

No 15

May 1994

# **WRI WOMEN**



**the  
newsletter  
of the  
women's  
working  
group of  
War Resisters  
International**



On the Abuse  
of Survivors  
Women's March  
in Cambodia  
Sex Tourism:  
the Men

**New Address: War Resisters International  
5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX, UK**

Newsletter of the Women's Working Group  
of the War Resisters International

Editor: Shelley Anderson  
Lay-out: Françoise Pottier

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Thanks to all the contributors. Opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the view of WRI.

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# SEX, LIES AND MILITARISM

Last year marked the centennial, or the first 100 years, of women's suffrage. The celebrations were very low key, except in Aotearoa (New Zealand), where women were first granted the right to vote in 1893. The gaining of political power by women is not something much of the world seems to think is important.

Some women consider voting a reactionary act, one that legitimizes electoral systems that lost any real semblance of democracy years old. Certainly, given the close connection between the rise of the nation state, the cult of the warrior and patriarchy, all the implications of nationalism that cluster around voting are problematic for women.

Other women have given their lives to win the vote for women, and for men. Women, especially African-American women organizers, were beaten and killed during the voter registration drives of the 1960s in the southern USA. This is being written as others are dying in South Africa as that country prepares for its first truly democratic election.

## VOTES FOR WOMEN.



**THE WOMEN'S SOCIAL & POLITICAL UNION,  
4, Clements Inn, Strand, W.C.**

The 19th century women's suffrage movement was the grandmother of the women's movement for peace today. Many of today's direct action tactics were pioneered by those early feminists; the suffrage movement was also an example of international solidarity, bringing Japanese and Indian feminists together with their Europe and North America counterparts. Those women knew that suffrage was just the first step toward women's gaining a say in the decisions that affected their lives. Their goals went far beyond that of just winning the vote. They also knew that militarism was an enemy of women's equality.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the brilliant strategist of the US women's suffrage movement, scoffed at the then-prevailing argument that women should not vote because they couldn't be soldiers. Citizenship isn't based on the gun, she said. No one, man or woman, should be a soldier, because war wasn't a natural state for humans.

There are still those who link citizenship with guns, who want to determine by violence just who has the right to participate in their country and who doesn't. In the following pages are articles about Women in Black (Belgrade), about Cambodian women, about women from Southern Africa who are working to violence and to promote women's equality. There's an article from a lesbian group in Croatia, where nationalist leaders condemn lesbians for not producing babies for the country's army; and another article on how white racism and male ideas about gender fuel sex tourism.

There are also those who see women's increased participation in the military as a step towards equality. This is one of the discussions now going on in preparations for the 4th United Nation's World Conference on Women (WCW). The outcome may be a recommendation in the WCW's action plan that countries recruit and train more women for military service. You can read more about the WRI Women's Working Group discussions on an appropriate response to the WCW in the following pages.

Who gets to be a citizen and who doesn't? Who decides? Is the idea of citizenship, of belonging to a particular country or state, also dependent on ideas about gender and nationalism, like militarism itself? It's a complicated business unravelling the threads of identity, sex, citizenship and militarism. If women don't come up with our own answers, others will impose their answers on us. We've made a lot of progress since 1893. We still have a long way to go.

Shelley Anderson

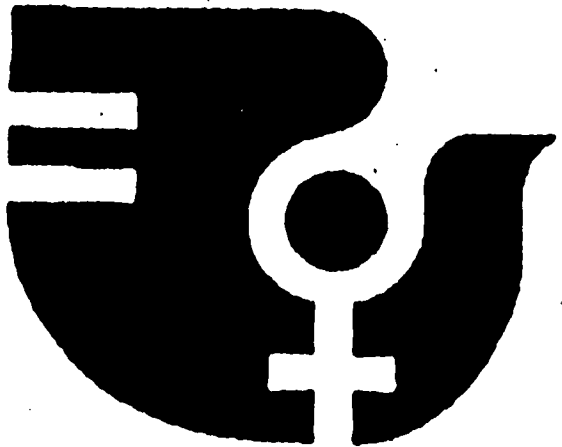
# WRI WOMEN'S WORKING GROUP AND THE BEIJING CONFERENCE

A core group meeting of the WRI Women's Working Group was held in London on March 24. The meeting opened with a warm welcome for Dominique Saillard, the new WRI and *Peace News* staff member. Several important issues were on the agenda: how to improve communication and keep in touch with women interested in the women's working group; the process for accepting new core group members; an evaluation of the Days of Action (including the "Crossing the Lines" campaign); the women's presentation at the upcoming (December 1994) Triennial in Brazil; and more. It was decided that the *WRI Women's Newsletter* will be published three times this year, and then perhaps on a quarterly basis, in order to improve communication. Maggie Helwig, who has moved to London from Canada, will continue her capable work as convenor of the group and help with coordinating preparations for the Triennial. The next meeting of the women's working group will be July 8, in London.

The upcoming (September 1995) United Nations World Conference on Women (WCW) was also discussed. It was strongly felt, for the reasons given below, that the WRI Women's Working Group should not have a presence at the WCW itself. A draft statement was drawn up explaining the reasons. The question was then asked, "What should our strategy be regarding the regional preparatory meetings? Should the women's working group boycott these also or try to influence the agenda setting process?"

Some members had previously expressed concern that a strong anti-militarist voice was needed, in order to make sure that the WCW does not recommend increasing the

number of women in the world's militaries. Within the WCW organization there are those who argue that the militarization of women promotes women's equality, by providing jobs and access to decision making. If the WCW action plan does recommend the increased



recruitment and training of women, this could influence many international and national policies and programs. While there are excellent reasons to condemn the venue for the WCW, who is going to oppose the militarization of women? The debate about participation in the WCW preparatory meetings is still being discussed.

