

Hi Tania;

My title is not a doctor. I have also changed the title from “Feminists of Iran” to “Struggle of women in Iran”. Best Wishes

Homa Arjomand

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### Struggle of women in IRAN

#### Interview-Questions:

##### Homa Arjomand

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- 1. As Spokesperson for the international campaign for the defence of women’s rights in Iran, please explain the mission and significance of this organization.**

As you may be aware, the ruling force in Iran has based itself on a system of total sexual apartheid, and created laws that are anti women. Women are oppressed in every aspect of their lives through compulsory veiling, by the complete segregation of men and women in every aspect of society, and by the treatment of women as disenfranchised and second class citizens. Misogyny is the defining characteristic and identity of the ruling order and for all women who share this life it has caused nothing but humiliation, oppression and daily exclusion. Reviving antiquated traditions, such as stoning, reveals the depth of the naked violence exerted against women and is seen as one example of the degradation women face.

The aim of this organization is to gain the complete and unconditional liberation of all women in Iran

- . To publicize the atrocities against women in Iran committed by the Islamic Republic of Iran;
- \* To highlight the resistance and struggle of women against sexual apartheid in Iran embodied in the Islamic laws governing the country,
- \* To gain international support for women’s movement for equal rights and human rights in Iran

#### We are for:

1. Complete equal rights for women and men through the abolishment of discriminatory laws, particularly laws in relation to family, marriage, divorce, and parental responsibility for children;
2. An end to the imposition of all Islamic laws
3. Freedom of = expression and assembly;
4. The formation of a secular state; in which, religion is separated from matters of the state and of education.
5. The abolition of compulsory veiling and for full freedom of dress
6. The complete abolition of segregation;
7. Equal access to education, employment, sports and cultural activities for all citizens.
8. The prohibition of violent and inhuman religious ceremonies and the prohibition of any form of religious activity or ceremony that is incompatible with people's civil rights and liberty
9. Religion being considered strictly a private matter for individuals.

**2 a. Where are you currently residing?**

**I have been living in Canada since 1989.**

**2b. If currently outside Iran, why did you leave and how?**

**I was a social/political activist in Iran. My life was in danger because of my political beliefs which left me with no choice but to flee the country during the winter of 1989. At that time my daughter was one years old and my son was six years old. We fled through the mountains to Turkey. In Turkey I worked for the United Nations and for the Canadian Embassy for almost a year. Then in 1990, after receiving my landed immigrant papers from Canada, I moved to Canada.**

**2c. when was the last time you visited Iran?**

**The winter of 1989 was the last time I was in Iran. Since I fled the country illegally I would not be able to return under the current Islamic regime that is still in power.**

**2d. what's the reason for you not being able to return to Iran?**

**As you can see I am spokesperson for an "equality movement" in Iran. Activists like me need to raise global awareness about the life and condition of women in Iran. I believe there is a need to present a clear picture of how women under the Islamic Regime are subjected to the most brutal form of misogyny and sexual apartheid. We need to let people know about the effect of political Islam on women's rights movements, about the countless crimes committed in the name of political Islam and how this backward movement is responsible for suppressing efforts towards women's rights.**

We need to mobilize people to end sexual apartheid in Iran. We need to mobilize and organize people for freedom, equality and separation of religion from state and education. We need to let people everywhere know that the main obstacle in the path of the Women's Movement for—a progressive change is political Islam.

To do the above I don't need to live in Iran. But if activists in Iran during the uprising need my direct input relating to specific issues, then I will be more than happy to be among them. The way the movement is going forward I can see the time is coming soon. Right now, I will not be able to return back to Iran as I face execution due to my past and recent activities against Islamic Regime of Iran.

### **3. Do you consider yourself a 'feminist'?**

No I am not a feminist. I see myself as a women activist who advocates for the unconditional freedom of women and for total equality of the sexes. This is totally different from feminism. Feminists see men as the cause of women's oppression, while we see women's oppression in relation to economic, social status and people's relations with each other. In other words, we see women's oppression being caused by many different social and especially economical variables and not solely to be blamed on men. That is why I don't eliminate men from women's rights movement. The struggle for equality and for the elimination of discrimination has a direct connection to an advance social insurgency.

