

# Women in the Middle East" Number 40" November & December 2005

## Bulletin of Committee to Defend Women's Rights in the Middle East

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### • **Iraq- Yanar Mohammad: They harass and degrade us Every Day**

Help us get the US Troops out of our Work place

"They have invaded our work-place and turned it into a military camp. They humiliate us with unreasonable measures at work. They are willing to crush us under their boots, and put us in prison for the most trivial matters..... Help us get rid of the daily humiliation, help us get them out of our work place."

Intisar and Aathra' were detained by the US troops while attending to most routine tasks in their daily work. They were released after two days with no apologies or promises that this matter will not take place again.

In the city of Al Musayab, some two hours south-west of Baghdad, the US troops have felt free to take over the work place of hundreds of workers to turn it into their military camp. They based themselves in the power station of Al Musayab only to turn their existence into a source of daily humiliation for hundreds of women and men. They subject them to daily searches, confiscating their cell phones and detaining those who enter the warehouses looking for spare parts.

The power station is no longer a safe place to work in as the US troops are attracting terrorist resistance attacks. The productivity of the station has decreased to half and left the city with intolerable electric shortages. Hundreds of working women and men are left under the mercy of American soldiers' orders, intimidations and harassment.

Intisar Mohammed and Aathra' Munir Saadoun were imprisoned for two days in addition to four other employees while they were attending to their daily tasks. Intisar and Aathra' need your support:

"They have turned our work place into a military base and a battle field

They have to leave

We need to live and work in dignity"

Support their demand. The US troops have to leave AL Musayab Power Station as a beginning to their withdrawal from our lives in Iraq. Email your letters denouncing this devastating occupation of our work places and our cities. The US troops have to leave immediately.

Yanar Mohammed  
Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq  
November 14, 2005

- **Tajikistan: banning Hijab in schools**

Tajikistan's Islamic party has criticized a new ban on wearing Islamic headscarves in secular schools in this ex-Soviet republic as an inadmissible violation of civil rights. The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) said in a statement that the ban, announced on 19 October, was against the interests of the majority of Tajiks and contradicted the constitution and international laws. It added that the ban could provoke a negative public response.

In announcing the ban, Education Minister Abdudjabor Rakhmonov said that wearing the hijab or headscarf traditionally worn by Muslim women, and other religious symbols, were unacceptable in secular schools and in violation of the constitution and education laws. Rakhmonov also expressed concern that pupils spent too much time in mosques at the expense of their education.

- **Iran: Another woman sentenced to stoning**

An Islamic court in Iran has handed out yet another stoning sentence to a woman by the name of Soghra. Soghra was implicated and sentenced to fifteen years of imprisonment as an accomplice to the killer of her husband. On top of the fifteen year sentence Soghra also received the stoning sentence for having a sexual relationship with another man outside her wedlock. The Sherieh law stipulates stoning sentence for married women implicated in having a sexual affair with another man.

A few years ago, under the international pressures and protests, the Islamic Republic had announced that it would end stoning practices. We are now again witnessing the resumption of stoning as well as an increasing number of death sentences and executions handed out to women involved in having a sexual relationship outside marriage. More alarmingly the Iranian authorities have executed a number of children guilty of having sexual relationships.

I appeal to you to protest against Soghra's stoning sentence as well as object to the laws of capital punishment and stoning in Iran and demand Soghra's stoning sentence to be overturned.

Respectfully yours  
Nahid Riazi  
Children and women's rights activist

Tif. 0045 40543992  
nahid@mail.danbbs.dk

- **Afghanistan: Women's rights editor Mohaqiq Nasar arrested for blasphemy**

Mohaqiq Nasar (50), editor-in-chief of the magazine Hoqooq-i-Zan (Women's Rights), has been arrested on 29 September 2005 on charges of blasphemy. He was detained on

instructions from the religious adviser to President Hamid Karzai, a government official said. The editor's arrest is violating the press law of Afghanistan, which clearly demands that a journalist can only be arrested after the government appointed media-commission has studied the case, questioned him personally and recommended his arrest. This has obviously not happened. In a letter to President Karzai, Rationalist International strongly condemned the illegal arrest of Mohaqiq Nasar and the act of violation of press freedom and demanded the immediate release of the editor and the withdrawal of all blasphemy charges against him.

