

THIS IS MY BODY; I WILL DO WHATEVER I WANT WITH IT.

Interview with Amina Sboui and Aliaa Magda Elmahdy

campaigns

Iran: Save Rayhaneh Jabbari from execution by hanging

news

News From Around The World On Women's Rights



editorial

I will be nude, I will protest, and I will challenge you to your core!

arts

*Body painter
Victoria Guggenheim*

interviews

THIS IS MY BODY; I WILL DO WHATEVER I WANT WITH IT.

Interview with Amina Sboui and Aliaa Magda Elmahdy



Maryam Namazie: *Why did you do the nude action in Egypt?*

Aliaa Magda Elmahdy: In Egypt, a woman is like a lifeless body, a corpse. This body is owned by other people. They think if she doesn't follow the rules, it is okay to beat her, to harass her; it is okay to kill her. So the best way to say no to all of that is to say "This is my body and I will do whatever I want with it."

Maryam Namazie: *Is that how you felt too Amina?*

Amina Sboui: It's mostly not just in Egypt, not just in Tunisia. It's in the Arab world that women are treated like that. I guess we have the same reasons why we did it. Actually we did it to show the world how we are treated and mostly to try to change things. Hopefully we will be able to change things – at least a little.

Maryam Namazie: *Your action has hit a cord with a lot of people. Do you think there is an universality to what you say? It's not just the Arab world (though it is very important for the Arab world) but it hits a cord for everyone?*

Aliaa Magda Elmahdy: Yes practices may differ but sexism is the same everywhere. Maybe the practices differ, the degree differs.

Maryam Namazie: *Some people will say that what you are doing is not culturally appropriate; it is offensive and you're not respecting people's culture.*

Amina Sboui: I think that what the old feminists did in their time was not culturally appropriate like when they asked for women's vote or women to go to school. Times change and people change. We can't use the same methods that they use. When we go back in time their methods were considered inappropriate or something coming from the western countries. People will always insult the feminists because most of the people do not believe in equality between men and women.

Maryam Namazie: *So you wouldn't agree that the*

"They think if she doesn't follow the rules, it is okay to beat her, to harass her; it is okay to kill her. So the best way to say no to all of that is to say 'This is my body and I will do whatever I want with it.'"

demand for the right over your own body or for equality is a western demand as that is what some have said.

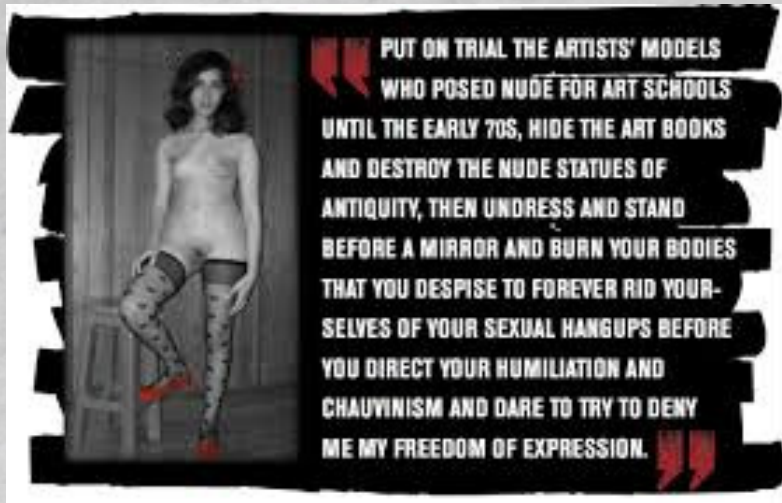
Aliaa Magda

Elmahdy: It's like they are stripping us from the will to be free. You're very angry and you want to fight for your rights and then they tell you: "No, shut up, that's not for you."

Maryam Namazie: *Obviously what you did, especially because you did it in Egypt and Tunisia, there is a great deal of risk involved. Do you regret the risk and the fact that it has changed your lives considerably?*

Amina Sboui: If we regretted it you wouldn't find us like this.

Maryam Namazie: *One criticism of nude protest is that women's bodies already sexualised and commodified and by using your body you are*



playing into the hands of sexists.

Aliaa Magda

Elmahdy: Not our nudity. Nudity can have several meanings.

Amina Sboui: If our nudity was pornographic, we would not face any problems.

Aliaa Magda

Elmahdy: Yes, they would not be that angry.

Amina Sboui:

There are a lot of Arab women who do pornographic movies and who get naked in

movies and nobody says anything to them. When we did it all the people started criticising us. We are doing this for good reasons. We are not doing this is a sexy way but to tell the world that the body you spend all your life either pushing me to hide it or to show it for sex, I'm using it for a political message.



Maryam Namazie: *I think what you do is revolutionary; I know some don't think so because they say nudity is not necessarily revolutionary and it might not be. What is it that makes what you do revolutionary and why inspired so many?*

Amina Sboui: there are so many women who have our ideas but they don't have the courage to do it. When Aliaa did it she encouraged me and maybe when we do it [on 8 March in Paris], we will encourage other girls. We just hope we will keep encouraging people.

Maryam Namazie: *Some will say it was fine doing it in Egypt or Tunisia but here in the west it is a different matter.*

Aliaa Magda Elmahdy: We still have internet; we can still reach people with our message. We were forced to leave our countries we didn't choose that. We would prefer to do it in Egypt but we were forced out.





Maryam Namazie: *What would you say to Muslim women activists who say: “don’t force your nudity on me? I find my hijab liberating”.*

Amina Sboui: we are not forcing our nudity. The pictures that they did of Muslim women against FEMEN made me laugh. It makes me feel that when Aliaa was in Egypt or I was in Tunisia, I was forcing women to get naked, telling them to take off their clothes in the street or with guns saying “take off your clothes”. We are not forcing any women.

Aliaa Magda Elmahdy: I did a campaign before to publish photos of women who willingly took off their hijab with their stories and how they were forced to put it on or how people reacted to it when they took it off. And people said “you want to force women to take off their hijab”. I said “No I want to give them a space to talk about how they are forced to wear it.”

Also the “Muslimah Pride” group posted pictures of children in hijab and then they are talking about us forcing people to take off their clothes!

“There are so many women who have our ideas but they don’t have the courage to do it. When Aliaa did it she encouraged me and maybe when we do it, we will encourage other girls.”