## **Why the WRI Women's Working Group Will Not Go to Beijing**

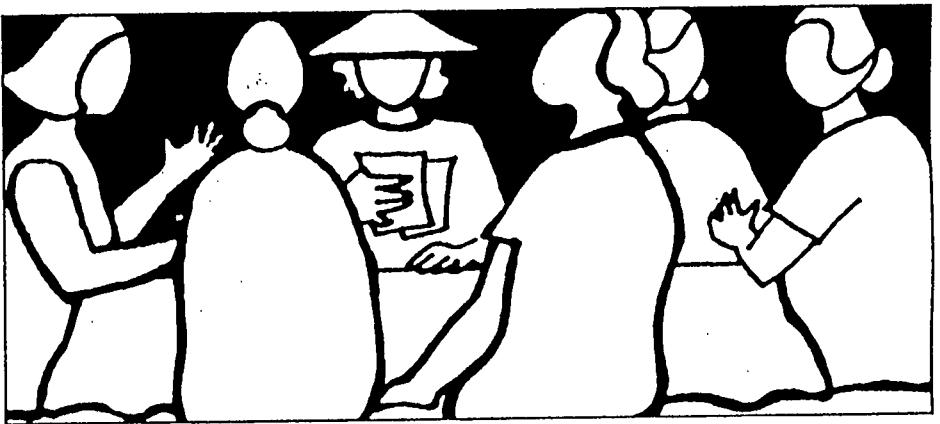
1. The Chinese government is maintaining an illegal military occupation of Tibet. Many Tibetan women have been imprisoned for peaceful independence protests, held under appalling conditions and usually subjected to torture, including sexual abuse; the reports that perhaps thousands of Tibetan women are being subjected to forced abortions need to be investigated immediately.
2. The population control policy of the Chinese government amounts to a systematic attack on women's rights. Chinese women may be subjected to forced abortions or birth control; women who bear more than one child face legal discrimination against themselves and their children.
3. The Chinese government is waging a relentless repression against autonomous civilian initiatives and organizations. The only women's groups allowed to function are those operating under the strict control of the Communist Party, mainly the All-China Federation of Women (ACFW). The 1995 UN conference would be completely monopolized by the government and the party-controlled ACFW. There will be no space for any independent voices or discussions which are not sanctioned by the government. The government-organized UN Conference would actually be blocking significant discussions and meetings which bear meaningful relevance to the problems and solutions facing women in China.
4. The only reason the Chinese government wants to hold this conference is to show its citizens and the world that it is getting support from the international community, despite its flagrant violations of human rights. The 1995 conference would legitimate the repressive regime in China and elsewhere.
5. The Chinese government will be extra vigilant from now until the conference against any signs of independent organizing by women's groups or on women's rights all across the country, especially near Beijing. Official vigilance will include secret police surveillance, intimidation, and detention.

It is standard practice for the government to carry out detentions and police intimidation to ward off any expressions of unsanctioned opinions or activities during important national and international meetings. For example, during the government's lobbying for

the 2000 Olympic, the state coerced support from citizens and organizations across the country. Shops and work units were forced to display posters and banners declaring their support to holding the Olympics in China. People and organizations will be coerced into giving donations to the event, which will worsen the already meagre income and resources of ordinary people.

In March 1994, at least two dozen activists were detained by the Public Security Bureau (PSB) during the National Peoples' Congress (the Chinese parliament) and the Chinese Peoples Political Consultative Conference in Beijing. Most of the detainees were arrested simply because they were active or had expressed their own opinions about the state. Similar police intimidation and detentions will take place during the 1995 UN WCW. As a result, instead of supporting efforts for the promotion of women rights, the meeting will actually add extra pressure on and victimize activists.

6. Independent women groups not sanctioned by the Chinese government would not be allowed to attend. This censorship applies to both inside and outside the country, most notably women's groups from Taiwan, Hongkong, Tibetan women living in India and Macau.
7. It is almost certain that many topics would be ruled off the agenda by the Chinese government. These would include not only the status of Tibet--and perhaps parallel cases such as East Timor--but issues such as coercive birth control and abortion, and any discussion of lesbianism and lesbian rights.



# THE ABUSE OF VICTIMS

By Stasa Zajovic

Since the beginning of the wars in ex-Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the image of the suffering of the civilian population projected by the major television networks is usually a variation on the image of the woman-victim, who, exhausted, humble and in tears, carries a child in her arms. If she is shown as a rape victim, that image is emphasized even more.

Endless scenes of suffering women served as a pretext for the Gulf War intervention in the Iraq-Kuwait conflict; the raped women in Bosnia were to be "protected by an efficient military intervention."

The abuse of victims and human suffering for political purposes is widely practised in this war; by the nation-state, by the media, even by humanitarian organisations. On the other hand, what such institutions don't seem to be willing to acknowledge is the fact that in Serbia and the other republics of ex-Yugoslavia women are the most active members of anti-war movements and the driving force behind most pacifist groups, human rights organisations and non-governmental agencies.

## MEDIA AND THE MILITARIST EXPLOITATION OF RAPE

Between the fall of 1992 and the fall of the following year, rape of women in Bosnia was a "media hit". Scores of reporters visited refugee and other camps and hospitals in search of "information"—the supreme right of western civilization.

They were not satisfied with just any victims; their picture had to meet certain criteria and expectations. Their attitude was focused on 'victimization', which negated the integrity of the women and elicited indignation from women who do not enjoy being labelled "victims."

At the Meeting of Female Solidarity held in September 1993 in Merida, Spain, Radmila Zarkovic said, "Very often I get disgusted with newsmen from Europe. Their typical demands are: we want a Croatian woman married to a Muslim who is still in Bosnia. I usually ask them, 'Should she also be a rape victim?' The stories of such newsmen are cliches with which we are expected to comply." A telling joke: "What does a newsman ask when he come to a camp? The answer: 'Anyone here been raped and speak English?'"



When women from autonomous feminist groups have visited rape victims, the raped women's first reaction is, "Don't you have a camera? You are the first one not to ask these questions."

It is true that for the first time in history war-rape is being talked about while the war is still happening. However, it turned out that the unusual interest in raped women did not tend towards their protection but towards the achievement of various political aims. The big media, above all CNN (a US news channel), wanted to create a psychological climate to justify a possible military intervention "in defense of innocent victims." As feminist analyst Cynthia Enloe writes, "It would not have been possible without a feminization of victims."



Political interests separated the victims on ethnic grounds. Initially, the West talked only about raped Moslem and Croatian women while Serbia lamented the fate of raped Serbian women, which in both cases fomented interethnic hatred.

The members of the patriarchal brotherhood consider rape a violation of male honour. But raped women can regain honour by killing or by committing suicide. "Many victims of rape have committed suicide," reports Duca in 1992. "One Dragana, mother of two, acted like a real hero at a torture chamber in Bosanski Brod. To avoid falling into her tormentors' hands, she shot herself in the mouth."

The ideal of honour deserves a special place in patriarchal history. Another chapter could be devoted to the suffering mother: for example, the great Serbian mother of the Jugovic clan who offers her sons to the fatherland without shedding a single tear. From Homer to the present day, war is the basis of western civilization and the mother is the guardian of death.

