

**Sculpting the Rock of Women's Rights:
The Role of Women's Organizations In Promoting the National Plan
of Action To Integrate Women in Development in Morocco**

“Working for Women's Rights is like Sculpting Rocks.”
Damia Ben Khouyya

The National Plan of Action To Integrate Women in Development has unleashed enormous passions and an ongoing debate that bears witness to a profound cleavage in Moroccan society (*Le Matin du Sahara et du Maghred [LMSM*, the official government newspaper] December 18, 1999). Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Rabat and Casablanca in rival demonstrations over the Moroccan government's plan to grant more rights to women (*New York Times*, March 13, 2000). While the plan revolves around women's education, health, employment and legal and political rights, the national debate is focused on propositions to reform certain articles in the Code of Personal Status, *Moudawana*, Morocco's family law (*LMSM*, December 18, 1999; May 15, 1999).

The National Plan of Action was launched in March 1999 at the occasion of celebrating International Women's Day (*LMSM*, January 29, 2000). It was elaborated in conformity to Morocco's international commitments in relation to the Beijing declaration calling for a national strategy for the integration of women in development (*LMSM*, July 18, 1999). The plan was formulated through the effective cooperation of several governmental sectors, nongovernmental organizations, women activists and experts on women's issues, and in collaboration with the

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World Bank (*LMSM*, March 21, 1999). It draws on concepts and terms, like “gender equality,” that are widely used in feminist and international development circles, but strongly criticized by the plan’s opponents.

Moroccan feminist leaders tend to emphasize the need for Morocco to modify its national laws to conform to the international conventions on women and the family that the government ratified. They stress the universality of women’s and human rights and the ideal of complete equality between women and men. Islamists oppose the underlying Western assumptions of the plan of action and object to their exclusion from participating in developing it. They reject what they perceive as the plan’s attempt to undermine the Moslem family through the proposed changes to the *Moudawana*.

The *Moudawana*, Personal Status Law, is a collection of legal rules that organize kinship relationships. It regulates the rights and duties pertaining to marriage, the custody of children, inheritance, divorce and alimony (*The Personal Status Moudawana* 1997, 15). Islamic Law, *Shariah*, governs questions pertaining to women’s civil status. Since Moslems believe that the *Qur’an* is the literal word of God, all issues pertaining to the family and women’s status mentioned in the sacred text are considered definitive by Islamic scholars, the *Ulama’a*. Until its revision in 1993, the 1957 *Moudawana* was almost entirely derived from the Malikite doctrine, one of four major Islamic schools of jurisprudence. The Moroccan legislator adopted a model of family relationships and womanhood formulated by jurists in the 8th century A.D. based on their interpretation of the *Qur’an*, the *Hadith* (the Prophet’s Sayings) and other religious texts (*Modifications of the Personal Status Code* 1997, 42).

The National Debate on the Plan of Action to Integrate Women in Development

Mr. Saïd Saâdi, the Secretary of State overseeing the plan, said that it would not have been possible to dream a better outcome than this unfolding debate at the dawn of the 21st century (*LMSM*, December 18, 1999). Morocco’s prime minister, Mr. Abderrahman El Youssoufi, made it clear that the government wants the plan of action to become an object of consensus before moving ahead with implementing it (*LMSM*, January 29, 2000). Far from an emerging consensus, however, the national debate over the plan of action has exposed fault lines within the government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the larger society.

As the opposing views of prominent leaders of the women’s and Islamic movements show (Appendix), Moroccan women and men are polarized between an international feminist

perspective and an Islamist world view. Feminist leaders like Latifa Jbabdi, former president of the Union of Feminine Action, insist that the debate on the Personal Status Code must remain open with the goal of adapting the *Moudawana* to the international conventions signed by Morocco (*LMSM*, March 8, 1999). According to Damia Ben Khouyya, president of the Moroccan Association for Women's Rights, the plan represents only a minimum of the demands of women's organizations (November 8, 1999). Amina Lamrini, president of the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women, said that women's groups are determined to continue placing pressure on the government to put the plan of action into effect (December 13, 1999).

The opposition to the plan centers on the contention that it undermines Islamic principles. Jamila Messala, a member of the (Islamist) Association of Renewal of Women's Consciousness, argues that the plan of action uses the ideology of human rights and the umbrella of the United Nations to destroy Islamic specificity (November 14, 1999). Bassima el-Haqqawy, Secretary General of the same organization, warns that the plan's call for gender equality, sexual freedom and alternative definitions of the family, aims at suppressing Islamic identity. In her view, this could lead to the eventual abrogation of the definitive texts of Islamic Law and their substitution with the rules of the United Nations (Party of Justice and Development, July 1999, 26, 27). Mr. Ahmed el-Rayssouni, head of the Islamist Movement for Unification and Reform, declared that real development is ignored in this plan, which clearly aims at attacking Islamic values and the foundations of the Moroccan family (*El-Tajdeed*, December 8, 1999). He calls the national plan of action the "Project of the Non-National Plan for Westernization and Dependence" (*Ibid.*, 16).

The wide gap between leaders of women and Islamic groups is echoed in the competing mass demonstrations that took place on March 12, 2000. In the capital, Rabat, more than 60 women's NGOs, several human rights organizations, at least six government ministers, and between 300,000 and a million people marched in support of the plan. Some chanted "no to reactionaries." The plan supporters appealed to the government to take the necessary measures to preserve women's rights, promote sexual equality, fight violence and discrimination against women and improve women's conditions. A national committee organized the march as part of the World March of Women planned to start in October 2000. The committee, made up of representatives of women's, human rights and other NGOs and various syndicates, pointed out that Morocco ranks 125th on the international scale of development indicators. It underlined women's precarious social and economic conditions of illiteracy, maternal mortality, and sexual,

psychological and legal violence (*LMSM*, March 5, 2000; March 12, 2000; March 13, 2000; *New York Times*, *Ibid.*). Representatives of regional and international NGOs also attended the march. Alham Belhaj, of the Tunisian Organization of Democratic Women, said that the march of Moroccan women is a march for women in all Arab countries who share a common struggle and destiny (*LMSM*, March 13, 2000).

In Casablanca, Morocco's economic capital, between 600,000 and a million supporters demonstrated against the plan. Men and women marched in separate columns, chanting: "we defend Islam with our bodies and souls" and "men and women are equal before God." Leaders of the march denounced imported ideas and proclaimed that they want women to be truly integrated in development, not in westernization. They called for women's rights emanating from Islam and said: "it is in our religion and our culture that we must find solutions" (*LMSM*, March 13, 2000; *New York Times*, *Ibid.*). The Casablanca march was organized by the National Association for Protecting the Moroccan Family (NAPMF)—specifically formed in November 1999 in response to the plan—and by several other political parties and religious groups. These include the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD) and the then banned Justice and Charity Movement founded by Abdessalam Yassine, whose daughter was leading the women marchers.