### **4. Are you in contact with feminists working inside Iran? If so, can you elaborate?**

In Iran there are individuals who call themselves feminist but as far as I know, there is no feminist's movement in Iran. I am in contact with many activists who are part of the growing women's movement in Iran for equality and liberation; some may call themselves feminists. We work together in order to organize both women and men to build non-governmental women's rights groups for unconditional equality of rights of women and men in every aspect of their lives. All these connections are done secretly, away from the government's authority. Our activities are mostly done through websites, e-mails, faxes, and satellite television. We run meetings on programs such as "Pal talk." Some activists from Iran are able to meet us outside of Iran by traveling to European countries or to North America for short periods of time.

#### **4a. what is the current situation of Iranian women?**

In spite of mass executions, arrests, imprisonment of women's activists, what we are witnessing in Iran is a growing women's movement to combat women's suppression and humiliation. More and more women are becoming a part of progressive movements, fighting against political Islam not only in Iran, Iraq and Middle East but also in the West. In Iran these activists are organizing various events and demonstrations to fight for freedom, equality, separation of religion from state, and for an end to sexual

apartheid. In the west the activists who had to escape from Iran have raised the banner of freedom and equality and are continually trying to put an end to interference of religion in any justice systems, education and matters of the state. These activists are seeking to put political Islam where it belongs, away from public matters.

**4b. Do women in Iran, believe they have made progress towards achieving their goals?**

**Women in Iran are first hand victims of political Islam. They have recognized that political Islam is one of the main obstacles in the path of their movement for change. They also know, in order to achieve their goals, they must first bring down the Islamic regime of Iran. So far the demand for separation of religion from state and education has placed the women's movement in Iran at the forefront of the struggle for secularism. Through the continual backlash against the government that can be witnessed in the riots and uprising of students and fans of major soccer events, and the general population rebellions, the fights is slowly gaining momentum and pushing forward into the public eye.**

**5. Some Iranian feminists have divided the feminist movement in Iran into the Islamic and secularist movements; what are your perceptions of this?**

**Islamic Feminism was initiated by Islamists' movement (political Islam). The initiators were persuading people that Islam can be modified and women can gain some reform within the boundaries put forth by Islam. It was explained that men and women can gain equality within the Islamic system. The Islamic feminism in Iran was initiated by the Islamic regime of Iran. Fayeze Rafsanjane, the daughter of former President of Iran, Rafsanjane played an important role in bringing about this so called movement. Many thousands of dollars were combined with outside efforts and public relation campaigns to set this idea into motion. Their aim was to save political Islam which was under scrutiny by the public and was becoming well known for oppressing women in Iran. This notion, which was accepted by a few, was not successful in holding ground for the rest of the Iranian population and was immediately defeated.**

**As I have explained before, the movement of secularism is not led by any feminists' movement. Women in Iran have not accepted Islamic measures at all, in spite of the pressure they were put under for the last 25 years to accept Islamic measures as part of their daily lives. The Iranian regime acknowledges the fact that not a day goes by, that at least a handful of women aren't arrested for opposing oppressive forces such as the compulsory Hejab. In my opinion, mass secularist uprisings in Iran will defeat Islamists in Iran and can act as an example to be followed by all other regions of the world that are currently influenced by Islam.**

**Women in Iran realize that only by abolishing all restrictive and backward cultures can they get close to achieving independence and be able to express their free will. We see religion, backward traditions and culture as huge barriers which act to prevent the advancement of any society. Almost every time that women withstand these barriers, they face a very harsh consequence by the Islamic regime. But none**

of the regime's attempts, ranging from arresting activists to gang raping them, from nail pulling to imprisonment, from slashing them in public to forcing them to remain at home, could not stop the women's rights movement from challenging religion, tradition and backward cultures. Any honest observer will conclude that Islamic feminism has no roots nor any current role in the Women's movement in Iran.

