

# we!

*selected articles taken from  
the electronic bi-monthly  
newsletter of Isis*



Isis International – Manila

Special Edition No. 1, 2005-2006

**Special  
Edition**

## **Backlash and Resistance! Militarism, Religion, and Power**

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# From the Editor

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## Resisting religious rights and wrongs

Initially, this special edition of *we!* was to be entitled “Fundamentalisms” for reasons you will see as you read through the various articles included in its spread. Upon further thought however, the editorial team dropped the title for two reasons: first, because the origins of the term can be traced to the Western first-world context defining the “other”; and second, because the term can be employed to uphold the cultural hegemony of such a context.

This is not to say in any way that the forms of “fundamentalisms” you will read about are justified. Rather, this is a challenge to be critical of the labels we use, their origins and promulgated meanings. Thus, we entitled this edition, “Backlash and Resistance.” Backlash no doubt refers to the ways in which the religious right finds multiple ways to make a comeback, despite the efforts and successes of progressive states and civil societies towards attaining gender and social justice globally.

This edition attempts to demonstrate the extent and depth of the influence of the religious right and traditionalists, as well as the impact of their actions on peoples and communities—from Hindi fundamentalism as exhibited in the Gujarat genocide, to political Islam’s rise to power in the Middle East. However, the Bush administration remains the unbeatable exemplar of the religious right, as reflected from its war policy on Iraq, to its policies on sexual and reproductive rights—including the ABC approach (Abstinence before marriage, Being faithful to one’s partner, and Condoms targeted for high-risk activity).

It is widely recognised that women are the primary targets of the religious right’s policies and practices, if not those who suffer the most from its consequences. It comes as no surprise therefore that women are at the forefront of resistance movements in diverse forms and actions globally. What remains an imperative, however, is to recognise the need for inter-movement dialogue and action as critical to social transformation.

Sincerely,

*Raijeli Nicole*  
Raijeli Nicole  
Executive Director

# Movements Within

## Fundamentalisms Exposed!

Political and religious fundamentalisms, along with neo-liberalism and militarisation, have been making serious impacts on women's lives and bodies and therefore constitute major challenges for the international feminist movement today.

This is the gist of "Women, Fundamentalism and Globalisation: Some Framework Points," a lecture by Reihana Mohideen, feminist activist and coordinator of the Philippines-Venezuela Solidarity Network.

Fundamentalism, neo-liberalism, and militarisation are interlinked and interdependent. "They feed on and off each other" because "the economic power of neo-liberal globalisation cannot exist without extra-economic military force. Boundless domination of a global economy requires boundless, massive military force and military action without end: endless wars to supposedly secure endless peace," Mohideen said at a forum on the interlinkages of fundamentalism and globalisation.

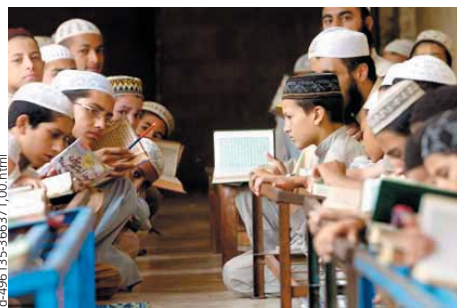
Mohideen asserted that the rise in religious and political fundamentalist movements is partly a reaction to neo-liberal globalisation—"the mother of all fundamentalisms,"—and the lack of a viable progressive alternative to it.

### The politics of religious fundamentalism

There had always been a relationship between religious fundamentalism and political power, as well as fundamentalisms and imperialism. "Religion has always been a highly political affair... The formal separation of religion and politics, in the form of the secular state, is only a very recent phenomenon, maybe a couple of hundred years old," Mohideen further explained.

Political and religious fundamentalisms take many forms, and Mohideen sees the

US as a major centre of active and growing religious fundamentalist movements today. A survey conducted in the late 1980s found that among the "baby boomer" generation (people born between 1946 and 1963), one-third accepted the biblical version of creation over evolution. Most considered themselves "moderate," but 13% classified themselves as "fundamentalists"—the cohesive core identified as the Christian right. In addition, 84% of all white evangelical Protestants who voted in the last US presidential elections cast their ballot for George W. Bush.



*A madrassa religious school in Pakistan. Some are said to be recruiting grounds for extremists.*

Recent developments also indicate creeping fundamentalisms in various parts of the world. Among these are US President Bush's nomination of a hard-line conservative, John Roberts, as Supreme Court justice; the phenomenon of Political Buddhism or Buddhist fundamentalism in Sri Lanka where the Buddhist clergy—the militant backbone of the Sinhala chauvinist state—have been carrying out indiscriminate acts of violence; and "born again" charismatic movements in the Philippines aggressively participating in politics, specifically in the electoral process as party list groups.

### Islamic fundamentalism

Religious fundamentalism also arises when people are discontented and feel that the political system does not work for them. "The rhetoric of political Islam has always

exploited the failings and vices of present leaders and the system. All currents of Islamic fundamentalism have related Islam to issues such as escaping poverty and oppression," Mohideen noted.

According to Mohideen, Islamic fundamentalism, more accurately referred to by many Middle Eastern progressives as "political Islam," is in essence a political movement composed of groups and organisations aspiring to state or political power under the cover of Islamic theology.

Yet Mohideen claims that imperialism always viewed political Islam—both the radical oppositions and the Islamic regimes—as natural partners in the task of suppressing the left, as proven by, among others, the support of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to Saudi Arabia's organisation of an "Islamic front" as an "alternative" against pan-Arab nationalism and socialism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This network included the Muslim Brotherhood (MB/Egypt), Hamas (Syria), Sarekat-e-Islam (Indonesia), the Front for Islamic Salvation (FIS/Algeria), and Jama'at Islami (Pakistan). Mohideen likewise cited Afghanistan as the largest covert CIA operation involving Islamic fundamentalists, with US military assistance to the *mujaheddin* reaching USD700 million in 1987.

Mohideen also pointed to *madrassas*—Muslim schools where children and youth learn the Quran and Arabic—that have become recruiting centres for fundamentalist groups. Usually housed in mosques, these schools attract thousands of students from poor families who cannot access mainstream educational institutions. In Pakistan, hundreds of thousands of fighters have been recruited and trained in the *madrassas* to fight in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Sudan, Algeria, and other jihads.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4, FUNDAMENTALISMS ...

## FROM PAGE 3, FUNDAMENTALISMS ...

Today, anti-imperialist or anti-US sentiments are fanning religious fundamentalisms. After the US's departure from Afghanistan and once the Soviet "threat" was removed, the US became political Islam's main target. "Washington's war on and blockade of Iraq, its military implantation in Saudi Arabia, and its support for Israel's continued occupation of Palestine and south Lebanon had fuelled the anti-imperialist sentiments of the mass of ordinary Muslims and Arabs during the 1990s—a development that the Islamists capitalised on," Mohideen explained.

### Fundamentalisms' impact on the rights of women

Fundamentalisms have been making serious impacts on women's lives and bodies, particularly on women's reproductive rights, Mohideen underscored.

"Before abortion was legalised and throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, most anti-abortion demonstrations were organised by the Catholic Church. The founding of Operation Rescue (OR) in 1986 by Randall Terry, a graduate of the Pentecostal Elim Bible Institute and a used-car salesman, changed that. By 1990, anti-abortion activists were two-thirds evangelicals and one-third Catholic. OR activists targeted doctors who performed abortions. Given the rhetoric about doctors being 'baby killers,' the inevitable happened: in March 1993, Michael Griffin shot and killed Dr. David Gunn outside a Pensacola, Florida clinic," she narrated.

She also used Pakistan as a case in point. "The political system in Pakistan, the ally of the West against 'terrorism,' is a political dictatorship against women," she said. In Pakistan, the law makes adultery a crime against the state and requires, as legal proof of an act of rape, evidence from four Muslim male witnesses against the accused Muslim man.

The Zina Ordinance (covering adultery and fornication) under the *Hudood* law treats rape as a form of adultery, although adultery signifies consent while rape

does not. Hence, reporting a rape leaves women with the deadly burden of having to prove their innocence at the risk of being charged with adultery. Women rights' organisations estimate that a majority of the women in jail have thus been wrongly convicted of the "crime" of adultery under the ordinance.

Add to this grave injustice the tribal custom of "honour" killings or *karo-kari*, which continues to be practised with impunity in many parts in Pakistan. Between January and August 2003, *karo-kari* claimed 393 lives, with women as a vast majority of the victims, Mohideen said.

She used a Pakistani Daily Times news item to show a typical case of *karo-kari*: "Lahore: A girl, Kausar, 17, was strangled by her elder brother because she married of her own free will. Ms. Kausar left her home around 45 days ago and married Muhammad Suleman. On Wednesday, she returned home and asked her family to forgive her, but her brother Muhammad Safdar strangled her with a piece of cloth."

### Challenge to feminists

"We need to make our feminism relevant. This means being more militant. This requires the women's movement, especially its militant wing, to form the broadest possible anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist alliances, with political movements that are supported by millions of women. Militant feminism must speak out and act on the major issues of the day," Mohideen urged.

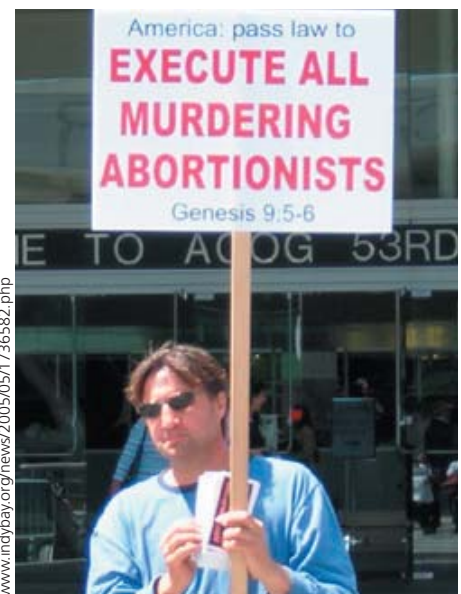
Opposition to the imperialist occupation of Iraq is a key question for all progressive political activists throughout the world, including feminists, said Mohideen.

"You are either unconditionally against the occupation or you support it. There is no neutral zone. If feminists don't demand the immediate end to the US-led occupation of Iraq, they will be perceived as accepting Washington's reactionary agenda and this will discredit feminism as a radical force for social change," she said.