Nasar has been publishing his women's rights magazine since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 and contributed much to the change of women's lives in his country that could be achieved since then. His magazine has always been a thorn in the flesh of the fundamentalist clergy and he was facing pressure from them. Before the parliamentary elections on 18 September, Nasar published an article, criticizing the draconian punishments for blasphemy, adultery and theft in Afghanistan's penal law today. This article was used as a reason for the editor's illegal arrest a few days after the election. Nasar's article has been referred as potentially blasphemous to the Supreme Court.

Quite as it had been under the Taliban, blasphemy is still punishable with death, adultery with public stoning to death and theft with cutting off hands. In fact, the new Constitution, adopted in January 2004, demands confirmity of all laws with the beliefs and provisions of Islam, that is with the laws of Sharia. The Supreme Court in Afghanistan can straightly take open blasphemy trials against alleged offenders proposed by the government and decide their punishment. Head of the Supreme Court is the country's Chief Justice, the hardline cleric Fazl Hadi Shinwadi, who is notorious for his ruthless action against critics of Sharia. In 2003, he forced a sitting minister to resign, after she questioned the role of Sharia in the new Afghanistan. Before the presidential elections in 2004, he "disqualified" a running presidential candidate for blasphemy. As the head of the Fatwa department of the Supreme Court, which is even under the new Consitution the final authority to determine the confirmity of legislation to Islam, he ordered in August 2003 death penalty for Sayed Mir Hussein Mahdavi, Chief Editor of the weekly Aftab, and his Iranian assistant Ali Reza Payam Sistany [Bulletin # 111]. The fate of the two journalists is not known, but it is believed that they escaped to Pakistan.

- **Iran: Death Sentences of juvenile offenders and stoning sentences continue to be passed**

Amnesty International  
Press Release

Amnesty International is outraged that Iran is continuing to pass death sentences on minors and juvenile offenders (those convicted of crimes committed before the age of 18), and that it is still passing sentences of stoning to death, despite having announced a moratorium on such executions.

Most recently, the newspaper Iran reported on 9 October 2005 that a youth identified as ? Hamid? has been sentenced to death by Branch 71 of the Criminal Court in Tehran for the murder of a 23-year-old man committed in 2004. The newspaper originally published his age as 17 but the following day published a letter from the court stating that his age is now 18. He would, however, have been under 18 at the time of his alleged offence. His case will now be submitted to the Supreme Court for review.

Previously, in August? Mostafa?, a 16-year-old student, and ?Sina?, a 17-year-old musician, were reported to have had their death sentences upheld by the Supreme Court. According to the Iranian daily newspaper E?temad, ?Mostafa? was convicted of killing a drunken man in the Pars district of Tehran. The drunken man was reportedly harassing a

girl when Mostafa intervened to stop him. The man reportedly started hitting Mostafa, who eventually killed him in the ensuing scuffle.

E?temad also reported that ?Sina?, a musician in Tehran, was convicted of murder after a dispute with a man over cannabis in October 2004. ?Sina? reportedly told the Court that he was addicted to drugs and had gone to a park in Tehran on the day of the incident to try and obtain cannabis from a drug dealer. He allegedly stabbed the drug dealer to death during a fight.

Iran has executed at least seven juvenile offenders in 2005 including two minors who were under 18 at the time of their execution. Most recently, on 12 September 2005, a 22-year-old Iranian man convicted of rape was publicly hanged in the southern province of Fars. According to E?temad, he had been sentenced to death in 2000, suggesting he was under the age of 18 when the crime was committed.

As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Iran has the obligation not to execute anyone for an offence committed when they were less than 18 years old. For about four years, the Iranian authorities have been considering legislation that would prohibit the use of the death penalty for offences committed under the age of 18.

On 11 October 2005, Minister of Justice, Jamal Karimirad, acting in his capacity as spokesman for the Iranian Judiciary, was reported as having told the Iranian Students? News Agency that if this bill was passed by the Majles (parliament), then those under the age of 18 would no longer be executed. However, he made a distinction between ?qisas? (retribution ? the sentence issued in cases where defendants are found guilty of murder) and other crimes carrying the death penalty, stating that ?qisas? was a private, not a state matter, although he did state that attempts were being made to address the issue of ? qisas? as well.

