

Fundamentally fascist

Marieme Hélié-Lucas is founder and was for many years co-ordinator of Women Living Under Muslim Laws, an international coalition of women living in Muslim countries and communities fighting for the rights of women and opposed to religious fundamentalism. She is an Algerian exile living in Europe. T&S interviewed her back in 1984 about the situation in Algeria, when the state introduced a new Family Code inspired by fundamentalist ideology, which was severely restricting women's rights. After September 11 we wanted to hear her views, in the light of her long experience of observing and combating fundamentalism from women's point of view.

Sophie Laws: *What impact has September 11 and the subsequent US-led war against terrorism in Afghanistan had on your work, on the network?*

Marieme Hélié-Lucas: We have for years have been saying to the world, 'Beware of fundamentalists, they are not religious, they couldn't care less about religion. If you confront them on their interpretation of religion, they do not respond. They are fascists. They are extreme right political movements of a fascist nature, like Nazis they use physical elimination of opponents and various "Untermensch" (those seen as inferior), praise of a mythical past, and other elements of fascism we have known through the years. Far from being backward they are modernists and capitalists. As Bob Dylan would put it, they have "God on My Side"'. And we also told the world that Islam and fundamentalism are two different things. This is why I don't use the term 'Islamist'.

Islam is an ideology, a religion, a philosophy.

It's not applied. It's thought, utopia, not action. It's very important to distinguish between this theoretical and ideological level and what people actually do in the name of an ideology, hence the very much-needed distinction between Islam and Muslims. Muslims are the real people doing real things, in fact very different things around the world under the same religious banner and ideology. What Muslims actually do, with whatever ideology they are provided with, varies hugely around the world. And then you have a third category: the fundamentalists who are an extreme right political movement using religion for their own political purposes, picking and choosing, eventually seeking in the religious text what suits them. These people do not know and do not care about religion. They use from the Koran and Hadith whatever suits them. Unfortunately, at present, they also export traditions from one country to another, traditions that may or may not have anything to do with religion, as we will see later.

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First let's look at religious interpretations. For example, on marriage and polygamy, the Koran says that men can have four wives (and as many concubines as they want) provided they treat their wives perfectly equally. In Tunisia, the civil authorities hence decided as early as 1956 that nobody human could manage to treat four wives perfectly equally. For them the full sentence in the Koran thus conveys the idea that the Koran does not allow polygamy. In Algeria, the next door country, the government decided in 1984 that the same sentence in the Koran is interpreted as allowing polygamy. From this example, one can see that it's very important to distinguish what Muslims actually do from what Islam is supposed to say.

I mentioned in the interview we did in 1984 the fact that contraception and abortion were banned in Algeria despite the fact that we managed to get a fatwa¹ by the highest religious authority in Algeria, i.e. the High Islamic Council. This fatwa stated that contraception is perfectly permissible in Islam. It's politically understandable that, when such a fatwa was issued in 1963-64, shortly after the end of a bloody liberation war of seven years which killed two million people, the interest of the Algerian state at that time was to 'replace' all the people who died. This is the reason behind the decision of civil authorities to declare contraception un-Islamic and therefore illegal — despite the fatwa that we brought to the President. But in the 70s the enriched ruling classes felt threatened by the high population growth, especially the growing number of lumpen proletariat in Algeria, they then decided that contraception was perfectly Islamic all of a sudden and took the 1963-64 fatwa out of their drawer.

People in power manipulate religion and tradition; in both, they pick and choose what suits their purpose of the moment, and indeed, this changes in the course of history. So do the fascist fundamentalists: if you look at what they presently pick and choose, it's very serious.