**5c. what are your personal goals for women in Iran?**

My personal goals for women in Iran are goals that all women in Iran share, that is to defeat the Islamic regime in Iran and not resting until all the above demands are achieved. I personally will do whatever it takes, to the best of my ability, to ensure that these goals are achieved. I strongly believe women's rights are universal.

**6. Many people claim that Islam and women's rights are incompatible. What is your response to these people?**

I fully agree with this statement. We can not achieve women's right within the framework of Islam. Islam, like all other religions, are based on ideology that was used 1300-1400 years ago and is incompatible for today's standards. These ideals were used as a form of control that was implemented during times of slavery. At that time, women were considered second class citizens. Humanity has already witnessed Islam's *cruelty* for the past 30 years. What Khomeini and the Taliban did to women in Iran and Afghanistan was through the direct implementation of Islam. Women can not even talk about equality in Iran and countries like it while an Islamic state is in power. We must first get ride of the Islamic state and immediately declare the separation of religion from the state. It can't be stressed enough that religion just cannot be involved in any form that relates to the state or to the social aspects of any civil matters. Islam, or any other religion for that matter, just cannot be forced upon a population. It has not worked in the past, and will not work in the future. A society, just like any other form of life on Earth, is ever evolving and changing in order to survive. Any ideology that is put forth to restrict that evolution can not work as it goes against the very nature of existence.

**8. Do you believe the Khatami government has had a positive, neutral or negative impact for Iranian women?**

The Khatami government was a part of a movement to prevent the Islamic Republic of Iran from Falling. I wonder how such a movement could be seen as having a positive impact on women in Iran. No one can deny that people are aware of the conflict between the two obvious fractions in the Islamic regime of Iran. People use this gap to strengthen their struggle. If women in Iran are seen with tight uniforms

and their loosened head scarves, if they are seen with lipstick at their work places and universities, then that is the result of an anti-Islamic wave, not of Khatami's so called reform. To return to your question, I believe that the view of the supporters of the Khatami's government, such as the intellectuals and writers, became an obstacle to the women's movement. The notion of Khatami being a reformist among these intellectuals has postponed the transparency of the Islamic regime, but that will not last long.

**8c. On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you rate the progress achieved with regard to women's situation under the Khatami administration?**

As I have said time and time again, women's achievement in Iran is the direct result of their own struggle against the regime on a daily bases and by the social movement in general. It has nothing to do with Khatami. For the women in Iran, there has not been a day without confrontation. Women's activists who have understood the current situation in Iran have taken a significant role and are now in the front line of resistance. Their opposition to the total structure of political power in Iran have significantly pushed back Khatami's regime and continue to push for its total destruction. Therefore I cannot give the credit of women's achievement to Khatami's regime.

**9. While working for the UNDP, you oversaw Iranian's first human development report in 1999, please elaborate on you significant findings in this report.**

I don't know which report you are talking about? Please see these reports U.S . Department of State: Iran Human Rights Report for 1999

HRW World Report 1999: Iran: Human Rights Developments

**9a. In general, you have made enormous contributions in your work, please elaborate. On a scale of 1-10, how significant have your contributions been to the Iranian women's cause?**

The International Campaign against Sharia court in Canada sees the move for "Sharia court," as part of a global political move simply because it has all the characteristic of an Islamic movement. This movement is not related to ideological Islam, and seeks for its share of power on an international level. This move is under attack in the Middle East and needs to be challenged in the West too. Any push towards its abolishment can be seen as another battle won, though the war will not be won until political Islam is completely dissolved. Therefore I can strongly say that our activities against political Islam are doing its part to prevent it from spreading more than it already has.

The obstacles we are facing in the West are far more complicated than one might believe. We need to challenge "cultural relativism", "multiculturalism", and the whole

notion of “minority rights”. Since we are fighting for the removal of family law from the “Arbitration Act,” and demanding that all family matters to be resolved within the secular court system, we are challenging not only the move of political Islam for establishment of “Sharia court” in the West, but also the “catholic marriage tribunals” and “Jewish faith court (Beth Din)” . Clearly, the Catholic Church is the dominant religion in Canada and both Jewish and political Islam are both significantly supported by Western governments.

