

**INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN
ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE DES FEMMES**

IAW website: <http://www.womenalliance.org>

**Equal Rights - Equal Responsibilities
Droits Égaux - Responsabilités Égales**

IAW NEWSLETTER April 2009, no. 4



Equal Rights

Dear members,

This time a longer and well written article on a resolution on religion, supported by IAW. If you like to read the resolution in full, just send mail to <iaw.newsletter@inter.nl.net> for an attachment.

The article can also be seen as background to recent news on women's human rights in Afghanistan and the Swat district in Pakistan.

Other issues are: a reminder of the IAW International Meeting in June in Switzerland, women's place in politics, illiteracy and education, recent appointments, the second IAW side event at CSW, equal sharing of responsibilities for the rural woman etc.

As usual you will find reports, events and actions at the end.

**WOMEN'S PLACE IN THE WORLD
POLITICS**

**Women marginalized in the global economy say women MPs
meeting at the 120th IPU Assembly**

More than 160 women legislators from over 120 countries have been attending the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians being held at the 120th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). They addressed the gender dimension of economic and financial crises and more particularly the role of women in ensuring financial stability and contributing to economic development.

Ms Azeb Mesfin, first lady of Ethiopia, Member of the Ethiopian Parliament and Chair of its Social Affairs Committee, recalled that women legislators in the region face common problems. "As parliamentarians, we demand a place at the table where laws are made to protect the political, economic and social rights of women. We must ask ourselves the following question:

- * Does the law guarantee women equal rights?*
- * Are women having equal access to education, health and other social services?*
- * Are programmes mainstreaming gender?*
- * Are we changing the behaviours and values of both men and women to bring about equality?*

Ms Mesfin underlined that this is critical as the region tackles the global economic crisis. "Even without the crisis, women are marginalized in the global economy. The current crisis will increase their labour, decrease their income, and negatively affect the health and wellbeing of their children." Parliamentarians underscored that the economic crisis has entrenched and even reinforced gender gaps and that the consequences for women will be dramatic.

However, while this is undoubtedly a time of crisis, it is perhaps also an opportunity to change and review discriminatory and outdated economic concepts. Women should also be involved at all levels of decision-making processes.

The Meeting of Women Parliamentarians also discussed the impact of climate change on women and women's political participation.

IPU - Established in 1889 and with Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, the IPU - the oldest multilateral political organization in the world - currently brings together 154 parliaments and eight associated regional assemblies.

The world organization of parliaments also has an Office in New York, which acts as its Permanent Observer to the United Nations.

Contact and information: Ms. Luisa Ballin, IPU Information Officer, e-mail: lb@mail.ipu.org and hy@mail.ipu.org - IPU website: www.ipu.org

Sent to us by: IAW secretary Lene Pind

RELIGION

UN Resolution on Defamation of Religions - supported by IAW

Women Living Under Muslim Laws Demand the Resolution on Combating Defamation of Religions be Revoked.

On **18 December 2007**, the **UN General Assembly adopted this resolution** recommended by its Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural), and long campaigned for by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which has a permanent delegation to the United Nations.

In **March 2009**, the **UN Human Rights Council once again passed the Resolution**, which urges the creation of laws in member states to prevent criticism of religion; while it makes specific mention of Islam, the laws could be applied to all religions and forms of belief.

Members of the Human Rights Council voted 23 in favour of the Resolution, 11 nations opposed the Resolution and 13 countries abstained.

Ahead of the vote, hundreds of secular, religious, media, women's and other groups from around the world appealed to the Council in Geneva to reject the proposals, which were introduced by the 56-nations of the OIC.

Civil society groups have expressed that the 'combating defamation of religion' Resolution may be used in certain countries to silence and intimidate human rights defenders, religious minorities and dissenters, and other independent voices. In effect this resolution has the potential to dramatically restrict the freedoms of expression, speech, religion and belief.

Item 12, which "Underscores the need to combat defamation of religions by strategizing and harmonizing actions at local, national, regional and international levels through education and awareness-raising", can be used to silence progressive voices who criticize laws and customs said to be based on religious texts and precepts.

Furthermore, this Resolution will have a disastrous effect on national laws in several countries that already stipulate they will comply with international treaties on human rights only if they do not prejudice laws said to derive from Islam.

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) maintains that this Resolution has no place in international law because only individuals – not concepts or beliefs – can be defamed.

After **meeting on 9 December 2008** in Athens, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Frank LaRue, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Miklos Haraszti, the OAS Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Catalina Botero, and the ACHPR (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, Faith Pansy Tlakula, released a **joint declaration on defamation of religions, and anti-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation**, in which they stated:

"The concept of 'defamation of religions' does not accord with international standards regarding defamation, which refer to the protection of reputation of individuals, while religions, like all beliefs, cannot be said to have a reputation of their own."