For instance in Pakistan, they recently were trying to import a Maliki interpretation of religious law and a tradition that belongs to North Africa which is very much against women: a woman is never deemed an adult in the legal sense. She remains always a minor. She is not able to enter into a contract, in that sense. Subsequently, if a woman wants to marry, she has to be given in marriage by her 'matrimonial tutor' or wali, who is generally her father. The

father can be replaced by another man in the family, even her minor son, and if she is totally without family, a judge will be appointed as her wali. In Algeria or Morocco, it is part of the law of the state, but in recent years we have seen attempts to import it into the law of Pakistan. We have seen fathers going to court saying, 'My daughter married without my consent'. They are going to court while they have no grounds under Pakistani law. But Pakistani fundamentalists pretend that 'religious' law supersedes state law. Pakistani feminist organisations and lawyers have been fighting such cases on legal grounds and fathers have lost the cases. But they then recourse to crime and some have attempted to murder their daughters, thus appointing themselves both as judges and as executioners.

Similarly we have been seeing the introduction in the fundamentalist guerrilla camps in Algeria of what is called the 'mutaa' marriage. It is a marriage of 'pleasure', a 'temporary' marriage into which one can enter for a limited number of hours, days, months or years, determined by contract. Among other stipulations, it should require both parties' consent. It exists in Iran; it is a Shi'ite practice, which is unheard of in the Sunni tradition of North Africa, and Algeria in particular. But Algerian fundamentalists import it and then, when they raid villages and take the young women in sexual slavery, they claim it is not rape: they call it 'mutaa marriage' and pretend it is perfectly Islamic.

There are lots of such examples. For instance, in Sri Lanka some years ago fundamentalist groups, including fundamentalist women's groups, demanded the introduction of female genital mutilation (FGM) as part of an Islamic duty. As you can imagine, nobody in Sri Lanka, certainly not the Muslims, knew what it involved because it is totally alien to their culture. We all know that it has nothing to do with Islam, it is a cultural tradition: in the region of Africa where FGM is found, Christians and Animists practice it too. It is geographically limited to the sphere of influence of ancient Egypt where it originated from.

We have to ask ourselves why do fundamentalists pick these particular aspects of tradition or of religious practice and why do they, more and more, try to export them to other Muslim areas in the world? What we are seeing again and again in Muslim countries — and I am sure you can see it too in your own contexts — is an ultra conservative choice being operated by fundamen-



Family Code by Daiffa

talists between all the cultural traditions, all the religious interpretations, to dig out what suits them and drop the rest. They discard all the positive traditions, be they religious or cultural, that could be used in favour of women. We witness an internationalisation of the fundamentalist movements in which the fundamentalists themselves define as the only true version of Islam all the worst traditions or interpretations of religion everywhere and pull them together, especially all the anti-women ones.

Women have fought both locally and internationally to resist such trends, by working at changing unjust laws and proposing new ones; by unveiling the actual non-religious origin of some bad practices; by calling on feminist theologians to redress erroneous interpretations of Islam; by taking perpetrators to court; and by alerting international bodies regarding the violations of women's human rights in our countries.

We in Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) are working on the early warning signs of the rise of fundamentalism in various countries. Fundamentalists generally come into a country through invading the educational system, by replacing the absent state in terms of social relief and social work, that is the entry point in general, and then they would move into terrorism, for instance. But if you tell the women in the countries where this is happening they say, no, not in my country, of course not. They don't see it. I remember when fundamentalism started growing in Algeria, I was one of the very few people who tried alerting people about it. Lots of my dear friends said, 'No, this is Algeria, a revolutionary country, what are you talking about? Of course not. Fundamentalists exist, but they are marginal'. Big mistake. I remember when we went to Tunisia, to alert Tunisian women, and Tunisian women had a similar blindness: 'come on, this is a very democratic country, we have the best laws of the Arab world, of course not'. I remember trying to alert Bosnian women, pointing at all the relief work fundamentalist groups were initiating after the war, all the schools they were opening where they enforced their version of religious education as well as compulsory classes in the Arabic language. And women would not believe me. Well, now it is clear to everybody that fundamentalists have their foot in ex-Yugoslavia and in the Muslim ex-Soviet republics.

