



**EQUAL RIGHTS NOW**

*Organisation Against  
Women's Discrimination in Iran*

# No Hejab

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## Sexual apartheid has to be a thing of the past

Maryam Namazie

When you think about apartheid, you can't help but remember the anti-apartheid movement of the 70s and 80s. At the time, there was hardly anyone who lived in the West and hadn't joined a demonstration or sit-in, signed a petition, written a letter of protest, worn an anti-apartheid badge and so on. During that time, the anti-apartheid movement became the struggle or at least issue of concern for most every decent human being. And you didn't have to be black or South African. The movement went beyond all those constructed divisions amongst people and went to the heart of being human. As a result of the movement, everyone had come to know that apartheid was fundamentally wrong and that something had to be done. Eventually, apartheid became despised and condemned. But it was not always so.

Racial apartheid was supported for years by Western governments. It was justified and excused whether by 'scientists' who could 'prove' that black people had smaller brains to organisations that said separate was still equal.

It was the South African liberation movement and solidarity groups in the West that fought long and hard to expose Apartheid and chip away at its justifications in order to remove all the layers of propaganda and excuses, revealing Apartheid - naked and bare, as it truly was - an intolerable inhumanity.

Today, the same must be done with the apartheid of the 21<sup>st</sup> century - sexual apartheid, and particularly in Iran as a pillar of political Islam. Just as a mass movement said no to racial Apartheid, so it must say no to the Hejab and segregation of women; no to the prevention of the mixing of the sexes; no to discrimination, no to women being deemed inferior, second class citizens and sub-human...

On the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of International Women's Day, the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain and Equal Rights Now - Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran are proclaiming 2008 as the year against sexual apartheid. We are asking people everywhere to condemn sexual apartheid and the political Islamic movement that perpetrates it, and to support egalitarian movements that courageously challenge it.

## Let's turn this International Women's Day into a day of protest against sexual apartheid

The hundredth anniversary of March 8, International Women's Day, is on its way. On this momentous occasion, we proclaim 2008 as the year against sexual apartheid. We call on people everywhere to condemn sexual apartheid and the political Islamic movement that perpetrates it, and to support egalitarian movements that courageously challenge it.

We invite all to sign the below declaration and call for an end to sexual apartheid.

### Declaration

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.

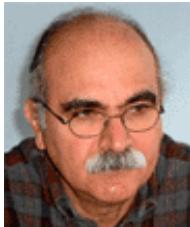
Warmest regards,

- Mina Ahadi; Spokesperson of Equal Rights Now; Coordinator of the International Committee against Stoning; Spokesperson of the Council of Ex-Muslims in Germany

- Maryam Namazie; Spokesperson of Equal Rights Now; Producer of TV International English; Spokesperson of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain

- Mahin Alipour; Coordinator of Equal Rights Now; Coordinator of the International Campaign in Defence of Women's Rights, Sweden

# No to Islamic Veil!



## Under Sexual apartheid the society is defined as a man's society

### Interview with Hamid Taqvae

*Mach 8<sup>th</sup> is approaching and Worker-communist Party of Iran has decided to welcome it with the slogan "No to Sexual apartheid!" as well as with efforts aimed at the international isolation of Islamic Republic as a regime of Sexual apartheid. Why Sexual apartheid? What is it that makes Islamic Republic a regime of Sexual apartheid?*

*Hamid Taqvae:* I believe all Iranian people, especially women, have a clear perception of what we mean by Sexual apartheid. You see, women are subjected to oppression and discrimination, and viewed as second-class citizens all over the world. In Iran, however, Islamic Republic is anti-woman in a peculiar way. It is, indeed, a misogynist state. Saying that women in Iran are deprived of their rights cannot, by itself, convey the whole truth about their condition. The Iranian state is officially, or legally, against women. It is a state with laws and regulations in which women are expressly and explicitly defined as unequal with men. Subjugation and degradation of women is part and parcel of this Islamic state's judicial system, as well as an ideological pillar of it. It is a state that separates women from men in social life, in assemblies, in group activities, and even in private parties and gatherings, in schools and university classes, buses, sport fields, swimming pools, parks, on public routes, on the beach, at recreational places, mourning ceremonies, wedding parties; in short, in the social life as a whole, men and women must legally, that is, as far as the state is concerned, be kept apart. That is the reason why this state is a state of Sexual apartheid in the explicit and strict sense of the word.

