

WAF National Meeting June 2-4, 2007.

Programme:

Day 1: Open meeting for WAF members and other participants from civil society.

Agenda Days 1, 2 and 3.:(as planned)

1. Discussion on the Karachi Situation*.
2. Chief Justice*.
3. Shezina and Shumail Case.
4. Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa
5. Action Aid.
6. Elections
7. Media/Freedom of Expression*
8. WAF procedures.

Agenda (as actually discussed):

1. The Karachi Situation.
Action Aid (?)
2. Extremism
3. Media
4. Lal Masjid
5. Shezina & Shumail Case
6. Elections.

(N.B. In KSK's draft, Action Aid has been included as the first item on this section of the agenda; I also recollect there was some discussion on the topic, but there is nothing concerning Action Aid in these minutes. Could those members who have relevant notes please contribute)

June 2, 2007 Day 1.

Anis welcomed all participants. She explained that initially the plan had been to hold the WAF National Convention in Islamabad; subsequently, in view of the critical situation in Karachi on May 12, 2007, meetings were held by Karachi WAF with other women's organizations on 14 and 17 May 2007. (A resolution was passed at this meeting, copies of which are in participants' folders). In view of Karachi's grave situation, WAF Karachi felt the need for a National meeting. Other chapters were contacted to obtain their views; a national meeting was agreed to, to be held at Karachi, and it was also decided that this meeting should be open to the general body of WAF, and with a specific session open to representatives of civil society

It was also suggested to WAF Lahore that there should be a WAF National meeting; Lahore agreed.. *When?*

The suggestion was raised that since the present gathering was a representative one, it could be considered a National Convention.

Rani chaired the first day's proceedings:

During introduction of participants, a question was raised regarding Bushra's participation at a National Convention, Bushra has indicated keenness to join WAF, and as Lala stated, WAF does not require formal membership through the signing of a paper. Bushra was therefore considered a member of the WAF Working Committee Peshawar, and as such, she would be attending future meetings and conventions.

Meena raised the question as to whether the present meeting could be considered an emergency National Meeting, or a Convention.

Following discussion, the decision was taken to regard the current meeting as a National Extraordinary Meeting, focusing on specific issues, and not a convention where chapter reports are presented.

1. THE KARACHI SITUATION:

A press statement (*prepared by WAF Karachi*) had been published in some newspapers, and was read out by Uzma. A list of demands pertaining to the current situation was prepared and has been circulated to members by e mail

Following the Karachi political tension and carnage of May 12, WAF Karachi members visited affected families: they were told that the arms used on May 12 were the same as those used by government agencies, and killing was done at very close range. Even innocent people who were merely going to welcome the CJ were targeted. A large section of the population was of the view that that the government (specifically the Sindh Government) and MQM together were responsible.

Some highlights from the discussion:

- Thousands of people had turned out to greet the Chief Justice.
- MQM people were armed.
- Karachi WAF member Azra Sayeed saw three people gunned down by MQM men.
- There was no retaliation from those who fell (or from their companions)
- The police remained sitting where they were; the State was absent.

Personal experiences were related by Azra and Anis, which highlighted the fear and tension experienced on May 12; personal threats were also being faced by individuals (*if desired, a separate para can be included giving details of the above*)

Anis added that WAF was the sole organization to call a meeting on 14 May 2007 to discuss the Karachi situation.

(The following section in italics can be deleted if not required):

*(Participation of Sindhiani Tehreek: (not sure of specific reason for including this, hence the italics)
Sindhiani Tehreek was invited to participate in WAF meeting held on May 17; however, Sindhiani regretted its inability to attend.*

Several WAF members voiced their concern with the fact that Sindhiani Tehreek had been part of the WAF platform since 1983, and in view of Sindhiani Tehreek's relatively new association with MMA, (indirect association, since it is Rafiq Paliyo's group which is associating with the MMA), what would be WAF's position vis a vis Sindhiani Tehreek?

Anis explained that Sindhiani Tehreek was invited to WAF meetings but not to Conventions, as they are allies, not WAF members.

Further examples of disturbed political conditions indicating fear, tension and religious extremism in other cities were related:

- A 'jaloos' in Lahore openly condemned the MQM;
- PIMS Medical Centre in Islamabad was attacked by the Hafsa brigade;
- Letters were issued to shopkeepers in Swabi and in NWFP warning them that women's clothes should not be sold in their shops).

Tea Break: (12.15-12.25 p.m.)