Sophie: *Going back to the war in Afghanistan, I think most feminists were broadly anti-war, but some feminists felt torn about the situation, that it couldn't surely be a bad thing to intervene militarily against the Taliban.*

Marieme: Frankly, I don't think the US Government cares about the situation of women in Afghanistan, nor about human rights, nor about the state of democracy there. The things they care about are that there are no bombs in their own country and they can have their pipeline going through Afghanistan. Otherwise, if they were to care about such things, they would not replace the Taliban by the Northern Alliance. What is the real difference between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance? The only difference is that the Northern Alliance does not threaten US interests, but as far as fundamentalism goes they are just as fundamentalist. When they were in power, they behaved just like the Taliban. They have done absolutely horrible things to the population in general and to women in particular. There were mass rapes also, to the point that when the Taliban came to power they were seen as the salvation by the population: there are many testimonies about this state of mind, including from women's organisations and women who became victims of the Taliban. What the US has done is to replace anti-US Taliban with pro-US Taliban. Thank you! Big deal!

It is absolutely unbelievable that anyone can now see the US as a champion of women's rights and the war in Afghanistan as a war for the liberation of women, or for democracy. The US Government does not care about women. You can see this in the people they choose to negotiate with, and in the composition of the new Afghan government, with very few exceptions. The US Government did not acknowledge the fact that there are many progressive people in Afghanistan who fought for democracy under the Taliban: they did not look for them, they looked for ethnic balance, elders, the King, etc. to be represented. Were progressive people at the negotiation table? They are eradicated from the political scene by the US Government and by the international media. Where are all the educated women? Where are all the people who maintained schools for girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban? Where are all the medical doctors who gave treatment to women at the risk of their lives? Where are all the people who organised the circulation of information within Afghanistan and

*Kabul students
from The Nation 2/12/01*



outside? What place has the US Government given them in the new Afghanistan?

In Algeria it's the same — it's really tragic. The US Government does business with our local fundamentalists. There is no recognition of the existence of progressive forces that could represent a viable alternative to either fundamentalist fascists or to a corrupt government. There is such a strong women's movement in Algeria. There are all the anti-fundamentalist movements, there are the workers' unions, the independent journalists, the artists and intellectuals, the progressive parties. They have opposed the fundamentalists at the risk of their lives and many of them actually died at their hands. But it's as if this does not exist in the eyes of European and North American states, nor in the eyes of the international media, nor in the eyes of international human rights organisations. There's a projection of backwardness on our countries that serves a purpose; it serves to legitimate the intervention, to legitimate whatever powerful countries want to do in our countries to serve their own vested interests, while at the same time progressive forces have been denied support for a long, long time and this is still going on.

As in Afghanistan, one can see that in Algeria what the US Government cares about is its oil interests. That's why it has been trying to bring down the Algerian government and to push FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) into power. There was a very interesting study published by Graham Fuller four years ago, commissioned by the Rand Corporation² — a US agency close to the defense of the US. What the study says in essence is that the US should support the coming to power of the fundamentalist party FIS, for the reason that fundamentalists do not threaten US economic interests in Algeria, especially in oil. The author wrote this; it's not my interpretation. Then the author goes on to say that the US is in a very good position to persuade European countries that FIS in power is also in their interests. And it ends with a small paragraph saying: of course we know that in this process human rights will be trampled and that women's rights will be curtailed under Sharia, but this is Algeria's internal affair, the US should not interfere. This is a wonderful summary of what they are doing in our countries for their own benefit. I do not think that anyone in civil society has yet understood that this is fascism and that it should be combated. Certainly at the level of governments, they could not care less.

I am really terrified that the US will bring war to other countries as a follow-up to the Afghan war. They certainly named the GIA (Islamic armed groups) — one of the armed branches of the FIS — as one of the forces they should have to deal with. So it is absolutely clear that the US are prepared to bomb everywhere, to bomb the population that has nothing to do with the GIA, which combated it and suffered under it, for their own interests, instead of supporting the democratic forces wherever they are. That is really the crucial part of it. They do not care what happens to us. In the current Afghan war they took the risk, for instance, that fundamentalist forces might take over in Pakistan. That was a real risk when the US requested, demanded, that Pakistan help the US forces. We were really scared of a nationalist reaction, hijacked by the Pakistani extreme right. Everybody was against the US intervention, the way it happened. Many of us would have loved to see the fundamentalists politically eradicated, but we knew that it would not be part of the programme of the US. They cannot care less about fundamentalists. They care about the portion of the fundamentalists who threaten US interests. The others can stay, they are most welcome as long as US interests are safely protected.