In ancient Greece, the cause of death was listed in public records in only two cases: death on the battlefield and death in childbirth. Such equivalence of childbirth and war, the cradle and the grave, has been characteristic of every war so far; thus, during the first year of the war in Croatia, the main news of the Serbian radio in Krajina was of deaths in battle and of births. After dedicating her entire life to the task of reproduction, to bearing and raising

sons, the woman gives them to the fatherland. "Even the generals wept," wrote Politika recently of one such woman. "Three hearts of a single mother have been built into the freedom of the proud Serbian people. Her heart ached, but she didn't shed a single tear." A similar necrophilic practice can be seen in Alija Izetbegovic's description of a mother who has lost a son: "Everyone present at the funeral was crying, both the women and the soldiers, except the mother. She said, 'We do not grieve over the loss of our sons. On the contrary, we are proud of it.' "

## THE NATIONAL STATE AS COLLECTIVE VICTIM

Since nationalism was promoted to the status of the official ideology in Serbia in 1987 (during the so-called "Anti-bureaucratic Revolution"), the image of the Serbian nation as the epitome of good has been maintained and embellished. The Serbian people are presented as a collective "martyr" which, because of 'naivete', 'magnanimity' and 'tendency to yield' has always been the 'victim of all kinds of conspiracies.' The apostles of nationalism, who are naturally 'public servants', recommend that 'the heavenly Serbian people come to its senses,' and free itself of its numerous enemies. Headed by the 'divine' leader Milosevic, it must mobilise its military potential against 'evil' (that is, all other nations in its territory and their civilian populations). Blessed by a wise Patriarch, the 'holy' Serbian warriors will do this job correctly.

This transformation of the aggressor into the victim serves no other purpose than to compensate for the feeling of powerlessness, turning it into a fatalism which accepts even collective suicide. This fatalism in its turn creates ideal conditions for the undisrupted perpetuation of the regime's power.

Another national state which more or less follows this logic is the Croatian state. Its version of patriarchal logic rests on the unquestioned dichotomy of aggressor and victim, in which a male army (the Serbian Yugoslav People's Army) does violence to the female Croatian land. Adherence to this dichotomy created painful tensions at a feminist meeting held in February 1992 in Venice. Some feminists from Zagreb erected a wall between us: on one side of that wall were we "from the aggressor country", on the other side they "from the attacked country." Such symbolic walls have their origin in the patriarchal myth which prescribes that when the homeland (a woman) is at war, women from the warring lands should also be at war.

By accepting the analogy between one's homeland and a victimised woman, one could easily turn into an accomplice in a war. Identifying with male and militarist states means internalising militarist logic. Accusing women from an 'enemy' country, especially women who have opposed 'their' militarist state, plays into a patriarchal strategy of eliciting feelings of guilt for something which the men of 'my' nation have done. Not women; no one asked women if they wanted this war. If we identify our experience with that of the

fatherland, the land of fathers, we are applying for a place next to the sons/heroes who have given their lives on the altars of that fatherland, which has nothing to do with the homeland of women as 'a land of life and feelings.'

The victim is, therefore, neither the fatherland nor the state but all those who have been deprived of choice, including the choice to live, while aggressors are those who destroy life, regardless of their nationality or the goals they advocate.

Experience has taught us that those who are fascinated by the fatherland and its history are precisely the people who kill and destroy.

## **ABUSE OF REFUGEES AND CIVILIANS IN SERBIA**

Having suffered violence in war-torn areas, refugees are repeatedly exposed to economic, psychological and political violence in the 'home' state as well. Women refugees who are not Serbian or whose husbands are not Serbs are blackmailed. Adult male refugees are subject to compulsory mobilisation for the front in Bosnia or treated as a 'reserve army' in case of internal conflicts in Serbia. Depending on the needs of the regime, refugees are abused in many other ways. During the 1992 elections they were employed as a voting machine; now they serve as scapegoats for the desperate economic situation (though the state has accommodated only 4.5% of 580,000 registered refugees and has found employment for only 10,000). If refugees are "ideologically deviant" and, for example, refuse to take part in the war, they are subject to additional persecution.

The embargo has affected only Serbia's civilian population. Women bear the brunt of the misery caused by it. The state-sponsored media have been trying hard to absolve the regime of all responsibility for the war and poverty by blaming others. We are shown terrible scenes of massacres whose victims are mostly Serbian. These scenes are presented as a call to vengeance. According to public opinion polls done by the independent media from Belgrade, in 95% of all cases the motive for joining a paramilitary unit was, "I can't stand watching television scenes of my people's suffering."

Such scenes serve as well to silence people or give sham consolation. Identifying with the 'victim', the recipient is likely to have reactions such as, "that could have been me," "things could be even worse," "I live well in comparison to those people." The purpose of such manipulation is to forestall any idea of rebellion against the regime.



## The Victim

'Victimism' as a production of the role of victim is not only the practice of a nationalist and militarist regime which spawns war. Unfortunately, many well-meaning individuals and humanitarian organisations fall into the same trap by looking upon victims as passive recipients of help. Statements such as "She doesn't look like someone who's been raped" or "She doesn't look like someone who doesn't have anything to eat," elicit anger. People who make such outrageous statements often forget that the victim does not fit the description because she/he is trying to get out of that role. According to the "benefactors", the victim is supposed to be grateful, humble, to elicit compassion and satisfy the "benefactor's" need to give protection. I'll never forget the almost-angry words of an Austrian female "benefactor" during a rally last summer, in which feminist pacifist activists took part: "Judging by the appearance of these women, one would never guess that sanctions have been imposed against Serbia. They are well-dressed and so cheerful." The 'benefactor' overlooked the fact that there are different ways of responding to oppression, some of which are personal. Nor did she seem to be familiar with Kathleen Barry's statement, "Victimisation fostered by so-called well-meaning people is just as oppressive and destructive as the sexist negation of the woman as victim."

Fortunately, our relationship with feminist and pacifist sisters from the West are free of such paternalistic attitudes. Our exchange presupposes differences related to the specific situation, yet all of us are fighting for the same goal: greater power and autonomy for women.

Stasa Zajovic works with Women in Black in Belgrade.

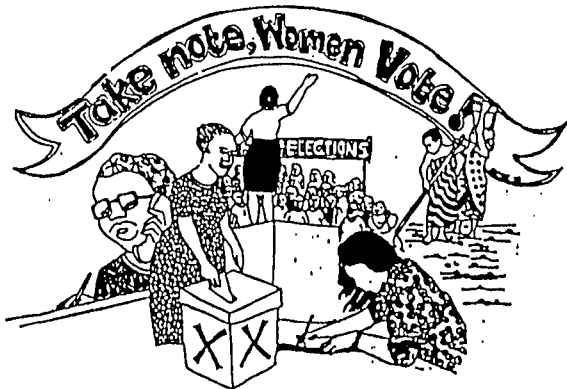
# TAKE NOTE, WOMEN VOTE!

by Shelley Anderson

In late November, 1993, the Dutch Southern Africa Committee organized the seminar "Women and political participation in South Africa" in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Several days later, the University of Utrecht held its annual Southern Africa Days with a program that focussed on women's perspectives.

