involvement in the *Every Human Has Rights* Campaign.

Are Muslim women allowed to play sports? In some countries they cannot even attend sporting matches. A symposium held by WLUML and Concordia University explored the different experiences of female athletes and sport spectators in various Muslim countries. We also look at some of the challenges faced by Muslim women competing in the upcoming Olympics.

As always, we take this opportunity to catch up with some networkers and initiatives from around the world. We discuss issues of gender and state repression in Uzbekistan with Marfua Toktakhodjaeva and cover a recent case of child marriage that was successfully annulled in Yemen. Other highlights include our conversation with Amina Wadud, an empowering photography project in Iraq, an analysis of fundamentalism and homophobia in Senegal, a commentary on a debate between Abdullahi An-Na'im and Tariq Ramadan, and the solidarity case of Cherifa Kheddar, an Algerian human rights activist.

We acknowledge the efforts of this issue's editorial team: Aisha, Ely and Chiara.

Happy reading!

Fatou Sow

**Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML)
Coordinator, International Coordination Office**

Disclaimer: The analysis and views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of any offices of the Women Living Under Muslim Laws – International Solidarity Network (WLUML) and the responsibility for all opinions, views and accuracy of information contained in this publication rests entirely with individual contributors.

CAMPAIGNS

THE EVERY HUMAN HAS RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

'The Elders' is an historic group of respected global leaders brought together by Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel who aim to contribute their wisdom, independent leadership and integrity to tackle some of the world's most challenging problems. In December 2007, The Elders joined with partner organizations around the world to launch the 'Every Human Has Rights' campaign, celebrating an idea that took shape sixty years ago.

Indeed, 2008 marks the 60-year anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR60), adopted by the fledgling United Nations as a universal declaration to transcend cultural and national boundaries. The UDHR established a common standard for human achievement for all peoples and all nations, rooted in the values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect and shared responsibility.



The following global organisations are partners of the Every Human Has Rights Campaign throughout 2008, focusing on specific themes: Actionaid, Amnesty International, Center for Women's Global Leadership (Rutgers University), Global Campaign Against Poverty, UNICEF, Club of Madrid, Realizing Rights, CIVICUS, Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect, Save the Children, International Crisis Group and International PEN. Yearlong partners include: Humanity United, Internews and Witness.



I-r: Lydia Alpizar (AWID), Sunila Abeyeskera (INFORM), Charlotte Bunch (CWGL)

As a partner of the Every Human Has Rights Campaign, the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) hosted an event on 4 March 2008 under the theme of "Human Rights for Women ↔ Human Rights for All". Co-organized with AWID, Amnesty International, MADRE, and the Global Fund for Women, the evening celebrated the 60th anniversary of the UDHR and highlighted March as the women's human rights month of the Every Human Has Rights Campaign.

WLUML sent a delegation of three networkers to present a statement on behalf of the Global Campaign *Stop Killing and Stoning Women!* to emphasize that culturally-justified forms of violence against women are grave violations of Human Rights. Also distributed at the event was a statement on behalf of WLUML on the occasion of 60 years of the UDHR, urging States and private actors to uphold the values and standards outlined in that declaration.

Excerpts from: "No Cultural Justifications for Violence Against Women: A Statement on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights"

..."As we gather here today, at least 10 women and 1 man accused of adultery languish in prison in Iran awaiting the execution of their sentences to be stoned to death... In Darfur, in 2003, a 14-year-old girl - who was 9 months pregnant at the time - was arrested by the "People's Police Force" and sentenced to being whipped 100 times for the supposed crime of "adultery" while a 25-year old businessman charged in connection with the incident, was found not guilty and freed "for the lack of evidence". In 2006, a 19-year-old woman in Saudi Arabia who was alone in a car with a man who was not an immediate family member was abducted by 7 men at knife-point. The woman was raped by the abductors before she and her male companion were taken to court and sentenced to 90 lashes of the whip. When the woman and her lawyer appealed a court reviewed the decisions, increased the prison terms of the rapists but also increased the woman's sentence to 200 lashes and added a 6-month prison term...



The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) recognizes human rights as being fundamental to the dignity and development of every human being. It states that everyone should enjoy human rights without discrimination on grounds of sex. 60 years after the framing of the UDHR, human rights have certainly progressed on many fronts and there have been significant breakthroughs in upholding equality between men and women. There are now clear and explicit States' obligations to secure human rights for individuals within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction "without distinction of any kind"...

At this commemoration of the 60th year of the UDHR, however, we remind the international community that for countless women in most parts of the world, the right to be regarded as a full human being remains elusive. At least one out of every three women is likely to be beaten, killed, coerced into sex or abused in her lifetime; by State agents or by private individuals, by groups known or unknown to them. Violence against women cuts across all countries, religions and cultures and affects us regardless of our ethnicity, faith, age or class. Violence against women is a human rights issue that cannot wait...

On this occasion we call upon all governments, civil society organizations, and the media to confront the tension between respecting diversity and difference and affirming the universality and indivisibility of rights. Certain principles are absolute: violence against women is never acceptable, whatever the justification offered.