*Does Sexual apartheid just mean the separation of men from women, and vice versa? Generally speaking, what dimensions can apartheid take on in society at large, and to what extent can it have an impact on the people, i.e., both men and women's, lives?*

*Hamid Taqvae:* Separation is only a part of the problem. This is a separation, not in the sense that social possibilities are divided fifty-fifty between men and women, or in that both sexes are equally subjected to the laws. It is a separation best conceivable if you remember the regime of racial apartheid in South Africa. In Iran men and women are kept separated,

not as two equal parts of society, but as a superior and an inferior, or second-class, part. In the racial apartheid system of South Africa blacks were not even considered people. They were deprived of rights. The society was defined as a white society and, as a result, blacks were considered second-class citizens. It is the same under Islamic Republic, but in regards to women. Here the society is defined as a man's society, in which only men are considered people, or members of the society, and women are defined as subjects of men, as "half-of-men", if you like.

A symbol, or representative, of this system of apartheid in Iran is the Hejab. Hejab is not an item of clothing, or an outfit, but a wall, indeed, that separates a woman, as an individual, from her surroundings. Why is that so, you may ask? Because, from the point of view of Islam and therefore an Islamic state, women are sex objects, or sexual commodi-



ties, as it were; a sexual commodity that, within the context of reactionary, religious, Islamic morality, is thought of as beguiling. Within such a context, a woman is a commodity that, while still unmarried, belongs to her father, brothers, and other men in the family. Once married, she becomes the property of the husband; and now it is he who has the monopoly ownership right to her. That is the logic behind Hejab: shrouding a woman in black in order to protect her from the *naamahram* (non-kosher) glance, as they themselves put it; or, in other words, in order to ensure that the commodity remains the property of the person who has acquired the monopoly right to its use through proper religious channels.

Hejab, in my opinion, explains very clearly what we mean by Sexual apartheid. The Sexual apartheid in Iran is even more de-

praved and inhuman than what existed in South Africa. Because there blacks were not viewed as a beguiling force in whites' lives and they could, as individuals, at least dress as they wished, and the colour of exposed parts of their skin would not beguile anyone! In Iran, however, women are the counterparts of blacks in the racist system of South Africa, while they are even deprived of the right, as individuals, as women, to reveal their identity, i.e., their face and/or their hair.

The existence of Hejab in and of itself declares that the society is patriarchal. It is the declaration of the fact that when it comes to social activities, social presence, sport and recreational activities, ranks and positions, and so on, they all belong to men, and women's existence is a function of that of the men's. From the standpoint of Islam and an Islamic state you are, not a woman, not an individual, but a man's daughter, or a man's sister, or a man's wife, and, generally speaking, your rights and social status are defined relative to those of the men's. In a patriarchal society, therefore, women must behave in such a way as to not cause any disruption in the status quo, and thus not make 'sin' fall upon it. And this, I believe, goes far beyond discrimination against women or depriving them of their rights. It is degrading them expressly and explicitly. It is insulting women through denying their human identity. That is why I think the term "Sexual apartheid" expresses women's condition in Iran - the blatantly insulting, degrading discrimination that the Islamic state subjects them to - more clearly than any other term.

I must also emphasise here that the system of Sexual apartheid is not only against women, but insulting and degrading to men, or society at large, as well.

Men also suffer from the wall that separates them from women, and are insulted by it. Sexual apartheid is an anti-human system in general which imprisons the whole society and should be condemned by all progressive people.

