

# **SMALL STEPS TOWARDS ACHIEVING WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS**

REPORT OF ACTIVITIES

January 2003 - June 2004

*Prepared by:*

**WOMEN'S RESEARCH & ACTION GROUP (WRAG)**

Post Box No. 6830, Santacruz (E), Mumbai 400055

Phone: +91 22 2667 2015 Fax: +91 22 2667 3799

Email: [wrag@vsnl.com](mailto:wrag@vsnl.com)

## CONTENTS

1. Overview	2
2. Community Outreach Programme	4
3. ‘Justice & Accountability Matters’ Programme	11
4. Campaign on Secularism	18
5. Our Trustees	21
6. The WRAG team	22

## OVERVIEW

This has been a very special year for WRAG as we celebrated 10 years of work on women's rights, in April 2003. The time period January 2003 and June 2004 has been a year of improvement in both staff competence and governance, and a year of expansion and consolidation of many of our activities. We have received encouragement and appreciation from many sides.

The existing programme – Community Outreach Programme (COP) underwent a phase of expansion, reaching out to more and more mahila mandals, and also beginning its work with groups of adolescent girls and men from the communities that WRAG works with. In addition, two new programmes were officially commenced in April 2003 – Justice and Accountability Matters (JAM) and Campaign on Secularism (COS). This has transformed WRAG into a multi-faceted organization working on community development, human rights, law and secularism in relation to women's rights, both at the preventive and curative levels, and from the community level to policy level interventions. WRAG has taken the initiative to coordinate and strengthen two campaigns – Campaign on reform of Muslim personal law and ICC-India: the Indian campaign on International Criminal Court. Both the campaigns have received a strong boost in recent months, with a rapid expansion of the NGO-support base for the campaigns.

This has also been a year when WRAG has forged strong links with community-based organizations, women's movement, human rights groups and organizations and initiatives that work on secularism. The World Social Forum held in January 2004 in Mumbai provided an excellent opportunity for us to interact with many organizations and individuals, and to find ways of taking many of our activities forward. The formation of National Network of Autonomous Women's Groups (NNAWG), the Feminist Dialogue, held in January 2004 that brought together over 200 feminists from all over the world, and the National Conference Committee formed recently to organize a national level women's conference in 2005, have provided opportunities for WRAG to develop closer links with the women's movement. These platforms have exposed the young feminists of WRAG to larger discourses on feminism, women's human rights and the women's movement. We have worked hard on our outreach, networking and visibility of the organization, reaching out to more and more like-minded groups and exploring possibilities for collaborative work.

Further, during this year, WRAG has also focussed on institution-building, and on streamlining administration. Formulation of a Staff Policy, formulation and introduction of performance appraisals and performance-based increments and formulation of a Salary Structure for 2004 to 2006 are some measures taken to further professionalize and streamline the functioning of the organization.

<b>Overall Picture On Funding And Projects</b>
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<b>Activity Programme /</b>	<b>Funding Agency</b>	<b>Start Date</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Status</b>
Community Outreach Programme	Global Fund for Women	January 2004	1 year	Will be completed in December 2004
Saheli – Solidarity Group of Single Women	Mama Cash	August 2003	1 year	Will be completed in July 2004.
International Criminal Court	NGO Coalition for International Criminal Court (CICC)	August 2003	6 months	Obtained extension for utilising the funds. Completed June 2004
International Criminal Court & Community level activities on secularism	Oxfam Trust	February 2004	6 months	Will be completed on 31 July 2004

Non-funded programmes & activities:

- Campaign on Secularism
- Activities of JAM other than the ICC campaign, such as human rights awareness and legal literacy programmes and women and law campaigns.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAMME

### Background

Between 1994 and 1998, WRAG undertook an action-research titled “Women & Laws in the Muslim Community”. The main objectives were to compile, document and analyse personal laws governing Muslims in India.

In the last 5-6 years a large number of Muslim women have organized themselves into small groups and are actively working in their local communities. During our work, women have expressed the need for information on basic laws, human rights, Muslim personal law and sexual and reproductive health.

In response to this situation and as an offshoot of the findings of Women and Law Project initiated by WRAG in the previous years, the Community Outreach Programme was started in 1999. Given below are some of the activities initiated within the Community Outreach Programme (COP) with specific reference to activities done in the year 2003.

### Publication of Booklets on Muslim Personal Law

WRAG felt a strong need to develop and publish relevant educational material on Muslim personal law with the aim of demystifying Muslim personal law and creating awareness about the same among ordinary Muslim women. It was with this purpose that WRAG published five booklets on Muslim Personal Law written with gender perspective on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2003 covering the following topics: We are in the process of translating the booklets into Hindi and Urdu in order to enable more women to access the same.

### Capacity-building Activities with Mahila Mandals

In the year 2003 WRAG financially supported 2 *mahila mandals* and provided capacity-building inputs to 10 *mahila mandals*. The *mandals* provide counselling, social action and legal aid to women in distress within the community. The *mandals* had expressed the need for capacity building. WRAG responded to their needs and supported these groups through training in legal literacy, knowledge of personal law, gender awareness, self-development, leadership development, and counselling. WRAG’s objective is to make these groups self-reliant through capacity building.

In the last year, we have been able to reach out to **14 community-based Muslim women’s groups**. Our objective is not only to disseminate information about MPL to the grass-root level,

but also to ensure that the voices at the grass-root level, which demand law reform, are heard by the policy-makers.

In order to build the capacities of the groups and to impart mandal-building skills, following activities are undertaken:

### Visits to Mahila Mandals

WRAG staff regularly (weekly and fortnightly) visit each of the mandals to interact with them and help them set up the mandal. They show them how to maintain various registers like the attendance register, case register, notice papers, receipt book etc. They train them to conduct meetings, motivate the members to attend meeting regularly and conduct short training sessions. They also help the group to build rapport with the local police station and help them gain membership in the Mohalla Committee. The group is also encouraged to build relationship with other committees in the community. The staff accompanies the mandal members for case visits so that they gain a better understanding of the strategies used to help women.

