

MUSLIM WOMEN FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

(MWDHR)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Women have been witnessing different kinds of subordination in Muslim societies which occur in a multiplicity of locations such as in kinship structures; in politics; in economic life and in different manifestations of cultural practices. This in spite of the fact that the true Islam does not call for women's subordination but on the contrary can be the driving force in liberating Moslem women, in advocating accepting the other and in ensuring gender equality.

There are a large number of Moslem women who come from different parts of the world who have done remarkable achievements during their life that need to be made known and be put under prime light so that other Moslem women can realize the many opportunities they can make use of to change their life to the better. These women include women who have made it to the top political positions in their own countries or in the United Nations assemblies and committees, those who have won Nobel prize, those who have established women's associations that realized sustainable positive impact on the life of thousands of other women and others who were instrumental in redressing gender discriminatory laws in their countries.

That is why a group of influential Muslim women who are active in the field of women's rights and are well-known internationally have met in Oslo, Norway on May 6 and 7 of 2007 where the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights facilitated their gathering.

Among the Muslim women who convened in Oslo were Mrs. Benazir Bhutto, ex Prime-Minister of Pakistan, Mrs. Latifa Jbabdi, Secretary General of l'Union de l'action Feminine and the woman who was instrumental in initiating the Moudowana, i.e. the new Family Law in Morocco, Mrs. Leila Alikarami, from Iran who is the co-partner of the Nobel prize winner Dr. Shirin Ebadi, Mrs. Asma Jahangir, special Rapporteur to the United Nations Council on Human Rights, Ms. Ghada Ghashmier, a human rights fighter from Bahrain and Dr. Hoda Badran, the first chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. (A full list of Muslim women who attended the meeting is attached)

During their meeting to discuss the status of Muslim Women in their regions and worldwide, they took the decision of establishing a non-governmental organization. This organization was registered in Finland and will operate out of Cairo, Egypt for the time being. They have registered their organization under the name of "MUSLIM WOMEN FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS" and have elected Ms. Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan) as their first chairwoman and

Dr. Hoda Badran (Egypt) as Vice Chair. Dr. Shirin Ebadi will serve as spokesperson and Ms. Asma Jahangir (Pakistan) will serve as legal expert. They have also signed a charter for Muslim Women for Democracy by which they have agreed on the following:

- 1) To join efforts to promote the position of women in the Islamic world and bring them back the original dignity which the Islamic religion meant for them.
- 2) They believe that to realize 1) above, they will work for the promotion of education, access to needed information, facilitation of economic and training services for women who need them.
- 3) To work together to combat violence against women, illiteracy, discrimination and under-representation in governmental and in economic sectors as well as in public life.

The eminent group of Muslim Women for Democracy intends to firstly address prevailing cultural traits that reinforce patriarchy and uses Islam as a justification for depriving Muslim women from their rights which are sanctioned in both the Holy Koran and in Hadith. They aim at supporting women with literacy, legal awareness to know their rights and to empower them to refuse all forms of violence exercised against them including rape, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, domestic violence and also child abuse. They believe that this needs a vast campaign in which Muslim women activists would participate to enlighten their sisters that the time is ripe to prove the strength and dignity of Muslim women and to correct their passive image that prevails in the west.

Secondly, Muslim Women for Democracy and Human Rights believe that they need to encourage and support the following programs in Moslem countries:

- a) Providing women with a minimum of education
- b) Raise the marriage age of women
- c) Put legislative limits to polygamy
- d) Ensure judicial supervision on all forms of divorce
- e) Grant eligible women the right of financial, educational and other guardianship on their children
- f) Support women's rights in inheritance
- g) Provide rural girls with education and information.

Muslim Women for Democracy and Human Rights believe that Islamic countries will only develop and enjoy a life characterized by safety and welfare when all citizens including women are enjoying equality and equity. Muslim men should put their hands together with Muslim women to show that Islam has given equal opportunities to both genders and that it is against Islamic religious to subordinate women in any form. The image of Muslim women should be the true image meant by Islam and not the one flawed as it is now.

