

Poem**How I say to you**

How I wish to you
 Happy New Year
 On this killing field
 With the lament of
 Mothers and widows
 Who lost their beloved?
 I have seen Homeless
 children
 Picking something
 To eat from rubbles
 I have seen Empty handed
 women
 With mourning rags
 In ruined villages.
 I heard thousand voices
 From locked down in
 prison
 Who were abducted?
 Tortured and raped?
 Number of neighbors
 Disappeared in bright sun
 In front of our eyes
 But we are silenced
 By oppressive state
 An unknown gun - man
 Walking around us
 Pointing its rough finger
 Towards you and me
 How I wished you
 Happy New Year
 On this killing field

Written by Sunil Ranasinghe,
 26th Dec. 2006 (Sri Lanka)

Source: http://www.rawa.org/sunil_poem.htm

**An Empowering song
By Queen**

I want to break free
 I want to break free
 I want to break free from
 your lies
 You're so self-satisfied I don't
 need you
 I got to to break free
 God knows, God knows I
 want to break free

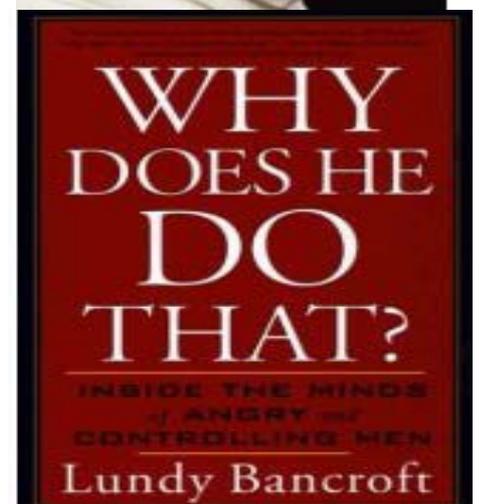
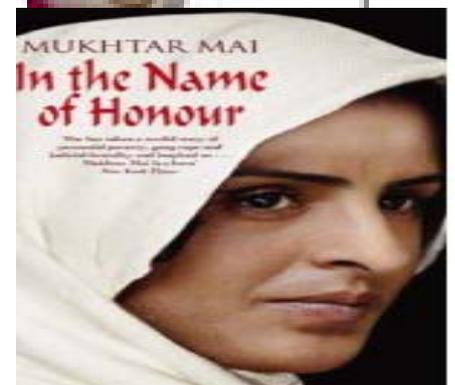
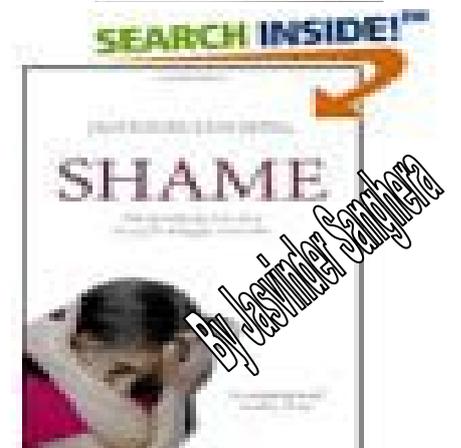
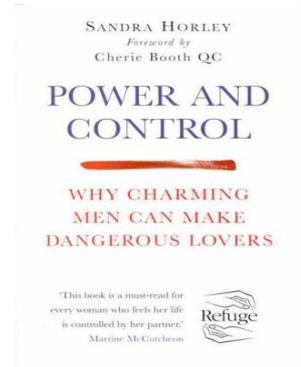
I've fallen in love
 I've fallen in love for the first
 time
 And this time I know it's for
 real
 I've fallen in love, yeah
 God knows, God knows I've
 fallen in love

It's strange but it's true (hey
 yea)
 I can't get over the way you
 love me like you do
 But I have to be sure
 When I walk out that door
 Oh how I want to be free,
 baby
 Oh how I want to be free
 Oh how I want to break free

(INSTRUMENTAL INTERLUDE)

But life still goes on
 I can't get used to live with-
 out, live without, live without
 you
 by my side
 I don't want to live alone, hey
 God knows got to make it on
 my own
 So baby can't you see
 I've got to break free

I've got to break free
 I want to break free, yeah

**Recommended books
For Women
To Read**

Woman's Trust is organising Counselling Skills for Frontline Professionals

Tuesday 6th and Wednesday

7th May 2008

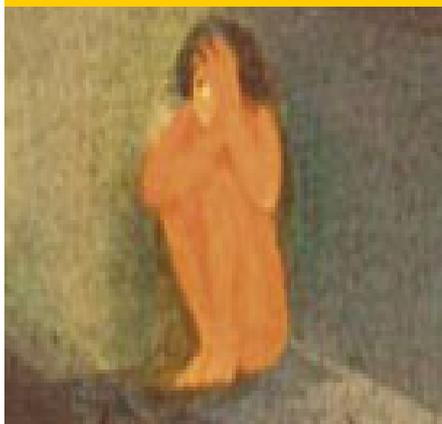
This two-day CSCT counselling skills course aims to increase the confidence and ability of front line workers to communicate effectively and appropriately with clients. Participants will gain the practical experience of using counselling skills and an opportunity to reflect and build on their current communication skills. The course will cover:

- Listening and communication skills
- The differences between providing counselling and using counselling skills
- The importance of establishing appropriate boundaries
- Asking appropriate and helpful questions
- Identifying and overcoming barriers to good communication
- The impact of self-awareness in communication
- Client centred principles
- Ethical interaction with clients
- Conflict Resolution.

For booking information contact the Woman's Trust: administrator@wtrust.entadsl.com

Iranian & Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKRWO)

14th May 2008



Ashiana Network is organising the following training courses:

Forced Marriage and Honour Based Violence (1 Day)

7th July 2008, 4th December 2008

The session is aimed at developing an understanding of forced marriage.

