

From Madrid Consecrated Virgins

"She will never know the love of a man and will remain a virgin her entire life." Some Spanish women have already taken vows to become "Consecrated Virgins". These women differ from nuns in that even though they are devout Catholics they are not willing to become nuns and submit to the rigorous rules of convents. Priests carry out a ceremony where these women are consecrated as brides of Christ and they wear wedding rings to symbolize their union. Apart from that these women lead ordinary lives. Age, economic independence, and maturity are among the requirements qualifying one to become a consecrated virgin. "In order to be consecrated as a virgin by the Church, a woman must be at least 30 years old, have a job to support herself and have a certain intellectual maturity" according to church representatives. Besides "there is usually no medical exam to check that the women are technically virgins. The Church may accept to consecrate a woman who had early boyfriends, as long as those relationships were not public, the sources said, adding that the women were usually technically virgins." (*Daily Star*, Monday, January 18, 1999)

From Iran Legalizing Gender Discrimination

A bill was passed by the Iranian mullah's Majlis "prohibiting the publication of any material in the media that would give rise to conflict between the genders on the basis of a defense of women's rights contradictory to religious values." This bill blatantly advocates misogyny and favors anti-human discrimination against women. It enables the mullah's to "condemn advocates of women's equality to imprisonment and lashing according to article 698 of the law on Islamic punishments." According to the head of the Judiciary, Mohammed Yazdi, "women cannot preside in the courtroom and are only consulted in judicial matters." Around 1,800 young men and women were arrested recently on charges of "malveiling and lewd conduct" in an attempt by the clerical regime to uphold virtue and condemn immorality. (*Women Envision*, September-October 1998, No. 61-62 p. 9)

From France Circumcision is Punishable by Law

Hawa Griyo, a Malian living in Paris, was sentenced to eight years imprisonment after being indicted for performing operations of genital mutilation on forty eight girls. The parents of the circumcised girls were also arrested and jailed on the grounds of promoting violent practices against women that lead to permanent scarring. It is the first trial of its kind to take place in France. (*An-Nahar*, Thursday 18 February 1999)

Women Raise Your Hand for Peace!

From May 11 to 15, 1999, thousands of people will gather at The Hague Appeal for Peace to create an agenda for peace and justice for the 21st Century. Women's groups representing women from every world region are organizing panels, exhibits and demonstrations to make it clear to the governments of the world that we feel sorry about peace and justice and want to be part of any decisions coming out of The Hague Appeal for Peace. However, most of us cannot be in The Hague in May. So we are inviting you to send us a short message, in your own language, that we can place on a cut-out of a hand and stand in a pot filled with sand that will be part of an exhibit in a prominent part of the conference building. In this way, we hope to show that women everywhere care about peace and want their voices heard.

**Fax or mail it to:
International Tribune Center
777 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
USA**

**Fax: 001 212 661 2704
If you have email, send your message to: iwtc@igc.apc.org
Under subject, put Hague Peace Message.**

From Egypt University Professor Under Attack

Samia Mehrez, a tenured professor and a highly respected scholar of Modern Arabic Literature at the American University of Cairo (AUC) is being charged with "sexual harassment for assigning 'pornographic' material to minors and forcing them to discuss it." The matter gained precedence when some students at AUC complained to their parents about the "pornographic" nature of a novel, Muhammad Choukri's fictional autobiography *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi* (For Bread Alone), they were assigned to read at university. Word spread to the president of the university who called upon professor Mehrez and asked her to "withdraw" the book and apologize to the class for assigning it. She refused but proposed to exclude the novel in question from the examination.

This event brought about public condemnation where a group of Egyptian newspapers waged a campaign to "discredit professor Mehrez and to embarrass the American University." As a result of this campaign two books, deemed by "self-appointed custodians of public morality" to be injurious to good taste namely *The Smell of It* by Sonallah Ibrahim and *Distant Views of a Minaret* by Alifa Rifaat were removed from the shelves of the AUC bookstore. Besides in order to shy away from adverse publicity the core curriculum committee at AUC is seriously considering excluding Tayeb Saleh's novel *Season of Migration to the North* from its reading list for this coming semester.

Such censorship is unacceptable. If it is allowed to go unchecked, this eager censorship will ultimately consign imaginative literature to the role of beautifying and consecrating the ugly reality of violence, oppression, and injustice that prevail, alas, in much of the contemporary Arab world.

All those concerned, please e-mail President Gerhart at: jgerhart@aucegypt.edu and cc. to Prof Mehrez at samehrez@hotmail.com (A Document received by IWSAW to be posted and forwarded).