Global Campaign *Stop Killing and Stoning Women!*
New York, 4 March 2008

Women & Sport in Muslim Contexts

On 28 March, 2008 a symposium on 'The Role of Sport in Resisting, Accommodating and Remaking Muslim Women' was held at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. Sponsored by WLUML and Concordia University, the speakers included WLUML Board member, Dr. Homa Hoodfar, as well as Dr. Martha Saavedra, Dr. Yoav Di-Capua, Nasrin Afzali and Hana Askren.



The conclusion of the panel was that in some countries Muslim women who are keen on sports may exercise their passion as freely as other athletes...and in others they may not even be able to watch men play sports. It has more to do with the country in which they live rather than their religion.

Across the Muslim world, activists and sportswomen are reclaiming the right to be both spectators of, and participants in their national sports. Whereas some Muslim countries see no conflict between women and sport – either as spectators or participants – in Iran, women are forbidden to enter public stadiums to watch sporting events. Ironically, the main football stadium in Iran is named 'Azadi'...which means 'freedom'.

Iranian journalist, WLUML networker and feminist activist, Nasrin Afzali is part of the campaign to overturn this prohibition.



Dr. Homa Hoodfar presented a paper on the Muslim Women's Olympics, which was successfully held in Tehran from 1993, including female athletes from nearly 40 countries. The alternative games were launched by athletes and feminists in an effort to regain a presence in public space that had been eclipsed after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Nasrin Afzali, said that as far as the mullahs are concerned, the gaze of women on men's bodies appears to be just as dangerous as the reverse. She described some of the subterfuges young women use to get into stadiums to watch their brothers play and contest their exclusion from a major public venue. Girls have dressed as boys, a ploy so notorious that it became the plot of an Iranian movie (*Offside*, 2006).

Yoav Di-Capua, a scholar at the University of Texas at Austin, contributed a paper about an Egyptian aviatrix – women pilots in the 1930s hey-day of aviation – Lutifa al-Nadi. Lutifa was the daughter of an upper-class family in the 1930s in British-ruled Egypt who, fascinated by the new sport, attended flying lessons in secret and won a dramatic race flying from Cairo to Alexandria!

Other presentations included award-winning wrestler and PhD candidate, Hana Askren. She reminded the audience that not so long ago, football was closed to women in the West and members of the national women's baseball team in the US were required to wear makeup on the field. Martha Saavedra, of the University of California, has compiled data on women and sport in Senegal, Sudan and Nigeria and found that the restrictions justified by religion and culture vary widely in these countries, and even between regions.

What is the reason? "The authorities say that it is not good for Muslims to see men's bodies", the journalist – blogger and human rights activist of 28 years old - explains with a wry smile.

Is all this for the love of soccer? "No, I hate football!" The Iranian journalist retorts. But the segregation of the sexes is one of the core policies of the Islamic regime. We thought that one of the best symbols to represent our opposition is the stadium. It has also allowed us to rally adolescents, who are not particularly interested in women's rights but who love soccer."

The politicized sport

"Iran is not the only Muslim country where sport has become a political issue", the sociologist Homa Hoodfar says. She is one of the organizers of the conference held at Concordia yesterday afternoon. "Many Muslim countries are also dictatorships. The sport gives women a new democratic space" she states. This is the case in Egypt, Nigeria, and Sudan among others.

In addition, the academic recalls how the ball bounced into the Quebec court last year, when a young footballer was expelled from a match because she was wearing the hijab. "When young women wear the hijab while they are playing football, they put forward their Muslim identity, but they also oppose the tradition that takes a jaundiced view of women doing sport."

By Laura-Julie Perreault (Montreal Gazette)



Report by Barbara Black (*Concordia Journal*, 3 April 2008), edited by Aisha Lee Shaheed

Saudi women athletes resist restrictions

In Saudi Arabia, a women's basketball team has begun resisting restrictions on female athletes. The Jeddah United Women's Basketball Team – made up mostly of Saudi students and homemakers – is preparing for a local tournament this month. But what the women hope to do is compete internationally and represent their country abroad, something Saudi Arabia does not permit.

Zahed, who prays regularly and wears a headscarf even when outside Saudi Arabia, said that nothing in Islam bans women from sports. "Our society just has to get used to it," she said."

Saudi Arabia is one of the few countries competing in the Olympics without a female delegation. Though the kingdom has come under increasing pressure from the International Olympic Committee to include women on its team, many in this deeply patriarchal and traditional society agree with the restrictions, believing that allowing female athletes could lead to Western-style independence for women and an erosion of established culture.

The phenomenon, reports the Washington Post, has prompted sharp words from the conservative clergy. In a recent posting on the Web site <http://www.islamlight.net>, prominent Saudi sheiks Abdul-Rahman al-Barrak, Abdullah al-Jibreen and Abdul-Aziz al-Rajhi issued a fatwa, or religious decree, banning women's sports centers in the kingdom: "Opening these centers is one of the main reasons and the biggest doors leading to the spread of decadence," the decree states. "And it is known that the only women who will frequent these centers are those with little or no manners." It concludes: "Banning the opening of these sports centers is not a ban on sports. A woman can practice sports at home, and there are many ways to do that, or she can race her husband in a deserted area, like the prophet Muhammad -- peace be upon him -- who raced with his wife Aisha twice."

In March, the women of Jeddah United were angling for a chance to play in a regional tournament in Kuwait. But Kuwaiti officials said they needed approval from the Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee. Maeena said that she asked Saudi officials for a permit but that they refused to issue one, saying only that the women did not have clearance.