Sophie: September 11 was widely perceived as a different kind of action by Muslim fundamentalists.

Marieme: No, I don't think it's new. Paris has had so many bombs in the past years — in the metro, the trains — so it's not new in that sense. It happened in the US, that's what is new. One of the people who is known to be the financial organiser of the bombing of the metro in Paris at the beginning of the 1990s is in Britain, and the UK does not respond to requests for his extradition to France. To this day the man is still in the UK. Indeed it shows how the European powers and the US want to negotiate with the fundamentalists, regardless of their fascist principles and political stands. Otherwise these governments would take action against them. But they barely do it. They don't even co-operate with each other. Fundamentalist leaders and organisers have settled all over Europe for years and years. We know who is where, moving from one country to another. When one country feels the need to say, 'hey, this is too much and we cannot tolerate you here' they just go to the next European country and live there.

In France many of them have had asylum while virtually none of the people who went into exile because they were threatened and attacked by fundamentalists got asylum. I can tell you none of the progressive Algerians I know personally has asylum, all of them victims of the fundamentalists. Meanwhile many fundamentalists have asylum in France. The interpretation of international law on asylum is clear: one is eligible for asylum when one is persecuted by the state. There is no denying that fundamentalists are victims of state repression in Algeria (but so were the Left generally for many decades and they did not get asylum at that time either). However the international law on asylum also clearly establishes that if one is a perpetrator — a violator — one cannot benefit from asylum. This second part of the law is not applied. What European and North American countries are doing is using one part of the law for political purposes and ignoring the second part. If the law as a whole had been considered, fundamentalists could not be granted asylum because they are violators, perpetrators of crimes against humanity — as well as, in some instances, victims of the state.

Asylum laws were thought of at a time when wars were taking place between official armies of different nations. This is less and less the case in the world today: we now witness more and more wars, including with modern arms such as Kalachnikovs and missiles, involving non-state actors. (Think of Rwanda, of Algeria.) Despite this change, asylum laws are not yet applied to cases when citizens are persecuted by non-state actors, as is the case in Algeria. Human rights organisations have been playing a terrifying role in this respect. Based on the principle that only states are signatories of international agreements therefore only they can be held accountable under international law, human rights organisations have been supporting fundamentalists as victims of the state, without adequately addressing their role as violators of ordinary citizens. Though of course everyone including fascists should be guaranteed a fair trial, no torture, no extra judicial killings, etc, it's very hard to understand why the political existence of non-state actors isn't taken into account. Women have done a lot of work on this issue at the level of the International Criminal Court.

Sophie: How do you see the Al-Qaida network in relation to the broader forces of fundamental-

ism within the Muslim world? Do you think they are important?

Marieme: I can draw a parallel with the GIA in Algeria. The GIA was most probably trained by the Al Qaida network. All these forces are autonomous but they start from the same root and support each other, financially as well as in armaments and training of troops, not to speak of media. So, isolating Al-Qaida and putting all the blame on Al-Qaida while not tackling the fact that your so-called moderate Islamists are sitting in London or in Manchester makes no sense to me. Who is more to blame? The poor guy who earns his food by being part of the GIA, for instance, because he has blood on his hands? Or the ideologist who created the whole system, recruits them, raises money for arms and everything that is needed in this terrorist movement? Or the European and North American governments who give them asylum and the human rights organisations that give them a political platform? Our GIA would not exist on the ground without all this backing. I think that just attacking terrorism in isolation doesn't make sense. These groups include all shades from the very well behaved people who speak in international fora — all the shades down to the poor guy who actually holds the gun or the knife in his hand and actually commits all these terrible crimes. I do not see how it's only the last one of the chain who is to blame. Certainly, the ideologists of the fundamentalist movement did speak to all the international human rights organisations and lobbied them for so many years, that these organisations now fail to see that they are fascists.