The three-day long program brought together women's studies teachers and students from Dutch, Zimbabwean, Namibian and South African universities. The emphasis was on research that could be used by community activists. While women spoke about personal experiences in union organizing and the anti-apartheid struggle, the emphasis was on violence against women.

A university teacher from Harare, Zimbabwe, spoke about an incident that received national media attention: a male student ripped the short skirt off a woman visitor to the campus. Predictably, some commenta-



tors claimed the woman had 'asked for it' by dressing so 'provocatively'. The incident angered many others and gave impetus to a group of university women working on developing guidelines on sexual harassment and assault. Such guidelines gave women more options: if state courts failed to protect them, they could then try to prosecute the harasser under university rules. Likewise, if the university rules failed to stop the harassment, women could go to the state criminal court.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

Violence against women in South Africa is common place. In 1992, the official figure for reported rapes was 23,921. It is estimated that only one in twenty rapes is reported, which means that more than 1,000 women are raped in South Africa every day. Some researchers calculate that one out of every four women in South Africa is a rape survivor: 95 percent of the survivors are black. One in every six women is beaten regularly by her male partner:

every week, an average of four women are forced to flee from their homes because their lives are endangered by their male partner.

Violence against women is not restricted to physical violence. Researchers found that many women were pressured into not using contraceptives by their male partner or parents; unwanted pregnancies lead to some 250,000 illegal abortions each year. Women's human rights are often violated: a woman married before 1984 (for whites) or 1988 (for blacks) cannot legally enter into certain contracts or negotiate a loan without the permission of her husband, who controls her property. The police and courts are dominated by white men--there is one woman judge in all of South Africa. Only five out of the 178 members of the white, Coloured and Indian Parliament are women.

## **WOMEN FIGHTING FOR EQUALITY**

Despite these figures, awareness is growing throughout South Africa of the need to promote women's rights. Women are organizing as never before to make sure the new South Africa is both non-racial and non-sexist. Groups like the Women's National Coalition support a Women's Equality Charter as part of the new constitution; women in the African National Congress are pushing for equal political representation; women in trade unions are organizing against sexual harassment and for better working conditions. Women constitute 53 percent of the electorate in South Africa, so their votes could be a decisive factor in the upcoming elections.

The fight will not be easy. Last year members of the Rural Women's Movement threatened to boycott the elections when a group of traditional leaders submitted a proposal that African women should be excluded for two years from the Bill of Rights. One traditional leader explained that rights for women would destroy tradition: his daughter would be able to contest her brother's ascension to the chieftainship under the Bill of Rights. Customary law may also allow men to marry more than one woman, and to retain control over land and custody of children. But women are determined. Democracy is coming to South Africa, and women will be a part of it.

A 56-page collection of articles on women in South Africa (the majority in English, with some Dutch articles), *Take Note, Women Vote!*, is available from the Dutch Committee on Southern Africa, Oudezijds Achterburgwal 173, 1012 DJ Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

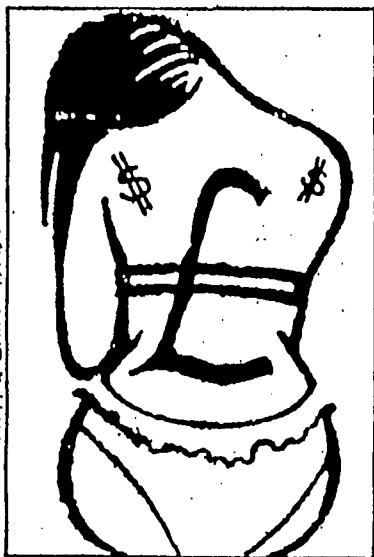
# BRITISH SEX TOURISTS IN THAILAND

by Julia O'Connell Davidson

According to the Tourist Association of Thailand (TAT), Pattaya is Thailand's 'premier beach resort.' Travel brochures depict it as both an 'exotic paradise' of palm trees and white beaches and as a 'single man's playground' of bars and women. Once the site of small fishing villages, Pattaya bay began to develop in the 1960s and 1970s when the US military used it for 'rest and recreation'. Today, nearly one and a half million tourists visit Pattaya each year. According to TAT figures, Germany, the Arab Emirates and Britain supply most tourists, but they also arrive from Japan, Australia, North America, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Hong Kong and even mainland China. Around 70 percent of the tourists are male; the majority coming for one reason--to buy the sexual services of Thai women, men and/or children.

Why do Thais become sex workers? The factors range from kidnapping, to debt bondage to poverty. In a country where the annual per capita income ranges from US\$ 235 in the Northeast to \$1,000 in Bangkok, there is nothing mysterious about the supply side of the sex industry. But who are the sex tourists and why do they come to Thailand? To find out,

I visited Thailand in January to interview 25 sex tourists in Bangkok and Pattaya and to speak to many others.



## MACHO LADS, MR. AVERAGE AND THE COSMOPOLITANS

The British sex tourists I interviewed fell into different types. One type was made up of 'Macho Lads'--skilled and unskilled manual workers in their early 20s, many with tattoos and semi-shaven heads that are associated with the far-right in Britain. All the ones I interviewed were not on a package tour. Most made their own travel arrangements and had visited Pattaya once or twice before. They came on the personal recommendation of another sex tourist. They often travelled in groups of three or four. Most said they used prostitutes regularly, or occasionally, back in England. They like Thailand because sexual ser-

vices are much cheaper and because, "Over here they're not low life like English prostitutes...you don't really think of them as prostitutes...they treat you well."

In Thailand "anything goes", according to Macho Lads; they can indulge in anonymous sex with large numbers of women and their masculinity is so powerfully affirmed that they do things in Thailand that would dishonor them back home, such as having sex with transsexuals. They were aware that rural poverty leaves most sex workers few alternatives. They conclude from this that sex tourism is a highly positive phenomenon, almost a form of welfare that the West can give a 'backward' nation. One Macho Lad, with a paternalistic air, said to me, "If these men stopped coming here, I'd hate to think what would happen to these girls."