To overcome these barriers we needed to appeal to people. We knew that if people were informed about the policy of political Islam and of the roles of multiculturalism and cultural relativism, we would get support to stop the interference of religion in the justice system. People did not know that women from the so called Islamic countries are going through tremendous emotional, psychological, verbal, financial and physical abuse and they cannot escape because of the policy of cultural relativism. Due to this policy, people are categorized by their religion, race, gender, nationality, colour, as if all Muslims have the same homogenous beliefs or all blacks are criminal minded and all browns go through arranged marriage and live according to their ancestors.

In this picture civil laws and regulations are meant to be for the whites and the assumption is that “whites” were the only ones who fought and endured harsh struggles to establish the civil laws and therefore they have rights to use these laws. We were told “Courts are expensive and procedures at courts are too costly for the governments therefore let the minorities resolve their own problem within themselves by use of their own tribal, religion, tradition, nationality’s rules and regulations.”

Governments establish inhuman regulations as the norm in people’s mind by infusing huge amount of money to promote multiculturalism and the notion of cultural relativism. They manipulate people to perceive religion, race, colour and nationality as more important than universal rights or the respect for all humanity.

It has gone so far that, unbelievably, in Canada, Sweden, and England girls are being mutilated at birth. Girls are pulled out of schools and forced into arranged marriages. Children are withdrawn from mainstream society and isolated to make them the “others”, the “outsiders”. The sophisticated systematic application of the concept of ‘multiculturalism results in these children being unable to avail themselves of the safeguards built into secular society. Instead, they find themselves in the custody of male relatives who then, unrestrained, apply the customs of their traditions and religions.

I was told at the “teachers’ federation’s meeting” that teachers and principles will only talk to the father or older brother regarding the child’s serious issues simply because that requirement is in the child’s file. (In case of emergencies only male family members may be contacted.). Their mothers somehow legally and socially disappear from the picture. If this can not be seen as sexism, then what can it be?

The question is how could all these disgraceful examples occur right before our eyes without us being aware that they occur? How could we allow promotion of male chauvinism to dominate a section of our society and fool ourselves with this notion that “it is their culture”, and therefore it is ok for women to be treated as second class citizens and to be-controlled not only by their husband and father but also by their own sons. I was told by an abused client at the hospital in the presence of police that her 8 year son hit her because she was laughing out loud in the kitchen while he had his friend over. The police officer immediately added a notation in his notebook indicating that the family came from Pakistan, thus explaining away the actions as being part of culturally accepted behaviour that could not be interfered with.

These issues are explained to the public as being private matters, and are made to be seen as distant from the worries of the rest of society. We are told that if these women are not happy with their situations they have the right to oppose them, and in doing so help can be provided. What is actually missing in this picture are the rights of individuals within that so called “minority”.

Some of the situations that we are being asked to ignore include: the rights of the children who are pulled out of schools to become obedient servants of their husbands under the name of marriage and the rights young girls who from the age of 13 get raped regularly for the rest of their lives in what is a community –defined marriage.

We are assured that women in these so called “minorities” have rights to oppose abuse and to seek help by simply calling “911”. What we are not told is that police, attorneys generals, lawyers, and whole sections of the legal system are trained in various workshops, conferences and training centres to respect the beliefs of those minority groups, hence allowing such actions to continue. Furthermore, those upholding the legal system can be sued or could face other consequences such as losing their jobs if they don’t put the concept of culture into the picture. They are told to become very sensitive towards “other” cultures.

It is not unusual to see a battered women with a broken arm and leg who is barely able to talk to inform the nurse that on three separate occasions she has ended up at the hospital and the police were called to the house because of domestic violence, but the most, the two police officers (one being a male and another female) did was to let the abuser know that he should behave and respect his wife or else he will face consequences. The abuser was not arrested, in this case, and many others like it. She was not referred to the hospital for further investigation; the “Children’s Aid Society” was not informed, and therefore the safety of the children were seriously compromised.

