



RCD Women's News

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Where is the honour in stoning?

In 2007, video footage showing the brutal murder of 17 year old Du'a Khalil Aswad* appeared on the internet. Du'a was stoned to death in front of hundreds of men. The motives for this extreme violence are unclear – some say she had run away with her boyfriend, others that she had merely been seen talking to the boy – either way it is clear that Du'a suffered a cruel fate reserved for her as a woman; her “boyfriend” was able to escape.

Fast forward three years and the case of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani** in Iran has been widely publicised in the western media. Sakineh was first sentenced to 99 lashes after being convicted of adultery. She was then acquitted of any involvement in the murder of her husband, but this was followed with a review of the adultery charge and a death sentence by stoning being imposed. Sakineh's children and lawyer led a successful global campaign resulting in a suspension of the sentence, however there has been no release and accusations of torture and forced confessions abound.

These two women in different countries, different circumstances and different times are united by their tragedy. Their stories have been well publicised, but many others remain unknown. What is behind such extreme corporal punishment for women? Sawsan Salim, Director at London based RCO Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organisation (KMEWO), says that in some countries (such as Iran) stoning can be implemented by the state but in others (Iraq, Kurdistan) it can occur in the community and be overlooked by the authorities. Though Sharia law is often invoked to justify the stoning of women, Sawsan believes that this is a fundamentalist view, and that traditional customs (particularly notions of 'honour') are often used to justify the violence.

Following Du'a's death KMEWO campaigned tirelessly, calling for those responsible to be convicted and for 'honour' killings to end. A concerted global campaign, such as the one conducted for Sakineh, can be successful in preventing or postponing state imposed death penalties (high profile supporters of the campaign included the Brazilian President and France's first lady Carla Bruni-Sarkozy). However, campaigns such as these are not – cannot – be fought for every single woman threatened with stoning or other violent reprisal. KMEWO advocates for a complete separation of religion from the state and law, which would prevent perpetrators using religion to validate violent reprisals and encourage convictions to be made.

Bethan Cansfield, of Amnesty International UK's gender policy team***, says that Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in any circumstance. However they also stress that “a charge of adultery, whether proven or not, has lasting, differential and disproportionate impacts and consequences for women”. Indeed, in many countries only women accused of adultery or improper relationships would suffer stoning, while their male co-accused is excused.

KMEWO are keen to highlight that the majority of people in communities affected by cases such as these are strongly opposed to such extreme violent actions. This is true both in the UK and abroad, for example the campaign for Sakineh's release has strong support in Iran; and following Du'a's death hundreds of people protested in Kurdistan. For Du'a this was too little too late, we can only hope that for Sakineh, the campaigning efforts of the many will succeed over the resolute judgement of the few.

For more information on KMEWO campaigns and activities contact **Sawsan Salim** on **sawsansalim@yahoo.com** or **020 7263 1027**.

* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoning_of_Du'a_Khalil_Aswad

** www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/04/sakineh-mohammadi-ashtiani-lashes-photograph

*** www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10257

Training

Writing successful grant applications

2 December 2010, 9.30am-4pm, London

Free training for London based women's organisations focussing on the whole application process: helping you to understand funders' expectations and criteria, plan your project, provide good evidence of need and improve your writing and presentation style.

For more information contact **Samantha** at Women's Resource Centre on **020 7324 3031** or at **development@wrc.org.uk**

Funding news

Voice of Courage Awards 2011

As part of their annual awards scheme, the Women's Refugee Commission are once again looking to honour refugee, internally displaced or asylum-seeking women or youth who are developing or leading programmes that benefit displaced or asylum-seeking people living in urban areas.

Two refugee, internally displaced or asylum-seeking women or young people will receive the Voices of Courage Award 2011. The honourees' organisations will each receive a \$5,000 grant from the Women's Refugee Commission to further their critical work to benefit displaced people in their communities. For more information about nominations visit <http://womensrefugeecommission.org/> or email luncheon@wrcommission.org
Deadline 30 November 2010

Events

Women's Resource Centre annual conference and AGM

Tuesday 7 December 2010, 9am-4.45pm, Cass Business School, London, EC1Y 8TZ

At the *Facing our future* conference there will be speakers, panels and surgeries on everything from social media to social enterprise - all the crucial topics the women's sector faces in the coming future. Participants will:

- Gain practical skills and information to help safeguard the future of your organisation
- Find out about the **why women?** campaign and lend your support
- Build alliances and partnerships with women's organisations from all over the country

For more information, email conference@wrc.org.uk or call **020 7324 3040**.

South Yorkshire women's RCO launch book

Development and Empowerment for Women's Advancement (DEWA) launched their book, *Different Cultures, One World* at Sheffield's 'Off the Shelf' literary festival on 11 October 2010. From the initial idea of producing a recipe booklet, the support they received and the creativity of the participants transformed the idea into a published book of stories, poems and recipes and a website!

DEWA is a new organisation, founded by a diverse group of women, predominantly refugees, living in South Yorkshire. The project hopes to raise awareness of diversity and integration, and of the issues facing the thousands of displaced women who are living in South Yorkshire. The management committee previously volunteered for the Refugee Women's Development Project (*RWDP*), and plan to continue to support women to reach their full potential, for example through training, campaigning and advocacy work. For more information, or to buy the book, visit <http://dewaproject.wordpress.com/>.

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/rcos

If you would like to submit an article to *RCO Women's News* or receive our newsletter, please email development@refugeecouncil.org.uk.