The NAPMF called for this march to "defend the dignity of women in our Moslem country, support their demands in the framework of the tolerant Islamic *Sharia'a* (Law), and aid their efforts to confront the atheist currents" (*LMSM*, March 12, 2000; *New York Times*, *Ibid.*). The march organizers said that the international conventions on the condition of women and the family—supported by the plan—do not take the specificity of Morocco into consideration. They denounced key proposals to reform the *Moudawana* such as exempting women from the presence of a guardian during the marriage contract and replacing the practice of the automatic divorce by a husband with court divorces. They objected to the calls to abolish polygamy and to equally divide money and property between the spouses in case of divorce. The plan's opponents also rejected the widespread sale of preservatives, which, they argue, will lead to spreading immorality. Based on these objections, they conclude that the plan is against the values of Islam (*LMSM*, March 13, 2000).

Given the controversy swirling around the plan of action, what are the prospects of turning it from project into policy? In assessing the possibilities for instituting the national plan

of action, it is necessary to understand the larger political environment in which women's organizations carry out their advocacy and their role in promoting the plan. It is also important to examine the international dimension of the struggle for women's rights, the Moroccan government's reaction to the plan, and the opposition to the plan by Islamists and other social forces.

Morocco's National Political Environment

The national plan of action was proposed by a new "socialist democratic" government that coexists with a hereditary monarchy. The prime minister submitted the plan to King Mohammed VI for his arbitration in his religious capacity as the Prince of Believers, Amir Al Mouminine (LMSM, January 29, 2000). The King is expected to convene a committee that includes representatives of women leaders, religious scholars and government officials to review the plan. As with all major issues confronting Morocco, the role of the King is crucial in determining the fate of the plan to integrate women in development.

The Moroccan monarchy is led by a King whose legitimacy largely rests on his religious role as the Prince of Believers and his descent from the Prophet's Mohammed family. Morocco was established as a royal Kingdom after its independence from France in March 1956 and was ruled by King Mohammed V, the current King's grandfather. The King is the head of state and the commander in chief of the armed forces; he is empowered to appoint the country's prime minister and to dissolve the legislature (www.arabnet.org). King Hassan II acceded to the throne on March 3, 1961 and ruled Morocco for 38 years until his death on July 23, 1999 when his 35 years old son King Mohammed VI succeeded him.

In a 1998 interview to the Portuguese magazine, *Diario de Noticias*, Prime Minister Abderrahmane El Youssoufi, clearly described the importance of the monarchy. He said, "his Majesty, King Hassan II, is the representative of our people, the key to our political system, and the guarantor of the application of the constitution and of the territorial integrity of Morocco. He is the supreme arbitrator of the country; the formation of all our institutions is articulated around him" (LMSM, November 20, 1998). In a 1992 interview with the French paper, *Le Monde*, King Hassan II expressed his view that the Moroccan monarchy was there to stay and said that nobody in Morocco contests the existence or continuity of the royal institution. When asked whether the Moroccan monarchy can develop into a constitutional monarchy, he replied that it is in fact already a constitutional monarchy. But then he added, "Islam prevents me from

establishing a constitutional monarchy where the King delegates all his authority and reigns without ruling” (Dareef 1998, 181).

Morocco’s political structure is a multi-party system. The 1992 constitution was significantly amended in 1996 and created a bicameral legislature. The Assembly of Representatives is a nationally representative chamber that is elected for a five-year term while the Assembly of Councilors represents municipal, regional and occupational interest groups and is elected for a nine-year term (el-Khatiby 1999, 24). Sixteen political parties participated in the November 14, 1997 elections for the Assembly of Representatives. The new 1998 government is led by the former socialist opposition in an alliance of seven political parties¹ that excludes the nine other political parties that participated in the 1997 elections.² The Prime Minister, El Youssoufi, is the first secretary of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), which got 17.5% of the parliamentary seats, the highest number of all parties. A number of socialist and Islamist parties and agencies are in the opposition (Dareef 1998, 11, 22, 23). The Islamist Movement of Unity and Renewal participated in parliament as part of the Constitutional and Democratic Popular Movement Party (el-Khatiby 1999, 60).

Abdelmoughit Benmassaoud Tredano argues that the new government has opened debates on fundamental values and sensitive questions in Moroccan society.³ The strong, dynamic and sometimes excessive debate on the national plan of action is the most significant debate in this regard (*LMSM*, May 2, 2000). Women’s NGOs perceived the new government as more receptive to feminist demands than its more conservative predecessors. The 1998 government professed a will to reform and instituted a culture of social dialogue. The declaration of El Youssoufi’s government incorporated important principles of the prime

¹The seven parties in the government alliance are: USFP, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, PI, the Independence (*Itiqlal*) Party, PPS, the Party of Progress and Socialism, RNI, the National Rally of Independents, MNP, the National Popular Movement, FFD, the Front of Democratic Forces, and PSD, the Socialist Democratic Party.

²The nine parties outside the government alliance are: UC, the Constitutional Union, MP, the Popular Movement, MDS, the Democratic Social Movement, PND, the National Democratic Party, MPCD, the Constitutional and Democratic Popular Movement, OADP, the Organization of Action for Democracy and the People, PC, the Party of Consultation, PCI, the Consultation and Independence Party, MPD, the Movement for Democracy.

³Tredano is a professor of public law and a founding member of the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights (OMDH) of the Aziz Blal Center for Studies and Research, *le Centre D’études et de Recherches Aziz Blal* (CERAB), and of the Association Alternatives.

minister's party, the USFP, including a social policy directed towards women's development and a commitment to cultural pluralism (el-Khatiby 1999, 13, 14, 42-47, 70).

Laying the Groundwork for the Plan, the Legacy of Women's Activism

The mobilization capacity of women's groups is shaped by the previous history of the women's movement. How did women's NGOs lay the groundwork for this plan through their previous activities? Did they use international factors to their advantage? Among the most important manifestations of women's activism that culminated in the plan of action are the women's press, fighting violence against women, the campaign to reform the *Moudawana*, providing legal assistance and consciousness-raising on women's rights, promoting women's participation in politics and decision-making positions, and previous lobbying towards a national strategy for women's rights.

Moroccan women's organizations have a well-established history of coordinating their activities and efforts to advance the agenda of the women's movement. The evolution of women's advocacy in Morocco towards the plan of action to integrate women in development can be best illustrated by reference to some of the major issues promoted by three prominent women's organizations and their leaders. These NGOs are the Union of Feminine Action (UAF), the Moroccan Association for Women's Rights (AMDF), and the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM). While the UAF expressed its allegiance to Islamic principles in its social change efforts, the AMDF and the ADFM were more explicit in expressing their reliance on international norms.

Most women NGO leaders active in promoting the plan are middle-class professionals who are well connected to the international women's movement. They were typically active in the student movement and joined leftist political parties that helped to crystallize their political and feminist consciousness. The affiliation of women's NGOs to political parties typically facilitates their ability to establish branches and service provision facilities in various cities throughout Morocco. Young women activists who eschewed party politics often joined women's clubs as an alternative route for public engagement. While many women activists are bilingual speaking both French and Arabic, some of them are more fluent in French and use it in their public speaking engagements, a fact that is projected in a negative light by opponents of feminism and the plan of action.

