

INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN  
ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE DES FEMMES

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

Equal Rights - Equal Responsibilities  
Droits Égaux - Responsabilités Égales

IAW NEWSLETTER January 2009, no. 1



Equal Rights

*Dear members,*

*One of the 10 promises of Barack Obama as President of the United States has been set into motion: "Close the Guantanamo Bay detention center". Please read the pledge of the new Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on acid attacks on girls and women. It is in line with the IAW action on the attacks and closing of schools for girls in the North of Pakistan.*

*At the other hand, there are also Imams (in Bangladesh) who are standing against all forms of violence against women at home, at school, at work or at street.*

*In this newsletter news and figures on AIDS in West-Africa. Orphaned children due to AIDS will certainly be one of the aspects of "Equal sharing of responsibility between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS", the main issue of CSW.*

*IAW representatives have been doing good work at the Human Rights Council, the European Women's Lobby and the Council of the EU.*

*Other good news too: Sylvie Lucas of Luxembourg was elected as the 65th President of the United Nations ([ECOSOC](#)), the second woman to lead the Council.*

*Events, Publications and some interesting websites are, as usual, at the end of the newsletter.*

## A NEW ADMINISTRATION FOR THE UNITED STATES

### **Hillary Clinton on women in foreign policy**

During Hillary Clinton's confirmation hearings she was asked by Barbara Boxer about violence against women. Senator Boxer referred to [acid attacks in Pakistan](#) and the column about the Cambodian teenager whose eye was gouged out by a brothel owner.

#### **Senator Clinton responded:**

I want to pledge to you that as Secretary of State, I view these issues as central to our foreign policy. Not as adjunct or auxiliary, or in any way lesser than all of the other issues we have to confront. I too have followed the stories that are exemplified by pictures.

It is heartbreaking beyond words that young girls are attacked on their way to school by Taliban sympathizers and members who do not want young women to be educated. They want to maintain an attitude that keeps women unhealthy, unfed, uneducated and this is something that results all too often in violence against these young women, both within their families and from the outside.

#### **This is criminal**

This is not culture. This is not custom. This is criminal. And it will be my hope to persuade more government — as I have attempted to do since I spoke at Beijing on these issues, you know, 13 and some years ago — that we cannot have a free, prosperous, peaceful, progressive world if women are treated in such a discriminatory and violent way.

I take very seriously the function of the State department to lead our government through the Office on Human Trafficking, to do all that we can to end this modern form of slavery. We have sex slavery, we have wage slavery, and it is primarily a slavery of girls and women. So I look also forward, Senator, to reviewing your legislation and working with you as a continuing partnership on behalf of these issues we care so much about.

This is a short version of an article by Nicholas Kristof, New York Times. More on:

<http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/author/nicholas-kristof/>

*See also Attacks with Acid later in this e-newsletter*

(Legislation. From the same website: Senator Boxer and Rep. Carolyn Maloney have introduced legislation that goes to this issue.

The International Women's Freedom Act of 2009 would create a U.S. Commission on International Women's Rights. The commission, modelled on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, would report to Congress and the President on the status of women worldwide.)

### **Obama and UNFPA**

More news from Nicholas Kristof: I hear that shortly after taking office, President Obama will restore American funding to the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) and end the "gag rule," which cut all U.S. funding for any organization that offered any information about abortion services, even in another country. These will be huge steps forward.

The Bush administration's refusal to support UNFPA and reproductive health groups has meant less family planning, more unwanted pregnancies and of course more abortions and maternal deaths. It has been a callous and counter-productive policy.

If anything, left and right should work together now to increase family planning programs, as the best way to reduce abortions and maternal deaths. It's a scandal that so many people in poor countries want help with family planning and can't get it.

By Nicholas Kristof on <http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/16/obama-and-unfpa/>

## **INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN**

*Statement submitted by Action Canada for Population and Development, Amnesty International, Center for Reproductive Rights, Center for Women's Global Leadership, DAWN, Family Care International, Federation for Women and Family Planning, Human Rights Watch, **International Alliance of Women**, International Planned Parenthood Federation—Western Hemisphere Region, International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP Asia Pacific), Ipas, and Physicians for Human Rights, all civil society organizations with ECOSOC status.*

This statement is specifically concerned with the **elimination of preventable maternal mortality and morbidity**. (*Editor's note: This statement is too long for the newsletter, so we introduce you only to part of paragraph 3*).