Given below is the list of the activities of the mandals with whom WRAG has initiated work:

Name of Mandal	Brief description of activities
Mahila Shakti Mandal Naupada, Bandra (E)	Started independently in 1995, and has been financially supported by WRAG from 2000. The mandal has gained a reputation of handling complicated cases relating to matrimonial problems of women. The mandal members have established a good rapport with the local police, religious leaders and the Maharashtra State Commission for Women (Mahila Ayog). The mandal handled about 120 cases last year, and has a present strength of 25 members. The members are also part of the Mohalla committee.
Samjhauta Mahila Mandal Behrampada, Bandra (E)	Started a year and a half ago, the mandal has handled nearly 40 cases last year. It works in collaboration with Mahila Shakti Mandal and other organizations in the area. It presently has strength of 15 members. The members are also part of the Mohalla committee.
Priyadarshini Mahila Mandal Chita Camp, Trombay	Started three years ago and associated with WRAG for the past two years. The mandal handled about 50 cases last year. The mandal members have established a good rapport with the local police who support them in their interventions.
Roshni Mahila Mandal Malavni, Malad	This group started independently in 1993, and has been supported by WRAG from 2003. This group has been handling cases of women facing domestic violence.
Hamraaz Committee Jeri Meri, Kurla	This group was established in 2001 in collaboration with Jagruti Kendra to intervene in cases of domestic violence. The total strength of the group is 15 women. The mandal members have established a good rapport with the local police, religious leaders and the Maharashtra State Commission for Women (Mahila Ayog). The members are also part of the Mohalla Committee. WRAG has been instrumental in imparting inputs on various issues related to women.
Bismillah Mahila Mandal Behrampada, Bandra (E)	This mandal was established in 1995. WRAG's association with the mandal dates back three years. The mandal members have taken up civic issues in the community and also attend the training programmes organized by WRAG.

Yadav Nagar Saki Naka, Andheri (e)	This group was established by Jan Jagruti Kendra. WRAG has been conducting regular capacity-building workshops with them since 2002. They take up cases of domestic violence and also take up civic issues and act as a pressure group.
Aman Mahila Committee Golibar, Khar (E)	WRAG has initiated this group in 2003. This group has started taking up cases of violence against women and provides counseling services to them. The total strength of the group is 15 women.
Bharatiya Mahila Mandal Bharat Nagar, Bandra (E)	The total strength of the group is 15 women. WRAG has initiated this group in 2003. The members are being trained on various issues concerning women. Regular visits are done to help them set up the group in a systematic manner.
Aasmaan project Bombay Central	This project was started by Saathi organization. WRAG has taken the responsibility of providing training inputs on gender issues. The group works with commercial sex workers.
Razaak Chawl Group Behrampada, Bandra (E)	WRAG has taken the responsibility of providing training inputs on gender issues. WRAG has been associated with the group for the past one-year. The group takes up issues of civic concern. WRAG also helps them to liaise with organizations working on civic issues. The strength of the group is about 20 women.
Seva Mahila Mandal Behrampada, Bandra (E)	The strength of the group is about 12 women. WRAG has taken the responsibility of providing training inputs on gender issues. We have been supporting the group since last one year.
Saheli group	The group comprises of single women from different mandals. They work in the communities to provide emotional support to single women and also work on the issue of employment for the single women. WRAG has initiated this group in the year 2002 and provides training inputs on developing counselling and vocational skills.
Amina Nagar	Strength of the group is about 12 women. They are keen to start a mandal in their community and want regular inputs and training for the same. They are keen to take up issues of civic nature and WRAG is helping them to liaise with the organizations working on the same.

### Gender Training Programme

As part of our capacity-building programme and in response to the demand from new mahila mandals for disseminating information on women's rights, WRAG formulated a programme which would facilitate the participation of two / three representatives from each mahila mandal. The training programme consisted of two sessions a month for six months. The first such programme was started in July 2003, and had met with enthusiastic response. 29 women participated in the course. All those participants who successfully completed the training programme were awarded certificates.

The contents of the workshop were as follows:

Module 1: Gender, Patriarchy & Feminism

Module 2: Women's rights within the Indian legal framework and women's movement.

Module 3: Muslim Personal Law & Women's rights

Module 4: Women's Health.

Module 5: Laws related to domestic violence and dowry.

Module 6: Human Rights and Awareness on Communalism

The second batch started in January 2004 and was successfully concluded in June 2004. In the coming months we intend to start intermediate course for the first batch with advanced information on the same topics covered in the first batch. The workshops are conducted by the staff members of WRAG, who use participatory training techniques such as games, role-plays, use of audio-visual aids and discussions.

### Training of Trainers

In the course of WRAG's work with the mahila mandals, expressed the need for more information on MPL and expressed an urgent need for guidance and capacity building so that they could actively take part in the national campaign for MPL reform. WRAG attempted to meet these demands within its existing resources. For this purpose the training of trainers (TOT) activity was started in the year 2002.

In this programme, we identified potential trainers from the communities that WRAG works with. These trainers were given training in self-awareness and development, gender, training techniques, communication skills and relevance of training in empowering women. Further training focussing on content – such as in general laws, Muslim Personal law, awareness on communalism, counselling was planned out. By the end of 2003, 3 trainers had agreed to prepare themselves on the issue of their interest. It is hoped that through TOT, WRAG can increase the multiplier effect and meet the needs of a higher number of people who require such inputs.