The Union of Feminine Action, (UAF)

The UAF, *L'Union de L'Action Féminine*, was founded in 1987 and has 20 branches and 9,500 members. It runs several facilities in different cities established in partnership with international NGOs including two centers of assistance to women victims of violence in Casablanca and Rabat, a literacy center in Rabat and a center for training cooperative cadres in Fès (Directory of Women's NGOs 1997, 95, 96). The UAF grew out of the activities surrounding the women's press. UAF leaders, El-Meghnawy and El-Khomassy, recount the history of their activism in the women's cause. Fatma El-Meghnawy is the director of the SOS Rescue center in Rabat, an UAF board member, and a high school inspector in history and geography. Aisha El-Khomassy, a lawyer, is currently the national Secretary General of the UAF. Both became active in the student's movement through the National Union of Moroccan Students, *L'Union National des Étudiants Marocains* (UNEM) and later joined the (party) Organization of Action for Democracy and the People, *Organization de l'Action Democratique Populaire*, (OADP).

The Women's Press, the 8th March Journal

The women's press played a crucial role in mobilizing women's groups and raising public awareness about women's issues. The women's section of the OADP issued a journal called *Anwal* in the beginning of the 1980s that was the first progressive party newspaper to devote an entire page to the women's cause. Women at the OADP felt that the women's cause was subsumed under the general struggle and that they needed their own media platform. When the *8th March Journal*, named after International Women's Day, was founded in 1983, it was a qualitative threshold in the history of the women's movement. Its slogan was: "towards a popular progressive independent women's movement." There were pages for the political, constitutional and electoral process, for health, education, the mother child relationship, women's creativity, and women's issues in the Arab world. There was a legal page entitled, "You and the Law," devoted to the *Moudawana*. A survey on divorce distributed in several Moroccan cities found out that men had unlimited power, took the decision to divorce alone and in an arbitrary fashion, and that the legal system was not intervening to protect women. UAF members discovered the wide range of forms of suffering that women undergo whether they are professors, housewives or civil servants. El-Meghnawy said, "opening up to women's problems inspired us and lit our road. Women's suffering showed us that the women's struggle was an urgent matter." El-Khomassy, who used to be a director of the *8th March Journal*, said that its

goal was to form a broad-based women's system that was large enough for everyone. It used to have a distribution of 15,000 copies per issue (November 17-30, 1999).

Latifa el-Bou Hosseyini, a UAF member who works at the Secretariat of State for the Social Protection of the Family and Childhood, recently returned from Paris after completing her graduate studies in history on women's place in writing in the Maghreb from the 10th to the 14th century. She said that the attraction of the *8th of March Journal* for her generation was that it was one of the first experiences that were not rooted in membership in a political party (June 23, 1999).

Fighting Violence Against Women

The UAF was spurred to action to fight violence against women by the Thabet affair. The UAF formed the Committee to Fight Violence against Women in March 1993 in connection with the trial of commissioner Thabet, a security officer who was involved in 500 rape cases in 1992-93. Upon being denied an official permit for a protest rally, the UAF started organizing symbolic trials that represented different forms of violence against women. The first women's trial was on divorce as social violence and was held in Rabat in 1996. There were four subsequent trials that were held in public meeting places and always took place in March. The second trial revolved around marital violence, while the third trial, held in Rabat, concerned the allocation of the marital home and family property after divorce. The fourth trial was about alimony and the fate of children. The trials involved testimony from witnesses, a defense team and a jury (November 17 and 30, 1999). The UAF, like various other NGOs fighting violence against women worked with the Secretariat of State for the Social Protection of the Family and Childhood on the National Campaign to Fight Violence Against Women. In launching the campaign, Mr. Saâdi, the State Secretary, stressed that the Secretariat is determined to break down the wall of silence on violence against women and sexual harassment (*LMSM*, December 12, 1998).⁴

The Campaign to Reform the Moudawana

In the first UAF conference in 1990, members determined that changing the *Moudawana* was the most important problem facing women in Morocco. The UAF advocated reforming the *Moudawana* through the One Million Signatures Petition. It corresponded with members of

⁴Other women's NGOs that participated in the campaign include the ADFM, the AMDF and the

parliament about the feminist demands and sent out letters to all the ministries to inform them about its undertaking. It organized media seminars to spread news about the campaign. On March 7th, the UAF announced the campaign to reform the personal status laws in a press conference in Rabat. It took the UAF two years to convince other women's organizations of the need to join the campaign to change the *Moudawana*. They were apprehensive of the obstacles this campaign may pose to women's political work. On April 18th and 19th there was a debate about the *Moudawana* in a conference held in Rabat and attended by women's NGOs, human rights associations and researchers.

The Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs tacitly encouraged the mosque preachers, *Imams*, to fight against the One Million Signatures Petition. The *Imams* used to plead with worshipers not to let their daughters sign the petition. A counter-petition opposing the reform of the *Moudawana* was circulated in the mosques stating that the 8th March group is made up of unbelievers who are calling people to abandon Islam. A religious ruling, *fatwa*, was issued declaring that women in the 8th March group deserve to be killed. In the end, the opposition to the One Million Signatures Petition had the effect of fueling the campaign to reform the *Moudawana* and spread the UAF's work to a larger audience. It was like a women's uprising; petitions were being signed in the districts, villages, secondary schools, and the universities that surpassed a million signatures.

While the One Million Signatures Campaign was a UAF initiative, the UAF sought to coordinate it with other NGOs and groups. Fatma El-Meghnawy said that they wanted to implicate everyone. Towards that end, a National Council to Change the *Moudawana* was formed that included most women's and human rights organizations, as well as numerous syndicates and political parties. Cooperation was reinforced through study circles, declarations and joint workshops. The National Council to Change the *Moudawana* issued a statement in support of the UAF against the *fatwa* labeling its leaders unbelievers in which they denounced the *fatwa* as a criminal act.

King Hassan II intervened in the unfolding dispute between the feminists and Islamists. He asked women leaders to send him their demands and formed a committee of religious

scholars, *Ulama'a*, to look into reforming the Personal Status Law, which eventually resulted in the 1993 changes of the *Moudawana*. On August 20, 1993, he devoted a speech to the women's question in which he acknowledged the injustice in the *Moudawana*. While other women's NGOs did not consider the changes to be sufficient, the UAF's position was that the campaign succeeded from the political point of view because it undermined the sanctity of the *Moudawana* and showed that it was a human product that can be changed (November 17 and 30, 1999).

In its attempt to change the *Moudawana*, the UAF stressed the necessity of taking Islam into consideration. In the 1992 petition that the UAF sent to the royal palace, it specified that its demands are based on two referents: an Islamic referent based on ideals of equality embedded in religion and a western legal referent rooted in the universal declaration of human rights. In its petition, the UAF argued that the laws of the *Moudawana* are derived from the *Ijtihad* (interpretation) of Islamic jurists within the confines of their time and that the Islamic texts are open to new interpretations. In response to the Islamist attack on the UAF's petition, the National Coordination Council to Change the *Moudawana* and Advance Women's Rights issued a statement on May 3, 1992 asserting that its demands are based on the principles of the *Sharia'a* (Islamic Law) that emphasizes justice, equality and tolerance (Dareef 1998, 58-60).

