



مونتيج زييراش سلام تواني  
 Women living under muslim laws  
 النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين  
 Femmes sous lois musulmanes

February 2006

# WLUML NEWSLETTER

Issue 2

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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.

## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN ON WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In November/December 2005, the International Coordinating Committee of the International Campaign on Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD-ICC) held an International Consultation to bring together WHRDs from different countries worldwide.

Nearly 200 male and female women's rights and human rights activists from approximately 70 countries worldwide gathered in Colombo, Sri Lanka to attend this historic global gathering on women human rights defenders.

The conference was linked to the international campaign launched in 2004 entitled "Defending Women – Defending Rights: the International Campaign on Women Human Rights Defenders (ICWHRD). Formed as a coalition of women's rights and human rights organizations, the Campaign is rooted in overwhelming evidence that many women, active in human rights work, routinely face harassment, abuse, violence, discrimination and marginalization because of their gender, sexual identity and their advocacy.

Defenders face specific challenges as women addressing a global rise in fundamentalisms and militarism and a climate increasingly hostile to the work of political activists in various social movements and regions. As women, they face some of the same abuses all defenders do, yet they are also exposed to or targeted for gender-based violence and gender-specific risks.

The conference aimed to raise awareness of the need for special protection of WHRDs and other human rights activists defending the rights of women by focusing on the challenges faced by WHRDs in their political organizing.

Delegates shared experiences and developed a range of strategies to combat the violence, discrimination and other abuses they experience specifically because of their gender and because of their work in defence of human rights.

The conclusions and recommendations will be submitted to Ms. Jilani (UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Human Rights Defenders) for consideration. Ms. Jilani will be submitting a report to the UN Commission on Human Rights and the UN General Assembly in 2006.

This gathering marked the first time women's rights and human rights groups have come together on a global level to address gender-specific concerns and experiences of women as human rights defenders.



WHRD Conference, Nov-Dec 2005, Sri Lanka  
©Defending Women-Defending Rights

**Audio files of all the speeches made during the conference have been made available by Feminist International Radio Endeavour at <http://www.fire.or.cr/nov05/whrd/audio.htm>**

For more information on the conference, please read: [www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/contextualising.php](http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/contextualising.php)

As a member of the International Coordinating Committee (WHRD-ICC), WLUML helped to plan and facilitate this international conference. WLUML also funded the participation of two WLUML networkers from Nigeria and Algeria/France and nominated other WHRDs to participate in the meeting including Mervat Omari (Palestine). WLUML facilitated the participation of activists from Muslim countries and communities in continued recognition that shared experiences and knowledge about both common and diverse situations, helps to strengthen their struggles by creating the means and channels needed to support their efforts internationally from within and outside their own contexts.



## UPDATE

### Personal Status Law, Canada

In September 2005, WLUML joined in the delight at the announcement by Ontario's Premier McGuinty that there will be, "...no religious arbitration in Ontario... one law for all Ontarians".

Since Autumn 2004, WLUML has supported Canadian women's and progressive human rights organisations in their struggle to resist the introduction of so-called 'Shari'a courts' in the resolution of family matters in the province of Ontario, following a government report arguing that the reform would promote cultural freedom and protect religious 'differences'.

WLUML issued several Calls for Action to support and raise awareness, and provided the necessary support for a WLUML networker to travel to Canada to work closely with campaigning groups (see *WLUML Newsletter Issue 1, July 2005*).

For full details please see: [www.wluml.org/english/actionsulltxt.shtml?cmd\[156\]=i-156-351675](http://www.wluml.org/english/actionsulltxt.shtml?cmd[156]=i-156-351675)

## Ms. Ghada Jamsheer – BAHRAIN

In June 2005, following a request from the *Bahrain Centre for Human Rights* (BCHR), WLUML issued an international alert in support of women's rights campaigner Ms. Ghada Jamsheer, who faced three trials for publicly criticizing family court judges and, if convicted, faced up to 15 years in prison. Ms. Jamsheer is the head of the *Committee of Women's Petition* (CWP), a network of Bahraini women activists campaigning for the codification of Bahrain's family laws and the reform of Shari'a Family Courts.

In September, two of the three cases were dismissed as illegitimate and the Public Prosecution's subsequent appeal against this decision was refused by the High Criminal Appeals Court in December. The remaining case against Ms. Jamsheer was raised by Jassim Mutlaq Al Thawadi, one of the Shari'a judges accusing her of using abusive language. It is important to note that Al Thawadi was dismissed from his position by the King following the campaign by the CWP campaign that Jamsheer headed.