The course will cover:

- Definitions of forced and arranged marriage
- Knowledge of the cultural roots surrounding forced marriage
- Information on marriage law
- An insight into the effects of forced marriage
- Different types of honour based violence
- Suggestions on how to deal with culturally sensitive cases

Cultural & Religious Awareness (1 Day)

29th August 2008, 14th January 2009

The session is aimed at developing an understanding about domestic violence within a cultural context.

The session will cover:

- Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism
- The difference between culture and religion
- Family structures within the South Asian community
- Knowledge of domestic violence within the BME communities
- Religion and Domestic violence

IKRWO's Fourth Annual Conference

IKRWO is holding its fourth annual conference on 'honour' related crimes, violence and oppression and launching the National 'Honour' Crime Helpline in partnership with Karma Nirvana on 14th May 2008

For more information and booking email:

ikwro@yahoo.co.uk
Or access: www.ikwro.org.uk
Or call: 020 7490 0303

Protecting women from perse- cution: claiming asylum and fi- nancial support in the UK

Rights of Women and Asylum Support Appeals Project are designing a new and practical training course that focuses on the needs of asylum seeking women who experience gender-based violence.

This practical course gives an overview of the legal asylum procedure and designed for women professionals in the statutory and voluntary sector. It specifically explores with participants the law that determines who should be granted asylum or human rights protection, what kinds of financial support is permitted and how claims are determined. It will particularly focus on:

- The legal framework for protection (including the Refugee Convention 1951, the European Convention on Human Rights 1950 and the EU Qualification Directive)
- Application for asylum in the UK (including the New Asylum Model and Legacy Cases)
- The different types of status given and refusals
- financial support throughout the process
- the different types of protection given, refusal and appeals
- financial support for failed asylum seekers including section 4 support
- Supporting asylum seeking and refugee women

For more information, booking, costs and copies of training brochure Tel: 020 7251 6575/6 or email: training@row.org.uk or visit: www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

Training & Events

Rights of Women (ROW) is offering new, exciting and updated training courses running throughout 2008 in England and Wales:

These practical courses are designed for those supporting or providing services for BMER women who are affected by domestic and sexual violence.

Just married? the law of marriage, divorce and forced marriage

To coincide with the expected implementation of the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 in autumn 2008, this exciting, new course will update participants on the very latest changes to the law of forced marriage

London 7 May 2008 9.30am – 4.30pm

Safe as houses: domestic violence – women's rights to housing and property

A practical overview of the housing alternatives and legal options available to women following the end of an abusive relationship

London 2 July 2008 9.30am – 1pm

Meeting the needs of trafficked women: immigration and criminal law

To coincide with the coming into force of the Council of Europe's Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings 2005 in Spring 2008, which the UK has signed, this exciting new course will look at immigration and criminal law around trafficking

London 10 September 2008 9.30am – 1pm

Removing the barriers: domestic violence and securing women's position in the UK

Rights of Women have developed this popular course to enable participants to support women who have an insecure immigration status and are experiencing domestic violence. It offers a practical overview of immigration law and procedure

London 23 October 2008 9.30am – 1pm

Pathways to justice: BMER women, domestic violence and relationship breakdown

This new course will explore the remedies available to BMER women experiencing domestic or sexual violence. The course will provide a comprehensive overview of the law that relates to relationship breakdown, divorce, financial matters and children

London 5 November, 9.30am – 1pm
(Also in: Cardiff, Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool and Newcastle)

Finding refuge: gender-based violence and seeking asylum in the UK

This practical new course is designed to introduce participants to the law that determines who should receive asylum or human rights protection in the UK and how their claim is determined. The course will focus on the needs of asylum-seeking women

London 1 October, 9.30am – 1pm
(Also in: Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle, Cardiff, Birmingham and Bristol).

The following courses are offered in partnership with the Nia Project:

Supporting survivors of domestic violence: law and practice

This new course offers participants the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of domestic violence and its impact on women together with a practical overview of the new law relating to domestic violence

London 4 June & 27 November 2008 9.30am – 4.30pm

Supporting survivors of sexual violence: law and practice

This new course offers participants the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of sexual violence and its impact on women together with an essential grounding in the law relating to sexual violence and an understanding of the criminal justice system

London 5 June & 3 December 2008 9.30am – 4.30pm

For more detailed information, costs and booking forms, please contact the Training Officer at Rights of Women: training@row.org.uk Tel: 0207 251 6575/6. Or visit the website: www.rightsofwomen.org.uk.

Centre for Women's Studies is organising a one-day conference: Violence Against Women: Histories, Methodologies, Activism and Research in the honour of Jalna Hanmer, a long-time researcher and activist in the field

York 30/05/2008. 10.30am-6.15pm

Among the speakers Prof Liz Kelly, Prof. Jeff Hearn, Prof. Marianne Hester, Prof Catherine Donovan, Prof Jill Radford, Julie Bindel (journalist and activist) and others. The topics to be addressed will include issues in domestic violence; rape in war and war crimes; men and violence; violence and representation; and histories of activism and research in violence against women. More details of the event and the registration form can be found on the Centre for Women's Studies website (www.york.ac.uk/inst/cws). We very much hope that many of you will attend this event, and will come on 30 May 2008.

For more information & booking: <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/cws/gsp/violenceconf.htm>

Petition Against Rape

Women Against Rape said that:

With so many serial rapists and murderers in the news, women are demanding to know why our



safety continues to be so undervalued. At our recent *Public Trial – the Rape of Justice, who's guilty?* 30 rape survivors gave harrowing testimonies about how their case was closed or evidence lost, leaving their attacker unprosecuted, free to attack someone else. Please help us to increase the mounting pressure on the government and the criminal justice agencies over their unacceptable response to rape, and their refusal to hold accountable their employees who are acting as “collaborators” with rapists.

There are four items below: please sign the petition, read the articles about police refusal to investigate, add your online comments to the press articles below, and/or write to your local press, your MP, and others, and please send us a copy. We look forward to hearing from you.