The 1993 Changes in the Moudawana

Abderrazak Moulay Rachid, dean of the faculty of law at Mohammed V University in Souissi, noted that the field of Personal Status in any Moslem country is very sensitive and extremely difficult to change (Modifications, *Ibid.*, 1997, 5). According to Amina Lamrini, president of the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women, the *Moudawana* is the embodiment of inequality between women and men (Lamrini 1992, 14). Farida Bennani, a law professor at the Faculty of Law in Marrakech, argues that the Personal Status Law establishes the worst forms of discrimination between the sexes (Modifications, *Ibid.*, 1997, 46, 52).

Some women's groups and political party organizations argued that the 1993 changes were not sufficiently daring and did not meet the hopes of Moroccan women (Modifications, *Ibid.*, 1997, 73). By contrast, Ben Khouyya, president of the Moroccan Association for Women's Rights, views the 1993 changes in the *Moudawana* as essential. She said: the *Moudawana* became a subject of discussion, which is a positive step; women possess the change through their struggle; we merit the change even if it is minimal; it is not a gift from anyone (November 8, 1999).

The 1993 changes were not confined to the articles of the 1957 *Moudawana*, but encompassed other legal texts related to organizing women's and children's positions within the family. These include the law of contracts, civil law and a decree pertaining to neglected children. The main changes pertaining to marriage stipulated that a woman's marriage guardian cannot force her to get married and that a marriage cannot be concluded unless the wife agrees to it and signs a summary of the marriage contract. A woman who is no longer a minor and has no father was now given the right to get married by herself without the need for a guardian who carries out the marriage contract on her behalf. Under the revisions, a judge is no longer entitled to force a woman thought to be prone to immorality to get married. The 1993 changes did not, however, adopt the position of the Hanifite doctrine—prevalent in other Arab countries—that a woman does not need a guardian to contract the marriage on her behalf. Concerning polygamy, the new revisions stipulated that the husband must inform his first wife that he wishes to take a second wife. Polygamy was also made contingent on the judge's permission. A medical certificate showing the absence of infectious diseases was now required of the prospective spouses. The most important change pertaining to divorce was the stipulation that a divorce cannot be registered unless both spouses are present and requires the judge's permission. The ensuing legal changes favorable to women included dropping the need for a husband's consent for his wife to obtain a passport and annulling the requirement for a wife to have her husband's permission to engage in paid work (Modifications, *Ibid.*, 1997, 11, 12, 18, 45).

The Moroccan Association for Women's Rights (AMDF)

The AMDF, *L'Association Marocaine des Droits de la Femme*, was founded in 1992 in Rabat and has no branches. It is explicit about its links to the international women's movement and the funds it receives from various international donors. In its organizational pamphlet, the AMDF states that it is an autonomous nonprofit association based on the international human rights conventions, particularly CEDAW, the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. The objectives of AMDF are to raise public awareness about the different forms of discrimination against women, inform women about their rights, struggle against all forms of discrimination encountered by women, work for the recognition of women's citizenship, support women who are victims of violence and work for a true integration of women in society. The AMDF uses a definition of violence that is taken from the U.N. declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. As part of its efforts to raise public

awareness on women's rights, the AMDF has published two booklets on violence against women, a book on Changes in the *Moudawana*, and a pamphlet on sexual harassment (November 8, 1999).

The Women's Clubs

Najaat al-Razzy, a sociologist with the Faculty of Arts, was AMDF's president from 1992 to 1997. She joined the National Union of Moroccan Students (UNEM) in 1980 and the women's committee of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) in 1982. She described it as the first human rights committee devoted to women's rights. Al-Razzy pointed out that Morocco has ten women who are chief justices presiding over their courts. Her experience with both the UNEM and the AMDH convinced her that working within gender-mixed groups was not the best way to be active in women's issues and that it was necessary to create an independent women's organization. She described AMDF members as professors, high school teachers, bankers, lawyers and civil servants who have more time to volunteer than other professionals. She said that although her sympathy lay with the left, she had no political party affiliation. Women, like herself, who were interested in the women's cause, were accused of imitating the West and of marginalizing the larger leftist conflict.

In 1982, Al-Razzy became active in the women's clubs that used to meet in the youth centers operated by the Ministries of Youth and Sports and Education in all neighborhoods. The women's clubs worked with women in the neighborhood and were active in literacy programs and in consciousness raising efforts. Active women used to sometimes go from door to door to generate interest in their activities. An unfounded fear of women's clubs was developing in the repressive political atmosphere of the time, but the clubs did not have the means to defend themselves and their activity came to a halt between 1985 and 1987. The first women's associations started forming in 1987 (June 1, 1999). Like al-Razzy, Touria Eloumri, a historian, joined the UNEM, the AMDH and the women's clubs. She received human rights training in France for a month at the International Institute for Human Rights in Strasbourg. She left the AMDF to write her thesis in history. She views NGO work as emerging out of the accumulation of the experience of working with the women's clubs. According to Eloumri, while many NGOs that formed were part of political parties, the choice of which NGOs to join was based on friendships among women formed in the women's clubs. The format of the literacy classes in the women's clubs, was built around the methodology of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.

The women's clubs organized cultural activities, workshops and literary activities around attempts to write novels and poetry (June 2, 1999).

The FAMA Center's Provision of Legal Assistance and Awareness on Women's Rights

The AMDF, like several other women's NGOs, offers legal assistance to women and strives to raise public awareness on women's rights through both advocacy and service provision. The association's FAMA Center of Information on Women's Rights, *Centre FAMA d'Information sur les Droits des Femmes*, was founded in 1995 in Casablanca with support from the European Union. Its mission is to familiarize women with their rights and assist them in defending them. FAMA provides information on laws governing women's family and professional life, guides and counsels women in the legal domain and offers legal assistance when necessary. FAMA conducts training for similar women's centers and carries out media campaigns and consciousness-raising sessions for women from the neighborhood and other parts of the city. According to Fadela Soad, FAMA receives between 50 and 100 cases per month and the age of the beneficiaries ranges from six years onwards. Fadela is a volunteer and secretary who works on the documentation of cases and also listens to the women who come to the center. She graduated one year ago with a B.A. in law. FAMA rarely takes up cases in court, but refers women to lawyers and other agencies like the ministries of Health and Human Rights. Most cases of women who come to FAMA are on the *Moudawana*: personal status problems typically relate to divorce, alimony and proving descent through blood relations when the father is either unknown or is known but denies his child (November 9, 1999). The International Women's Fund at the U.S. gave FAMA funding to structure itself (November 8, 1999).

Touria Eloumri, who served as FAMA's director in the first four month of its operation, gave the examples of divorce and child custody to illustrate the problems related to the *Moudawana*. If a woman asks for divorce, she has to go through very complicated procedures. She has to prove that her husband either abandoned her in bed, committed violence against her or is impotent. In order to prove his impotence, she has to obtain a medical certificate signed by 12 doctors. A woman who remarries loses custody of her children. A divorced woman typically receives a minimum of \$30 in alimony and an average monthly payment ranging between \$100 and \$150. She receives rent for three months following the divorce. One of the demands of women's groups is for a divorced wife to retain the apartment if she is in custody of her children. Ninety per cent of the cases of child support are resolved through the courts. In Eloumri's view,

the only demand of the women's movement that was met in the 1993 changes of the *Moudawana* is granting child custody to women (June 2, 1999).

