

The Global Campaign ‘Stop Stoning and Killing Women!’

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) is launching the Global Campaign ‘Stop Stoning and Killing Women!’ to end the persistent misuse of religion and culture to justify killing women as punishment for violating the ‘norms’ of sexual behaviour as defined and imposed by vested interests. This Campaign is inspired by and grows out of women’s struggles in their own locations to combat various manifestations of this phenomenon, for instance in Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran and Nigeria. The Campaign will support and enable women’s rights advocates, national and transnational women’s movements to resist those forces which politicize and mis-use culture and religion for subjugating women and the abuse of their human rights.

Stoning to death has been introduced as a legal form of punishment for ‘adultery of married persons’ (*zina al-Mohsena*) in Afghanistan, Iran, Nigeria (about one-third among 36 states), Pakistan, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates. While the penalty has never been carried out by the state in either Pakistan or Iraq, incidents of stoning have been carried out by communities, seemingly encouraged by the the existence of the punishment in law. In May 2007, one such incidence was recorded and the disturbing video footage of a girl being stoned to death in Iraq began to circulate via the Internet. As this video demonstrates all too clearly, stoning is a particularly cruel and dehumanising punishment involving a slow and painful process until death, and takes place in public. Significantly, this public stoning occurred in a non-Muslim community. Recent cases of stoning by state authorities have mostly occurred in Iran, where stoning is not limited to ‘adultery.’ In May 2006, a man and a woman were stoned to death in Mashhad, Iran. A month later, Ashraf Kalhori was handed an official 15-day notification of her impending execution by stoning. Most recently, on July 5, 2007, Jafar Kiani was stoned to death in Aghche-kand village near Takistan, Ghazvin in Iran. Nine others, currently in Iranian prisons, await similar fates, including Kiani’s partner for alleged ‘adultery.’

Despite there being no mention of stoning in the Quran, the practice has come to be associated with Islam and Muslim culture. In fact, stoning is a highly debated topic within the Muslim religious community: reputable Iranian clerics, such as Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi, Ayatollah Yousef Saneii and Ayatollah Seyyed Mohamad Mousavi Bojnourdi, have spoken out against it. Others have led lively theological debates to convey that the practice is not Islamic.

Sentences to death by stoning have been overturned after strong national and international protests in Nigeria and the UAE. For example, Amina Lawal of Nigeria finally escaped her stoning sentence after immense national and international pressure in 2002. In Iran, after a successful campaign by women and human rights activists, the Iranian Head of Judiciary, Ayatollah Shahroudi, ordered a ban on the practice in 2002. However, because these efforts were not sustained, these public pressures did not have a lasting impact; and despite the declarations of the religious authorities, stoning is still being used to execute people.

Today, with the advent and propagation of political Islam and other forms of religious extremism, stoning and other forms of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of women have been increasing in many parts of the world. With the establishment of the Sharia court in Aceh, Indonesia, women are now subject to caning or whipping for the alleged ‘crimes’ of ‘relationships outside of marriage’ (*zina*) and ‘improper Islamic dress.’ In Nigeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, the Sudan and certain regions of Indonesia, the trend towards political Islam is being accompanied by a disturbing rise in the control of women’s bodies in the name of religion and culture.

Such violently oppressive treatment of women is by no means limited to Muslim societies. While the media tends to present so-called ‘honour crimes’ (which have the most dis-honourable intention of harming women) as predominantly prevalent in Muslim countries, documented cases testify to thousands

of women being murdered every year, the world over, in the name of 'family honour'. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights acknowledges that so-called 'honour' killings have occurred in Great Britain, Brazil, India, Ecuador, Israel, Italy, Sweden, and Uganda as well as in Muslim nations such as Turkey, Jordan, Pakistan, and Morocco. In Latin America, 'crimes of passion' committed by men are not classified as murders and are instead treated leniently or completely excused. The abuse of women's human rights cuts across boundaries, cultures and religions.

These killings of women are a grave and serious violation of International Human Rights Law. They are disturbing examples of how local laws and customs, embedded within highly patriarchal value-systems, consistently assign more guilt to women than to men in any act perceived to violate 'norms' of sexual behaviour. Women constitute nearly all the known victims of violent punishments like stoning, whipping or other violent punishments for such supposed transgressions.

The Global Campaign: *Stop Stoning and Killing Women!*, initiated to address this intensifying trend of cultural and religious legitimisation of lethal violence against women, will:

- Stimulate and promote discussion and public awareness of the politicisation of culture and religion as a means for justifying the abuse of women's human rights
- Develop an inventory of discourses and counter-discourses on the use of culture and religion as means of legitimisation of violence against women.
- Build the capacity of women's human rights advocates and women's movements to document such cases of abuse and to use the relevant international instruments for advocacy.
- Mobilise the support of internationally reputed personalities from legal, religious and human rights arenas.
- The Campaign reiterates the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Professor Dr. Yakin Ertürk, in her January 2007 Report: 'Intersections between Culture and Violence against Women'¹:
 - To engage in a "cultural negotiation" in ways that validate and emphasize the positive cultural elements, while simultaneously de-mystifying the oppressive elements in culture-based discourses of the same society.
 - To address violence against women in all its intersections with other forms of inequality and issues of basic human rights.

Together with the international community, we can put an end to stoning and all other practices that prevent women from maintaining their bodily integrity, human rights, and human dignity.

The Campaign 'Stop Stoning and Killing Women!' will be launched on 26 November 2007, at 10 AM, in Istanbul (Santral Istanbul, Silahtaraga Kamousu).

Speakers at the launch include: Shadi Sadr (Iran), Ayesha Imam (Nigeria), Sri Wiyanti Eddyono (Indonesia), Nebahat Akkoç (Turkey), Yakin Ertürk (UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women), Farida Shaheed (Pakistan) will chair the launch.

For more information: <http://www.wluml.org>, www.stop-stoning.org (currently under construction)

¹ Report: "Intersections between Culture and Violence against Women" (A/HRC/4/34), 17 January 2007.