P e t i t i o n : <http://www.petitiononline.com/WAR08/petition.html>

To read the Guardian Article go to: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/mar/12/ukcrime.gender>

Updates on The Forced Marriage Act

The former Home Secretary Charles Clarke said "Forced marriage is nothing less than an abuse of human rights. It can involve serious forms of duress, including physical assault,"

The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act explains who should be able to ask the courts to take action to stop a forced marriage? Vulnerable people; whether children, teens or adults regardless of their background, gender or religion, in society who have been forced into marriage. The Act gives the courts a wide discretion to deal flexibly and sensitively with the circumstances of each individual case, using civil remedies that will offer protection to victims without criminalising their family members.

The Act sends out a strong message to victims that they have got the government's backing and support. It gives them the power they need to get Forced Marriage Protection Orders from the courts without conditions. The Justice Minister Bridget Prentice said that “This is really vital work. When you look at the situations some of the people affected by forced marriages will be in, it's clear that not all of them will be able to apply personally to the courts for protection. And some victims might not want to take court action against members of their own family. Where this happens we want to make sure that other people or organisations can step in on their behalf.” She also mentioned that it sends out a very clear message that forced marriages are not acceptable and will never be tolerated. The court can directly order those forcing another into marriage to stop, otherwise a set of

requirements would be imposed upon them. If the forcing person fails to obey the court order they could be jailed for contempt of court.

The Act supports the joint work of the Home Office and Foreign Office's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) and the many voluntary and charitable organisations that offer support on this issue.

The FMU deals with around 250 suspected cases a year, most of the involved are linked to South Asian countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh or India (news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4205173.stm). Every year dozens of girls disappear and reported missing from schools, because parents take them abroad to get mar-



ried against their will (www.bbc.co.uk/insideout/content/articles/2007/10/03/northeast_forced_marriage_s12_3_feature.shtml).



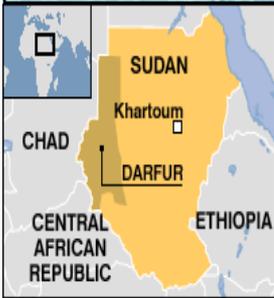
See the following websites:

- www.justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease121207c.htm

- www.justice.gov.uk/publications/cp3107.htm

- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4205173.stm>

- www.bbc.co.uk/insideout/content/articles/2007/10/03/northeast_forced_marriage_s12_3_feature.shtml



Violence Against Women in Darfur: The Rape of Justice, Who's Guilty in Sudan?



Hanan Babikir

On 16th February 2008 Women Against Rape (WAR), Crossroads Women's Centre, celebrated their 30th birthday by conducting a 'public trial' of the British system in Camden Town. The main purpose of the trial is to publicly name and shame the responsible officials. Victims of rape and domestic violence stood up and testify against the authorities they believed were responsible for letting their assailants go free to rape again. Ruth Hall, a founding member of WAR, said that women who had their cases rejected by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) on a daily basis come to us. The CPS will "find many excuses to drop a prosecution or not even start one."

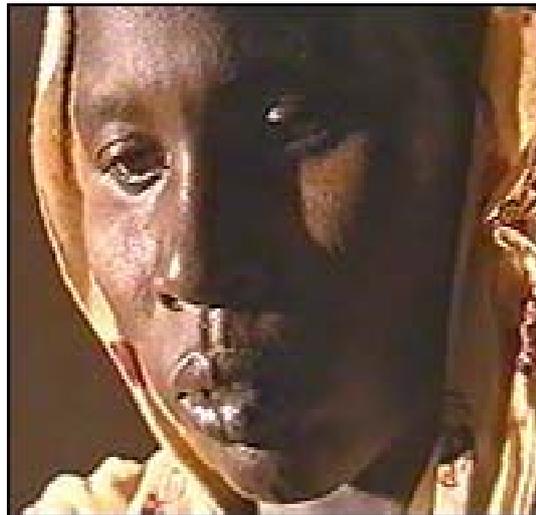
In the UK less than six percent of reported cases get a conviction, which seriously indicates something is wrong and the authorities need to address this failure.

www.womenagainstrape.net/Trial/WARTrialHamHighSmFile-Col.pdf (see: www.guardian.co.uk

Women who testified bitterly spoke about how police officers not only failed to gather existing evidence but also lose vital clues and tape recordings of incidents submitted by victims. They don't even talk to present witnesses. This intolerable behaviour made victims' cases fall short of a fair trial or been tried in courts instead. Although there are modest gains made in improving the chances of victims of rape seeing their attackers jailed WAR still thinks that is far from satisfactory even after their thirty years struggle for justice.

WAR's 'public trial: the rape of justice' made me reflect on what had happened five years ago in February 2003 when 'Janjaweed' militia (i.e. devils on horsebacks) supported by the Sudanese government aircrafts attacked civilians in Southern Darfur Western Sudan. They have been accused of 'ethnic cleansing' of black Africans from the region. They killed more than 200,000 people and displaced more than 2 million to their neighbouring country Chad (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7063331.stm>).

They raped women and girls when they go out to gather firewood for cooking.



Rape is the most violent and mentally destructive act that can happen to a woman especially in a country that claims to govern according to the will of God (Sharia). Since the start of the attacks we constantly hear about all the rapes that happen to women in the displaced camps and no body is doing anything serious about it. Hawa who was raped in broad daylight came in October 2006 to live in a camp outside Kutum said that she "found 21 women and girls have been raped in the camp in the past two week." (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/5405586.stm>).

Khadija said that "Before it was a very big problem and the father or brothers of the girl would kill the person responsible. But now rape has become common because of the fighting. Previously, the girls would be cast out of society and no young man would marry them. She would be ostracised. But now that rape is common the victims are not being ostracised. Society is changing our ideas and they are supporting these women more by letting them live a normal life. But it is still difficult." <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7063331.stm>

However, the rebel groups of Darfuri fighters also account for their fair share of crimes against women. There are similar stories of rapes across Darfur, the figures rising in areas that are now hard to reach (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7063331.stm>).

