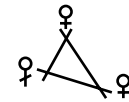


CSBR E-NEWS

Sexuality in Muslim Societies



WWHR New Ways

CONFRONTING SEXISM IN MALAYSIAN PARLIAMENT

How many of us can say that we have never been blamed for being “too sensitive” or were never brushed off because we simply did not get the “amusing” part of a sexist joke?

The sexism encountered on the street or in the workplace has recently invaded the seats of Parliament in Malaysia. Toni Kasim from Sisters in Islam (SIS) in Malaysia informs us about the MPs who are evidently unable to make politics without mentioning virginity, women’s bodies or menstrual cycles.

Continued on page 3



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RESEARCHING NON-NORMATIVE SEXUALITIES

Comparative research project of the Kartini Network for Women and Gender Studies in Asia discovers that widowed / divorced women in India and Indonesia are often victims of various forms of violence, though at the same time, widowhood / divorce opens up new possibilities of sexual autonomy for women. *Continued on page 4*

CSBR MET IN ISTANBUL



CSBR General Assembly met in Istanbul in April 2007.

Participating members of the Coalition not only brainstormed for days to identify the priority areas for the Coalition’s upcoming three year work plan, but also had fun and definitely did much dancing and singing too.

Among the imminent actions devised during the **Strategic Planning Meeting** was to hold an international simultaneous “One Day One Struggle” campaign on pertinent sexual rights issues in member countries. *Continued on Page 2*



ACTION ALERT



Shamial Raj, a transsexual man from Pakistan, and his wife Shahzima Tariq appealed to the High Court in Lahore to stop the

harassments they have been subject to. Upon disclosure of Shamial’s transsexuality, the court turned the case against the couple and sentenced them to 3 years for perjury on the basis of lying about Shamial’s “true” gender.

Shamial and Shahzima are currently held in separate facilities despite their request to be together. CSBR joined in the international efforts to support the couple. Shamial and Shahzima need our support letters to remember that they are not alone! Please send your letters to Nighad Saeed Khan who is visiting the couple on a regular basis at: nskhan@brain.net.pk

CSBR GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING HELD IN ISTANBUL

This January CSBR will join powers for One Day One Struggle!

The Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies held a very exciting Strategic Planning Meeting in Istanbul on April 26 - 29, 2007. 24 of the 38 organizational members from Algeria, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Lebanon, Malaysia, Pakistan, Palestine, the Philippines, Tunisia, and Turkey were present at the meeting. Our discussions on the sociopolitical context and sexuality revealed increasing religious conservatism and fundamentalisms as an overarching emerging concern. We also discussed how advocates have to overcome the stigmatization of “being complicit in the Western Scheme,” as sexual rights are often regarded in our regions as a Western imposed agenda. The members identified priority areas for the Coalition’s upcoming three year work plan:

To raise awareness on sexual rights, we decided to launch a simultaneous campaign entitled “One Day, One Struggle” on pertinent sexual rights issues in member countries in January 2008. In each country members will hold an action (meeting, demonstration, exhibition, panel etc), and all the actions will be documented and compiled for a final product by the Coalition, which will be disseminated internationally.



A capacity building workshop on sexuality and sexual rights will be organized for Coalition members in summer of 2008. The objectives will include solidifying our common language, improving our advocacy skills, and developing a theoretical framework from which we can build our training potential.

An international comparative research on sexual and bodily rights is launched. Identified research areas include documenting and investigating the emergence of new movements and spaces for sexuality-based advocacy, looking at backlashes and analyzing sexuality discourses, and documentation and analysis of legal reforms on the national level. The research is expected to be completed and by the end of 2009.

Participants agreed to continue international advocacy and networking by partaking in International Platforms, both UN and non-UN, through the organization of panels and side events as the Coalition. CSBR decided to continue with the e-newsletter as it provides a good tool for regular information sharing, as well as for external use to publicize our efforts.

“The overarching emerging concern of network members was the increasing religious conservatism and fundamentalisms.”

INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA

ORGANIZED BY HELEM IN LEBANON

Helem, the first LGBT rights organization in Lebanon, organized the International Day against Homophobia (IDAHO) on the 12th May 2007 in Beirut for the third consecutive year. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community in Lebanon, and in many other countries, faces complex layers of oppression, where legal, economic, and social factors contribute to long-ingrained historical marginalization.



Helem was founded in 2004 as a voice calling for tolerance in Lebanon, and has quickly become a regional reference for LGBT rights. In order to achieve public support in a society that still condemns homosexuality as a shameful crime and taboo, Helem wanted to conduct a large-scale awareness campaign that would carry gradual messages of tolerance and diversity. To this end, the international day against homophobia events included a supporters’ exposition, a poster competition for designs depicting homophobia, and various discussion panels on topics including the culture of discrimination and fighting homophobia.

