

The Organisation for Women's Liberation-Iran



A magnificent
display of fight
against sexual
apartheid in Iran

700 students
staged a sit-in in
Sanandaj

And they said it wouldn't happen!!!

Students at "Sanandaj Free University" staged a sit-in on 12th May 2005 to protest against sexual apartheid and the compulsory veil. This is a mile stone in the struggle of women and students to end sexual apartheid and all its backward and anti women laws in Iran.

Students have been told that the restrictions and separation of female and male students were going to be extended to different entrances into the university. One entrance for males and a separate entrance for females!!!! Students, who already were enraged with the discriminatory rules, felt that this is the last straw and gathered in groups to discuss the matter. They decided to stage a sit-in. The slogans at the sit-in are:

- **Down with sexual apartheid**
- **Down with sexual discrimination**
- **We die before accepting any more restrictions**
- **Freedom of organisation and speech**

The Islamic laws imposed by the Islamic Republic of Iran are detested by majority of people, especially women. Sexual apartheid is one of the pillars of political Islam. The movement for women's liberation is making headways by questioning and protesting against it. The students in Sanandaj are making history. They are showing the way to the rest of the population in Iran. It is magnificent and commendable and should be supported full force.

We urge all to send their letters of support to the students. Freedom of women in one part of the world is the freedom of women everywhere! Please send your letters to us. We make sure the students will receive them. Let's put the spot light on their heroic attempt. They deserve it. Women every where deserve it.

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Speech at panel discussion with *Marion Boyd* at Law Union Toronto

March 5th, 2005

Religious laws contradict the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Separation of Religion and state is mandatory in order to guarantee an equal and just society for all.

We are told that religious arbitrators will promote “minority rights” and to be more specific it will ensure minority’s religious rights. What is missing here are the rights of individuals within that group. What about the rights of my client “Nasrin” who was pulled out of school and forced to an arranged marriage?

To place “minority rights” above individual rights would mean forcing my young client Nasrin to get raped regularly for the rest of her life in what is a community - defined marriage. It would mean that members of the greater society, who are not part of that community, would be forced to accept this horrific act and be totally powerless in opposing or preventing it.

Such horrific scenarios will occur when the government of Ontario, under the guise of religious rights legalizes the violation of individual members, particularly women and children.

We are told faith-base court deals with civil and not criminal matters!! My question is where can we draw a limit on religious law and regulation? To subsume religious law into civil and criminal law is impractical. These types of classification are drawn by a

secular court system not a religious. Under Sharia law there is no boundary between civil and criminal. For example, according to Sharia the least penalty a single unmarried woman can have for having sexual relations with a man is death by stoning. In the case of pregnancy outside of wedlock the punishment is death by stoning, right after the birth of her child. The same punishment is meted out to a married woman having a sexual relationship out of marriage. According to today’s enlightened view as seen from the perspective of modern secular society and according to criminal law in secular society, no crime has been committed by any of the above mentioned women!

In today’s civil society rape, child molestation, forced marriage and child bride are all considered to be very serious crimes. According to Sharia law, however, girls as young as nine can be raped legally, under the guise of “marriage” by any man- even a man as old as their grandfather. One can give thousands of examples that in Sharia, there is no border between civil and criminal law.

Allowing religious interference in the justice system promotes respect and tolerance for minority beliefs and practice rather than respect for the individual. The problem is that the defenders of religious arbitrators see communities as having one

Homa Arjomand making a speech in Toronto



homogeneous belief. The inhumane aspects of this notion is the violation of individual members particularly women and children in those communities. This is an obvious discrimination against a significant part of the society. It is a delineation of different categories of citizens which is equivalent to racism.

I need to emphasize the fact that there has been a long battle for recognition of the citizen and the citizen's rights for the past 100 years. The reduction of the Church's power over society and achievement of the secular system and secular legislations, did not come to us without a harsh struggle.

We are told parallel court systems are permitted legally in order to prevent the hidden practice of Religious law. There is no need to say that it is the duty of the State to protect the rights of all its residents, independent of their country of origin, religion, race, and gender. The law and regulation of a secular system must be able to disallow the hidden practice of so-called religious leaders. The law must be enforced! All the once who deny women's in areas of marriage, divorce and child custody must face consequences rather than recognition and validation.

The question is, should the government of Ontario legalize driving while

under the influence of alcohol because statistics show that the numbers of people who tend to drink and drive are increasing? Or should government mete out harsh punishment to those who disobey the rules and cause harm to other individuals?

It has been emphasized that it is completely voluntary to attend a religious court. What is being purposely ignored is intimidation and social/ moral pressure to attend such a court. Women in so called Islamic communities are forced to not only accept inequality in all aspects of their lives but are also forced to respect all these degradations as the norm. Or else no women would voluntarily accept to have inequality in marriage, divorce, custody the list goes on and on.

