

NewsBriefs

FROM LEBANON

Antonia Caccia in Beirut

Renowned Emmy award-winning British film maker Antonia Caccia visited Beirut where she screened her documentary film **Stories of Honour and Shame** at the American University of Beirut. The documentary which is based entirely on first-hand accounts tackles the experiences of Palestinian women in the Gaza strip. **Stories of Honour and Shame** is Caccia's third documentary tackling the Palestinian cause. The two previous films are **On Our Land** and **Voices from Gaza**. The film is based entirely on first-hand accounts on how many of these women have no say in how they live; however, they show remarkable courage and frankness because, despite the many obstacles, they manage to endure."

(The Daily Star, November 13, 1997)

FROM ALGERIA

Sakharov Prize for Human Rights goes to Algerian Rights Activist

The European Parliament presented the Sakharov Prize for Human Rights to Salima Ghezali, Algerian human rights activist, director of the Algerian weekly newspaper **La Nation** and co-founder of Algeria's Women's Rights Movement. The award was granted to her in appreciation of her courageous journalistic investigations regarding the violence in Algeria. After receiving the award which amounted to \$ 16,500 Ghezali called for international intervention and investigation into the mysteries surrounding the massacres in Algeria. According to her, "There is terror practiced by criminals, and there is a terror sustained by the government in defense of its power. We should try to identify the source of the violence, and see who profits from it." She also maintained that nowadays "courage and freedom of thought consist first and foremost in daring to demand an international commission of inquiry into the massacres."

(The Daily Star, December 18, 1997)

FROM IRAN

A Female Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Women's Affairs

Iranian Minister of Interior, Abdallah Nuri, appointed Zahra Shujaey to the position of Mudir 'aam (general Manager, the equivalent of a permanent secretary) to the Ministry of Women's Affairs. This is the first time a woman occupies such a rank since the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Shujaey, a human rights activist, is former consultant to the minister in question. She served as his adviser on women's issues for 4 years from 1989-1993. She taught Political Science at the University of Tehran and is a member of the Women's Educational and Social Council which is part of the Higher Council for the Cultural Revolution. Shujaey is expected to

tackle issues regarding social laws and legislation pertaining to women as well as violence against women. Shujaey is the third woman to be appointed to a key position in president Mohammed Khatimy's Government.

(Al-Nahar, September 3, 1997)

Iranian Women and Karate

During the years that followed the Islamic Revolution in Iran sports for women, especially martial arts, were ignored because such recreational activities did not fit the traditional role of Muslim women. This year and for the first time since the eruption of the Islamic Revolution Iranian women will be allowed to compete in Karate.

(Al-Nahar, September 3, 1997)

FROM EGYPT

Female Circumcision

Egyptian human rights activists and women organizations cheered the government's decision to enforce the decree banning female circumcision, while fundamentalists and tribe members considered the court's ruling as absurd. Even though female circumcision is now punishable by law in Egypt and courts ruled that "it's illegal for anyone to carry out circumcision operations, even if the girl or her parents agree to it," many families, especially in Southern Egypt, publicly refused to abide by such a law irrespective of the consequences. Given that circumcision is a deeply entrenched traditional practice, local women's organizations maintained that "Before trying to enforce the Law, it will be necessary to sensitize the population to the reasons for the ban."

(The Daily Star, January 10, 1998)

FROM TURKEY

Turkish Minister Supports Virginity Tests

In an interview with a local newspaper, the Minister for Women's Affairs, Isilay Saygin, supported the traditional practice of subjecting women to virginity tests: "It does not bother me. I do whatever Turkish tradition and customs require of the family. Educating children is the duty of the father and mother. The state is the father." Since her appointment, Saygin has succeeded in provoking feminist by publicizing her anti feminist stance. For instance, she believes that "three women do not equal one man" and claims that "women don't want to take part in politics." Her announcements outraged feminists who protested against violations of individual rights and demanded her resignation. Sahika Yuksel, a doctor from Istanbul, maintains "No one should have an interest in whether an adult woman is a virgin or not ... Unfortunately, in certain countries including Turkey, virginity is considered an important sign of honor."

(The Daily Star, January 9, 1998)