But opposing US occupation does not mean supporting every action, tactic, and position of the Iraqi resistance.

"We clearly do not. Neither does the anti-war movement. This is especially the case for women's movement outside Iraq," Mohideen clarified. Building a stronger global movement against the war would strengthen the struggle of women inside Iraq against occupation and for their rights.

Mohideen delivered the lecture at the Women, Fundamentalism and Globalisation Forum held at the Bulwagang Tandang Sora of the College of Social Work and Community Development of the University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman, Quezon City on September 29, 2005. Some 100 participants attended the forum, which was organised by the Welga ng Kababaihan Laban sa Kahirapan at Globalisasyon, an assemblage of 50 women's organisations which includes Isis International-Manila, and was co-sponsored by the UP Department of Women and Development Studies. ■



*Anti-abortion militants in the US aggressively campaign for a law against abortion providers.*

**Source:** *Fundamentalism and globalisation: Some framework points (2005) by R. Mohideen. From Proceedings Report of the "Women, Globalisation and Fundamentalism Forum." Q.C. Philippines, September 29, 2005.*

## 4 Movements Within

## Defining Fundamentalisms

Fundamentalism is a modern socio-political movement that uses religion, ethnicity, or culture to win or consolidate power and social control. Modernity and westernisation have been virtually synonymous concepts and fundamentalism is a reaction to and a refuge from modernity and the penetration of 'western values.' It calls for the return of traditional practices unsullied by modern excesses and corrupting ideas.

In many respects, fundamentalist movements are thoroughly modern movements although they claim legitimacy from an ideal past. They use those aspects of modernity and of modern economics and technology that suit and advance their purposes—for example, modern weaponry, the internet, telephone, email, and market systems. Equally they reject those that do not suit their purposes.

Women face an increased risk of violence from fundamentalisms. As women gradually achieve more visibility in public life and break some of the bonds of patriarchal control, they also face a backlash aimed at the reassertion of cultural, traditional, and religious values. Fundamentalisms are anti-democratic, anti-secularist and anti-women. All fundamentalisms have a remarkable consistency of vision regarding gender relations and sexuality. They share a central preoccupation with women, their bodies, and the assertion of patriarchal control over women their sexualities. Frequently, violence (often under the guise of customary practices such as female genital mutilation, honour killings, dress codes, virginity tests, etc.) is used to achieve this.

**Source:** *Talking about taboos: Asia-Pacific women reflect on issues of sexuality 2004, July 25-28* by APWLD, *Forum-Asia*, and *Komnas Perempuan*.

## Palestine: Despite Democracy, Women Still Fear for their Freedoms

The victory of the radical Islamic party Hamas in the recent Palestinian elections has many secular women fearing for their freedoms.

Naila Ayesh, who runs the progressively feminist Women's Affairs Centre in fiercely conservative Gaza, recently told *The Independent* she has already noticed subtle changes since Hamas's election victory. "You will hear even kids saying to you, 'your head isn't covered now but it will be. You can drive now but you won't be able to later,'" she said.

Beyond these omens, Donald McIntyre reported that Ayesh is worried that laws beneficial for women—such as the family law protecting women from abuse and safeguarding their custody rights after the divorce for which her organisation is campaigning—would not be the priority of Hamas.

McIntyre noted in his article that Hamas is far from being the Taliban. "It strongly supports women's education, is generally opposed to 'honour killing,' and some of its candidates supported women's shelters. Its spokesmen have also been at pains to stress that it does not intend, in the foreseeable future, to impose its religious ideology—including its long-term commitment to *sharia*, on the parliament."

However, Ayesh is concerned that Hamas's more congenial public message might conflict with the deeply held belief of its new parliamentary members. She noted, for example, that Mariam Farhat—whose election campaign video showed her helping her 17-year-old son to prepare explosives which killed him and five Israelis—said in an interview that her first parliamentary campaign would be for a law requiring all Palestinian women to wear the traditional Muslim *hejab*.

Farhat's subsequent disavowal of the interview left Ayesh unconvinced. Rather, it seemed to confirm her expectation



Andrew Cottle/media.www.dailyuhchronicle.com

*Women in Palestine fear encroaching fundamentalism.*

that change will be cultural and gradual, rather than legislative. "Hamas will not institute change directly but they will use other respected figures, for example, in the mosques," Ayesh added.

Meanwhile, *sharia* continues to take women's lives in Iran. A court recently sentenced a teenage rape victim to death by hanging after she confessed she had unintentionally killed a man who tried to rape her and her niece. Eighteen-year-old Nazanin confessed to stabbing one of the three men who attacked them in a park west of the Iranian capital in March 2005.

Also recently, a court in the city of Rasht, Northern Iran, sentenced another girl to death by hanging after being charged with murder when she was 17 years old. In August 2004, Iran's Islamic penal system sentenced a 16-year-old girl to death after a sham trial, where she was accused of committing "acts incompatible with chastity." Having no access to a lawyer, Atefeh personally defended herself and told the religious judge that he should punish those who force women into adultery and not the victims. She was eventually hanged in public. ■

**Sources:** *Iran to hang teenage girl attacked by rapists (2006, Jan. 7)* from *Iran Focus* <[www.iranfocus.com/modules/news/print.php?storyid=5183](http://www.iranfocus.com/modules/news/print.php?storyid=5183)>; *Palestine: Women of Gaza fear for their freedoms under new religious regime* by D. Macintyre (2006, Jan. 20) from <[www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-508128](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-508128)>.

# A Failure: US Policy on Iraq

The US peace-building processes in Iraq are increasingly being slammed for its systematic oppression of women and for failing to bring peace and security.

“Almost three years after the toppling of Saddam Hussein, Iraq is characterised by chaos, violence and disintegration. The methods used to rebuild Iraq’s security sector are simply making matters worse,” said Albrecht Schnabel, a senior fellow of the Research Programme on Human Security in Bern, Switzerland.

## Threatened, unemployed women

Bush’s Iraq policy has two impacts, Yanar Mohammed, president of the Organisation of Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), said.

Its first impact is the lack of safety for citizens. “The invasion by the Americans ended police, army, and government services. All the civil institutions and frameworks began to fall apart. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) also quickly changed the legislation, adding a new article that allows for soldiers not to be directly accountable for their actions.” She noted, however, that laws regarding honour killings remained in place.

Women are now at a greater risk since they have become targets of gangs involved in human trafficking and prostitution. Mohammed related that at the start of the war, a woman could be sold into sexual slavery for as little as USD100 and a virgin for USD200. Many have been raped, some in prisons like Abu Ghraib, but do not speak out for fear of honour killings.

Unemployment is the second symptom of the invasion’s failure, said Mohammed. With Saddam’s ouster, public service disintegrated, the private sector collapsed, and many people lost their jobs.

Unemployment specifically affected women because of the few jobs available, most were given to men. In addition, many women were recently widowed, having lost their husbands to the war. These women have also been without social security since the war started and have found it difficult to find work. Those who found jobs, however, were new to the workforce and to being single parents, Mohammed added.

## Rising fundamentalism

The American invasion likewise factored into the rising religious-political fundamentalism in Iraq.

“To promote the war on our country, Iraqi women are being portrayed in the US media as veiled in black and uneducated. This is not the true picture—we have attended universities, worked as writers and doctors, and advanced in every field,” OWFI said in a statement.

But all these appear to be changing.

“Saddam’s regime flirted with Islamists; now Islamists are all over the streets,” said Mohammed. “The US allows and supports the Islamists in Iraq... In fact, they have legislated and formalised their presence in government ministries. The ministry of education, the ministry responsible for fuel and oil, for example, have Islamists in charge, and with the blessing of the Americans. This has meant a more systematic oppression of women. Veiling is becoming mandatory; girls are forced to leave school after the sixth grade,” she explained. In addition, Iraqi women feel they had more freedom in the 1970s because they cannot participate freely in protests now.

OWFI also fears that Islamic law is going to forbid women the right to

divorce and to allow ‘pleasure marriages’ for men, temporary arrangements trading money for sex.

OWFI is urging an end to the US occupation. “Then, we could focus on a socialist, economic revolution to end poverty, improve women’s status, and provide equal pay. Now, the fight for a secular state must happen. There has to be an end to the killings by the Islamic fundamentalists and the members of the Baath regime. This could be resolved if the US were out of Iraq. There must be equal rights for all—Kurds, Arabs, Christians—because the diverse people of Iraq have a right to their own government, not just what the US dictates,” OWFI said. ■



*The presence of US occupation troops does not bring safety for Iraq’s women, says OWFI.*



*Bullets and bombs, aside from the threat of kidnapping, keep Iraqi women at home.*

**Sources:** First of all, the US occupation must end: Huda Samir of the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq speaks out (2005, Aug.-Sept.) from Freedom Socialist Newspaper at <[www.whrnet.org/fundamentalisms/docs/interview-samir-0507.html](http://www.whrnet.org/fundamentalisms/docs/interview-samir-0507.html)>; Bungled peace-building opens door to terrorism (2006, Jan. 31) by S. Leahy from <[ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=31987](http://ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=31987)>; and Tell Mr. Bush this! The “W” in George W. Bush stands for women’s abuse and women’s devastation: An interview with Yanar Mohammed (2004, Oct.) from <[www.whrnet.org/docs/interview-mohammed-0410.html](http://www.whrnet.org/docs/interview-mohammed-0410.html)>.

# Laws Not Enough to Curb Female Genital Mutilation

Some three million girls are made to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM) each year, despite the number of national and international laws prohibiting the practice, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported recently.

FGM is the “harmful practice of cutting or removing all or parts of the female genitals for non-medical reasons,” according to the Feminist Majority Foundation. It could range from the mildest form of cutting the clitoral hood to “infibulation,” which entails the removal of the clitoris and stitching up the vaginal opening. Depending on the procedure and the environmental conditions where it was performed, harmful effects may range from infections, diseases and sterility, to loss of sexual pleasure, birth complications, and even death during childbirth.

“There is no justification for it from a health point of view,” UNICEF communication officer Paula Claycombe said. “From a religious point of view, neither Islam, Christianity, nor Judaism advocate for it,” Noel King of the Voice of America reported from Khartoum.

Nevertheless, FGM is still rampant in Africa and is widespread in parts of Middle East and in immigrant communities worldwide. Reasons cited for its prevalence include religious dictates and societal perceptions that uncircumcised women are unclean and promiscuous, reported the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), an international membership organisation committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development, and women's human rights.