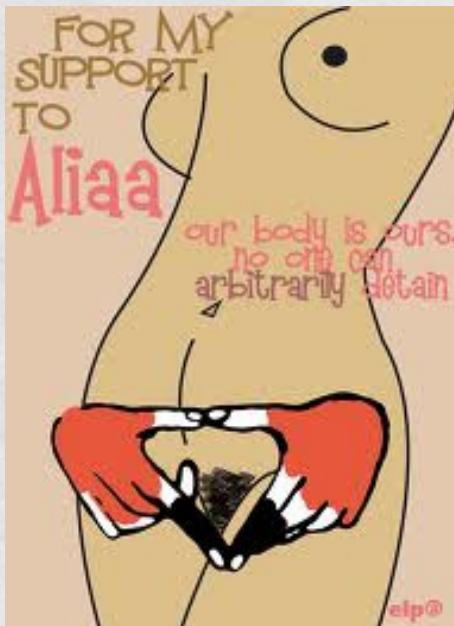




Maryam Namazie: *Some women's rights campaigners will say that nudity has no place in the women's rights movement. I think it is crucial. Would you agree and why is nudity so key?*

Amina Sboui: So important because people are not used to it. In the Arab world since we are kids our mums and our grandmums keep telling us that our bodies are not yours, that we must not show your body that you must hide it. When you grow up people start to tell you to show your body. For example people never stopped telling me I must be a model. And then others tell you to hide it. So I think now the main problem for women is not education or health, we have that, (in other countries we don't have that but in many we do) – now it is about the body.

Aliaa Magda Elmahdy: and it because of the view of the body that women can be deprived of their education and everything because they are viewed as something – not someone.



Aliaa Magda Elmahdy is the Egyptian blogger who posted a nude photo of herself as a scream against misogyny. **Amina Sboui** is the Tunisian topless activist who was imprisoned for her actions.



newsflash

GENERAL

An Afghan law that protects perpetrators of domestic violence, new Sharia criminal laws in Brunei that allow stoning, sexual assaults in Arab Spring countries, and virginity tests in Indonesia are just a few examples of a [rollback of women's rights](#) in recent years.



Image credit: National Geographic

Libya's Supreme Court has effectively lifted restrictions on polygamy requiring a first wife's consent, and the country's religious leadership has called for a ban on women marrying foreigners and for greater use of the hijab, or head scarf. According to Indonesia's official Commission on Violence Against Women, as of August 2013 Indonesian national and local governments had passed 60 new discriminatory regulations so far that year. These included dozens of local bylaws requiring women to wear the hijab, and others permitting female genital mutilation or banning women from straddling motorcycles. Mandatory virginity tests have been proposed in several parts of the country. Brunei will see new criminal Sharia laws going into effect this spring that, among other things, allow the stoning of adulterers. Historic gains in

women's rights have been made in some countries, such as Tunisia—the birthplace of the Arab Spring—with new rights for women enshrined in their constitutions.

AFGHANISTAN

Hundreds of women's rights campaigners [marched](#) calling for an end to violence against women and for women's rights in Afghanistan.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has [postponed](#) the signing of the new criminal procedure code, passed by both houses of the Afghan parliament. Article 26 of the code would have effectively denied women protection from domestic violence and forced or child marriage, and would have given immunity to many perpetrators given its ban on relatives testifying against one another. This development would not have been possible without the perseverance of Afghan civil society groups, most especially women's rights advocates, and their allies at home and abroad.

For now, it remains unclear how the law will go on to be altered. How decisive Karzai would be in this, considering the imminent end of his term after the April presidential elections, is also uncertain. Furthermore, Karzai's commitment to women's rights has been in serious question over the past years, as he has presided over the strengthening of forces opposed to gender equality.



Image credit: BBC

BAHRAIN

Bahrain's top legal authority has [recommended](#) that husbands who force their wives to have sex should not be prosecuted. It has also suggested husbands and guardians who "reasonably" discipline their wives and daughters should be above the law. The Supreme Judicial Council made the recommendations to ensure new legislation on domestic disputes does not contradict Sharia (Islamic) principles.



Image credit: Sara Hassan

EGYPT

The Egyptian army promised to ban [virginity tests](#) after it emerged that more than a dozen women arrested during the 2011 protests in Tahrir Square had been forced to submit to them. It hasn't, and the doctors arrested for performing the tests were acquitted when they brought to trial a year later. Now, the tests are back. After more than a year in which activists say that police refrained from carrying out virginity tests, or employing the types of harsh interrogation methods regularly associated with the ousted regime of Hosni Mubarak, reports have resurfaced of police brutality against both men and women. It's the final sign, activists say, that the police state is fully back. "I thought the tests were history. I thought we had left them behind in the days of Mubarak," said another woman, who spent nearly a month in detention in December 2013. She asked not to be identified by name. "I cannot believe Egypt has returned to this. I cannot believe that this was done to me." Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, the Egyptian general who publicly defended virginity tests, argued in April 2012 that virginity tests had been carried out "to protect the girls from rape, and the soldiers and officers from accusations of rape." Forced virginity tests fall into a larger pattern of security service abuse.

BRUNEI

Brunei's Sultan has [ordered](#) citizens to stop criticizing his plan to institute a harsh version of Sharia law, telling them they'll be sorry once the law is implemented. He announced last October that Brunei would gradually institute Sharia law punishments such as flogging, severing limbs and death by stoning beginning April 1. Criticizing the sultan is forbidden, but the citizens of Brunei have still expressed their displeasure with Sharia law over social media.



Image credit: Mohamed Abd El Ghany - Reuters

IRAN

Iran Stoning Case: Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani Given Leave



Iranian mother of two, Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, who had been sentenced to death by stoning for adultery and later given a 10-year jail term instead due to public outrage has been allowed to leave prison, a judiciary spokesman [said](#). Larijani, head of the judiciary, told Fars News Agency that "Ms. Ashtiani's case was the source of four months of widespread attacks against the regime... this individual was sentenced to death for murder but the international groups began a controversial campaign over it.... we did not pay much attention to those efforts.... we are letting her out simply for good behaviour." Ms. Ashtiani was the subject of one of the [largest international campaigns](#) initiated by International Committee Against Executions and International Committee Against Stoning by their founder, Mina Ahadi, who was contacted by Ms. Ashtiani's son, Sajjad Ghaderzadeh.

"I initially received a phone call in 2006 from a man

asking for help because his mother was going to be stoned to death in Iran. In 2010 I received yet another frantic call from Sakineh's son, who informed me that his mother was going to be stoned in two days; that is when we started campaigning very strongly for her all around the globe," said Ahadi in a telephone interview from Germany.

Larijani said that the decision was a sign of "our religion's leniency towards women". There was no immediate word on whether the release was permanent or whether it was subject to some form of probation.