This just shows how vulnerable these women are in a country where their own government violently attacks them instead of protecting them. Women in Darfur will never find justice because they don't even get the chance to recognise their attackers or a genuine police officer who is not part of the conspiracy.

The government denies links to the Janjaweed militia; however their aircrafts were spotted many times by Western NGOs bombing villages to the extent that they disguised their planes to look like the UN's! (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3496731.stm>)

Some lobbying organisations are targeting Sudanese government's biggest ally China to play a more positive role in ending the suffering of the Darfurians and organising rallies against Beijing's Olympics (darfur.3cdn.net/5d18f8d552eb83103c_hhm6btkwz.pdf).

Two Met Police Officers face disciplinary action over their failure to save Banaz's life

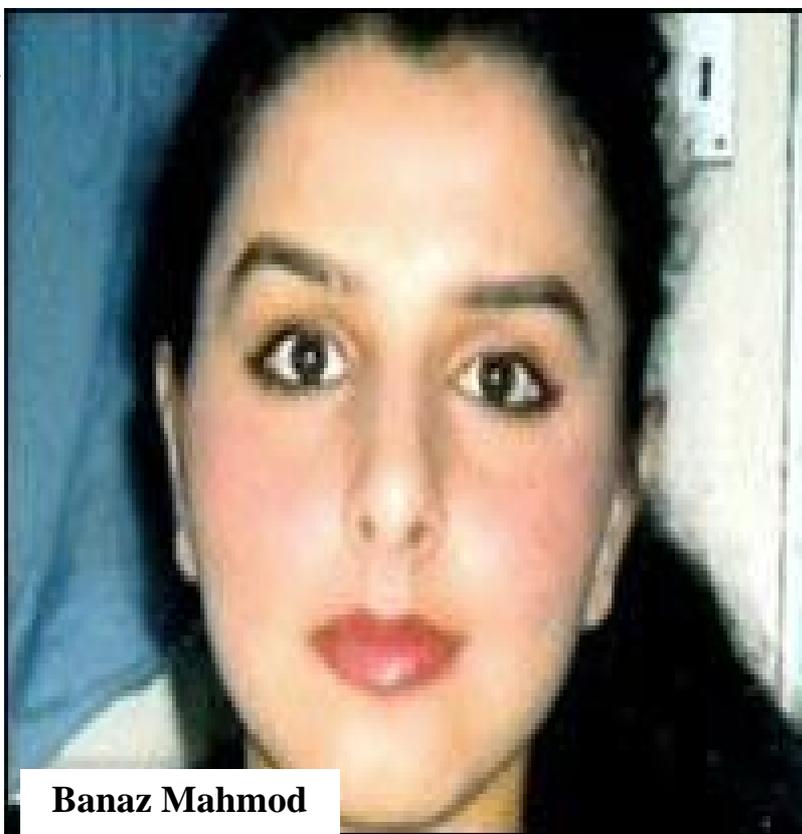
By: Jessica Silverstone

In April 2007, four months after Banaz Mahmud made her last request to the police for protection, the body of 20 year old was found in a suitcase buried in a garden in Birmingham. The police estimate that on average there are 12 honour-based killings a year but lack of reliable data means this number could be much higher. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/7326468.stm>

The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) investigation into the police response to Banaz Mahmud's repeated requests for help prior to her murder recommended that a review of procedures and a reinforcement of frontline knowledge of domestic and honour-based violence would improve future policing practice. This response by the IPCC is not unlike the police initiatives that were prompted by Heshu Abdullah's high profile honour-based killing in 2002. There was a promise then that frontline police officers would receive training to ensure that in future they were able to deal sensitively and appropriately to all potential victims of honour-

based violence. Nevertheless, between 2005 and 2006, Banaz Mahmud approached the police on four separate occasions for protection. Banaz knew she was at risk of an honour-based killing. She had walked out of an abusive marriage that had been arranged for her when she was 17 and now she found herself in love with a man her family did not approve of. Banaz was aware that her self-determination and freedom of expression would be perceived as irrevocably shameful by her family.

While the IPCC found that on two of the four occasions that the Metropoli-



Banaz Mahmud

tan Police Service (MPS) and West Midlands Police Service (WMPS) were approached by Banaz, they showed compassion and a willingness to engage, the IPCC also noted that on these occasions police investigations were seriously flawed and subsequently many lines of enquiry were not followed up.

Further, the IPCC cited a general lack of timeliness and poor supervision as factors that contributed to police failings in her case.

A week or two before Banaz's disappearance and four months before her



Heshu A. Yones

body was found in a suitcase buried in a garden in Birmingham, Banaz made a final plea for police protection. However, while the police officer who saw Banaz in December 2005 noted that she was in fact hysterical, her behaviour was bizarrely dismissed simply as melodramatic and no life saving action was taken.

Kurdistan Refugee Womens' Organisation (KRWO) and the Middle East Centre for Women's Rights (MECWR) cite police insensitivity, irresponsibility, lack of understanding and stereotyping as the factors that contributed to a failure to take Banaz seriously.

Police negligence was a primary contributor to Banaz's death and the officers who dealt with Ba-

naz failed in their public duty to protect her.

The strategies promised in 2002 that would have saved her life were shelved. Frontline police officers had not received formal training on honour-based violence, no risk assessment initiatives were in place to immediately identify the level of risk Banaz faced and further no procedures were in place to ensure her safety. KRWO and MECWR are clear that if there is not an immediate cultural shift within the police force even more lives will be lost.

Al-Nisa: You are running a campaign demanding justice for Surjit and Banaz, who were victims of what's so called 'honour' killings, what do you aim to achieve from it?