However, laws prohibiting FGM and other harmful traditional practices remain unimplemented.

In Guinea, for example, FGM became illegal in 1965. Almost half a century later, however, 99% of girls still undergo the procedure, and no case has ever been brought to court, Sharon LaFraniere of the New York Times reported. “This is a practice that goes on in secret. Nobody talks openly about it,” said Suheila Hidayat Qadir, a doctor from WADI, a German non-profit organisation. Qadir was part of a team gathering data on FGM in Iraq.

Some religious leaders have given their commitment to help eradicate FGM, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (IRIN) reported.

“We are in no way abandoning African culture when we abandon (FGM),” said Melegue Traore, traditional Chief and former president of Burkina Faso National Assembly.

However, despite the support of these traditional leaders, the campaign could still be hampered, with a high-ranking Liberian government official himself affirming the “constitutional right” of the people in practicing FGM. “Every society has its practices and traditions and so there is a need to protect (them),” Liberia's Internal Affairs Minister designate Ambulai B. Johnson said. He added that the practice was “not bad” and that he would not discourage it.

With the extreme reactions facing the campaign to end FGM, human rights activists still have a long way to go. And

given that even progressive laws and the current human rights framework are seen to be ineffective in bringing concrete gains in the protection of women's rights, as Kathambi Kinoti of AWID wrote, more innovative and alternative approaches are called for.

UNFPA executive director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid said that since traditions were often stronger than law, to end the practice, “change had to come from the communities.... Perhaps more than any other issue, FGM or cutting has taught us that change cannot be imposed from outside. It must come from within.” ■



*Despite prohibitory laws, some three million girls undergo female genital mutilation yearly, says UNICEF.*

**Sources:** *Eradicating female genital mutilation: Sexuality rights vs. cultural relativism* (2005, Apr. 25) by AWID from <[www.wlumf.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5b157%5d=x-157-190374](http://www.wlumf.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5b157%5d=x-157-190374)>; *Evidence of female genital mutilation in Iraq* (2005, Aug. 15) by IRIN from <[www.feminist.org/news/newsbyte/uswirestory.asp?id=9218](http://www.feminist.org/news/newsbyte/uswirestory.asp?id=9218)>; *Female genital mutilation, widely condemned, still rampant in Sudan* (2005, Nov. 19) by N. King from <[www.voanews.com/english/archive/2005-11/2005-11-19-voa1.cfm?CFID=32426592&CFTOKEN=76041826](http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2005-11/2005-11-19-voa1.cfm?CFID=32426592&CFTOKEN=76041826)>; IRIN. (2006, February 07). *Long way to go in fight against FGM—UN*. From <[www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=51579&SelectRegion=Horn\\_of\\_Africa,%20Middle\\_East&SelectCountry=GLOBAL](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=51579&SelectRegion=Horn_of_Africa,%20Middle_East&SelectCountry=GLOBAL)>; *'I support female genital mutilation'* Internal Affairs Minister Designate (2006, Feb. 10) by A. David from <[allafrica.com/stories/200602100832.html](http://allafrica.com/stories/200602100832.html)>; *Tradition binds African women, despite laws* (2006, Jan. 1) by S. LaFraniere from <[www.ihf.com/articles/2005/12/30/news/women.php](http://www.ihf.com/articles/2005/12/30/news/women.php)>; *UNICEF releases report on female genital mutilation* (2005, Nov. 29) by IRIN from <[www.feminist.org/news/newsbyte/uswirestory.asp?id=9401](http://www.feminist.org/news/newsbyte/uswirestory.asp?id=9401)>; *West Africa: Religious leaders denounce FGM* (2005, Dec. 7) by IRIN from <[www.wlumf.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5b157%5d=x-157-500609](http://www.wlumf.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5b157%5d=x-157-500609)>; *When culture overrides the law: Does 'rights talk' always get results?* (2006, Jan. 13) by K. Kinoti from <[assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/doc05/EDOC10670.htm](http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/doc05/EDOC10670.htm)>;

# Gujarat Cases Reopened, but Crimes against Women still Invisible

Four years after Hindu mobs attacked and killed nearly 2,000 Muslims in the Indian state of Gujarat, police have reopened the cases with the conviction of nine Hindus and arrest of hundreds more.

Yet, the state fails to acknowledge the violence committed to Muslim women of Gujarat.

Nine Hindus were sentenced to life in prison last week by a local judge after being found guilty of setting fire to the Muslim-run Best Bakery in Gujarat's Baroda town in 2002.

The Gujarat police have also recently looked into the culpability of more than 40 police officials who allegedly failed to "adequately investigate" the cases. Gujarat chief of police AK Bhargava said for the first time, inquiry against investigating officers "who failed to carry on the probe of riot cases" will be conducted.

Bhargava added 640 had been arrested and 13 new cases filed in the past 18 months. In December last year, a special court sentenced 11 people to life imprisonment for killing 11 Muslims during the 2002 riots.

The renewed interest in the Gujarat cases came in 2004, after the Supreme Court ordered the review of more than 2,000 cases that were declared closed by the police. Nearly 2,000 Muslims were killed in 37 cities and towns of Gujarat when Hindus attacked Muslim communities, looted and set fire on shops, houses and mosques.

Amnesty International (AI), a human rights group, assailed the Gujarat government in March 2003 for failing to acknowledge the "magnitude and scale

with which women were made a specific target" of the Gujarat attacks.

AI said accounts from eyewitnesses and human rights activists "indicated that a large number of women in Gujarat were beaten up, stripped naked, gang raped, stabbed with iron rods, swords, or sticks. Many of them were mutilated, disfigured, and then often burnt alive by mobs allegedly led by Hindu nationalist groups." In addition, police took insufficient action to protect the victims while some officers reportedly instigated attacks or even sexually assaulted and verbally abused the victims.

AI called on Indian and Gujarat authorities "to publicly acknowledge the extent of the gender violence which took place in the state; to take urgent steps to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators; and to provide appropriate redress and protection to the victims."

Following the AI exposé, the International Initiatives for Justice in Gujarat (IIJG) reported in its study titled, "Threatened Existence: A Feminist Analysis of the Genocide in Gujarat," that the government has denied, and has taken no action against the violence on Muslim women in the Gujarat attacks.

"Women have been invisibilised in Gujarat," said Farah Naqvi, one of the authors of the report, released in December 2003.

The IIJG, comprising feminist jurists, activists, lawyers, writers, and academics, interviewed more than 300 men and women from seven Gujarat districts attacked by angry Hindu mobs. The report reinforced the observation by independent groups working in Gujarat

that women were the worst victims of the 2-month violence. The report stressed "the need to look at sexual violence as a significant engine of genocide."

It also alleged that the state's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu dominated political group, had downplayed the violence against women, as evidenced by the absence of the names of women who were sexually assaulted during the riots in the government's list of those eligible for monetary compensation.

The IIJG report warned that even long after the riots, women and young girls in Gujarat would continue to face different forms of violence in their lives if state mechanisms continue to fail to provide justice to victims. ■



*A mass grave in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, in which 34 women and 27 children are buried. Since February 27, 2002, more than 850 people have been killed in communal violence in Gujarat, most of them Muslims.*

**Sources:** *A feminist analysis of Gujarat pogroms (2004, Jan. 1-15)* from <[www.milligazette.com/Archives/2004/01-15Jan04-Print Edition/0101200488.htm](http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/2004/01-15Jan04-Print%20Edition/0101200488.htm)>; *Analysis: Why is Gujarat so violent? (2002, Sept. 25)* by S. Srivastava from BBC News <[www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/1856049.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1856049.stm)>; *India: Crimes against women in Gujarat—denied and unpublished (2003, Mar. 7)* from <[www.amnestyusa.org/regions/asia/document.do?id=80256AB9000584F680256CE200586665](http://www.amnestyusa.org/regions/asia/document.do?id=80256AB9000584F680256CE200586665)>; *Gujarat riot cases to be reopened (2006, Feb. 8)* from <[www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4693412.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4693412.stm)>; *Making sense of Gujarat (2002, May)* by B. Parekh from India Seminar (513) <[www.india-seminar.com/2002/513.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2002/513.htm)>; *Nine Hindus convicted of Gujarat Muslim massacre in India (2006, Feb. 24)* by Yahoo News from <[news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20060224/wl\\_asia\\_afp/indiaunrestgujaratjustice\\_060224080604](http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20060224/wl_asia_afp/indiaunrestgujaratjustice_060224080604)>; *The problem (2002, May)* by H. Sethi from India Seminar (513) <[www.india-seminar.com/2002/513.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2002/513.htm)>; *Threatened existence: A Feminist analysis of the genocide in Gujarat (2003, Dec.)* by International Initiatives for Justice for Gujarat from <[www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/reports/iihg/2003/fullreport.pdf](http://www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/reports/iihg/2003/fullreport.pdf)>; *Women from minority community still traumatised (2003, Dec. 16)* by P. Banerjee from <[www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/article/show/369025.cms](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/article/show/369025.cms)>;



## FY*i*

### Backgrounder on the Gujarat Riots

The 2002 riots were the third episode of communal violence in Gujarat in the past 50 years.

Most analysts said the violence was the result of a changing culture in Gujarat, whose Ahmedabad town is the adopted hometown of non-violence activist Mahatma Gandhi. The textile business in Gujarat flourished, causing the influx of immigrants who did not adhere to the non-violent teachings of Gandhi.

Old time residents also noted a growing culture of intolerance, a vision of a nation with little legitimate space for anyone dubbed an outsider—Dalits, Christians and, above all, Muslims.

When many of the textile mills closed down in the 1980s and when 50,000 people lost jobs, many resorted to crime, turning Gujarat into a thriving underworld state. When a Muslim became one of Gujarat's most powerful underworld characters in the 1980s, tensions between Muslim and Hindus increased. Muslims comprised only 12 to 13% of Gujarat's population.

Another factor that led to the violence was the growth of fundamentalist Hindu organisations in the last 20 years. In 2002, then Gujarat home Minister LK Advani began a campaign to build a Hindu temple in Ayodhya, a disputed holy site. The move intensified Hindu-Muslim hostility all over India.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) also gained a stronghold in Gujarat, exploiting its close links with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This close tie between Hindu religious organisations and political groups was the reason why Muslims accused government troops and security forces of standing by and allowing Hindu mobs to rampage across the state during the riots.