By Faiza Saleh Ambah, the *Washington Post*, 15 April 2008 (page A09)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/14/AR2008041402653.html>



Muslim women train for the Beijing Olympics

21-year-old Iraqi sprinter Dana Abdul-Razzaq has managed to overcome not only religious and cultural opposition to female athletes, but also sniper's bullets and crumbling training facilities, in order to reach the Beijing Olympics. "I love running, I have the persistence to keep practicing and I have ambition despite all the problems that I face," she told Reuters at Baghdad's crumbling Shaab stadium.

Mahboba Ahdyar is the only woman among four Afghans due to represent the war-torn country at August's Beijing Olympics. The 19-year-old recalls, "When I was small I used to run in my house and watch my brother who was doing body building. I kept my exercising secret even from my neighbours because of the Taliban." Under Taliban rule, women were banned from working or leaving home unaccompanied, let alone playing sports.

Source: Reuters, 17 March 2008 and 26 March 2008



NEWS FROM NETWORKERS

Human Rights & the Women's Movement in Uzbekistan: A conversation with Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva



Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva reflects on how circumstances have changed for women and activists in contemporary Uzbekistan since her publication 'Between the Slogans of Communism and the Laws of Islam: The Women of Uzbekistan' in the early 1990s.

A long-time leader of the women's movement in Uzbekistan, Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva was a founding member and co-director of the Women's Resource Center (WRC) in Tashkent, an NGO founded in 1991 to work towards economic and social stability, democratization, and increased awareness of women's human rights in the region. The Tashkent Women's Resource Centre was closed down under pressure from the Uzbek government in 2005.

The following is an excerpt from a recent interview with Dr. Tokhtakhodjaeva. (for the complete interview, see <http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B157%5D=x-157-560937>):

Aisha Lee Shaheed: Your book 'Between the Slogans of Communism and the Laws of Islam', published in the early 1990s, was written in a context of emerging forms of statehood in the Central Asian region. How would you assess the political climate in which you currently research?

Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva: The time when I wrote that book was actually better than now: there was more freedom; we were full of hope.

Independence raises the dignity of people and their faith in the future. But the leadership has been afraid of democracy and their political past keeps in them the worst features of communist leaders.

So now, some people are nostalgic for the Soviet era because they could then appeal to Moscow for justice. Some people now dream about Islamic justice. This difficult situation leads my country into Third World conditions, with its problems including instability, dictatorship, low levels of literacy, faltering material economy, poverty. There are many protests under Islamic slogans.

ALS: Your previous books have discussed social and political changes in the region, which required a great deal of historical research. What are some of the challenges you face in researching the histories of Central Asian women?

MT: I thought that there would be new research and many new studies on this topic, but there have not been new points of view on the position of women. Most research is done under government orders and so the problems faced by women stays closed off from view. There were many challenges in Uzbekistan and there were many new problems that we had not imagined 17 years ago. My country became poorer and, despite democratic rhetoric, autocracy increased and became a mixture of communistic and medieval styles. Freedom of speech and opinion remains limited. In this situation, there is an absence of communal public life and everybody is face-to-face with their own problems. My book was written 17 years ago and I can state that the situation has become worse.

ALS: How is the Uzbek women's movement shaped by dynamics of class and ethnicity?

MT: The Uzbek women's movement could not overcome the limitations set by the government over their activities. They could not protect their rights to be active and independent and could not organize actions together to fight

to be active and independent and could not organize actions together to fight for their rights. Unfortunately, under government pressure, they were separated and indecisive.

The women's movement has been shaped by multi-ethnic women from the Soviet middle-class who lost their stable position in the period of transition. Other social groups have faced problems of language barriers and limited access to knowledge and technology. It was difficult to involve the young, middle-class generation in the women's movement, as their interests tend to lie more in business activity than social problems.

ALS: How would you assess the relationship between the Uzbek women's movement and the women's movement on regional and global levels?

MT: The Uzbek women's movement had close relations with others at the regional level, but this was limited by the existing restrictions on visas to visit neighboring countries. This limited our contacts.

The main limitation for stronger relations with global women's movements is a language barrier that leads to limited knowledge about feminism. Unfortunately, even now only a few activists know English.

Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva's publications are available via the WLUML website:

Between the Slogans of Communism and the Laws of Islam: The Women of Uzbekistan

The Daughters of Amazons: Voices from Central Asia (with Elmira Turgumbekova)

Her latest publication is:

The Re-Islamization of Society and the Position of Women in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

This book examines the socio-political and religious shifts Uzbekistan has undergone in the last twenty years. Ms. Tokhtakhodjaeva focuses on the position of women in the Soviet era prior to the country's independence in 1991 compared to post-independence when the country began to re-introduce customs and laws associated with Islam.



To order a copy: http://www.globaloriental.co.uk/book.asp?Title_ID=127

Act Together: Women's Action for Iraq

To mark International Women's Day 2008, the Act Together collective presented selections of work from a unique creative event: *Open Shutters Iraq*, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. The group of UK-based Iraqi and non-Iraqi women formed in 2000 and now focus on the occupation and the support of independent grassroots women's initiatives in Iraq (<http://www.acttogether.org/>). *Open Shutters* was conceived of by photo-journalist, Eugenie Dolberg and Etana Press and set up in affiliation with PhotoVoice in spring, 2007. Eight Iraqi women – and a 6-year-old child – were invited to Damascus and given digital cameras and photography lessons. Once back in Iraq, the women set out at considerable risk to make deeply personal and emotional photo essays of their lives.

