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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.

THE EMERGING HOLY ALLIANCE

As an international women's network, WLUML transcends regional and national boundaries in order to resist the fundamentalist homogenisation of Muslim contexts and the imposition of uniform definitions of acceptable 'womanhood'. WLUML seeks to preserve the space for diverse and alternative voices in Muslim societies, whether these be secular or from within a faith-based framework.

WLUML statement to the World Social Forum

Appeal Against Fundamentalisms

There is no such thing as the "clash of civilisations": the clash in the world today is between fascists and antifascists

In January, WLUML participated in the Feminist Dialogues II and the World Social Forum 2005. Discussions focused on militarisation and war, fundamentalisms and neo-liberal globalisation, underlining the strategies that the women's movement has used or may use in the future to confront those forces.

WLUML issued a statement calling on the democratic movement at large, on the anti-globalisation movement gathered at the WSF and on the women's movement, to give visibility and recognition to progressive democratic forces and the women's movement within it, that oppose the fundamentalist theocratic project.

Women have experienced on various occasions - starting with the Cairo UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) - the mutual support that various forms of fundamentalists and extreme right forces give each other. Therefore, it is vital that women's movements support one another against these reactionary forces.



World Social Forum, January 2005, Brazil
© Kent Klautd

Disturbed by the discrimination and exclusion that more than often affects people of migrant descent in Europe and North America, progressive forces in the West are keen to denounce racism and rightly so. But subsequently, they often choose to sacrifice both women and our own internal indigenous democratic progressive opposition forces to fundamentalist theocratic dictatorship, on the altar of anti-racism. Or they censor their expressions of solidarity with us for fear of being accused of racism.

Fundamentalisms are not a legitimate response to situations of oppression. They seek to perpetuate oppression. WLUML calls upon its friends and allies to join together to end this unholy alliance between sections of the left and extreme-right politico-religious groups.

Read the full WLUML statement in English, Spanish, French and Arabic at www.wlumf.org

FUNDAMENTAL UNION

When it comes to defining family values, conservative Christians and Muslims are united against liberal secularists

Brian Whitaker (Guardian: Feb. 2005) explains that the family debate is being fought between liberal secularists, predominantly in Europe, and conservatives elsewhere who think religion has a role in government. The United States now sits in the religious camp alongside the Islamic regimes: not so much a clash of civilisations, more an alliance of fundamentalisms.

For the full article go to:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,,1398055,00.html>



PERSONAL STATUS LAWS

In December 2004, former Attorney General Marion Boyd ruled in favour of the introduction of so-called 'Shari'a Courts' in the resolution of family matters in Canada.

Although the National Assembly of Quebec has since rejected implementing the proposal, the province of Ontario continues to debate the recommendation.

Resistance to this gender discriminatory move is growing rapidly but Canadian women's groups continue to need support from women and progressive human rights activists' abroad to ensure that the Canadian government does not extend this disastrous 'experiment'.

In all Muslim countries and communities there has been a history of resistance to the imposition of a homogenous, authoritarian vision of society, such as that promoted by fundamentalist groups. Progressive scholars have consistently challenged traditional patriarchal monopolies over the interpretation of Islam, while women's and progressive human rights activists have insisted that human rights and social justice form the basis for local social development.

Where democratic expression has been allowed to develop, the people in Muslim countries and communities have rejected the fundamentalists' project, while even in undemocratic countries women and progressive men have forced the opening of debate and had a measure of success in protecting the spaces for alternative voices.

This victory has led the extreme right from Muslim contexts to launch a new strategy, opening up a new front in Europe and North America. In the name of 'freedom of expression' and anti-racism – the very values we stand for – and under the

disguise of defending 'community rights', fundamentalist groups have increasingly succeeded in entering progressive circles, which continue to take cultural relativist positions.

