



Extraordinary Women

FROM THE
MUSLIM WORLD
NEWS



Monthly Newsletter Highlighting Extraordinary Muslim Women in Society

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● ASMA NAWAR - In Pakistan Tribal Belt, Female Reporter gets a Voice

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"I feel good about that," she says, peering out from the maroon-and-yellow veil that covers the rest of her face. "I can't say that our cultural values are wrong, but I think women should come out and work, and get the jobs they want."

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Photo Credit: LA Times

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WOMEN OF THE MONTH

● ASMA NAWAR

In Pakistan Tribal Belt, Female Reporter gets a Voice

"It's wrong that Pashtun women are held back like this... It's unfair, and that's what inspired me to work here".

Reporting from Peshawar, Pakistan - Radio Khyber airs in the heart of Pakistan's wild and volatile tribal areas, where women are bound by strict centuries-old codes of conduct.

The code's tenets are oppressive and nonnegotiable. Women should confine themselves to their homes and the sole task of raising children. And their voices should never be heard by strangers.

Asma Nawar, a 25-year-old Pashtun with wide brown eyes and a crisp, resonant voice, repeatedly breaks that last rule as a reporter for Radio Khyber.

"I feel good about that," she says, peering out from the maroon-and-yellow veil that covers the rest of her face. "I can't say that our cultural values are wrong, but I think women should come out and work, and get the jobs they want."

Nawar and two other women hired in the last year as reporters for the radio station see themselves as trailblazers in a part of Pakistan that mires its women in old world thinking. Nawar and her female colleagues focus primarily on children, education and healthcare, considered here as women's issues.

The Taliban, which believes in keeping women away from college and work, still controls large swaths of Pakistan's tribal belt along the Afghan border.

Additionally, the Taliban does not hesitate to demonstrate its views on education for women. This year, Taliban militants burned down scores of girls' schools throughout the Swat Valley. Nawar narrows her gaze when the subject of the Taliban comes up.

"We know they are listening to us," she says in a studio at the University of Peshawar, where she and Radio Khyber's other two female journalists prepare and edit their radio pieces. "Am I worried? No, because I'm doing the right job."



Photo Credit: LA Times

WOMEN IN THE NEWS

● SISTERS WORKING TO HELP IRAQI WOMEN

"We thought, "OK, they need help. Let's do this. We're not any different.""

Ty Reed and Teresa Nguyen have lived through the rough beginnings of the refugee experience. They remember how their parents, after fleeing Vietnam on a fishing boat, struggled to raise them in New Jersey. Nearly three decades later, the sisters are trying to help out a new generation of refugees – those arriving in the Dallas area from Iraq. "What they've seen and what they've experienced is basically what every refugee has experienced," Nguyen said. "It doesn't matter when you come over."



Photo Credit: Dallas News

The sisters organized a conference to highlight the plight of Iraqi women. They hope to raise awareness that there are hundreds of refugees making a new life in the Dallas area, as well as showcase artwork created by dozens who remain in the war-torn country.

SOURCE:

http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/localnews/stories/DN-iraqiwomen_14met.ART.State.Edition1.4bcd9d0.html

● A FIGHTING CHANCE

India's Muslim girls box their way out poverty

"In sports, boys and girls are equal. Everybody is the same."

As the sun dips below the horizon, roll call begins at a boxing club in southeast Kolkata. The trainer, Sheikh Nasimuddin Ahmed, calls number 20, a 16-year-old girl named Sughra Fatma, to the front. Grabbing her ear firmly with a twist, he berates her for snickering during roll call, and reiterates the importance of discipline. Here, Ms. Fatma is one of the boys.



Photo Credit: WSJ

As it is for many of the kids at the boxing club, life is hard. For girls - unlike boys who have a few more options - it's practically scripted: They stay home, help their mothers, and get married so they aren't a burden to their families anymore. Girls like Ms. Fatma, who dream of a better life with more options and opportunity, join the Khidderpore boxing club because it offers a potential way out.