It is clear from his statement that the draft law currently under consideration falls far short of the measures which are urgently needed in Iran if it is to meet its international obligations under the ICCPR and the CRC. The majority of executions of minors and juvenile offenders in Iran are cases of ?qisas? where the individual has been found guilty of murder and it is unacceptable in this regard for the Iranian authorities to separate cases of murder from other crimes carrying the death penalty. Legislation is urgently required to ensure that no person in Iran is sentenced to death for any crime, including murder, committed when they were under the age of 18.

Amnesty International is also concerned at reports on 15 October 2005 that a woman called ?Soghra? has been sentenced to death by stoning. According to E?temad, she was convicted of adultery by Branch 71 of the Criminal Court. She also received a 15-year prison sentence for complicity in the murder of her husband, an Afghan. Another Afghan man, known as ?Ali Reza?, was sentenced to death for the murder of her husband and to 100 lashes for adultery.

Soghra? apparently maintained her innocence during her trial. She reportedly claimed that she had been married against her will and that her husband had ill-treated her but that she had not wanted to murder him, and that the reason she had fled her home with ?Ali Reza? after he had killed her husband was because she feared that she would be killed by her husband?s brother.

Iran imposed a moratorium upon stoning in December 2002 under a directive from the Head of the Judiciary, which was welcomed by Amnesty International. However, in September 2003, a law was passed concerning the implementation of certain kinds of penalties, including stoning. Amnesty International has recorded sentences of stoning being imposed since the moratorium was announced, although it is not aware of any such sentences being carried out. The organization has written to the Iranian authorities on two occasions to seek clarification of the precise status of stoning in Iran, but has not received any reply. The organization urges the Iranian authorities as a matter of urgency to clarify the position of stoning in Iranian law.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty as the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ICCPR, to which Iran is a state party. Article 6 of the ICCPR states: "Sentence of death shall not be imposed for crimes committed by persons below eighteen years of age". Methods of execution such as stoning, which are specifically designed to cause the victim grievous pain before death are of particular concern to Amnesty International, as the most extreme and cruel form of torture.

Amnesty International urges the Iranian authorities to commute all death sentences in Iran, including those of "Hamid", "Mostafa", "Sina" and "Soghra".

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

- **Britain: Debates on outlawing forced marriage**

Britain may soon begin to prosecute parents who force their children into marriage by making it a specific criminal offense. The practice largely affects South Asian immigrants, where it's a divisive cultural issue.

Jasvinder Sanghera fled her home at 15 when her parents, Indian immigrants who had settled in Britain, tried to force her in 1975 into an arranged marriage.

"My parents told me, 'You either marry who we say or you are dead in our eyes,'" says Sanghera. Now shunned by her family, she regularly receives death threats from her sisters, aunts, cousins and extended family.

Sanghera is one of thousands of British women who have tried, and failed, to reconcile Western standards with family loyalties. Estranged from her family for over two decades, she now heads Karma Nirvana, a women's refuge in Derby, a city of 220,000 that has a large South Asian immigrant community. "I have been called an imposter for speaking against my community," Sanghera says, "but I am not going to stop."

The British government is now considering whether to punish families for forcing arranged marriages. On Sept. 5, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office jointly launched a three-month consultation to decide whether to introduce a specific criminal offense into law.

The extent of the problem is still unknown. The Foreign Office, which oversees immigration, handles 250 to 300 cases every year, but many more go unreported. Girls and boys as young as 13 are kidnapped and imprisoned, raped, assaulted and, in some cases, murdered to save the family honour, although the government does not specifically track "honour" killings.

It is believed that most forced marriages here occur in families from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, which make up 3.5 percent of the United Kingdom's population. Cases have also involved Middle Eastern and African families, however.

"Often young girls who show signs of wanting more independence or being interested in British men are perceived as immoral and are hurriedly forced into marriage," says Sanghera.