Summary of the morning session:

WAF holds the MQM responsible for the Karachi situation, and the State has been a party to it. WAF's position is that MQM's fascism was solely responsible for the Karachi carnage.

Discussion continued for evolving Peace initiatives. Kausar suggested that in view of peace initiatives in other parts of the world, where women came together even when they were from warring sides of a divide, should WAF members meet MQM women?

Discussion on this point raised some concerns:

- In a peace process women must acknowledge their responsibilities.
- We should keep up the pressure against the MQM; they terrorize people
- MQM is a fascist party
- Farooq Sattar of MQM has apologized to the public, on television.
- MQM women have no voice of their own; they give votes because they are forced to.

- We have tried, but not succeeded in talking to MQM women.
- What we need is to reach out to the Urdu speaking women, not only MQM women.
- We should visit those who have been affected

Anis explained that it had been a long process, meeting affected families, both to condole with them and also to check claims made by political parties. At the same time, it is important to be careful of what is said by WAF members, in order to avoid a backlash.

Responses:

- Karachi is divided. In many places, MQM members are watching, and individuals can be targeted.
- There is arms proliferation in Karachi.....de-weaponisation is a critical need.
- We do not know how to go about addressing this problem
- Peace initiatives must continue; those affected must be reached, but ensuring that those visited are not at any risk.
- Deal with de-weaponisation at the time of election; otherwise it is too large an issue to be taken up [by us]
- We should tell the political parties to take forward the issue of de-weaponisation
- Our whole society is militarized, and with sophisticated arms. An arms race has begun, and it is all linked to extremism
- which is linked to the war in Afghanistan.
- There are curbs on the media.
- We need to understand the larger issue of militarization
- WAF in principle should repeatedly declare that we are against militarization, and work for a Peace Initiative

The Women's Peace Commission:

The Women's Peace Commission was considered a great initiative. A discussion was held to clarify its principles and working methodology.

Discussion: Major points/questions/comments:

- Who will be Peace Commissioners?
- Can WAF members affiliated to political parties be Peace Commissioners?
- Details of how the Commission will function are to be worked out by WAF Karachi
- Anis explained that the Commission will involve people other than WAF (in addition to WAF members). 3 persons are to be nominated for the Commission. Committees will be formed, to visit families and meet with political parties.
- The Peace Commission is to talk to all political parties, but WAF does not wish to talk to MQM.....
- If peace is our mission, those more prone to violence need to be talked with
- The Peace Commission is a WAF initiative....
- What is the difference between a Peace Initiative and the Commission?
- A commission needs sustainability....autonomy.....
- Peace must be an on-going process, not reaction to violence when it happens.-

(My comments, as I was unable to attend Day 1 of the meeting: Hilda:

- Eventually, I hope we will be able to link up with global Peace initiatives. In our efforts, we should specifically stress reaching out to the media—they have suffered drastically as a group. We need to highlight UN Resolutions for Peace, and commemorate/celebrate the International Day of Peace each year)

Lunch Break (2.00 – 2.45 p.m.)

Post Lunch Session:

A brief discussion was held to clarify the onward approach, and working methodology, at the open meeting, which was scheduled to begin at 4.00 p.m.
Anis was asked to introduce the agenda of the open meeting.

Decision:

At the open meeting, it is to be communicated to the participants that the WAF National Meeting has been held because Peace is a national issue.

Rani spoke for WAF Lahore.

Discussion:

- WAF position on the CJ is clear. We support independence of the judiciary.
 - Freedom of the press is essential.
 - Lahore and Peshawar should also mention action taken in their cities subsequent to May 12.
- (Does anyone have more material on the discussion pertaining to the CJ, as this is an agenda item?)

End (3.20 p.m.)

Summary:

The WAF National Meeting began at 10.54 a.m. and ended at 3.20 p.m.

All welcomed all members and gave a background of the meeting. Rani was asked to chair the meeting. There were participants at the meeting, from Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar.