For more information, please go to: <http://www.wluml.org/english/actions.shtml>

## Harassment of WHRDs – SERBIA

In November 2005, WLUML received a call for action from friends and allies Women in Black, to support their demands for the immediate end to the continual harassment of Women in Black, Belgrade, who have been under investigation in recent months.

The organization is being investigated by the police for allegations of organizing prostitution in Belgrade following a complaint made in February 2005 by a local man well known to the police for his violent behaviour. Despite the falsehood of the charge, police have continued to investigate the co-ordinator of the organisation, Stasa Zajovic (a Nobel Peace Prize Nominee), examine office files, and interrogate members of staff.

Such action, if sustained for much longer, will discredit and criminalize an organization whose sole purpose is to promote non-violence and democratic process in the achievement of peace in the world.

For more information, please go to: [www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[156\]=i-156-430987](http://www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[156]=i-156-430987)

## Decriminalization of Polygamy – CANADA

Following the success of the campaign against the use of Shari'a law in Ontario (see *boxed text*), in early January 2006 WLUML received another call for action from friends in Canada. WLUML fully supports the current protest against Dr. Martha Bailey's recommendation that the Federal Government of Canada remove Section 293 from the Criminal Code of Canada, thus, decriminalizing polygamy in Canada.

For more information, please see: [www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-507316](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-507316)

## PAKISTAN EARTHQUAKE RELIEF EFFORTS

On October 8 2005, a massive earthquake shattered Northern Pakistan's Kashmir region. Figures released at the end of 2005 showed that the death toll had reached 73,331 (Government of Pakistan figures), with 69,392 people injured and 3.5 million in total affected by the earthquake.

Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Center (WLUML Asia Regional Coordination Office) in Lahore has been working tirelessly in partnership with MADRE, an international women's human rights organization, to deliver emergency aid to women and families in the more remote regions devastated by the earthquake. With 30 years of experience working specifically to promote women's rights, Shirkat Gah has access to local social networks that can distribute aid in remote communities, which government and large relief organizations have failed to reach, and an awareness of the specific challenges facing women in crisis situations.

For more information on the work of Shirkat Gah, please see: <http://www.wluml.org/english/news/sg-earthquake-relief-report-141105.pdf>

If you would like to contribute to the relief effort, please see the following details:

[www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B157%5D=x-157-388593](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B157%5D=x-157-388593)





## **Fundamentalisms and Human Rights Meeting**

**Montreal, Canada – May 2005**

In November 2002, WLUML convened a meeting on the theme of warning signs of fundamentalisms at which it became evident that it was both important and urgent for human rights organizations to take stock of this phenomenon.

In response to the work that clearly needs to be done on this issue, Rights & Democracy hosted a three-day meeting, in May 2005 entitled, 'Fundamentalisms and Human Rights'. The goal of the meeting was to help key actors from several organizations that promote and defend human rights to identify guidelines on the subject.

It was acknowledged that all participants, whether they are involved in human rights groups, women's rights groups and/or social justice organizations, are working in the field of human rights and, as such, represent a human rights organization. The agenda for the meeting reflected Rights & Democracy's awareness that the issue of fundamentalisms and human rights presents challenges and that there is a diversity of strongly held views and opinions.

The complete report is available at:

<http://www.dd-rd.ca/frame2.iphtml?langue=0&menu=m01&urlpage=/english/commdoc/publications/women/fundamentalisms.html>



## **1<sup>ST</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON ISLAMIC FEMINISM**

**Barcelona, Spain - October 2005**

*Junta Islàmica Catalana* organized this meeting, which for three days (October 27-29th, 2005) assembled over 400 delegates in Barcelona. The Congress heard from women fighting for their rights and working in very difficult conditions against the implementation, in the name of Islam, of highly sexist and discriminatory family codes of behaviour.

Discussions were held on diversity and feminism, Koranic hermeneutics, Islamism and feminism, and other topics. There was also an exploration of the situation of Muslim women in South East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Amina Wadud (lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Commonwealth University of Virginia (USA) and WLUML Networker), gave the Friday *khutba* (sermon) and led a mixed-gender congregation in a Friday communal prayer.