With all these restrictions and systematic abuse how could a woman coming from a so called “minority group”, be able to seek help? Let’s count all the barriers she needs to overcome in order to gain the same rights as “a white battered woman” in Canada. She needs to start not from her abuser or her home or even the community of the so called “minority” . She needs to start with government’s policy of “multiculturalism” and challenge “cultural relativities” simply because the whole society and legal system from her school teacher, principle, classmates, neighbours, and nurses to the police who are put

there to protect her, and the attorney general are all agreeing that (for the sake of argument, let say that she is a Brown women coming from Pakistan and her religion is Islam.) All these labels put her in a category of “minority” the “others” and all other mentioned notions automatically comes with it. If she managed to overcome these mentioned barriers then she is still left to challenge the community’s and her family’s backward culture. Only then will she be able to seek help on the same scale as a white battered woman.

Since the state has made the protection of individuals-based on so many factors like class, race, religion, colour, nationalities and so many other hidden factors such as racism, homophobia, and ageism, right now, if she somehow managed to seek help from an “outreach” worker and exercised her human rights, since she is still not integrated within the bigger society, the least consequence she would face would be isolation. She for sure will be disowned by her family and community.

Dorkhi, 13 years old, did not want her breasts in her uncle’s mouth. She reported the incident to her teacher, immediately. “The Children’s Aid Society” was informed and that day she was put in the care of a foster family. Her uncle was arrested and a few days later, he was out of jail on bail. Dokhi’s sisters and brothers were questioned by an aid worker and her uncle received a restraining order, not allowing him to go close to his nieces and nephews. Dokhi attended court several times but the charges were eventually dropped. As a result Dokhi was disowned by all members of her family and community for making a family matter public. I as her counsellor rushed her to hospitals on several occasions because she tried to end her life. She wrote her mother’s name all over her arms, stomach, and legs with a razor blade. Dokhi told me for every mother’s day and NewYear, she likes to leave a permanent scar on her body. She told me she loves her mother so much that she cannot bear being away from her. On many occasions I and her teachers tried to contact her mother and let her know how much she is missed by Dokhi. Each time, a young boy would pick the phone up and would tell us she is not home. Finally I put my life in danger and went to their home when all the other members of her family were out. I managed to see Dolki’s mother. As soon as she realized that I was Dolkhi’s counsellor, I was greeted with hugs and showered with kisses. She did not stop crying not even when she was kissing me. She told me it was wrong for Dolkhi to talk to her teacher about her uncle. Now she can never meet her again. When I asked Dolkhi’s mother how else would she stop the abuse? She shocked me by stating very casually that even she had lost her virginity to the uncle, he would have arranged for his son to marry her. I wonder for how long people such as Dolki have to live in a minority community before that minority becomes a part of society as a whole.

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What system would allow such nonsense to continue? How could we allow children to suffer that much? The system needs to be blamed. The system made “culture” so huge , so big, so important , so untouchable, so unchangeable that no one dares to question it, let alone challenge it. The system provides financial and political support to keep minorities forever minorities by providing funds to the television channels to run special programs on promoting culture, by expanding the funds to create more temple, mosque, churches, religious schools, and recently they began talking about building religious shelters for

abused women! Just recently on April 18, 2005 under prime Minister Paul Martin's leadership, Canada contributed \$30 million to Aga Khan, the Religious leader of Ismailis, for a new "Global Centre for Pluralism" to promote multiculturalism. No wonder Mrs. Boyd admires the Ismaili's model, in her review on the Ontario Arbitration Act 1991.

I was told by a sheik at a panel discussion at the University of Toronto that Muslim women want to be the second or third wives because they know they cannot please their husbands sexually. Another mullah who claimed that he is an arbitrator sitting in the audience clearly compared women losing custody of all her children and being forbidden to even pay her children a visit through a religious arbitrator, to going to an Islamic supermarket and paying one and half times for the price of one pound of "Halal" meat. He said, "I, sacrifice extra money for my religious beliefs". The women, who are forced to give up their children, are considered good believers of Islam and that is a price she pays to be a good believer.