I have seen and known when I was in exile in Morocco towards the end of the liberation struggle of Algeria some of the young men, very often less than 20, who were the executioners of the FLN (National Liberation Front) and of the ALN, (National Liberation Army). I know they were destroyed by what they had to do, by what they were asked to do, they were totally destroyed, they were having nightmares all the time — they were very young people. The Nazis too forcibly recruited younger and younger boys in their army; those boys are victims, as much as perpetrators. My experience with the young executioners of the ALN makes me think that, although I don't want to exonerate anyone from killing anybody, I cannot accept that the man with the knife in hand, the gun in hand, the poor guy, the young guy, maybe the illiterate guy, is

more responsible and more accountable than the man in London or in Washington DC giving orders, recruiting, raising funds and lobbying international human rights organisations. Those organisers with clean hands should be held accountable for the crimes committed on the ground.

Sophie: *I wanted to ask a specific question about the Palestinians. A lot of commentators have been saying that that situation is part of what feeds the Muslim world's problem with the US. I wonder how that looks from your perspective?*

Marieme: The war, the bombing of Afghanistan has reinforced, if at all it was needed, the anti-US feeling that is common in the third world, and not just in Muslim countries. People in Latin America, Asia and Africa have the same gut level anti-US feeling. The reaction to the situation in Palestine and Israel has to do with this anti-US feeling. Now, let me be clear: to me, Israel is a colonial state, there is no doubt about that. New people coming in in force, and either forcibly taking the land, or 'buying' it when people are so poor that they will sell it for a piece of bread, and then pushing them out, this is plain and simple colonisation. It is what happened in South Africa, in Algeria and in Israel (not to speak of the whole of Latin America, where the near eradication of indigenous people fully succeeded, to the point that the sons and daughters of Spaniards and Italians there are now claiming to be the indigenous people). Those are three places where there has been something called in French 'colonisation de peuplement' — settlers' colonisation, where people come and stay; colonisers do not just come, exploit the wealth of the country and go. They put down their roots. Nobody can deny this about Israel; it's a historical fact.

At the moment, the international media point at what the Israeli army is doing to the Palestinian population and it is indeed horrendous — killings, destruction, expulsions. But the media do not point at the colonial root of the present problem. At the same time what we can see is that the legitimate nationalist response of the Palestinians has been progressively but surely hijacked by extreme right fundamentalist forces within the Palestinian opposition to Israel. As everywhere, when facing a terrible situation, there can be a response from the left or from the right, and when people respond from the right

you have Nazism.

What we witness in Palestine now is the national struggle slowly moving out of the hands of secular people — who were eventually ready to share territory with the Israelis on democratic grounds — into the hands of extreme right forces working under the banner of religion, such as Hamas. And therefore it becomes increasingly difficult for the progressive forces within the Palestinian population to go on with their national demands for democracy, for land, for rights and to distance themselves from the main trend, which is the fundamentalist trend. They are in a terrible position. We salute both those Palestinians who, today, maintain human and political contacts with their progressive anti-fascist counterparts in Israel, and those Israelis who demonstrate daily against the occupation of Palestinian territory by the Israeli army, the refuseniks, the Women in Black against war, etc. Both deserve our deepest admiration for their courage, their political integrity and their antifascist commitment.

As mentioned earlier about Algeria and Afghanistan, the media do not give the progressive forces any visibility. Similarly in Israel, where I have been in touch with progressive forces for more than 30 years, the many courageous people there working so hard, at the risk of their lives, in alliance with progressive people on the Palestinian side, against their own Jewish fundamentalists and their own extreme right government, are not given any visibility. How often do you see accounts of their various actions in the newspapers? What I want to say here is: 'We are the alternative. Give us a chance'. Last year there was a wonderful young Israeli woman, 29 years old: when the Israeli soldiers were encircling Palestinian villages in the night and firing at everybody, this woman just armed herself with a loudspeaker, went every night into Palestinian villages, and locked herself in with the Palestinians. And when the Israeli troops encircled the villages, she would speak to them through the loudspeaker, explaining that she was an Israeli Jewish citizen, that she was inside as a human shield and that if the army fired at the village, which was illegal, they might kill her, and it would have legal consequences. Those are the people we should be talking about and with.