2. EXTREMISM:

The national situation vis-à-vis extremism in the country was discussed:

- NWFP is quite tense. The provincial authorities wanted to pass the Hasba Bill; it was not passed, but it has become a base from which to attack people in the name of religion. It is a State plan to introduce extremism. -- Religious elements are being used to support the State in its operations
- Young men (who are not Taliban) are issued arms, recruited and used as mercenaries
- It is a frightening situation.
- Khandokhor is being attacked
- MMA and Musharraf are together
- Threatening letters are being sent to all NGO workers, along with Rs. 500/-, advising people to buy kaffan material, or donate to charity for their own safety.
- Letters have also been sent to workers in Tank; these have been followed by bomb blasts
- The fear of being targeted has increased.
- US policies are pushing Muslims to the wall. Because of the role of US policies and the [Pakistan] government role, MMA has developed a vote bank.
- People are voting blindly for the MMA, (hoping the connection with the religious parties will lead to) in the hope of better lives hereafter.....
- Discussion and dialogue is discouraged, blocked—this needs to be re started.
- Large funds came into Pakistan in Zia's regime: they were used to create extremism.
- Religious parties received an impetus from the Afghan war
- A monster has been unleashed
- Those who voted against the MQM were harassed
- Our politics and analysis must be very clear

Decision/agreement:

1. This situation needs to be counteracted, with a strategy that analyses the politics of the current state of affairs, with its political and social dimensions. It is an issue of globalization. WAF should issue a political paper with political and economic analysis (also social) and accordingly decide on future strategy
2. We need to reach out to the younger generation... be more imaginative. Younger people are being sucked into religion (or into religious extremism?); or alternatively, they are being sucked into the corporate sector

3. THE MEDIA:

Comments/suggestions raised during a discussion on the media:

The electronic media could be approached for discussion on this topic. The objectives of lessening of religious extremism, and encouraging the greater involvement of the younger generation in our struggles cannot be done by us alone; we would need to involve political parties such as the ANP.

Consider establishing FM Radio, or liaising with existing FM Radio channels:

- Personnel of the electronic media (TV and radio) state that some of their programmes are not supported by advertisements; if WAF could raise funds, they too could get programmes. (on existing radio channels).
- Frank, open discussion is not encouraged; criticism of religious extremism is frowned upon.

- WAF members are familiar with provocative TV talk shows where a mulla is included in the same discussion programme with WAF/other liberal minded participants....
- Efforts are constantly being made to use religion to control women.

Decision

WAF can and must play its role in addressing this issue (of religious extremism); discussion with political parties is needed.

Strategising on ways in which WAF can play a strong role with the media:

- **Create material for children**
- Teachers can be bigoted; their teachings about religion slanted towards religious extremism.... These attitudes must be discouraged
- **Interact with TV programmers**, and suggest how a programme can be organized.
- **For FM radio we can draw in younger people (as the audience? Or as anchors, or to operate the channel?)**
- FM radio on Peshawar University campus charges Rs. 3,500/- for a **weekly broadcast programme**, and it is very popular-
- **Spaces are available**, and FM radio can be set up in 2 to 3 lakh rupees. Before giving the radio channel to youth, we need to mentor them...
- We need to **build our contacts with the media**.... they too are worried about the rising religious extremism.
- We can **organize programmes**....
- 13 episode plays have been written by Attiya for TV; they have a feminist approach
- There is hate propaganda broadcast on some FM channels...
- WAF should demand that the government puts a stop to this hate propaganda.**
- We should distribute handbills at the end of each programme
- **Every WAF chapter should have a media committee**; we could then start producing small material and feed it into local FM channels and other spaces....

Other initiatives for reaching out to the public:

- Have **study groups/circles**
- **WAF can organize meetings on rights**
- Don't reach out only to the converted
- Have **melas**, which are more attractive to the public... organize a seminar with it.... (and film shows) pool the information of all groups

Decision: It was decided that every WAF chapter should have a media committee, for production of small materials for broadcasting on local FM radio and TV].

Media Committee: Karachi: Azra, Hilda, Aliya, Nuzhat, Uzma, Attiya.
Lahore: Lala, Neelam, Meena
Peshawar: Bushra/ Rakshanda will give names later.
(Islamabad?)

4. LAL MASJID:

Discussion/comments:

- This is a government sponsored drama
- Protests have taken place in major cities
- This is all imperialism... they want us to keep fighting against terrorism
- We need to focus on those who are directly affected
- We need to bring in the larger picture into the debate
- Zia ul Haq gave them land, (for the Lal Masjid), and patronized them. They construct masjids illegally, and threaten members of the public who protest against them.
- They intrude on the lives of private citizens.
- Religious minorities are under greater threat.

Decision:

WAF has to keep raising this issue. WAF Islamabad should keep monitoring the situation, and inform us so we can take action.

5. SHEHZINA = SHUMAIL CASE:

Discussion: Major points/comments.