In October 2010, Ms. Ashtiani's son, along with her lawyer, Mr. Houtan Kian and two German reporters, who were seeking an interview with the prisoner, were arrested by Iranian Intelligence agents. Mr. Houtan Kian was accused of "acting against national security" and subjected to tortures, such as being repeatedly burned with cigarettes on his genitals, until he made a televised confession. He was sentenced to 11 years in prison along with being barred from practicing law for five years. Sajjad Ghaderzadeh, who had also been subjected to torture, was later released along with the journalists, who were charged for failing to attain press permits and were detained for a few months inside one of Iran's prisons. Mr. Houtan Kian was freed three years later on August 20, 2013.

"Although I have not heard from Sajjad yet," Ahadi said, "I am sure he is simply overjoyed about his mother's pardon; he went through horrible times for years trying to free his mother."



A new [report](#) entitled Iran: “Thirty-five Years of Hijab” has been published by Justice for Iran which states that Hijab laws amount to widespread and systematic violation of women’s rights. The report points out that over the past ten years more than 30,000 women have faced arrest throughout Iran due to hijab laws. Iran is the first country where the state forces all girls and women to observe uniform hijab laws. Without a clear definition of hijab, Islamic Republic laws consider women who lack “Islamic veil” in “public” as criminal and punishable by imprisonment and fines. The call for enforced hijab was first raised 35 years ago by Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, just 24 days after the revolution was declared victorious, on 7 March 1979.



However, given the resistance of a considerable percentage of Iranian women, it took three years of tension and violence to enforce this law. Although Islamic Sharia laws deem hijab compulsory at age 9, Islamic Republic requires all girls to begin observing hijab laws at the outset of primary education at age 7. It also imposes hijab laws on women of all faiths regardless of their sacred teachings on the issue of hijab. Furthermore, it is used as a tool for segregation and imposition of a wide range of limitations on women including violations of fundamental rights, including the right to education, work and movement. The report documents over past 35 years many women have been deprived of education, employment, driving, travelling by air, access to public medical services as well as cultural and recreational facilities because of their hijab.



The report goes on to point out how a high number of women are not only exposed to insult, harassment and physical abuse at the hands of the authorities, but that they also face detention and various forms of torture, including lashing. The report describes the process of arrest and prosecution of women based on the charge

of improper Islamic hijab and unjust sentences. It also presents an overview of the psychological abuse where in some cases women have faced death or suicide. However, it also highlights an important historical fact that despite 35 years of violent enforcement measures, Iranian women continue to resist hijab laws and through their daily struggles provide an example for women in other Muslim majority countries, in particular those in transition, to demand their rights and freedom. In addition, based on official statistics, reports by human rights organisations and victim statements instances involving harassment, such as expulsion of women from governmental offices, refusal to grant promotion on the grounds of lacking proper Islamic hijab, banning access to education, summoning female students to disciplinary bodies and expulsion from dormitories continue unabated. Furthermore, despite many promises there has been no tangible improvement since Rouhani took office.

Iranian Airport Authority [instructed](#) staff to apply the Islamic Amre be Maroof (moral guidance code), and ensure that all female passengers observe hijab. “Women on flights that cross Iranian airspace must also follow the code”. The policy appears to be a reaction to the long-held practice of most Iranian women flying out of Iran of taking off their headscarf and hijab as soon as they board the plane, doing the reverse on their return.

Farzaneh Moradi, a 26-year-old woman charged with the murder of her husband was [hanged](#) in Isfahan, Iran without the knowledge of her lawyer. Farzaneh Moradi was forced to marry a paternal relative at the age of 15 and gave birth to her first child at 16. She fell in love with a man named Saeed at 19 and a year later was charged and arrested for the murder of her husband. At Saeed’s incitement she initially took responsibility for the murder of her husband hoping his parents would forgive her because of her child, and

Saeed who had committed the murder would then be in a position to marry her. When transferred to solitary confinement in preparation for her hanging this week, Farzaneh was denied her sole wish to see her daughter one last time. The parents of the man who married Farzaneh as a child bride and have insisted on Farzaneh's execution are now in charge of her daughter's care. The prospect of her daughter becoming another child bride is now a possibility.

A number of Iranian trade union leaders have [written](#) an open letter to the Minister of Works, complaining that they and their families are living below the poverty line. In their letter the union leaders reminded the minister that almost 90% percent of the country's working-class families live below the poverty line, with medical expenses absorbing a large proportion of their earnings.

IRAQI KURDISTAN

Two sisters, [Shler and Halima](#), (aged 16 and 18), who disappeared on February 11, were found murdered in Said Sadiq two weeks later. The sisters had previously stayed at a government shelter in Suleimania. After a legal decision, the sisters were returned to their family only to be found murdered some time thereafter. Lanja Abdulla, chairwoman of Warvin foundation for women issues, reports about another young girl who was killed earlier this year after she had been in the shelter in Erbil. Lanja Abdulla and other women activists protested and demanded the government protect women and girls from being killed by family members. The state shelters in

Kurdistan are failing to protect women and girls at risk of gender-based violence.

MALAYSIA

Malaysian court [evoked](#) Sharia law to allow a man to divorce his wife by text message. The decision was condemned by women's rights groups in Malaysia, who say this highlights the way it is inherently biased towards men and leaves women with the short end of the stick. Under Sharia law, a man can divorce a woman simply by announcing his intentions. This is followed by a three month "cooling off" period before the divorce can be finalized, to create an opportunity for resolution. However, if a woman wants a divorce, she must go before a court to seek a divorce, and she must prove her husband has an inadequacy - usually impotency or extended absence. If not, she has no right to divorce him.



NIGERIA

Even for a country which has seen much violence by the Nigerian Islamist group Boko Haram, its February 25 [attack](#) on sleeping schoolchildren in Buni Yadi was shocking. The attackers set alight the administration block and then locked the pupils in before firebombing the hostels. Up to 59 children were killed; a teacher said they died either in the blaze or at the hands of the attackers, who shot them as they tried to climb out of the windows or caught them and

cut their throats. Boko Haram means “western education is sinful” in Hausa, and since the school murders, the federal government has closed five federal secondary schools in three northern states; the pupils have been offered alternatives. The violence continues, with at least 650 already killed this year; north-eastern Nigeria is in a state of civil war.

PAKISTAN

The Council of Islamic Ideology [ruled](#) that Pakistani laws related to the minimum age of marriage were ‘un-Islamic’; that non-pubescent children (including babies) could be entered into the contract of marriage by their parents and/or guardians; and that said marriages could be consummated upon reaching puberty by said children according to Islam.