This Unholy Alliance between some progressives and the fundamentalists has then sought to take advantage of state policies of multiculturalism and the painful realities of continuing racial discrimination to demand special rights for the 'Muslim community'. But these special rights inevitably involve anti-women practices and highly regressive interpretations of Islam. They also unquestioningly presume that all migrants from Muslim contexts identify as 'Muslim'.

Indeed, family and community pressure can severely limit a woman's right to exercise 'choice' regarding for example which legal fora she approaches for her claim. Provisions that apparently offer a range of legal options can in reality force women to have to 'choose' one aspect of their multiple identities at the cost of another, jeopardizing women's autonomy.

We are also keenly aware that any victory for conservative forces among Muslim communities in Europe and North America will in this globalised world automatically reinforce fundamentalist groups in Muslim countries and communities elsewhere. This will lead to a backlash against us in contexts where we have had a measure of success in preserving the space for women's and alternative voices. In addition to our sense of solidarity, it is fear of such a development that leads WLUML to express our support for women in migrant Muslim communities in Canada and elsewhere.

For full details please visit:
[http://www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?md\[156\]=i-156-180177](http://www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?md[156]=i-156-180177)

“The complex notion of identity cannot be left to right-wing male community leaders to define”

WLUML

Related News

INDIA:

In June 2005, the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board renewed calls for the introduction of separate courts for India's Muslim population.
[http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-226171](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-226171)

AUSTRALIA:

In April 2005, Muslim leaders requested separate courts to be established in Australia to deal specifically with divorces under Muslim laws.
[http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-224686](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-224686)

NIGERIA:

For a detailed account covering the recent emergence of Sharia in Nigeria states and the effect this has had on current religious-political debate, please go to:
[http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-250013](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-250013)

WLUML SOLIDARITY IN CANADA

In solidarity with the women of Canada, WLUML secured support from the Urgent Action Fund to support WLUML networker, Ms. Ziba Mir Hossaini, in a trip to Canada in April 2005. An expert in Muslim family law and gender, Ziba provided input into capacity building initiatives, conferences and gave presentations to women's rights group, helping to raise awareness and the effectiveness of the campaign against 'Sharia tribunals' in Ontario.

For further details see:
<http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?d%5B157%5D=x-157-198243>



Ziba Mir Hossaini (left) with Yasmin Ratansi MP (centre) and Alia Hogben (right), the president of Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Toronto, April 2005. © WLUML

WLUML NETWORKERS

In remembrance:

Salma Sobhan

1935-2003



© WLUML

Salma Sobhan passed away suddenly in December 2003 at her home in Dhaka.

Salma, as she was affectionately known to many of us in the network, was one of WLUML's most dynamic analytical minds, someone to whom we always turned when faced with difficult questions of policy and strategy. Our loss is beyond measure.

But Salma did not just bring us her superb sense of justice and commitment to women's rights. She also enriched us all with her wonderful sense of humour, her cheerful willingness to take on the most difficult and delicate of tasks, and her great humbleness. Of her many special qualities was her ability to reach out to all generations and form real friendships with younger activists linked through WLUML and beyond. All this in spite of the fact that she occupied a position as one of Bangladesh's foremost human rights activists, a Barrister and former Executive Director of the legal aid and human rights organisation, Ain-o-Salish Kendra.

Our thoughts are with Salma's husband and soul-mate Rehman, and two sons Babar and Zafar.

Salma Sobhan never wanted to be an icon. In fact, she avoided stage lights, but ironically she has become a public figure and now, [over] a year after she left us, she is remembered not only by family and friends, but nationally and internationally by many others.

An award for journalists has been established in her name by Professor Amartya Sen's Protichi Foundation, a volume containing some of her writings has been published by ASK, and at several commemorative meetings, she has been held up as an example of a selfless human rights worker.

