

WAF GB Meeting

17th November 2021

Participants

1. Aiman
2. Bushra
3. Farida Shaheed
4. Fatima Razzaq
5. Fauzia Waqar
6. Hiba Akbar
7. Jalvat Ali
8. Khawar Mumtaz (Rani)
9. Khushbakht Khan
10. Leena Ghani
11. Mehreen Ahmad
12. Naazish (Najji)
13. Naila Naz
14. Nasrene Shah
15. Neelam
16. Nida Usman
17. Nighat Khan (Bunny)
18. Noor
19. Riffat Maqsood
20. Rukhsana Shah
21. Sarah Sheraz
22. Tauseef Hyat
23. Ume Laila

Discussion on WAF

Khawar gave a brief introduction to WAF, which was started in Karachi in 1981 in response to the laws being passed by Zia ul Haq, especially the Hudood Ordinances. Later chapters were set up in Lahore, Islamabad etc. Khawar highlighted some of WAF's basic tenets: -

- It is a platform
- There is no hierarchy – collective decisions are taken by the members
- No funds taken from donors or from the Government
- Not aligned to any political party
- Secular
- Has a charter
- WAF aligns with other like-minded organizations on an issue to issue basis.

Riffat asked how WAF could help individual women with problems. Neelam responded by saying we can't take up all the cases but do support women who come to us. Bunny said she often referred women to organizations which dealt with the problems they were stating.

Fatima said there were so many issues that need to be taken up, like the implementation of laws such as the Domestic Workers Law. There were so many issues where more could be done.

Rani said we do engage with lawmakers, and some of our suggestions are incorporated into the law. We did a lot of work on Forced Conversions and on Harassment for example. We have been working on the SNC and given statements to the media, and many of the younger WAF members have been involved with the SNC.

Bunny pointed out that we needed more active members. All WAF members were on the General Body and the more active members came on to the Working committee which met regularly once a week. A person interested in joining WAF as a member needs to attend three WAF Activities. Bunny also mentioned WAF National's RTI (Right to Information) initiative asking for the salaries of members of the judiciary and the armed forces. The Army sent their reply but the judiciary still hasn't replied.

During the discussion it was agreed that women's groups need to be more in touch with each other, support each other's work and join events whenever possible. Members felt that WAF needed to be more visible, especially in communities. Rukhsana has agreed to design a pamphlet about WAF, in Urdu, which can be distributed among communities and at other events.

Rukhsana felt we needed to reach out more to the marginalized and the disabled. Jalwat briefed the members on their mobilization of communities. Fatima said that WAF was the organization to bridge the gap between the older and the younger generation. WAF had the academic depth and the younger women had the energy and the curiosity to learn. Noor also agreed with Fatima and Leena about the need to connect between the older and younger generations. Umme laila Laila said that Advocacy and action was required.

As Rani pointed out that we have to look at our own limitations and connecting with others was necessary.

It was agreed that now that Covid was on the decline WAF would re-start its Political School Discussions which were a huge success.

Organise Events on Women's Day, such as the one WAF organized at Hamdard Hall a few years ago.

Rukhsana said we need to do something about students being forced to wear Hijab, and Bunny responded by saying we need to collect concrete evidence and then write up a policy paper. Rani pointed out that we do strategize at our meetings and then come out with a consensus.

Another issue brought up was the representation of women on mainstream TV plays. Neelam suggested we set up a Media Watch to monitor the media and the Plays, but need volunteers for this work. It was also decided to link up with Tasnim Ahmer in Karachi whose organization monitors the media.

Riffat pointed out that Committee on Harassment of women in various Departments were not effective. Farida suggested we meet with the Sexual Harassment Ombudsperson. Rani mentioned the problems related to the implementation of policy on harassment. Some other clarifications also needed, whether students were included in the law on harassment or not.

The meeting will continue next week.