Mr. Average is another type. Usually older, widowed or divorced, the ones I spoke with were also in Thailand for their second or third time. All had first come on package tours, some specifically for 'single men'. Mr. Average may be a skilled manual worker, self-employed or in a junior or middle management position. He is primarily, though not exclusively, interested in simulating some kind of emotional or romantic relationship with a woman or a series of women. They claim never to visit prostitutes at home and the fact that in Thailand "you don't feel as if you're going with a prostitute" is of central importance. Mr. Average spends a great deal of time telling himself and others about how 'different' Thai women are: 'they' think differently, are more innocent and loyal than western women, and find white skin attractive. He explains the women's involvement without referring to the commercial transaction which is taking place.

Some are aware that poverty forces the sex workers into the industry. This is clearly a source of anxiety for Mr. Average. They cannot fully convince themselves that they are truly desired or that a fair exchange is taking place. They then strive to 'treat the girls well', by which they mean giving tips and gifts, which are hardly generous by British standards. A number of these men expressed great ambivalence towards the sex workers, moving from paternalistic sympathy ("They do it for their families") to hostility ("They're hard bitches really") in the space of a few minutes' conversation. I was assured that most of the Pattaya bar girls were really earning huge sums of money, and wasting it away, and that many had accumulated great wealth by tricking elderly English gentlemen who fell in love with them. One Mr. Average complained, "It's all changed now. You never saw a girl drink or smoke when I first came to Thailand. All the business with whisky and cigarettes is totally new. They were nice girls then, soft, very soft. Now it's commercialised. They're hard and they're after money."

Cosmopolitan men are more bourgeois, often well educated and travelled. They are keen to differentiate themselves from their compatriots: "I am not a sex tourist", "I am not a package tourist", "I am here on business." They visit more remote and less developed spots, spend more time in Bangkok, but visit Pattaya to relax. Several said they would never visit a prostitute anywhere else in the world. Thailand is different because first, "it's very easy and convenient" to buy sexual services here, and second because Thai women are so 'natural' and 'innocent' that the transaction does not feel purely commercial.



These are the common 'pull' factors for these different types of men: first, sex is cheap in Thailand. A man can buy 24 hours of a sex worker's time for as little as 350 baht (approximately US\$ 14 or DM 25). This sum would not buy ten minutes of oral sex from a British prostitute. In Britain, too, the client specifies his requirements in advance and the prostitute indicates her charges. Sexual services are sold by the piece, less frequently by the hour.

In Thailand, a man usually buys access to the sex worker for the whole night and day, either by paying a 'bar fine' or by paying her directly if she is freelance. Most sex workers provide some non-sexual services as well, acting as translator, tour guide, masseuse, companion or even laundress for the client. But perhaps more important for British clients than the cheap price and inclusive service is that the non-contractual nature of the exchange conceals its commercial nature. This makes it possible for clients to buy sexual services without having to see themselves as the kind of men who use prostitutes. But sex tourism does more for these men's self-image than simply make them feel okay about using prostitutes. It also helps them construct a powerful and positive image of themselves as white men.

## **CONSTRUCTING MORAL HIERARCHIES, CONSTRUCTING WHITE MASCULINITY**

One unexpected characteristic of the sex tourist was that he appears to be obsessed about other sex tourists' morality. At first this seems like hypocrisy. It is acceptable for heterosexual men to take a 16-year old girl back to a hotel for the night, but 'disgusting' for a homosexual man to take a 15-year old boy back to his room. Where does this sense of moral superiority come from? I think it is a way to define an unpleasant variant of Western heterosexual masculinity. Once a Mr. Average was ranting to me about how sickening it was to see 'old gay men' with young boys, when his friend interjected that it was also sad to see 'beautiful young girls' on the arms of 'fat old men'. "But at least that's natural," Mr. Average said. His friend agreed. The moral issue was not whether there can be genuine consent between people who are unequal in terms of age or economic power, but whether sex tourists' actions transgressed rules about 'normal' male sexuality.

The construction of moral hierarchies by British sex tourists is not only about reinforcing a particular kind of masculinity. It is about constructing a specifically white, British masculinity. The most powerful moral condemnation is directed towards sex tourists from the Arab Emirates. Almost every sex tourist I spoke with told me that Thai women hate 'Arabs' and avoid 'going with them.' This is because 'Arabs', unlike European men, rape and cheat them, because 'Arabs' are 'dirty', 'smelly', 'do it with boys and girls' and are unattractive to Thai women because they are not white. In Pattaya you can see British skin heads, one arm around a Thai woman, the other raised in a Sieg Heil salute as a citizen of the Arab Emirates passes by. One British owned bar displayed a poster of a pig in a yashmak with the words, "We respect your religion--that is why we refuse to serve you."

## SEX TOURISM'S FUTURE--AND HOW TO FIGHT IT

A small British travel company, Thai Holidays (York), currently specialises in trips to Pattaya, the 'single man's paradise.' The company's directors had recently visited Vietnam and Cambodia, where they negotiated with hoteliers, and now offer trips to Vietnam. Several Macho Lads I spoke with in Thailand had either already arranged to visit Vietnam, or were considering it. All had heard that "Vietnam is supposed to be like Thailand six or seven years back. More natural and unspoilt." A friend told me that recently a Vietnamese official was quoted in Chinese newspapers as saying that Vietnam would have to 'sacrifice' several thousand women in order to modernise through tourism. Laos and Cambodia are also opening up their borders, and sex tourism may develop there over the next few years.

Deciding on a political response to sex tourists is difficult, as the term 'sex work' covers such a wide spectrum of activities. At Jomtien Beach I saw sex tourists 'playing' overtly sexual 'games' with children as young as seven or eight. It seems to me that there must be possibilities for direct action against this kind of child prostitution, and that news of such action would travel and act as a powerful disincentive to this particular type of sex tourist.

Deciding on a political response to sex tourists who buy the sexual services of adults is more difficult. Sex tourism seems a pernicious phenomenon because it not only involves economic exploitation but also helps to maintain and reproduce white racist myths and a virulent concept of masculinity. I am haunted by the images of the men I saw who were able to draw a boundary between their own humanity and that of others, and by their enormous self-serving self-deceit. But I also think it is necessary to ask whether, when literally thousands of people are directly or indirectly economically dependent on sex tourism, it is useful to call for its immediate termination. Is the direct action against sex tourists Kathleen Barry reports in *International Feminism: Networking Against Female Sexual Slavery* (1984) or that taken by the Philippine guerilla movement with the slogan "Kill a sex tourist a day" really likely to improve the lives of Thai sex workers?