WHEN LAW-MAKERS ARE SO BLATANTLY SEXIST

BY TONI KASIM, SISTERS IN ISLAM, MALAYSIA

When a young, female Member of Parliament (MP) posed a question in Parliament recently about the leaking ceiling in the building, two male Members of Parliament chose to make a non-sequitur sexist comment about her menstrual cycles instead of answering the question at hand. They asked why she was concerned with the leak, when she herself 'leaked every month'.

What was equally disgusting was the reaction of various members of the House – although some members spoke out strongly against the behavior of their fellow Parliamentarians, most kept silent while others, including the Deputy Prime Minister, brushed these comments off as jokes and as a conspiracy of the opposition. In fact, when women's groups spoke out against the long trend of sexism and sexist comments in Parliament, several MPs used the age-old strategy of minimizing women's voices, i.e. by referring to them as being 'emotional'.

The women's groups organized a protest outside the Women's Ministry to demand an apology for the sexist comments, the suspension of the two offending MPs and that the Government ensures a high level of gender sensitivity amongst the elected members. It was a good show of solidarity that representatives from human rights groups, student groups, political parties and other civil society groups joined the protest, where various members of NGOs and political parties made speeches denouncing sexism in Parliament. Toni was also interviewed on a live morning talk show on this together with another Member of Parliament who maintained that the whole issue was a storm in a teacup and that it was unlikely that this would repeat in Parliament. The two MPs were eventually instructed to issue a public apology, which they did, but their apology was viewed by many as a 'half-baked' and insincere. No further action has been taken, and the hope presumably was that this would be laid to rest.



“Women protesting sexist remarks”,
Malaysia

However, barely three days after the two MPs were directed to make an apology, yet another MP, this time the Minister of Works, likened the poor conditions of the ageing Parliament building to the looks of an ageing 50 year woman! The Minister though is no 'virgin' to sexist comments. In 2006, he made the remarkable architectural observation of toilets being like 'virgin brides'. And a day after that, two state assemblymen from a northern state blamed women and their clothing – again – for the sexual harassment they face.

The tip of the sexist parliamentarian iceberg

What is disappointing is that these are really the tip of the sexist Parliamentarian iceberg. The bigger tragedy though is that in trying to make excuses for the sexist behavior of the MPs in question, the Government failed to take firm action against these elected members and in so doing failed women once again. The sins of commission are as grave as the sins of omission and by treating the matter lightly with no more than a telling off, the Government has given MPs a *carte blanche* to demean women and entrench misogyny.

It is shameful that Malaysia proudly announces that it has ratified the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women but at the same time allows sexism to flourish in the highest decision-making body of the country.

Considering women form the majority of voters and that MP's fate literally lies in the hands of women, it is perplexing how these elected members don't seem to have any compunction in degrading the people who put them in Parliament. Elections are just round the corner.

If voters have put them in, voters can get them out. Perhaps the only way civil society groups will be able to send a strong message to these male chauvinist elected members is to ensure that they do not get voted in again. This way they will not have to say sorry the next time. They will just *be* sorry when we collectively get rid of them.

“In trying to make excuses for the sexist behavior of the MPs in question, the Government failed to take firm action against these elected members and in so doing failed women once again.”

NON-NORMATIVE SEXUALITIES: A COMPARATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT IN NEW DELHI AND JAKARTA.

The Kartini Network for Women and Gender Studies in Asia has completed the research phase of a project on non-normative sexualities in India and Indonesia. The need for this project emerged from the limited knowledge of sexual practices in the Asian region. Most of the preceding research has focused on issues of reproductive health and family planning due to strong taboos around sexuality. The non-normative sexualities research and advocacy project, however, breaks through these taboos. First and foremost, the research and analysis of non-normative sexual practices and behaviors brings to the limelight hitherto marginalized expressions of sexuality and stimulates a debate on the rights of these minorities. In addition, it proposes strategies of empowerment for these groups.

In India and Indonesia, small groups of researchers carried out research on three groups of marginalized women (widowed/divorced women, young lesbians, and sex workers). The broad objective of the oral history project is to interrogate the issues of sex, secrecy and the denial of women's sexuality within a perspective of human rights and women's sexual rights. The oral history is complemented with historical research into pre-colonial sexual regimes and media analysis.