Sophie: *Is there more you would like to tell us about what is happening in Algeria?*

Women living under muslim laws النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين Femmes sous lois musulmanes

Marieme: The social movement is growing. There is a lot of social protest against the government — rightly so of course. Unfortunately, it is often hijacked by fundamentalists. Any of the organisers of the Berber cultural and social protests that took place last summer will tell you that beyond a certain point, the demonstrations were hijacked by young people who looked well organised, and they had no control over it. And of course, there is a continuous women's protest, because despite what was promised by the new president Bouteflika, the Family Code passed in 1984 when we did our last interview, has not been changed. This means that women still cannot marry, they have to be given in marriage by their wali; women cannot initiate divorce, only husbands have this right; women cannot have guardianship of their children upon divorce, they can only have custody under the constant control of their ex-husbands and provided they do not remarry; women have half the share of inheritance that their brothers have; polygamy (up to four wives) and repudiation are the privilege of men. The government compromised with the fundamentalists in 1984 on the question of women's rights, and continues to do so — basically that is what it amounts to.

I know that people in France and England believe that the fundamentalists are not in power and defend their democratic right to be represented, but they were and are part of the government. For many many years they have had one third of the national assembly, and several ministers. So, they are democratically represented. Indeed they are. But fundamentalists are not for democracy, as they clearly stated before the legislative elections in Algeria: their political leadership publicly declared on several occasions that if they were to win there would not be any other elections because democracy is 'kofr'. Kofr means blasphemy. They said: if we have the law of God, we do not need the law of people. These are the kind of statements we heard from the three leading figures of FIS, before the elections. That is why, when the government cancelled the second round of the election, they had the active support of democratic forces.

What is unpleasantly striking to me is that, in Europe, the stopping of the election was seen as the end of democracy in Algeria. But don't forget that Hitler was elected and this was not for the best of democracy. Don't forget that Franco in Spain or Salazar in Portugal stayed for 50 years with no elections, just dominating the scene.

Fascists, when they come to power, are very hard to get rid of. In that sense, although it is sad to consider that fascists can be elected, a lot of democrats, in the broad sense, supported, and in fact requested the Algerian government to stop the election, because they did not want Hitler to come to power. People in Europe do not see the difference between democracy, the aim, and the means to get democracy (elections), which can be perverted. I'm not saying that to defend the decision of the government, because it is quite clear that it stopped the elections for its own purposes and certainly not to defend democracy but to remain in power. However in the process, there is no denying that we have avoided having our own Taliban in power in Algeria today. Women are the last ones that would regret it.

I have nothing good to say about the Algerian successive governments which were all undemocratic and more and more corrupt over the years. However maybe I can make a comparison that will make sense: if my only choice is between Margaret Thatcher and Hitler, I think no one should deny me the right to choose Thatcher, even at the risk of putting an end to the electoral process. I believe European Jews, who paid such a high price for Hitler being 'democratically' elected, would not contradict me. It's not the government we would like to have, but fascism is much worse. We have a very undemocratic government. It's probably much worse than Margaret Thatcher. However it's not Hitler. The fundamentalists are Hitlers.

Sophie: How do you feel that women in the UK and the West can support women who are more directly affected by fundamentalists' attacks on women's rights?

Marieme: We need visibility. The progressive forces in Europe and North America should support us as the alternative to either corrupt undemocratic governments or extreme right fascist fundamentalist forces. We exist. But we have no voice outside our own country, outside our independent media, which are accessible to international media but which they choose to ignore. Act against fundamentalist non-state actors. And demand from your government that it deals with so-called 'moderate' Islamists, as you people call them — I call them fascists — who are sitting in your country and devising, planning, plotting, financing the crimes the poor guys on the ground are going to commit. Not only poor guys but young guys. Just remember

WLUML statement on the current situation in Palestine/Israel

The international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) is well placed to identify extreme Right political projects hidden under religious/ethnic agendas and their devastating effects on progressive forces at large and on women in particular.

