

WAF NATIONAL CONVENTION Karachi, 18-19 December, 1992.

DAY-1. Session 1: Introduction, Finalisation of agenda and chapter reports.

Chair: Kausar Khan.

Rapporteurs: Hilda and Neelum.

Issues addressed

1) Inclusion of term "secular" in WAF Charter.

Lahore and Karachi clear on the decision to include the word in the charter.

Karachi clear on the decision to include the term but felt that the location of the word in the charter needed to be discussed.

Islamabad have decided to shelve the issue for the time being after 2 G.B. meetings when two equally strong groups of 49 and 51 respectively had taken opposing stands on the issue. Subsequently, an attempt had been made to resolve the issue through postal ballot. A 100 ballot papers were mailed to the G.B. for a vote on the issue. The attempt failed as only three people responded. All three were against the use of the word.

During the morning meeting the Karachi chapter agreed to the inclusion of the word secular in the charter.

With two chapters in favour of the inclusion of the word secular in the WAF charter it was decided to ask the Islamabad reps to call their GB. to review their decision in the present context. If Islamabad agrees then the word secular will become a part of the Charter – at the time that they come to this decision. It was also decided that 3 members – one from each chapter – would work out the exact phrasing of the sentence including 'secular' in the charter.

2. Question of whether WAF is a political organisation with its attendant implications to be discussed.

The issue to be taken back to the respective GBs for discussion.

3. Suggested that each chapter hold workshop on Feminism and WAF.

4. Islamabad's position on inclusion of office bearers of political parties in WAF. Issue to be resolved by Islamabad in the light of the position taken by Karachi and Lahore in the 1985 Convention at Islamabad.

DAY 1. Session 2: Speaking Out phenomenon

Chair: Samina Rahman.

Rapporteurs: Tauseef Hayat and Tehmina Ahmed.

Kausar Khan introduced the topic which had been put on the agenda by Karachi. She said that there were various questions that WAF needed to discuss at this stage. The questions are basic: there are more men and women protesting now but can we equate protest with the beginning of a women's movement? Are women really speaking out? What is the difference between us and other movements? Within WAF are we willing to speak out, even amongst ourselves? How does WAF regard the speaking out issue?

Farzana from Lahore said that WAF needs to go out to workers and other groups at the grassroots level and talk to them about sexual harassment and other problems that they face.

Nasreen Azhar said that perhaps the other chapters should replicate Karachi's experience

with small group workshops. Kausar clarified that the topic under discussion was not directly related to the workshops Karachi had held.

Bunny said that the women's movement is different because it says that the personal is political. We have different ways of relating, for instance the way we talked among ourselves during the morning introduction. But WAF members have not talked sufficiently of their own oppression. We must be able to talk among ourselves before we go out to talk to others. There are contradictions within.

Ghazala: we do not share ourselves, so why should others talk to us.

Different views expressed: We suppress our own problems when we deal with others' problems – we have concentrated on just a few issues such as the discriminatory laws and this is not enough to involve people. People think that you have to go out to villages to do real work but there is plenty of work inside your own neighbourhood and inside your own home – Sameena Nazir taught her mother to read and write.

Nasreen Azhar: Women's movements in the third world have their strength in linking with larger issues. Speaking out is inward looking.

Kausar: Speaking out means looking inwards and then using that method to move outwards.

Kamila: WAF has always been reactive. We should discuss our own issues.

Neelum: Speaking out is useful and we have found it to be so in our own experience but it can also become manipulative, and we may end up repeating ourselves.

Ghazala: If we talk it helps others to talk. Women tell us they don't understand us. We can get more women with us if we get a dialogue going, and in order to do that we first have to look within ourselves. Once that process is complete, it will move outward.

Bunny: In response to Nasreen's point, while joint struggles have their own importance, we must acknowledge that even after socialist revolutions, women's lives did not change. The third world movement has combined both processes.

Various views: Even if you can talk about yourself, it is difficult to talk about your family – speaking out should focus on the male-female relationship and woman to woman relationships – the process is painful and time consuming – we cannot take criticism against ourselves – can we give continued support to women we talk to?

