



violence is not our culture
the global campaign to stop killing and stoning women

THE GLOBAL CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLING AND STONING WOMEN AT THE 54TH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

On March 10, the Global Campaign To Stop Killing and Stoning Women (SKSW Campaign) hosted a forum to introduce the Women Re-claiming and Redefining Cultures (WRRC) programme and a screening of two video documentaries on violence against women and girls justified in the name of 'culture'.

The event was part of the SKSW's agenda during the 54th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women which took place at the UN in New York on 01-12 March 2010. The aim of the event was to present an overview of the diverse issues the Women Reclaiming and Re-defining Cultures (WRRC) programme works on, highlighting the strategies of our partners and the fruits of their work, and to share the video documentaries produced by SKSW Campaign's partners on stoning in Iran and the whipping of a young girl in Indonesia – both were punished under zina laws.

Edna Aquino, Ngozi Nwozu , and Rima Athar presented an overview of the MDG3 funded Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures (WRRC) programme, coordinated by Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) and Institute for Women's Empowerment (IWE). The WRRC consists of three working groups – Women's Inheritance and Property Rights, Sexuality, and the Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women. All three working groups are active across Senegal, Nigeria, Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indonesia.

Women's Inheritance and Property Rights (WIPR)

The WIPR working group focuses on strategies for ensuring women's rights in the face of disempowering uses of 'culture' including religion and custom/tradition to reduce their rights in the spheres of land use and property inheritance. Women are often discriminated against in their ability to receive equitable access to land. In some instances State allocation policies often refer to only the family head, with the presumption that this is male, and women's abilities to individually purchase land are often blocked by other obstacles, such as their limited accesses to mortgages and other resources. In Afghanistan, women may receive land at the time of their marriage as their *mahr* or dowry, and in principle are granted full ownership over the land. In practice however, *mahr* is defined as a room in a house which is shared between families and or family members, reducing women's abilities to take ownership of it. Even if the *mahr* is defined as a separate unit, marriages

are often not registered in Afghanistan, and therefore women have no legal claim to it. One strategy to counter this has been to have marriages registered so that formal claims may be made in courts for women's property. In both Africa and Asia there can often be different systems of rights regimes operating at once – state law, customary and/or religious laws and practices – under each of which women and men have different sorts of entitlements to land, and often the system which is least favourable to women is applied when women attempt to claim their rights. Increasingly however, women are finding ways to negotiate these overlapping and competing regimes to access or develop their rights claims. The WIPR working group is also examining women's strategies in the face of loss of land, whether by displacements due to conflict/war, natural disasters, State or corporate appropriation for development, divorce or polygyny.

The WIPR working group is currently supporting 2 projects in Pakistan, 1 in Afghanistan, 1 in Sudan, 1 in Niger, 1 in Nigeria, 1 in Senegal, and 3 in Indonesia, with a focus on raising awareness, capacity building and developing strategies for asserting women's property rights.

Sexuality Working Group

The Sexuality working group examines the following cross-cutting themes in all focal countries: Sexual violence, the relegation of sexual rights to the 'private realm' and the association of women's bodies with male ownership. On the last point it explores how the promotion of male control over women's bodies serves to maintain unequal power relations within marriage and family structures, which in turn serve to institutionalize abuses such as marital rape, honor crimes, and 'corrective rapes'. Corrective rapes target sexual minorities, particularly lesbian women, who are often subjected to rape by male community members, to 'correct' their desires. Discrimination and stigma, within cultural and legal frameworks are also examined, particularly for the ways they pose a threat, and reinforce the marginalization of many groups, such as sexual minorities, migrant workers, sex workers, indigenous women, women with disabilities, single mothers, unmarried women, and women living with HIV/AIDS. Within these issues, specific forms of culturally justified violence against women and girls which are examined include dowry or bride price, female genital mutilation, virginity testing, and dress codes, to name a few.

Initiatives of the working group include conducting research on marital rape in Iran, working to challenge FGM and threats to Women's Human Rights Defenders in Gambia, promoting sexual rights of persons living with disabilities in Senegal, documenting ways in which boxing and sport are being used as arenas to increase girls autonomy and empowerment in Indonesia, examining marriage contracts and dress codes, advocating for legal reform and engaging with religious leaders on these issues across contexts.

Some of the fruits of this work which are in process include: a) the creation of a Database of materials to support advocacy on sexual rights across cultural contexts, b) conducting training workshops on progressive interpretations of rights and recording best practices

for advocacy through personal narratives, and c) engaging in web and new-media trainings in order to keep partners connected and to help sustain the initiatives.

The Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women (SKSW)

The SKSW Campaign was launched on the occasion of the international day to eliminate violence against women in November 2007, by women activists leading the movements to counter culturally-justified violence against women and girls (CVAW) in their local contexts. The campaign is now actively being waged across Senegal, Nigeria, Sudan, Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. CVAW can be identified across contexts by the fact that it stems from patriarchal interpretations of 'culture', 'traditional practices' and religious texts, and resorts to cruel, degrading and oftentimes sadistic actions against women and girls. Often CVAW is seen as a Muslim problem, but the reality is that CVAW occurs everywhere in the world.

Honour killings were first legally sanctioned in the Napoleonic Codes, and the 'grave and sudden provocation' clause was introduced by Europeans into the legislation of many countries with colonial histories across Latin America, Asia and Africa. In Italy, honour killings were sanctioned until 1981 and men who killed their wives, sisters, or daughters in a 'fit of fury' upon catching them in the act of adultery could receive no more than a 7 year sentence. In 2006, Nicaragua outlawed abortion even in cases of medical emergency due to the strong influence of the Catholic church, which results in women who try to exercise their reproductive rights becoming targets of backlash, intimidation and harm by the State and community members. In 2008 reports began surfacing that self-proclaimed morality police in certain Jewish sects in Israel were inciting violence against women for failing to cover their heads or opting for divorce. In Senegal, early/forced marriages of minors are still occurring, despite their being national legislation prohibiting forced marriage and setting the national marriage age for girls at 16. In 2009 President Karzai signed the Shia Family Code which effectively legalizes marital rape, including a clause which maintains a husband's right to withhold basic necessities, including food, until a wife submits to his sexual demands.

The underlying connection in all of these cases is that women's fundamental rights to control their own bodies and make their own life choices are being denied on the basis of claims of cultural or religious authority and authenticity. Such claims must be rejected because there is no cultural or religious right to threaten, harm or kill anyone because she is a woman exercising her human rights.

See: www.stop-stoning.org for more information

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All three working groups engage in diverse strategies such as original research, capacity-buildings and trainings, information sharing and advocacy to demystify sources of control

over women's lives and bodily autonomy. A key strategy for all groups is documenting women's strategies to reclaim and redefine the rules by which their lives are governed, with the following films being shown as fruits of this strategy:

Mokarameh – Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh

This film tells the story of Mokarameh Ibrahimi, an Iranian woman who along with her partner Jafar Kiani was sentenced to death by stoning for the 'crime' of adultery in May 2007. The film captures the efforts by her lawyer, Shadi Sadr, to obtain an acquittal and secure the release of Mokarameh and her son from Choobin prison.

Makkunrai Makkunata: The Women Who is Questioning – Wahida Rustam

This film recounts the case of a young teenage girl, Siti, who was sentenced to whipping in Padang, a village in Bulukumba, South Sulawesi. Told from the perspective of a Muslim woman, the film addressed various controversial facts underlining whipping as a form of punishment, and highlights its lack of accord with the values of Islam and the secular State system in Indonesia.

Open Forum

The open forum which followed brought up the following questions and comments:

The audience was intrigued to discover that stoning is never mentioned in the Quran, and pleased to learn more about the intricacies and diversity of Islamic jurisprudence and *Sharia* laws. Others were curious to know whether the prevalence of CVAW was rising globally, and despite documenting instances of CVAW, the Campaign does not yet have base-line surveys from which to make this assessment. Another question was on what role socio-economic issues (class, rural-urban divides, education, etc.) play in promoting or reducing CVAW. To provide further information, the Campaign distributed its Policy Briefing Series 1 to the audience members, as well as our multi-media DVDs containing original research, presentations and documentaries on the issues of CVAW in various contexts. To the Campaign's knowledge, increased access to education and information play a positive role in decreasing occurrences of CVAW, but the role of other factors are as of yet undocumented. Women from within Catholic contexts highlighted the ways in which Catholic religious institutions and laws discriminate against women not only on the basis of sexual rights, but further deny women from becoming priests and occupying decision making positions within the church precisely because this acts as a barrier to women defining their own cultures and traditions. The general consensus of the audience was that regardless of the excuse given, there exists an overarching dominant patriarchal culture in all countries which promotes misogyny and devalues women, and that the struggle to overcome CVAW is inherently linked to ending all other forms of discrimination against women.