On International Women's Day 2009 the International Coalition of Women Human Rights Defenders, of which WLUML is a part, proclaimed in their statement:

"We stress the importance of the work done by women human rights defenders to document, monitor and provide protection for those under attack for their religion or belief as well as for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

We hold these two rights to be inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing and note that attempts to limit them on grounds of 'defamation of religion' will undermine existing standards, and hinder the work of defenders by legitimizing targeted attacks on them."

To adopt this Resolution would effectively place the tenets of religion in a hierarchy above the rights of the individual.

As the protection of fundamental human rights is at the forefront of the United Nations stated mission and mandate, we demand that the Resolution on 'Combating defamation of religions' be revoked and that the rights to freedom of expression and belief are upheld and championed by policy-makers and national governments.

On: [http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-564223](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-564223)

Human Rights Council - 10th Session - Agenda Item 9 - March 26, 2009

Draft resolution on: Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance, Follow-up to and Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

Sent to us by IAW President Rosy Weiss.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Swat Valley - Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: The teenage girl who was filmed being flogged by the Taliban in Pakistan's restive Swat valley has denied that the incident ever occurred in a statement made to government officials. Chand Bibi, the 17-year-old girl who was shown being held down by three men while a fourth flogged her, reportedly told the judge of a Qazi or Islamic court and Divisional Commissioner Syed Mohammad Javed yesterday that such an incident had never happened.

The incident was condemned in Pakistan and around the world and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani ordered an inquiry into it after TV channels last week aired the video of the girl being flogged. Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry too took suo moto notice of it and directed the interior secretary and other officials to appear before him to give an explanation.

The story by the North West Frontier

North West Frontier Province Information Minister Mian Iftikhar Hussain told The News daily that Chand Bibi had made a statement to the two officials who visited her village of Kala Killay in Kabal sub-division yesterday. Quoting the divisional commissioner, Hussain told the The News Daily the girl made it clear she was married to a man named Adalat Khan.

She refuted reports that both of them were flogged by the Taliban as punishment for having "illicit relations" and then forcibly married.

Hussain claimed a fake video had been used to tarnish the reputation of the people of Swat and to disrupt the peace process in the area. "We condemn the acts of repression against women... But the incident depicted in the videotape never took place in Swat," he said. He claimed the videotape was released as "part of a conspiracy to foil the peace agreement in Swat and put pressure on President (Asif Ali) Zardari not to sign" a regulation for implementing Islamic law in the region.

The story by the filmer

Meanwhile, the man who filmed the Taliban flogging Chand Bibi has said that the incident occurred about two weeks ago. Shaukat told Dawn News that the treatment meted out to the girl was actually a "punishment" for her refusing a marriage proposal from a militant.

The man who proposed to marry Chand Bibi joined the Taliban after the rejection and this was how he took revenge on the girl, Shaukat said.

Asked about the reaction of the people who had witnessed the incident, Shaukat said the people in Swat are so scared that no one has the courage to stand up and speak out against the Taliban and their verdicts.

National and International Outrage

The incident caused outrage in Pakistan where civil society and rights activists organised protests across the country.

The incident was also condemned by most political parties and religious scholars.

It was mentioned in international newspapers like the Guardian and the New York Times. In the Indian Times on: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/Pakistan/Now-Pak-girl-denies-being-fl>

Sent to us by IAW member Anjana Basu

Latest news, on the BBC radio:

President Zardari of Pakistan has signed the decree that allows sharia to be introduced in the Swat district. This after a motion in parliament urging him to do as he promised.

IAW does not accept this decree and will continue her campaign.

Afghanistan Law that discriminates against Women

[Afghanistan](#)'s president, Hamid Karzai, came under intense western pressure to scrap a new law that the UN said legalised rape within marriage and severely limited the rights of women.

At a conference on Afghanistan in The Hague, Scandinavian foreign ministers publicly challenged the Afghan leader. The US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, was reported to have confronted Karzai on the issue in a private meeting.

At a press conference after the meeting, Clinton made clear US displeasure at the apparent backsliding on women's rights. "This is an area of absolute concern for the United States. My message is very clear. Women's rights are a central part of the foreign policy of the Obama administration," she said.

Permission needed from husband?

UN, [human rights](#) activists and some Afghan MPs said it included clauses stipulating that women cannot refuse to have sex with their husbands, and can only seek work, education or visit the doctor with their husbands' permission.

International aid officials say the law violates both UN conventions and the Afghan constitution. It is widely seen as a political ploy by Karzai to win support from conservative Muslims in presidential elections scheduled for August.

