

*Centenary of 8th
March, International
Women's Day,
Gothenburg, Sweden*

*Against Political Islam,
for Secularism*

*In Solidarity with Imprisoned
Iranian activists*

In commemoration of 8 March centennial, OWL organised a conference against religious and traditional misogynist practices. Veteran women's rights activists, secularists, experts in socio-therapeutical work, aiding victims of violence, and artists came together on 7th March 2008 to make a memorable evening in defence of women's rights and secularism, and against political islam, Islamist offensive and new wave of religious surge.



Speakers in the conference were **Homa Arjmand**, Coordinator of Campaign against Sharia Law, Canada;

Diba Ali khani, women's right activist and organiser of 8 March events in Sanandaj, Iran;

Rasool Awla, Sociologist and psychologist, from Organization of Men against Violence against Women;

Maria Hagberg, social worker and the chair for a shelter for girls threatened by "honor violence";

Iraj Janati Ataei, poet, playwright and human rights activist;

Azar Majedi, Chair of Organisation for Women's Liberation- Iran;

Houzan mahmoud, spokes-woman Organisation of Women's Freedom-Iraq;

Sara Mohammad, Chair of Never Forget Pela and Fadme (two victims of honour killings.);

Mitra, Iranian modern choreographer and dancer, performing a dance entitled Freedom.

Annie Sugier, Human rights activist, Chemist, member of the French Institute for Radiological protection and Nuclear Security, and chairperson of The



Mitra

International Union for Women's Rights (La Ligue du Droit International des Femmes);

Parvin Kaboli, Moderator, International Campaign in Defense of Women's Rights-Iran.

The conference started with words from Parvin Kaboli and Azar Majedi. Parvin reviewed the 100 year struggle of women's liberation movement and the

The speakers from different countries contributed to the discussions by expressing their experiences and thoughts. The main issue addressed by all the speakers was the importance of secularism as one of the main pillars in the movement for women's liberation and a free society. Condemning sexual apartheid as the discriminatory system against women with reference to anti apartheid movement in South Africa was another common point in speakers' talks. Annie Sugier suggested that countries with practice of sexual



Iraj Janati Ataei



A break and a chat!

necessity of removing the obstacles for the success of the movement. Azar focused on the importance of international solidarity of secularist movements in defense of women's

rights. She also emphasized the vital position of women's liberation movement in Iran and the Middle East, specially the role of women's organizations in Iran and Iraq. Azar added that Y e n a r Mohammad, the

famous women's activist in Iraq was actually in Iraq for the 8th March celebrations.

apartheid should not be allowed to partake in this year's Olympic Games. The presence of such line up of activists gave the conference a momentum which brought all nearer to each other in their struggle for women's liberation in an international scale. In her closing statement, Azar Majedi said: "This was a very educational conference. However we must not stop here. We have to put many of the ideas discussed here into practice. We have to build an international movement in defense of women's rights and secularism for freedom and equality".

There were cultural programmes during the conference, namely poetry, dance and showing of documentary films about 8th March celebrations in 2004 in the city of Sanandaj where Diba Alikhani had made speeches.



Maria Hagberg



Annie Sugier

In Gothenburg an international feminist and secular force is being set up

An article by *Annie Sugier*, chairwoman of The International Union for Women's Rights (*La Ligue du Droit International des Femmes*)

At last an international feminist secular united force displaying its rejection of cultural relativism is being set up in Gothenburg.

A meeting was held in the outskirts of the city, in a hall above a supermarket. It was a late grey rainy afternoon.

Little by little, at the appointed time, the hall filled up. It was not crowded. However there were 150 people for sure, mostly Iranian exiles if I am not mistaken. The hall looked dull, worn out, just like my morale when I arrived, despite the bunches of flowers and the metal bar inlaid with flashy lights that cut out the space above the tribune, in expectation of a dance interlude which was announced on the programme.

To mark the 8th of March anniversary OWL (Organisation for the Liberation of Women – Iran) had organised an international conference “against religious and misogynist practices” which was to be held in Gothenburg, Sweden. It would be the continuation of the international meetings of Montreuil (France) held in February 2007.

As Azar Majedi, chairwoman of OWL, pointed out, time is short “faced on the one hand with the offensive of the Islamic movement on women’s rights, let alone their lives, not only in Islamic regimes but also in western countries, and on the other hand on the international campaign led to promote Sharia as a law. It is a matter of great urgency. We ought to be able to mobilise a world-wide force to counterattack political Islam. Promoting secularism to protect women’s rights and their safety is a matter of urgency. Secularism is an essential foundation of a society from which misogyny would be excluded”.