### Capacity-building Activities with Adolescent Girls

For the past several years, WRAG has been supporting mahila mandals who work at the curative level in dealing with matrimonial violence and harassment faced by individual women. In the year 2003, WRAG decided to extend its activities towards working at a preventive level too – through conducting awareness and training programmes for adolescent girls. Purpose of the programme is to empower girls by developing gender perspective, positive sense of self worth and identity, independent decision making awareness about rights and their assertion and creating solidarity group in the community to share and ventilate. WRAG is working with three such groups and conducts regular meetings, workshops, exposure visits and camps with them. Some of the topics covered in the weekly meetings are gender discrimination, general police law, self-defense, menstruation & hygiene, public speaking and self-awareness.

In the last six months WRAG is in touch with three such groups and coordinates its activities. A 6-day camp was organized for these girls in which topics like health and hygiene, Muslim personal law, stress management, gender discrimination were covered. Picnics and exposure visits were also held to make an interesting learning experience. We intend to have these camps every 6 months.

## Dialoguing with Men

The Indian women's movement has been frequently critiqued as having focussed its attention solely on empowering women and creating gender awareness among them, thereby ignoring the necessity to work simultaneously on a reform in men's attitude towards women. The women's movement has also been dubbed as anti-men. WRAG has attempted to deviate from this approach, and perceive men as partners in the process of social change whereby women's status in the country will be improved. To achieve this, WRAG initiated a dialogue with men from the communities that it works with. We held monthly meetings with the men. Initially the meetings helped to break ice. We had informal sessions where we discussed how each man present in the meeting supported his wife in her work. An exchange of ideas took place on issues relating to gender, patriarchy, discrimination and violence against women. Through such interesting exchanges, we hope that WRAG's understanding of the male perspective will be enriched, while at the same time, we will be able to make inroads into the patriarchal mindset of the men.

In the last 6 months we have been able to hold training workshops with men on health issues with special focus on reproductive health. We involve the men in the decision making process and based on their expressed needs we tailor the training inputs. Through such interesting exchanges, we hope that WRAG's understanding of the male perspective will be enriched, while at the same time, we will be able to make inroads into the patriarchal mindset of the men.

In the long run, we hope to build the capacities of these men, who could become agents of change. The men could then reach out to male youth within their communities, and broaden their understanding of the concerns of women.

## Campaigning on Muslim Personal Law Reform

### ***Muslim women's Rights Network:***

A strategy for the campaign for reform of Muslim personal law was the formation of the Muslim Women's Rights Network in 1999 at the initiative of local women's organization that works on Muslim women's rights. The Network consists of groups and individuals from various parts of the country working on the issue of Muslim personal law from a gender perspective.

In August 2003 the network members met in Mumbai. In this meeting WRAG took on the following responsibilities:

- To work on the draft of 'standard nikahnama' with the objective of promoting a more gender-friendly marriage contract under Muslim personal law.
- To collect and compile information on the strategies used by network members throughout the country to help women obtain divorces under Muslim personal law.

The Qazis were very supportive of the effort to standardize the nikaahnama. Advocate Uraisee also studied the nikaahnama and gave his suggestions so that the document becomes legally enforceable.

## Initiatives with the Qazi

The women's groups that WRAG has been supporting have been handling the matrimonial cases of Muslim women. Resistance to our work also came from Qazis who felt that we are dealing

matters related to personal law without having adequate knowledge about it. Some Qazis who were already handling matrimonial cases, were approached by our mandal for getting help in cases which they were receiving. These Qazis were very helpful. Some even appreciated the work that we have undertaken. This experience has been contrary to our understanding that **all** Qazis are conservative and they will always support the men. Right now the mandal gets support from 5-6 Qazis in handling Muslim women's cases.

WRAG has also initiated the process of strengthening the campaign by meeting organisations that work with Muslim women, in other parts of the country. We have interacted with organisations like COVA and Shaheen in Hyderabad and Olakh, Sahiyar and Anandi in Gujrat. WRAG will conduct training programmes on Muslim Personal Law with the representatives of these organisations. These organisations are also part of the network and hence are keen to know more about the Muslim law. We look upon these organisations as our campaign partners who will work towards creating awareness about the need to reform the law.

### Collaborative Action with Other NGOs

Many women's rights organisations have felt an inadequacy in understanding women's rights within the parameters of Muslim personal law. This negatively impacts strategies taken by these organisations at ensuring the assertion of women's matrimonial rights. WRAG felt an urgent need to create a platform where these strategies can be shared with other groups involved similarly in providing support services to women. It was also envisaged that this sharing would also equip all such organisations with relevant strategies and improve our capacities to assist women in distress. In 2003 we held a workshop with organisations and its objectives were:

- To share strategies used when handling matrimonial cases of Muslim women;
- To help build a network of such organisations to help Muslim women better; and
- To help participants understand Muslim personal law from a gender perspective.

Recently in June 2004 we organised a 2-day workshop to discuss the provisions for Muslim women in the Muslim personal law with focus on codified and uncodified laws of divorce and maintenance. Speakers like Dr. Vibhuti Patel, Advocate Niloufer Akhter and Islamic scholar Dr. Zeenat Shaukat Ali were invited. WRAG intends to continue the dialogue with women's rights organisations on understanding Muslim personal law from a gender perspective.

### Initiation of & Support to a Women's Solidarity Group

WRAG has initiated a solidarity group among destitute women living in the communities that we work with. This activity arose from constant confrontation with the economic and emotional difficulties faced by single women – including women who are widows, divorced, deserted and unmarried. The aims of this self-help group are as follows:

- To provide emotional support to each other
- to help develop strategies to overcome the problems faced by single women
- to enable women to overcome loneliness, low self-esteem and a sense of abandonment
- to facilitate women to secure their economic rights through self-employment, skill development and education

- to help provide ancillary services, including legal and medical, to the women

This group meets regularly to provide emotional support to each other. Many women in this group have neither education nor skills to support themselves. Moreover, they also face rejection from their family and society, which pushes them further towards destitution. The group enables them to deal with their need for companionship, sympathy, legal and other support. In the year 2004 the group has started to work independently and have peer counsellors active in the communities of Navpada, Behrampada and Jerimeri. The group members have also acquired income-generation skills and are engaged in activities which help them economically.