This followed on from the talk on the mixed prayers she gave in New York in March 2005 (see *WLUML Newsletter, Issue 1, July 2005: p.2*).

For further information, please see:

[www.feminismeislamic.org/eng/congress.htm](http://www.feminismeislamic.org/eng/congress.htm)



## **AWID 10<sup>th</sup> International Forum**

**Bangkok, Thailand – October 2005**

Several WLUML networkers joined over 1,800 women's rights activists (both male and female) at the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID) 3-day international forum, attending numerous sessions, panels, films, book launches, lunchtime caucuses and workshops etc.

WLUML contributed to the development of new analysis by holding a panel entitled, 'Secularisms as an Alternative to Fundamentalisms: questions for feminists'. WLUML has found that while much work has been done to analyse fundamentalisms, debate regarding secularisms is relatively underdeveloped within the global women's movement.

The panel was organized and moderated by the ICO Senior Programme Coordinator, and consisted of three speakers linked with the WLUML network: Dr. Vivienne Wee, a professor at City University Hong Kong, challenged the presumption that secularism is a cure for patriarchal oppression (presentation available at: <http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B157%5D=x-157-430926>); Vahida Nainar from the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice, asked how it was that a Hindu fundamentalist movement grew and captured power in secular India; and Soheib Bencheikh, the Mufti of Marseilles and a determined secularist who sees secularism as Islam's only chance of survival in Europe.

Several WLUML Programme Implementation Council (PIC) members also attended the AWID Forum and spoke on various panels.

## WLUML NETWORKERS



Marieme Hélie-Lucas  
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## MARIEME HÉLIE-LUCAS INVITED TO DELIVER PUBLIC LECTURES Canada – November 2005

Marieme Hélie-Lucas, founder of WLUML, feminist activist and political theorist, was invited as the 'Distinguished Visitor' to the 2005 Dame Nita Barrow Public Lecture (Toronto).

The lecture, entitled, 'Women Living Under Muslim Laws', focused on the threat of fundamentalisms to the creation of a democratic world and on the response of feminists and activists at the global and local levels who are struggling for control over their own lives, bodies and sexuality.

For further details please see:  
<http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B157%5D=x-157-430884>

Ms. Hélie-Lucas also spoke about the secular response to fundamentalist claims at the Muriel V. Roscoe Annual lecture at the McGill Centre for Research and Training (Montreal) in November 2005.

For further details, please read:  
<http://upload.mcgill.ca/mcrtw/December2005.pdf>

**An Algerian sociologist, Marieme Hélie-Lucas was in charge of the policy of education and training for the new industries and for gas (Algeria, 1962-66). Ms. Helie-Lucas has also taught epistemology in the social sciences at Algiers University (1967-80). In 1984, she founded WLUML and was International Coordinator of WLUML from 1984 to 2000 before assuming her current role as Programme Advisor.**

## WLUML PUBLICATIONS

### WLUML PUBLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE AT: <http://www.wluml-pic.org/shop>

#### The Harvest: Two Years After Khol - An Analytical Study

*The Center for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance (CEWLA) (November 2005)*

WLUML supported the translation of this book, from Arabic to English, which details Egyptian women's experience of new khol provisions and the problems and inequities of the profoundly unjust nature of khol.

[www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87-i-87-403656](http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87-i-87-403656)

#### Reading the Constitution: In Search of Rights

*Sohail Akbar Warraich, Shirkat Gah (2004)*

Provides some guidelines and pointers in looking at the position of rights in the Constitutions, states promises to ensure those rights, mechanisms for enforcement of rights, especially the powers and functions of the Courts and other Constitutional bodies which facilitate promotion of rights.

[www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87-i-87-348111](http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87-i-87-348111)

### NEW PUBLICATION

#### Recognizing the Un-Recognized: Inter-Country Cases and Muslim Marriages & Divorces in Britain

*Sohail Akbar Warraich & Cassandra Balchir (January 2006)*

WLUML has conducted a brief policy research project with the aim of beginning a dialogue on how to address the human rights violations being suffered by women in Muslim communities in Britain and South Asia in connection with the recognition of Muslim marriages and divorces in Britain. We believe this to be the first in-depth report of the issue to combine sociological, legal and political analysis.

[www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87-i-87-507849](http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cmdf87-i-87-507849)

### WLUML PUBLICATIONS CATALOGUE

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

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