

UNVEILED

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Editor: Maryam Namazie



We have to stop them now

Sohaila Sharifi

The new law approved by the Afghan government against women last month is outrageous. I find it humiliating to think how a woman's sexuality and her most private life is being exploited by some reactionary movement and has become codified as the law of a country. According to the new law, a woman (correction, a Shia woman!) has to submit to her husband's sexual demands at least once every four days. Not that there is anything new in this law; on the contrary a woman's total sexual submission is one of the fundamentals of Islamic teaching. A married woman has to accept that by marrying a man she has agreed to provide sexual services when and where her husband desires it. The Koran specifically states that women are fields to be entered by men whenever he wishes. Moreover, several Hadith or religious sayings of Mohammad, the prophet, speak of how women are supposed to be ready for their husbands even if they are riding on the back of a camel.

What is most outrageous though is that this regressive teaching has become legally binding, with the new law actually legalising the traditional subordination of women. This is not just another religious requirement which people can choose to follow or forget; this is a law and any woman refusing to follow it can easily be prosecuted. Even worse in my view is that the political Islamic movement has come out victorious yet again with the imposition of this latest law.



Afghan women in Kabul protest new law

'We don't want Taliban's laws!'

The lives of women living under Sharia laws have never been easy; discrimination and sexual apartheid are part and parcel of any Islamic state or wherever the Islamic movement is powerful. But this law just goes one step further in legitimising the existing inhuman condition of women.

And Afghanistan is not the only country. Sharia law is now the law of the land in northwest Pakistan and on 19 April this year the Somali parliament endorsed the introduction of Sharia law in the country. In Iran women have been surviving and resisting sexual apartheid for more than 30 years and the rise of political Islam in Iraq means that no woman is safe to walk out of her house without a male chaperon or unveiled any longer. In Saudi Arabia a senior judge has recently decided that the 'marriage' of an 8 year old girl to a man 50 years

her senior is legal but that he can have intercourse with her when she is a bit older!

And where is the international community when all these horrific, inhumane conditions are imposed on women by political Islam? I am afraid their record is not very impressive. The majority of western governments, with the US in the lead, are too busy finding some compromise with so called 'moderate' elements of Islam. There was some half hearted criticism against Karzai for passing the new law in Afghanistan. Other than that they have continued to turn a blind eye against what is happening to women under Sharia law.

Fortunately, these regressive laws have been opposed by majority of people who value secularism, freedom and universal women's rights

and don't want to see religious and inhuman laws advance in the 21st century. Following the passing of the new law by the Afghan parliament, some 200 women took to the streets in Kabul to protest against it and in other countries, including Germany, women and men took to the streets to show their opposition to these laws.

There is also a new Coalition for Women's Rights being launched in order to organise the international struggle against the imposition of Sharia laws and to mobilise all those who oppose these laws under one powerful front.

This international opposition and a strong, unified movement is what we need to stop this most regressive movement from conquering more battlefields. We have to stop them now.

Join the International Coalition for Women's Rights

www.equalrightsnow-iran.com



We will not allow Shahla and Delara to be executed

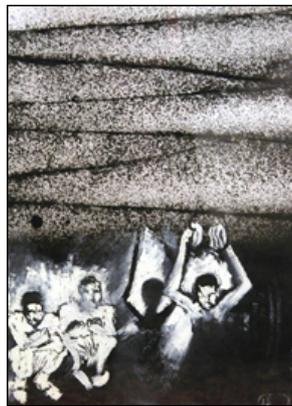


Equal Rights Now – Organisation against Women’s Discrimination in Iran and the International Committee Against Executions have in recent weeks stepped up their campaign against the impending execution orders against Shahla Jahed (pictured above left) and Delara Darabi (pictured above right). According to Mina Ahadi, a spokesperson for both organisations, ‘The Islamic Republic of Iran has tried to execute them many times. Widespread domestic and international protests have been the most important factor in saving them from execution. More than 22 judges have sentenced Shahla Jahed to death but they haven’t been able to kill her yet because of this opposition. We must keep the pressure on.’