Ghazala: The process is painful because we have not been successful in creating a safe space. So we hold back.

Positions formulated:

1. The process is important but difficult, therefore we should not carry on with it.
2. Important, necessary and difficult, but we should try it.
3. It's necessary and difficult but when we take it up we must be aware of the responsibility we are taking on.

Other positions/questions:

- Our neglect of speaking out is not the reason for our lack of success. Our issues have either not been the right ones or they have not been pursued with vigour.
- How is the women's movement substantially different from any other?

Other views: We are not trained, we could destroy someone's life – we should talk to psychologists to find out what the problem is, pick up techniques – should we talk to WAF members or to others – it has to be a series of meetings, not one meeting out of the blue – can there be a breach of trust.

Ghazala: Sharing yourselves creates trust, so a breach of trust should not happen.

Tehmina: Through sharing we can build stronger relationships among ourselves.

Kausar: We cannot function if the trust is not there.

Different views: There is a coldness creeping into WAF – in the past there has been trust and understanding among WAF members – we don't share our feelings and thoughts.

Bunny: We had old WAF members at the ASR workshop at Changa Manga and we discussed our feelings, some new participants later came on to the WAF committee.

Other views: We can try this out in a drama workshop – we should also meet socially –

Kamila gave a brief description of Karachi's workshop series. Began with an informal dinner to which new people were invited, discussed various ideas for mobilisation, among other activities it was proposed to hold a workshop with the title "Reflections on being a woman." The other workshops grew out of this, as the participants in the first workshop asked for more workshops. Meetings were held once a month with discussions on "What is WAF", on "Personal Visions", on objectives and strategy, in all six workshops were held.

Discussion: One Karachi working committee member felt that since only one participant from the workshops had come on to the Karachi working committee, the workshops had not been successful, and that they should have been more task-oriented. Others said that working committee membership had never been defined as a criterion for success, and that in any case the process itself was not yet complete: It had led to new links being formed; one of the participants had provided access to a group of 200 nurses and the dialogue with this group was still on.

Different views: The workshops provided a base and WAF Karachi now has to build on it – WAF members should meet once a month without a fixed agenda to reflect – we should pursue the question of how a women's movement is different from other movements and also how we gauge the speaking out phenomenon. It was pointed out that the Lahore G.B. felt that the Speaking Out phenomenon should be a chapter issue.

DAY-1. Session 3: Chronic Issues.

Chair: Lahore (Sameena Nazeer)

Rapporteurs: Nasreen Azhar and Anis Haroon.

1) Reserved Seats.

Islamabad had asked for Clause 17 in the statement of demands to be rediscussed and reformulated because they felt that the double vote asked for was unrealistic and men elected by women smacked too much of separate electorates. Islamabad also wanted the issue to be taken up by WAF as a major agenda item in the next year.

Karachi had not discussed the issue of reserved seats.

Lahore's position was that stage one should be done away while this government was in power. That is, WAF should not ask for reserved seats to be reinstated during the next two and a half years. Then for the next election we should start campaigning for a constitutional amendment that the reserved seats should be increased to 20% and women should be elected by women, who should have a double vote, as was done prior to 1956. The Political Parties Act should be amended at the same time to stipulate that political parties must field at least 10% women

candidates and that this should be increased to 20% in the next elections, and continue to be increased until parity was reached. In other words, stage two and three should remain.

One view was that instead of the double vote for women only, both men and women should be given a double vote and both should elect women on reserved seats.

Lahore's recommendation was accepted by the meeting and each chapter was asked to take it back to its GB and take their approval.

2) 5 % quota in government

Lahore felt this quota was not being filled, and pressure should be put on the government to fill it. WAF needs to monitor, check and challenge various government departments. Legal action should be taken where the quota was not being filled. It was decided to demand that the 5% quota be raised to 20%. And as a strategy each chapter could take one specific case to court.