3. The organisations submitting this statement recommend detailed attention to the 15 Principles spelled out in the Programme of Action as relevant to the fulfillment of Millennium Development Goal 5 (MDG 5) on improving maternal health.

In this connection, we call particular attention to principles 1, 3, 4, and 8, which reaffirm the interconnections between human dignity and rights; the need to eliminate all kinds of violence against women and to ensure women's ability to control their own fertility; the importance of guaranteeing universal access to reproductive health services; and the fact that lack of development may not be invoked to justify the abridgement of human rights.

*Sent to us by Helene Sackstein, IAW representative at the Human Rights Council*

### **Commission on the Status of Women - CSW**

Please be so kind to e-mail IAW Secretary Lene Pind at <[iawsec@womenalliance.org](mailto:iawsec@womenalliance.org)> if you are attending the [53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women](#) (2 to 13 March 2009, in UN Headquarters, New York). *IAW President Rosy Weiss cordially welcomes you!*

### **Attacks with acid - maiming women and young girls - in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Cambodia**

KANDAHAR, [Afghanistan](#) — One morning two months ago, Shamsia Husseini and her sister were walking through the muddy streets to the local girls school when a man pulled alongside them on a motorcycle and posed what seemed like an ordinary question.

"Are you going to school?"

Then the man pulled Shamsia's burqa from her head and sprayed her face with burning acid. Scars, jagged and discoloured, now spread across Shamsia's eyelids and most of her left cheek. These days, her vision goes blurry, making it hard for her to read.

But if the acid attack against Shamsia and 14 others — students and teachers — was meant to terrorize the girls into staying home, it appears to have completely failed.

Today, nearly all of the wounded girls are back at the Mirwais School for Girls, including even Shamsia, whose face was so badly burned that she had to be sent abroad for treatment. Perhaps even more remarkable, nearly every other female student in this deeply conservative community has returned as well — about 1,300 in all.

More on: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/14/world/asia/14kandahar.html?scp=2&sq=&st=nyt>

*Sent to us by IAW member Anjana Basu*

### **BANGLADESH: Acid Attacks Continue Despite New Laws**

Acid attacks against women and girls are continuing despite legal campaigns to halt their spread. Over 2,600 cases have been reported since 1999, according to the Acid Survivors Foundation ([ASF](#)) of Bangladesh. Almost all the attacks have been on women or girls. Many of the victims are under 18, says ASF, which has been working to eliminate acid violence for almost a decade.

#### **Dowries, refusal of love proposals, land disputes**

The main reason for the violence is dowries, refusal of love proposals, or land disputes, ASF said. Bent on revenge, perpetrators throw acid into their victims' faces in an effort to severely disfigure them, often with horrifying results.

Nitric or sulphuric acid has a catastrophic effect on human flesh, ASF said, resulting in skin tissue melting, often exposing the bones below the flesh, and even dissolving bone.

Scarred for life and badly burned, many survivors also lose their sight in one or both eyes. Others are so psychologically traumatised they never recover.

#### **The poor and powerless do not go to court**

Despite the viciousness of these attacks, many go unreported: "Many incidents are never reported. [The] media covers only those cases that go to court," Rokhsana Akhter, an activist told IRIN in Dhaka, adding: "The poor and powerless do not go to court. Their cases remain unreported."

#### **Efforts to combat the crime have had limited success.**

In 2002, parliament enacted two laws against acid violence: Under the Acid Control Act of 2002, the unlicensed production, import, transport, storage, sale, and use of acid can result in a prison term of 3-10 years. Those who possess chemicals and equipment for the unlicensed production of acid can get the same prison term.

One doctor sounded an optimistic note: "Since then, acid violence has been showing a rapid decline," said Shamanta Lal Sen of the burns and plastic surgery unit at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

#### **A number of organisations are working to combat the crime, or mitigate its effects.**

ASF and the DMCH (Dhaka Medical College Hospital) are working to support victims of acid attacks. BRAC ([Building Resources Across Communities](#)), Bangladesh's largest NGO, offers survivors logistical assistance with access to health facilities. Legal aid organisations, such as [Ain o Salish Kendra](#), and the [Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association](#) provide legal aid to acid victims. Prothom Alo, a popular daily, raises funds for the treatment and rehabilitation of victims, as well as campaigning against the crime.

