

# UNVEILED

Number 3, February 18, 2009

Editor: Maryam Namazie



## We had to flee to escape Sharia

Maryam Namazie

One year on, the Archbishop of Canterbury has once again defended his comments on Sharia law.

Just the word itself is for me like a kick in the stomach. I find myself trying to catch my breath every time I hear it being uttered.

I mean Sharia is why so many of us have fled and are fleeing Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

To get as far away from it as possible.

Only to have it repackaged and sold to us by the US-led 'liberators' in Iraq and Afghanistan or by the Archbishop of Canterbury in Britain as the next best thing to sliced bread.

Contrary to claims of promoting social cohesion and 'minority rights,' Sharia in Britain is actually a capitulation to political Islam. Just as the Pakistani government's agreement to allow the imposition of Sharia in the north-west this very week is an at-

tempt to placate and appease the Islamists. It has nothing to do with freedom of religion and belief, or rights and choices. In fact, the stronger and more pervasive its hold, the less freedoms, rights and choices people – and particularly women – have.

Yes of course there is a difference between letting Islamic courts and councils decide on civil matters rather than criminal ones. But the difference is a matter of degree; the fundamentals are the same. Losing custody of your child at a pre-set age irrespective of the child's welfare, being told to remain in an abusive relationship or having your forced marriage at 13 stamped with the approval of these sham courts can be just as destructive. In fact, discriminatory family and personal status codes are important pillars in the oppression of women in Islamic states. And much of the struggle for women's rights is taking shape in countries like Iran against these very aspects of Sharia. Moreover, rather than promote



'minority' rights and social cohesion, Sharia law promotes fragmentation and social conflict. It imposes different standards and norms for 'different' people. It denies universal and equal rights fought for and established by progressive social and working class movements over centuries. It gives precedence to the most regressive cultural and religious norms of the ruling elite rather than to human beings and their rights and lives.

Opposing Sharia law in Britain, as in Afghanistan or elsewhere isn't an attack on peo-

ple's right to religion; it is a defence of people's human rights.

After all, rights, equality and respect are for real live human beings not for beliefs and certainly not for inhumane political movements.

*This was first published in The Guardian's Comment is Free as Another Thought for the Day: A series of podcasts offering a secular alternative to the BBC Today programme's Thought for the Day, in association with the Humanist Society of Scotland. To listen to this podcast and others, go to:*

[www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/audio/2009/feb/17/maryam-namazie-sharia-law](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/audio/2009/feb/17/maryam-namazie-sharia-law)

[www.equalrightsnow-iran.com](http://www.equalrightsnow-iran.com)

## Join the fight against sexual apartheid

Sexual Apartheid is the outrage of our century. In Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and countries ruled by Islamic laws, millions of women and girls are segregated, degraded and relegated to second class citizenship. Keeping women and girls separate and unequal are important pillars of Islamic rule, affecting every aspect of people's lives. Just as a mass movement rejected Racial Apartheid in South Africa, so too must it reject segregation based on sex in Iran and everywhere.

8 March 2009 will be the 30th anniversary of the mass demonstrations against veiling and sexual apartheid that took place in Iran after Khomeini proclaimed the day before that women were to be veiled in workplaces. The protests were suppressed and the Islamic regime in Iran went on to impose compulsory veiling for girls and women and segregate the society at large.

The women's liberation movement in Iran, however, continued to mobilise and grow in strength and numbers. Today, it is a resolute movement against



sexual apartheid and discrimination against women and for freedom and equality.

Equal Rights Now - Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran is calling on people everywhere to pay tribute to this movement by recognising 8 March (International Women's Day) as the International Day against Sexual Apartheid.

We also call on individuals, unions, parties and organisations to condemn sexual apartheid and the political Islamic movement that perpetrates it by continuing to sign on to the declaration.

## Declaration against sexual apartheid

Benson, Editor, Butterflies and Wheels, USA; - Shahnaz Bokhari, Chairperson, Progressive Women's Association, Pakistan; Pamela Bone, Journalist and Author, Australia; A. C. Grayling, Author and Philosopher, UK; Maria Hagberg, founder of organisation against honour killings, Sweden; Hope Knuttson, President, Sidmennt, the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association, Iceland; David Pollock, President of the European Humanist Federation, UK; Terry Sanderson, President, National Secular Society, UK; Michael Schmidt-Salomon, philosopher; CEO of Giordano Bruno Foundation, Germany; Joan Smith, Novelist, Columnist and Human Rights Activist, UK; and Peter Tatchell, Human Rights Campaigner, UK.