A couple were [stoned to death](#) for adultery in a remote area of Pakistan's western Baluchistan province, leading to six men being held on suspicion of murder. The couple, both married to other people, were believed to be in their 30s. The woman's father and brother, and the man's uncle and father have been arrested, along with a cleric believed to have issued the order to kill them. Another man linked to the cleric is also being held. In many rural areas of Pakistan, gatherings of tribal elders, often referred to as jirgas, issue death sentences for couples or women deemed to have offended the conservative culture. Such killings are illegal in Pakistan, but the police force is weak and often ignores them. Even if the cases are brought to court, they can take years to be heard and the national conviction rate hovers between 5 to 10 percent. If convicted, the victim's family can forgive



Image credit: Aurat Foundation, Pakistan

the killers - a major loophole, since the killers often are the victim's family. Women's rights group The Aurat Foundation says it tracks around 1000 cases of honor killings per year just from media reports. The true figure is probably much higher. In one high profile case that captivated the country, five women were allegedly killed in 2012 in remote Kohistan after they were videotaped singing and clapping softly to music with two men present.

SAUDI ARABIA



Image credit: AFP

A group of Saudi women have [petitioned](#) the Shura Council to back a demand to curb the “absolute authority” of male guardians over women in the country. Saudi Arabia forbids women to work or travel without the authorisation of their male guardians. It is also the only country that bans women from driving, and a woman cannot obtain an identification card without the consent of her guardian. A recent case in which a pregnant student had to give birth on campus after a women-only university in Riyadh denied access to paramedics was cited. And a university student died last month after paramedics were prevented from entering her campus because they were not accompanied by a male guardian, a must according to the segregation rules in the kingdom. This year, Saudi Arabia suspended a notification programme that had been running since 2012, which alerted male guardians once women under their custody left the country, even if they were travelling together. Three female members of the Shura Council presented a recommendation that women be given the right to drive in October, but the male-dominated 150-member assembly blocked the proposal.

SOMALIA

Sexual and gender-based violence is a major [issue](#) in Somalia, especially for internally displaced persons living in south and central Somalia. A Mogadishu-based NGO working to protect women and children has recorded more than 2,000 survivors of sexual violence in Mogadishu since it was set up in July 2012.



Image credit: Kate Holt/IRIN

SUDAN

An Ethiopian woman in Khartoum, Sudan, who was gang raped by seven men, has been denied by the Attorney General the ability to make a formal complaint of rape and thus instigate a full investigation. She has instead been charged with adultery which carries the potential sentence of death by stoning.

guaranteed equality between men and women, secured a constitutional mandate for environmental protection, only the third country in the world to do so, made a declaration that health care is a human right, with preventative care and treatment for every citizen, that it is a democracy with civil laws that respects freedom of religion and an established right to due process and protection from torture.

TUNISIA

In the face of strong pressure from the more extreme factions, Tunisia [approved](#) a constitution that



Image credit: AFP

Victoria Guggenheim's Body Art



Victoria Guggenheim

is an award-winning body painter who sees the expression of sexuality and the autonomous use of the body as a human right. Censoring the human body is an act of closed mindedness and prudery



and is a form of oppression. People confuse it especially when it's on a female body, as porn. The conflation of art with porn, and the idea that a woman's body is obscene is largely due to organised religion's view of the female form.

Body painting isn't just a way to connect back with one's own body, it is a source of power especially when used in conjunction with political activism such as the International Day to Defend Amina. The art form is visceral and immediate. It is almost impossible for one to not take notice when someone is covered in paint and with good reason - it was the first art form dating back to 300,000 years ago.

In addition to working on LGBT rights, Victoria has worked with people who have

disabilities and mental health issues and those who are ashamed of their body to get them to see themselves in new ways. People who are pathologically shy can become roaring dragons, people who are depressed can see themselves in a new skin, and people who are disabled can reclaim their body in a beautiful and artistic way. It often makes them realise the potential for beauty, and the strength their body has.



All images are copyright © Victoria Guggenheim.
Her official website: www.victoriaguggenheim.com



upcoming events



The Religious Right, Secularism & Civil Rights

OCTOBER 11-12, 2014 | TOWER HILL HOTEL, LONDON, UK

Join a **weekend of discussions and debates** on the religious right, its attacks on civil rights and freedoms, and the role of secularism for 21st century humanity.

The Arab uprisings; Sharia and religious laws; the burqa and conspicuous religious symbols; freedom of expression and its limits; apostasy, blasphemy and free thought; "Islamophobia" and racism; honour crimes; faith schools and religious education; reproductive rights and secular values will be amongst the **topics discussed**.

The conference is **endorsed by** Atheist Alliance International; Children First Now; Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain; Equal Rights Now; Fitnah; International Committee against Stoning; International Committee against Execution; International Federation of Iranian Refugees; Iran Solidarity; One Law for All; Secularism is a Women's Issue; The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science UK; & Women Living Under Muslim Laws, amongst others.

**FOR ORGANISATIONS OR VENDORS WISHING TO BOOKS STALLS,
FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO PURCHASE TICKETS, PLEASE CONTACT:**

Post: BM Box 2387, London, WC1N 3XX, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 7719166731

E-mail: onelawforall@gmail.com or fitnah.movement@gmail.com

Web: <http://www.onelawforall.org.uk> or <http://www.fitnah.org>

For up to date information on the conference, please visit www.secularconference.com

upcoming events



The Religious Right, Secularism & Civil Rights

WEEKEND ADMISSION

2-day conference, including lunches, a cocktail reception and a Saturday evening dinner and entertainment.

UNWAGED £150

WAGED £160

ORGANISATIONS £170

PRICE AFTER 1 MAY 2014: UNWAGED £155, WAGED £170, ORGANISATIONS £180.

SINGLE ADMISSION

Admission to **either** Saturday or Saturday conference (including lunch), **or** Saturday dinner & entertainment.

UNWAGED £50

WAGED £60

ORGANISATIONS £70

PRICE AFTER 1 MAY 2014: UNWAGED £55, WAGED £70, ORGANISATIONS £80.

REGISTRATION FEES ARE NON-REFUNDABLE AFTER MAY 1, 2014.

For up to date information on the conference, please visit www.secularconference.com

PHOTO CREDIT: Ezequiel Scagnetti © European Union (Front)

editorial

I WILL BE NUDE, I WILL PROTEST, AND I WILL CHALLENGE YOU TO YOUR CORE!

MARYAM NAMAZIE

All religions have a disturbing view of the female and her body. Islam is no different. Given that Islamism - a regressive political movement with state power and political influence in many places - is using Islam as its banner, however, women's sexuality and bodies are policed and criminalised and misogyny is encouraged and imposed by the state.