See also: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/01/afghanistan-womens-rights-hamid-karzai>

Sent to us by IAW members Anjana Basu and Helen Self

Editor's comment: Karzai is under severe pressure to pull back the new law.

Latest news: Taliban killings in Afghanistan

Female politician

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) today strongly condemned the "vicious and deliberate" killing of a female politician on Sunday in Kandahar, calling it a "cowardly act." Sitara Achikzai was shot dead outside her home after leaving the provincial council in southern Afghanistan by two motorcyclists, according to media reports.

On: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30455&Cr=afghan&Cr1=>

Fatwa on a love affair couple

Governor Ghulam Dastageer Azad told the killings of a love affair couple followed a decree by local religious leaders and were an "insult to Islam". Mr Azad said: "An unmarried young boy and an unmarried girl who loved each other and wanted to get married had eloped because their families would not approve the marriage."

Officials said the couple were traced by militants after they tried to go to Iran. They were made to return to their village in Khash Rod district.

"Three Taliban mullahs brought them to the local mosque and they passed a fatwa (religious decree) that they must be killed. They were shot and killed in front of the mosque in public," the governor said.

On: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7997749.stm

EDUCATION

Illiteracy among Iraqi Women

With the illiteracy rate among Iraqi women twice as high as that of men and with women making up only 18 per cent of the country's labour force, a United Nations conference that opened in Baghdad has been seeking ways to improve the situation of women in the fledgling democracy.

Great disparities between men and women

According to information compiled by various UN agencies, some of the greatest disparities between women and men in Iraq are in the areas of literacy and labour force participation. Around 70 per cent of all illiterate Iraqis are women, and female illiteracy is particularly serious in 39 out of the country's 115 districts. In the area of work, women make up 82 per cent of all Iraqis outside the labour force. In the personal sphere, 1 in 10 Iraqi households are headed by women, more than 80 per cent of whom are widows. In addition, one in five married Iraqi women has been a victim of physical domestic violence, while one in three has been subject to emotional violence.

Recommendations

Organized by the human rights section of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq ([UNAMI](#)), the two-day conference is expected to set forth a series of recommendations to Iraq's Government and Parliament on issues holding back women's equality in the country.

It aims to set a strategy to improve women's political participation and to provide constitutional guarantees that address violence against women and the general impact of conflict. Participants at the meeting include high-level Iraqi officials and representatives from a number of human rights and women's organizations from around the region

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30236&Cr=iraq&Cr1=Pressure on Hamid Karzai to scrap Afghan women's law>

UNESCO - Dutch princess UN envoy on literacy

According to UNESCO, one in six adults is still not literate – two-thirds of them women – while 75 million children are out of school.

Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands was chosen as Special Envoy on Literacy for Development in recognition of her “outstanding commitment to the promotion of education and her profound dedication to the Organization's ideals and objectives”.

She has already worked closely with UNESCO to promote reading among children and young people, and participated in its 2008 Regional Conference in Support of Global Literacy in Europe.

The uncomfortable truth

At the nomination ceremony, Princess Laurentien also highlighted the need to work with developed nations to address the “uncomfortable truth” that a high proportion of adults in those countries do not have the skills required to meet the demands of daily life and work. In May she will travel to Brazil to participate in Confinte VI, a global conference organized by UNESCO on adult education.

More on: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30296&Cr=literacy&Cr1=>

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Council of Europe - Convention on domestic violence

There is a clear need for a Convention to prevent and combat domestic violence and other forms of violence against women and to protect and support the victims.

The Council of Europe is the first European organisation to tackle this problem head on by setting up the Ad Hoc Committee on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence which, beginning in April 2009, will start working on one or more legally binding instruments. On: <http://www.coe.int/t/DGHL/StandardSetting/Violence/>

IAW Representative at the Council of Europe: Anje Wiersinga

APPOINTMENTS

Former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark confirmed as new head of UNDP

The United Nations General Assembly unanimously approved Helen Clark of New Zealand as the new Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) for a term of four years.

Helen Clark was selected, amongst a group of excellent candidates, for her outstanding qualifications and numerous accomplishments in her long career, said Michelle Montas, the Secretary-General spokesperson, in an official statement.

Miss Clark has the needed leadership and international recognition that would allow her as the new Administrator to build on her predecessor's legacy. In addition, she will bring a strategic perspective coupled with fresh thinking and impetus for change.

On: <http://www.undp.org/>

First Australian woman Premier voted in - Anna Bligh

Australia had three women Premiers before, one in Western Australia, one in Victoria and Anna Bligh in Queensland, but they all took over when the incumbent Premier resigned or was deposed. Now Anna Bligh has made a great breakthrough with her Party being elected into office. Anna, who is quite young and very vigorous, is a descendant of Captain Bligh of Mutiny on the Bounty.