## Women and Activists Campaign to Stop War on Iraq

Celebrity writers, artists, lawmakers, as well as social activists from across the world, join women living under Muslim laws in solidarity in global campaigns against fundamentalism and the US-led war in Iraq.

### No to war!

CODEPINK: Women for Peace, a California-based rights advocacy group, has launched "Women Say No to War," a global campaign to gather 100,000 signatures to be delivered to the White House and US embassies around the world by March 8, International Women's Day.

According to the group, the initial response to the call was overwhelming: more than 200 high-profile women from various walks of life endorsed the campaign even before it was formally launched on January 9. Among the signatories were popular film star Susan Sarandon, playwright Eve Ensler, comedian Margaret Cho, and award-winning authors Alice Walkers, Anne Lamott, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Barbara Ehrenreich.

The call states: "We, the women of the US, Iraq, and women worldwide, have had enough of the senseless war in Iraq and cruel attack on civilians worldwide.... We have buried too many of our loved ones. We have seen too many lives crippled forever.... This is not the world we want for ourselves or for our children..."

With fire in our bellies and love in our hearts, we women are rising up—across borders—to unite and demand an end to the bloodshed and destruction."

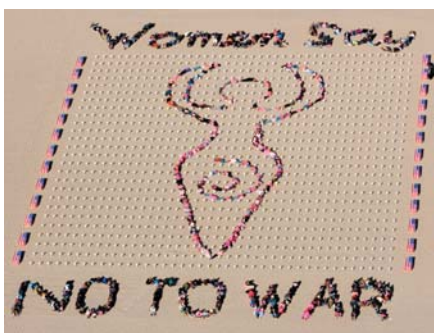
Urging a shift in the US strategy in Iraq "from a military model to a conflict resolution model," CODEPINK organisers say they want a withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq and full representation of women in the peacemaking process in the country.

### Black as a symbol of sorrow

Meanwhile, international peace network Women in Black has been holding silent vigils to protest war, rape as a tool of war, ethnic cleansing, and human rights abuses all over the world. "We are silent because mere words cannot express the tragedy that wars and hatred bring. We refuse to add to the cacophony of empty statements that are spoken with the best intentions yet may be erased or go unheard under the sound of a passing ambulance or a bomb exploding nearby," the organisation said.

"Our silence is visible. We invite women to stand with us, reflect about themselves and women who have been raped, tortured or killed in concentration camps, women who have disappeared, whose loved ones have disappeared or have been killed, whose homes have been demolished. We wear black as a symbol of sorrow for all victims of war, for the destruction of people, nature and the fabric of life," the group urged. ■

[www.womensaynotowar.org/article.php?id=813](http://www.womensaynotowar.org/article.php?id=813)



CODEPINK women of Los Angeles created this aerial image in Santo Monica beach.

[www.womensaynotowar.org/article.php?id=814](http://www.womensaynotowar.org/article.php?id=814)



Iraqi human rights advocate Eman Ahmad Khamas dons a pink tunic for the Women Say No to War march in Washington DC.

**Sources:** The women's call: Women say no to war campaign by CODEPINK from <[www.womensaynotowar.org/article.php?id=645](http://www.womensaynotowar.org/article.php?id=645)>; Women's anti-war petition circles the globe by H. Rizvi (2006, Jan. 16) from <[www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=31792](http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=31792)>; <[www.womeninblack.net](http://www.womeninblack.net)>

# Inter-Movements

## US Policies Undermine HIV Prevention Efforts: Religious Groups and Big Pharma Benefit

Community and church groups are getting a bigger slice of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) budget for HIV/AIDS prevention.

Last year, religious organisations accounted for more than 23% of the groups that got HIV/AIDS grants, Associated Press writer Rita Beamish reported. Beamish, who was quoting US State Department estimates, added that some 80% of secular and religious grant recipients are based in countries where the aid is targeted.

This year, the Bush administration put out a call for community and church groups to get involved in HIV prevention and care in 15 target countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. It is reserving USD200 million specifically for groups with little or no government grant experience, Beamish added.

Recent grant recipients include a Christian relief organisation famous for its televised appeals to feed hungry children, a well-known Roman Catholic charity, and a group run by the son of one of the US's leading evangelists Billy Graham.

### ABC's of the US AIDS program

The Bush administration's HIV prevention strategy—like its overall sexual and reproductive health approach—reflects a strong “far-right moral agenda,” said sexuality and reproductive rights activist Francoise Girard in the paper “Global Implications of US Domestic and International Policies on Sexuality.” To prevent HIV, the US embraces the controversial ABC approach: Abstinence before marriage, Being faithful to one partner, and Condoms targeted for high-risk activity. The strong emphasis, however, is on agenda A and B.

At least a third of the US's USD5 billion-budget for HIV/AIDS prevention

in Africa and the Caribbean go to abstinence-until-marriage programs, but no similar minimum is allocated for condom distribution or other prevention approaches, said Girard. Similarly, US guidelines mandate condom promotion to include abstinence and fertility messages but it does not compel groups preaching abstinence to provide condom education, she added.

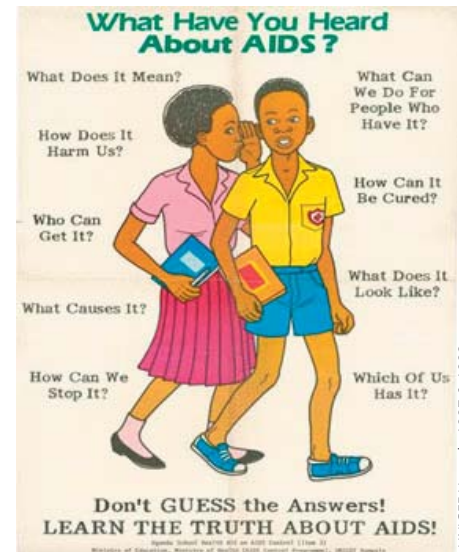
In addition, organisations receiving US AIDS funding have been required to sign a pledge opposing prostitution and sex trafficking since June 2005, thus entitling government officials to scrutinise their projects for compliance, Kaiser Network reported.

Criteria for grant eligibility have also been revised: groups must now agree to the Mexico City Protocol, or what is commonly referred to as the Global Gag Rule (GGR), reported the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE). Public pressure forced the Bush administration to exempt US AIDS funding from the GGR in August 2003. The GGR bars US-funded family planning programmes from using separate, private monies for abortion counselling, services, referrals, or lobbying work. However, the GGR was recently imposed on a request for applications for a new USD193 million program in Kenya, CHANGE noted.

### Who benefits?

As expected, groups that have deep local ties in the countries and focus on abstinence and fidelity—instead of just condoms—are faring well in the scramble to get a piece of the Bush AIDS pie, Beamish reported.

A post on the USAID website reasoned: “Community and faith-based organisations have a critical role to play in



*Primary-school materials used in Uganda in the early 1990s presented accurate information, based on scientific research, to children. Prevention strategies included: delaying sex, being faithful, and using condoms.*

the provision of HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment. They possess an extensive geographic reach and a well-developed infrastructure in the developing world. This, in addition to their unmatched staying power, makes them an invaluable asset in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.”

However, secular organisations in Africa are raising concerns that new money to groups without AIDS experience may dilute the impact of Bush's program.

“We clearly recognise that it is very important to work with faith-based organisations... But at the same time we don't want to fall into the trap of assuming faith-based groups are good at everything,” said Dan Mullins, deputy regional director for southern and western Africa for the humanitarian organisation CARE.

Moreover, most of the money in Bush's initiative goes to treatment programs.

According to Girard, not less than 55% of amounts appropriated yearly from 2006-2008 are marked for treatment of individuals with HIV, at least 75% of which will be for the purchase of anti-retroviral drugs.

While Bush has earned praise for delivering lifesaving drugs and care to millions of HIV-infected patients, Girard and others are more critical. This new focus on treatment, Girard said, “skirts the question of sexual practices and rewards pharmaceutical companies by ensuring the purchase of brand name drugs.”

Randall Tobias, Global AIDS Coordinator and recently nominated administrator of USAID, has indicated his office will not purchase generic anti-retrovirals. Tobias used to head a large pharmaceutical company and contributes to PHARMA, a pharmaceutical trade group that has sought to block access to lifesaving, generically manufactured anti-retroviral drugs.

### Targeted and beleaguered

Meanwhile, organisations that stray from the Bush administration’s “abstinence-only” ideology became targets of right-wing leaders.

Beamish relayed that in January this year, congressional conservatives wrote to Bush and the USAID, contending that several large grant recipients were pro-prostitution, pro-abortion, and not committed enough to abstinence priorities. As a result, USAID declined to renew funding for two major consortiums fighting HIV/AIDS namely CORE and IMPACT.

Last year, Population Services International (PSI) and Advocates for Youth were put under similar pressure, according to William Fisher of Inter Press Service. Right-wing Senator Tom Coburn demanded that the US stop funding PSI’s USD14 million grant because PSI’s bingo-style games teaching Guatemalan prostitutes about safe sex misused funds “to exploit victims of the sex trade.” PSI eventually won back some of the grant.