*What's the significance of presenting Islamic Republic to the world as a regime of Sexual apartheid? It is the regime of impos-*



*ing Hejab as well as the regime of robbing women of dozens of other rights. Why do you put a special emphasis on "the regime of Sexual apartheid"? Is Hejab, or depriving women of some other their rights for that matter, not more comprehensive than Sexual apartheid? Do you not think that placing so much emphasis on Sexual apartheid would overshadow the people's struggles against Hejab; struggles that are carried out on a daily basis in the streets on a vast level?*

*Hamid Taqvae: These two are not separable. As I have already said, Hejab is a symbol, a token, of Sexual apartheid. It is apartheid on a personal level. Through Hejab a woman is forced to separate herself, as an individual, from the rest of the society. That is the function of Hejab. So, when we emphatically demand the abolition of Sexual apartheid, we do not mean we are following a different policy or a different slogan. Hejab is a specific form, an outstanding feature, of Sexual apartheid, and the slogan "unveil!" remains our emphatic slogan this year too. Taking off the Hejab or unveiling is a field in which women can individually take action, stand up against Sexual apartheid, and practically bring down the wall of Sexual apartheid.*

However, we should also bear in mind that if we focus solely on Hejab, and agitate only against it, by so doing we will not have presented and attacked the issue on its more extensive levels, that is, in its entirety. True, imposing Hejab is one of the most blatantly



depraved forms of discrimination against women and of Sexual apartheid. But, Sexual apartheid is not limited to Hejab. As I have already mentioned, separating women from men at schools, universities, sport and recreational facilities, and even in private parties and gatherings, and so on, these are all concrete examples of Sexual apartheid, of humiliation and degradation of both women and men, and must therefore be abolished.

There is another point, another policy, which is also nothing new to us, but, on the contrary, something that we have always insisted on, and that is making every effort to get the Islamic Republic of Iran isolated and banned

from the rest of the world as a regime of Sexual apartheid. The phrase "Sexual apartheid" expresses, almost comprehensively, the fact that it deprives women of their inalienable rights, and reveals its misogynist character to the people across the world; particularly as the world still vividly remembers the racial apartheid system in South Africa and its reactionary nature. One of the things that at last caused the fall of the racist regime was that progressive people of the world rose up against it, and even forced other states to boycott and break their relations with it. It was as a result of a global awakening, as well as an international mobilisation, that the South African regime was defeated and brought down. This background, this historical parallel, will also help us call on the people of the world to mobilise and raise their voice of protest against the regime of Sexual apartheid in Iran. This regime is in no way less anti-human and anti-humanity than the former racist regime in South Africa. That is one of the reasons we believe we must focus on "Sexual apartheid", and expose the Islamic state in Iran as a gender-apartheid state.

In the direct anti-regime struggles of the women in Iran, Hejab will, of course, continue to play a pivotal role; and our emphasis on exposing and standing up against the regime as a regime of Sexual apartheid should, therefore, make us all the more determined to mobilize against Hejab, so that women unveil on March 8<sup>th</sup> as a symbolic action. Our call on women shall remain unchanged; while our demand for abolition of Sexual apartheid and condemning the regime as a regime of Sexual apartheid is something that we pursue on a world scale, and are hoping to be able to increasingly draw the attention women's rights organisations, as well as progressive, humanist, secular and human rights institutions, trade unions, etc., to that issue, and ask them to condemn the Islamic Republic, exert pressure on international organisations such as UN, etc., demand that they condemn the Islamic state in Iran, and break their political ties with it.

*What is the outline of activities necessary for exposing and isolating Islamic Republic internationally as a regime of Sexual apartheid?*

*Hamid Taqvae: As I said, when we start from standing up against the Iranian state as a regime of Sexual apartheid, we can deduce that a chief demand of this year's March 8<sup>th</sup>, both inside and outside Iran, should be abolition of Sexual apartheid. This should be one of the fundamental slogans. A practical and decisively significant step in this direction*

will be putting aside the Hejab. Unveiling, as it were, on March 8<sup>th</sup> as a protest gesture and for a limited span of time is quite feasible. Let us not forget that the women's liberation movement in Iran has been active ever since the day the Islamic Republic came to power, and has continually protested against Hejab as well as other aspects of Sexual apartheid. According to the regime's own statistics, during the past few months, more than a million women have been arrested for wearing "improper Hejab", that is, for their practical protest against Hejab. The women's rights movement in Iran is a vital, dynamic, and expansive movement, and is quite capable of taking a step forward by taking off the Hejab.

As for our activities outside Iran, we will make every effort - through leafleting, protests and so on - to, as I said, have the Islamic Republic condemned by women's rights organisations, trade unions, progressive forces, etc., as a regime of Sexual apartheid. We will try to hold up the examples and instances of this apartheid before the eyes of the world. We will endeavor to show the people of the world why this state is not much less depraved than the previous racial-apartheid state in South Africa, and how it legally and officially considers half the population of the country as non-human. This must be shown, and our activities hinge on it.