To see some of the photographs and essays created by these women, visit: <http://www.lightstalkers.org/galleries/slideshow/3111>. Each story and photo is testament to the state of insecurity that all Iraqis live in under occupation. This state of fear has long affected disproportionately the lives of women, who are now more than ever subject to violent aggression and threats in the name of religion and culture. These are excerpts from some of these narratives:



'I feel like Iraq is becoming empty.... Everyone we know and love is going away and leaving us behind... my friends – Nazaline and Aya and Hayat... the school bus drivers.... My friend, Tuqa's dad went to Syria, my friend Nour's uncle to Egypt... a lot of my schoolmates miss classes.... A few times, not many my mum lets me sit on the bench in the street with my friends... she always stands close by and sometimes my aunt or my grandmother sit by the garden gate and keep and eye on us.... When I see a strange man pretending to be a beggar, I run and hide in the house... we don't want him to know there are kids here. He might steal us from our families and they would have to give him money to get us back... but probably he still wouldn't give us back.'

**Dima, 6 years old,
Baghdad**



"[After the start of the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003] I returned to my city – Basra [from Baghdad]. [...] Basra was always so full of life and open to new ideas. [...] Now, after the occupation, the religious parties have taken over all the buildings in Basra, including the Cultural Centre. Everything is black now [...] Women are compelled to wear black robes and face veils. My life has become black.... One morning I found a leaflet shoved under my door. "Stop your work. You and your daughter must wear proper *hijab*, you sinner." I noticed the spelling was bad."

Um Mohammed, Basra

Yemen: 8-year-old girl successfully annuls forced marriage

After taking her own case to court, 8-year-old Nojoud Mohammed Ali Nasser was granted an annulment of a marriage she was forced into with a man in his 20s. After running away from her husband and taking a taxi to the judge's office to file for her divorce, a Yemeni court annulled Nojoud's marriage. Her lawyer, Shatha Nasser, told reporters she had heard about Nojoud by chance and instantly decided to represent her. "Child brides are common in parts of Yemen, but this case received wider attention because it reached court," she said.

"My father beat me and told me that I must marry this man, and if I did not, I would be raped and no law and no sheikh in this country would help me. I refused but I couldn't stop the marriage," Nojoud Nasser told the Yemen Times. "I asked and begged my mother, father, and aunt to help me to get divorced. They answered, 'We can do nothing. If you want you can go to court by yourself.' So this is what I have done," Nojoud said.



Nojoud's father, Mohammad Ali Al-Ahdal, told the court he felt obliged to marry off his daughter after receiving repeated threats from the would-be husband. He said was frightened because his oldest daughter had been kidnapped several years earlier and had been forced to marry her abductor.

Nojoud told the Sana'a West Court she had signed the marriage contract 2 1/2 months ago on the understanding she would stay in her parents' house until she was 18. "But a week after signing, my mother and father forced me to go and live with him." The former husband, Faez Ali Thameur, told the court the marriage was consummated, but he denied Nojoud's claims that he beat her.

Shatha Nasser confirmed that item number 15 in Yemeni Civil Law reads: "no girl or boy can get married before the age of 15." However, this item was amended in 1998 so parents could make a contract of marriage between their children even if they are under the age of 15, with the understanding that the husband cannot have sex with the girl until puberty.

Human rights activists are using the case to highlight the need for more child protection in Yemen. Nasser says the judge annulled the marriage instead of granting a divorce, to stop the husband trying to reinstate the wedlock. "We are grateful to the judge" she explains. "Had it been someone with strong traditional views, Nojoud could have been sent back home." Instead, Nojoud is now living with her maternal uncle and is looking forward to returning to primary school.

Sources: BBC (16 April 2008) and the *Yemen Times* (9 April 2008)

Sisters' Arab Forum for Human Rights (SAF)

Sisters' Arab Forum is an NGO founded in 1998 with the aim of advocating women's rights in Yemen. It is particularly focused on raising awareness within the Yemeni society on women's legal abuses and crimes, and engendering their political empowerment. SAF provides legal assistance, organizes workshops and exhibitions, conducts field research, and publishes articles and reports. They have also initiated and coordinated the *Shadow Report* on the implementation level of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), sponsored by UNDP, in 2007.

Visit their website here: <http://www.saf-yemen.org> (Arabic)

The marriage between two North African Muslims was annulled for lack of virginity, by the Court of Lille (France), in May 2008

The husband feeling his honour was violated has resorted to annul his marriage, citing Article 180 of the Civil Code on "the lack of the essential qualities" of his spouse, since she had 'lied' about her virginity. Political parties and organizations have denounced the judgement as 'archaic', 'shocking' and 'outrageous', denying the woman's sexual rights. The organization *Ni putes ni soumises*, offended by this 'regression', regrets that virginity is still regarded as an 'essential quality' in France, and calls for a change of law.