Like some groups in the West, some Thai women's organizations argue that a distinction must be drawn between child and forced prostitution and those women who enter into sex work in the same way most workers enter into wage labor (that is, on the basis of a rational decision in view of their economic and other circumstances). If this distinction is made, it follows that political campaigns for legal and civil rights which empower sex workers vis a vis sex tourists and political struggle against the economic colonialism which denies people alternatives to sex work must take precedence over campaigns to prevent sex tourism per se. After much soul searching, the only thing I feel really confident of saying is that academics and Western feminists must seek out and listen to the views and wishes of sex workers themselves. We must offer them our services, rather than presume to give them advice on the politics of resistance.

Julia O'Connell Davidson is a lecturer in sociology at the University of Leicester, UK.  
A longer version of this article is available by contacting the WRI office in London.

# MARCH 8TH ACTIVITIES

March 8, International Women's Day, was celebrated in many ways in many countries. Perhaps one of the most unexpected actions took place in Norway, where soldiers protested violence against women. Endorsed by the Minister of Defense, the soldiers' campaign was to show solidarity for women in war zones, especially rape survivors in Bosnia. Soldiers in uniform displayed campaign posters, collected money at street stands, and knocked at doors to collect money for women survivors of violence.

In Algeria, women held a public march as a protest against fundamentalist violence. Fundamentalist violence has claimed thousands of lives over the last several years in Algeria, including the lives of women who have refused to dress in ways some Islamic fundamentalists consider appropriate. One recent victim was a 17-year-old school girl who was shot for not wearing a head scarf. The classmate standing next to her, who was wearing a head scarf, was spared.

In Cochin (southern India), as part of WRI's "Crossing the Line", a candlelight march was held with women of different economic classes, castes and religions participating. In Israel/Palestine, women celebrated the opening of "Jerusalem-Link", two centers in East Jerusalem (Palestine) and West Jerusalem (Israel) which promote issues of women and peace. A mixed Jewish and Palestinian "women's protest culture" night of music, poetry and dance was held after a rally and march.

In the Netherlands, volunteers from the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) ran an information table with handouts about the war in Burma. They collected over 100 signatures on special postcards to be sent to the Burmese junta, requesting the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratic leader who has been under house arrest for almost five years. A special window display was made at the IFOR office to celebrate the "Crossing the Lines" campaign. The display highlighted the work of Women in Black (Belgrade), Innu women's resistance against low-level military flights, women's activities in Cambodia, and how FOR women in Uganda are conducting nonviolence training for returning refugees.

If you celebrated the "Crossing the Lines" campaign, please send details to the WRI office so we can spread the news.

# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY IN CAMBODIA: A GIANT FIRST STEP

by Liz Bernstein

Pink and green banners proclaiming "End Violence Against Women" and "Women Build Peace" remain strung up in the streets of Cambodia's capital, indicating the themes of this year's International Women's Day. March 8, International Women's Day, was declared a national holiday by the Royal Cambodian Government. Cambodian women's groups, in cooperation with the newly established Secretariat for Women's Affairs, launched a series of events to celebrate the day. Activities included a visit by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to women in two Phnom Penh prisons (eight women were later released as a result of the visit); recognition of the new women's police team; a religious ceremony of offerings to Buddhist monks and nuns; and a national workshop on AIDS.

Perhaps the most moving event was a peace walk led by Buddhist monks and nuns through Phnom Penh's prostitution district. There are an estimated 10,000 sex workers in Cambodia now, a number which has greatly swelled over the past two years after the influx of over 20,000 UN peacekeeping soldiers and foreign businessmen.

Banners proclaiming "Stop Violence and Trafficking of Women" and "Stop Exploitation of Women" were carried as about 1,000 marchers, with flowers, incense sticks and candles, walked through the red light district. Over 100 participants had travelled from four outlying provinces, led by local Buddhist clergy. The four hour walk was led by Maha Ghosananda, the recent Nobel Peace Prize nominee and spiritual leader of two peace walks across Cambodia's war-torn provinces. The marchers encouraged the creation of real economic alternatives for women and expressed their solidarity with both the Vietnamese and Cambodian sex workers, thus helping to bridge some of the mistrust between the two ethnic groups. The evening ended with a candlelight ceremony, 'illuminating the darkness', and chanting at Independence Monument.

Police were seen barring people from entering one red-light district hours before the march, causing one organizer to comment, "Now we know who is in charge of the brothels--the police!" Organizers had leafletted and talked with women in the area days before the march to explain their solidarity while speaking out against the exploitation of women. Most local media still chose to focus on the 'loss of business' and lack of understanding of some of the workers about the march's meaning. Marchers had asked the press to focus on the social and economic causes of the sex industry, rather than blaming the women workers. One local

newspaper did quote a teenaged prostitute as saying, "Because of today's procession, women may one day get full rights--and may even get on top of the men exploiting them."

In a position paper outlining plans for March 8, the Secretariat for Women's Affairs stated, "Although war and destruction have affected all Cambodians of every level of society, women have undoubtedly been most victimized by these years of conflicts. Women are over 60 percent of the population...and more than 30 percent of these women must raise their families alone...The improved status of women, including the full recognition and participation of women in the reconstruction of the country, is the fundamental base for sustainable development and peace...Cambodia cannot afford to ignore the strength of its women and the suffering they have endured for more than two decades."

The Secretariat stated that a year-long campaign would be devoted to the issue of violence against women. This is ground breaking in a society where domestic violence is still taboo. The Secretariat will work to encourage that legislation securing women's rights be adopted. The new constitution, revealed last September, clearly defines women's rights, thanks to the lobbying of the Constitutional Assembly by Cambodian women and NGOs. Yet these rights remain to be guaranteed by legal mechanisms, particularly family, employment and criminal law. The campaign will encourage, for example, that laws regarding rape, trafficking of women and children, and domestic violence be adopted.

As the position paper continued, "The culture of violence pervading a society at war has fostered tolerance of violence against women. Although recent economic improvements have benefitted a very small portion of the society, women have not reaped many of such gains." A newly established media center, the Voice of Cambodian Women, will lead the media campaign. Having recently received training in video techniques, four women and a team of women writers will publicize the campaign and prepare television and radio sketches. In addition, brochures and reports with information on the situation of Cambodian women will be produced in Cambodian and English. Interviews and debates on women's situation will be broadcast on national radio, television and in the national and international press.

As one woman organizer said of all the special three-day events around March 8, "It will benefit our children. In fact we are doing this for them. It is a first step. We hope it is the first step to build a society which creates effective laws and puts them into practice to protect women's rights...."

Liz Bernstein works with the Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation (CPR),  
Maha Ghosananda Center for Nonviolence and Peace In Cambodia and the World,  
Wat Sampeo Meas, P.O. Box 144, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Fax +855 232 6400.  
Donations for CPR's work may be sent to 87/2 Sol 15, Sukehumt Road, Bangkok, Thailand 10110.