Discrimination and gender -based persecution should not be tolerated. All citizens should be equal before the law. Religion, race, minority or majority should not serve as the basis for the definition of the civil rights of citizens.

Marion Boyd, on the panel discussion on February 26, 2005 at CILSC (Canadian International Law Students' conference) questioned why it is that when the communities put social pressure on individuals, it is called oppression but when individuals are

forced to resolve their disputes at the secular court system by the government, it is not oppression?!

A civil society has norms and standards. Part of these norms and standards are the restrictions which are recognized legally and are included in the legislation. These restrictions are beneficial to individuals. Restrictions, such as punishing children physically even if it is part of the individual's culture are recognized as crime.

Furthermore, there may be repercussions to certain parental decisions. For example, not sending children to school might cause a child aid worker to step in and apprehend the child, forcing the parents to lose their parenting privileges. Putting restriction on culture so that it won't become more important than women's and children's rights should not be called oppression.

There is no need to say we still have many long hard challenges ahead for the total separation of religion and state. Fighting Sharia tribunal is one important step in defending universal rights for all who live in Canada.



International Women's Solidarity

"Why is it that the brutal acts of misogyny against women living under Muslim laws does not provoke condemnation, but our efforts to speak out against them do?" *Jennifer Fasulo*

*From left to right:
Fran Luck, Jennifer Fasulo*

Soheila Sharifi interviews Jennifer Fasulo



Soheila Sharifi

Jennifer Fasulo is the Co-Founder of *Solidarity with Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (SOWFI)*

- **You are working with an Organisation called SOWFI. What does it mean and what are your aims and objectives? What kind of activities do you carry out?**

SOWFI stands for Solidarity with Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq. When we first formed, back in February of 2004, we were interested in doing solidarity work with OWFI. We had heard that the Iraqi Interim Government, puppet of the US, had tried to implement Resolution 137 (Islamic Sharia) in Iraq. We were disgusted that the US government was trying to turn back Iraqi women's rights by 50 years, all the while boasting about how they were in Iraq to "liberate the Iraqi people." We wanted to expose their hypocrisy. Also, we had learned of the tremendous spontaneous protests by Iraqi women who opposed Res 137 and we wanted to show our solidarity with them. Finally, we wanted to get more press for the issue since the corporate media barely reported on it and the left press was even worse.

After some time, we became aware of the Organization of Women's Liberation in Iran, and all the amazing work they were doing to stop stoning and other atrocities practiced by the Islamic Republic. We decided to branch out and try to support both organizations. We felt that there was an important connection between Iran and Iraq in the sense that Iranian women had been suffering under Political Islam for 25

years and now Iraqi women are facing a similar fate. So we were fortunate to bring Mina Ahadi to speak at NYU law school about her work against stoning and her experience of the Iranian revolution. It was a very successful event that packed the house and opened up many peoples' eyes.

- **What is your view about women's movement in America? In comparison to 70s how do you think this movement has progressed or declined? Why?**

The women's movement in the US has lost its radicalism. In the early years, from 1968 to 1973, the women's movement was very radical and in your face. It was unafraid to be bold and speak out against male domination in all its forms, including religion and capitalism. Many things happened to subvert its radicalism and it's a more complex story than I can effectively explain here.

In brief, there was a concerted effort by the establishment to buy off movement activists, discredit radicals and give legitimacy, resources and status to liberal feminists. Much of what is considered the women's movement today, is just a watered down status quo feminism that got where it is by riding on the coat-tails of radical women. The liberal feminists are household names, while the radical feminists who ignited the feminist revolution, are known to very few. Of course, because of this, many of the gains that were won by the early movement, are now being severely pushed back, such as legalized abortion, sex education, welfare entitlements, affordable childcare, the right not to marry, the right to be free of excessive beautification and sexual objectification.

- **You are closely familiar with**

women's liberation movement in Iran and our struggle against political Islam and for women's rights. What do you think of this movement? And how do you think we can join forces with women's movement in the USA and Europe to become stronger?

I think the women's liberation movement in Iran kicks ass! All of the members of our group have been inspired by the militancy of OWLI and your uncompromising stance against the religious enemies of women. It really reminds me of the early days of American feminism, especially when I read the articles in Medusa. Yea! Tell it like it is sisters! Even the article by Monsoor Hekmat reminds me of something that a radical feminist for the early days of the American women's movement would have written.

- **Do you believe there are any reasonable grounds to form an International front against political Islam and in defense of equality and freedom?**

Well, I think to a certain extent this is being done already. At least, SOWFI sees itself as part of this international front, though I would say not just against political Islam, but all kinds of religious fascism. The christian right is gaining tremendous power in the US. George Bush was relected in large part because of the religious right and he sees himself as having been "chosen by God to be president." The religious right is launching a concerted and strategic attack against women and women's freedom in the US and not many people are paying attention to it. As far as political Islam is concerned, we have a long way to go to educate people about what it is. There is a lot of general ignorance about the Middle East generally, and all kinds of racist

stereotypes that assume everyone in the ME is religious and Muslim—so this contributes to people's sense that political Islam is some kind of "authentic movement of the people" We are trying to educate people about the fact that political Islam does not represent Middle Eastern people any more than the Christian right represents Americans.