#### Meetings with Mandal Leaders

Since the time WRAG has begun its work in the communities, it has initiated a regular monthly meeting of the leaders of the groups with whom it has been in touch with and collaborating. At the beginning of the year we were in touch with 6 groups. **At the end of the year 2003 we are in touch with 13 groups.** Through regular meetings with the leaders we create a platform where they can share their activities with each other. The following topics were covered: gender perspective, leadership development, values and principles of counseling, Muslim personal law, nikaahnama. At the end of the year 2003 we have been able to increase our strength in the community, which gets reflected in the increase in the number of leaders, who attend the regular meetings. This year we have focused on sharpening their gender perspective, giving more information and awareness on Muslim personal law and counseling skills and techniques. We have also strengthened the relationship between the mandals and government institutions like the Women's Commission and Mohalla Committee.

#### Human Resources

At present, the COP programme has 5 staff members, including a Programme Coordinator. However, the activities are expanding rapidly, requiring the recruitment of personnel on a full-time / part-time basis.

## ‘JUSTICE & ACCOUNTABILITY MATTERS’ PROGRAMME

### Introduction

Within the country, on the one hand, we have an extremely powerful state that uses its machinery to target disadvantaged and marginalized groups of people for human rights violations, based on its Hindu right wing ideology, and remains non-accountable for the crimes it commits; on the other hand, we also have a situation where the poor, illiterate, disadvantaged and marginalized groups of people including women, are ignorant of even their basic legal rights, thereby making them more vulnerable to such attacks. Due to their ignorance, justice remains illusive even for serious violations that are committed. This present situation within the country has necessitated the commencement of the JAM programme.

This is a new programme, launched on the occasion of WRAG’s tenth anniversary. The project aims at addressing issues of justice and accountability for violations of women’s human rights, and participation of women from minority and marginalized communities in the discussion of justice and accountability.

#### ***Long Term Purposes***

- To end the climate of impunity that exists within the country now, and to create a culture of accountability and respect for rule of law
- To build and strengthen capacities of women from minority and marginalized communities in the discussion of justice and accountability.
- To make the legal system (including the justice delivery system) efficient, fair and sensitive to the needs of marginalized persons, including women
- To work towards integration of a gender perspective and gender equality within Indian laws
- To increase the capacities of women’s groups to articulate women’s rights issues using a human rights paradigm
- To build the capacities of individuals and groups (of women), especially from disadvantaged & marginalized communities, to assert their legal rights effectively

#### ***Projects / Activities***

- ICC-India: the Indian campaign on International Criminal Court
- Programmes on Legal literacy and human rights awareness
- Campaigns on Women & Law
- Lectures, workshops, seminars and conferences on human rights issues

### ICC-India: The Indian Campaign on International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is the first permanent forum mooted at an international level to deal with individual perpetrators committing crimes of a heinous nature. It is intended to try individuals who have perpetuated war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The ICC would not supplant the jurisdiction of national courts in any way; it would exercise jurisdiction only in those cases where national legal systems either fail to make such persons accountable, or are unable to do so.

While the international community has been actively campaigning for the creation of an ICC to make individual perpetrators accountable for the most heinous crimes under international law, very little is written, spoken or known about the issue in India. The Indian government has certain apprehensions about the mechanism, and is yet to accede to the Treaty. If the civil society plays an active role in this campaign and initiates a dialogue with the government, such apprehensions may be warded off, which would then pave the way for India's early accession to the Treaty.

An awareness campaign on ICC, named ICC-India, was initiated in the year 2000. This campaign began to be housed in and function from WRAG as a project of WRAG from November 2002. In April 2003, when the JAM programme was initiated, it was integrated as a project within JAM. The aims of the campaign are as follows:

- To initiate and sustain an awareness and advocacy campaign on women's rights and ICC
- To establish a national network on this issue
- To disseminate information and coordinate activities among the members of the national network
- To consult and work with the National Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Women on issues relating to women's human rights.
- To initiate a dialogue with the Indian government, from time to time, on issues related to violence against women.
- To meaningfully contribute to the ongoing human rights campaigns within the country on various issues, with a particular reference to women's rights.

An advisory board has been formed for ICC-India to guide in its activities. It consists of the following persons:

- *Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin*, Convenor, Asian Network for ICC & Director, Bangladesh Centre for Genocide Studies, Belgium
- *Dino Kritsiotis*, Faculty, School of Law, University of Nottingham, U.K.
- *Henri Tiphagne*, Executive Director, People's Watch - Tamil Nadu, Madurai, India
- *Jitendra Sharma*, President, International Association of Democratic Lawyers & Senior Advocate, Supreme Court, New Delhi, India
- *Mihir Desai*, Director, India Centre for Human Rights & Law, and human rights advocate, Mumbai, India
- *Sitaramam Kakarala*, Assistant Professor, National Law School of India University, Bangalore, India
- *Usha Ramanathan*, Honorary Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and law researcher, Delhi, India
- *Vahida Nainar*, Chair, Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice, The Netherlands and Co-Founder, Women's Research and Action Group, Mumbai, India

The ICC-India project includes research and publication, information dissemination and campaigning.