Delara Darabi, is a young artist who has been in Rasht prison for the last 5 years. Her lawyer, Abdolsamad Khoramshahi, is convinced that if she were to be given a new trial whereby they could re-enact the scene of the crime, it would be easily proven that Delara is innocent of the alleged murder she was convicted of. Khoramshahi has said many times that he has new evidence including the crime being committed by a right handed person whereas Delara is left-handed.

In 2007, Stop Child Executions pro-

duced a 10 minute documentary about Delara which can be viewed here: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?do-cid=533103998986446192&ei=7kbeSZumHaO0qAOo-YzVAw&q=delara+darabi>



Shahla Jahed was a ‘temporary’ wife to Nasser Mohammad-Khani, a former Iranian national footballer. Shahla was accused of killing his wife, Laleh Saharkhizan on 9 October 2002. Shahla was said to have confessed to the murder of Laleh Saharkhizan during the initial investigation, but during her trial consistently upheld her innocence. In December

2004, on being told of a previous Supreme Court ruling in the case, Shahla said, ‘Everyone knows the conditions under which I confessed.’

To oppose the execution of Delara and Shahla, please send letters or emails to the Islamic regime of Iran’s authorities.



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Equal Rights Now, the International Committee Against Executions and the International Committee against Stoning are calling for the abolition of stoning and executions in Iran.

We are also presently campaigning against the stoning sentences of at least nine women and one man in Iran. The women are Sakine Mohammadi Aschtiani held in Tabriz, Kobra N., held in Reja’i Shahr prison, Karaj; Iran A, held in Sepidar Prison, Ahvaz; Khayrieh V., also held in Sepidar Prison, Ahvaz; Ashraf Kalhori, held in Evin Prison, Tehran; Afsaneh R, held in Adel Abad Prison in Shiraz, M.J, held Vakil Abad Prison in Mashhad; H, also held in Vakil Abad Prison in Mashhad; and Gilan Mohammadi, held in Esfahan Central prison. The man is Gholamali Eskandari being held in Esfahan Central Prison.

End execution and stoning

Declaration against sexual apartheid

We, the undersigned, unequivocally oppose sexual apartheid and the subjugation of millions of women living under Islamic rules and laws.

We condemn regimes and the political Islamic movement that perpetrate sexual apartheid, including in Iran.

We support the legitimate struggle of millions of women and men for freedom, equality and universal rights.

Sexual apartheid, like racial apartheid, has no place in the 21 century.

Add your name to the declaration: http://www.equalrightsnow-iran.com/sexual_apartheid.html.

The fight against Sharia – a historical task and duty

Maryam Namazie

Sharia law may take different forms from Iran to Afghanistan and Indonesia to Algeria but the difference is a matter of degree.

In the worst case scenarios, like Iran, the law even specifies the size of the stone to be used in stoning someone to death for adultery.

Or in Saudi Arabia, it demands the flogging of a 74 year old woman for being alone in her own home with two young men who have come to bring her food.

In Britain, it takes yet another form. Apologists will say that Sharia courts and councils, which are thriving here, are different because they are not stoning women to death in Trafalgar Square and are only dealing with 'mundane' civil matters. The difference, however between a law that stones a woman to death for adultery and one that denies her the rights to divorce and child custody is a matter of degree. The fundamentals are the same. It is medieval, misogynist and inhuman. It is what happens when religion has political power. It is different in different places not because of religion and Islam but despite it and because of people's resistance via progressive social movements.

In Britain, the government has no problem with Sharia councils and tribunals, which have already decided on over 7,000 cases since the late 80s, having even issued a death fatwa. The

British government is even helping to set up informal Sharia courts in Afghanistan – as if the formal ones - like the one that sentenced Perwiz Kam-bakhsh to death and now life imprisonment for downloading information from the internet on the status of women under Islam - are not enough.

Western government policy in general has no problem with Sharia. Iraq is more Islamic than it was under Saddam; a current law in 'liberated' Iraq allows a rapist to evade prosecution if he marries the woman he has raped. And marital rape has just been signed into law by Karzai in Afghanistan (though it is on hold due to pressure).