The researchers brought to light some important issues. They discovered that in both countries widowed/divorced women are often victims of various forms of violence, though at the same time, widowhood/divorce opens up new possibilities of sexual autonomy for women. They also looked at young self-identified lesbians in both countries and investigated the ways in which they have to negotiate between a global rights discourse, and the relative safety that the tradition of silence allowed an older generation. Finally, a historical analysis of pre-colonial sexual regimes shed light on strategies that have been effectively used to disempower women, such as the introduction of homophobia and the domestication of women. For a more comprehensive summary of the research go to:

www.wwhr.org/apik_research.pdf

Reference: Nursyahbani Katjasungkana & Dr. Saskia Wieringa

Attitudes Towards the Status and Rights of Palestinian Women in Israel by Women Against Violence (WAV), Palestine



We are pleased to announce the most recent research publication of Women Against Violence (WAV): **Attitudes Towards the Status and Rights of Palestinian Women in Israel**. WAV representative Aida Touma Slima informed us that this book was published as part of their Women's Rights Project.

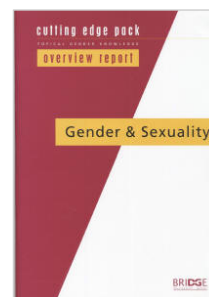
Since the beginning of 2005, Women Against Violence has been conducting an extensive research report on prevailing opinions and

attitudes towards Palestinian women in the Palestinian community in Israel. WAV aimed to elicit true and candid responses throughout the research process, the recording and analyzing of which will provide a better understanding of the current situation of Palestinian women in Israel. WAV sees this research as a resource to prioritize and focus their actions for a substantial societal change, and they expect that others too will find "Attitudes Towards the Status and Rights of Palestinian Women in Israel" useful in their own forward-looking work.

The research book is available in English, Arabic and Hebrew. To get a copy of the book, please contact Women Against Violence (WAV) at info@wavo.org for ordering information.

BRIDGE: "Cutting Edge Pack on Gender and Sexuality" by Pinar Ilkcaracan and Susan Jolly

BRIDGE released a **Cutting Edge Pack on Gender and Sexuality** in February 2007. It is a great comprehensive resource including both an overview report by Pinar Ilkcaracan of WWHR – New Ways and Susan Jolly from Bridge providing analyses of current issues and debates around sexuality and recommendations to promote sexual rights, as well as a resource collection with case studies, tools, and resource materials.



Sexuality can bring misery through sexual violence, HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality, female genital mutilation, or marginalization of those who break the rules, such as non-macho men, single women, widows who re-marry, sex workers, people with same-sex sexualities, and transgender people. Sexuality can also bring joy, affirmation, and well-being. How can we make possible more joy and less misery? Gender and Sexuality pack hopes to inspire thinking on this question. The pack is a concise resource consisting of an Overview Report outlining the main issues, examples of innovative practice and recommendations; a Supporting Resources collection, including summaries of new ideas, case studies, online resources and contact details for relevant organizations. The pack can be downloaded free from the BRIDGE website:

http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports_gend_cep.html#sexuality.

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT ON SEXUAL AND BODILY RIGHTS IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES IS LAUNCHED

A comparative research project has been launched based on the emerging need identified by the Coalition for knowledge and resource production.

Since the founding of the Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies in 2001, the regions of Middle East/North Africa and South/South East Asia have witnessed the rise of religious right movements which, combined with increased tensions at the global level (particularly between countries of the West and the Muslim world), is constraining the already limited space for advocacy on sexual and bodily rights.

Participants in the comparative research project have expressed the need for research to investigate, document and analyze initiatives and developments that have taken place on a variety of particular rights and freedoms in their particular domestic contexts. From the academic perspective, the insider activist voice still rarely speaks for herself in research and scholarship on these issues. It was originally conceived that the comparative research project would share the positive experiences of certain initiatives as well as the lessons that may be learned from less immediately successful efforts, increase the visibility of organizations working across the regions to

promote sexual and bodily rights, and broaden the range of alliances working for change. The output of an academic publication would provide an unprecedented resource for policy-makers and activists, as well as academics, in both the North and the South, on an area that is as potentially inclusive as it is challenging.

An initial brainstorming meeting was held in Istanbul on April 24-25th, 2007, just before the strategic planning meeting of the Coalition. The brainstorming meeting was dedicated to the memory of Nasreen Huq, who passed away the previous year. The brainstorming meeting was attended by the Coalition members interested individually or organizationally in participating in the research project from Tunisia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Lebanon, Pakistan, Palestine, Bangladesh, and Turkey.



Brainstorming Meeting, Istanbul

“From the academic perspective, the insider activist voice still rarely speaks for herself in research on issues related to rights and freedoms”

UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

CSBR members issued an NGO statement at the 51st session of CSW on behalf of the Coalition

The fifty-first session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women took place from 26 February to 9 March 2007, at the UN Headquarters in New York. In accordance with its multi-year program of work for 2007-2009, this year the Commission considered **“The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child”** as its priority theme. The CSBR delegation included representatives from Egypt, Tunisia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Turkey. Also, Pinar Ilkkaracan of WWHR – New Ways was appointed to the Government Delegation of Turkey.