In Iran, under Sharia law, for example, a woman's testimony is worth half that of a man's, she can't travel without the permission of her "male guardian", and there's segregation based on gender. Certain fields of study and work are closed to women; girls from puberty onwards can be "married"; veiling is compulsory and women who transgress these norms can face imprisonment, flogging, and even stoning to death.

The idealised woman is obedient, properly veiled, submissive, and accepting of her assigned "place" in society. The rest of us are whores, often compared to unwrapped sweets - covered in flies and free for the taking. We are the source of *fitnah* in society and blamed for every calamity and natural disaster, as well as the disintegration of the family and society, and deserving of punishment in order to maintain national

and Islamic values, pride and honour.

You don't have to look far for evidence of this. Women protesters in Tahrir Square were given virginity tests and routinely blamed for the rape and sexual assault they faced. In Tunisia, Islamists use violence to "correct" the behaviour of women. And in Iran, women are routinely arrested or harassed for acts against chastity and morality.

Islamism's obsession with women's bodies and its insistence that women be veiled and hidden from view means that nudity becomes an important form of public resistance. Islamists want us bound in body bags, not seen and not heard. We refuse to comply. A nude woman is the antithesis of the idealised veiled and submissive woman. Whilst nude protest is not the only way to resist Islamism and the veil, it is a very modern, practical and appropriate way of doing so. It also challenges discrimination against women and a system which profits from the commodification and sexualisation of women's bodies.

Detractors argue that nude protests play into the hands of sexists by further commodifying the female body. Their erroneous conflation of nudity and

obscenity, pornography, vulgarity, and immorality buys into the attitude that female bodies serve only as titillation for the male gaze. They see a nude protestor and cannot see beyond her "tits and ass".

The idea that the female body is shameful, dishonourable, gross and crude fits within this debased view of women's bodies. The shocked outrage at nudity reflects the



discomfort with the female body rather than any problematic related to nude protest.

There is nothing wrong with nudity in and of itself. That the female body is used for profit, sexualised and commodified does not make the female body obscene just as it does not make breastfeeding in public vulgar.

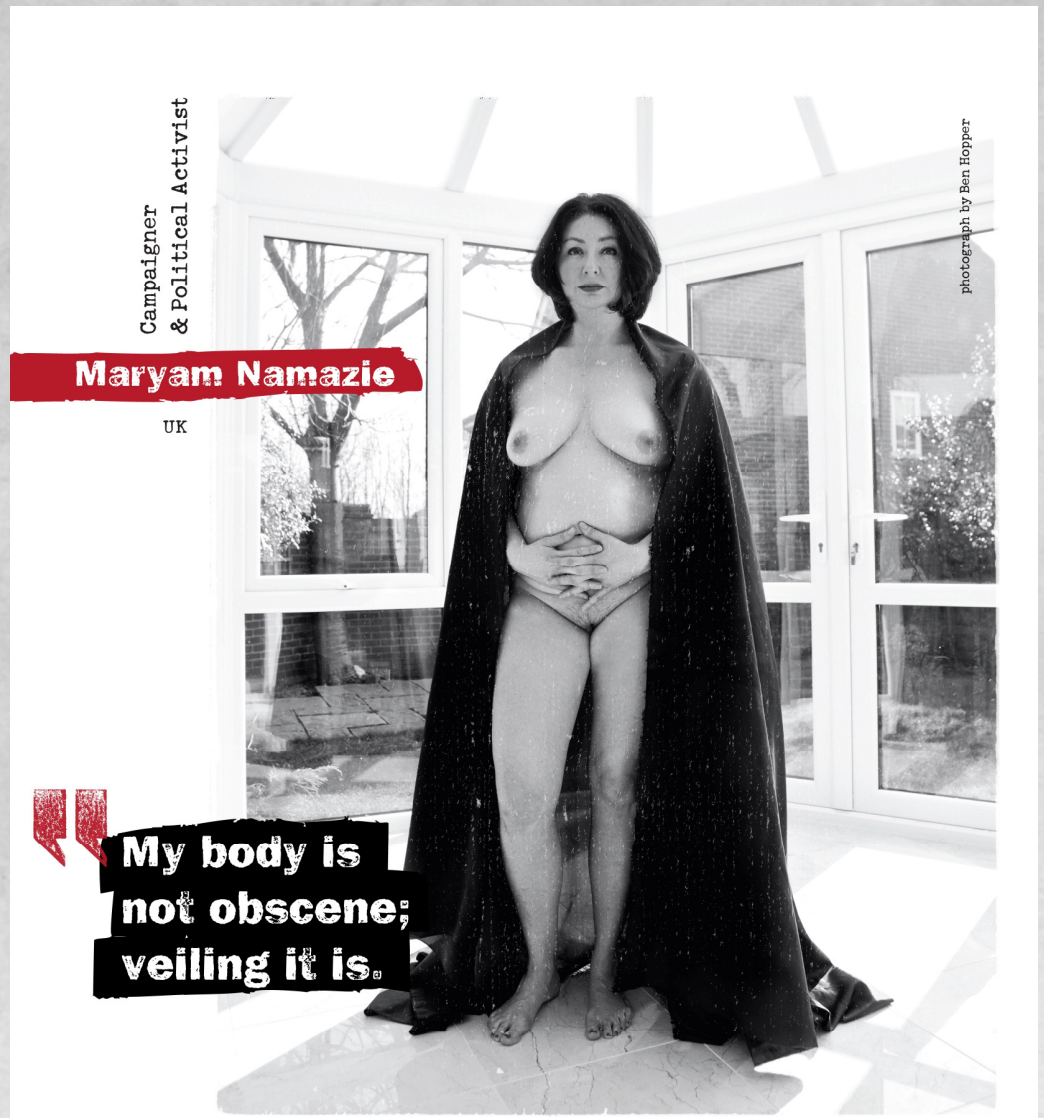
Commodification relies on an objectified image that is separate from the reality of women's bodies, minds and lives and which is used to regulate, control and suppress. Whilst Islamists often portray their rule as a prescription for the debasement of women in western societies, their image of women is the ultimate in objectification. In fact from early on, girls are over-sexualised with the imposition of child veiling. (This viewpoint also sees men as rapists unable to control their urges.)

The actuality and frankness of women's bodies as a form of protest challenges this negative image of females, turns it on its head and undermines the limits of what is deemed socially acceptable. It's subversive and threatens the status quo.

This is different from pornography which is widespread in the Middle East and North Africa. In fact, the more overtly religion and the state intertwine, the more chauvinistic the society and the more pervasive and blatant are pornography, sexual assaults, harassment and violence against women.

It's nudity as protest and outside these socially accepted limits of the woman as either whore or submissive that so enrages.