Other groups likewise lost funding when they refused to comply with the US’s requirement of a signed



## Who got the money?

Some USAID winning grants	Some groups that did not get renewed or lost funding
<p><b>Catholic Relief Services.</b> It was awarded USD6.2 million to teach abstinence and fidelity in three countries, USD335 million in a consortium providing antiretroviral treatment, and USD9 million to help orphans and children affected by HIV/AIDS. The group offers “complete and correct information about condoms” but will not promote, purchase or distribute them, said Carl Stecker, senior program director for HIV/AIDS.</p>	<p><b>The BBC World Service Trust.</b> The group refused to sign a pledge to oppose sex work, causing the US to pull out of its USD4 million HIV prevention campaign six months after the contract was signed. The BBC planned to team up with Tanzanian broadcasters to produce radio dramas, phone-ins, and public service announcements which could have “non-judgmentally” portrayed sex workers.</p>
<p><b>Samaritan’s Purse.</b> Run by evangelist Billy Graham’s son, its mission is “meeting critical needs of victims of war, poverty, famine, disease and natural disaster while sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.”</p>	<p><b>DKT International.</b> It refused to adopt and certify USAID’s policy on prostitution and thus lost support for its AIDS-prevention work in Vietnam. It has filed a lawsuit against the US government to seek injunctive relief to permit it to resume its work.</p>
<p><b>HOPE.</b> The global relief organisation founded by the International Churches of Christ recently brought comedian Chris Rock to South Africa for an AIDS prevention event. AIDS grants support HOPE in several countries.</p>	<p><b>CORE.</b> An HIV-fighting consortium whose lead partner is the secular humanitarian group CARE. It is losing its central source of money, meaning its work survives only if it can win grants from individual USAID missions in target countries.</p>
<p><b>World Relief.</b> Founded by the National Association of Evangelicals, it won USD9.7 million for abstinence work in four countries.</p>	<p><b>Family Health International (FHI).</b> The lead organisation of the anti-HIV consortium IMPACT, it brought hundreds of local and religious groups into its USD441 million project, but was told the administration wants new partners, said Sheila Mitchell, senior vice president of FHI’s Institute for HIV/AIDS.</p>

**Sources:** *Politics: Condoms lose ground in HIV prevention (2005, Aug. 31) by W. Fisher from <www.ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=30086>; Religious groups get chunk of AIDS money (2006, Jan. 30) by R. Beamish from <www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2006/01/29/natonall/w091644571.DTL>; USAID anti-sex work clause makes BBC quit HIV prevention campaign (2006, Jan. 23) from Kaiser Network*

pledge condemning sex work and sex trafficking. These groups include the BBC World Service Trust, which seeks to use media to further development goals, and DKT International, an NGO managing contraceptive social marketing programmes.

### People are the real losers

As years of HIV-prevention advocacy are undermined by US policies, the real losers in this battle between ideology and reality are people’s health and lives.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12, US POLICIES ...

## FROM PAGE 11, US POLICIES ...

The abstinence emphasis, long-time AIDS volunteers said, has led to a confusing message and added to the stigma of condom use in parts of Africa. Village volunteers in Swaziland maintain a supply of free condoms but say they have few takers.

Meanwhile, Uganda is in the midst of a “condom crisis” that is endangering the country’s previously successful prevention efforts, Fisher reported. Condoms have become difficult to find in cities, even at a high price, and are unavailable in rural areas, said CHANGE.

Similar trends are underway in a number of other countries. These include Zambia—where reduced supplies of condoms and shifts in funding of prevention programmes are leaving millions at risk—as well as Kenya, Namibia, and Tanzania, where US funding is indirectly supporting the resurgence of fundamentalist movements and undermining effective HIV prevention.

Meanwhile, the restrictions against sex work and sex trafficking are already having a “chilling effect on work in the field,” CHANGE said in its November 2005 policy brief on the implications of US policy restrictions.

The Bush administration’s drive for abstinence is also said to be reversing years of advocacy. It is “putting a lot of pressure on girls to get married earlier,” said Dr. Abeja Apunyo, Uganda representative for Pathfinder International, a reproductive health non-profit group based in Massachusetts.

“For years now we have been trying to tell our daughters that they should finish their education and train in a profession before they get married. Otherwise they have few options if they find themselves separated from their husbands for some reason,” Apunyo said.

**Sources:** *AIDS funding to be subject to Global Gag Rule (2005, Nov. 30)* from *Feminist Daily News Wire* <[www.feminist.org/news/newsbye/printnews.asp?id=9406](http://www.feminist.org/news/newsbye/printnews.asp?id=9406)>; *Faith and community-based organizations by USAID from* <[www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/global\\_health/aids/TechAreas/community/](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/TechAreas/community/)>; *Policy brief: Implications of US restrictions on programs aimed at commercial sex workers and victims of trafficking worldwide (2005, Nov.)* by Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE); *Politics: Condoms lose ground in HIV prevention (2005, Aug. 31)* by W. Fisher from <[www.ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=30086](http://www.ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=30086)>; *Religious groups get chunk of AIDS money (2006, Jan. 30)* by R. Beamish from <[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=n/a/2006/01/29/natonal/w091644571.DTL](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=n/a/2006/01/29/natonal/w091644571.DTL)>; *Uganda's shift in AIDS policy tied to US (2006, Feb. 21)* by A.L. Sussman from *Women's eNews* <[www.womensenews.org](http://www.womensenews.org)>; *USAID anti-sex work clause makes BBC quit HIV prevention campaign (2006, Jan. 23)* from *Kaiser Network*; *WGSSP Working Papers 1: Global implications of US domestic and international policies on sexuality (2004, June)* by F. Girard

In 2006, Uganda is slated to receive from the US USD186 million for HIV/AIDS programs. Last year, the first lady threw a “virgin party” for 70,000 young Ugandans and now wants to implement a nationwide virgin census to promote abstinence, reported WeNews correspondent Anna Louise Sussman.

This is despite the fact that “abstinence-before-marriage” and “be faithful” programmes leave women “unprepared for the realities they face,” Beatrice Were of the Memory Project of Uganda said. “Many women and girls are unable to insist on condom use within marriage, for fear of being labelled unfaithful [while] others are compelled by poverty to engage in sex work.”

“Ugandan women face a high risk of HIV in marriage as a result of polygamy and infidelity among their husbands, combined with human rights abuses such as domestic violence, marital rape and wife inheritance,” a report by Human Rights Watch revealed.

The US’s prostitution clause is likewise having a “chilling effect on the ground.” In Cambodia, NGOs discontinued plans to provide English language training classes for sex workers for fear these would be interpreted as “promoting prostitution,” said CHANGE. In Jamaica, health workers working with people in prostitution say these restrictions curtail their ability to support people working to protect the rights of those in the sex sector.

While Girard’s paper was written in 2004, what she said remains apparent: “The right-wing’s moral and religious agenda on sex outside marriage is more important to the Bush administration and Republican Congress than epidemiology, science, or the rights and realities of young people.” ■

## Widespread Homophobia Tramples LGBT Rights Worldwide

Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender (LGBT) persons worldwide continue to suffer the brunt of growing societal homophobia.

The US dealt the latest blow to the LGBT community when it denied two LGBT rights groups a voice at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

The US allied with Iran, Sudan, Zimbabwe, and six other countries to vote against the Danish National Association for Gays and Lesbians and Belgium-based International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) from joining the ECOSOC. A New York Times article by Warren Hoge reported US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Mark P. Lagon to have said in an interview that the US vote was based on the past association of ILGA with the controversial North American Man/Boy Love Association, which “openly condoned paedophilia.”

However, Human Rights Watch (HRW) director Scott Long pointed out in the same NY Times article that ILGA had already publicly expelled the man/boy association in 1994. Martin Thümmel, the German representative who voted for the two groups, also said that “those delegations (claiming that ILGA) is supporting paedophilia are using this as a pretext in order to shirk the real issue of sexual orientation.”

From the voting held, ECOSOC dismissed the NGOs’ application without the hearings usually accorded to other organisations, some 3,000 of which enjoy consultative status in the council.

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, commented: “it is repugnant that the self-proclaimed ‘leader of the free world’ will align itself with bigots and tyrants to advance the right wing’s virulently anti-gay agenda.... Apparently, Iran, which President Bush has deemed part of the

'Axis of Evil,' is a suitable partner when it comes to discriminating against gay people."

According to HRW, the US's 2004 country report noted that Iran punishes homosexual conduct between men with the death penalty, and that Zimbabwe denounced homosexuals, with President Robert Mugabe even blaming them for "Africa's ills," and calling them "people without rights" and "worse than dogs and pigs."

### Homophobia in the legal system

A basic form of homophobia is seen in laws penalising people with a different sexual identity. According to Alejandra Sardá, "penal codes in countries and international human rights treaties condone violence (against LGBTs)...because they mention public morals as a valid reason to restrict freedom of expression....No law defines what 'public morals' is—only the church."

The Turkish government cited "public morals" in its threats to close down an organisation defending LGBT rights, asserting the group violated a provision in the Turkish Civil Code forbidding the operation of an organisation "that is against the laws and principles of morality."

In Afghanistan, Russia, Iran, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, consensual sexual activities between same-sex couples can be meted the death penalty. In India, homosexuals could be imprisoned for life while in more than 80 countries, persons engaging in homosexual acts could be meted punishment ranging from a fine to public flogging, "mental rehabilitation," or even up to 20 years imprisonment.

### More insidious

More insidious than the legal provisions prohibiting homosexual relationships, however, is the widespread discriminatory views of people in churches and in government positions and police enforcement agencies.

HRW reports that EU representative Jan Tadeusz Masiel sees LGBT persons as "repulsive" and "shocking," Poland President Kaczyński calls them as "perverts," and Poland Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz warned that if a homosexual tries to "infect" others with their homosexuality, "the state must intervene in this violation of freedom."

In Guatemala, transgender women and gay men are openly attacked. Referring to an incident in February where two transgender women were wounded and killed by alleged police officers in uniform, HRW researcher Jessica Stern said these "cold-blooded shootings are just the latest tragedy in Guatemala's pattern of deadly violence based on sexual orientation." In 2005, 13 transgender women/gay men were murdered in Guatemala City alone, HRW data showed.

The Philippine government, through its Movies and Television Review and Classification Board, warned TV producers last year against producing shows containing lesbian relationships, which it described as "an abnormality of nature."

In 2005, the Methodist Church in Fiji took on a more active role by rounding up 5,000 citizens to march against homosexuality and advocating constitutional reform to remove the provision for non-discrimination against sexual orientation.

In Nepal, police officers attacked and sexually abused transgender people, while an NGO defending sexual health and rights is being sued for "advocating homosexual rights." Meanwhile, in China, the government prevented the opening of Beijing's first gay and lesbian culture festival.

This widespread discrimination has an enormous impact on the campaigns of sexual rights advocates and hampers efforts to curb the rising incidence of HIV/AIDS. In China, for example, members of civil society organisations serving people living with HIV/AIDS have been harassed while some have even been beaten and jailed.

But the most basic violation is the attempt to suppress the freedom of LGBT communities to express their sexual identity. Society's denial of the existence and rights of LGBT persons creates vulnerability not only to LGBTs themselves, but to the community in general, FannyAnn Eddy said at the 60th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. "The silence surrounding (male homosexuals)—the refusal to acknowledge their existence or address their health care needs—endangers not only them but their wives and girlfriends," she said.