- Bunny has been following the case. She has met and given moral and other forms of support to Shezina and Shumail.
- ASR is fully supporting Shezina and Shumail.
- WAF did not wish to sensationalise the case, but has been fully supporting them. A press release was prepared, but before that the case went to court.
- Shumail, who has been undergoing operations for achieving (medically advised) sex change from female to male, was forced/pressured to confess that 'he' was a woman, by a judge who is reputed to be prejudiced.....the doctor's reports were incomplete.
- The lawyer's argument was that the marriage should be declared void: as this was considered an apology, the maximum sentence could not be given.
- The couple was sentenced to 3 years for perjury, and a fine of Rs. 100,000/-
- The case is due to go for appeal, and the 3 year sentence may be set aside.
- WAF Lahore was unable to take a decision on this case as the issue had not been discussed with other chapters.
- However, in view of the fact that this is an unprecedented case, and also because it is linked to the issue of sexuality raised at the (last) WAF Convention, **it was agreed that the issue needs further discussion and understanding in each chapter in view of the transgender issues that can occur.**

-To meet the immediate needs of Shezina and Shumail:

- The couple would appreciate letters of support from sympathizers.
- Letters to the editors of newspapers and newsmagazines.
- WAF could compile such letters and send them to Bunny.
- When the case goes to Supreme Court, WAF would need to support the case.
- There will be court expenses to meet.
- They need security and livelihood, particularly if they are released early on bail.
- Shumail's Identity Card has been cancelled, as the court has now declared him a woman.
- The couple is on the exit control list.
- WAF Lahore has not yet taken a position on the transgender identity, nor has the HRCP
- However, it is a basic human rights violation
- **The foremost needs are the safety of the couple and (ensuring/ working for) their release from prison.**

The Transgender Issue:

- A document on the issue has been given to Karachi WAF by Neelam; the issue has also been raised in the PRHN to encourage its discussion with sensitivity..
- Simorgh contacted partners in other countries for information on dealing with similar issues
- Punar in Turkey has offered help
- The case has been discussed in a horrible way by Nadia Khan of Geo TV <
- We should use sensitive language
- People's sexual identity needs to be respected, and also their human rights
- The confusion in this case is in turning it into a lesbian issue.
- This is a case of the right to sex change, and the right of two people to live together.
- All WAF members in each chapter should educate themselves about the transgender issue, by seeking understanding with discussion with surgeons and psychologists

WAF should organize a round table or a seminar on this phenomenon (the Issue of sexuality? Or on the impact of public attitudes on people like Shezina and Shumail? Or both?)

Discussion: Major points/comments

- To date there has never been punishment for perjury.
- Both Shezina and Shumail are in the women's prison

- Putting them on the ECL is an awful move.
- WAF is a platform for all issues pertaining to women.
- The precise definition of transgender is in a state of flux... people define themselves along a continuum of male and female... there can be a whole range of combinations, people can be bi-sexual, homosexual or heterosexual. All have their biological and /or psychological identity.
- For WAF, this is a rights issue, a person's rights as a human being.
- At the last WAF Convention, it was agreed that each WAF chapter would discuss the sexuality issue. In view of the present case, it is important/urgent to do so.
- We have to be sympathetic to the positions of Shezina and Shumail
- We need to obtain the views of doctors and psychologists, to strengthen our position
- Bunny is actively pursuing this issue; funds are needed to support her

WAF position:

- **WAF considers it wrong to put Shezina and Shumail on the Exit Control List.**
- **WAF's political position should be drafted now, for subsequent discussion by each chapter.**
- **A support statement is required to express our support to Shezina and Shumail.**
(was this drafted? if yes, where is it?)

6. ELECTIONS:

Discussion: Major points/comments:

- WAF Karachi was approached by Nazi Jamil and Dr. Naseem Salahuddin to play an active part in the forthcoming elections. Countless women do not have identity cards; WAF can talk to such women.
- Earlier, WAF had developed a women's manifesto which was taken to different political parties. This initiative can be revived.
- What could be our role in the elections?
- WAF cannot do the work of voter registration. Aurat Foundation has done some work on this, and it is an issue for political parties.
- WAF can prepare the necessary information on various issues, and monitor the casting of votes.
- We are heading for a more oppressive environment
- There is the possibility of violence during the elections.

WAF position:

1. **Presidential election should not take place before general elections.**
2. **Political parties should resign if elections are held at any other time**
3. **Do not accept any deal of any political party with ???**

The WAF position is an ideological one: WAF does not have mass based support.