Jagdeesh: Both these landmark cases, have revealed the enormous fundamental injustice in the way the British Government, through the Foreign Office, has failed to take positive action on overseas suspects in these types of cases. In both these cases, there are major suspects who remain abroad either by absconding from the UK or by the fact that the murder was committed abroad. The British Government has done nothing to initiate, facilitate and support proceedings for the arrest, investigation, extradition and prosecution of these outstanding suspects.

This again, demonstrates racial double-standards. The British Government has actively pressed and pursued after investigations overseas into the cases of Lucy Blackman (Japan), Kirsty Jones (Thailand) and Madeleine McCann (Portugal). Why this inequality? Why the neglect from the British Foreign Office? Are Surjit, Banaz and the many other UK born, UK resident ethnic minority victims not British enough? Through the online petition, we want to harness public awareness and support, on pressing the British Government on this fundamental issue.

Al-Nisa: What do you hope the government would do in terms of legislations for the potential sufferers of 'honour' based violence? Or if you have a chance to advice Gordon Brown on this matter what would you say?

Jagdeesh: There needs to be decisive legal and public action on this hidden issue, from government level down. Honour violence, forced marriages and associated domestic oppression, is a

definitive practice across Kurdish, Pan-jaabi, Pakistani, Iranian, Bangladeshi, Arab and Indian communities. This culturally defined and culturally driven practice is not mainstream violence or mainstream murderous.

It is a very specific, deliberate, organised and concealed crime in the UK. It is wholly cruel, and driven by domination and power founded on male 'honour'. Like racially-aggravated murder, 'honour' violence and murder need to be treated as definitive crimes in UK law, and receive specific substantive punishment. The British Government needs to show responsibility and leadership on this.

Al-Nisa: As a man, what would your message be for other men who assist in murdering women in the name of family 'honour'? Or for those who force women to marry against their will and also for family 'honour'?

Jagdeesh: As a Sikh male, guided by Sikh feelings and principles, I find the whole subject of honour killing wholly repulsive. It is unacceptable male domination and control. The idea that 'honour' can be used as a justification for retribution and violence is grotesque. This is a twisted idea of 'honour', however, historically and culturally rooted it may be for some communities.

A culture which practices honour violence, is founded on violence and murder. Such a culture goes against natural law and natural justice. Liberty, justice, spiritual growth and exploration and self-determination; is as much a right of women as of men. Men have a moral duty to set a positive lead in combating these sadistic practices. It has been said: "Evil prevails, when good men fall silent?"

Al-Nisa: What could Al-Nisa's readers do and how could they get involved in the campaign?

- (1) They can sign and circulate the online petition to Gordon Brown, calling for robust equal action on the cases of

Banaz Mahmood and Surjit Athwal

www.petitiononline.com/surjit

This currently has 2,000 signatures. We are aiming for 4,000 signatures. We will be delivering the petition on Wednesday 7th May 2008, with support from various campaign groups and, hopefully, support from MPs.

- (2) They can write to their MPs to raise the issue of unequal government action on honour cases.
- (3) Continue to support the various campaigns and groups working on these critical issues.

Al-Nisa: Final thoughts?

Jagdeesh: A huge amount of work needs to be done to expose this horrific pattern of crime which remains insidiously concealed in various immigrant communities in the UK.

We need to break the silence and cover up. Equally, we need the public authorities and the British Government, no less, to actively intervene in breaking the continuing cycle of abuse, violence and murder.

This enjoys freedom to continue as there is no full-scale public condemnation and action on this by the British government.

Victims continue to be abused, and taken abroad to their deaths; with no serious intervention by the British Government. The official inaction is letting this continue. British Prime Ministers do wish to alienate the so-called 'community leaders' who they wish to keep close, for electoral support.

Al-Nisa: What was it like for you as a family of a missing sibling coped with her disappearance and the fact that she might be killed but you can't be sure because no body was found? What was going through your mind all these years? Did you assume her murder when she didn't come back after the wedding in India finished? What did her husband first said to you when they came back and Surjit not with them?

Jagdeesh: Surjit's failure to return along with her mother-in-law in December 1998, immediately triggered our worst fears. When she was leaving on the two-week visit to East Panjaab (India), we were extremely anxious for her. We urged her not to go. Her marriage was in dire straits, and she was experiencing huge pressure and domestic threats because of her decision to divorce from the Athwal family. I personally urged her not to go, but for some unknown reason, she insisted on going. She was not confident about going. She was nervous, but nonetheless insistent. I was very nervous and anxious; and urged her to call by phone when she landed in East Panjaab (India). She never called at any point. We remained worried and anxious throughout, the two weeks. When she failed to return on the 18th December 1998, along with her mother-in-law; it was an emotional bomb explosion for us. We were out of our minds.

We phoned her husband and mother-in-law, many times. They continued to pretend that, they had no knowledge of her whereabouts. They insisted we do not worry, and make no official enquiries; as that would aggravate the problem and bring unwanted attention to both families. They refused to join us when we asked them to accompany us to the Hayes (west London) police station to report her missing. All this suspicious behaviour, confirmed for us that, they were involved in making Surjit disappear.

Al-Nisa: What was it like when you had to approach the official channels; police, CPS, government officials including the commissioner for India, Indian government, etc.? What procedure did you have to follow to finally get to the trial? What role did the UK's government (foreign office) play in approaching India's government officials to obtain answers to your questions about your missing sister?

Jagdeesh: We were thrust into a maze. We contacted all official sources, in the UK and India, for help and action. However, the overall response was disinterest and inaction. Only the UK Metropolitan Police, in all of the various bodies and governments concerned, decided to take



Surjit Athwal

some action. The Metropolitan Police conducted an investigation, which ran over many years. Meanwhile, the Indian Government, Indian Police and British Foreign Minister and Foreign Office, failed to take any significant action. The latter responded to one or two letters, with general non-committal information. The Indian Police conducted a short minimalist enquiry, following repeated pressure from our family. This enquiry proved too weak to secure a prosecution of suspects in East Panjaab. There was no joined up action between all the concerned bodies. The UK Metropolitan

Police worked in isolation, single-handedly. There was no encouragement and support from the Indian and British government, just plain silence and inaction. It is only because of god's enduring protective support that we have come through this torturous process. The inaction of the British and Indian governments have served as a double injustice, on top of the murder of Surjit. The British and Indian government's have failed in their moral and public duty, and served to help the murderers cover their crime and prolong the struggle and agony of our family.