I should add that March 8<sup>th</sup> is only one of the occasions for calling for the banning of the Islamic Republic from the world community. Calling for its isolation is not an occasional campaign of ours, but a pivotal policy of our party which we pursue earnestly and consistently. I hope on March 8<sup>th</sup> this year we will be able to present the world with the hideous, inhuman face the Islamic state in Iran more extensively than ever before.



## Equal Rights Now Organisation Against Women's Discrimination in Iran

"Equal Rights Now- Organisation Against Women's Discrimination in Iran" struggles for freedom and emancipation of women, abolishing sexual discrimination, and equality between women and men in all areas. In Iran, despite the atrocities of the Islamic regime and routine and brutal violations of the most basic women's rights and freedoms, there is a widespread social movement against sexual oppression, sexual apartheid, compulsory Islamic veiling, misogynist laws and regulations in every arena from the streets and schools to factories and universities, and in art and culture.

Equal Rights Now belongs to this movement and sets organising and unifying this movement as its immediate task. Our goal is abolition of sexual discrimination and achieving complete equality between women and men in all legal, social, economic, political, and cultural areas.

Equal Rights Now also belongs to the international struggle for the emancipation of women from all forms of inequality and discrimination. Its victory in Iran depends on this international solidarity.

Equal Rights Now has the following on its agenda:

1-Ending any form of discrimination against women; abolishing any form of oppression, humiliation, and deprivation of rights against women; achieving true and complete equality between women and men in society.

2-Separation of religion from the state and from education. De-religionisation of society and all social affairs of people. Patriarchy, subjugation and humiliation of women are among the bases of all religions; religious laws, by their nature, are in total contrast with women's rights and freedoms. In a society where religion and religious laws interfere with the state, education system, and social affairs of people women cannot be free.

3-Fighting against patriarchy and all forms of religious, backward, and misogynist traditions. Under the rule of the Islamic Republic these traditions have been strengthened, become legalised and been used as an oppressive apparatus against women. Abolition of veil, freedom in dress, and absolute abolition of sexual apartheid are the three immediate demands of libertarian women and men in Iran; Equal Rights Now fully supports these demands and the ongoing struggle for their realisation.

4-Uniting and unifying the women's freedom movement around egalitarian, radical, maximalist and secular demands. Criticising and deciphering political movements and organisations, which flirt with religion and yield to religious laws and legal systems and thus are obstacles in the path to women's emancipation.

5-Striving to build open organisations around women's particular demands in different areas and bringing a line of radical, continuous, and resolute leaders to the forefront through conducting political campaigns for immediate demands and problems of women's freedom movement in Iran.

6-Introducing the women's freedom movement in Iran to the world; obtaining the support of international activists of women freedom movement, leftwing, progressive, and libertarian forces, movements, and activists. Equal Rights Now considers participation in the secularist movement and the struggle against political Islam on an international scale as an important area of its activity.

Maryam Namazie and Mina Ahadi are the spokespersons, Mahin Alipour is the general secretary, Zari Asli, Mitra Daneshi, Shahla Daneshfar, Sohaila Sharifi, Mahboubeh Siyahmardi, Mercede Ghaedi, Asqar Karimi, Fereshteh Moradi, Mahnaz Masori, Manouchehr Masori, Shahnaz Moratab, and Shiva Mahboobi are the members of central council of Equal Rights Now.

Equal Rights Now has a periodical and a TV programme that can be viewed in Iran, the Middle East and in Europe.

The sexual apartheid regime in Iran should be isolated; it should be replaced with a secular state that guarantees the equal rights of women and men and unconditioned freedom of people. Strengthening international solidarity with the struggle of people for equality between women and men and forming a widespread international movement against the sexual apartheid regime in Iran is an important goal of the organisation on a global scale and is an important factor in strengthening the women's freedom and emancipation movement in Iran. We call on all women's rights advocates, women rights organisations and all secularists to join this international effort and to support the widespread struggle for freedom and equality in Iran.