# LESBIANS IN CROATIA

by Andrea Spehar

Lesbian life in Croatia today is a life of women who are victims of totalitarian systems forced to hide their sexuality and to have a dual life--the private and the public. A few of us decided to struggle for our rights, to be public. I hope our activities will stimulate others to join us. Obviously in war time it is very hard to overcome the lack of courage. It is hard to struggle for truth when you can be fired from work the next day.

## SOME HISTORY

Lila was the first lesbian organization in Croatia, and was formed within the feminist group Tresnjcvka. The idea for such an organization was due to an anonymous public opinion poll of December 1988, during the second feminist meeting in Zagreb. Those questioned felt that the issue should be treated in a more open way. During the organization's one-year of existence, about 70 women were in the group.

Lila wanted to make lesbians and bisexuals visible and popularize women's culture. It was not able to achieve all its goals, but there were some positive results: there was a place where women could be together and relax (there was no public place in Zagreb where lesbians could meet). The importance of Lila is best described by a member: "When my long love relationship ended, I was desperate and really alone. It was not possible to talk about this with my friends or my mother--I was a lesbian. When I came to the group, for the first time I felt that my problem was also a problem of these women, and that at least here, it was not a problem."

## NEW POLITICAL SITUATION

After the elections of May 1990, when Franjo Tudjman won, Lila lost her space. Even worse, the political situation for our movement was bad, so new women did not come to continue the work. Lila stopped. In December 1990, Croatia adopted a new Constitution. For the first time in our history, women and lesbians had an opportunity to take part in democracy. But 45 years of socialism had its influence on women's self-confidence: few women took part in the government, and our political influence was zero.



There were hopes for human rights and pluralism when the new government began. But it soon became clear that homosexuality was still to be invisible. In 1991, during the middle of Croatian television showing the British series "Oranges are not the only fruit" (after a scene where two actresses kissed), the series was stopped. Technical difficulties were claimed. The reaction from Radio 101 was great: one program was devoted to this event, in which the station's programmer explained that they had received telephone calls from church leaders who asked that the "immoral drama" be stopped.

## **THE DANGER of A Kiss**

The Church has great influence in Croatia, so the television series was stopped. Lesbian relationships were seen as dangerous to society, especially to the roles men and women play. Lesbians are dangerous especially now during the war, because lesbian sex does not result in children. Lesbianism destroys the hope of a strong, national state. According to the Croatian government, women exist only to reproduce the state.

Now when women and lesbians fight for our rights, there is a counter public information campaign, which says we are trying to destroy Croatia and Christianity. It is claimed that we are against an independent Croatia, that we do not love Croatia. We are suppose to be re-educated.

If you are a lesbian in Croatia today, you are forced to live in total isolation. We are not only isolated from society, we are isolated from each other. In Croatia there is no public space (outside of our group, Lesbians and Gay Men Action--LIGMA) where lesbians can talk and share their experiences, without prejudice. You cannot read a book based on lesbian themes, as there is no such thing in Croatian and books from abroad are few. The same is true for other media and scientific papers. The only thing you will hear about yourself from the public media is that you are a whore, or are ill, or do not even exist. In a direct, political sense, you are the destroyer of the state and all its moral values.

According to the new Croatian Constitution, being a lesbian is not a punishable offence. But in practice this is not true. Croatian families are very patriarchal, and there is great pressure on lesbians to marry. Today, it is impossible for young girls to be independent. The average monthly salary is DM 100. If you want to live on your own, a rented apartment costs at least DM 200 per month.

Lesbians who live in smaller towns see moving to Zagreb as their only chance of freedom. But in Zagreb there are no public spaces for lesbians to meet. Because of the unequal status of women in Croatian society, lesbians have lagged behind gay men in developing a sense of identity and community. The one gay male bar in Zagreb is regularly visited by police, who take personal information about those present away for their files. If you do not give the information, you are taken to the nearest police station, which is even worse.

## LIGMA

In June 1992, a few of us decided to form Lesbians and Gay Men Action (LIGMA). LIGMA is only in Zagreb, but we have supporters in other towns. There are many more sympathizers who are afraid to act because of the fear of losing their job or family.

It is hard as people are more concerned about finding food in order to survive than about struggling for their rights. But we want to work for the protection of lesbians and gays in Croatia, to publish lesbian and gay magazines, and do AIDS education. We have been forced to give interviews to newspapers in order to publicize the group, but the government-controlled media usually made interviews scandalous and insulting.

Financing is our major problem. There is a great economic crisis in Croatia (annual inflation is from 2,000 to 3,000 percent). But we also need literature and other materials, advice, and your support. Our organization is young, but well organized and willing to fight for our rights until the very end.

by Andrea Spehar, LIGMA coordinator for lesbian issues. LIGMA, PP 488, HR-41001, Zagreb, Croatia.



# **WRI WOMEN ON THE MOVE**

## **BIENVENUE, DOMINIQUE!**

Dominique Saillard is the new woman on staff at WRI's London office, and the official liaison with the WRI Women's Working Group. She works three days a week at the office, and you can write or speak to her in French, Spanish, German or English. Dominique was born in France and educated as a professional translator; she lived in the US for awhile, where she was active in peace and environmental groups. She is deeply committed to women's empowerment. A very warm welcome from all of us, Dominique.

## **FÁILTE, OILLAN!**

Congratulations to Veronica Kelly, former WRI staffer and now WRI Women's Working Group member, and partner Serge Vanden Berghe, on the birth of WRI's youngest member: Iollann Benoît. Iollann is a healthy baby boy and Veronica and Serge's first child. Anyone want to bet that Iollann will grow up to be a conscientious objector?

## **IN THAILAND**

Many of you will remember Niramorn Prudatorn, former director of Friends of Women (FOW), one of the Thai co-sponsors of the 4th WRI Women's Conference in Bangkok. Niramorn fulfilled a dream she had long had shortly after the conference, and left her job to travel extensively in Thailand. She helped to organize this year's International Network of Engaged Buddhists, highlighting the need for women's equality....Khunying Kanita, the director of the WE-TRAIN facility, where the WRI 4th Women's Conference was held, broke new ground for Thai women when she opened WE-TRAIN as a refuge for women fleeing violence. Last year, at an international conference of Buddhist women, Khunying Kanita took the vows of a Buddhist nun. Helping with the ceremony was Chatsumarn Kabil Singh, one of the speakers at the Conference in Bangkok.