To read the article visit: http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2008/05/29/l-annulation-d-un-mariage-parce-que-l-epouse-avait-menti-sur-sa-virginite-suscite-de-vives-reactions_1051589_3224.html?xtor=RSS-3208

Algeria: Human rights activist Cherifa Kheddar unfairly dismissed

Through WLUML networkers, the Algerian 'Collectif des familles de disparus' (CFDA) and the OMCT, we learned of the unfair dismissal of Ms. Cherifa Kheddar from her position of employment at the prefecture of Blida, in Algeria. Ms. Kheddar is the president of the Djazairouna association, a group which defends the victims of terrorism. She is a dedicated human rights activist and a WLUML networker.

According to received news, on 17 May 2008 as Ms. Kheddar went to work only to learn that she had been fired from the prefecture of Blida where she had worked for 12 years.

She had just returned from a week of training organised in Rabat, Morocco, which in order to attend she had taken official leave. Some of her colleagues asked her not to contact them anymore and not to speak in their presence about her opposition to the Charter for 'Peace and National Reconciliation'. In the past Ms. Kheddar had received warnings from her superiors for her actions in the defence of human rights.



Photo: Samantha Appleton for The New York Times
With a poster in each hand at a rally, Cherifa Kheddar joined in calling for justice for victims of terror by Islamist insurgents in Algeria.

According to the latest news received, Ms. Kheddar has not been officially fired but a *wali* (prefect) has issued a decree demoting her position. The WLUML network expresses our deep concern about this treatment of Ms. Cherifa Kheddar, which seems to be a punishment for her activities in the defence of human rights and which will deprive her from resources. This also shows once again the context of intimidation in which the Algerian defenders of human rights must act.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

You can write a polite but firm letter to the Algerian government and the embassy of Algeria in your home country. Letters can be written in English, French, Arabic, or your own language. Please notify us at wluml@wluml.org of any correspondence you send.

In your letters, faxes, emails and telephone calls, you can explain the details of the situation, as outlined above, and express your grave concern at the unfair dismissal of Ms. Kheddar.

Specifically, you can call upon the authorities to:

1. To guarantee the security and psychological integrity of Ms. Kheddar.
2. To allow Ms. Kheddar to contest in front of an independent and impartial judge the lawfulness of her dismissal.
3. To immediately end any harassment against Ms. Kheddar and indeed, against all non-violent defenders of human rights in Algeria to allow them to continue their peaceful activities without obstacles.
4. To conform to the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, especially to Article 1, which declares that: "Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels", and article 5c that says "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels... To communicate with non-governmental or intergovernmental organizations" and article 12.2, that affirms that "The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration."
5. To conform to the standards and spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to the regional and international instruments regarding human rights ratified by Algerian state.

For contact information and the original Call for Action in French, please visit the WLUML website:

in English [http://wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[156\]=i-156-561740](http://wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[156]=i-156-561740)

and French [http://www.wluml.org/french/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[155\]=i-155-561711](http://www.wluml.org/french/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[155]=i-155-561711)

ACTIVISTS' REFLECTIONS

Senegal: "Homophobia and Islamic political manipulation"

At the beginning of February 2008, *Icône*, a popular magazine of human interest stories, published an issue about homosexuality in Senegal. Its main article reported an alleged marriage between 2 men, without specifying the date. This event triggered an onslaught of homophobic hysteria generated by the president of a fundamentalist political party and around 15 Muslim organizations, the 'Collective of Senegalese Islamic Associations' (*Collectif des Associations Islamiques du Sénégal*, CAIS). The editor claimed that he had received death threats from some of the people who were photographed, and lodged a complaint. On 4 February, 10 people were arrested for "undermining decency and an unnatural marriage," held at the Criminal Investigations Division (DIC) and released four days later without any explanation by the authorities.

The media jumped on the case the moment this magazine was published.

"Specialists" from everywhere were invited to give their opinions, which included: perversion and repudiation of holy scriptures (religious Muslims), sickness and sexual deviation (most psychologists), the evil influence of cultural globalization, etc.

In light of this situation, many local and international organizations as well as human rights activists rose up against these injustices. Recalling that Senegal had signed, in 1978, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, they demanded the decriminalization of homosexuality so as not to penalize relations pertaining to private life. Moreover, any discriminatory law runs against the provisions of the African Charter of Human and People's Rights, which stipulates in Article 3 that: "Every individual shall be equal before the law."

But these declarations did not halt the crusade for the defence of morality, whose organizers unveiled a plan.

A call was issued to all Senegalese imams to take the issue of degenerating morals and of homosexuality as the theme of their Friday sermons, and the inauguration of a political campaign after the following Friday's prayers, through the organization of a huge protest march against "moral degeneration and homosexual freedom", to start from the Grand Mosque of Dakar.

Manipulation of facts

The event that caused such a stir, and that CAIS and the media presented as a recent happening, actually took place in November 2006, 14 months before the anti-homosexual mobilization was launched. CAIS based its crusade on the assertion that two people of the same sex married. Senegalese law is clear in this regard: marriage must be between people of the opposite sex. Also, the law is very precise about the official nature of a marriage. It must be between two people of different sexes, united by a State registry officer or by a religious or traditional authority. Neither of these conditions existed in the 'marriage' denounced by CAIS, the members of which harped on about the exchange of wedding rings. The wearing of wedding rings is not part of Senegalese or Islamic tradition. So in no way is it a proof of marriage.