#### ***a. Workshops & Meetings***

- Participated as a resource person on ICC at a South Asia Human Rights Training Programme for activists, organized by People's Watch Tamilnadu in Madurai, December 2002

- A two-day residential workshop held at a national level on women's rights & the ICC, coorganised by Women & Media collective, Colombo & ICC-India, project of WRAG, held in Mumbai, 15-16 April 2003. About 30 persons participated in this workshop; the participants were women's rights and human rights activists, lawyers and para-legal personnel. There were 8 resource persons for this workshop. *(A copy of the report is available on request)*
- Participated as a resource person on ICC at a human rights training programme for youth, organized by Documentation, Research & Training Centre, Mumbai, 1 May 2003. The presentation and the discussion that followed were made in Hindi.
- Participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Asian Regional Coordinators' Meeting and Experts Study Session on Implementation Issues, organized by Forum Asia and CICC-Asia at Bangkok, 7-10 July 2003. At this meeting, a paper was prepared & presented on 'India & ICC'
- Workshop On ICC & its relevance to India, coorganised by Free Legal Aid Committee Jamshedpur & ICC-India, project of WRAG, held at Jamshedpur, 20 July 2003. This workshop was held to honour 5 years of Rome Statute & the International Justice Day. The participants for this workshop included lawyers, social workers, women's rights and child rights activists. *(A copy of the report is available on request)*
- Guidance was given to law students for 2004 Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition as the problem related to issues concerning the ICC. September – November 2003
- Organized a workshop on ICC & India at the World Social Forum, January 2004
- Delivered a lecture on relevance of ICC to India to students of Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work March 2004
- Participated in ICC workshop and South Asian regional coordinators' meeting, Dhaka 28 April – 2 May 2004
- Addressed students of National Law School of India, Bangalore – conducted 3 one-hour sessions on ICC May 2004
- Participated in and made a presentation on ICC at South Asian Teaching Session on International Humanitarian Law, organized by ICRC – South Asian regional delegation, 12 – 18 May 2004
- Made a presentation on Victims' Rights & ICC at Coimbatore, at the Trainers' Training on Combating Torture, organised by People's Watch – Tamilnadu in association with other human rights organizations. 20 May 2004
- Organized a workshop on ICC in Bangalore, in collaboration with PUCL-Karnataka & Alternative Law Forum. 26 May 2004
- Organizing a lawyers' workshop on ICC in Mumbai, in collaboration with India Centre for Human Rights & Law 3 July 2004

#### ***b. Campaigning***

- Prepared and released a press note on India signing a bilateral agreement with the US, December 2002
- Participated in an 8-day workshop on Advocacy & Information and Communication Technology. Though the workshop did not deal directly with the ICC campaign, the knowledge and information gathered from this workshop will contribute to taking the Indian ICC campaign forward more efficiently with the help of the ICT.
- Presentation on ICC campaign strategies and techniques, in a workshop on Human Rights, organized by Mumbai Initiative for Human Rights Education (MIHRE), 26-28 June 2004
- ICC-India has been carrying on with outreach and networking activities throughout the year, in order to expand and strengthen its campaigning efforts.

**c. *Research, Publication & Information Dissemination***

- A publication titled ‘Combating Impunity’ was brought out in April 2003. The publication is the first attempt at a compilation of articles written on the relevance of ICC for India. The articles have been compiled by Vahida Nainar and Saumya Uma. Apart from assisting the Indian campaign generally, the compilation is intended specifically to be a resource material for future workshops on ICC
- Published articles on ICC from time to time, many of which have been included in ‘Combating Impunity’;
- A research project has been initiated by ICC-India focusing on a comparative analysis of ICC-related laws with Indian laws, as well as ICC’s relevance for human rights in India. This project has stemmed out of a need to understand, analyse, and articulate more clearly the manner in which the ICC is relevant for the human rights situation prevalent in India. In particular, there is a dearth of research on how ICC can impact the rights of women, children, religious minorities, dalits and other disadvantaged groups in India. Further, there has been no research done so far on how the Indian law compares with the ICC-related laws on various aspects. This research would be essential to expose the lacunae present in Indian laws and strengthen the law reform campaign within the country. The research is also requisite for illustrating the Indian record of justice and accountability for major human rights violations, and finding ways in which this may be improved with an impetus from the ICC.

ICC-India has prepared a research synopsis, invited researchers and guides to participate in this project, set modalities, assigned topics and has facilitated the process of started the project, all via email. It is hoped that the research papers will be completed latest by July 2004, and will be published thereafter. An initial meeting with the researchers is scheduled to be held on 3 July 2004 in Mumbai, in order to share the research papers, assess the status of each research and explore ways to use the research for the ICC campaign.

- Members of ICC-India have researched and written articles relating to the need for protection of victims & witnesses within the Indian legal system. These articles were necessitated by the Best Bakery case where witnesses were intimidated and forced to give false testimonies in court, leading to the acquittal of all 21 persons accused of murder, arson and destruction of property during the Gujarat carnage last year. The articles have made specific references to the ICC and its system of protecting victims and witnesses. These articles have been published in January – February 2004 in *Combat Law* and *Urudhva Mula*.

<b>Programmes on Legal Literacy &amp; Human Rights Awareness</b>
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This project aims at spreading awareness of law and human rights among women, among staff members of WRAG, among the communities that WRAG works with, mahila mandals (community-based women’s organizations), CBOs (organizations which work with communities), NGOs and other persons working on implementation of law (including the police).