## **IN TAIWAN**

Yvonne Lin Mei-Jung continues her work as coordinator of the Taiwan Grassroots Women's Working Centre. Founded in 1988, the Centre helps women workers reform

male-dominated unions; organize their own women-led unions and fight against unfair labor practices. The Centre publishes *Asian Women Worker* (in Chinese) and *Female Workers in Taiwan* (in English): Taiwan Grassroots Women's Working Centre, 4/F, 208 Chienkang Road, Taipei 10577, Taiwan. Tel. & fax +886 2 762 1006.

## **Violence Against Women in Zimbabwe**

Late January the Harare newspaper "The Daily Gazette" ran a feature story on "Violence Against Women--When will society lend a sympathetic ear?". The article, with a photograph of a women's rights march in the city, stated that 192 women in Zimbabwe died in one year as a result of being physically abused. The article quoted Alice Mudzengerere from the Musasa Project, the public education, counselling and research project on violence against women, which participated in the WRI Women's conference in Bangkok. Musasa Project, P.O. Box A 712, Avondale, Harare, Zimbabwe. Tel. 794982/3.

## **NEWS**

### **AGAINST THE WAR IN FORMER-YUGOSLAVIA**

Women in Black in Belgrade celebrated their second anniversary on October 9, 1993. A pamphlet and a book of leaflets and articles about their work was published: for copies, fax +381 11 334 706. The group, in addition to their regular antiwar vigils, also held the workshop "Is there no end to this war?" on international women's day in 1993. In August last year, the group sponsored the second international conference on "Feminist Solidarity Against War" in Subotica, Tresnjevac and Novi Sad. On International Human Rights Day (December 10), the Belgrade Women's Lobby issued a statement condemning the war, urging "each one of us should take responsibility to denounce the crimes of her own regime...." The statement ends with the call for all "women to tell their stories of personal suffering out loud, to speak about everything that has become unspeakable because they have kept us silent for so long. Let's transform the silence into language and action!" The "I Remember" campaign, which collect poetry and writing by women refugees, is also an action to turn break the silence about the suffering of war.

The SOS telephone line in Belgrade for women and children who are victims of violence, founded almost three years ago, continues its work to help women at home and in refugee camps by providing counseling and legal services, and documenting war rape. Tel. +38 11 322 226.

The Zenska Infoteka (Women's Information and Documentation Center) opened in March 1993 in Zagreb, Croatia. They are establishing a women's library and translating feminist books, plus information about the declining status of women in Croatia, including the Croatian media's attack against five women journalists who publicly advocated an anti-nationalist feminist perspective. Fax +385 41 422 926; email: zenskainfo\_zg@zamir-zg.comlink.de. (From the winter 1994 issue of the Network of East-West Women newsletter: NEWW, 395 Riverside Drive, Suite 2F, New York, New York 10025, USA).

## **UN Soldiers Visit Rape Camps**

According to a six-month investigation by a prize winning US reporter (Roy Gutman of *Newsday*), UN personnel regularly visited a Serb-run brothel in Vogosca where Muslim and Croat women were imprisoned and sexually abused. The article, which appeared in the New York newspaper last November, said some 50 men in UN uniforms or UN vehicles visited the brothel, called Sonya's Kon-Tiki, outside Sarajevo, during the summer and fall of 1992. Witnesses report seeing UN personnel forcibly taking women prisoners away after parties. Witnesses also reported seeing UN personnel frequenting the Park Hotel, where local women were "regularly taken at gunpoint to be raped by Serb military leaders." An ad hoc UN commission was formed in October to investigate the charges, and others, of UN misconduct in Bosnia. (Report from Ms., Jan/Feb., 1994).

## **First Woman MP in Jordan**

In 1988, Toujan Faisal used her television program to discuss wife battering, polygamy and other women's rights issues. In 1989, when she first ran for Jordan's Parliament, fundamentalists petitioned a religious court to dissolve her marriage, take away her children, and sanction her assassination. The court dismissed the case after several hearings. She lost the election. But last November, she was elected to Parliament, becoming the first woman to ever serve in Jordan's Parliament.

## **Woman Dies Protesting Persecution**

According to a report from the Sisterhood is Global Institute, a prominent Iranian academic set herself on fire in public on February 22, to protest the government's treatment of women. Homa Darabi, a psychologist and university professor dismissed from her job for failing to observe government regulations on women's dress, later died in hospital. UN special investigator on human rights in Iran, Raynaldo Galindo Pohl, said a government campaign enforcing its interpretation of Islamic dress for women has resulted in physical violence against women. Some 26 young women were arrested in November for not wearing veils

at a private party. "Iran continues to rely heavily on a mix of executions, torture, repression and intimidation," he wrote. Contact: Sisterhood is Global Institute, 4343 Montgomery Avenue, Suite 201, Bethesda, Maryland 20814, USA. Tel. +1 301 657 4355; fax +1 301 657 4381.

## DEATH SENTENCE FOR WOMAN WRITER

Taslima Nasrin is a Bangladeshi novelist, poet and journalist. Her work often criticizes Muslim fundamentalism; her latest novel Lajja (The Shame) is the story of a Hindu family attacked by Muslim fundamentalists in the aftermath of the 1992 destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya, India. The book sold 50,000 copies in six months, until the Bangladeshi government banned it in July 1993. Extremists in the Council of Soldiers for Islam consider the novel blasphemous and have issued a call for Nasrin's death, offering US \$1250 to anyone who kills Nasrin. She has been refused police protection by officials, who also refuse to restore her passport (confiscated in January 1993). The International PEN/ Women Writers' Committee (IPWWC) is organizing a campaign calling on the government to protect Nasrin, unban her book and restore her passport. IPWWC is also researching the effect of fundamentalism (including Christian, Hindu and Jewish) on women writers internationally. IPWWC, 532 W. 111th St., #75, New York, New York 10025, USA. Tel. +1 212 866 4283; fax +1 212 932 0678.

## PEG AVERILL DIES

You may not know her name, but you have seen her work: images of women of all colors and backgrounds, rising up strong and proud. Peg Averill (1949-1993) was a progressive artist and illustrator, whose political art work graced many publications (including the cover of the No. 11 WRI Women's Newsletter). She died unexpectedly of a heart attack on August 7, 1993. Several of her protest posters and banners are now part of the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC. A memorial observance in her name was held by War Resisters League in the USA.

## BLACK WOMEN'S NETWORK

The Black Women's Network (Box 5, 136 Kingsland High St., E8 2NS London, UK) is organizing SOJOURN II, sponsoring visits by black activists to Zimbabwe, India and Nigeria. Sojourners will study the role of women in relation to land use and ownership, and network with health workers (in order to better understand issues like AIDS, female genital mutilation, and nutrition). The Black Women's Network publishes a regular international magazine called *Linkages*.