Damia Ben Khouyya's Public Presentation on Women's Rights and the Plan of Action

Damia Ben Khouyya, AMDF's current president, who is 45 years old, is a social science researcher with training in literature and Arabic. She worked as a civil servant at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, then changed to the field of secondary education in 1979-80. She was one of the founders of the 8th *March Journal* and worked for it for three years from 1983 to 1986. She emphasized that the journal was initially independent politically though it later became linked to the UAF. She said that the referent of the AMDF is international law, which is a human heritage. The AMDF is struggling to change Morocco's reservations to CEDAW. Despite Morocco's ratification of CEDAW, the text of the convention is not published in the Official Newspaper. Once it is published in that paper, it becomes national law and hence binding (November 8, 1999).

Ben Khouyya is one of the women's leaders whose command and eloquent use of Arabic is an asset in public lectures about women's rights. In a conference in Rabat, Ben Khouyya said that the reality of women's rights in Morocco is one linked to violence. There is legal violence embedded in the *Moudawana*, which considers a woman to be a minor throughout her life and expects her to obey her husband in exchange for food, clothes and housing. There is also physical and psychological violence: beating women is attributable to popular, literary and religious culture. When it comes to sexual violence, it is claimed that this is a Western phenomenon that does not exist in an Arab Moslem society. This is not true as is evidenced by a study on rape conducted by the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights that investigated 1,050 cases of rape in Rabat and Kénitra. It found that 20% of all crimes are rape crimes and that they occur across all levels of education, professions and age groups. There is no protection for women from sexual violence anywhere or anytime. Sexual violence can occur at educational institutions, places of work or in the fields and it can occur from 7 a.m. to the evening. The rapists may be fathers, stepfathers, neighbors or employers. It is a threatening reality that is not spoken about in Morocco.

The National Plan of Action to Integrate Women in Development came about in order to implement the recommendations of the Beijing conference. It was formulated in the context of the miserable reality of Moroccan women reflected in the increase of women's illiteracy and

maternal mortality during pregnancy and childbirth. The plan embodies the absolute minimum of what can be agreed upon and which cannot be compromised on or done away with. This includes raising the age of marriage to 18 years, guaranteeing women housing in the case of divorce if she has custody over the children, restrictions on polygamy, and making guardianship, *welaya*, over the woman in marriage voluntary and not required. Concerning child custody, the plan proposed equality between girls and boys in terms of making the age of custody 15 for both instead of 12 for boys and 15 for girls. The plan's critics are working to prevent it from being ratified and implemented. The first opposition to the plan of action came from within the government. The Ministry of Religious Endowment and Islamic Affairs formed a scientific committee to respond to the plan. In its memorandum it argued, for example, that raising the age of marriage to 18 will lead to immorality.

The opposition from outside the government came from the Association of Moroccan *Ulama'a*, religious scholars. It accused the plan of being derived from the West and financed by it and of taking Morocco away from its Islamic values. With a few exceptions, the Islamic trend opposes the plan. Opponents of the plan resort to a popular Islamic discourse that arouses people's feeling by claiming that the plan touches religion. A fierce battle has been waged by the *el-Tajdeed* (Renewal) newspaper, against the plan. *El-Tajdeed* takes the position that the plan is a destruction of religion and the Moroccan family. The National Association for the Protection of the Moroccan Family (NAPMF) wants to take proponents of the plan to court. They are talking about a civil war and a national referendum about the plan, but this is not a program. It would have been better to call NAPMF the National Association to Protect the Moroccan Family from the National Plan of Action to Integrate Women in Development.

Faced with these opposition efforts, proponents of the plan have formed a Network to Support the Plan to Integrate Women in Development. It includes several women's, human rights and development associations, as well as many individuals. It is working on formulating a program to push for implementing the plan. It is based in Rabat and there is a support group in Casablanca. What is currently taking place in Morocco is an enormous political and societal conflict. Ben Khouyya concluded her remarks by saying that Moroccan society must choose between modernity and remaining a traditional society that does not give citizens their right to choose and considers women minors (November 19-21, 1999).

The Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM)

Advancing women's political rights is a major axis of the national plan of action. Nozha El-Sequelly, vice president of the ADFM, *L'Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc*, said that she founded the ADFM in 1985 in Casablanca as the first advocacy-oriented NGO. She was joined by a group of women from within the Party of Progress and Socialism, *Parti du Progrès et Socialisme*, (PPS). She is a pharmacist by profession and an elected member of the urban Commune, the *Jama'a*, of Sidi Balyout since 1997. One of ADFM's slogans was "Together for Equality and Dignity." The NGO's goals are the elimination of discrimination against women and equality in rights. Since the PPS entrusted her to work in the women's milieu, she became involved with the women's cause. At the time, she was more interested in "the general problematic of the country" than in women's issues. But once she started working on women's issues, she realized that women's issues were related to democracy, justice, human rights, and economic and social rights and that women needed strong advocates and lawyers. El-Sequelly said that the PPS helped in founding the ADFM and organized lectures for women to raise the subject of the *Moudawana*. After a couple of years, however, the ADFM women wanted their independence from the party (November 29, 1999).

CLEF (Key), the Center for Women's Leadership

ADFM's Center for Women's Leadership, CLEF, *Centre de Leadership Feminine*, started its work in 1992 in Casablanca to promote women's involvement in politics and public life. CLEF, or key, stands for the idea that women's participation in politics is a key that opens the door to other rights. It trains women in communication, negotiation, knowledge of politics and relationships with the authorities to enhance women's participation in positions of decision making and responsibility. It directs its advocacy towards state agencies, political parties and parliamentarians. In 1993, two women entered parliament for the first time. The first, Badea al-Sequelly, a university professor in law— who is Nozha's sister—entered parliament on behalf of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) while Latifa Bannani Semires was the representative of the *Istiqlaal* (Independence) party. In the 1997 elections, Badea al-Sequelly was re-elected but Latifa Bannani Semires was not. The debate about a quota for women representatives, which resurfaced in the debates about the plan of action was also the result of the efforts of the ADFM in Casablanca. Women currently make up 34% of officials but few of them are in top positions. El-Sequelly pointed out that a petition concerning women's political equality was signed by El Youssef before he became prime minister. It was also signed by the

leaders of all the political parties, which include about half the current ministers. The Union of Moroccan Writers and about 200 prominent people, including artists and novelists, signed the petition.

Nozha El-Sequelly argues that the 1996 constitution should have included equality between the sexes in politics, the economy, culture, social and civil matters. When it failed to do so, the ADFM drafted a petition to present these demands and to argue for the primacy of international laws over local laws (November 29, 1999).