The present escalation in Palestine/Israel is not due to a conflict between religious and ethnic communities. Clearly, it is the result of the coming to power in Israel of extreme Right forces mercilessly bent on implementing a colonial project.

Unfortunately, its brutality sparked off the hijacking of the legitimate protest and struggle of the Palestinians by extreme right fundamentalist forces within them. We know from experience that the rise of such forces will inevitably work against the interests of people, especially minorities and women in Palestine.

The text of the complete statement can be found at www.wluml.org

the Nazis also recruited very young people. These young boys have no ideological defense. Our youth is revolted, and rightly so, by the situation they live in, by the inequalities, by the fake democracy, by the corruption, by the arrogance of the government and the ruling classes they represent; but their revolt is being hijacked and manipulated by extreme right political forces.

Give visibility to women, their continuous struggle both against the anti-women laws passed by our governments, and against our fascist fundamentalists who launched a real femicide in Algeria throughout the nineties and would do it again if they had a chance. But more generally give visibility to the democratic forces that the women's movement is part of in our countries. I mean democratic in the very large sense. The anti-fascist forces. Don't let human rights organisations speak in the defense of fundamen-

talists outside the strict defense of their human rights, do not allow human rights organisations to give them a political platform under the disguise of human rights, as they have been doing for so long now. And don't let the leaders of fundamentalists sit in your countries, be received as diplomats, negotiate with ministers, negotiate with the heads of human rights organisations. Don't let them be given a political platform from where they can develop their ideas about women, and about democracy — in the name of God. Don't ever forget what the buckles of the belts of the SS in the Nazi Party were engraved with: 'Gott mit uns', 'God with us'. That is exactly the banner of fundamentalists. You have every historical reason not to be fooled by their religious claims, to identify them as fascists and to help us combat them, be it in Algeria or in Afghanistan, in Israel or in Palestine. □

Notes

¹ A fatwa is a religious opinion given by someone whose expertise in the field of religion is widely known and recognized.

² Graham E. Fuller 'Algeria: the Next Fundamentalist State?' Arroyo Center for the US Army, Rand Corporation, 1996. Summary available on the internet: www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR733/

The Women Living Under Muslim Laws International Solidarity Network (WLUML) was founded in 1984. WLUML is a network that links women from around the world whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws, customs and practices said to be derived from Islam and that are selectively used by political forces.

WLUML uses a variety of intervention strategies to build linkages and break women's isolation: **It collects, analyzes and circulates information** regarding women's diverse experiences and strategies in Muslim countries and communities, using a variety of methods and media including printed publications (both regular and occasional). Information activities also involve the proactive documentation and analysis of trends, experiences and strategies with the aim of strengthening local and international struggles.

Networking is used to link women across the network and link women with the wider feminist and human rights movement as well as provide support for local struggles. Horizontal linkages — i.e. putting women in direct contact with each other rather than centralized linkages through the network coordination offices — are emphasized wherever possible.

Collective projects identify and articulate issues of common concern. The decisions regarding WLUML's priority activities as a network are taken collectively according to the specific needs expressed by active networkers who come together regularly to formulate the network's Plans of Action.

Solidarity actions, in the shape of international alerts for action, campaigns and support provided in response to specific appeals (e.g. linking individual women with legal advice and support institutions), recognize that the provision of concrete support and intervention is vital for the promotion of women's human rights.

Capacity building is undertaken to strengthen the network's ability to generate, circulate, analyze and use information; to articulate and disseminate alternative points of view through more effective use of communications technology; to facilitate specific training programmes; to develop outreach programmes that can lead to positive social and legal change; and to strengthen international linkages.

More specifically, the work currently undertaken by WLUML articulates itself around the issues that were prioritized during its 1997 strategic planning (the Dhaka Plan of Action). The main themes on which the network focuses are: 1) the continuing rise of fundamentalisms; 2) militarization/armed conflicts and impact on women in Muslim societies; and 3) sexuality.