

ASSOCIATION FOR WORLD EDUCATION

STATEMENT by Representative David G. LITTMAN – Friday (am) 19 Sept. 2008

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – Ninth Session (8–26 September 2008)

Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration & Programme of Action: Integrating the human rights of women throughout the UN system / human rights violation experienced by women

[Words reduced and in square brackets were not pronounced in the 3 minutes available]

Thank you, Mr. President, we wish to “address human rights violations experienced by women” [under paragraph 59 of agenda item 8] that need concerted action at the international, national and local levels:

[At the 6th session of the HRC, in a joint statement on 16 June with IHEU, we were interrupted 16 times, and instead of a 3 minute statement, 90 minutes were taken, half for a recess, before we could complete our substantive statement on four points]

1. Female Genital Mutilation; 2. So-called ‘honour killings’; 3. Death by stoning; 4. Disfiguration of women by acid; 5. Marriage of female children.

FGM is a barbaric, ongoing crime which is creeping into Europe. Even in Switzerland the number of mutilated young girls from immigrant families is now over 7,000. As we have indicated in previous sessions, the latest UNICEF figures indicate that about 3 million young girls are thus mutilated each year in 32 countries, 29 of which are Member States of the OIC. We wish to highlight the useful work of WADI, an NGO working in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Our detailed written statement: Background on “Traditional or Customary Practices” /Female Genital Mutilation is available [E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/NGO/27]. [See Sara Corbett, “A Cutting Tradition”, *NYT Sunday Magazine*, 20 January 2008]

Our second example is “honour killings”, which are on the increase worldwide and should be condemned and criminalized and not accepted as a social, tribal or religious anomaly. This “custom” is also increasing in Europe, even among second-generation immigrants. All States should strive to eliminate it from their societies.

[As an example, 10 years ago there were a reported 300 cases of honour killings in one province of Pakistan alone (Mufti Ziauddin “Status of Court Cases for Murdered Women; and BBC film, Home programme, 8 April 2000.) On 28 April 2000, President Musharraf declared that “*The Government of Pakistan vigorously condemns the practice of so-called ‘Honour Killings’ and that such actions do not find any place in our religion or law.*” Yet this murderous practice seems to be on the increase in Pakistan & elsewhere – even in Europe in certain communities. It must be criminalised & the law strictly applied.]

Thirdly, the stoning of women for alleged sexual misconduct still occurs regularly in certain States that need not be named again. How can this be “justified”?

Fourthly, another practice where tribal concepts of “honour” is concerned is the equally barbaric crime – practiced in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, parts of India, and elsewhere – of throwing acid in the face of young women. This “custom” is also “justified” when some men believe that their “pride” or “honour” has been wounded by the rejection of a marriage arrangement, a courtship, or a dowry considered insufficient. The information available here comes from Dr. Guiseppe Losasso, an Italian plastic surgeon, who has dedicated himself to operating on such cases (47 women so far) and founded a courageous Association, “Smile Again”. [Ridare Un Volto: Dignita Speranza] Last Sunday he spoke movingly in Florence on this woeful subject.

The last example is the medieval-like marriage of girl children as young as 9 years old – sometimes even at 8, as was described in a recent *New York Times* report. Three months ago the Iranian Noble Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi, speaking in Geneva, strongly denounced the fact that in Iran a girl is considered an adult and liable to punishment, even execution at 9, and a boy at 15. [*Le Temps*, 10/6/08]. She totally rejects “cultural relativism.”

We warmly welcome the recent decision of the President of the Human Rights Commission of Saudi Arabia, H.E. Turki K. Al-Sudairy, who recently described child marriage as a violation of human rights. He declared: “We call on all government agencies to take necessary steps to end the practice of child marriage by adopting a clear and unambiguous position on child and forced marriages.”

[“Human Rights”, Bulletin, Human Rights Commission, Saudi Arabia. August 2008, Vol. 1, Issue 2.]

Mr. President, we call on this Council to address such grave issues in a comprehensive resolution.