### Ray of hope?

The European Union (EU) recently warned member states to eliminate homophobia or be sanctioned. "Homophobia is a violation of human rights," EU Justice Minister Franco Frattini said. He specifically referred to the refusal of some countries to legalise same-sex unions.

Frattini further proposed to designate 2007 as Equal Opportunity Year, with the goal of promoting diversity and informing the public about their rights.

But Wanda Nowicka, director of the Federation for Women and Family Planning, is not impressed. She said that EU has good policies for developing countries but not for its industrialised member states. Policy, then, is left to individual governments, and if it is conservative, the governments even derail efforts of organisations at promoting LGBT rights.

Which is why civil society movements are working more actively to address the issue, and ILGA will continue to fight for its place in the UN, despite being twice denied. "(We) will fight this latest setback," an ILGA press statement said. "(We) will continue to defend the rights of LGBT persons worldwide and... continue to ask the UN to consider the rights of all persons regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity." ■

**Sources:** China: *Police shut down gay, lesbian event* (2005, Dec. 20), *Guatemala: Transgender people face deadly attacks* (2006, Feb. 21), *Nepal: Police on 'sexual cleansing' drive* (2005, Jan. 13), *Philippines: Censor targets TV shows featuring lesbians* (2004, June 11), *Poland: Official homophobia threatens human rights* (2006, Feb. 16), *Testimony by FannyAnn Eddy at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights* (2004, Oct. 4), and *Turkey: Officials try to shut down rights group* (2005, Sept. 27) by Human Rights Watch (HRW) from <[www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)>; *ECOSOC dismisses two LGBT organizations without fair hearing!* (2006, Jan. 25), *Legal survey on the countries in the world having legal prohibitions on sexual activities between consenting adults in private* (2006) by D. Ottosson, *U.S. votes with Iran, Cuba, Sudan, and Zimbabwe against two gay groups at United Nations* (2006, Jan. 24) by ILGA from <[www.ilga.org](http://www.ilga.org)>; *EU states warned to accept same-sex marriage* (2006, Jan. 20) by Catholic World News from <[www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=41919](http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=41919)>; *Fundamentalism threatens women of Eastern Europe* (2005, Nov.) by E. Clift from <[www.whrnet.org/fundamentalisms/docs/perspective-clift-0602.html](http://www.whrnet.org/fundamentalisms/docs/perspective-clift-0602.html)>; *Rights groups fault U.S. vote in U.N. on gays* by W. Hoge (2006, Jan. 27) from <[www.truthout.org/docs\\_2006/printer\\_012806B.shtml](http://www.truthout.org/docs_2006/printer_012806B.shtml)>; and *The imprint of nationalism and fundamentalism on sexuality* (2004) by A. Sardá in *Isis-Manila Women in Action* (2).

# Middle East: New Religious Regimes

## Voted into Power

Thousands of demonstrators celebrated the recent victory of the radical Islamic party Hamas in Palestinian elections even as millions of observers were stunned. The victory generated a flurry of reactions and caused more anxiety for Western policy-makers and political observers already troubled by the recent electoral gains of radical populists and Islamic hardliners in Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, and Egypt.

Are we seeing the spread of radicalism through the ballot box or the march of democracy in the region? There is no clear-cut answer at the moment.

Predictably, prophets of doom are already pronouncing that Hamas will impose its fundamentalist social agenda and are urging governments to refuse contacts with the Palestinian Authority. Many Palestinians and Muslims worldwide, however, have expressed disappointment over the Hamas victory. They urge the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority not to lead the Palestinians into international isolation, despite Hamas's assurances of their belief in a secular, independent and sovereign Palestine, where religion would not be the basis of citizenship.

### The reality of democracy?

What if you foster democratic elections all over the Middle East and only radical Islamists are voted into power? Perhaps, one of the biggest single political nightmares for US policy-makers is fast becoming a dreadful reality, wrote Inter Press Service News Agency's Thalif Deen in an article.

The ambitious plans touted by US President George W. Bush to "democratise" the Middle East are in danger of being derailed because of recent electoral gains by radical populists and Islamic hardliners in the Middle East, said Deen. As a result, the argument against multi-party democracy will be used by virtually all of the authoritarian or family-run regimes in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and also Morocco and Tunisia,

who have already warned Washington that democratic elections could bring radical forces into power.

### But other voices ask: Is this the reality of democracy?

No matter how deeply one differs with Hamas and its politics, it now has the mandate to represent the people of the occupied Palestinian territories, said Tarek Fatah and Jihad Aliweiwi, two members of the board of the Muslim Canadian Congress. Fatah hosts the weekly TV show *The Muslim Chronicle*, while Aliweiwi the weekly Arabic radio show *Kan Ya Makan*.

In an article published in *The Toronto Star*, Fatah and Aliweiwi said the Hamas victory "forces us all to confront the reality of democracy. Do we respect the will of a people, or do we add to their cynicism about democracy as a system tolerated only if it serves the interests of the US and its allies?" They urged: Why not give Hamas a chance?

To reject this mandate, they said, will send a disturbing message, not just to the people of Palestine, but to the rest of the Muslim world as well, where ordinary citizens have been struggling for the introduction of democracy long before George Bush saw its merits, and where the US has propped up dictatorships and monarchies for decades. If Israel and the West do not accept the results of the Palestinian election, it will only validate the claim by Islamic fundamentalists that parliamentary democracy is acceptable to the West only if it serves the interests of the US, not the Arab people.

### The "reality of democracy" cannot be a blank cheque

Is this what comes with democracy?

No, said Algerian sociologist Marieme Hélié-Lucas. She argues there is a need to "reflect on the concept of democracy and to differentiate between an electoral process which is only a means to achieve social justice—a means that

can be perverted—and the aim of democracy, which is to ensure, through a representation of the people, a better and more just society," she wrote in response to Fatah and Aliweiwi.

Hélié-Lucas is recognised internationally for her work resisting the fundamentalist homogenisation and monopolisation of Islam. She is the founder of *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, an international solidarity network of women from over 70 countries.

"The government of the people (democracy) is a system that is supposed to ensure more justice than monarchy (the discretionary government of one single leader), or oligarchy (the power of a few people, of an elite). However, as we all know, the people may eventually be wrong, the people may elect Hitler and no one would dare say that this system was just: certainly not the homosexuals, gypsies, communists, and Jews that disappeared under this regime," Hélié-Lucas said.

"The 'reality of democracy' cannot be a blank cheque signed to the new fascists of the time. I am not using this term in a loose way: if one cannot compare two extreme right movements, in different times and contexts, one can say that fundamentalists are like fascists in many ways," she wrote.

Hélié-Lucas noted that like fascists, fundamentalists "believe in a superior race, or creed, and therefore they qualify certain categories of people as *'untermensch'*"; in the case of Muslim fundamentalists, the infrahumans the subhumans are the *'kofr'*; the unbelievers, i.e., all those who do not condone their version of Islam, including other Muslim believers; like fascists, they believe in a mythical past: the Aryans, Ancient Rome, or the Golden Age of Islam, that they want the society to return to, in the case of Muslim fundamentalism, it is the *'Kalifat'*; like fascists, they stand for the physical elimination of their opponents, not just their political elimination; like fascists, they are pro capitalists, and social injustice will be dealt with through charity (*zakat*); like fascists, they keep women in their place: at home and under the boot of religion." ■

**Sources:** *International: Democracy—aims and means* by M. H. Lucas (2006, Feb. 2) from <[www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-508245](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-508245)>; and *Islam radicals rise via the ballot box* (2006, Feb. 27) by T. Deen from <[www.ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=32034](http://www.ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=32034)>.

# Community & Independent Media

## Cartoons Lead Muslim Leaders to Propose Blasphemy Language at UN

Leading members of the 57-nation Organisation of the Islamic Countries (OIC) want to bring anti-blasphemy language into the human rights council, following the publication of 12 cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in the Danish publication Jyllands-Posten.



Nasser Ibtayeh/AP  
www.msnbc.msn.com/id/1164199

Supporters of the Islamic group Hamas burn a Danish flag during a demonstration against the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in Danish and other European newspapers.



Keystone  
www.msnbc.msn.com/id/1164199

Many Muslims, including those in Indonesia, have protested about the cartoons.

The OIC lobbied with the Human Rights Commission at the United Nations General Assembly on February 9, 2006, where they said the cartoons and their reproductions “constituted an incitement to hatred and violence against Muslims.” They called for European nations “to ensure such incidents do not recur.”



### Laws on Freedom of Speech

Article 19 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Article 10 (Freedom of Expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights states:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This article shall not prevent

**Sources:** *Universal Declaration of Human Rights and European Convention on Human Rights from Wikipedia <en.wikipedia.org>.*

On February 21, Western nations, UN officials and some human rights groups objected to the request.

In an article on the issues at stake, the New York-based NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the Muslims’ objections to depictions of Mohammed did not give them any right under international human rights law to insist that others abide by that view.

“Muslims, like all others, are free to state their religious objections and to press for more respectful treatment,” HRW said. “But they are not entitled to censor the expression of others in the name of their own religious freedom.”

States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television, or cinema enterprises.

2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions, or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

Freedom of speech is presently guaranteed under international law under human rights instruments, notably under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

### A deeper look

Feminist activist and sociologist Marieme Helie Lucas gives a deeper analysis of the issue at hand.

In her article “Doing Away with the Enlightenment,” Lucas wrote: “What we see coming into Europe and into France, largely under the influence of Muslim fundamentalists, is the imposition of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16, CARTOONS...

FROM PAGE 15, CARTOONS...

forced religious identities and forced 'respect' for modes of behaviours and thinking that are specific to religion. Thus, Muslim fundamentalists in France are gaining ground, for there is no force on the left to confront them, to put limits to their freedom when it tramples others' freedom."

"The European Parliament already gave us valuable indicators of this shift, when it discussed whether Christianity should be specified in the Constitution as a common value of Europeans, and whether blasphemy should be criminalised under European laws. In both cases, the representatives of the secular French Republic opposed these propositions. However, their hesitations are more and more visible, even at the time of the veil controversy. One can feel that they are more and more ready to compromise with Muslim fundamentalists, in the name of respect of cultures and religions, in the name of anti racism, in the name of freedom of expression, etc."

Lucas's article also noted the narrowing range of political views in Europe, produced by the controversy over the Danish cartoons.