Al-Nisa: Why do you think Sukhdave and Bachan Athwal managed to get away with their lies about Surjit Athwal's disappearance for 9 whole years without even proper questioning from the police? Do you think there was lack of judgement or institutional racism in connection with BMER matters in the UK?

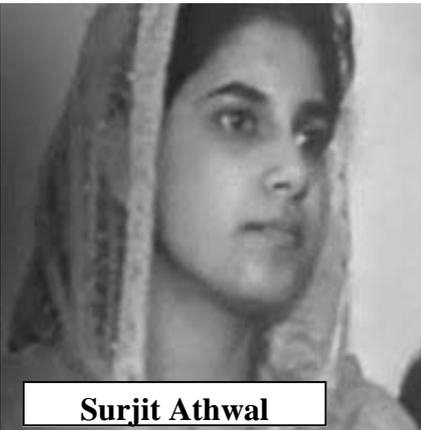
Jagdeesh: The UK police investigation proved to be lacking in thrust and direction. Even some of the lead officers, were not convinced about the fact that Surjit was dead and continued to treat her only as a missing person. It is now clear that, a series of misjudgments were made, based on cultural ignorance, poor knowledge of disappearances abroad and a general incoherent attitude to the case. It is clear that, for a long while the police continued to give undue reliance to the information being supplied by the Athwal murderers. Opportunities to ask some decisive and penetrating questions, were missed. Eventually, in 2004, Surjit's case came to a new team of officers. They applied a fresh, vigorous approach to the case. They were convinced about her murder, and worked with a solid commitment to convicting the culprits. Their work, resulted in the criminal prosecution of Surjit's husband and mother-in-law in 2007 - eight years after her concealed murder.

Justice For Surjit Athwal and Banaz Mahmood Interview with Jagdeesh Singh

On 19th September 2007, Bachan Athwal and her son Sukhdave were sentenced to life imprisonment for the killing, in the name of "honour", Sukdave's wife Surjit Athwal. Surjit disappeared after going to a family wedding with her mother-in-law, in East Panjaab, India in December 1998. Bachan reportedly boasted to some family members that she had arranged the killing of Surjit and disposal of the body in a river. Bachan had discovered that Surjit was involved in another relationship and wanted to ask Sukhdave to divorce her. Unfortunately, Surjit's family has never recovered her body. To read the full article see:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/crime/article/0,,2172489,00.html>

Surjit's brother, Jagdeesh Singh, pointed out that since 1998 the police and the Foreign Office failed to gather the sufficient evidence needed for a prosecution. He is asking for a public inquiry to address that failure. He is lead-



ing a campaign to bring justice to Surjit, Banaz and others, by extraditing to the UK, the actual "honour" murderers who were left at large without punishment.

First of all we are sorry to hear about your sister's sad fate, but pleased that her vicious killers are now behind bars serving a well deserved sentence.

Al-Nisa: After the trial of your sister Surjit Athwal's murderers in 2007 we came to know that she was missing for 9 years and nothing was done about her disappearance in December 1998. Why do you think it had taken the police and you (Surjit family) this long to know she was murdered and get her murderers to stand trial?

Jagdeesh: It has taken this long, due to a failure by the British police combined with a major failure by the British Foreign Office to apply serious effort in Surjit's case immediately after her suspicious disappearance.

The case was the victim of slow action, inactivity, stops and starts; for many years after her disappearance. This collective failure is shared between the UK police, British Government, Indian Government and Indian police. If we as a family had not remained committed and persistent, the case would have been left to fizzle away. The case was only picked up, at the start, by the British authorities, because we made a fuss about it. What if we had not made a fuss? Surjit's murder would not even have been investigated, at all!

We urged the British Foreign Office to make immediate official representations to the Indian Government to instigate an enquiry into Surjit's disappearance. The Foreign Office did not act immediately. It wasn't until 2003 – four years after Surjit's disappearance, that they wrote their first official letter to the Indian Ministry of External affairs. No concrete action followed from the Foreign Office or the British Foreign Minister. We watched aghast, as we saw the Foreign Minister and British PM take official



action on the cases of Lucy Blackman, who disappeared in Japan in 2000, and Kirsty Jones murdered in Thailand in 2000. Surjit's case received none of this official action. Why the double-standards? Why the discrimination?

If the British government had asserted their official influence with India, Surjit's case would have been properly investigated rapidly after her disappearance; just like Lucy Blackman's case in Japan. The continuous inaction of the Foreign Office, enabled the Indian authorities to remain inactive and unresponsive to our concerns.

Surjit's case was neglected and left to drift into oblivion. We as a family, had to fight and protest publicly for action.

The search for justice became one whole agonising journey, fighting against obstinate inaction, non-explanation, non-accountability and discrimination from the highest levels of the British Government.

It was a David versus Goliath battle for justice.

In 2004, a fresh set of investigation officers (Metropolitan Police) took over the case, led by DCI Clive Driscoll. They understood the case fully, and were committed to taking it forward. They re-invigorated the case, and brought it to a successful prosecution in 2007! Their positive attitude and determination, made all the difference.

The women's sector which one the professional one or the grass roots one or the street one or the underground one??? Women and girls in the UK are taking refuge anywhere they find it and are open to extreme exploitation. I have met women who are unpaid; women who are putting women and girls up with no recourse to public funds because no other refuges or women's sector can. Housing benefit is not applicable and once again money takes precedence over a woman and girls' safety. These unpaid women put them selves at risk from honour killings, sex industry violence and are often on the poverty line themselves. They do it because it's the right thing to do, as a human being.