On: <http://www.thepremier.qld.gov.au/about/bio.aspx>

INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN

International Meeting - Switzerland - June 2009

A cordial invitation to Presidents/heads of our member organisations and to Board members to come to Switzerland in June for the [International Meeting of the International Alliance of Women 2009](#).

Other members of the IAW are welcome to attend as observers and participate in the "Tour de Suisse Féministe". More information on the IAW website: www.womenalliance.org
Deadline for registration, [hotel reservations](#), written reports etc. is May 1.

CSW 2009 - Side Event, 3 March, Church Centre.

„What does equal sharing of responsibilities mean for the rural woman?“

This meeting, organised by the Women's Working Group of the ad hoc group of INGOs at FAO, Rome, together with the Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division of FAO and IAW, represented one of the rare appearances of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation at a session of the Commission on the Status of Women. As such it already raised the interest of a great many women's organisations present in New York, sending well informed and interested representatives to attend the meeting.

Reviewing art. 14 of CEDAW

IAW was privileged to welcome Ms Marcela **Villarreal**, the Director of the Gender Division, who gave an inspiring introduction to the theme. By choosing the sharing of responsibilities and the situation of rural women, the Women's Working Group intended to critically review the implementation of art. 14 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) at the national level. This part of the programme was presented by speakers from like-minded sister organisations such as Soroptimist International, WAAGS, WILPF and the International Co-operative Alliance of Gender Equality Committee (ICA).

Conclusion

The meeting concluded with agreement that further work should be carried out in order to enforce art. 14 CEDAW and that the best possible way to do it was by taking advantage of the expertise and involvement of the Women's Working Group at FAO, Rome.

IAW's particular thanks go to our representative at FAO, Bettina Corke, for the excellent preparation of this meeting and her choice of outstanding speakers. She should have been in my place as moderator and we all missed her a lot!

Sent by IAW President Rosy Weiss

CSW Events

You can view archived video CSW events from this and previous years -

<http://www.un.org/webcast/SE2009>

Check out the IAW sponsored event *The Climate Change Negotiations — an Action Agenda* on 3 March 2009.

PUBLICATIONS - EVENTS - CONFERENCES - ACTIONS

European Women's Lobby - Sign the Petition!

In June 2009, Europeans will elect a new European Parliament and a new European Commission will be appointed. The "50/50 Campaign for Democracy" aims to ensure that women and men are equally represented among them. Many [prominent persons](#) from across Europe have already given their wholehearted support to the EWL 50/50 Campaign.

On: http://www.womenlobby.org/site/form_3.asp

IAW representative at the European Women's Lobby: Joanna Manganara

Free Burma's pro democracy prisoners - Sign the Petition!

The monks marching for democracy in Burma a couple of years ago were brutally attacked by the military regime. Many of them were locked away and since then been languishing in brutal Burmese prisons. Now brave ex prisoners and activists are pushing for the release of all political prisoners, including Nobel peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

The UN is finally beginning to get some out of jail. Sign a petition calling on UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to prioritise their release on:

http://www.avaaz.org/en/free_burma_prisoners/96.php/?CLICK_TF_TRACK

Sent by IAW secretary Lene Pind

Editor's note: AVAAZ is an international lobby group that calls on its members to lobby on issues of international importance and concern. Australia has a similar lobby group GetUp! which quickly built up a very active membership totalling more than the combined membership of all Australian political parties.

Define Religious Fundamentalists

Full AWID Publication on: <http://www.awid.org/eng/About-AWID/AWID-News/Shared-Insights-Women-s-rights-activists-define-religious-fundamentalisms>

Based on the responses of more than 1,600 individuals to AWID's survey in September 2007, and 51 in-depth interviews conducted by the AWID research team, this publication aims to explore how women's rights activists characterize religious fundamentalisms and to reach a better understanding of their views and experiences of the issue in various parts of the world.

62nd Annual DPI/NGO Conference on Disarmament

Mexico City, 9-11 September 2009, on: <http://www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/index.asp>

The gender of democracy matters

A democracy worth the name must have women's equality with men at its heart. Thus gender equality must be an explicit goal for democracy-building processes and institutions, says Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu.

On <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/idea/the-gender-of-democracy-matters>

Sent by IAW Member Soon Young-Yoon (well worth reading)

Note

We are sending this Newsletter as an attachment, saved in Word 97. Please be so kind to advise Pat Richardson if you know of any IAW members or affiliate/associate organisations with an e-mail address, so we can mail them this Newsletter too.

IAW Newsletter / News Flash : Joke Sebus

<iaw.newsletter@inter.nl.net>

International Women's News : Priscilla Todd (English)

<iaw.iwnews@womenalliance.org>

: Mathilde Duval (French)

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