The construction of homosexuality as an innovation and menace

The second argument put forward by CAIS is about the worrying growth of homosexuality in Senegal as a recent phenomenon, one which had never existed in traditional Africa, and one which has been caused by imitating and incorporating Western values. Relying upon anthropological sources from the 1950s, a group from the university Cheikh Anta Diop (Niang 2004) did research on men who had sexual relationships with other

men, and found that these practices have been long established within Wolof society.

In fact in Senegalese cities, rich businesswomen would surround themselves with homosexuals and transvestites who played the role of master of ceremonies during family celebrations, including those taking place upon the return from the pilgrimage to Mecca. They were showered with gifts by their benefactors who protected them both from possible stigmatization or violence. Such relationships exist even today. Homosexuals are openly present and part of family ceremonies, or play the role of master of ceremonies at political or sporting events.

But with the growth of religious conservatism, Senegalese society is becoming more and more intolerant, as well as more and more hypocritical. However, there are many Senegalese Muslims, just like believers of all religions, who are working to create a progressive Islam, centred upon the values of justice, love and equality.

It is from one of them that the conclusion of this article will be borrowed: "The argument often expressed, which consists of saying that the majority of Senegalese people are Muslim, is dangerous, in that it becomes an attack on religious freedom.

In fact, what is the entitled authority, and according to which criteria can we establish the "Islam-ness" of an individual?

The Qur'an teaches us that 'Allah alone knows the depths of our hearts.' When somebody appoints himself or herself as the authority that certifies the Islam-ness of a person, is not he or she, in a certain manner, violating divine prerogatives?... Rules exist for entrance into the political arena – the sacred must be separated from the profane. Certainly, many Senegalese are Muslim and do not know much about their religion, but that does not legitimize religious fundamentalists' taking charge of their social problems for the sole reason that they are the ones presumed to know about Islam and to work in their interests. This way to attaining power derives from a vision, which is, at once, naive, simplistic and out-dated".

By: Codou Bop / Translated by Jane Pincus, edited by Eleanor Kilroy

To access the unabridged French version:

<http://www.wluml.org/french/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B157%5D=x-157-561101>

Codou Bop is a journalist based in Dakar, Senegal and is the co-coordinator of the Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois au Senegal (GREFELS) and coordinates the Regional Coordination office for Africa and the Middle East (RCO-AME) for the Women Living Under Muslim Laws network.

Can Religious and Moral Obligation ever Justify the Use of Force Inadmissible under Secular Law?

On 19 May 2008, a public dialogue was held at the Temple Church, London, a debate led by Abdullahi An-Na'im and Tariq Ramadan around the question: "Can moral and religious obligation ever justify the use of force unacceptable under secular law?". Their answers were negative as one might have expected. What made the debate interesting were the very different arguments put forward. If An-Na'im uses the legal argument, the reasoning of Tariq Ramadan is more philosophical.

An-Na'im, professor of law, resumes arguments highly developed in his recent book, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a* (March 2008). Neither the *Qur'an* nor the Sunna, he says, refers to a concept of the state; also, one must separate the state from Islam. The relationship between the state and the citizen can only be political, not religious. The Islamic State has no justification. The state should not instrumentalize the *Shari'a* for political purposes. Therefore, there cannot be any moral or religious justification of violence.

If Tariq Ramadan, the philosopher, condemns the moral and religious use of violence, yet he stands openly apart from An-Na'im because he refuses to oppose the religious to the secular. Understanding these concepts, he says, varies depending on whether it is the case of Muslim or Western societies. Their respective definitions of *Shari'a* or of jihad, for example, may be contradictory, even conflicting, depending upon the definition is psychological, prescriptive, or historical. They also contrast when it concerns understanding or justifying them. Thus, the *Shari'a*, whose understanding by the West as essentially a set of laws is reductive, is for Muslims basically a way of thinking that allows them to reconcile their lives and their faith. Two systems are opposed in a binary way instead of sharing spaces and values. The State should constitutionally ensure not only freedom of religion to every citizen but enable them to exercise it. He concludes: "In Islam, the essence of jihad is the tension between what exists and what we want. Peace is a struggle, resistance to violence. Jihad allows resisting oppression because of the lack of dignity, legitimacy, and equality". Hence, it derives a justification for violence depending on the context.

The organization of the debate has unfortunately not allowed those present to ask all the questions that these arguments generated. On my side, I would have liked to ask An-Na'im why does the state in Muslim countries continue, despite the degree of secularism, to bend to religious prescriptive rules, especially in family law which governs gender relationships, not counting the number of countries that are Islamic States? Finally, to Tariq Ramadan, whose conclusions politically justify violence as a weapon of resistance to oppression, how can this be accepted when violence attacks women's human rights?

Fatou Sow
WLUML Coordinator, ICO

Amina Wudud visits the WLUML-ICO

On 20 April 2008 the WLUML International Coordination Office (ICO) was pleased to host Amina Wadud for a roundtable conversation with our networkers. This was an opportunity to discuss with Ms. Wadud their own efforts as Muslim women working at a grassroots and international levels as well as to hear her speak of her experiences as a scholar of Islam.

An African-American Muslim, Wadud's scholarship has particularly focused on issues of gender and the *Qur'an*. A founding member of Sisters in Islam, the Malaysian-based women's organization, Wadud is perhaps most well-known as one of the first women to lead prayer with a mixed-sex gathering, in New York in 2005.