**Mahin Alipour**  
general secretary



**Mina Ahadi**  
spokeswoman



**Maryam Namazie**  
spokeswoman

**Support Equal Rights Now in every possible way!**

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## **Sexual apartheid, political Islam and women's rights A seminar in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day**

**Monday, March 10, from 6:30-9:30pm at Conway Hall, London**

### **Speakers:**

- Mina Ahadi** Spokesperson, Council of Ex-Muslims of Germany and Equal Rights Now; 2007 NSS Secularist of the Year
- Louise Couling** Chair of Unison's Regional Women's Committee and member of the National Executive Council
- Houzan Mahmoud** Spokesperson, Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq
- Maryam Namazie** Spokesperson, Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain and Equal Rights Now, National Secular Society Honorary Associate
- Joan Smith** Novelist, columnist and human rights activist

### **Chair:**

- Hanne Stinson** Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association

The event is free of charge; donations are welcome.

The seminar is organised by Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain and Equal Rights Now, an organisation for women's rights in Iran, and endorsed by the National Secular Society, the British Humanist Association, the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association, and the Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq.



**A successful conference was held in Stockholm, Sweden in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of international women's day and against sexual apartheid**

## Women's liberation in Iran, the struggle against sexual apartheid



**Sohaila Sharifi**

The past twenty nine years have been struggling times for Iranian people and in particular for Iranian women. Right from the very beginning of coming to power of Islamic republic, the women's rights have been attacked and a sexual apartheid state has formed brutally oppressing and suppressing any activities demanding women's right and equality. Thousands of young girls in Iran grew up to realise that they criminals by nature, just by being born women. In Iran and according to the religious laws, a woman is considered the root and the cause of most social problems. She is the one causing men to loose their minds and commit terrible sins. She usually gets the blame for rape, prostitution, corruption and many other dysfunctions of the society and more than often she is punished in a brutal way. According to the Islamic republic of Iran, women must cover up, stay at home and look after their family. Wearing make up, showing your hair, going out and being independent are not qualities valued in women. There is a sexual apartheid ruling women's lives and unfortunately the rest of the world has turned a blind eye on all these for a long time.

At the same time and from the very beginning of coming to power of the Islamic government, a mass movement has formed to fight against inequality and discriminatory laws. The Iranian society very much resembles a battlefield with the government and its battalion of mullahs and clergies and security services and police and other forces on the one side and masses of women and men who refuse to accept reactionary and inhumane laws ruling their lives on the other side. In this battlefield there had been many attacks and counter attacks and loses and gains. At the beginning it was usually the government that won, brutally suppressing women, dismissing them from their working places, literally pinning the veil to women's heads, cutting uncovered legs and throwing acid on the made up faces. But women and masses of freedom loving people never completely gave in. they fought back. They rebelled in their own little and

great ways and so far they have achieved a great deal.

The first major demonstration in Iran was organised by women activists and organisations on 8 March 1979, only few days after ayatollah Khomeini's Fatwa for compulsory veiling. Ever since, this struggle has continued and women have managed to force the government back step by step. They refused to stay at home and be mere servants, they went out and studied and tried to find jobs. They fought for custody of their children and the right to divorce. No wonder more than 60% of all students in higher education are girls and young women and no wonder this has caused great concern among the authorities, trying hard to dissuade young women to go to university and even limiting university places for girls and women. Even though many of these girls will never manage to find a job in the market, they still insist to go to university and study and do something about their lives. The unfair and unjust regulations have never stopped women from trying on the contrary, the more restrictions the government introduces the more women find ways to defy them. According to the authorities in the course of six months more than a million women have been arrested, flogged, fined and beaten up for not observing the Islamic dress code, and again according to the same sources the government authorities have officially announced they have failed in their attempts to force the proper Islamic Hijab on women in Iran. A survey done by a women organisation in Iran showed that 71% of women in Iran want a secular society and a secular state. They want internationally recognized human rights to govern their lives and they want religion to stay out of their public and private lives. The list is long and these are only few examples of a strong and growing movement against sexual apartheid and discriminatory laws in Iran.

While the western governments and western media have been trying to sell a religious, traditional image of Iranian women to the rest of the world, while the followers of cultural

relativism were trying to persuade people that what is happening to women in Iran is "their own culture and must be respected", while the western politicians were looking for a moderate president or politician figures in Iran to justify their economic connections with a fascist government, Iranian women and those who cared for equality and freedom fought none stop for a better life, for equality and for freedom.