➤ *Short Term Purposes*

- Creating awareness of legal rights among women, with a focus on poor, illiterate & marginalized women
- Familiarising women with legal & human rights institutions such as courts, police stations, human rights commissions etc.
- Reducing dependence of women on the established legal system & on lawyers, and simultaneously strengthening alternative dispute resolution mechanisms
- Building women's capacities to perceive and articulate their rights using a human rights framework

➤ *Work Done So Far*

- Training of WRAG staff: WRAG staff members have a weekly meeting, which begins with a discussion of current affairs. During this discussion, effort has been taken to integrate and initiate discussions on aspects of law, human rights and women's human rights. In addition, special training sessions have been conducted on the Indian women's movement & campaigns on law, feminism, gender & patriarchy, women's right to health, human rights, Indian human rights situation, women's human rights and the International Criminal Court.
- Trainings for mahila mandals: Sessions on gender, patriarchy and feminism, and on the Indian women's movement were conducted in order to provide a conceptual grounding in women's rights. These sessions were followed up with sessions on basics of law, legal system, courts and criminal law, with a focus on the practical aspects. The trainings for the mandals then concluded with specific sessions on law related to domestic violence, dowry and human rights.
- Trainings / presentations in other places:
  - A three hour training on Women & Law for 40 para professionals, as part of a para-professional course, organized by Media Matters, Ambarnath. March 2003
  - Made a presentation on Women's Human Rights (in Hindi) at Stri Bal Shakti, Bandra (E). 50 women, who work in anganwadis, participated in the training programme. April 2003
  - Made a presentation on Women's Human Rights (in Hindi) at Nirmala Niketan Extension Project (ICDS – Integrated Child Development Scheme - training programme). 30 women, who are middle level anganwadi workers, participated in the programme. April 2003
  - Training for the police were jointly organized by Police of Western Region, Mumbai, and the Women's Cell of Mohalla Committee Movement Trust. 4 sessions were conducted on Women's human rights, Indian Constitution & law relating to dowry, rape & domestic violence. About 30 –35 participants of officer and constable cadres attended each session. July 2003
  - Delivered a lecture on 'Women's Rights as Human Rights' at Sophia Centre for Women's Development March 2004
  - Organized a three day residential workshop on Human Rights, for school and college teachers and NGOs, along with other members of Mumbai Initiative for Human Rights Education (MIHRE) 26-28 June 2004
  - Presentation on 'Women's Rights as Human Rights' at a workshop on Human Rights, organized by Mumbai Initiative for Human Rights Education (MIHRE) 26-28 June 2004

- Participation in Workshops:
- Workshop on Women & Media, organised by Joint Women's Programme & National Commission for Women, Feb 2003
- Workshop on Violence Against Women, organised by National Commission for Women & State Mahila Ayog, Feb 2003
- 5 day workshop on Human Rights Education, organized by Documentation, Research & Training Centre, Mumbai in October 2003
- Seminar on Communalism & Muslim women's rights, organized by Awaaz-e-niswan, July 2003
- National Workshop on Right to Health Care, organized by Jan Swasthya Abhyan, Sep 2003

### Campaigns on Women & Law

- Shelter homes: Participated in meetings organized by Sakhya to formulate & finalise a Bill regulating the services provided by shelter homes (state-run and private ones) in Maharashtra
- Sexual harassment at workplace: Participated in public meetings convened to discuss a Bill drafted on the issue by NGOs and advocates in Mumbai; drafted suggestions for modification of the Bill & sent the same to the drafters of the Bill. December 2003
- Malimath Committee recommendations: The Committee on Reforms of the Criminal Justice System, headed by Justice Malimath, was appointed by the present government in 2001 with a broad mandate "to examine the fundamental principles of criminal jurisprudence, including the constitutional provisions relating to criminal jurisprudence, and see if any modifications and amendments are required." The Committee submitted its report to the government recently and since then, its recommendations have come under severe criticism both internationally and domestically. Representatives of JAM have participated in meetings organized in Mumbai to create awareness of the negative aspects of the recommendations, and in a signature campaign protesting against implementation of the same.
- Signature campaign against a judgment on arrest of women: On 26<sup>th</sup> August 1994, the Bombay High Court had passed an order in Christian Community Welfare Council of India Versus Govt. of Maharashtra and another, holding that: "The State should ensure that no lady or female person is arrested without presence of lady constable and in no case, after sun-set and before sun-rise and if there are already rules or guidelines to that effect, these are to be strictly followed and complied with." On the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2003, when the case was heard by the Supreme Court on appeal, it modified, diluted and relaxed these guidelines. NGOs and human rights activists are convinced that this judgment would pave way for increased violence against women in police custody. Therefore a signature campaign was initiated to create awareness against the judgment. JAM programme participated in this campaign. October 2003
- JAM members have written articles on law relating to protection of victims and witnesses – the international scenario as well as the issues for concern within India. These articles

are intended to contribute to an ongoing discussion about the need for protection of victims and witnesses under the Indian legal system, subsequent to acquittals in the Best Bakery case. January 2004

- Participated in a consultation with women's organizations on the formulation of HIV/AIDS Bill, organized by Lawyers' Collective, Agra, April 2004
- Participated actively in a press conference in Mumbai, convened by women's rights and other human rights groups, demanding an enquiry into alleged sexual harassment at workplace of an employee of Sahara, April 2004

#### Workshops / seminars on Other Issues

- Organized and participated in an 8 session Lecture & Discussion Series on Understanding Genocide, April 2003, with Vahida Nainar as the resource person.
- NNAWG: Participated in meetings of women's organizations held to strategize a feminist intervention in the World Social Forum 2004. When the organizations decided to form a National Network on Autonomous Women's Groups (NNAWG), WRAG, through members of JAM, became a member of this network. This network has been formed specifically to integrate a gender perspective into the WSF process.
- Organized a two-day International Feminists' Dialogue, along with other members of NNAWG. 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> January 2004
- Organized and participated in Women's Day Celebrations organized by several women's groups in Mumbai, 8 March 2004
- Member of National Conference Committee, formed recently by women's groups all over India, in order to organize a national conference on women's rights in 2005. Participating actively in NCC meetings.
- Participated, from time to time, in the meetings and activities of INSAANIYAT – an initiative by groups working on secularism in Mumbai.