Rasool Awla



Azar Majedi



Parvin Kaboli



Azar Majedi and the Press



Houzan Mahmoud

The guests came from all over the world: Great Britain, Canada, Iraq, Kurdistan, France, and Sweden. They spoke in Persian, English and Swedish. For lack of time the organisers did not always translate what was said at the tribune, which was sometimes frustrating. It mattered little. The guests asked their neighbours to explain and clapped their hands trusting the others. There was also a dance in honour of freedom featuring black veils. Poems were read out. A very young girl from Iran ended the evening with her pianist singing one single song as “the piano was too out of tune”.

The piano being out of tune was not relevant and yet it was meaningful as it showed the necessity to build, by dint of human warmth, what the place could not give us. One of the main things was also the few hours before the conference, during which we, the speakers who had arrived there in advance, talked about what we could do together to go beyond a simple conference. We explained our plans, the petitions, the next appointments, the points which were not clear and which could be discussed (for instance is the veil which some do not want to see in public areas any more the one which covers the face or the one which leaves the face visible but covers the body down to the toes?). We wrote together a draft resolution liaising secularism and women’s rights and which identifies priority actions: action against the attempts to impose Sharia, against crimes called “honour crimes”, which should not be called “honour crimes” any more, action on the issue of limiting the wearing of the veil, on the extension of the Geneva convention to violence against women, on the analogy between apartheid and segregation imposed on women and on the symbolic value of the Olympic Games in this Olympic year. This text, which is still a rough copy, will circulate to be submitted to our different organisations before being presented to the Rome Conference this summer.

Thus Azar Majedi was able to announce as an introduction that “the international secular force, whose creation was the topic of this conference, could be set up on the basis of a manifesto which is being written and which aims in particular the Middle-East and is addressed to the political authorities”. She stressed that “This movement will gather forces that have existed and been fighting for years but often without a common plan of action. The ambition is continuity in action”.

Houzan Mahmoud referred to the dramatic degradation of women’s situation in Iraq and reminded that “what



Diba Ali khani

was to fight was not only Sharia as a law, but also the Islamic code of ethics. In Iraq the government wants to impose quotas to make women more visible on the political stage. But what difference does that make when in reality women are second-rate citizens because of this code of ethics which presses on all of everyday's gestures?"

The audience was greatly moved when Diba Ali Khani, from Iran, showed a video on the meetings held in her country in spite of the mullahs' oppression, in halls crowded with men and women to celebrate the 8th of March. It was amazing. The woman's courage was touching. The men's attentive eyes were moving too.



Homa Arjomand

Homa Arjomand spoke about what is happening in Canada. Strengthened by the reaction against those who wanted to impose Sharia and those who wanted to come back to the public funding of cults, she pleaded for international solidarity: "we must feel that our own dignity is hurt when it's a woman in Iraq, Iran or in other countries that is affected".

"Public opinion is on our side, it is not on the side of those who plead for cultural relativism, veritable instrument of the oppression of women". Maria Hagberg, from Sweden, who used to be the member of a left-wing party and has now joined a feminist party, described the resistance she was faced with when it was necessary to attack religion and traditions, especially when it comes to honour crimes. "They are not regarded as violence whereas they aim at controlling women's sexuality". She underlined the importance of the site she has created in Sweden on the subject, which is very active and is concerned about "Sweden's regression in matters of secularity".

I stepped on to the tribune to present the petition launched by "Regards de Femmes" and "Riposte Laïque" on the extension of the 2004 law and the action of the Ligue du Droit International des Femmes to show, notably through history and the current news of the Olympic Games, the analogy between apartheid of blacks in South Africa and the segregation of women in Islamic countries.



Sara Mohammad

It was Sara Mohammad's turn to intervene. She showed pictures of women victims of violence. Azar Majedi went on talking about honour crimes and exclaimed: "Honour? What honour? It must be decided to stop calling such acts of terrorism honour crimes! Indeed their aim is to terrorise half humankind or rather the whole of humanity. They are mafia-like practices! Their motives are the same as those behind the taking of power. As a matter of fact that's what it's all about. In western countries people stop in front of the word "honour", as well as the words "tradition" and "religion" for fear of offending the Muslim community. Well, I want to have the right to offend religion. I differentiate between religion and Muslims. My mother was a Muslim."

The next step will be Rome on the 1st of June 2008. The topic will be the common resolution which is being drafted. *(Translated from the French by Rosa Valentini)*

**Let's make the anniversary
of Dua's murder
a day to say:**



NO to

- Killing women in the name of so-called "honour".
- Religious law, religious domination of society.
- Patriarchal and tribal values and norms.

- Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq. (www.equalityiniraq.com)
- International Campaign Against Killings and Stoning of Women in Kurdistan.

April 2008

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Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq OWFI

A call to remember Du'a Khalil Aswad and denounce "Honour killings" globally!

A year ago images were posted on the internet of 17 year old Du'a Khalil Aswad, savagely stoned to death by a crowd of hundreds of people which included several of her own relatives. It sparked outrage across the world. Dua's "crime" was to fall in love with someone from outside "her own" religious and ethnic group.

Despite public outrage and protests, since then hundreds of women have been killed, or driven to commit suicide in Kurdistan and Iraq, in so-called "honour killings".

The Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq and the International Campaign Against Killing and Stoning of Women in Kurdistan have made a huge effort to expose this atrocity and the many others like it internationally.

This year, on 7 April, we will commemorate Dua's and all victims of "Honour killing" in a week of action in different countries across the world.

We will organize activities to expose "cultures", "traditions", and religious norms and laws which cause all these brutalities against women in the region.

We call on you to join our efforts and endorse this call.

For more information and to endorse this call please contact:

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8th March 2008 in Iran



"The essence of our activities is human liberation which is intertwined with the liberation of the society"

This year International Women's Day was celebrated in Iran yet again under most suppressive conditions. Many workers', students' and women's activists have been arrested and jailed by Islamic Republic of Iran. Many of them are in dire situation suffering years of maltreatment and torture. Some political prisoners are in such horrendous physical and mental situation and need immediate medical attention. However the Islamic regime not only refuses medical treatment, in many cases it does not even allow visits by families.

Despite all the hardships many gatherings were held in different parts of the country to celebrate 8th March. Resolutions were also issued with demands for a secular and equal society. Here we publish a summary of some of these resolutions.

Sanandaj and Tehran:

- 1- Provision of suitable living conditions for street women and children;
- 2- No to any discrimination between men and women in all areas of social, economic and political arena;

- 3- Equal pay for equal work;
- 4- Freedom of speech, organization and a stop to all forms of suppression of social, civil and trade union activists;
- 5- Equality of men and women in property, witness, custody of children, inheritance without any discrimination;
- 6- Banning of stoning, execution, the law of "an eye for an eye" and all laws inflicting violence against women;
- 7- Equal opportunities for women to excel economically and educationally;
- 8- Provision of job security, elimination of all obstacles for working women, suitable provision for single parents and housewives, free health care system for all;
- 9- We support workers' struggle for a better life;
- 10- We condemn exploitation of children and declare that execution of children is unlawful and against international convention in support of children;
- 11- We support the struggle of teachers, students and nurses

for their trade union and social rights.

Esfahan:

Students in the city of Esfahan issued the following resolution.

- 1- The essence of our activities is human liberation which is intertwined with the liberation of the society;
- 2- We demand the abolition of sexual apartheid;
- 3- We demand the basic rights for workers', teachers', nurses' and other movements;
- 4- Unconditional freedom of speech and organization;
- 5- We demand unemployment benefit for unemployed women and single mothers;
- 6- All societies and groups have the right of existence, and no authority or capitalist or oppressor does not have the right to deny this right;

Baneh:

- 1- We demand the abolition of all laws that depict women as second class citizens;
- 2- We condemn the prosecution of women activists and

demand their immediate release, and abolition of capital punishment;

- 3- Equal pay for equal work;
- 4- We declare our solidarity with the International Federation of Workers, Federation of Transport Union and demand the immediate release of Mansour Osanloo and Mahmood Salehi (two worker activists who have been jailed for many years);
- 5- We condemn the arrest, suppression and imprisonment of student activists and demand their immediate release;
- 6- Killing of women under the pretext of “honor killing” is murder and is strongly condemned. The murderers must be prosecuted in the court of law;

- 7- We condemn the war and demand peace, bread and freedom for all;

Kamyaran:

- 1- We demand equality between men and women in all arenas;
- 2- All anti women laws must be abolished;
- 3- We demand freedom of speech, organization and strike;
- 4- Any form of segregation of men and women must be abolished;
- 5- Any form of violence against women, be it physical or physiological, humiliation is a crime;
- 6- Male chauvinist culture is inhumane and leads to honor killing and stoning. The perpetrators of such actions must be tried;
- 7- The phenomenon of street women and children with no birth

certificate is one aspect of capitalist system. We demand a secure and humane standard of living for all street women and children;

8- Temporary marriage (Sigheh, Islamic law by which a man can marry an unlimited number of women for one hour or days) is a form of prostitution and must be made illegal;

9- Women must have the right and freedom of clothing, choosing their partners, traveling, working, studying etc. Housewives must be compensated by social networks and benefits;

10- We demand the freedom of all political prisoners;

11- We condemn war and the nuclear race which is the result of capitalist economic race. It brings nothing but misery to people and should be condemned.