"The women who come to us just want a safe place to go," says Shaminder Ubhi, director of Ashiana, a London-based shelter for victims of domestic violence. "What they don't want is to see their families go to jail." "Forced marriages have already gone underground," says Sanghera, with obvious frustration. "I see 14-year-old girls being raped, killed, beaten

and married to men twice their age. What I don't see is anyone being held accountable. If a strong message is sent out to the community, perhaps we might deter parents."

Narina Anwar, who narrowly escaped a forced marriage, wishes the government would stamp out the practice. "If forced marriage was recognized as against the law it would give people like myself ammunition to stand against it," she says.

When she was 21, Anwar and her two sisters were taken to Pakistan by their parents to visit their grandmother and then informed that they were to be married. They were guarded day and night for five months and told they would be shot if they escaped. Eventually they fled to the British High Commission, which brought them back to the United Kingdom. They lived in a women's shelter for six months, until they were given government housing. They contacted their parents four months later and reconciled with them.

The British government--after years of tolerating the practice in the name of cultural sensitivity--is now taking action. "This is a problem that cuts across all sectors of public life: education, health and social services," says Vinay Talwar, head of the Forced Marriage Unit, which the Foreign Office set up in January 2005.

The unit regularly rescues and repatriates victims taken overseas to be married. It also conducts publicity campaigns in schools and community centres, and through videos and Web sites. In March 2004, the government introduced guidelines for responding to forced marriage for police, teachers and social service workers, all of whom are trained to spot victims in distress. Officials are advised to treat any information disclosed to them as confidential and look at mediation as potentially dangerous. Victims are not to be sent back to their families to work out issues informally.

In practice, however, critics say authorities often err on the side of political correctness. Part of the problem is confusion among British authorities, some of whom are uncertain about the difference between arranged marriages--which are traditional and widespread among South Asians but involve a degree of choice--and forced marriage, in which partners have no say in whom or when they marry.

"Social services often do not intervene because they are scared of being called racist," says Sanghera. "You can have guidelines, but they are of no use if no one knows how to put them into practice."

After the events of 7-7, as the subway terror attack this summer is known here, and the subsequent calls from several government officials urging greater integration of minorities into British society, any interference in social issues by the government is watched closely by the immigrant community.

British Muslims have already termed curbs on immigration that are intended to discourage forced marriages--such as a requirement that spouses of immigrants applying for entry be at least 18 years old--as discriminatory against British Asians. But Talwar feels such concerns are misguided. "Forced marriages are a human rights issue, not a cultural issue," he said. "This is not intended to target any particular community."

Anwar, a devout Muslim, says foolish notions of Islam and family honour are also used as a reason for forcing women into marriages. "We need to get across the message that forced marriage is not culture or religion but an ugly abuse hidden in a blanket of so-called family bonds. Parents need to consider what is right and wrong, and not sacrifice their children for family honour."

Sanghera, for her part, is clear about what the government should do. "I thought it was OK for my parents to be doing this to me," she says with quiet rage. "I wish I had been able to say to my parents at 14, 'You can't do this to me because it is illegal.'"

**Womenenews**

- **Denmark: Considering ban on hijab**

According to a survey, carried out for the free daily Metroexpress, nearly one in two Danes believe that Muslim headscarves should be banned in Denmark.

After seeing the results of the poll, the Danish People's Party have decided once again to propose a new law banning the wearing of headscarves in schools. They attempted to impose a similar ban four years ago but were not supported in parliament by any other party. The Social Liberals have already announced they would not support any ban on religious headscarves.

Likewise, the Major of Århus, Louise Gade said that she would strongly oppose any ban in Århus. "There are far more important things to take issue with than what clothes people wear," she said.

- **Middle East & Africa: Millions of girls mutilated**

An estimated three million girls and women, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, undergo female genital mutilation each year, according to a Unicef report to be released on Thursday

The report said the custom - "a dangerous and potentially life-threatening procedure" - could be eliminated within a single generation with commitment and support from governments and communities. It is largely a social practice, not a religious one.

The practice is one of the most hidden forms of rights violations, according to the report. Better data collection has revealed that the practice was more prevalent than previously thought, raising the annual estimate from two million, the report said. Because of the private nature of the FGM it was "impossible" to estimate the number of women or girls who die from it each year.

"In the 28 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East where female genital mutilation/cutting is performed, some 130 million girls and women have been victims of this practice," a press release issued with the report said.