On the one hand is the racist European extreme right movement that uses present situations to legitimise migrant bashing of those with Muslim descent, she said.

On the other hand are the Muslim fundamentalists that use the cover of religion to forward their political agenda. She calls the influence to silence free press an "imposition of forced religious identities and forced respect for modes of behaviour and thinking that are specific to religion."

She believes the progressive forces bear a significant responsibility in this state of affairs. "Where are the progressive forces?" she asked. "They are eaten up from within by doubts and hesitations, precisely because of fear of being accused of racism, because of the colonial past, because of the actual discrimination against migrants from Muslim countries and communities," she further stated.

**Sources:** International: Update on recently published 'Doing away with the Enlightenment?' (2006, Feb. 16) by M.H. Lucas Women Living Under Muslim Laws from <[www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-528745](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-528745)>; Muslim leaders want UN to outlaw 'defamation' (2006, Feb. 21) by P. Goodenough from Cybercast News Service <[www.cnsnews.com/ViewForeignBureaus.asp?Page=%5CForeignBureaus%5Carchive%5C200602%5CFOR20060221b.html](http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewForeignBureaus.asp?Page=%5CForeignBureaus%5Carchive%5C200602%5CFOR20060221b.html)>; Muslims want anti-blasphemy clause in rights body (2006, Feb. 9) by E. Leopold from Reuters in Y! India News <[in.news.yahoo.com/060208/137/62f1a.html](http://in.news.yahoo.com/060208/137/62f1a.html)>.

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## Behind the Cartoons Crisis

Violence, a few deaths, international tension, and renewed debates over free speech and blasphemy have followed the September 2005 publication of 12 cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad by the Danish paper Jyllands-Posten.

From Jerusalem, Lebanon, Iran, Syria, Cairo, London, Russia, to the Philippines, Muslim communities have joined in on various forms of protest.

Peaceful demonstrations and official statements have escalated to riots, the boycotting of Danish products, withdrawal of ambassadors, burning down of embassies in some countries, and death threats against those who printed the cartoons.

Islamic tradition or Hadith—stories of the words and actions of Muhammad and his Companions—explicitly prohibit images of Allah, Muhammad and all the major prophets of the Christian and Jewish traditions. They also discourage the figurative depiction of living creatures, especially human beings, BBC reported.

However, BBC also reported that there is no explicit ban in the Koran on images of Allah or the Prophet

**Source:** Q & A: *Depicting the Prophet Muhammad* (2006, Feb. 2) by BBC News from <[news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4674864.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4674864.stm)>

"They have adopted the apolitical discourse of human rights, which efficiently served the interests of a fascist faction of the so-called Muslims and condoned the representation of a whole community of migrants by a right wing coalition that ranges from deeply conservatives to plain fascists."

Her article likewise explores the good that came out of the controversy, particularly raising political issues among

Muhammad – whether carved, painted, or drawn.

However, chapter 42, verse 11 of the Koran does say: "[Allah is] the originator of the heavens and the earth... [there is] nothing like a likeness of Him." Muslims have interpreted this to mean Allah (and his Prophet Muhammad) cannot be captured in an image by human hand because of his grandeur, and to attempt such is seen as an insult.

The anger is also fuelled by the perception among Muslims that many in the West harbour hostility towards and fear Islam and Muslims. One cartoon depicts the Prophet wearing a turban shaped as a bomb with a burning fuse, linking Islam, the Prophet, and Muslims to terrorism.

Some critics agree that the act of publishing the cartoons was offensive to the Islamic community. However, others say that retaliation by fundamentalist groups, violent protests, and vandalism only strengthen the stereotype of Muslims as terrorists and overlook religious beliefs that prohibit violent actions.

European governments about allowing fundamentalists to control the voice of all Muslims.

"For those who believe neither in one god nor in several, it is inconceivable that they should publicly adore what for them are only man-made idols. It is the undisputed right of believers to do so, but the laws of the Republic, European laws, or international treaties should by no means impose it on others." ■



# Silencing the Vagina Monologues

The Vagina Monologues (TVM) has been called many things: offensive, vulgar, brutal, and pornographic. At the same time, it has also been hailed as empowering, invigorating, validating, and liberating. Written by Eve Ensler, the play explores themes of identity, sexuality, and abuse, often mixing humour and shock value to tackle topics like rape, masturbation, and menstruation.

With such mixed reviews, TVM has wrought its own share of controversy.

In February 2006, two Catholic campuses in the US faced scrutiny from school administrators for staging the play. According to officials of the University of Notre Dame (South Bend, Indiana) and Providence College (Rhode Island), the play “affronts Catholic standards their institutions are meant to reflect.”

Similar attempts were previously made to suppress the staging of the play around the world.

In 2002, administrators from a leading Catholic university in the Philippines banned a localised version of the play on campus; it was instead staged at a nearby restaurant.

In 2004, city officials banned the play in Chennai, Mumbai. In the same year, the Shanghai Cultural Bureau banned a Chinese version of the play, stating that the conditions were “not ripe” for the taboo-breaking drama.

In 2005, the Ugandan Media Council barred the play in Kampala because “it promoted and glorified acts such as lesbianism and homosexuality.”

## Going against values

Groups staging the plays often face opposition from influential cultural and religious fundamentalist groups.

Since 2003, The Cardinal Newman Society (CNS) has headed the fight against the V-Day benefit productions of TVM at Catholic colleges and universities in the US. CNS is the national organisation dedicated to the renewal of Catholic identity in higher education in the US.



*Eve Ensler, The Vagina Monologues' author.*

On February 17, 2004, CNS protested the play through full-page ads in the Baltimore, Washington, Boston, and Chicago editions of the USA Today. The ads called on Notre Dame, Georgetown and Boston College, among others, to cut off funding for the play and ban its performance on campus.

The Catholic organisation American Society for the Defence of Tradition, Family and Property (ASDTFP), also launched an anti-V-Day campaign in 2005. According to their website, the group was formed in 1973 “to resist, in the realm of ideas, the liberal, socialist and communist trends of the times and proudly affirm the positive values of tradition, family, and property.”

ASDTFP has publicly protested against films and plays it views as blasphemous through newspaper advertisements, direct mail, leafletting, public meetings, caravans, and volunteer groups. It calls TVM “a piece replete with sexual encounters, lust, graphic descriptions of masturbation, and lesbian behaviour,” condoning mortal sin and promoting “the corrosive agenda of the sexual revolution on campus.” Student action against the play’s corporate sponsors resulted in the cancellation of its performances in 16 Catholic colleges in the US in 2005.

FY*i*

## About V-Day

V-Day is a global movement to stop violence against women and girls. It is a catalyst that promotes creative events to increase awareness, raise money and revitalise the spirit of existing anti-violence organisations. V-Day generates attention for the fight to stop violence against women and girls, including rape, battery, incest, female genital mutilation (FGM), and sexual slavery.

Through V-Day campaigns, local volunteers and college students produce annual benefit performances of The Vagina Monologues to raise awareness and funds for grassroots, national and international organisations and programs that work to stop violence against women and girls.

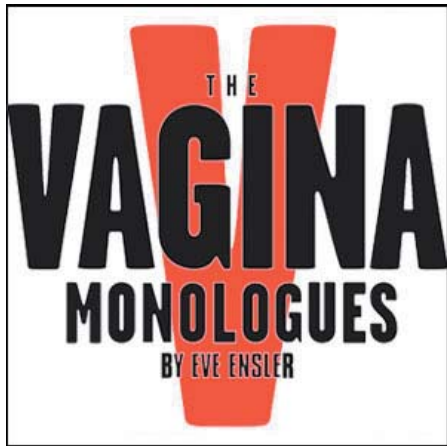
*Source:* <[www.vday.org](http://www.vday.org)>

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## The play must go on

While there have been efforts to restrain the play, others remain critical of the reasons behind them and the selectivity at pinpointing TVM as a culprit against culture, morality, and religion.

“You cannot suppress ideas, just because they upset your sense of propriety,” said Sarah Mukasa on the banning of TVM in Uganda in 2005. Mukasa is the programmes manager for the East and Horn of Africa at Akina Mama wa Afrika.



*The play that cannot be silenced.*

In an article in Isis International-Manila's *Women in Action* magazine, Mukasa criticised the government's handling of the play, noting that material featuring the corruption of values by Western morality had not been banned in subscription TV and salacious print media.

Banning the play would not keep the social movement down, Mukasa said. In fact, state interference brought even more awareness on the issues it tackled and reached a wider audience because of

the debates it generated. The common reaction among women is that “there must be something good in it for women, if the ministers have banned the play.”

Discussions on the matter continue—in radio stations, online discussion boards, mailing lists, and even casual conversations in public places. These discussions spur healthy media debate, drawing more interest in the play and attracting audiences who would not even be interested in the first place.

Likewise, in the US, attempts to censor the play have contributed to enlivened debates on free speech. Groups continue to stage the play and raise awareness and funds for victims of violence even without full community or university support.

According to the official V-day website, TVM has been performed in 5,000 sites to packed audiences in 81 countries and translated into 45 languages. It has won a 1997 Obie Award and 2001 Elliot Norton Award, and has raised over USD30 million in eight years for organisations that work to end violence against women. A television version starring Eve Ensler has even been produced by cable TV channel HBO.

As Mukasa said, the play has different effects on different people. Those who have seen the play and condemned it may exercise their right to stay away from future productions. But those who find it liberating should not be prevented from staging, or watching it either.

In the end, it is for the audience to decide whether the play is indeed vulgar or empowering. ■

**Sources:** *Ateneo disapproves campus staging of 'The Vagina Monologues' (2002, Mar. 10)* by A.A. Ayaya from [www.cyberdyaryo.com/features/f2002\\_0301\\_02.htm](http://www.cyberdyaryo.com/features/f2002_0301_02.htm); *Chennai says no to Vagina Monologues (2004, March 10)* by P. Ramani Express India from [www.expressindia.com/fullstory.php?newsid=29217#compstory](http://www.expressindia.com/fullstory.php?newsid=29217#compstory); *Higher learning reaches new low with vulgar V\*\*\*\*\* Monologues" (2005)* by TF Student Action from American TFP [tfp.org/student\\_action/activities/protests/monologuesprotest\\_2004.htm](http://tfp.org/student_action/activities/protests/monologuesprotest_2004.htm); *History of opposition to V-Day on Catholic college campuses* from [www.vday.org/contents/vday/resistance/catholic](http://www.vday.org/contents/vday/resistance/catholic); *Shanghai not quite ready for Vagina Monologues (2004, February 9)* by A. Brown from *The Scotsman* [news.scotsman.com/index.cfm?id=156262004](http://news.scotsman.com/index.cfm?id=156262004); *The Vagina Monologues* by Wikipedia from [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vagina\\_Monologues](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vagina_Monologues); *The Vagina Monologues: I am glad they have banned it (2005, April 7)* by S. Mukasa from *Pambazuka News* [www.pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/27623](http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/27623); *"Two Catholic campuses hush Vagina Monologues" (2006, Feb. 12)* by H. Seligson from *Women's eNews* [www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/2633/context/cover/](http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/2633/context/cover/); and *Uganda ban on Vagina Monologues (2005, Feb. 18)* by BBC News from [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4277063.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4277063.stm).