As Soraya Chemaly [writes](#): "when women refuse to sexualise themselves and use their bodies to challenge powerful interests that profit from that sexualisation, the words we should use aren't 'lewd' and 'obscene'; they're 'threatening' and 'destabilizing'. Women who use public nudity for social commentary, art and protest are myth-busting along many dimensions:



active, not passive; strong not vulnerable; together, not isolated; public, not private; and, usually, angry, not alluring. The morality offense is misogyny, not nudity".

Nude protest makes women visible in the public space and redefines who controls the female body. It's the reclamation of a tool used for suppression and an insistence that our bodies are our own, not "owned" by anyone, nor the source of honour, shame, national embarrassment...

Reclaiming nudity by women has special meaning under circumstances where women's bodies have been abused or raped as weapons of war or repression. In Iran, for example, young virgins were raped before execution to prevent them from going to heaven. The Armed Islamic Group (GIA) carried out mass rapes in the 1990s in Algeria as part of its terror campaign. In response, nudity has been used to confront armed and repressive forces from the Indian subcontinent to Africa.

Nude protest is not confined to the west. Some of the most famous examples of nude protest are from elsewhere. Aliaa Magda Elmahdy in Egypt and Amina Sboui in Tunisia are cases in point. In China, supporters of Ai Weiwei have been posing naked after the Chinese government accused the artist of pornography for a series of nude photos. Hundreds of women in Niger Delta staged a topless protest against non-implementation of an existing agreement by Shell. Late last year in Argentina, an estimated 7,000 women, some of whom were topless, stormed a cathedral demanding women's autonomy. A "bare buttocks" women's protest took place in



Swaziland in 2000 to oppose evictions by the king's brother. In March last year, a women's group in Orissa, India staged a semi-nude protest against land acquisition for a proposed steel plant... There have been nude protests in many places for everything from opposition to war to a defence of the environment.

An incidental positive outcome of this form of protest is a more open and relaxed attitude towards nudity but nude protest is a means of political protest that goes beyond the issue of nudity. Nude protest challenges discrimination with important implications for other aspects of women's lives - much of which have to do with control and suppression. Those who

say that there are more important fights for justice other than nudity miss this important fact. A woman's control over her own body translates into her being considered a real and distinct human being separate from the men who "own" her. This translates into more freedoms such as the freedom to study what she wants, work where she wants, visit friends and family when she wants, travel without permission, mix freely with members of the opposite sex, have the right to divorce and child custody, marry whom she wants, choose to be an atheist if she wants, have sex when she wants, and refuse sex when she wants, as well as to have the right to food, clothing and healthcare irrespective of how she is perceived by her male guardian or the society. In a society where women have ownership of their own bodies, everything from veiling to Female Genital Mutilation, stonings and honour killings become impermissible.



Nude protest aids in the fight for women's liberation in one of the key battlefields - her body. Whilst women's oppression is fundamentally a product of the economic and social system, which benefits from the commodification and objectification of women as well as sexual division in the production process, it is also the product of religious values and chauvinistic traditions and beliefs. Nude protest challenges the status quo.

Those who say nude protest is not the task of Communists and the Left have no clue about the role and responsibility of the Left. Class

“Nude protest makes women visible in the public space and redefines who controls the female body. It’s the reclamation of a tool used for suppression and an insistence that our bodies are our own, not “owned” by anyone, nor the source of honour, shame, national embarrassment...”

struggle does not take place in factories alone. Workers also include women with a myriad of problems many related to the control and suppression of their bodies. Women’s inequality springs from the same system that is responsible for workers’ inequality.

If the measure of a society’s freedom is based on women’s freedom, then nudity’s political challenge is an important one. Detractors who argue that nude protest pushes the women’s liberation movement backwards, including those who consider themselves progressive, Left and “veteran” women’s rights campaigners, equate women’s nudity with obscenity and indignity and cannot see its political, revolutionary, taboo-breaking, liberating and deeply humanising effects.

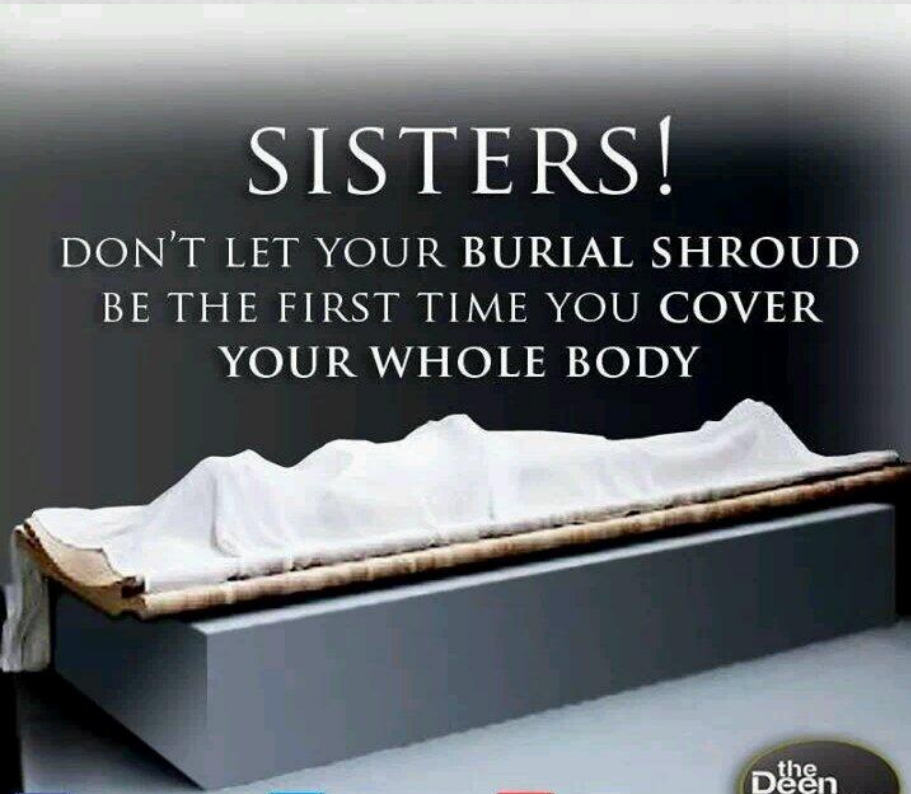
And the closer the nudity, the more uncomfortable. For many Egyptians, Aliaa Magda Elmahdy was said to embarrass the Egyptian revolution. Amina Sboui was blamed for pushing back the Tunisian women’s liberation movement. I have been accused of pushing back the women’s liberation movement in Iran and putting women’s rights campaigners in Iran at risk. No repressive regime needs excuses to suppress and deny the rights of women. It is absurd to blame the Islamic regime of Iran’s misogyny on those of us who resist. I have also been accused of embarrassing the Left which will apparently face further accusations of “immorality” as a result of my nudity.