3) Violence against women and strategies

The meeting expressed concern that there was increased violence and many more cases of rape as a weapon against political dissent had been reported.

A view was expressed that rape as a crime had received some attention from WAR, WAF, by the press, even by the P.M. and the leader of the opposition and that other forms of sexual harassment should also be acknowledged and taken up by WAF.

WAF should:

i) Protest the publicity given to rape victims and the political capital the P.M. is making from visiting rape victims and doling out money to them. Why are the rape victims exploited in this way? Their privacy should be respected and the rapists shown on T.V.

ii) Continue to work on the issue alone and in association with WAR and other NGOs.

iii) There should be an educational series in the Urdu press.

iv) The whole issue had to be seen in its entire perspective. The portrayal of women in the media, the laws—everything was responsible for the present atmosphere where women are subjected to violence.

v) People in the health field are not aware of this issue. Perhaps we need to work with them, with the PMA for example.

vi) A crisis centre for violence victims is needed.

vii) We give a press release but don't follow up. More pressure needs to be put on the government to bring the criminals to justice.

viii) WAF should oppose the death penalty for rape and ask for life imprisonment.

Someone mentioned castration and some black humour was displayed by one member who asked for castration for rapists as a national policy.

4) Membership Drive

Every year we plan to do something about the membership, but never do! But on further consideration the convention recalled that at the last convention in Lahore a policy for membership had been evolved— which was that WAF could not and did not want to enlist vast numbers of members because we wanted an active and committed membership. In any case WAF was not a political party aspiring to a large membership at the grassroots level. WAF was a catalyst. So last year WAF took a conscious decision to approach the grassroots through various NGOs that work at the grassroots level.

5) Discriminatory laws.

We felt that we had put the issue on the back burner and needed to take it up more vigorously again. Other chapters agreed, strategies need to be worked out.

DAY 2. Rapporteurs: Ghazala Rahman/Samina Rahman/Nuzhat Kidwai.

Began with introduction of participants joining the group: Uzma and Ayesha Jafar from Karachi, Amina from Islamabad and Sherraz Waqir Ali from Lahore.

Islamabad WAF on group behaviour.

Nasreen and Samina: We suggested this because we have serious problems: our GB complains that it is not consulted, the Working Committee does not allow it to work independently. Attendance at meetings is sporadic. We had a very poor response at meeting held to discuss convention. Maybe other chapters have had similar problems and can advise us. We have decided to try internal GBs: every fourth GB will be a meeting with an internal agenda, only working committee and GB members will attend.

Islamabad asked why they get this criticism and why GB members who want to work more actively don't come on to the committee. Nasreen responded that some members don't want to work, they just want to criticise, others don't have the time to come on to the working committee.

Bunny: while the GB- WC relationship varies from chapter to chapter, there are always some resentments. Some people come just to criticise and leave.

Kausar: The GB is behaving like the grouchy husband whose wife can never get anything right. When she makes an omelette he wants a poached egg and when he gets a poached egg complains that the wrong egg was poached. Why do we take criticism so seriously, why do we burn? Why should we please the other.

Shenaz: Every organisation has grouches, we don't expect everyone to behave in the same way, but we have a deeper problem, a symptom of a deeper malaise. We should mobilise our GB on issues.

Ghazala: Doesn't Islamabad GB know that it cannot work independently of the WC? You should lay down procedure.

Anis: Ours is a catalytic role. When we deviate from a political role, it doesn't work, there has to be political appeal. We should analyse what is WAF's role, on what issues people come along. Is it the feminist appeal or the political appeal?

Hilda/Nasreen: Criticism can also be valid.

Shenaz: There was a time when we were the only ones on political issues, but now we have a diffused image because so many groups are taking up similar issues. WAF has lost its place at the forefront.

Uzma: When WAF started we were working in a different political climate. We took up burning issues as they came and we thought that the problem would be solved with a return to democracy. But are we now a pressure group or a political organisation?

Bunny: We're all despairing but we're a unique organisation anywhere in the world.

Dealing with harassment.