We can not talk about choices while governments promote and respect this type of nonsense; while they support the collective rights of minorities; and while they legitimize ancient courts applying 1400 years old laws and regulations. In this scenario, the abuser will be in charge of the children and the abused is not entitled to any financial support and moral support. If she is not pleased, if she wants to see children and be with them then she has no choice but to live with the abuse, she can become the maidservant of her husband and second wife. And Mrs. Boyd the reviewer of "Ontario arbitration Act 1991," and the so called defender of women's rights seems to see no problem with **polygamy** (see report of review).

Universal rights of women cannot be achieved without sweeping out all kinds of barriers from its path, and for sure multiculturalism should be recognized as the main barrier. Modern and civil societies are based on the concept of equal and universal rights of all residents. It is based on the social identity of human beings as opposed to their religion, their nationalities or their ethnicities. A civil society should not create various minorities and then base its law and regulations to fit these created minorities.

**9b. Did you face a lot of difficulties in attaining your goals? If so, what were some of them?**

I never expected the fight against "Sharia Court" to be easy. I knew all the obstacles and difficulties. I also knew the move for Sharia court is pushed by political Islam globally, and must not be challenged only on the local level. It was important for us to confront it globally. I knew the Islamists move was receiving lots of political and financial support from parties on power.

September 11, caused Islamists move a great deal of criticism, particularly in the West. This move needed to regain its credibility and not only that, this move was pushing for greater recognition from political parties, for greater for public support and for increased political sway. And of course the policy of multiculturalism became a very good tool to vindicate their action. This policy has already provided this move

with community centres, mosques, Islamic schools, media (e.g. radio stations, television programmes, newspapers, websites, free channels etc), and prayer rooms in various pharmaceuticals companies and factories. Day by day they are expanding their communication not only through so called local shops and mosques but also through strong international networking. Their disturbing activities, across the world, have already caused horror and fear among women and children in so called Islamic communities. The Ontario Arbitration Act 1991 just opened the gate of heaven to them to have another big bite of civilization.

I just wanted to paint a clear picture for the readers of some of the barriers that we have no choice but to overcome, with totally empty hands, with no financial support to run panel discussions or even to run advertisements to announce our public meetings.

We needed to reach to people in any way possible, and that too was quite a challenge. We were for state intervention for the sake of women and children who were living in fear of reactionary and parasitical elders and imams. Initiators of Sharia court were throwing out “**minority rights**”. In the name of minority rights, the initiator of Sharia court tried hard to label all oppositions to Sharia Court as racist, specifically if they were out side of the so called Islamic community.

This brought forth fear among activists who wanted to join the campaign. I was asked on many occasions by the audience, would they be labelled as racist, if they tried to help? Several of activists feared to appear on panels with so and so sheik or Mullah. They were worried about being labelled or worse targeted for repercussions. The Universities’ students, Shelter movement’s activists, women’s organizations, labour organizations and all other members of communities were following the matter with interest but did not want to take leadership. For the first several months of our activity, I received letters of support from the people in charge of shelters, sexual assault centres, Children Aid Societies, schools, universities, various clubs and sport centres individually but not on behalf of their organizations. They admired us, they thought that it was a very serious issue but they were hesitating to take the issue to their staff meetings. **So instead of becoming active in this campaign and being one of the campaign’s spokespersons, they became side activists** and tried to arrange meetings, conferences, panel discussions and even interviews for me and other members of campaign. That of course caused some delay in reaching the peak of the movement. It was hard to be everywhere at the same time. Imagine organizing speakers to attend all “shelters”, “board of educations”, “women’s organizations’ staff meetings as well as their board meetings across Canada, and at the same time reaching effectively the general public.

