

The Testimony Project

On 23 July 2009, “The Testimony Project” was launched at Amnesty International’s UK headquarters in London, and in attendance were two staff from the WLUML International Coordination Office (ICO). The event brought together individuals and organizations from all over the country to give voice to and listen to the stories of women seeking asylum in the United Kingdom, with the objective of building a network to support them.

Bella, Marjorie and Farhat are three women who delivered testimonies to their own experiences as asylum seekers. Their stories, in common with hundreds of people in similar circumstances, are tales of violence, deprivation, humiliation and isolation, and their voices refuse to be silenced. Bella and Marjorie left Uganda to escape political persecution, while Farhat left Pakistan with her children after suffering domestic violence. The physical and psychological tortures they suffered in their home countries did not guarantee them compassionate treatment here in the United Kingdom; in fact they were subjected to further injustice and discrimination on their arrival in the country.



Other speakers lent their voices to the Testimony Project, among whom were: Monica Ali, writer and author of *Brick Lane*, who talked about the importance of telling a credible story; and Jon Snow, broadcaster and presenter of Channel 4 News, who encouraged everyone to use the internet and social networks to raise awareness among people of what is happening every day all over the world.

In particular, Debora Singer who is champion of the Refugee Women’s Resource Project at Asylum Aid, explored the reasons why women asylum seekers generally face more discriminations than men. She underlined the scant consideration of issues that affect women, (i.e. FGMs, honour crimes, forced marriages, domestic violence), at the time when the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was written, and the lack of understanding of women’s rights and needs in



the UK Border Agency and the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT). Also, the MP Jeremy Corbyn added his voice, criticising the ‘tick the box mentality’ and inhumanity of the UK asylum process. Other speakers were Helen Bamber OBE, co-founding director of the Helen Bamber Foundation, and Chris Leave, storyteller, who reminded the audience through his reading of the story of a child asylum seeker that “the story means that the storyteller is alive”.

In fact, The Testimony Project aims at “giving voice to those who would otherwise not be heard”, especially women asylum seekers and refugees as they are the most vulnerable ones, and wants to empower them providing that useful information and essential expertise (at this purpose see the Charter of rights of women seeking asylum which many other organisations have also endorsed). An actual community of people made of individuals and organizations is behind the website, which will contribute to create and widen a safe space where to share experiences, get support and receive legal advice.

By Chiara Maurilio

If you want to learn more about the Testimony Project, visit: www.testimonyproject.org.uk/

“The story means that the storyteller is alive”

If you want to read the Charter, see which organisations have endorsed, and be part of it, please go to: www.asylumaid.org.uk

A Muslim Feminist: An Exploration of Multiple Identities

Neng Dara Affiah identifies as a Muslim feminist, is a commissioner with the National Commission on Violence Against Women, and is a vocal advocate of women’s rights in Indonesia. She attended WLUML’s Third Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institute in Malaysia, in 2007.

We are pleased to announce that her memoirs have now been published:

Muslimah Feminis: Penjelajahan Multi Identitas (A Muslim Feminist: An Exploration of Multiple Identities).

If you want to read more visit: www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=25700&lan=en&sid=1&sp=0&isNew=1