Lobbying Efforts Towards the Plan of Action To Integrate Women In Development

To Amina Lamrini, ADFM's president, the plan of action represents a moment of destiny for the women's movement in Morocco. Lamrini is a geographer by profession and an inspector of high school history and geography teachers. At age 16 or 17, she joined the Party of Progress and Socialism, (PPS,) and upon attending university, she joined the National Union of Moroccan Students (UNEM). According to Lamrini, the plan of action is not the first effort of its kind. Women's NGOs started lobbying the Moroccan government to devise a strategy for integrating women in development since the women's conference in Nairobi in 1985. The ADFM and other women's NGOs worked with the Ministry of Social Affairs and contributed to the national commission formed to prepare for the Beijing conference. The plan's seeds started before the 1998 government with Mme al-Nassery, the (former) State Secretary for National Cooperation, but the new government took women's rights and development to a higher level. Lamrini said, "women's organizations defend their cause regardless of the kind of government in place; that is why we worked on advancing women's rights even in the previous technocratic and rightist governments" (December 13, 1999).

In response to the recommendations of Nairobi for countries to devise national strategies for women's development, Morocco issued "the National Strategy for the Development of the Moroccan Woman Until the Year 2000" in 1987. In Lamrini's view, the responsibility for the national strategy should have been assigned to a high governmental agency empowered to devise a comprehensive plan that involves all ministries working on women's issues. The national strategy did not mention ratifying CEDAW, reforming the *Moudawana*, or the promotion of women's participation in positions of decision-making. Despite the valuable efforts of the Ministry of Traditional Crafts and Social Affairs in charge of the strategy, tremendous resistance arose focused around the concept of women's equality. Equality of the sexes is the basis of the

U.N. decade of women and the strategies of Nairobi (Lamrini 1992, 11-15). Lamrini concluded that women's equality "as formulated in the strategies of Nairobi remains our primary demand, our irreplaceable goal and the object of struggle in any national strategy" (Ibid.).

The International Dimension of the Struggle for Women's Rights

In their attempt to advance women's rights in Morocco, both the state and the women's movement are faced with the dilemma of having to grapple with reconciling a western international referent and an Islamic referent based on Islamic Law, the Sharia'a. The contradiction between certain provisions of the international treaties ratified by Morocco and certain aspects of the Personal Status Law, the *Moudawana*, is at the crux of disagreements between the feminists and Islamists over the national plan of action.

The Maghreby 1995 Collective for Equality

The Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM) is one of the main member organizations in the Maghreby 1995 Collective for Equality (*Collectif 95 Maghreb Egailté*) formed in 1991 to prepare for the Beijing international women's conference. Besides the ADFM in Morocco, *Collective 95* is made up of six women's organizations from Tunisia and Algeria and a number of individual women activists from the three countries of the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia). In its numerous documents, *Collective 95* acknowledges that Maghreby reality is permeated by both the Islamic *Sharia'a* referent and the western democratic referent. Its goal is to transcend this situation of a double referent and adopt a unified international referent. It argues that the western international referent is based on the universal principle of equality between the sexes. The *Sharia'a* governing the *Moudawana* is based on a paternalistic system that accords women a low status that views them as minors throughout their lives. While women's liberation is linked to their liberation from religion, it is necessary to distinguish between two levels of Islam. Islam as belief and as a cultural and civilizational heritage should be left intact, but Islam as a legislative system produced by jurists should be changed. Since the modern ideology reflected in human rights represents universally shared cultural norms, it is necessary to urgently change national laws in accordance with international standards such as CEDAW. *Collective 95* recommended an alternative legislation to the *Moudawana* that is secular, as well as adapted to the Islamic referent. Dareef notes that this alternative legislation clearly contradicts the *Sharia'a* in what concerns polygamy, the rights of a Moslem woman to marry a non-Moslem man, equal inheritance for the two sexes and the right for adoption (M.

Dareef 1998, 60-68).

The State's Vacillating Positions on Feminist Demands

The Moroccan state departs from the assumption that both the Islamic Sharia'a and the western democratic referents are based on similar premises about reason, justice, equality and fairness. This allows it to justify ratifying international conventions on a number of political, economic and social rights, change some national laws and abrogate others. Whenever the requirements of international conventions explicitly contradict Islam, as is the case with certain provisions on women's civil and nationality rights, it is necessary for the Moroccan state to either express its reservations to these conventions or not to ratify them. When Morocco ratified CEDAW on June 21, 1993, it expressed reservations on article 9 that grants women equal rights of citizenship for herself and her children and on article 16 that revolves around questions of marriage, divorce, parenthood and property. Since Islam is the state religion, Islamic rules have precedence over international laws in cases of contradiction. The state leaves the door open for compromise by adopting the position that in all cases where there is no clear contradiction between international and Islamic laws, reconciliation is constitutionally up to the King in his capacity as Prince of Believers (Dareef 1998, 51-57, 66).

The Moroccan Government's Reaction to the National Plan of Action

While the new government initially seemed receptive to the national plan of action to integrate women in development, key figures held varying positions on the plan from the onset. Mr. Mohamed Saïd Saâdi, the Secretary of State for the Social Protection of the Family and Childhood, officially presented the plan to the government on March 19, 1999 (*LMSM*, November 30, 1999). He pronounced reforming the *Moudawana* to be a legitimate demand of the women's movement (*LMSM*, July 18, 1999). In his view, without government action, women's NGOs and other associations cannot succeed in their action in favor of women's emancipation (*LMSM*, March 13, 2000). According to prime minister El Youssoufi, the government's new orientation to integrate women in the process of development is inspired by the teachings of Islam, which has always accorded women all their rights including their right to work, education and participation in all aspects of public life (*LMSM*, March 21, 1999).

Even though the Ministry of Religious Endowment and Islamic Affairs adopted the plan, it was among the first to express its reservations to it (*LMSM*, December 18, 1999). The Minister, Mr. Abdelkebir M'Daghri Alaoui argued that the polemics surrounding the plan give

the false impression that the debate is between Moslems and non-Moslems when all citizens are attached to their religion and respect Islamic law, the *Sharia'a*. He argued that women's problems are not attributable to a shortcoming in the *Sharia'a*, but rather to a bad application of the sacred texts. He said that nobody contests women's integration into development on the social and economic levels. Differences of opinion revolve around certain articles of the *Moudawana*, which should be treated by the specialists. This does not mean that religious questions are the sole domain of theologians. The entire Islamic community, *Umma*, should partake of this effort as long as it is based on the *Sharia'a* rather than on personal opinions (*LMSM*, January 25, 2000).

According to Damia Ben Khouyya, AMDF's current president, the government, which is the author of the plan, has been silent in face of the simmering conflict between the feminists and the Islamists and has started to retreat without openly declaring that. The prime minister has not taken a single step in order to put the plan into effect. The governmental committee formed to implement the plan has only met twice since it was formed, which is in itself a kind of retreat from the plan. The government retreated and left others struggling which shows that women's rights have not taken root in Moroccan society (November 19-21, 1999).

The Islamist Response to the National Plan of Action

Implementing the plan of action to integrate women in development probably depends on the capacity of women's organizations to engage the opposition in a constructive manner. Did women's NGOs play a part in alienating the plan's opponents? The Islamist opposition to the national plan to integrate women in development is a reaction to its secular, feminist, western and international orientation. The Islamist response is reflected in seminars organized by Islamist NGOs, statements made by Islamist leaders and newspapers and publications by various Islamic groups.