Al-Nisa: What are you hoping to achieve from such event? What's the initiative's future? Would a trust or organisation emerge to adopt and continue this march every year?

Sabrina: The main intent of this march and gathering is for us women to hold up a mirror to ourselves to feel our energy together; powerful and positive; in time we will feel the rage and

Anger together over issues such as the ever-present institutionalized discrimination faced by women, particularly sistas of colour, differently baled and other marginalised womyn. Confronting patri-



archal, racist domination, the March and rally will bring womynist/feminist focus to bear on: state sanctioned violence - that war and other such 'conflicts' impact on us massively. Three out of four fatalities of war are women and children. The 'no recourse' requirement for abused women who have insecure immigration status. This legislation denies women who leave abusive partners access to

benefits/financial support. The trafficking / commoditization of women - increasing numbers of women are being trafficked into and out of the UK for sexual exploitation.

The ever diminishing rape conviction rates - the UK has one of the lowest rates in Europe.

The corporate media's misrepresentation and objectification of women's bodies throughout all media forms.

It is this anger that we want to harness; together in solidarity and not turn in on ourselves but to hold the vision from the focus that anger will bring and we women together on this day and allow us to voice our outrage and collectively develop strategies for protection and defense through creative women's circles such as the million women camp planned for July this year, and the million women rise album where we are encouraging women to get involved.

'After the march MWR will continue to engage with women, the public, government and international bodies. And next year MWR will march again and the following year and the year after that. So long as women want to march we will march with them; for women in the UK and internationally; until violence against women has



Sabrina Qureshi

I encouraged her (the young survivor) to think of what could be done and a vision of a critical mass of women coming together in solidarity against violence against women rose. It was then when I began talking to friends, colleagues or just any one who would listen about a march, a gathering of and a friend told me about the million man march that happened in America in 1996. I went on the net straight away and discovered the million woman march that took place a year later in 1997. This was a march that was for women of African decent and the images of black women who had come together inspired me further.

Al-Nisa: Is there any significance for the event to be a women only event? why men are excluded? Does it imply that all men are perpetrators?



Sabrina: I personally welcome the day when a million men march the streets of London or any country in protest against male violence committed against women. I also believe strongly that the million women rise march should only be for women and girls especially on International women's day. Girls need their space too and as women we should provide that for them with a sense of pride and respect for our womaness. This march is women only not just because a woman may not feel safe with men

around because of the violence she has experienced or witnessed but because women need a space to come together as a mass and gather energy from each other and the energy we build together can be harnessed to bring about positive change which is ultimately good for the whole.

I live as neighbours to Arsenal Football ground and men alone together; father and sons and grandsons; up to 80 thousand 98 percent are men and boys pour into the stadium, my house shakes as they cheer together or boo, the energy and bonding is a good thing other than when they break into violence which they often do. Internationally women's spaces are becoming less. War, poverty, capitalism and all forms of violence against women is limiting our places to come together and share experiences and grow solidarity. Male violence against women affects all women; be you from Iraq, China, Zimbabwe or London. Women experience male violence and it is a global pandemic and this is why the march is essential as it is empowering women to join forces in the UK and Internationally; our strength and answer to our prayers as women is in our unity against this issue. To end violence against women and girls is to sow the seeds that will end all wars. Let us demand the respect we deserve; universally in one voice.

Al-Nisa: How are you going to fund the event? Do you have sponsors? Are you organising your own fundraising activities? Would you like to tell us about your helpers and forthcoming events?

Sabrina: We have raised money through the love of women through fundraising benefits. We have no sponsorship presently, but we have had promising support from unions such as CWU and PCS and unison but nothing substantial. The one thing we are rich in are women; there is an average of 30 million women in the UK, We have just received funds from the global women's fund.

Al-Nisa: How many and which organisations targeted to join the campaign? How many joined so far? Do you have a message for those who didn't join yet? Are you going to target MPs or governmental bodies to join your campaign?

Sabrina: This has been a calling to all women to take the issue to where they want it to go, to join us on the 8th March in solidarity to end violence against women and to let the women who are still under occupation be it in the home, at work and in war zones; women who are incarcerated world wide in starvation and facing death due to the lack of health care and medication; that we do care.

We women who join in the solidarity of a million women rise be it, physically or spiritually we care. If women are MP's, heads of women's



groups or schools, or hospital or of unions; hear the calling, spread the word and come. This is not about any one organisation or a group of women. This is about woman internationally and it is only through our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual economic solidarity that we will bring about the social change and one that men will want to respect. Divide and rule down to each organisation having to compete for funding for a crime that men commit in the first place is time to stop.

8th of March Million Women Rise Interview with Sabrina

This all-woman march against all forms of male violence against women, was organised by Sabrina Qureshi and supported by women members of; Middle East Centre for Women's Rights, Kurdistan Refugee Women Organisation, Women Against Rape, Women's Resource Centre, trade unions and political organisations, feminist groups, sex workers, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Women's Network of the international action network on small arms and Women's Institute.

Al-Nisa: Sabrina, can you tell us some thing about your self , your work and the idea of a Million women Rise?

Sabrina: I am a woman who believes that we can end violence against women in our lifetime.

A rage from within myself at the lack of woman centered provisions for women and girls; my feelings were that this was not good enough. pressured into ending resettlement support for women survivor's after only 6 months due to the lack of funding. The rage I felt when reading that a 19 year old girl was offered a lap dancing job at her local job centre; the fear witnessed in a clients face when she was returning back to her abuser after a counselling session because she believed she had to; the lack of real choices that women, strong and vulnerable really have, it felt that although personally having witnessed the strength of a strong women's community which I felt part of as a young woman who enjoyed the fruits of the pioneering women who had gone before me; where had that women's movement gone? I realised like many other women colleagues, friends and family and women who I have yet to meet in

the UK and internationally it was us. the time was now and the power was in the calling of all us women to unite against male violence.