We also try to expose political Islam's crimes against women, which we believe represent the most heinous crimes against women in the world today. There is a great taboo in the US left against speaking out about these crimes. When we had our demonstration, we were later demonized as "racists" and "cultural imperialists" Isn't that interesting? Why is it that the brutal acts of misogyny against women living under Muslim laws does not provoke condemnation, but our efforts to speak out against them do? And why is that its only crimes against women that get defended as "culture?" We think this is just part of the misogyny of the left, and the "normalization" of crimes against women. Did you know that in the US, 4000 women are killed by their husbands or boyfriends every year? This should be considered the number one public health crisis in the country, instead its barely discussed.

So as you see, the oppression of women, though it exists at different levels of severity, is a worldwide phonemona, and this is why SOWFI believes that international women's solidarity is a fundamental requirement for women's liberation everywhere. Sisterhood is Powerful!! For Women's Liberation and Nothing Less!!

Beijing +10



Mina Ahadi

**Compiled by
Maryam Kousha
from an interview by
Soheila Sharifi**

10 years ago United Nations and the NGOs of the world gathered in Beijing to discuss the situation of women. On 28th February till 11th March 2005 a similar conference was held to review and assess the progress of the initial conference. Mina Ahadi, a member of the Central Council of Organisation for Women's Liberation, and Coordinator of the International Committee against Stoning took part in both conferences.

In an interview, Mina has reported that participants from 130 countries took part making the total numbers to 20,000. Mina delivered her speech on 28th Feb about the situation of women in Iran, the discrimination and suppression imposed on women in countries where Islamic laws and traditions exist. She also spoke of the struggle of women in these countries, especially Iran to fight back suppression. Mina explained about the international efforts of the two committees in publicising the situation of women in Iran. Her speech raised the anger of a few women who clearly defended Islam and were wearing the Islamic veil, but it mostly was admired by NGO representatives from most countries. A resolution to condemn and ban stoning was

presented to the conference.

Mina was asked to make a comparative comment about the two conferences. She added "In general when you talked to many people they all felt that women's position has regressed and they face more aggression in the society. Having said that you would hear reports from many NGOs that had done great works for women's advancement. The fact of the matter is that poverty, prostitution, women's trafficking, honour killings, stonings and violence against women have increased."

Mina also concluded that although such gatherings bring the activists together for a common goal, but there is still a long way to see a real progress that changes women's lives in practice. Governments should do a lot more and actually implement what is usually decided in these meetings. Most resolutions and declarations might look neat and nice on paper but women do not see the benefits. On the contrary, they experience the downward trend in their rights. Mina believes that the lack of a radical, socialist and progressive force that can make a real difference was absent in the conference.



Fatemeh

A woman condemned to death by stoning in Iran! Fatemeh's life must be saved! International Committee against Stoning

Stoning must be banned NOW!

According to the newspaper "IRAN" dated 18th May 2005, *Fatemeh*, a mother of two was condemned by *Tehran Court Branch 71* to death by stoning. She is accused of killing her lover with the help of her husband. According to Islamic laws, a woman who has had sexual relations outside marriage is to be executed by stoning. *Fatemeh's* husband has been condemned to imprisonment for 16 years.

This case has had a lot of official media coverage with the pictures of *Fatemeh* published in every newspaper. Yet again the Islamic regime of Iran has shown its brutal side and tries to impose an atmosphere of fear and terror in the society.

The couple have two small children whose fate and conditions are not revealed in any of the reports, as though they do not exist. Nobody should be stoned or executed. This medieval law should be banned immediately.

We urge all international bodies and human rights organisations to condemn stoning and executions in Iran.

**For more information please contact
Shahnaz Moratab or Mina Ahadi: 172 97 16 227, minaahadi@aol.com**

Build Solidarity Groups against Sexual Apartheid in Iran

**Do you want to join us in ending:
Sexual apartheid in Iran?
Executions in Iran?
Gender inequality in Iran?
Women's suppression in Iran?**

Build solidarity groups in your area. Contact us for more information. Lets build a strong network of solidarity groups to strengthen the movement for women's liberation in Iran. Together we can make a difference.

**Contact us: www.azadizan.com
m.namazie@ukonline.co.uk parvin.kaboly@telia.com**

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, 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

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Financial contributions

We need your support and donations. Please send your contributions to the following bank account and let us know by email. We urge all individuals and organisations to help us in our efforts to make a difference in the lives of women in Iran.

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