The reasons why have been brought out in the commemorative meetings. In her personal life, she was clear about rights and wrongs, and while she had little time for hypocrisy, she was tolerant of the views of others and didn't make value judgements. She was able to discuss issues honestly, and talk about events or people she knew with humour and without rancour. These were qualities that endeared her personally to all those who came into contact with her . . .

Her active public engagement emerged later, and more by chance than a determined decision. In commemorating her life, we remember these qualities, but more than that, we chart her journey as a humanist who became an activist because she translated her personal values into a public struggle for justice.

She became the first woman barrister in Pakistan in 1959, but unlike other lawyers who pursued their profession single-mindedly, she had a wide range of interests. She was well versed in literature, particularly in Urdu and English, and would quote verses extensively from memory . . .

(South Asia Citizens Wire)

For full article, please see:

[http://www.wuml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-91081](http://www.wuml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-91081)



Amina Wadud, March 2005

© WLUML

FEMALE SCHOLAR LEADS MIXED FRIDAY PRAYERS

Dr. Amina Wadud, a Muslim scholar of repute from US led the mixed congregational prayer on 18th March 2005 in New York and also delivered khutba. It was a historic step as it was a unique development in the history of Islam. (Islam & Modern Age)

[http://www.wuml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-211712](http://www.wuml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-211712)

Amina Wadud is an Islamic studies professor in the department of philosophy and religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. She is nationally and internationally known for her groundbreaking book Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective, the first interpretive reading of the Qur'an by a woman. Dr. Wadud seeks to validate the female voice in the Qur'an and bring it out of the shadows.

[http://www.wuml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-126862](http://www.wuml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-126862)

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Although the service has been criticised by a number of Muslim leaders, who say it goes against Islamic doctrine, the Islamic Council in Spain issued this statement in support of the initiative:

<http://www.wuml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B157%5D=x-157-178401>



WLUMML

NETWORK NEWS

January – June 2005

BEIJING+ 10: GLOBAL WEEK OF ACTION

International - March 2005

Women rights activists around the world took part in the Beijing & Beyond Global Week of Action for Women's Rights, (1-8 March 2005) an initiative designed to draw attention to the UN Commission on the Status of Women ten-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing + 10), which several WLUMML networkers attended.

As co-sponsor, WLUMML networkers in Montreal facilitated a series of meetings and workshops in collaboration with Rights and Democracy relating to the WLUMML Afghan Family Law Project.

As part of the International Coordinating Committee of the Women Human Rights Defenders Campaign www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org.

WLUMML gave a presentation during a panel discussion in New York on women activists defending human rights. The presentation focused on violations against human rights defenders as perpetrated by non-state actors (including 'fundamentalist' groups).

For further details see:

<http://www.beijingandbeyond.org/>

Women's Learning Partnership Calabar, Nigeria - February 2005

WLUMML regional coordination office BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights, a partner of WLP, convened the four-day Africa Regional Learning Institute for Women's Leadership and Training of Trainers. Participants included 25 women's rights activists and leaders from nine countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. WLP Institutes are learning centres for empowering women to participate as leaders in the decision-making processes in all areas of social, political, and economic life.

[http://www.wlumml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-114302](http://www.wlumml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-114302)

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN A NEW IRAQ: The Constitution and the Future

Southern Shuneh, Jordan - June 2005

WLUMML networkers joined women experts from around the world in sharing their experiences with Iraqi women in constitution-building during a two day conference organised by Women for Women International.

WLUMML networkers shared their considerable experience and expertise gained from work in the area of gender, religion and conflict – a WLUMML collective project that ran 2002–2004 – focusing on the post-conflict situation in Afghanistan.

Women for Women International launched its Iraq program in July 2003 to help women support their families and equip them with the skills necessary to participate in the reconstruction of Iraqi society through grassroots level training on women's rights, leadership and job skills.

Women for Women International contacted WLUMML in March to request assistance in proposing participants, facilitators and refining the agenda for the conference.