What is happening to women in Iran is horrendous and unique in a way. We hear sad stories of women who have been oppressed, destroyed and humiliated in different parts of the world, wherever traditional, religious and male chauvinist ideas have got any ground and power, but what is happening in Iran is a legalised sexual apartheid through which women are officially second or even third citizens who should be heard and seen as little as possible. The long arm of religious law reaches deep inside their private and public lives and they are deprived of the little rights that ordinary men in that society enjoy. Sexual apartheid or any kind of discrimination against human being is totally unacceptable in twenty first century and we have to do something about it. We have to form a united front and fight for a secular and humane society. We have to demand an immediate end to sexual apartheid in Iran. We can do that by demanding Iranian government's isolation from the international organisations, by demanding that our governments break connections with Iranian government. The world and especially the western world has got experience in dealing with apartheid governments, what with the racial apartheid in south Africa and the international solidarity with people ruled by apartheid. It is up to us to do something and today is the day. The history and in particular the history of international women's day is full of brave women and men who refused to accept the fate they had been destined to have and decided to step out and change the course of history and mark it with their own good action. It is now up to us to do our bit. We can make a difference to our world.

# Long Live Freedom and Equality



Maryam Namazie

## Nothing is inevitable

Rowan Williams' lecture on Civil and Religious Law in England would do any Islamist - or for that matter archbishop - proud. And it has. Hizb ut Tahrir, Muslim Council of Britain, and UK Islamic Sharia Council have all rushed to his defence whilst the rest of us are still grappling with its adverse implications for real live human beings and our society at large.

Let's be frank. The Archbishop's lecture lays out quite concisely the Islamist strategy for gaining access to political power and a how to guide on diminishing the role of secularism (with lessons for religious groups aiming to access or - as in his case - maintain power).

Like the Islamists, Rowan Williams uses rights language to help justify regression and violations of rights. By using terminology like '*Muslim communities in this country seek the freedom to live under sharia law*', he deliberately fails to differentiate between the political Islamic movement and Islamists on the one hand and Muslims and those deemed to be Muslims on the other.

Of course Islamists want sharia here and everywhere. But to imply that 'Muslims' would 'freely' choose sharia implies that the masses of 21<sup>st</sup> century humanity would choose to live in the Middle Ages. On the contrary, a large number of those of us he wishes to hand over to the Islamists have resisted and fled Islam in power and have not accepted nor ever will accept sharia law.

Moreover, like the Islamists, he uses anti-racist language to assert that his defence of sharia is a defence of the '*rights of religious groups within a secular state*'. Clearly, however, having the right to a religion is not the same as having the 'right' to religious law. His is merely a prescription for discrimination, inequality and culturally relative rights.

Also, like the Islamists he justifies and excuses sharia law and even attempts to dispel

the 'myths' surrounding it. He quotes Tariq Ramadan saying '*the idea of Sharia calls up all the darkest images of Islam...It has reached the extent that many Muslim intellectuals do not dare even to refer to the concept for fear of frightening people or arousing suspicion of all their work by the mere mention of the word*'.

Clearly, though, it frightens people because it is frightening.

From the death sentence imposed on Parwiz Kambakhsh in Afghanistan for blasphemy and the recent sentence of death by stoning of two sisters Zohreh and Azar Kabiri-niat for 'adultery' in Iran, the image of Islamic law is dark because its reality is even darker.

Of course the archbishop is not referring to nor do the Islamists want the stoning of adulterers or the hanging of apostates like myself from cranes in Trafalgar Square. That is - according to Suhaib Hasan, one of the 'judges' at these sharia courts or councils and a spokesperson for the MCB, the job of Islamic states. This, however, doesn't mean that he can't dream: '*Once just only once if an adulterer is stoned nobody is going to commit this crime at all*'.

*'We want to offer it to the British society. If they accept it, it is for their good and if they don't accept it they'll need more and more prisons.'*

Despite mountains of evidence to the contrary, we are told that we need not worry. Ibrahim Mogra of the MCB says the sharia councils will only cover '*small aspects of Sharia for Muslim families when they choose to be governed with regards to their marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody of children and so forth*'.