Add your name to the declaration:  
[www.equalrightsnow-iran.com/sexual\\_apartheid.html](http://www.equalrightsnow-iran.com/sexual_apartheid.html)

**Join the fight against sexual apartheid!**

We, the undersigned, unequivocally oppose sexual apartheid and the subjugation of millions of women living under Islamic rules and laws.

We condemn regimes and the political Islamic movement that perpetrate sexual apartheid, including in Iran.

We support the legitimate struggle of millions of women and men for freedom, equality and universal rights.

Sexual apartheid, like racial apartheid, has no place in the 21 century.

This declaration has already been signed by: Norm R. Allen Jr., Executive Director, African Americans for Humanism, USA; Ophelia

***For more information  
 contact Mahin Alipour, Executive Director  
 Mina Ahadi and Maryam Namazie, Spokespersons  
 BM Box 6754, London WC1N 3XX, UK  
[equalrightsnow.iran@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:equalrightsnow.iran@yahoo.co.uk)***

# Join Equal Rights Now events for International Women's Day

## Britain

### London

March 7, North Terrace, Trafalgar Square, London  
3:30-4:30pm, Symbolic rally and march towards Red Lion Square from 4:30-5:30pm  
6:00-8:00pm, Public Meeting on Sharia Law, Sexual Apartheid and Women's Rights  
Conway Hall, 25 Red Line Square, London, WC1R 4RL  
Speakers at the public meeting include: Sargul Ahmad (International Campaign against Civil Law in Kurdistan Iraq Head), Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (Journalist and British Muslims for Secular Democracy Chair), Naser Khader (Democratic Muslims Founder), Gina Khan (One Law for All Spokesperson), Kenan Malik (Writer and Broadcaster), Yasaman Molazadeh (One Law for All Legal Coordinator): Maryam Namazie (Equal Rights Now – Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran and One Law for All Spokesperson), Pragna Patel (Southall Black Sisters and Women Against Fundamentalism founding member), Fariborz Pooya (Iranian Secular Society and Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain Chair), and Carla Revere (Lawyers' Secular Society Chair).

Prizes for our Art Competition will be awarded at the March 7 public meeting. People can still participate in the competition by submitting a painting, drawing, photograph, animation or short video in digital format no later than February 27, 2009.

The goal of the art competition is to expose the discriminatory nature of Sharia and religious-based tribunals and/or promote equal rights for all citizens, as embodied by the campaign's emblematic phrase: One Law for All. All submissions will be reviewed by a panel of prominent judges, namely, AC Grayling (Philosopher), Deeyah (Singer), Johann Hari (Journalist and Playwright) and Polly Toynbee (Writer and Columnist).

For more information: +44 7719166731 or onelawforall@gmail.com.

## Canada

### Vancouver

28 February, 3350 Victoria Street  
7:00pm, IWD celebration including speeches, film screening, music, dance  
8 March, city centre, across art gallery, Vancouver  
Tent and informational stall on situation of women in Iran  
March 20, UBC Vancouver  
6:30pm, Maryam Namazie's presentation on Political Islam, Sharia and Women's Rights  
Victoria  
March 23, 2009, UVIC, Victoria, BC  
6:30-9:30pm, Maryam Namazie's presentation  
For more information: +1 604 727 8987

### Toronto

March 7, to York University  
Demonstration along with informational stall  
March 14, 25 Cecil Street, United Steelworkers' Hall  
7:30pm, Panel discussion on Political Islam, Sharia and

Women's Rights with Maryam Namazie (Spokesperson of Equal Rights Now, Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain and One Law for All Campaign against Sharia Law in Britain), Tarek Fatah (Founder of Muslim Canadian Congress and Author of "Chasing a Mirage: The Tragic Illusion of an Islamic State," Khayal Ibrahim (Women's Liberation in Iraq), Justin Trotter (Executive Director of Center for Inquiry, Ontario) and Issam Shukri (Head of the Organization for the Defense of Secularism and Civil Rights in Iraq).