According to rights groups, apart from Bangladesh, acid attacks are common in a number of Asian countries, including Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and Cambodia.

More on: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82194>

*Sent to us by IAW President Rosy Weiss and IAW member Anjana Basu.*

### **Imams Movement for Women Rights**

PHREB is an outcome of an intensive study on violence against women and girls conducted by four young students Faridul Alam - Bangladesh, Peter Arnold Das - Netherlands, Sandra Wendlandt - Australia and Graham Edward Bradley - Canada. Through detailed fieldwork surveys in both rural and urban areas surrounding the Chittagong region, information was gathered regarding the types of violence, accessibility to social justice and information, causes of abuse and its impact on both women and girls in society.

#### **Imams**

The research found that if we can change the mindset of today's children and youth, we can make a difference in the present culture of violence against women.

The research found that some Mullahs (Islamic Leaders) and Patriarchal Society may use Islam as a tool to subjugate women. Other Imams may be very enlightened about concepts of gender equality within Islam.

### **Seminar Islam and Women's Rights**

To interpret Islam correctly for the benefit of women and girls, PHREB started involving enlightened Imams with its STOP Violence against Girls Program in December 2005.

On 14 December PHREB organized a Seminar titled Islam and Women Rights. 14 Imams from Chittagong Region Participated in this Seminar to discuss women's right to inherent property, gender equality, women's rights to participation and violence against women.

The Imams present in this seminar has agreed to work with PHREB in ending violence against women and girls.

Later PHREB and Imams created a network of individual, enlightened Imams, titled **Imams Movement for Women Rights**.

Since its inception, Imams have taken various initiatives to aware their followers about Early Marriage, Domestic Violence, Sexual Abuse, Girls and Children Trafficking, Birth & Marriage Registration, Dowry and women's inherent right to property etc. Currently 140 Imams are involved with this Mosque and community based Religious Campaign for Women Rights and Freedom.

Imams Movement for Women Rights Network is increasing day-by-day by with more moderate and intellectual religious leaders in the southern part of Bangladesh. The success of this network is huge. The Imams are standing against all forms of violence against women at home, at school, at work or at street. Imams are creating mass awareness among men and women through mosque based weekly speech (Friday Speech) and Community based religious gathering (waj mahfil). ***The imams are reaching about 100,000 people every week with their Friday Speeches.***

## **EUROPEAN UNION**

### **European Women's Lobby - EWL**

The IAW representative of the EWL and European co-ordinator, *Joanna Manganara*, has mailed interesting information from the EWL to all IAW Board Members in the EU.

For example:

- \* the establishment of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights;
- \* focussing on fundamental rights *within* the EU;
- \* the development of the Lisbon Treaty.

### **Council of Europe**

Also interesting is information from the Council of Europe by IAW representative *Anje Wiersinga*:

- \* a Declaration of the Conference of INGOS (including IAW), the need to set up a legally binding European convention to combat and prevent violence against women;
- \* a list of subjects under discussion by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe with a possible gender equality aspect.

### **Election EU Parliament: June 2009**

*This is a big opportunity for IAW members in the EU to ask relevant questions on gender equality for the election of the candidates for the European Parliament! Please contact your national President or mail IAW secretary Lene Pind <iawsec&womenalliance.org> for information.*

### **European Parliament gives Working Time opt-outs the red card**

On December 17, an absolute majority of Members of the EU Parliament (MEPs, 421 to be exact) said there must be no exceptions to the 48-hour maximum working time calculated over a reference period of 12 months. They added that the opt-outs of the UK and some new Member States must end three years after the directive is adopted, and insisted that any period of on-call time should count as working time.

This vote contradicts the agreement obtained in the Council on June 9. A conciliation committee, gathering representative from the Council, the Parliament and the Commission should therefore gather in order to reach a common version of the working time directive.

*More on :* The [European Parliament's press release](#)  
*ETUC's reaction:* "[Social Europe is alive and well](#)"

## CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD

### **Children in West Africa - is it trafficking or what?**

The nearly one-million dollar initiative led by UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and NGOs Plan International, Save the Children Sweden, and Terre des Hommes will conduct national and regional workshops and focus groups to produce a 2010 report on the reasons behind children's regional migration.

### **Hundreds of thousands of children to take on risky jobs ?**

Despite most West African governments having ratified the 2000 Convention, and some passing laws criminalising trafficking, rights organisations estimate hundreds of thousands of children continue making precarious journeys to take on risky jobs throughout West Africa.