Nearly half of the three million girls annually affected are in Egypt and Ethiopia, the report said. Ending such a practice is not just a matter of enforcing laws, the report said. Female genital mutilation/cutting, often called female circumcision, is a traditional practice believed to enhance a girl's beauty, tame her sexual desires, maintain her honour and increase her marriagability. Where it is practiced, it is part of a girl's cultural gender identity, the report said.

"The procedure imparts a sense of pride, of coming of age and a feeling of community membership," the report said. Failure to perform it "brings shame and exclusion" to the girl and her family.

Realising how socially entrenched the practice is, the Unicef report looks at ways to ensure that the decision to abandon FGM reflects "a collective choice" rather than

enforcing a ban. Young delegates from Egypt, Sudan, Yemen and others are preparing a declaration for Thursday on their efforts to promote the abandonment of the practice.

The most reliable data available on the prevalence of the practice focuses on women aged 15 and 49 who have undergone some form of genital mutilation, the report said, which is provided mostly by Demographic and Health Surveys. Most girls are cut between the ages of four and 12.

The latest figure available for Egypt shows that 97% of ever-married women have undergone genital mutilation as of 2003. A survey conducted in 2000 in Ethiopia shows 80% of women between 15-49 years of age have been circumcised.

- **Holland: A female teacher in hijab legal fight**

Samira Haddad, 32, a Dutch female teacher, is taking legal action against The Islamic College in Amsterdam after it refused to employ her because she did not want to cover her head. Her insistence on her legal right not to wear a headscarf, or hijab, is a contrast to the campaign fought by Muslim groups across Europe for the right to wear one.

The case comes at a time when the Dutch Government is proposing a partial ban on the burka, including in state schools. The city of Utrecht has recently begun withdrawing unemployment benefits from Muslim women who cannot get jobs because they wear burkas to job interviews.

In a hearing this week, Ms Haddad said that she was told in an interview for a job as an Arabic teacher that because she was a Muslim she had to wear a headscarf if she wanted to work at the school. She explained that she was from Tunisia, where the wearing of hijabs is banned, and she would not feel comfortable doing so.

The Islamic College insists that the Koran requires all Muslim women to wear the hijab.  
**The Times October 20, 2005**

- **Saudi Arabia: Beaten TV presenter flees**

Rania al-Baz, a Saudi Arabian television presenter who shocked her country by publishing photographs of herself after being beaten by her husband, has left for France, apparently never to return.

"I won't go back," Ms Baz said in Paris yesterday, clearly exhausted. "At the moment I don't have anywhere to live. I will try to find work here or in London." Asked the reason for her departure, she would only say: "I was not safe any more in Saudi Arabia. Now, I must rest, remain quiet for a few days, and think about my children, who are still back in Jeddah."

She was an iconic figure in Saudi Arabia even before her husband beat her nearly to death: a young and vivacious TV face resented by the dogmatically religious establishment. But by publishing pictures of her bruised, disfigured face after she was beaten by her husband in April 2004, she shattered a wall of silence about rampant domestic violence in the kingdom. In making her stand, she told the Guardian, she had won respect, but life had been especially hard.

Reports on some Arab news websites said she had escaped aboard a goods lorry bound for Bahrain, but she would not comment. Margot Fero, a spokeswoman for her publisher, Michel Lafou, said: "She is here in France legally, but without the permission of the Saudi

government. Yes, it was an escape, but she is OK. Obviously, she is worried about her children [two boys and a girl]." Ms Fero said Ms Baz would give full details next Monday  
**The Guardian October 5, 2005**

- **Turkey: Backing for honour crimes**

A survey by a university in Turkey has shown almost 40% support for the practice of "honour killing". The results come days after a court in Istanbul gave a life sentence for the murder of a girl by her brothers for giving birth to a child out of wedlock.

Turkish law, which used to be lenient on "honour crimes", was heavily revised as part of the country's preparation for EU accession proceedings. Turkey has started talks with the EU but is not expected to join for years. The survey was conducted in the conservative south-eastern city of Diyarbakir.