## France

### Lyon

7 March, City Centre, Bellecour, Photo exhibition and informational table

## Germany

### Frankfurt

City Centre  
27 February, weekly  
Demonstration against sexual apartheid in Iran along with photo exhibition and information stall every Friday from 12-2pm in the university.  
For more information: +49 172 971 6227

### Bremen

March 6 and 7, informational stalls in the city centre  
March 7, IWD event with speeches  
For more information: +49 172 403 7035

### Berlin

March 8, Participation in IWD event with informational stall  
For more information: +49 176 248 66317

## Sweden

### Stockholm

March 7, 2009, Årsta Folkets Hus

7:00pm, Ceremony including speeches, music, poetry reading, and a play  
March 8, 2009, Venue: Södermalmstorg in T-Slussen  
2:00-4:00pm, Meeting with exhibition on women's rights struggle in Iran  
4:00pm onwards, IWD march  
For more information, contact: +46 7036 10279

### Gutenberg

March 6, Wieselgrensplatsen  
7:00pm, Mina Ahadi will speak at the celebration event with music and dance  
For more information: +46 707 387 548  
March 8, 2009, 4:30-6:00pm  
Meeting and rally including an exhibition of women's situation in Iran  
6:00pm, IWD march  
For more information: +46 703 610 279

### Malmö

March 8, 2009, Kirsebergs Fritid och Kulturhus  
3:00pm onwards, Participation in an IWD event including a speech by Farideh Arman, music, slide show on the situation of women in Iran and book stall  
March 14, Venue: Jannet Kaffe, Nobelvägen 24  
6:00pm, IWD celebration night including speech by Farideh Arman and music  
For more information: +46 703 638 088  
There will also be IWD celebrations in Helsingborg and Borås on March 8, 2009

## US

### Dallas

8 March, Russell Creek Park, Plano, 12-5pm, rally  
For more information: +1 214 675 2120





# The Islamic regime in Iran must be condemned

Mahin Alipour

The pictures you see are representative of the position of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The former apartheid regime in South Africa was known and despised for its racial discrimination by people all around the world; the distinguishing feature of the Islamic Republic of Iran is its discrimination against women and sexual apartheid. From its establishment, the Islamic regime in Iran has deprived women of their most basic rights and legitimate demands and brutally attacked them under any excuse be it the colour and form of their dress, makeup, hairstyle, and for anything from dancing to having an extra-marital relationship. At times women's laughter has been deemed an offence punishable by imprisonment, flogging, threats, and humiliation. The segregation of men and women at universities and schools, municipal buses and in public spaces is one aspect of its policy of sexual apartheid. Millions have been persecuted and or fled the country due to their transgression of Sharia codes. Despite these atrocities, women have not surrendered and have intensified their struggle. Transgressing compulsory veiling is one such example.

Every summer the regime harasses and arrests those it deems to be 'badly veiled'

on the streets, at schools, universities, work places, factories and even at private gatherings and parties. However, last year it stepped up its assault on women beginning in April. Hundreds of thousand of women received summons, were assaulted, detained and flogged. Hundreds of boutiques and hair dressers were shut down. However, due to large scale resistance, especially on the part of youth and women, the regime did not succeed in realising its plan. The second stage of the attacks started in July and is still in effect.

The increased attack against women is part and parcel of a general attack against the people's struggle in Iran against the Islamic regime. In addition to attacking women, it has increased executions, and imprisoned even more political prisoners. The workers who were detained on May Day have been sentenced to imprisonment and flogging. A large number of university students have been suspended; students have been arrested and tortured. This is the regime's reaction to the unrelenting struggle against the Islamic Republic in Iran. And despite the repression the struggle continues full force. It deserves unconditional international support.

Equal Rights Now – Organi-



sation against Women's Discrimination in Iran calls on all parties and organisations, and people across the world to support the struggle of the Iranian people, condemn the Islamic Republic, demand an end to sexual apartheid, compulsory veiling and discrimination

against women, and put pressure on governments everywhere to isolate the regime politically and shut down its embassies. The Islamic Republic of Iran must face the same international condemnation as the apartheid regime of South Africa.

**Long Live International Women's Day**