## Freedom of Speech Curtailed by Anti-Blasphemy Laws

“All over the world, educated and illiterate women alike are being persecuted by religious fundamentalists for expressing their beliefs,” said Women Against Fundamentalisms (WAF).

WAF, a group of women and activists formed in 1989 to challenge the rise of fundamentalism in all religions, said religious intolerance continues in Islamic countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Mauritius.

According to WAF, blasphemy in Islam constitutes of speaking ill of the Prophet Muhammad, or any other Prophet mentioned in Quran or all Biblical Prophets. It also holds true for speaking ill of Allah. It is considered a very serious offence and may be punishable by death if charges are proven.

### Cases of blasphemy

WAF's education pack “The Crime of Blasphemy” reports various cases of fundamentalism and blasphemy laws in different countries.

A Muslim-majority country, Pakistan has one the strictest anti-blasphemy laws, making it legal to punish those who oppose religious beliefs. These laws have been used to persecute journalists.

In 1982, President General Ziaul Haq introduced Section 295B to the Pakistani Code of Criminal Procedure. The new law punishes those “defiling the Holy Quran” with life imprisonment. In 1986, Section 295C was introduced, making the death penalty mandatory for anyone convicted of using “derogatory remarks with respect to the Holy Prophet.”

In 2004, the Pakistani parliament approved a law to reduce the scope of its blasphemy laws. The amendment meant that before presenting criminal charges, police must first investigate accusations of blasphemy to ensure that they are well founded.

Despite this move, more than 4,000 people have been accused of blasphemy since 1986. Currently, some 560 people have been charged and 30 are still waiting for a court decision. The accused often had to change residences for fear of their lives and those of their families.

In Bangladesh, the number of Islamic fundamentalist groups has grown in strength and these groups frequently take the law into their own hands.

The WAF report states: “The resurgence of *salish* (village arbitration council) proceedings are targeting rural women and most of the victims are accused of adultery. Two reported deaths from *salish* verdicts in 1993, in which one woman was publicly stoned and later committed suicide, and another woman was burned to death, are examples of the extralegal and often fatal verdicts that *salish* leaders impose. Islamic fundamentalist groups have pronounced *fatwas*, which have resulted in the burning of schools and offices, and prevented development workers and activists from working among the poor. Individuals and groups are targets when they directly challenge the power and income of local religious leaders.”

**Sources:** *Afghanistan: Imprisoned journalist says freedom of expression under attack* (2006, Dec. 29) by G. Esfandiari from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty <[www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/12/81da419f-1d5e-44c7-a3f3-7209ce39f428.html](http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/12/81da419f-1d5e-44c7-a3f3-7209ce39f428.html)>; *Apostasy* by Wikipedia from <[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostasy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostasy)>; *The crime of blasphemy* by Women Against Fundamentalisms from <[waf.gn.apc.org/blasphemy.htm](http://waf.gn.apc.org/blasphemy.htm)>.

## Some Organisations Working against Fundamentalism

**Catholics for Free Choice (CFFC)**  
<[www.catholicsforchoice.org/](http://www.catholicsforchoice.org/)>

CFFC shapes and advances sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women’s well being and respect, and affirm the moral capacity of women and men to make sound decisions about their lives. Through discourse, education, and advocacy, CFFC works in the US and internationally to infuse these values into public policy, community life and Catholic social thinking and teaching. They run worldwide campaigns such as Condoms4Life, which raises public awareness about the devastating effect of the bishops’ ban on condoms.

In Mauritius, the Prime Minister bowed to pressure from Hindu fundamentalists and banned *The Rape of Sita*, a book by Lindsey Collen on sexual violence against women. A common name for women in Mauritius, Sita is also the name of the revered wife of the god-king Rama in the Hindu epic Ramayana and symbolises the ideal Hindu wife—pure, chaste and virtuous. WAF reports the Prime Minister declared the book “blasphemous” and an “outrage against public and religious morality.” He also called on the Commissioner of Police to take action against the author.

In Afghanistan, Ali Mohaqeq Nasab, Islamic scholar and male editor of the women’s monthly magazine Women’s Rights, was sentenced to two years in prison by Kabul’s primary court in 2005 on charges of apostasy, defined by sociologists as the “renunciation and criticism of or opposition to one’s former religion.” The ruling against the magazine editor highlighted the strain between moderates and conservatives in the country’s government extremist religious groups. In an interview with Radio Free Europe (2005), Nasab said his arrest

show the limited freedom of expression in Afghanistan, and how Afghan journalists are under attack by those using religion to advance their own causes.

In Algeria, increasing numbers of women have been killed because of their association with secularist causes. WAF writes that “fundamentalists have vowed to target women who do not cover their heads in public, and two unveiled Algerian women, aged 19 and 20, were killed by gunmen while waiting at a bus stop. This is one case of hundreds of women’s deaths. Editors, journalists and publishers are also targets of religious fundamentalist groups worldwide.”

WAF works to understand the growth of fundamentalism and to support women and women’s organisations that challenge its effects. Their education pack provides information and promotes debate on important issues for students, teachers and professionals working with women affected by fundamentalism. ■

**Challenging Fundamentalisms**  
<[www.whrnet.org/fundamentalisms](http://www.whrnet.org/fundamentalisms)>

A web resource for women’s human rights, the site is handled by the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), Rights and Democracy, and Women Living Under Muslim Laws.

The site aims to strengthen women’s movements locally, globally and cross-regionally, both within specific religious/ethnic communities affected by fundamentalism and across religious/ethnic divides. It is a handy source of information on the following: the warning signs of fundamentalisms and strategies to counteract them; comprehensive, cross-

regional data and analysis on the impact of fundamentalist movements and trends on women’s human rights; awareness-raising materials; and other resources providing alternative visions for society.

**CODEPINK: Women for Peace**  
<[www.codepink4peace.org/](http://www.codepink4peace.org/)>

CODEPINK is a women-initiated grassroots peace and social justice movement working to end the war in Iraq, stop new wars, and redirect US resources into healthcare, education and other life-affirming activities. The website contains coverage of present campaigns, newlinks,

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SOME ORGANIZATIONS...

#### FROM PAGE 20, SOME ORGANIZATIONS...

a list of local groups, galleries for movies, and photos of the groups activities. A notable contribution is the handy planning and resource tools for event and action planning, including training camps, street theatre and meetings. Local campaigners may also download the group's flyers, sign-up sheets, fundraising tips, and songs to use in their own activism efforts.

#### No to Political Islam

<[www.ntpi.org/](http://www.ntpi.org/)>

This is a campaign "to oppose political Islam, its agenda of hatred and oppression, and its imposition of the most barbaric interpretation of Sharia law." It seeks a future in which "all people, men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims, can enjoy the benefits of equality, democracy, human rights, freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought, and freedom of expression."

#### PeaceWomen

<[www.peacewomen.org](http://www.peacewomen.org)>

A project of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, PeaceWomen monitors and works toward rapid and full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The site contains extensive resources on peace women updates (including links to relevant UN, government and NGO documents, status of CEDAW in different countries), news, and links to similar organisations. Over 72 translations of the UNSC are available on the site. The site works to facilitate communication and mobilisation among advocates and supporters in civil society, the UN system, and governments working on women,

peace and security issues. It also advocates for the integration of gender analysis in the governance, peace and security work of civil society actors, the UN system, and governmental bodies.

#### Sisters in Islam

<[www.sistersinislam.net/](http://www.sistersinislam.net/)>

The site provides a collection of articles and features for Sisters in Islam and women who are interested in learning more about Islam. It likewise features a discussion forum for members (women only) to share stories or news. The site also contains links to the Quran (in Arabic and English), an Arabic recitation for listening or/and downloading via Real Audio and MP3, and a searchable online version where keywords can be used to find select chapters and verses.

#### Women Against Fundamentalisms (WAF)

<[waf.gn.apc.org/](http://waf.gn.apc.org/)>

WAF together with the e-mail discussion forum called "WAF-L," represents a revival of WAF, the London-based organisation that became inactive in 1997 due to lack of womanpower. The site contains articles from WAF Journals (1990-1996), an overview of current campaigns, and useful education packs on blasphemy, religion and education, multiculturalism, and other relevant topics.

#### Women in Black International (WiB)

<[www.womeninblack.net](http://www.womeninblack.net)>

WiB is an international peace network. Not an organisation, WiB is a means of mobilisation and a formula for action.

The WiB vigils started in Israel in 1988 when women protested against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. WiB has developed in Italy, Spain, Germany, England, Azerbaijan, Colombia, and in FR Yugoslavia, where women in Belgrade have stood in weekly vigils since 1991 to protest war and the Serbian regime's policies of nationalist aggression. WiB groups have formed in many cities in the US since September 11. WiB New York has been holding vigils in solidarity with sisters throughout the world since 1993.

#### Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press (WIFP)

<[www.wifp.org/fundamentalism.html](http://www.wifp.org/fundamentalism.html)>

The site contains articles and information that give voices to women living under fundamentalism. Resources include interviews, analysis, news links, and a list of books of interest. It also provides links to relevant country pages in Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

#### Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUM)

<[www.wlum.org/english/index.shtml](http://www.wlum.org/english/index.shtml)>

WLUM is an international solidarity network providing information, support and a collective space for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned, or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam. For more than two decades, WLUM has linked individual women and organisations in more than 70 countries from South Africa to Uzbekistan, Senegal to Indonesia, and Brazil to France. The site focuses on news, views, and calls for action, with links to WLUM publications. ■

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