#### Human Resources

At present, two full-time persons are working in the activities of JAM programme. As the activities of JAM have expanded rapidly, we look forward to recruiting more persons for its activities, subject to availability of funds.

## CAMPAIGN ON SECULARISM

### Introduction

Since the time of its inception ten years ago, WRAG has taken a stand against communalism (religion-based discrimination) and fundamentalism. WRAG works with women from communities that faced the brunt of communal violence in Mumbai in 1992-93. Such women are already involved in initiatives such as the formation of *mohalla committees* – a platform for the police and citizens from minority communities to come together and work on issues of common concern. WRAG, together with the mahila mandals, had also organised peace marches. In the recent context of increased communalisation, WRAG now seeks to consolidate these sporadic actions and responses into a proactive cohesive programme, working both at the preventive and curative levels. This programme has been started recently.

### *Long Term Purposes*

- to create spaces for increasing visibility to acts and ventures that oppose communal forces;
- to promote justice and accountability for violations of human rights during times of communal violence; to counter communal propaganda and advance secular concerns;
- to facilitate role of women in the peace process; and
- to promote understanding of the manipulative use of people for furthering the politics of hate.

### *Areas of Intervention*

- advocacy
- mass action
- research and publication
- conducting programmes for inter-religious harmony within and among communities, and
- solidarity-building with secular-humanist organizations.

### Public Meetings

On 29<sup>th</sup> April 2003, WRAG organized a public meeting on strategies to counter communalism. Participants included women and men from communities that WRAG works with, and interested activists and members of non-governmental organisations. Sophia Khan, an advocate and women's rights activist from Ahmedabad, and Shakuntala Mehta, an activist from Sabarkantha district of Gujarat, participated in the programme as resource persons. They shared their experiences on the communal carnage in Gujarat, and the efforts they had taken in relief, rehabilitation and justice for the victims of the attacks. They also facilitated an interesting discussion on the possible strategies that could be used to prevent such communal attacks in future. Strategies suggested during the discussion included increasing interactions between members of Hindu and Muslim communities, challenging communal stereotypes through research and dissemination of material at the grassroot level, strengthening the fight for justice to victims of communal attacks, dialoguing with community leaders, networking with community development organizations, coordination among like-minded non-governmental organizations, facilitating more women to participate in elections and exercising the right to vote in order to root out communal persons from politics, questioning the concept of democracy at a national level to prevent persons with scant respect for the fundamental principles of human rights and

our Constitution from being voted into power, and mass action to take the message to the politicians that communal politics is not acceptable to us. The programme ended with a strengthened resolve of the participants to work on the issue in a concerted manner.

### **Talks on Communal Myths & Prejudices**

WRAG staff have been initiating discussions on communal myths and prejudices in schools and colleges in Mumbai with the purpose of countering communal stereotyping and hatred among youth. In addressing youth and students, WRAG has worked closely with Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS) headed by Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer.

At the community level, such programmes focus on enhancing participants' understanding of the history of communalism (religion-based discrimination) in India and the forms it takes. We have also held meetings with community-based women's organisations to explore, understand and constructively plan ways in which women can contribute towards the peace process within India.

In addition, this topic has also been integrated in the staff training programmes of WRAG as well as the gender training programmes that WRAG conducts for members of mahila mandals that are associated with the organization.

### **Peace Rally**

In October 2003, we initiated a peace rally to protest against Vishwa Hindu Parishad's action of mobilizing kar sevaks throughout the country to hold a rally in Ayodhya, thereby creating a communal tension and insecurity among religious minorities across the country. The demonstrators consisted of women's rights and human rights NGOs, community-based organizations, mahila mandals and individuals committed to secularism, justice, peace and human rights. The demonstration highlighted the voices of protest of women and children from minority religious communities, and their demands for peace and justice, as groups of people who are worst affected by communal violence. The rally received press coverage in English and Marathi newspapers.

### **Pre-election Meetings with Community Women**

These meetings were an off-shoot of the need felt for facilitating more women to participate in elections and exercising their right to vote in order to root out communal persons from politics. From January to April 2004, prior to the recent Lok Sabha elections, we held meetings with women in the communities that WRAG works with, with the aim of creating political awareness among women in communities, so that women may exercise their right to vote in a more informed and independent manner. The meetings have also helped in having interesting discussions on the secular agenda of political parties, and their impact on women's rights. During these meetings, resource persons have made presentations on the different types of political parties, their ideologies and their policies and programmes for women.

### **Participation in Secular Initiatives**

Through the programme on secularism, WRAG has become a member of various secular initiatives within the city, such as Insaaniyat. In addition, we are engaged in policy-level interventions in the form of improving the legal structures, including provisions of law, law enforcement and justice delivery systems, within which perpetrators of communal violence can be effectively prosecuted. The campaign on International Criminal Court forms an integral part of our policy-level work on secularism.

### **Human Resources**

At present, the COS programme has no exclusive staff. We look forward to recruitment of new staff once some stable funding support is secured.

## ABOUT OUR TRUSTEES

**Ms. Nasreen S. Mohammed** is currently holding the position of Programme Officer for South Asia with the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE). ASPBAE is a regional network for policy-advocacy and capacity building to advance the rights of all adults to continued education and life-long learning. She holds a Masters Degree in Social Work from the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan and has previous experience of grass roots organization work with youth and women for leadership development. She has worked closely with community groups and NGOs in Mumbai city and has also represented on local networks and actively worked on civil society campaigns around urban poverty, communalism and women's issues. She has participated in and organized several regional and international advocacy and capacity-building events and has authored partnership proposals, reports, research and policy documents.