The day was spent conversing with Amina and was attended by members of the WLUML Council (Cassandra Balchin, Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Homa Hoodfar) and of the WLUML-ICO (Eleanor Kilroy and Aisha Lee Shaheed), along with members of the Muslim Women's Network-UK (MWN-UK) who travelled from all around England to attend. Both Cassandra Balchin and Ziba Mir-Hosseini – along with Zainah Anwar of Sisters in Islam – also coordinate the MWN-UK.

Amina Wadud's most recent book, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oneworld, 2006) includes a chapter recounting the first time she was invited to lead mixed prayer. This was not the gathering in New York in 2005, but over ten years earlier in 1994 in Claremont Main Road Mosque, Cape Town, South Africa.

"It is just as easy for liberal Muslims to dismiss Muslim terrorists by saying they are not 'true' to Islam. When I engaged in such oversimplification and reductionist claims, I inadvertently implied I actually had the power to express and possess the 'true' Islam"

Wadud concludes that neither their 'Islam' nor her 'Islam' has ultimate privilege: 'We are all part of a complex whole, in constant motion and manifestation throughout the history of multifaceted but totally human constructions of 'Islam'.

To order a copy of *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*, visit:
<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Inside-Gender-Jihad-Womens-Reform/dp/1851684638>



Back row l-r: Ziba, Cassandra, Khatija, Gemma, Shaista, Parvin, Tamsila, Azam.
Front row l-r: Aisha, Bano, Gina, Amina, Homa

Wadud states her objectives in the introduction to *Gender Jihad*; one of which is "to demonstrate part of how to transform Islam through its own egalitarian tendencies, principles, articulations, and implications into a dynamic system with practices that fulfil its goals of justice, by first admitting that concepts of Islam and concepts of justice have always been relative to actual historical and cultural situations." She adds that it was a painful experience at the Second International Muslim Leadership Conference on HIV/AIDS that resulted in her transformation: "Those who opposed my analysis boisterously hurled their opposition directly in my face, claimed certain of my comments were blasphemous, according to their interpretations of Islam, and eventually named me a 'devil in hijab.'"



l-r: Bano, Cassandra (seated), Amina, Shaista, Gina (back), Faeza, Eleanor

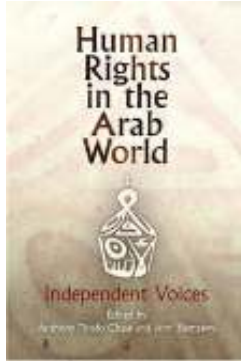
Compiled by Eleanor Kilroy and Aisha Lee Shaheed

REVIEWS

Human Rights in the Arab World: Independent Voices

Edited by Anthony Chase and Amr Hamzawy
University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008

The co-editor of this volume, Anthony Chase, delivers in his introduction an indictment of political Islam: 'As a generality, Islamist movements both inside and outside the Arab world have served the convenient role of demonstrating that, in fact, things can get even worse than currently dismal realities.'



Both in opposition (e.g., Algeria,) and in power (e.g., Afghanistan and the Sudan), Islamic nationalists have shown zealous enthusiasm for exacerbating already poor human rights situations by an absolutist demonization of their opponents. Contributions to this book have been chosen with the purpose of belying the oft-repeated accusation that intellectuals and activists who are critical of their region's human rights record are cultural traitors or 'inauthentic appendages to a Western ideology'.

The issue should not be one of authenticity, but of agency that is denied by repressive regimes and ideological movements.

In a provocatively entitled chapter, 'Defending the Islamists', founding member of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR), Bahey el-Din Hassan explains that the EOHR's main work in the 1980s involved confronting the Islamists' violations of human rights. The issue of defending Islamists' rights was not an easy one, therefore. He argues, however, that a refusal to do so 'would imply an unprincipled political alliance with a government capable of flagrant human rights violations.' The fact that EOHR continued to condemn the practices of Islamic groups was, he adds, unprecedented among international and local NGOs. Rather, the prevalent opinion was – as repeated by Neil Hicks of Human Rights First in his chapter: 'it is misleading to refer to criminal acts by armed opposition groups in Egypt as violations of human rights. They are criminal acts, violations of the law.' (It would be worth referring to Anissa Hélie and Jan Bauer's publication, *Documenting Women's Rights Violations by Non-State Actors* for a strong counter-argument to such a claim. [http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[87\]=i-87-532328](http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[87]=i-87-532328))

Despite the title, the book is heavily focused on Egypt, although there are chapters on Morocco, Yemen and Palestine. Discussion is included on the 'controversial' role of foreign funding of local NGOs – where the government plays on fears of foreign interference and 'cultural penetration' – and Valentine M. Moghadam considers how feminists are challenging second-class citizenship in the Arab world.

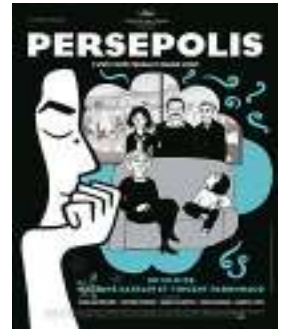
Reviewed by Eleanor Kilroy

Persepolis

Dir: Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud (France, 2007) 95 min.

Persepolis is an animated film based on the comic-book series by the Iranian graphic novelist Marjane Satrapi. It recounts the artist's childhood in Iran under the Shah and Khomeini, and Marjane's search for her own identity as a woman, against the backdrop of a historical revolution and changing ideologies. Her individual changes are represented by a riveting succession of black-and-white panels.