Other participants included Mr. Ibrahim Jaafari, the nominated prime minister of Iraq, Iraq Ministers, the Iraqi constitution drafting committee, representatives of women's groups in Iraq, and leaders in the international community including Mary Robinson.

For more information see:

www.womenforwomen.org/iraqrelconf.html

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM & FEMINIST DIALOGUES

Porto Alegre, Brazil, January 2005

Eight WLUMML networkers from Algeria, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, South Africa, the Palestinian community in Israel and from the WLUMML International Coordination Office (London) staff attended the Feminist Dialogue (FD) and the World Social Forum (WSF), in Porto Alegre, Brazil from 23-31 January 2005.

Following the European Social Forum (ESF) in October 2004, where several extreme-Right fundamentalist groups participated and held workshops, WLUMML attended the WSF to prevent further fundamentalist domination of international spaces. WLUMML also wished to draw attention to the growing alliance being forged between fundamentalist extreme-right groups and some left-wing groups.

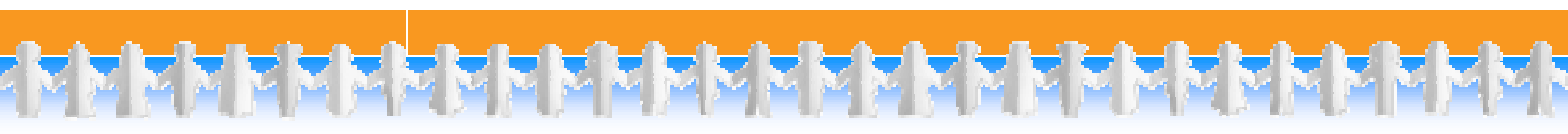
As an international network, WLUMML also wanted to reinforce the successful expansion of its networking in the Middle-East and North Africa by facilitating the participation of women activists from the region. The participating WLUMML networkers were keen to use this opportunity to develop feminist linkages beyond their usual linguistic and/or geographical boundaries.

As an international solidarity network, WLUMML considers supporting the participation of such groups in international conferences as part of our networking role, breaking the isolation in which women wage their struggles and creating and reinforcing network links between women within Muslim countries and communities and global feminist and progressive groups.

[http://www.wlumml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-119969](http://www.wlumml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-119969)



Feminist Dialogues, January 2005, Brazil
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RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ALL WLUML PUBLICATIONS ARE NOW AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE ON THE WLUML WEBSITE: <http://www.wluml-pic.org/shop/index.php>

Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms

Ayesha Imam, Jenny Morgan & Nira Yuval-Davis (Eds.) (2004)

In 2002, WLUML held an international conference on the theme, 'Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms'. This book includes many of the papers presented at the conference, some of which retrospectively analyse the common danger signals that indicate the rising intensity of such right-wing political projects, and some of which focus on specific strategies of resistance - political, legal, and cultural.

<http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cr87=i-87-98541>

For Ourselves - Women Reading the Qur'an

WLUML (1997)

Due to popular demand, WLUML has reprinted the edited transcripts of a 6-day workshop 'Qur'anic Interpretations by Women Meeting' held in 1990. This publication presents the views and work of a dynamic group of activists, Muslim scholars, jurists and historians of Muslim jurisprudence. Their groundbreaking effort was to begin the process of a new approach to Qur'anic interpretation, reaffirming women's right to read and interpret the Qur'an for themselves.

<http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cr87=i-87-3011>

Knowing Our Rights: Women, family, laws and customs in the Muslim world

Knowing Our Rights is designed as a tool for activists engaged in lobbying and advocacy related to women's rights within the family at the policy level as well as in communities. It covers twenty-six topics relevant to marriage and divorce, including the status of children (paternity and adoption) and child custody and guardianship. Not only is it unique in providing a user-friendly, cross-comparative analysis of the diversities and commonalities of laws and customs across the Muslim world, it is also the first handbook to attempt to rank laws in Muslim communities in terms of whether they are more or less option-giving for women, analyzed from a rights perspective and the realities of women's lives.