Nisha: Where it starts is the workplace— you can't say it right there.

KSK: We talk of violence but we remove it from ourselves. We put it on the convention agenda because we want to discuss how do we respond to harassment? Is there a way of dealing with it in ourselves, not giving a prescription to others.

Iqbal: What do we consider harassment? Being made to wear chaddars and the mullahs outside, that's harassment.

Nasreen: It should be a policy issue.

Neelum: It should be identified as a part of our strategy, we should experience it, not fake it in silence.

KSK: Make it more than a policy issue—we should make it an action issue. We should be more pro-active on it within our chapters.

Kamyla: We should talk to WAR— make posters against sexual harassment.

Nasreen: We only respond when a rape occurs. We should take up other forms of harassment.

Uzma: We have never discussed how we feel about harassment.

Bunny: We should first raise consciousness of WAR in Lahore.

KSK: We should take action this year and report at the next convention.

Ghazala: We should look at the laws in countries that ban eye-teasing, Iran, Singapore, Saudi Arabia...

Bunny: The telephone company should tap telephones when women get obnoxious calls. In Japan the multi-nationals have strict rules against harassment.

Tehmina: We could get copies of these company rules and circulate them among companies here.

Ghazala: Also look into harassment in high places, like the Anita Hill case...

Suggestions: Posters and pamphlets in schools, material on harassment be given to trade unions, take the mullahs to court for their anti-woman fatwas, make a common strategy for WAF chapters, workshops.

Religious intolerance and blasphemy laws.

Lahore read out statement on blasphemy and ideology of Pakistan and all three chapters condemned these laws as well as the inclusion of the religious column on ID cards.

Action Plan

i) Network.

ii) Awareness.

iii) Lobby with legislators, political parties.

iv) Take legal action after consulting lawyers—challenge on basis of infringement of human rights.

v) Use media, specially Urdu press.

vi) Formulate leaflet collectively with extract from laws with JAC/HRCP.

vii) Contact newspaper editors to start a press campaign.

Pass resolution on desecration of mandirs and churches.

UN Conference on Human Rights, 1993.

Main issues to be brought up include women's rights as human rights, for instance, rape as a human rights violation, patriarchy to be outlawed or declared as a form of slavery.

Action Plan.

i) build up pressure at home by broadening base through working with other women's groups on the issue and publicising it.

ii) signature campaign.

iii) have conference in February in Lahore and finalise WAF petition by 8th March.

Family Laws

Meena: Read out Lahore position. AGHS has held a series of workshops to suggest changes in the Family Laws, 12 organisations including WAF participated. Workshops based on request from PPP to prepare something which they could table as a reform. WAF Lahore GB says that in the long run we should work for a universal family laws ordinance, based on a civil code, not constrained by what is Islamic. Discussion on conflicting court judgements on registration of marriages—the Federal Shariat Court regards compulsory registration as unIslamic while the Sindh High Court has ruled to the contrary.

Sameena Nazir: Read out Islamabad's position on the two judgements.

Suggestions: A WAF National conference on the Family Laws and a proposed civil code.

Dialogue with women of religious groups.

Lahore and Islamabad read out their positions. Kausar from Karachi said that the issue has been raised to clarify whether there was a national policy against dialogue with religious groups. Discussion on pros and cons. People said that religious groups want to co-opt us, also that dialogue with religious groups is not a priority for WAF. Lahore said that while WAF did not talk about Islam as a policy, it has done so as part of its strategy. Karachi questioned why policy and strategy should head in different directions. Conclusion: we are not against dialogue with religious groups, but we will not pursue it.

Dialogue with women's wings of political parties.

Karachi clarified that it had brought up the issue because of problems that it faced that were particular to Sindh politics. Lahore said that while Sindh had an ethnic divide, Lahore faced the same problem with Shia -Sunni tension and did not want to be identified with any of the sectarian groups. Discussion on whether WAF should now take up wider political issues such as the Kalabagh Dam, consensus that it should. National conference suggested to discuss WAF's politics.