One problem is that western governments are only opposed to that which they deem as 'extremism' or rather terrorism. They have no problem with political Islam or Sharia if it stays in 'Muslim minority' areas in the west or in political Islam's sphere of influence in the Middle East, Asia and North Africa.

Another problem is that it is deemed Islamophobic and racist to criticise Islam and the political Islamic movement. The UN Human Rights Council has recently approved a resolution against the defamation of religion. Clearly, one can't defame a religion – the right not to be defamed, other rights, equality, and respect are for people not religions or beliefs.

Cultural relativism is another problem.

It is often portrayed as anti-racist. In fact it's the opposite. The idea of difference has always been the fundamental principle of a racist agenda not the other way around. The defeat of Nazism and its biological theory of difference largely discredited racial superiority. The racism behind it, however, found another more acceptable form of expression for this era. Instead of expression in racial terms, difference is now portrayed in cultural terms.

And anyway, whose culture? Du'a Khalil's and her parents who opposed her stoning or those who stoned her for loving the wrong boy? Atefeh Rajabi's culture or the Islamic regime that executed her for crimes against chastity? The 13 year old Somali girl who was stoned for being raped and the people who intervened to try and stop her stoning or the militia who stoned her?

Another problem is the European anti-imperialist nationalist left. In my opinion, the left is the banner carrier of social justice but not this left. The likes of the Socialist Workers' Party segregates meetings and calls on women to veil in solidarity at anti-war demos. It carries signs saying 'we are all Hezbollah.' It excuses, legitimises, apologises and supports political Islam at the expense of people's lives and rights. These anti-imperialists have it all wrong. 'My enemy's enemy is my friend' is lazy logic. According to them, then, I should be pro

US militarism because I am opposed to the Islamic regime in Iran!

How absurd. Their problem is that they don't begin with the human being. If they did, it would be easy to see that one can be against both US-led militarism and political Islam. In our fight back we have to put the human being at the centre if we are to succeed.

Moreover, the struggle against political Islam is actually part of the anti-racist movement. What greater act of anti-racism today than to demand equal rights, universalism, and citizenship rights, oppose ghettoisation, and a policy of minoritism that segregates and gives lesser rights to those deemed 'minorities' or 'different.'

In the face of this onslaught – and the rising attack on women's rights - secularism, universalism, citizenship rights, a humanity without labels and values worthy of 21st century humanity has to be defended via another transformative enlightenment that pushes religion once more out of the public sphere.

This is our historical task and duty.

The above is Maryam Namazie's speech at an April 4-5, 2009, International Conference on Secularism in Paris, France.

**For more information
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Join International Coalition for Women's Rights

On April 19, 2009, the Somali parliament unanimously endorsed the introduction of Sharia law across the country.

A few days earlier, the imposition of Sharia law in Pakistan's northwestern Swat region was approved.

Last month, a sweeping law approved by the Afghan parliament and signed by President Hamid Karzai required Shi'a women to seek their husband's permission to leave home, and to submit to their sexual demands. Because of international and national protests the new law is now being reviewed but only to check its compatibility with Sharia law.

Sharia law deems a woman unequal and subordinate to her husband or male guardian. Under Sharia, women's testimony is worth half that of men's, women have limited rights to divorce and child custody and women can be executed for apostasy or stoned to death for adultery. It imposes sexual or gender apartheid and the veil and denies women rights, equality and freedom.

The imposition of Sharia law in the legal codes of Somalia, Pakistan and Afghanistan brings millions more under the yoke of political Islam.

Local and international pressure and opposition are the only ways to stop the rise of this regressive movement and defend women's universal rights and secularism.