The Seminar of Al-Balagh (Transmittance) Association for Education and Culture

A seminar organized by the Islamist *Al-Balagh* (Transmittance) Association for Education and Culture on November 14, 1999 provides an overview of the Islamist response to the plan. The meeting started with a beautiful recitation of the *Qur'an*. The panel had three men and one woman. The *Balagh* Association representative said that education, reproductive health, vocational training, enabling women in politics and fighting against poverty are important, but that *Al-Balagh* had several reservations about the plan. First, there is a conspicuous absence of

an Islamic referent in the plan that treats issues using Western referents. The plan relies on international conferences like Beijing and Cairo that advance principles that contradict the Islamic *Sharia'a* (Law) and threaten the well being of the Moslem family. Second, the *Ulama'a* (religious scholars) and some women's organizations were excluded from participating in the process. Third, the plan is based on ideological formulations and is a carbon copy of Western recipes, especially items relating to the *Moudawana*. It is necessary to base women's development on Islamic *Sharia'a* and principles and to hold onto the Islamic referent in all social issues, especially in the affairs of women and the family.

Mr. Tohamy el-Qaed⁵ said that the plan is attempting intellectual killing and that every colonial endeavor has its own pattern of killing. The most important United Nations conventions were put in place after World War II at a time when the Islamic world was colonized. International rules cannot be compatible with Islamic rules because the Islamic world was not taken into consideration in formulating them. The plan has some good principles in it, but it does not have the means to implement them. While the plan's apparent philosophy is to defend women's rights, it uses a model that encroaches upon *Qur'anic* definitives. The plan covered certain questions that should not be touched because they are addressed in the *Qur'an*. Its proponents refused to discuss inheritance directly, but they suggested the possibility that property may be divided equally upon divorce if the husband and wife agree upon such an arrangement. Reinterpretation, *Ijtihad* is not permitted in questions of inheritance, marriage, polygamy, and divorce that are at the heart of the *Moudawana*. The right to *Ijtihad* is reserved for specialists in the fields of *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *Shar'a* (law). Advocates of the plan cannot read a single *Qur'anic* verse or *Hadith* (the prophet's sayings) and do not know the laws of *Fiqh*.

In response to the feminist demand of abolishing the system of marriage guardianship, he said that the law stipulates that it is necessary to seek consultation in all contracts. He stressed that it is a daughter's right to consult her father in marriage just as civil law requires consultation. Polygamy has been misunderstood and some women suffered as a consequence, but the incidence of polygamy is very limited. However, even if polygamy were prevalent, it would not be possible to abolish it because there is a clear text in the *Qur'an* allowing it under

⁵He is a researcher in Islamic Law, *Fiqh*, and a member of the National Association to Protect the

certain conditions. He emphatically said that the *Qur'an* cannot be fragmented and is not a decoration out of which one can simply select some parts. The plan's conditions on the marriage contract are tantamount to calling upon people to stay away from marriage. A marriage that starts with conditions will not last.

Mr. Fareed Shawqy⁶ said that the plan is based on a feminist referent and is promoted by a party—the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS)—that has a women’s section and a feminist organization. Raising the marriage age to eighteen, as the plan proponents are demanding, is a matter of dependence and a cultural surrender to the other. Even if early marriage for rural women has negative consequences, postponing the age of marriage would open the door for adultery. The distribution of condoms within the framework of reproductive health is an encouragement of adultery. The plan is a literal implementation and a coronation of international conventions. It calls upon Morocco to modernize its personal status laws based on changes in Western society. Its proponents argue that rejecting these conventions is tantamount to isolation and the absence of dialogue with the other. The plan’s discourse equates the sacred Islamic referent with the international referent when it should be above all referents. The plan, financed by international agencies to achieve their aims, is not a national plan and leads to dependence and surrender.

Jamila Messala,⁷ was the only woman on the panel. She said that Moroccan women are torn between two world views, “one based on international conventions and a western development model,” and another based on respecting the specific principles of nations. She said that most items of the plan are based on international documents, conferences and agreements, which show the domination of Western colonialism through culture and education. Through internationalization, globalization, and organizing international women’s conferences, the U.N. dictates its policy and robs nations of their will. The Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is especially important because it combined all previous texts in a unified document. All subsequent international women’s conferences derived their themes from it.

Women’s NGOs in Morocco have pressured the government to ratify international

⁶He is a professor at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities at Mohammedeyya, a graduate of *Dar el-Hadith el-Hassany* (an Islamic institute) where he did Islamic studies, and a member of an Ulama (scholars) agency.

⁷She is a researcher at Mohammed V University’s Faculty of Letters and Humanities in Rabat, a member of the Association of Renewal of Women’s Consciousness, *Jame’yyet Tajdeed el-Wa’y el-Nessaey*, and of the National Association to Protect the Moroccan Family.

conventions including CEDAW and to remove its reservations. Their strategy is to first embarrass the government by asking it to ratify international treaties. They then call upon the government to cancel its reservations to these agreements. Finally, they ask the government to make sure that internal laws are consistent with international agreements. Morocco ratified CEDAW with reservations because articles 9 and 16 of CEDAW are against the Islamic *Sharia'a*. Equality between men and women is against the Islamic *Sharia'a*. Morocco also had reservations about children being granted a mother's nationality. The secular women's NGOs have objected to the stand of the Moroccan government and considered the reservations akin to the annulment of the agreement. They have tried to implement the content of these international agreements through the plan of action. Their central goal is to establish roots for the concept of complete and identical equality between the sexes. They do not speak about complementarity but about removing all differences between women and men. Women's NGOs ascertain that CEDAW is the most important agreement because it removes all differences between the sexes. Beijing's document likewise insists on absolute and identical equality. It is a concept of equality that leads to conflict between the sexes.

These international agreements and conferences can have negative effects on Moslem societies. The concept of gender rather than sex is designed to support the idea that there is no difference between the sexes. It requires a reevaluation of the division of roles between women and men. Commitment to the requirements of CEDAW can lead to the disintegration of the Moslem family and the spread of immorality as is evidenced by the disintegration of the Western family. The plan claims that it is necessary to take the essence of Islam into consideration. Since Islamic scholars have refused these documents and agreements, women's NGOs need to reconsider their positions. Instead, leftist NGOs in Morocco are refusing to subscribe to the traditions of Morocco and the values of Islam. The secular trend reflected in the plan tries to secularize religious texts by subjecting them to international conventions. Its proponents argue that the rules of *Shar'a* are time bound, limited by particular circumstances, tied to the period in which they were formulated and incapable of superseding that time frame. They say that rules of inheritance, for example, are linked to the tribal clan system and cannot survive in a civilized society. Those with leftist inclinations attempt to suspend some of the *Shar'a* rules on issues such as polygamy and divorce. *Shar'a* rules are for all time and place and the *Qur'an* is valid for all times. Plan proponents say that since Islam is the religion of justice and interest, marriage

guardianship, polygamy and inheritance no longer serve social interests and hence could be substituted. Some women NGOs thus call for the suspension of certain matters where there has been a definitive Islamic text. Western countries are attempting to impose the secular model through foreign assistance and conditional loans. Since those who formulated the plan are ignorant of Islam, it was necessary to create the National Association for Protecting the Moroccan Family (November 14, 1999).