Not all are trafficked, according to IOM director, Ambassador William Lacy Swing at a November migration conference in Dakar. Some may instead be economic or environmental migrants, internally displaced people or refugees.

### **Different Opinions ?**

Largely absent from the planning documents of the project, "Mobility of children and youth in West Africa," is the word trafficking.

Rather, partners undertaking the study in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Togo speak of regional mobility.

### **Not necessarily trafficking victims**

"Children have been moving around the region for centuries and working just as long. That is the cultural reality here," said Feneyrol, regional adviser for the West Africa office of non-profit organisation Terre des Hommes. "Some of that movement and work is dangerous.

For years, we have approached this problem as a fight against trafficking, but this has not really benefited children.

We have to move beyond focusing exclusively on trafficking to a more global strategy where we take into account children's reality."

### **Thousands of children are on the move**

Feneyrol said thousands of children on the move are uncounted while repatriated ones are not necessarily trafficking victims. "Just because they are working in a stone quarry in Nigeria does not mean they are a victim of trafficking. Breaking up stones can be less tiring and abusive than the agricultural work they did on their farms in the village."

He said it is not always in the child's best interest to return home. "They are too old to enter school. They come from large families that cannot afford to raise them and there is no way to earn a living wage where they came from, which is why they left."

### **Don't be soft !**

Antonio Mazzitelli, the West Africa director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) – which is part of a regional anti-trafficking working group along with the mobility project's five collaborators – said his office supports the proposed mobility study, but cautioned researchers against softening the stance against trafficking or child labour.

*Selections from:* <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82225>

*Sent to us by IAW member Helen Self.*

### **Aids Orphans**

Worldwide, it is estimated that more than 15 million children under 18 have been orphaned as a result of AIDS. Around 11.6 million of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa. In countries badly affected by the epidemic such as Zambia and Botswana, it is estimated that 20 percent of children under 17 are orphans - most of whom have lost one or both parents to AIDS.

Even with the expansion of [antiretroviral treatment access](#), it is estimated that by 2015, the number of orphaned children will still be overwhelmingly high.

The number of orphans in some sub-Saharan African countries exceeds half a million, and, in some countries, children who have been orphaned by AIDS comprise half or more of all orphans nationally.

*More on:* <http://www.avert.org/aidsorphans.htm>

## UNITED NATIONS

### **Luxembourg diplomat elected to lead UN Economic and Social Council in 2009**

Ambassador Sylvie Lucas of Luxembourg was elected as the 65th President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)), making her the second woman to lead the world body's principal organ responsible for coordinating work in these critical fields.

### **Three women Ambassadors**

Ms. Lucas will be assisted by four Vice-Presidents who were also elected today: Carmen Maria Gallardo Hernandez of El Salvador, Tiina Intelmann of Estonia, Hamidon Ali of Malaysia and Somduth Soborun of Mauritius. This is the first time in the history of the 54-member Council that its Bureau will be led by three women Ambassadors.

More on: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=29561&Cr=mdg&Cr1>

## **EVENTS - CONFERENCES - INTERESTING WEBSITES - PUBLICATIONS**

**CEDAW** - Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, forty-third session, Geneva 19 January - 6 February 2009.

Interesting **worldwide news**, in English, can be found on <http://wordpress.org/hosting/> or <http://www.opensource.org/>

### **Obama's People**

A website on Obama's top advisers, aides and members of administration, with pictures, on: <http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/magazine/2009-inauguration-gallery/index.html>

The 2009 edition of **UNICEF's flagship publication** – "[The State of the World's Children](#)" – adds that a child born in a developing country is almost 14 times more likely to die during the first month of life than a child born in a developed one. On: [http://www.unicef.org/sowc/index\\_47139.html](http://www.unicef.org/sowc/index_47139.html)

The General Assembly President's Commission of Experts on Reforms of the **International Monetary and Financial System** held its first meeting in New York on 4-6 January 2009. The next meeting will be held from 8-10 March in Geneva

### **The Road to Doha - December 2008 Issue**

On: [http://www.un-ngls.org/site/article.php?id\\_article=668](http://www.un-ngls.org/site/article.php?id_article=668) Website on: [www.un-ngls.org/doha2008](http://www.un-ngls.org/doha2008)

### **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)	<aifnfi@womenalliance.org>
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