

From Lebanon

The Tenth Asia-Pacific Workshop on Regional Cooperation For the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

The Tenth Asia-Pacific Workshop on Regional Cooperation for the Promotion and Protection of Human rights was held in Beirut, Lebanon from 4-6 March 2002. The Workshop is held on an annual basis and represents a forum for sharing initiatives in the field of human rights. In her opening statement, Mrs. Mary Robinson (High Commissioner for Human Rights) emphasized the need to ratify international human rights treaties. "The obligation of states parties under some of the treaties to prepare reports for a treaty body is time consuming", said Mrs. Robinson, "but it can also be a rich experience that brings together government and civil society in understanding human rights problems and potential solutions. One particular human rights convention that Mrs. Robinson underlined is the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and their families. This Convention was adopted in 1990. Now only one more ratification is necessary for it to come into force. Mrs. Robinson called upon participating countries "to give life to a convention that protects a group so especially vulnerable in this globalized world".

The Workshop was an occasion for announcing the appointment of two regional representatives of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Beirut. These advisors will work for the region of South West Asia. The Office of the High Commissioner is in the process of appointing such representatives in all regions, in an effort to enhance the capacity of the Office to be of service to UN member states and to assist them in concrete steps to promote and protect human rights.

From Iran

Dara and Sara, Iran's Answer to Ken and Barbie

The Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, an Iranian government agency affiliated with the Ministry of Education has developed its version of Barbie and Ken — twin toy dolls named Sara, a female, and Dara, a male. Sara and Dara possess an oriental appearance and come in different models wearing various traditional clothes. They advocate traditional values and unlike their Western counterparts, who wear revealing clothes, the dolls are modestly clothed and cannot be undressed.

Barbie was banned in Iran since 1996 for fear that young girls who play with the doll are bound to be affected by the model she presents and hence may grow to reject Iranian values. Iran first announced it would produce Sara and Dara in 1996, but technical problems delayed production until now. Sales of Sara and Dara have so far been slow. A shop owner after displaying the new dolls in his window recounts: "A lot of people have come to look at the dolls, but they just laugh and leave, ... We haven't sold any yet."

Eleven Things you Should Know About Women in Prison in the United States:

1. There are over 90,000 women in prison in the US today. The majority are in prison for economic crimes. The most typical convictions resulting in imprisonment for women are property crimes, such as check forgery and illegal credit card use. Eighty percent of women in prison report incomes of less than \$2,000 per year in the year before their arrest, and 92% report incomes under \$10,000.
2. Of the women convicted of violent crimes, the vast majority were convicted for defending themselves or their children from abuse. In California alone there are 600 women in prison for killing their abusers in self-defense. Average prison terms are twice as long for killing husbands as for killing wives.
3. Fifty four percent of women in prison are women of color.
4. Ninety percent of women in prison are single mothers. They lose contact with their children, sometimes forever. There are 167,000 children in the US

- whose mothers are incarcerated.
5. The average age of women in prison is 29 years, and 58% have not finished high school.
6. Racism and economic discrimination are inextricably linked to sexism in our culture, creating severe inequalities in the court system and the prison system. For example, black women are twice as likely to be convicted of killing their abusive husbands than are white women. Black women, on average, receive longer jail time and higher fines than do white women for the same crimes.
7. Twenty five percent of political prisoners in the US are women.
8. The number of women in prison has increased 138% in the last ten years. This is partly due to the worsening of economic conditions for women, but also to the increase in arrest rates due to the "war on crime" and "war on drugs".
9. Women prisoners spend on average 17 hours a day in their cells, with one hour outside for exercise, compared to men prisoners, who spend on average 15 hours a day in

- their cells, with 1.5 hours outside.
10. The Women's High Security Unit at Lexington, KY, was closed in 1988 because of a national and international human rights campaign. The prison kept the women in years of isolation in subterranean cells, conducted daily strip searches, allowed extreme sleep deprivation practices, and as policy, condoned a complete denial of privacy, including male guards watching the showers, and an intense campaign of sexual abuse.
11. The late Senator Hart estimated that the annual cost of corporate crime was between \$174-231 billion dollars, while the economic cost of "street crimes" (e.g. burglary and robbery) was \$3-4 billion. We must look at why the state focuses on enforcing laws which penalize the types of actions taken by poor and working class men and women while systematically ignoring the more destructive white-collar crimes. (<http://www.prisonactivist.org/women/women-in-prison.html>)