<http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?cr87=i-87-16766>

Dossier 26

WLUML (2004)

This volume seeks to address issues of concern to women in Muslim countries and communities around the concepts of identity, politics, movements, and alliances. Crucial to identity politics is the fraught question of alliances: all the articles, ultimately, address this question. <http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?mdf87=i-87-89744>

NEW PUBLICATION

Great Ancestors: Women Asserting Rights in Muslim Contexts

Farida Shaheed & Aisha L.F. Shaheed (2005)

The essential information and training kit on women's rights activists from the 8th to the 20th century. This publication, jointly produced by Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre and WLUML, explodes the myth that struggles for women's rights are alien to societies that embraced Islam and profiles women who defied and changed the contours of women's lives from the 8th to the mid-20th century.

<http://www.wluml.org/english/pubsfulltxt.shtml?mdf87=i-87-186208>

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.

WLUML BROCHURE

WLUML has published a short brochure summarising the history and concept of WLUML and outlining the network's aims, focus and organisational structure. This brochure is now available in English and French and will shortly be available in Arabic.

If you wish to order a copy of the WLUML catalogue or brochure, please contact: pubs@wluml.org



WLUML STATEMENT ON LONDON ATTACKS

The network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) extends its deepest condolences to the families of those killed and to those who suffered terrible injuries in the appalling bomb attacks in London on 7 July 2005.

We extend our solidarity to all those in the UK working against violence and in particular our allies in the women's movements and other progressive people in the UK.

WLUML reiterates comments it made regarding the September 2001 attacks:

"Our sorrow is particularly heartfelt because many of those linked through the WLUML network have directly experienced terror and the devastation that goes with it. We know that indiscriminate violence and terrorism by state and non-state actors are a global phenomenon. However we regard all of these as assaults on the principle of respect for civilian life..."

WLUML continues to believe that ending terrorism requires addressing the roots of inequality: poverty and deprivation, injustice and exploitation both globally and within each country, as well as domestic and foreign policies that are and are perceived to be hypocritical.

Racism and Homogenisation

The London bombings took place in a city with a significant migrant population from Muslim contexts, including a third generation.

By emphasizing the "Muslim community's responsibility" to denounce the attacks and by highlighting statements from 'religious leaders', the media and government officials in effect accept the claim from extreme-right politico-religious groups that these acts were somehow related to religion. These are violent crimes, without justification. WLUML refuses to allow the hijacking of our diverse identities by forces which, while posing as representatives of "Muslims", in fact pursue their own political agendas, including via terrorism.

Moreover, once again, WLUML witnesses the imposition of religious identity onto people simply on the basis of their birth place, ancestry or skin colour. This focus on supposed religious identity is also at the expense of secular thought.

That the perpetrators are British-born also raises the spectre of the 'enemy within'. WLUML is concerned that this has led to a rise in racist attacks in the immediate instance and more deeply ingrained racism in the long term.

WLUML is also concerned that this indigenous connection does not seem to raise questions regarding the UK authorities' long-standing complacency regarding the activities of extremist right-wing politico-religious groups on their soil. London is home to many secularists from a Muslim cultural background and progressive Muslims, as well as harbouring numerous extreme right groups who seek to (mis)use Islam to advance their goals of political and social dominance.

Among many possible examples, the website of a registered UK Muslim charity group advocates female genital mutilation, using religious texts to support such harmful and degrading practices. Rachid Ramda, accused by the Paris Courts of managing the finances of the 1995 Paris bombings, is detained in the UK and, ten years later

The Impact on Human Rights Struggles and the Silencing of Secular Options

WLUML is equally concerned that such extreme right groups based in the British Muslim community will seek to turn a very real racism to their advantage.

