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July 2009

HUMAN RIGHTS THROUGH THE RULE OF LAW

GJCnews

"Human rights is universal - it equally applies to all human beings and it is the collective wisdom of all faiths, religions and peoples."

-Shirin Ebadi, San Francisco Jewish Community Center, May 18, 2009

When Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Iranian human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi spoke these words "in conversation" with GJC President Janet Benshoof on May 18th, the packed auditorium at the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco broke into applause. It was a historic and profound evening, as these two legal pioneers explored topics ranging from how Iranian feminists in the lead-up to the elections forced candidates to talk about human rights and equality and the important role international law has and must play in enforcing equality and universal human rights.



Much has happened in Iran since this remarkable evening, but the principles that were discussed remain unchanged. The day before the elections in Iran, Dr. Ebadi wrote in a Washington Post editorial that "the true mark of success in Iran will be an election that follows due process...a healthy, functioning and fair legal system is the people's long-term guarantee for greater human rights." As we now know, the Iranian election and the government's response in the following days and weeks regrettably did not follow this ideal.

Despite the Iranian government's attempts to block news and images from leaving Iran, the world has witnessed hundreds of thousands of Iranians protesting peacefully in the streets in the face of brutal violence thanks to new technology and citizen journalism. What is perhaps most striking about these images is the countless number of women - at least half of the protestors - who are taking a stand against the government.

The brave women we have seen in the streets did not end up there by accident or as part of some overnight phenomenon. This crucial moment in Iran's history came about as part of a long process toward democracy building and equal rights that is being led by the feminist movement in Iran. Iranian women have led a campaign to educate citizens about women's rights and collect a million signatures to petition the government to overturn the discriminatory laws. They also leveraged the recent election as an opportunity for democratic change.

In the country with the most bloggers per capita in the world, Iranian women are a leading voice and presence. Though they might be less visible on television or in the news headlines, this extensive network of women and civil society leaders are leading change on a national scale and must be allowed to take part in Iran's move towards a more peaceful, democratic, and secure future.

The courageous women who are leading the fight for equal rights and justice are not singular to Iran. They are part of a powerful movement within the Muslim world that is poised to pioneer acceptance of international law and human rights in Iran, other Muslim nations, and around the world. As Dr. Ebadi noted in her remarks, "Women in Iran are a very powerful force with potential of bringing about change."

In honor of the historic conversation with Dr. Ebadi and in solidarity with the women in Iran, this GJCnews is dedicated to exploring how women in the Muslim world are putting into practice the universal principles of human rights and equality to create a more just and secure world and how you can be a part of this change.

- [Read](#) Shirin Ebadi's post-election commentary in the Huffington Post.
- [Read](#) Anne Applebaum's editorial on the women's movement as "An Overlooked Force in Iran" in the Washington Post.
- [Speak out](#) in defense of Shadi Sadr, Iranian lawyer and women's rights activist, who was arrested and disappeared last week and the countless others who are being unjustly persecuted in Iran.

This GJCnews features:

- Organization Profile: The Muslim Women's Fund (MWF)
- Recommended GJC legal briefs and resources related to international law, equality rights, and the Muslim world
- Links to other organizations that are working to empower women to transform the Muslim world

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Organization Profile: The Muslim Women's Fund (MWF)

With 1.2 billion Muslims in the world, it is only logical that Islam maintains a constant presence in news headlines. Yet, from the growing instability in Pakistan to the political protests in Iran, Islam

is too often examined through the lens of regional instability and sectarian strife. A new organization, the Muslim Women's Fund, seeks to address the root causes of these issues - poverty, lack of access to education, and unequal rights - with an innovative new approach: a fund for Muslim women that is led and run by Muslim women from around the world.

MWF invests in the transformative impact that Muslim women could have on their families, communities and countries if they have access to a funding source that understands the cultural and religious context in which they live. The history of women-focused funds around the world shows how this idea has the potential to be effective. By funding women to establish their own priorities and solutions to the problems they face, similar women's funds have contributed to a transformation of laws and power structures around the world (the first women's fund, The Global Fund for Women, was founded by GJC Board Chair Anne Firth Murray in 1987). By taking this approach, the Muslim Women's Fund is pioneering new applications of this model for the 600 million Muslim women worldwide who lack access to funding and resources. A few facts:

- There are 600 million Muslim women in the world - one-tenth of the global population.
- Much of this population remains impoverished, illiterate, likely to die young and oppressed by local cultures of patriarchy that supersede religious ethics.
- There are 141 women's funds giving \$50 million to women and girls.
- Yet, there is NO fund anywhere in the world dedicated solely to Muslim women.

MWF believes that to fight against culturally-embedded inequality and patriarchy, Muslim women must be empowered to embrace their Islamic rights and responsibilities and become full stakeholders and change agents in their societies. MWF's first grantmaking cycle will support three pilot projects that advance education, economic empowerment and human rights for Muslim women. These projects are:

- A Pakistani NGO that will provide transformative human rights curriculum at girls' madrasas to teachers who will then pass this education on to thousands of students.
- An Egyptian NGO that seeks to eradicate the practice of female genital mutilation ("FGM") in Cairo through religious re-education and economic training for the midwives and barbers who perform FGM.
- A U.S.-based non-profit that will help Muslim immigrant and refugee women start their own micro-enterprises with the hope that this financial empowerment will stimulate improvements in other aspects of Muslim women's lives.

The Muslim Women's Fund officially launched on July 16th in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia at the second convening of the Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity (WISE). The Global Justice Center welcomes this change-leading organization and encourages you to learn more about their idea to change the Muslim world.

To read more about the Muslim Women's Fund [please click here.](#)

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Recommended GJC legal briefs and resources related to international law, equality rights, and the Muslim world

International law is key to equal human rights for all citizens of the world, regardless of religion, and to long-term peace and security. The resources below are examples of how the GJC utilizes international law as a tool to help women advocate for human rights and equality.

- [Historic training of Iraq High Tribunal Judges](#)
- [Crafting Human Security in An Insecure World](#): Report from conference that explored global acquiescence to impunity, gender violence and exclusion that continues to obstruct peacebuilding and deny human security
- [Training materials on gender rights under international law in Arabic](#), and [Kurdish](#)
- [Women's Unequal Access to Justice in the Middle East and North Africa](#): A summary of the obstacles women face to access and participation in Middle East justice systems
- [Facilitating Collaborations in Darfur: Organizations Working Within Darfur, Sudan on Sexual Violence and the Rule of Law](#)

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Links to other organizations that are working to empower women to transform the Muslim world

The Global Justice Center is proud to be a part of a movement of organizations that are challenging the status quo to create cutting edge solutions that ensure equal rights and security in the Muslim world.

- The [Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity](#) aims to address the current lack of female participation in current debates about the political, social and religious concerns of Muslim women globally.
- [Women Living Under Muslim Laws](#) is an international solidarity network that provides information and support for women whose lives are shaped or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam.
- [Women's Alliance for a Democratic Iraq](#) (WADFI) is an international non-partisan and not-for-profit women rights organization dedicated to a free and democratic Iraq with full and equal individual rights for women.

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