Nothing brings out the misogynists from their hiding places like nudity.


This discomfort means that the same rules don’t apply when it comes to an analysis of nude political protest. The Ukrainian revolution is not denigrated for being “white” and “western” but FEMEN (whatever your opinion on

the group) is often referred to in this way. The relatively small numbers of nude protestors are highlighted when what matters are not numbers per se but significance and effect. Many taboo-breaking protests and demands were raised and organised by a minority, an avant-garde who first led the way. Also, geographical location not politics is stressed when it comes to nude protest. Distinctions are made, for example, between Aliaa’s nude protest in Egypt versus her actions in Stockholm and our 8 March nude protest in Paris. The actions of Islamists have a global impact and so does nude protest irrespective of where it takes place. Our nude protest on 8 March in Paris has been hotly debated amongst Iranians from Tehran to London and Islamists have rioted in Kalkata when photos of our protest were published in a local paper.

If Occupy Wall Street can take the form and content of Tahrir Square, why not nude protest? In fact, the



SISTERS!
DON'T LET YOUR BURIAL SHROUD
BE THE FIRST TIME YOU COVER
YOUR WHOLE BODY

[f /TheDeenShowTV](#) [t /TheDeenShow](#) [y /TheDeenShowTV](#) 

www.TheDeenShow.com



material bases of the protests, including nudity, are similar. Those who fail to see the importance of nude protests addressing deep-rooted discrimination against women don't see the deep-seated discrimination in the first place.

Even in a majority of western countries, women still cannot appear topless in beaches or parks as can men. Breastfeeding in many public places is considered taboo. Facebook doesn't allow nipples to be seen. Earlier this year, Facebook temporarily shut down a French museum's page after it uploaded one such image. Recently, a French politician called for censoring a children's book "Everybody Get Naked" , which shows people from all walks of life taking off their clothes in an aim to calm children's fears about their own bodies. At our 8 march nude protest with Amina Sboui and Aliaa Magda Elmahdy we were kettled in, with a large number of police brought to arrest us. We were shouted at, grabbed, and arrested. At the station, the police wrote down all our personal details as well as the slogans we had on our bodies, what we chanted, and what flags we carried... We were held for several hours and chastised for wasting police time. This gives nude protest universal significance.

Detractors who criticise nude protests taking place in the west ignore the real risks involved for those who do it in places like Egypt or Tunisia. Aliaa Magda Elmahdy and Amina Sboui were forced to leave their countries because of it.

Critics have dared me to hold my 8 March Paris protest in Iran. If I could, I would do it in Tehran's Azadi Square – and like in Paris cut out the “Allah” from the Islamic regime of Iran's flag and put my vulva in its place (pussy riot, Iranian style according to one) but that would mean a death sentence. This type of criticism is akin to telling exiled political opponents that they must either remain silent or dissent in their countries of origin even if means death. It ignores the repression that many of us have fled from and the real risks involved with any form of protest against Islamism, especially nude protest, even when it is done outside of the Middle East and North Africa.

Opponents have called our nude protest “offensive” and “culturally inappropriate” but anything that breaks taboos and demands fundamental change will offend existing sensibilities and will be deemed inappropriate for its time.

Even so, not everyone is offended. Whilst there are many who condemn it, there are also many who vehemently support it. No culture or society is homogeneous. Those who consider nude protest as “foreign” and “culturally inappropriate” are only considering Islamism's sensibilities and values, not that of the many who resist. In the same way that there are opponents of nude protest and supporters of the veil in the west, there are also supporters of nude protest and opponents of the veil in the east. In fact more so because there is no greater opposition against Islamism and religious misogyny than from those who have lived under, survived and resisted it.

The call for free, equal and autonomous women is also a call for a free Iran, Middle East and North Africa. No society can be free without women being free.

When it is a crime to be a woman, nude protest is an important public political challenge. It says loud and clear: “Enough! No More!” “I will be nude, I will protest, and I will challenge you to your very core!”



editorial

WOMEN'S BREASTS: A SERIOUS THREAT

PATTY DEBONITAS

Thousands of people have attended breastfeeding protests in support of a Staffordshire mother who was labelled a "tramp" for feeding her baby in public.

The breast is a thing of concern for many. To show it or not, to look or not. To breastfeed or not. In public that is because women's breasts it seems are public property.

It's okay for women to flash their boobs, just ask any newsagent. Our breasts, the naked kind, are good enough to be prominently displayed on many newspapers and magazines in any newsagent you enter.

And they sell very well.

It is funny how we seem to be discussing the same things over and over again. For years, for decades, for eternity. Breastfeeding in public? Women going topless?

When you flash your boobs for money no one bats an eyelid. Breastfeeding your baby in public seems to turn you into a disgusting, attention-seeking cretin.

Until today I didn't even know that breastfeeding women are protected under the Equality Act in Britain and shall not be harassed for doing so.

Shame has a louder voice than the law, and so women are still turning around, stepping aside and crouching in corners with their babies. The act of breastfeeding is apparently so hideous to many that the baby has to eat whilst its face, or rather the breast, is hidden under a piece of cloth.

I have tried hard to understand how and what people can find disgusting about a baby eating in public. The only thing I can come up with is that the attitude itself is disgusting beyond belief.



© Graham Stone/REX

our campaigns

IRAN: SAVE RAYHANEH JABBARI FROM EXECUTION BY HANGING

Reyhaneh Jabbari is now 26 years old and has been in Tehran's dreaded Evin prison since 2007.

In July 2007 she was alone inside a coffee shop and was speaking on her phone about architecture and design. Morteza, a physician and a former employee of the feared Iranian Intelligence Services, overheard the conversation, approached her and asked for her expertise in order to renovate his office. The afternoon of 7th of July 2007, Morteza made an appointment with Reyhaneh for business purposes.

Reportedly, Morteza stopped his car at a pharmacy on the way to the appointment. It was later discovered he bought condoms. Then they went into the apartment and Morteza closed the door. Morteza approached her and demanded to have sex with her; he had already made some drinks for her. Forensics analysis found that the drink he intended to serve to Rayhaneh contained sleeping aids and sedatives. Reyhaneh did not allow him to rape her, therefore he asked her several times to have sex with him but Reyhaneh resisted. During this time she felt threatened and scared.

Fearing imminent rape, she took a knife out of her bag and stabbed Morteza at the back of his right shoulder. Morteza died due to heavy bleeding.