Policy documents from governments and multinational corporations in Europe and North America increasingly recommend dialogue with 'moderate Muslims' [[Preventing a 'clash of civilisations'](#), BBC, 13 April 2004 and [Leaked No 10 dossier reveals Al-Qaeda's British recruits](#), The Sunday Times, 10 July 2005] – without ever questioning who gave them the authority to speak on our behalf or on behalf of Muslim communities. Such an approach fails to recognise that many thus labeled groups hold extremely regressive positions on women's human rights and the rights of other marginalised groups, such as gays and minorities such as Shias and Ahmadis/Qadanis. Meanwhile, parts of the global Left mistakenly see supposed 'moderates' as allies in the struggle against capitalism and Washington's global domination, has yet to be extradited to France.

WLUML fears that following the London bombings, certain politico-religious groups will seek to further this 'Unholy Alliance' which will increasingly invisibilise progressive believers and secularists in all Muslim contexts (including in Europe and North America).

Also, playing upon liberal guilt at the racist backlash to the attacks, we fear these extreme right groups may increase pressure for the passage of legislation creating the offence of 'religious hatred' already under consideration in the UK, and 'blasphemy laws' elsewhere. As WLUML has seen in our networking contexts, such laws are largely used to silence progressives and secularists, impose religious identity on people, and strengthen monolithic interpretations of religion.

Impact on Women

Women are likely to bear the brunt in several ways. In an overall context where all "Muslims" are constructed as potential terrorists, women also will be branded as part of extremist groups; at the same time, they will remain the target of fundamentalist forces within their own communities.

In the immediate aftermath of the bombings, the potential impact on women's rights within Muslim communities, especially migrant communities in the UK, was already visible. The president of the Muslim Association of Britain was prompt to warn: "women in headscarves, particularly, should be vigilant and avoid unnecessary journeys". Thus, racist violence is already being exploited to restrict women's mobility and further enforce gender segregation.

This creation of a siege mentality, along with the silencing of alternative voices, will make it all the more difficult for women within Muslim communities to speak out against patriarchal and regressive practices. Indeed, such developments will also backlash violently on women in other Muslim contexts: discriminatory moves are likely to be justified in the name of protecting "threatened Muslim values". Demands for separate family laws which are highly discriminatory towards women may increase under this guise. It is our experience that when politico-religious movements are legitimized in one context, this has a direct impact on the struggles for human rights in other contexts, crossing both boundaries of both geography and religion.



Finally, it is likely that civil liberties will be further curtailed in the UK following the attacks. This, too, by example will strengthen the power of governments in WLUML networking countries, which have opportunistically used their participation in the 'war on terror' to clamp down on progressive political opposition.

Ultimately, WLUML fears that the suppression of progressive opposition, the silencing of alternative voices and the enforced homogenization of Muslim communities both in Europe and elsewhere that are likely to result from the reaction to July 7's terrible bombings will feed into the agenda of the extreme politico-religious right. This may contribute to making future such atrocities more likely.



WLUML DRESS CODES EXHIBITION

Created in 2002, *Dress codes and modes – Women's dress in some Muslim countries and communities* looks at the diversities and commonalities of women's dress through space and time, highlighting the influence of many forces – class, status, region, work, religious interpretation, ethnicity, urban/rural, politics, fashion, climate...

The exhibition celebrates both this diversity and our historic as well as contemporary similarities.

Comprised of 20 large printed panels focusing on women's clothing in Muslim contexts generally, and then in 7 specific countries and regions:

Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Northern Nigeria, South Asia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the exhibition uses 250 images (paintings, drawings, photos), past and present, and over 85 quotations from a rich variety of sources plus some explanatory original text.

The exhibition is designed for WLUML networkers to display at events and conferences. This year the exhibition will form part of a larger exhibition of Muslim Women in the Arts in Malaysia this September-November.

If you would like to know more about the exhibition or if you would like to display it – do contact Caroline@wluml.org



Turkey Panels of the WLUML Dress Codes Exhibition
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