Al-Nisa: where did the idea of 'Million Women Rise' come from? Is there any significance for the name, number or timing to you?

Sabrina: The idea of million women rise came from a young woman survivor who I had the honour to work with and she was outraged by the violence that women face, she felt powerless; as I had witnessed from so many other women,



colleagues, friends and family express; an anger and grieve as well as a numbness at times and at worse an acceptance that this was how it is. I refuse to believe that this is how it is ! for women not just here in the UK but internationally. I am a descendent of a line of Pakistani and Indian ancestry born in mile end hospital, East London to a very strong matriarchal household. My mother was the eldest of seven sisters who came to England fifty years ago this year. She became a widow in February 1971, she gave birth to me in September the same year; so she was a widow; I was brought up by a 'single parent' and was blessed as far as I could see from a young age not to have a man

running our household I felt it was a good thing; I have two older sisters, which makes us three. The majority of what I witnessed about men was violent and charming and often smelly. Men dominate women. I have met lovely, gentle men but they are far and few between but then who really knows them as well as their most intimate; and if they are good men they are blessed. I say with the strongest conviction that the majority of men are violent because they hold the majority of power and control that presently exist in our society. This is a fact not my opinion despite if women are more increasingly in power; the fact remains that men hold the power and control; this being true only points to the fact that men indorse violence against women because they allow it to go on. In the UK and the Americas and Internationally women academics, grass roots workers, lawyers, teachers, survivors, psychologists and doctors have presented society, communities and the governments with solutions and preventive

measures to end violence against women. I have witnessed this movement silently as it has been going on in different groups of women; breaking the silence, wanting to see social change and for me the last several years have gone by in total disconnectedness amongst the women groups due to competitive grant applications that drive groups to misrepresent what they are doing cheaper than they are doing it in order to get some money to run the crucial women only services which has lead to raising the stakes to include men's service, when we break this down even further it's the BMER women's groups that suffer the most!

Middle East Centre For Women's Rights' March 08 Activities

The Middle East Centre for Women's Rights (MECWR) organised a seminar on 1st March in Kurdish as part of Southwark's International Women's Week event to discuss the widespread of 'honour' killings in Europe.

They also organised a conference on 28th March 2008 titled 'End Honour Based Violence (HBV): the way forward'. The aim of the conference was to check on the progress of the initiatives and services for women who are at risk of HBV, both in the statutory and voluntary sector. The themes of the conference were:

- To update the conference on the new initiatives and services that have been developed by police, social services, Home Office's forced marriage unit (FMU) and the women organisation especially the BMER organisations.
- To look at the funding crisis that facing specialist services for women, persecuting overseas perpetrators and the legal remedies for women to protect them from HBV such as FGM Criminal Law and Forced Marriages Civil Law.

250 delegates attended from



The next speaker was Jagdeesh Singh who gave an overview of the murder of his sister; Surjit Athwal and his campaign which lasted 8 years to bring perpetrators to justice for murdering his sister.

Followed by a presentation from Steve Deehan from Association

of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) who spoke about ACPO's strategy on HBV and the launching of special helpline for HBV and forced marriages and other police initiatives to support potential victims.

The afternoon session started with a presentation from Khalida ElHafiz from FORWARD who talked about the effects of FGM in the UK.

The last presentation by Shilian Shah from FMU, where she introduced the Home Office initiative on forced marriages and the work of the FMU in helping women.

The conference was unique in bringing many relevant agencies who want to learn and share information and knowledge about HBV and the services needed to effectively support women at risk.

all over the UK. Professionals from the police force, social services, housing, home office, staff from women organisations and many academic students and researchers. The conference started with an introduction by Gona Saed, the Development Worker in MECWR and facilitator of the Combating HBV forum.

First speakers consisted of Hannanah Siddiqui from Southall Black Sisters, Nazir Afzal from CPS, Sawsan Salim the director of Kurdistan Refugee Women Organisation, Geeta Patel from IMKAAN and Aisha Gill from Roehampton University.

They debated the HBV, framework of violence and Domestic Violence. The way the CPS is dealing with overseas perpetrators and the crisis of funding cuts to specialist women services.

Women's Organisations'

Funding Crisis

What's the way out?



Nadia Mahmood

I would like to thank Hanan, who solely collected the information for Al-Nisa, Issue 12, by conduction the interviews, translated them, edited and proof read it, design and I have no doubt will email to 3 thousands recipients.

Hanan had a masters' degree years ago and work as a volunteer with us. She looked for employment and still searching to support her children. It seems challenging for women these days to find a job in the women's voluntary sector. It's not just for Hanan as an individual, our women organisations, who provided amazing wonderful services in support for protecting women's rights regardless of their cultural heritage, are facing financial hardships, which threaten the continuity of their invaluable service.

An extraordinary dilemma, in the time the needs for our service increased funding and other financial support decreased!

The first annual conference for our Combating Honour Based Violence Forum was a success, attended by more than 200 delegates from all over Britain. This was a clear indication as to how our community work, knowledge and skills are desperately needed. We believe our service is unique, but despite the fact that we live in one of the world's richest country, our precious communities' projects face closure, our employees dismissed, our offices closed and our working power decreased. While the phone doesn't stop from ringing, letters and emails continue to come to us and work increases and spread widely to the extent that our limited staffing can't deal with.

Don't you think that's a real dilemma that needs explanation?

Middle East Centre for Women's Rights will merge soon with our long working partner Kurdistan Refugee Women's Organisation, because of the financial hardships on one hand, and to unite our long working efforts together for years in one organisation. We think it's been a long successful partnership and it's time to get married!

We all happily look forward to the start of our continued partnership with our sister organisation, and we will deliver and face the challenges together.

I really enjoyed reading this issue and hope you do too.

Nadia, April 2008

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