Actions will be taken by MSDHR:

- 1) To generate and exchange information on the true teaching of Islam with regard to the status and position of women.
- 2) To spread information on the achievements made by contemporary affluent Moslem women.
- 3) To build the confidence and agency of Moslem women to encourage them to support each other and work together in order to overcome the obstacles they face at present.

The new NGO intends to::

- 1)To build the capacity of the newly established Muslim Women for Democracy and Human Rights Association to effectively start its activities out of Cairo Office.
- 2) To network with other associations and NGOs in different parts of the world who are concerned with Moslem Women such as Sisters in Islam in Malaysia and Women under Moslem Law in London.
- 3) To organize the second meeting of members of the association sometime beginning of 2008 in order to approve the two-year action plan of the association and which suggests undertaking the following activities:

BOARD MEMBERS

NAME	COUNTRY
Late Benazir Bhutto was the first chairperson.(*)	Pakistan

<p>Is a former prime minister of Pakistan. At the age of 35, she was the youngest and the first Prime Minister woman to lead a Muslim nation in modern age. Bhutto was educated at Harvard's Radcliffe College in the U.S and at the University of Oxford England</p>	
<p>Latifa Jbabdi</p> <p>She serves as the president of the Women's Action Union (UAF) which was instrumental in changing the Moroccan Moudawana (Family Law) since 1987. She was the coordinator of the national council for the Moudawana reform in 1992. She is a member of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission in Morocco</p>	<p>Morocco</p>
<p>Asma Jahangir</p> <p>Is an advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. She is a founding member and head of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. She has also served as the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Arbitrary and Summary Executions. She is also a law partner and co-founder the first female law practice office. She is a holder of PhD from University of St. Gallen</p>	<p>Pakistan</p>
<p>Hoda Badran</p> <p>Is the chairperson of one of the largest feminist NGOs in the Arab region; Alliance for Arab Women. She was the first woman head of the UN Committee on the Child Rights Convention. She is an ex Unicef Representative in Sri Lanka and the Maldives and Ex Secretary general of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood. She is a holder of PhD from Case Western Reserve Univ. in U.S.A</p>	<p>Egypt</p>

<p>Leila Alikarami</p> <p>Is a member of Society for protecting the rights of the child, of International Media Lawyers Association and of the Center for Defenders of Human Rights. She has been actively working alongside with Mrs. Shirin Ebadi.</p>	<p>Iran</p>
<p>Leila Sharaf</p> <p>Is a senator and former Minister of Information. She is the chair of the board of trustees of Philadelphia University and President of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature. In 1990, Ms. Sharaf was a member of the Royal Commission for drafting the National Charter for Jordan.</p>	<p>Jordan</p>
<p>Rokiatou Ndiaye Keita</p> <p>Is the first vice president of the party Rassemblement Pour Le Mali who is now holding the relative majority in the Parliament. She was minister of Health from 2002 until 2004. She was also a member of the Advisory Committee for Peace and Disarmament to the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan. She is a holder of PhD from university of Strasbourg</p>	<p>Mali</p>
<p>Fawzia Alkhaja</p> <p>Is the president of Awal Women Society, one of the large NGOs in Bahrain. She is a permanent representative of AWS to the Women International Democratic Federation, representative of AWS at Bahrain Union and at the personal status committee. She has a diploma in</p>	<p>Bahrain</p>

Management and public relations	
<p>Ghada Jamsheer</p> <p>Is the founder of Women’s Petitioning Committee, an organization working to reform the Sharia court system. She is an author of a famous book on the legislative and judicial system in Bahrain. She has been selected as of the ten most powerful and effective women in the Arab World.</p>	Bahrain
<p>Aicha Alkmas</p> <p>Is a lawyer from Morocco. She has a law firm in Casablanca and specializes in women’s rights. She has worked together with Ms. Latifa Jbabdi on the Moudawana in Morocco.</p>	Morocco
<p>Shirin Ebadi</p> <p>She received the Nobel Prize in 2003 for her efforts for democracy and human rights especially women’s and children’s rights. She was the first female judge in Iran and is currently practicing as a lawyer and teaching law at the University of Tehran. Ebadi who could not attend the Oslo meeting has voiced her Support for the Muslim Women for Democracy Initiative</p>	Iran

(*) During the second annual meeting in 2008, a new chairperson for MWDHR will be elected