It questioned 430 people, most of them men. When asked the appropriate punishment for a woman who has committed adultery, 37% replied she should be killed. Twenty-five percent said that she deserved divorce, and 21% that her nose or ears should be cut off. The survey group was small but the results are a reminder that "honour killing" - a practice where women are murdered for allegedly bringing shame on their family - still has significant support in parts of Turkey. There are no reliable statistics on how many women die this way, but Turkey has made major strides fighting such violence.

Since the penal code was reformed last summer a man can no longer claim he was provoked as his defence. That used to lead to light sentences. But last Friday a court in Istanbul sent a man to prison for life for murdering his sister in her hospital bed.

He shot her for giving birth to a child outside marriage. And there is evidence the authorities here are committed to taking the reforms further. A commission has just been established in parliament to research the whole issue for the first time. Its 12 members are expected to report back in December.

**BBC News**

- **Letters to & requests from CDWRME**

**USA:**

Dear Ms. Kamguian,

I just finished reading your brief essay for the ISIS web site, and wanted to congratulate you for your honesty and courage. I actually had never heard of ISIS before. I was simply doing a search for information about honour killing, since I work with many Muslim men (and find myself occasionally engaged in debate on such topics), and was a good friend to a young Palestinian woman for a while a few years ago. My search brought me to this web site and to your essay. I am certain you are a very busy person, but perhaps, if you have the time in future, I might gain some insights by corresponding with you when you are free to do so.

At any rate, again, I thank you for standing up and speaking your mind.

Sincerely,

James Cates

**USA:**

Hi My name is Jen and I am an African-American woman that read a newspaper about a 16yr old girl stabbed by her father. Where does this come from? I know that it is Islamic or whatever but

how did it come that tradition means more to a person than a family member's life? And if it is so honourable then why did her family try to hide it to keep from punishment? Honourable means that you are willing to die (or in this case, kill) for it so if it were so honourable then why didn't he proudly turn himself in instead of trying to hide it? I feel this is brutally cruel and I am American so maybe I have a lot more to learn about how sacred these deep rooted cultural beliefs are but I also believe that taking a human life, especially a family member, in cold blood is horrible. Can you please send me a pros and cons response? Thanks for your time.

**Bangladesh:**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Voluntary Organization for Social Development (VOSD) is an NGO, established in 1987 with an aim to promote the socio-economic and cultural development of the hard core poor people of rural and coastal areas of Bangladesh and has been implementing different kinds of development activities with the support of different donors from UN organizations, bilateral organizations, foreign donors, local donors, government departments' supports and local supports. It has been covered 4100 villages under 818 Unions of 87 Upazillas of 26 Districts in Bangladesh and covered 667,000 beneficiaries, who are from the poorest of the poor and 95% of them are vulnerable women and children. It has engaged 3929 staffs and volunteers to provide services to them for their life development. At present we facing funding problems to provide services to the increasing number of beneficiaries, who need development services cryingly, because, to survive in the present world, they need support. So, we are requesting your valuable suggestions, advice and guidance to provide services to the poor people for their own development. We know you have wide communication and relations with different donors in respect of personnel, individual, organisation, bilateral, foreign donors, etc. So, please help us through providing addresses of those benevolent donors, who can help us. Please extend your kind helping hands and cooperation and help us to help the poor women to survive in the world.

Anticipating your cordial cooperation and looking forward to hearing from you soon. Please reply the letter.

With much regards,

Sincerely yours,

AKM Mostafizur Rahman,

Executive Director,

Voluntary Organisation for Social Development (VOSD),

8/8, Lalmatia, Block-A, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh,

Telephone: 88-02-9126278, Mobile: 0171-568361 (ISD),

Fax: 88-0208127629,

E-mail: [vosd@dhaka.agni.com](mailto:vosd@dhaka.agni.com)

**UK:**

Dear Ms. Kamguian,

WOW! I read your essay! If only the world will listen to you then there is hope.

Bravo for your courage ad intelligence!

Sincerely,

Larry Garza

USA:

Hello Azam,

My name is Molly Horn and I am in high school in the United States. With two other students, I am doing a history fair project on honour killings. We would like to interview you, so I am now asking permission to do so. If you could e-mail me back about this, that would be great.

Thanks,

Molly

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Committee to Defend Women's Rights in the Middle East

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