Boxing is one of several avenues that have opened up to poor Muslim women across a modernizing India, including careers with nonprofit organizations and in teaching. It reflects the changing role of women within their own communities, particularly in the past decade, says Sabiha Hussain, an associate professor who at Jamia Millia Islamia university in New Delhi.

"They find (boxing) as a way of coming out from conservativeness. They have very limited role - poor Muslim women - in the public sphere. So these women, these boxers, they find a way to come out and this is an outlet for them to fight poverty."

SOURCE:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125073377934645059.html>

● BAHRAIN: SEEKING GENDER EQUALITY IN QURAN

For the first time, feminists in Bahrain are seeking new Islamic perspectives on gender and women's empowerment, and asking for modern interpretations of the Quran.

Through a series of four workshops, launched in May, the Bahrain Women Association for Development intends to engage the public in serious debate over the "true meaning" of Quranic verses that are used to assert male supremacy.

"We aren't against Islam and don't want to promote our perspective," explains Asma Rajab, an activist and member of its board of directors. "We want to make our society consider women as complete humans."

With the advances made by Muslim women in many countries including Bahrain, it is time to reinterpret the Quranic verses, she adds. "Islam is a renewable religion that fits all situations and periods, so its regulations should be re-interpreted to meet the advancements of Muslim women," she says.

"To change the men-oriented societies, the Muslim world should accept the flexibility of the Quran and Islamic thoughts," advises Rajab.

SOURCE:

<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=48205>

N.G.O. REPORT

● AFGHAN WOMEN FORM 5 MILLION WOMEN CAMPAIGN, ISSUE DECLARATION

The Afghan Women's Network, an umbrella organization in which many *Women Waging Peace* Network members play a significant role, gathered 1,500 women in Kabul on August 4, a day when insurgents fired 7 rockets into the city.

The newly formed 5 Million Women Campaign issued a declaration to commit to furthering Afghan women's rights, particularly their political participation. "This campaign asks the people and government of Afghanistan to support their commitments regarding women's political rights and transparency of election process."

SOURCE:

http://www.huntalternatives.org/pages/7_the_initiative_for_inclusive_security.cfm

● A VICTORY FOR DEMOCRACY IN KUWAIT

To the surprise of many observers, four women were elected to parliament in the 16th of May elections in Kuwait. When the results came in, the four newly elected parliamentarians broke into tears of joy and were joined in their celebrations by crowds of Kuwaiti women who had determined to fully support the candidates and to ignore the insidious propaganda of their Islamist opponents.

The country's men and women had combined their efforts to make this long-anticipated event happen, and for the first time in a GCC State. Their joy stems from the fact that the four women candidates won on merit and neither were they appointed by royal decree, nor do they owe their victory to a quota system.

In campaigning alongside male candidates, these four women are maintaining Kuwaiti women's long history of participation and visibility in social and political domains.

SOURCE:

http://saudiamber.blogspot.com/2009/08/victory-for-democracy-in-kuwait_07.html

● MUSLIM WOMEN'S DIRECTORY LAUNCHED ONLINE

An online Muslim women's directory has been created to allow different groups to form a national focus, New Zealand's Ethnic Affairs Minister Pansy Wong says. The directory was launched as part of Islam Awareness Week and includes 26 Muslim women's groups in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

"There are many wonderful organizations out there offering a range of support to Islamic families and I am delighted that these groups have been brought together to ensure they can further assist Muslim New Zealanders," Mrs Wong said.

The directory allows different organizations to "adopt a national focus in their contributions to their community." Organisations in the directory include sports clubs, playcentres and other family assistance groups. "It is crucial that all New Zealanders feel supported," Mrs Wong said.

SOURCE:

<http://www.nbr.co.nz/article/muslim-womens-directory-launched-online-107322>

GENERAL LINKS:

Empower Peace: <http://www.empowerpeace.org/>

Global Fund for Women: <http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/cms/>

Women for Women International: <http://www.womenforwomen.org/>

Women for Afghan Women: <http://www.womenforafghanwomen.org/>

Vital Voices: <http://www.vitalvoices.org>

Omid E Mehr: <http://www.omid-e-mehr.org>