**Ms. Vahida Nainar** is a co-founder of WRAG in 1993, where, among other things, she coordinated a nation-wide research project on how social norms and laws affect Muslim women. She is also the Chair of the Board of Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice, The Hague and Vice-President and Treasurer of Urgent Action Fund, Colorado. She is also the former Executive Director of the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice, formed in 1997 to ensure a gender perspective in the International Criminal Court. Based in Bombay, she has advocated extensively for women's rights in India. Ms. Nainar was also the Indian liaison for the International Solidarity Network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws, and an activist with Aawaaz-e-Niswan (Voice of Women) in Bombay.

**Dr. Vibhuti Patel** holds a Doctorate in Economics, and has made contributions in Women's Studies and Gender Economics. At present, she is Reader, Department of Economics and Member Secretary of Women Development Cell of University of Mumbai. She is also an Academic Advisor of Sophia Center for Women's Studies and development, and the co-editor of its journal *Urdhva Mula*. Dr. Patel is a feminist and activist, and has been associated closely with many non-governmental organizations working on women's rights and other human rights issues, including Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes (CEHAT), Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai and Institute for Community Organisation and Research, Mumbai. She was a founder member and an active member of Forum Against Oppression of Women (1980-1992), Women's Centre (1982-1992) and Forum Against Sex Determination and Sex Pre-selection (1982- 1992).

**Ms. Vipula Kadri** has rendered 25 years of service to the less fortunate people in the urban and rural sectors of our country through advocating their rights, lending her support to various programmes dedicated to the cause of social upliftment. She founded P.R.I.D.E. India in 1982, SAVE THE CHILDREN INDIA in 1988 and Women's Institute for Social Education (W.I.S.E) in 1990. She is also a recipient of the distinguished Leadership Award for 'Outstanding Professional And Community Leadership' in 1990 by the American Bio-graphical Institute, inc. and also the 'Mahila Shiromani' Award 1990, awarded by the Shiromani Institute, New Delhi.

<b>THE WRAG TEAM</b>
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**Leena K.K.** is the oldest team member of WRAG, having been with the organization almost since its inception. She has performed various responsibilities involving office administration and accounts. Her loyalty to the organization and the value she gives to personal needs of team members have earned her the respect and affection of the entire team of staff. She now works in WRAG as Office Assistant.

**Suraiyya Razzak** is a para-professional social worker, with a passion for community work with women. She has completed Standard XII, and joined WRAG as a part-timer three years ago. Through her own initiative, she has expanded her scope of work. At present, in her capacity as Assistant Project Officer, Mahila Mandals Project of COP, she is involved with capacity-building of several mahila mandals, with groups of adolescent girls and single women.

**Shabana Sheikh** is a graduate and law student. As one of the youngest women in the organization, she has infused energy and dynamism into her work and the work of the organization. Her main responsibilities within the organization include training, sensitisation and capacity-building of mahila mandals, groups of adolescent girls and single women, and other related activities of Community Outreach Programme. She has prior work experience in organizations working on child rights and women's rights.

**Khatoon Sheikh** has over ten years of work experience in working with women in communities. With a flair for networking, outreach and rapport-building, her initiatives and personal competencies have expanded the scope of Community Outreach Programme's work to a large extent. Her rational, tolerant and mature approach to work and to human relationships has helped secure the organization valuable contacts with qazis, police, governmental authorities and mahila mandals alike. She works as Project Officer, Mahila Mandals Project of COP.

**Shilpa Kachelkar-Nipunge** has completed her Masters in Social Work from College of Social Work Nirmala Niketan, and holds a diploma in counselling psychology from St. Xavier's Institute, Mumbai. She has prior experience in working with other non-governmental organizations as counsellor and project coordinator. Her areas of special interest include mental health of women and rights of single women. She conducts regular training programmes for community women on counselling, leadership and communication skills. In her capacity as Project Coordinator, she coordinates various activities of Community Outreach Programme including activities with members of mahila mandals, single women, adolescent girls and community men.

**Pouruchisti Wadia** has a masters degree in social work from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, and is a law graduate. She has several years of working experience in representing women in cases of domestic violence, in the Bombay High Court and Family Court. As the Project Coordinator of Legal Literacy & Human Rights Awareness project of 'Justice & Accountability Matters' programme, her present work profile includes assisting the coordination of the Indian campaign on International Criminal Court, doing legal research and advocacy, as well as conducting legal literacy and human rights awareness programmes for women in communities and in non-governmental organizations.

**Saumya Uma** is a Co-Director of the organization. She is a lawyer and a women's rights activist with ten years' work experience. She graduated from National Law School of India, Bangalore, in 1994 and has a masters degree in law (LL.M.) in Human Rights & Family Law from Bombay University, and an LL.M. in International Human Rights from University of Nottingham, U.K. She initiated *ICC-India*: the Indian awareness campaign on the International Criminal Court, in 2000 and continues to coordinate the campaign. She joined WRAG in 2002, and has, since, initiated and incorporated activities relating to feminism, women's movement, human rights and legal literacy into the existing activities of the organization. In April 2003, she initiated 'Justice & Accountability Matters' programme within the organization and continues to coordinate the programme. She co-compiled articles on ICC and its relevance to India for the publication 'Combating Impunity' in 2003, and authored a book titled 'International Criminal Court & India: Some Questions and Answers' in October 2004.

**Noorjehan Safia Niaz** is a Co-Director of the organization as well as a trustee in an ex-officio capacity. She is a trained social worker from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and has over ten years' work experience in capacity-building of women in communities. She has prior working experience on issues including economic development of women, community-based activities, with special focus on Muslim women's groups and adolescent girls in Mumbai and Mumbra. She joined WRAG in 1999 and initiated and coordinated the Community Outreach Programme. In 2003, she authored five booklets aimed at demystifying Muslim personal law for the lay woman. She is the Programme Coordinator of Community Outreach Programme, and coordinates the campaign on Muslim Personal Law reform.