Mogra implies that those who avail themselves of sharia law will 'choose' to do so. It is interesting how pro-women's 'choices' the political Islamic movement becomes when it is vying for power and influence in the west. According to Mogra, sharia will even give rights to women they don't have under Eng-

lish law. His pathetic example? '*A Muslim man can take a second wife under sharia law and treat her as he wants knowing that she has no legal rights in Britain. It means that she is regarded as no more than a mistress and he can walk out on her when he wants*'.

Despite their deceptive claims, in the real world, even 'small aspects of sharia' will increase intimidation and threats against the most vulnerable women and girls, deny them rights they have and deserve and leave them hostage in virtual Bantustans at the mercy of the likes of Suhaib Hasan and Ibrahim Mogra.

And for those rejoicing that sharia law in England will be a 'moderate interpretation,' I need to remind them that a 'small aspect' is not the same as a different interpretation. As Hasan says to the woman who questions his ruling in one of these kangaroo courts: '*there is no exception to this rule, in the sharia there is no exception, you have to accept it*'.

Marriage, divorce, child custody may be 'small aspects' to Mogra and the MCB but they are important pillars in the oppression of women living under Islamic law. Much of the struggle for women's rights has taken shape in countries like Iran against these very aspects.

And by the way, laws are generally meant to safeguard rights not violate them. Many of the laws that sharia courts aim to avoid have been fought for by progressive movements over centuries in order to improve people's, women's and children's position in society and often vis-à-vis religion in power.

This whole scandal is in my view a feeble attempt by the archbishop to muster up support for religion in power, safeguard its dwindling position in society and reduce secularism's role by going to the Islamists. This time, though, the archbishop may have been a little too clever for his own good.

Nonetheless, we need to remind him and his friends that backwardness is never inevitable and we have many rights and freedoms here in Britain to prove it.

# No to Discrimination



## I strongly admire Iranian women's fight for their rights and against sexual apartheid

Sina Voget is co-author of Mina Ahadi's autobiography which has been published in Germany recently. Sina Voget has been a freelance journalist for more than 10 years. Her work is mostly about human rights and health politics. In 2000 she was spokeswoman of Amnesty International Germany. Since September 2007 she has been spokeswoman of the University Hospital in Cologne, Germany.



### **What made you decide to write Mina Ahadi's story?**

Sina Voget: I first met Mina Ahadi in the late 90s when I did an interview with her for German TV about her fight for women's rights under Islam. Then I met her again in 2006 at International Women's Day in March where she had organised a campaign against so called "honour killings" with Ayaan Hirsi Ali. I wrote an article about Mina Ahadi for the German newspaper Taz after that and asked her if she ever had thought about writing a book about her life. Her power and spirit and her life-story just seemed to be something that should be written. So we met for the first interview. It took another year and needed the campaign of the Ex-Muslims until an editor was found to publish the book.

### **Based on Mina's story, what do you think of the women's movement for equality in Iran?**

Sina Voget: I strongly admire the power of some Iranian women, in exile and even in Iran who fight for their rights and against sexual apartheid. After listening to Mina's story I strongly believe that it needs a secular state in Iran to fight the dictatorship of the religious regime. I came to the conclusion that in Germany a stronger division between state and (Christian) church would be better for equality as well.

### **As a women's rights activist, what is your opinion on the women's rights movement in the west?**

Sina Voget: The great feminist activists seem to be quiet on some very important matters regarding women's lives in Iran and some Islam stricken countries. Matters such as compulsory Hejab, stoning and honour killing.

When I became a feminist in the 80s violence against women was a big issue. But it is no longer a big issue when it happens in "different cultures". That shows the problem of wrongly understood "tolerance" even within the women's rights movement. But there are always some German women, who don't hesitate to talk about it, and some Turkish-German women who talk about violence against women in their own community. All German women should support that more, as well as your fight against sexual apartheid.

### **Do you think writing Mina's life story might help strengthen a solidarity movement with Iranian women's struggle against Sexual Apartheid?**

Sina Voget: If her story doesn't help to form a solidarity movement I have no idea what else could do so!



**We won't go back to lessons till all the segregationist rules are withdrawn!**

**Students from Shiraz University on their seventh day of protest against sexual apartheid**