Organisation for Women's Liberation 8th March in Austria



A street meeting was organized by OWL in Vienna, Austria to celebrate 8th March. An information desk decorated with banners, books and newsletters about the situation of women in Iran and in solidarity with international women's movement was set up in the city centre. Many people visited the stall and signed our petition to condemn the Islamic Republic of Iran for its treatment of women in Iran.

Mahin Kaboli, the representative of OWL in Austria made a speech and read out Azar Majedi's message to the public.

International Women's Day
Central Baghdad event - Nasiriah event

5 Years on Occupation
Freedom Space event

OWFI
March 8-08



Can women & youth initiate change in Iraq?!

Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq

IWD festival in Baghdad

Technology University

March 9, 2008

Theatre play dedicated to "Du'a Khalil"

OWFI organized a festival in the theatre of the Technology University in Baghdad for IWD on March 9th. The festival opening was a pantomime theatre play dedicated to "Du'a Khalil", a victim of male-fascist tribalism in the northern town of Baashiqa. Police patrols stood around the scene of the crime, which was the public square of the town. They stood in solidarity with the cold-blooded killers. The criminal compromise between the police and the girl's killers set the vista of our festival, which was a play of rejection of "honor crimes". This play expressed anger against the slaughter of an innocent girl whose only crime was falling in love. The only spoken phrase in the play was (love will not die) which was followed by continuous applause from the audience.

The play was written and produced by Ali Jwad who is the head of the "Hurriya Theatre group" which is currently the Freedom Sapace-theatre branch. They joined the FS (Freedom Space) gathering where they can express themselves freely with no censorship.



Yanar Mohammed

Women's Freedom after 5 years of occupation - IWD speech

The following part was the IWD speech for Yanar Mohammed, OWFI president. She introduced March 8 as the consequence of a historical struggle of women for their rights and equality with men, s struggle which was connected with progressive and freedom-seeking movements. Yanar focused on current women's sufferings under 5 years of occupation. They have lost their social status because of insecurity and anti-women legislation which in turn, ruled out the physical being of women in the society. This has been enforced by the creation of a dress code which covers the overall feminine appearance from the public domain. She reiterated that there will be no civil society without liberated women. Women must be the organizers and struggle hand-in-hand with all people who believe in freedom and equality. In the end, she concluded:" ... There are serious steps; which this crowd of women needs to take towards organizing the struggle for freedom and equality for a better world.

Our aims

Women's freedom is the measure of freedom in society. There is still a great deal left to accomplish in order to eliminate inequality between men and women, not only in Iran where misogyny brutally rules, but in the most advanced societies as well. The Organisation for Women's Liberation (OWL) sees itself as part of the immense historical and international struggle for women's liberation.

The OWL's aim is the unconditional liberation of women and complete equality between women and men in Iran. The OWL, therefore, must fight for the following demands:

- 1- *Complete equal rights for women and men; abolition of discriminatory laws, particularly laws in relation to family, marriage, divorce, and parental responsibility, for children;*
- 2- *Abolition of compulsory veiling and freedom of dress;*
- 3- *Complete abolition of segregation;*
- 4- *Access to equal resources in education, employment, sports and cultural activities;*
- 5- *Separation of religion from the state and education.*

Women in Iran

Women are banned from a wide range of social, economic and political activities; Islamic veil is compulsory. Women are separated from men in buses, universities, and many public places. Husbands and fathers are their guardians, at home and outside. Women cannot travel, even within the country, without permission from their male guardians. They have no right to divorce, or custody of their children. The list is endless.

We can change this. The Organisation for Women's Liberation-Iran is the organisation with the vision and dedication to make a difference in the life of millions of women in Iran. Progression in Iran will mean progression in the region.

Join us, make donation, distribute our paper, and contact us. Together we can make a difference.

Related links:

Medusa, Journal of Women and Socialism
www.medusa2000.com
International Committee against Stoning
www.stopstoningnow.com
International Campaign to End Sharia Court in Canada
www.nosharia.com
International Campaign in Defense of Women's Rights in Iran
www.irandwr.org

The Organisation for Women's Liberation-Iran

www.azadizan.com

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