From Iran and Iraq to Britain and Canada, Sharia law is being opposed by a vast majority who choose 21st century universal values over medievalism. We, the undersigned, support this international struggle and call for:

- the abolition of discriminatory and Sharia laws
- an end to sexual apartheid

- secularism and the separation of religion from the state

- equality between women and men

List of initial signatories:

Boaz Adhengo, Humanist and Ethical Union of Kenya, Kenya
 Nazanin Afshin-Jam, Coordinator, Stop Child Executions Campaign, Canada
 Mina Ahadi, Spokesperson, Council of Ex-Muslims of Germany; Coordinator, International Committee against Stoning, Germany
 Mahin Alipour, Coordinator, Equal Rights Now - Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran, Stockholm, Sweden
 British Humanist Association, UK
 British Muslims for Secular Democracy, UK
 Caroline Brancher, UFAL, France
 Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Chair, British Muslims for Secular Democracy, UK
 Nazanin Borumand, Never forget Hatun, Campaign against Honour Killings, Germany
 Clean Break Theatre Company, UK
 Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, UK
 Council of Ex-Muslims of Germany, Germany
 Council of Ex-Muslims of Scandinavia, Sweden
 Richard Dawkins, Scientist, UK
 Patty Debonitas, Coordinator, International Campaign for Women's Rights, UK
 Sonja Eggerickx, President, International Humanist and Ethical Union, Belgium
 Equal Rights Now – Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran, Sweden
 Tarek Fatah, Author, Chasing a Mirage: The Tragic Illusion of an Islamic State, Canada
 Jacqueline Fichet - Professeure en Retraite, France
 Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association, UK
 AC Grayling, Writer and Philosopher,

London, UK

Rahila Gupta, Activist and Writer, UK

Maria Hagberg, Chairperson, Network Against Honour-Related Violence, Sweden

Katie Hickman, Writer, UK

Humanist and Ethical Union of Kenya

Leo Igwe, Nigerian Humanist Movement, Nigeria

International Committee against Stoning, Germany

Iranian Secular Society, London, UK

Asqar Karimi, Central Committee Member, Worker-communist Party of Iran, UK

Kenya Association of Humanists in Aid of Women Atheists

Ruth Kithei and Teresia Naomi,

Kenya Association of Humanists in Aid of Women Atheists, Kenya

Derek Lennard, Chairperson, Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association, UK

Doreen Massey, Peer, House of

Lords, London, UK

Caspar Melville, Editor, New Humanist magazine, UK

Reza Moradi, Director, New Channel TV, UK

Maryam Namazie, Spokesperson, Equal Rights Now – Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran, Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain and One Law for All Campaign against Sharia Law in Britain, UK
 National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies, UK

National Secular Society, London, UK

Never Forget Hatun Campaign against Honour Killings, Germany
 Network Against Honour-Related Violence, Sweden

Nigerian Humanist Movement, Nigeria

One Law for All Campaign against Sharia Law in Britain, UK

Lucy Perman, Executive Director, Clean Break, UK

David Pollock, President, the European Humanist Federation, London,

UK

Fariborz Pooya, Founder, Iranian Secular Society, London, UK

Pragna Patel, Founding Member, Southall Black Sisters and Women Against Fundamentalism, UK

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, Pakistan

Terry Sanderson, President, National Secular Society, London, UK

Sohaila Sharifi, Editor, Unveiled Persian, London, UK

Joan Smith, Writer and Activist, London, UK

Southall Black Sisters, UK

Issam Shukri, Head, Defense of Secularism and Civil Rights in Iraq; Central Committee Secretary,

Left Worker-communist Party of Iraq, Iraq

Hanne Stinson, British Humanist Association, UK

Annie Sugier, Ligue du Droit International des Femmes, France

Peter Tatchell, Human Rights Campaigner, UK

Women Against Fundamentalisms, UK

Ibn Warraq, writer

To join the coalition, click here:
<http://www.PetitionOnline.com/ICFWR/petition.html>

To help organise a rally in your city on November 21, 2009, please contact coalition coordinator Patty Debonitas +44 (0) 7778804304, ICFWR, BM Box 2387, London WC1N 3XX, UK, email icwomensrights@googlemail.com.

To support the coalition, please send your donations to One Law for All (<http://www.onelawforall.org.uk/donate.html>) or the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain (<http://www.ex-muslim.org.uk/indexDonate.html>) earmarked for the coalition.

Abolish discriminatory and Sharia laws!

End to sexual apartheid!

Equality between women and men!