Combating the conservative approaches and the backlash, CSBR members, in collaboration with other NGOs followed all the formal and informal hearings of the sessions on Agreed Conclusions and Resolutions, developed strategies for lobbying relevant stakeholders, recommended amendments and new language for the promotion of girl children’s human rights. The CSBR members also issued an NGO statement on behalf of the Coalition. Since Pinar Ilkkaracan was in the government delegation, WWHR- New Ways had the chance to raise recommendations through the Turkish Government Delegation and other government delegations that worked in cooperation. As a result, Turkey was one of the most progressive and active delegations during the negotiations, making significant contributions to the adoption of the strong Agreed Conclusions.

The meeting concluded with a great success in including progressive demands by the NGOs, with a human rights and gender equality perspective. The gains in the Outcome Document of the session included strong references to girls’ human rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, girls’ empowerment, universal access to education including sexual education, and the allocation of resources by member states to promote girls’ human rights.

“The 51st session concluded with a great success in including progressive demands by the NGOs, with a human rights and gender equality perspective.”

COMMEMORATION OF THE 1ST DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF NASREEN HUQ

Nasreen Huq was an indefatigable human rights activist, and a great friend to many of us. At the past Strategic Planning Meeting for the Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies, we had a chance to commemorate Nasreen, and we dedicated our Comparative Research Meeting to her memory. Also, Action Aid Bangladesh celebrated the life of Nasreen Huq with a three-day commemoration event organized on April 22nd -24th, 2007.



Nasreen at Law & Sexuality Meeting, 2005

The events included the commencement of 'Nasreen Memorial Awards', various discussion panels, and cultural shows including a performance by Panchamsur, a music group formed by Nasreen. She will remain dear to our hearts and her inspiration will keep us going further.

Visit our Website at

www.wwhr.org

Prepared by
WWHR - New Ways

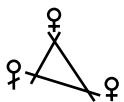
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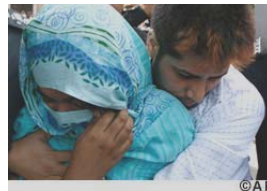


WWHR New Ways

JUSTICE FOR WHOM?:HIGH COURT FAILS PAKISTANI COUPLE

BY SINEM GOKNUR, WWHR-NEW WAYS, TURKEY

In September 2006 Shahzima Tariq and Shamial Raj were married in a medium-large city in Pakistan. Since they were mutually committed to each other and determined to spend their lives together, this was to them the most 'natural' thing to do. However, this decision was contested by Shahzima's father Tariq Hussain who was determined to marry Shahzima to someone whom he owed a considerable debt.



Shahzima and Shamial in front
of the Court, Lahore.

After the marriage, Tariq Hussain and the rest of Shahzima's family continued to harass them and filed several charges against Shamial Raj. The newlyweds approached a lower court in Faisalabad and the court decided in their favour since they provided their marriage certificate and both of them were adults. The family continued to harass them to a point where they thought that their lives might be at stake.

Shahzima and Shamial finally came to Lahore and went to the High Court to put a stop to the harassment. When Shahzima's father Tariq Hussain appeared at the court and disclosed Shamial as a "woman", all hell broke loose. Shamial is a transsexual man who has already gone through a sex reassignment process including removal of his uterus and breasts and hormonal therapy. Transsexuality is still a taboo in many countries around the world and the pertaining laws are ambiguous because the condition contravenes the commonly held binary understanding of gender. Upon Tariq Hussain's disclosure, the court ordered Shamial to undergo a medical examination. The doctors, largely unaware of transsexuality, presented a confusing report, which concluded that Shamial

was in fact a "woman." Shamial and Shahzima are currently sentenced to 3 years in jail for perjury on the basis of lying about Shamial's "true" gender.

In an ideal world, this case would challenge the notion of 'love' being a privilege to be enjoyed by only certain groups of people; it would initiate a societal debate about the confining nature of

gender norms and would consider the true complexity of gender identities. The case could be used to debunk patriarchal notions of family, which, as in this case, allow a father to feel justified in using his daughter to pay off his debt. However, the local and international media have turned a blind eye on all of these factors, and have presented the couple's story in the most sensationalized ways, further pushing them into isolation and alienation. Unfortunately, transsexuality is still such a taboo and "shocking" subject that Shamial's gender identity has overwhelmed every other aspect of the couple's story, including Shahzima's bravery in standing up to her family and society in choosing to be with the person she loves.

Shamial and Shahzima are admirable for their courage and their case reminds us that denying justice to women and transgender people is still common practice. They are currently imprisoned in separate facilities in Pakistan, despite their request to be together. Please let them know they are not alone by sending your support letters to Nighad Saeed Khan who is visiting the couple on a regular basis at nskhan@brain.net.pk.