**Media** was the most important tool for not only awareness but also for mobilizing people in general. While needing media interest, the obligation to respond to every article or news item relating to Sharia or faith based court, required a huge number of hours. Often after spending several hours preparing an appropriate and thoughtful response, only a phrase or two would appear in print, though many times, no response

at all could be found... We received lots of pressure from the media to provide them with examples of specific cases. Reporters were insisting upon getting interviews with the victims of arbitrators, while those women and young girls were terrified of being interviewed. As much as we wanted these cases to come forward, at the same time we were worried about the safety of the women. These issues took lots of our energy and time

**Freedom of Religious** was put forward by the initiator of Sharia court. What they attempted to do was to legalize oppression under the name of freedom of religion. As if we were against freedom of religion. To us freedom of religion meant people are free to choose a religion or not to choose one. It meant banning any form of religious ceremonies or customs that is incompatible with people's civil rights and liberties and the principle of the equality of all. Which meant banning religious arbitrators, banning arranged marriages, forced marriages, child marriages, mutilation of girls, polygamy, disciplining women, and list goes on and on. We also insisted on banning any physical or psychological coercion for the acceptance of religion. We don't think this is too much to ask, we are in the twenty first century, one would think these issues would have been solved decades ago.

The initiators of Sharia Court in Canada realized the number of people opposing faith based courts was increasing, since the issue had reached the media outside of Canada, and people in England, Sweden , Germany, France and Austria, were showering members of parliament and the ministries in charge with opposing letters stating that Sharia law is inherently unjust and unfair.

Therefore the initiators of Sharia law in Canada claimed they want these courts to resolve civil matter only and not criminal matters. But in real life, many acceptable civil matter in Sharia , become unacceptable according to today's social standards and sometimes are, in fact, considered to be criminal activities.

We had to analyse the concept of "civil matters" under Sharia law and had to let everyone know that to classify Sharia law into civil and criminal cases was impractical. We needed to let the public know that there is no boundary between civil and criminal in Sharia. Almost everyone knows that for a Muslim, unmarried women to have sex with a man or a married woman who have relations out of marriage is considered a serious crime. Their penalty would be death by stoning while according to the norms of today's society none of them committed any crime. In fact it is considered to be a personal matter and has nothing to do with other members of society. Everyone was aware that in Sharia girls as young as 9 can legally marry to a man as old as her grandfather and that is considered a civil matter, while according to our society, that is a very serious crime and all adults involving in this matter, her parents/ guardians, mullah /sheiks who bless this marriage and all the adults who attended the wedding ceremony could face serious charges since it is considered child molestation, forced marriage, rape and so on.

**Freedom of choice/voluntary**, was put forward by Mrs. Boyd the reviewer of Arbitration Act 1991. She was appointed by two ministries who were charged with the review of that Act.. The initiators of Sharia court initially said, “on religious grounds, a Muslim who would choose to opt out ( after she/he has committed to it by their prior consent ) for reasons of convenience would be guilty of a far greater crime than a mere breach of contract and this could be tantamount to blasphemy –apostasy”. This statement which was proposed by Mumtaz Ali and put forward for establishment of Sharia court became a wake up call for equality seekers to push harder for the banning of Sharia court.

Mrs Boyd’s came up with the notion of Freedom of Choice and stated that those who avail themselves of the Sharia court will “choose” to do so voluntarily.

We needed to let everyone know what a ridiculous joke it is to speak of freedom of choice for women living in an Islamic family in a very condensed Islamic community. If we ignore beating, intimidation, and all kinds of abuse, we just allow for this abuse to worsen. The least consequence women in these communities face, is isolation. I will not be astonished, if we witness honour killing in Canada in the near future .

I.

#### **10. Women have always held an active role in Iran, how unique is their role today?**

**The reality is that the Islamic regime of Iran does not have the ability to grant equality and freedom to women. We have no illusion about the suppressive and anti-woman nature of the Islamic regime. In this regard one can see that women’s role in Iran is unique. Their freedom is directly related to the fall of the Islamic regime of Iran. The women’s protest movement in Iran is gaining momentum daily.**