Persepolis narrates the story of this 'divinely inspired' girl who campaigns against the Shah together with her Marxist family and friends, and is fond of Bruce Lee, heavy metal and rock music. Marjane tries to reconcile her Iranian origins with the fact of being a woman in a country where subordination and humiliation of women start to be the norm, if not the rule. The denial of freedom of expression forces her to develop a kind of double self: on the surface is a religiously observant and submissive girl, while under the compulsory chador is a young woman who is rebellious and independent.



Two characters play a crucial role in her life: her uncle Anoosh and her grandmother. Indeed, the first – arrested and executed during the Islamic Revolution – passes on to the little Marji the strength to fight for the freedom, and helps consolidate her Iranian identity. The words of Marjane's grandmother, on a parallel level, mark her identity as a woman and resound in Marjane's ears as the voice of her conscience. She learns not to be ashamed of her origins and, especially, to behave as an assertive individual able to confront the difficulties of her daily life and to make decisions.

The question of identity is a sensitive one for the young Iranian girl. An outsider in Vienna as well as a stranger in Tehran, Marjane is regarded by others as different. Indeed, she is different because she has tried to follow her personal path and to find her own way of living as an Iranian woman, free from any judgement and restriction, desirous of telling both her story, and that of her country.

Reviewed by Chiara Maurilio

Sukkar banat (Caramel)

Dir: Nadine Labaki (Lebanon, 2007) 95 min.



Caramel follows the lives of a quartet of women who work in a beauty salon in Beirut. The film explores how the roles meted out to women are fraught with potential humiliation and the fear of illegitimacy, and shows how the madness of too-close familial attachments in tiny, crowded apartments allow for an enviable intimacy between women, but also preclude the need of the individual to express their sexuality with dignity.

The young bride, Nisrine, adopts an absurd name, Julie Pompidou, when registering at the clinic for a hymen repair operation, and on the eve of her wedding her mother touchingly prepares her daughter for her impending womanhood, telling her: 'one must cut open a melon to taste its sweetness'. Layale, the protagonist and the film's director, enters several hotels to book a night for herself and her married lover; each time she is asked for ID that would confirm her married status: 'new regulations' she is told. Finally she squeamishly takes a room in a seedy hotel where she later tells her friends she is taken for a 'whore'. There exists below the radar of respectability a layer of humanity it would be easy to disassociate oneself from – that is until one must join them for a night or day.

Religion is not directly approached as a theme, yet it is everywhere in this confessional society; the two 'spinsters' tell their rosary in the bed they share, Nisrine buttons up her shirt in deference to her future in-laws conservative Islamic dress, and Layale rifles through the wallet of her married lover and along with a photo of his raven-headed wife and daughter, she finds a picture of the original Madonna. Behind the screen and this icon of holy woman- and mother-hood, are real women screeching in pain as unwanted hair is stripped from their bodies by a mixture of sugar and water – the caramel of the title.

Review by Eleanor Kilroy

UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

GRAFELS: Advocacy campaign against Violence Against Women (VAW)

In the framework of the reform of the penal code in Senegal, GRAFELS (Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois au Senegal) and other women's associations are starting an advocacy campaign. They demand that the reform commission include in the law on violence against women (VAW) an article giving women's associations the capacity to bring civil actions before the Court, should a woman who has been a victim of violence (or parents of a girl who has been raped) decide, under pressure or bribery, to withdraw their claim.

This demand is motivated by the increasing number of cases of violence against women brought to Court that were dismissed because the victims withdrew their claims. As a result, despite the law against VAW, most perpetrators get away with the murder and impunity remains the rule.

For more information, please write to grefels@gmail.com

2008 AWID Forum *The Power of Movements*



From November 14-17, 2008, some 1500 women's rights leaders and activists from around the world will converge on Cape Town, South Africa at the 11th AWID International Forum to discuss the 'power of movements'. WLUML is delighted to announce we will be presenting 5 sessions at this year's AWID Forum, with topics including Women and Secularisms, Feminist Religious (Re) Interpretation, learning about Muslim women's diverse histories, and the Global Campaign *Stop Killing and Stoning Women!*

Find out more about the 2008 AWID Forum here: www.awid.org/forum08

VIII International Human Rights Colloquium "60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Challenges for the Global South" Sao Paulo, 8-15 November 2008

Applications are now open. The deadline is June 30th, 2008

The VIII International Human Rights Colloquium will take place in Sao Paulo, Brazil from 8 to 15 November, 2008. The Colloquium is an annual capacity building and peer-learning event designed for young activists from the Global South (Africa, Asia and Latin America). The objective of the VIII International Human Rights Colloquium is to strengthen the impact of human rights activists work and to offer the opportunity to build new collaborative networks among activists, academics and the United Nations (UN).

Application to the Colloquium can be made directly online at its website www.conectas.org/coloquio or through an offline application.

For more information, write to: coloquio@conectas.org

The 8th session of the UN Human Rights Council will be meeting in Geneva from 2 - 18 June 2008.
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/8session/index.htm>

The 9th session of the UN Human Rights Council will be meeting in Geneva from 8-26 September 2008.

For further information, visit the UN website here: <http://www2.ohchr.org/>