

Association for World Education International Humanist and Ethical Union

UNHR Council: 8th Session (2-18 June 2008): President: Ambassador Doru Romulus Costea
Speaker: AWE Representative David G. LITTMAN. Monday (p.m.) 16 June 2008

*Follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action:
Integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system (item 8)*

Mr President

In the context of integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations System, we wish to draw attention to four examples of widespread violence against women that we believe merit far greater attention from the Council.

1. Regarding FGM we are making available our written statement: E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/NGO/27: Background on "Traditional or Customary Practices" /Female Genital Mutilation [& the Arabic text (& translations), certified by Al-Azhar University, the authoritative source for the Shafi'i school of Sunni law, widely adhered to in Egypt]. This discusses the reasons why 96% of Egyptian women are still subjected to FGM despite State legislation in 1997 outlawing the practice [Sara Corbett, "A Cutting Tradition", *NYT*, Sunday Magazine, 20 Jan. 2008]. "Almost 90% of the female population in the north of Sudan undergo FGM which, in many cases, is practised in its most extreme form known as infibulation" wrote Special Rapporteur Halima Warzazi [E/CN.4/Sub.2/2004/41, §24]. UNICEF figures indicate that over 3 million young girls are mutilated each year in 32 countries, 29 of which are Member States of the OIC. We believe that only a fatwa from Al-Azhar Grand Sheikh Sayyad Tantawi – replacing the ambiguous fatwas of 1949, 1951 and 1981 – will change this barbaric, criminal practice, which is now growing even in Europe.
2. The number of "honour killings" is on the increase, worldwide. Ten years ago in 1998, there were a reported 300 cases of honour killings in one province of Pakistan alone [Mufti Ziauddin "Status of Court Cases for Murdered Women; and BBC film, Home programme, 8 April 2000.] On 28 April 2000, President Musharraf declared that "The Government of Pakistan vigorously condemns the practice of so-called 'Honour Killings' and that such actions do not find any place in our religion or law." Yet this murderous practice seems to be on the increase in Pakistan and elsewhere – even in Europe in certain communities. It must be criminalised and the law strictly applied.
3. The stoning of women for alleged adultery still occurs regularly in Iran, Sudan and other Muslim countries that apply Shari'a law. In Iran, they are buried up to their waists in pits and by law blunt stones are used thereby increasing their agony in death.
4. The marriage age for girls in Iran remains at 9 years, based on Shari'a law. In the year 2000, the Iranian Parliament attempted to increase the age to 14 but the law was overturned by the Council of Guardians, claiming Quaranic justification ["Islamic scholars have put a lot of efforts into these laws." – "Iran Bill to End Marriage at 9. Guardian Consent Still Needed", *IHT*, 10 August 2000] Last week, Noble Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi, speaking in Geneva, denounced the fact that in Iran a girl is considered an adult and liable to punishment, even execution, at 9, and a boy at 15. [*Le Temps*, 10 June 2008]. She rejects the concept of cultural relativism, as does the French Secretary of State for Urban Affairs, Fadela Amara, who recently strongly criticised the ruling of a French judge in Lille for annulling a marriage between two Muslims because the girl lied about her virginity in the marriage contract. Ms. Amara rightly called this aberration "a real fatwa against the emancipation and liberty of women." [Steven Erlanger, "Muslim minister tackles French suburbs: Blunt talker refuses to accept 'injustices'", *Int. Herald Tribune*, 14-15 June 2008]

Thank you Mr. President.

AWE c/o Case Postale 205 – 1196 Gland – Suisse