An interrogator went to the apartment and made a report. At that time Reyhaneh clearly stated to the investigator that she was innocent, that she had met Morteza a week earlier, and that said she killed him only in self defence.

"The evening I was there, I knew that he wanted to rape me, so because of self defence I stabbed him and escaped," she said.

Reyhaneh explained that she had to defend herself: "Two and half months before the crime, I saw the doctor and his friend, at that time my phone was ringing, so I picked up the phone and was speaking to one of my friends about the decoration, and design, and the doctor's friend realized that I was an interior designer."

She added: "Morteza's friends came closer and got my contact number to ask help to design a private health centre. After a couple of days, the doctor's friend's calls started and thereafter Morteza himself called and invited me to visit the flat, which was supposed to be converted to private health centre. The time was 6:15 that evening when I reached there, and I found



Morteza looking suspicious. I was so worried and anxious so, I decided to take out the knife and I stabbed his right shoulder. Believe me, I just wanted to be safe, that is why I did it, because I had no other choice. The same day, Reyhaneh was sentenced, and the decision was confirmed by the Supreme Court.

Now, any moment it is possible for her to be hanged. *Fitnah* calls on groups and individuals to step forward and stop her execution.

In Iran men and women, including some minors, face execution everyday for some 131 offenses punishable by death under the Islamic Republic of Iran. Some of these crimes include adultery, theft, homosexuality, drug possession and political dissidence. Iran hangs more people per capita than any other country in the world, Since President Rouhani's election; there has been a sharp increase in executions. Trials in Iran fall short of International standards and the majority of those hanged did not even have access to a lawyer, jury, or even evidence.

[To sign the petition supporting Rayhaneh, click here.](#)



عکس کودکی ریحاته یا خواهران کوچکترش

our campaigns

THE LAW SOCIETY MUST WITHDRAW ITS GUIDANCE ON SHARIA-SUCCESSION RULES

We, the undersigned, are appalled to learn that the Law Society, the representative body for solicitors in England and Wales, has issued Sharia-related guidance on wills, succession and inheritance.



The guidance says:

“Certain principles of Sharia are different to English succession laws. For example, it is not possible to inherit under Sharia rules via a deceased relative. No distinction is made between children of different marriages, but illegitimate and adopted children are not Sharia heirs.

“The male heirs in most cases receive double the amount inherited by a female heir of the same class. Non-Muslims may not inherit at all, and only Muslim marriages are recognised. Similarly, a divorced spouse is no longer a Sharia heir, as the entitlement depends on a valid Muslim marriage existing at the date of death”.

Whilst not binding, the guidance legitimises rules which are highly contested by many Muslims themselves and which discriminates against Muslim women, non-Muslims, and 'illegitimate' and adopted children. The guidance seriously undermines the Equality Act, citizenship rights and one law for all.

Since individuals are already free to dispense of their estate as they see fit (as long as they provide for their dependants) such guidance unwittingly aids and abets Islamist attempts at subverting democratic laws and principles with a de facto parallel legal system where minority women and children have increasingly fewer rights than other citizens.

This scandalous guidance is similar to that which Universities UK published endorsing gender segregation at universities in Britain. UUK was promptly forced to withdraw its guidance after widespread condemnation.

We call on the Law Society to immediately and unequivocally withdraw its guidance.

[To see a list of signatories, click here.](#)

To support the campaign calling for the Law Society's withdrawal of its discriminatory guidelines, [please sign the Lawyers' Secular Society's petition.](#)

There will be a symbolic protest action on Monday 28 April at 5pm. More details to follow.

For more information, contact:

Gita Sahgal, Centre for Secular Space,
gita@centreforsecularspace.org, <http://www.centreforsecularspace.org>

Maryam Namazie, One Law for All,
onelawforall@gmail.com, www.onelawforall.org.uk,
07719166731

Pragna Patel, Southall Black Sisters,
pragna@southallblacksisters.co.uk, <http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk>, 07985399740



letters to the editor

Send questions and comments to fitnah.movement@gmail.com and we will respond in the next issue of the publication.

contact us

For more information on Fitnah, contact:

Mina Ahadi, +49 (0) 1775692413

Keyvan Javid: +44 (0) 7861476869

Maryam Namazie: +44 (0) 7719166731

BM Box 1919, London WC1N 3XX, UK

Email: fitnah.movement@gmail.com

Blog: <http://fitnahmovement.blogspot.co.uk>

Website: <http://fitnah.org>

Editor: Maryam Namazie

Design by @[KiranOpal](#)


join us

Fitnah – Movement for Women’s Liberation is a protest movement demanding freedom, equality, and secularism and calling for an end to misogynist cultural, religious and moral laws and customs, compulsory veiling, sex apartheid, sex trafficking, and violence against women. We remind the Islamic regime of Iran and Islamists everywhere that the women’s liberation movement is a source of fitnah for their rule alone. We are Islamism’s worst fitnah!

To join Fitnah – Movement for Women’s Liberation, [visit here.](#)

[Click ‘like’ on our Facebook page.](#)

Supporters include: *Amina Tyler, Tunisian topless activist; Avijit Roy, Activist, Bangladesh; Chadi Bejjani, Lebanese Atheists, Lebanon; Dya Ahmad, Member of Youth Parliament in Iraq and Secretary of Student and Youth organisation in Iraq; Harold Walter Kroto, Nobel Prize in Chemistry Winner, UK; Imad Iddine Habib, Founder, Moroccan Council of Ex-Muslims, Morocco; Inna Shevchenko, Spokesperson, FEMEN, France; Karl Karnadi, Founder, Indonesian Atheists, Indonesia; Lloyd Newson, Director of DV8 Physical Theatre, UK; Maryam Jamel, Organisation of Women’s Liberation of Iraq; Nadia El-Fani, Tunisian Filmmaker; most recent films “Neither Allah nor Master” and “Our Breasts; Our Arms”, France; Raheel Raza, President, Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow, Canada; Safia Lebdi, Founder, “Les insoumis-es”, France; Shahin Najafi, Independent Anarchist Artist, Germany; Soad Baba Aissa, President, of Association pour l’Egalité, la Mixité et la Laïcité en Algérie, France; Soraya L. Chemaly, Writer and Activist, USA; Tarek Fatah, Writer, Canada; Taslima Nasrin, Bangladeshi Writer, India; Waleed Al-Husseini, Palestinian Blogger and Founder of Council of Ex-Muslims of France, France; and Zari Asli, Women’s Rights Campaigner, Canada.*



FITNAH
TIME FOR CHANGE

**Visit our new website
designed by Siamak Amjadi:
www.fitnah.org**