The National Association for Protecting the Moroccan Family, the PJD and the MNP

In a statement sent to the MAP (*Maroc Agence Presse*) press agency, NAPMF said that its objective is to defend the pillars of the Islamic identity of the Moroccan family at a moment in history where it is facing alienation from its civilizational identity. This association was founded on November 7th in Rabat at the initiative of prominent national political personalities including the leaders of the parties of Justice and Development, *Parti de Justice et du Développement* (PJD) and the National Popular Movement, *Mouvement National Populaire* (MNP). It seeks to unequivocally clarify the position of Islam on the family and on women. Its position is that it is necessary to permit *Ijtihad* (interpretation) to eliminate all forms of injustice against family members within the limits of respecting the laws of the *Sharia 'a* that originate in the divine revelation. Any treatment of the problems of the family cannot be effective without a constructive dialogue in which the *Ulama 'a*, jurists, sociologists and psychologists participate (*LMSM*, December 4, 1999).

In another statement sent to the MAP, Abdelkarim Al-Khatib and Mahjoubi Aherdane, respective leaders of the Islamist PJD party and the conservative MNP party, declared, “We are not contesting the bases of this plan which are development, modernity and social equality. . . . We are opposed to the standardization of the Moroccan woman in accordance with Western values and to limiting the references of this plan solely to Morocco’s international engagements.” Morocco is an Islamic country that has always succeeded in reconciling modernization and tradition. “The destiny of Moroccan civil society should not be uniquely dictated by an international institution or a world congress. . . . We do not want to break our family unit as happened in the morally decadent West.” The plan was formulated as if it only concerned women of the exclusive neighborhoods who have no need for a plan of action for their development. It is necessary to first give women what is essential for them “before flattering their egos with a hypothetical percentage of representation that only profits the elite.” Limiting

women's participation in politics to a quota of 33% is not equality but a curtailment of women's rights (*LMSM*, December 9, 1999).

According to Khadija Amiti, a member of the World March of Women 2000 committee, with the clear exception of Mr. Saâdi, the new government is retreating from supporting the plan in face of the Islamists' show of force. In contrast to the spontaneity of the women's march in Rabat, the Islamists march in Casablanca was highly orchestrated and disciplined. The left did not fully grasp the wider ramifications of the Rabat march. They treated it as the women's march and did not fully mobilize behind it as the march of the larger leftist democratic movement. The Islamist renewed vigor made the government reluctant to antagonize the Islamists (August 2, 2000).

In face of the unity and organizational ability demonstrated by the Islamists, it seems necessary for women's NGOs to effectively respond to them. Since many feminist leaders are from the same leftist parties making up the new governmental alliance, they gained an unprecedented access to their fellow activists who became the top government positions. This probably led women activists to have heightened expectations about the government's willingness to push for instituting the plan and to underestimate the strength of the opposition to the plan. In the midst of this moment of destiny brought forth by the national plan of action to integrate women in development, how can women's NGOs sculpt the rocks of women's rights out of both universal principles of equality and human rights and Islamic values?

Appendix

Names and Affiliations of People and Groups

Women's NGOs and Leaders

UAF, Union of Feminine Action, L'Union de L'Action Féminine

Latifa Jbabdi, former president of the UAF Union of Feminine Action, L'Union de L'Action Féminine

Fatma El-Meghnawy, the director of the UAF's SOS Rescue center in Rabat

Aisha El-Khomassy, National Secretary General

Latifa el-Bou Hosseyini, a UAF member and employee at the Secretariat of State for the Social Protection of the Family and Childhood

AMDF, the Moroccan Association for Women's Rights, *L'Association Marocaine des Droits de la Femme*

Damia Ben Khouyya, current president

Najaat al-Razzy, president from 1992 to 1997

Touria Eloumri, former member

Fadela Soad, volunteer in FAMA

FAMA, the AMDF's Center of Information on Women's Rights in Casablanca, Centre FAMA D'Information sur les Droits des Femmes

ADFM, the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women, *L'Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc*

Amina Lamrini, president

Nozha El-Sequelly, vice president

CLEF, ADFM's Center for Women's Leadership in Casablanca, Centre de Leadership Feminine

Collectif 95, the Maghreby 1995 Collective for Equality, Collectif 95 Maghreb Egailté, seven women's organizations and a number of individual women activists from the three countries of the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia)

Khadija Amiti, president of Chaml Association for Research on the Family, *Association Chaml Pour la Recherche sur la Famille et la Femme*, Kénitra

CEDAW, the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

The King, Government Officials and Parliament

King Mohammed VI, current King of Morocco

King Hassan II, King of Morocco, 1961-1999

King Mohammed V, King of Morocco, 1956-1961

Mr. Abderrahman El Youssoufi, Morocco's prime minister

Mr. Mohamed Saïd Saâdi, the Secretary of State for the Social Protection of the Family and Childhood

Mr. Abdelkebir M'Daghri Alaoui, the Minister of Religious Endowment and Islamic Affairs
The Assembly of Representatives, *Assemblée des Représentants*, *Majlis al-Nuwab*

The Assembly of Councilors, *Assemblée des Conseillers, Majlis al-Mustasharin*

Other NGOs and Unions

OMDH, the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights, *L'Organisation Marocaine des Droits de L'Homme*

AMDH, the Moroccan Association for Human Rights, *L'Association Marocaine Pour Les Droits Humaines*

UNEM, the National Union of Moroccan Students, *L'Union National des Étudiants Marocains*

Political Parties

USFP, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, *L'Union Socialiste des Forces Populaire*

MNP, the National Popular Movement, *Mouvement National Populaire*

OADP, Organization of Action for Democracy and the People, *Organization de l'Action Democratique Populaire*

PPS, the Party of Progress and Socialism, *Parti du Progress et Socialisme*

Istiqlaal, the Independence Party

Islamist Groups and NGO Leaders

Bassima el-Haqqawy, Secretary General of the (Islamist) Association of Renewal of Women's Consciousness, *Jame'yyet Tajdeed el-'Wa'y el-Nessaey*

Jamila Messala, a member of the Association of Renewal of Women's Consciousness

Mr. Ahmed el-Rayssouni, head of the Islamist Movement for Unification and Reform, *Haraket el-Tawheed wa el-Islah*

NAPMF, the National Association for Protecting the Moroccan Family, *el-Hay'a el-Wataneyya le-Hemayet el-Osra el-Maghrebeyya*

PJD, the (Islamist) Party of Justice and Development, *Parti de Justice et Developpement, Hezb el-'Adala wa el-Tanmeyya*

The Justice and Charity Movement, *el-'Adl wa el-Ihssan*

Al-Balagh (Transmittance) Association for Education and Culture

Arabic and French Terms Used

Moudawana, the Personal Status Laws

Shariah, Islamic law

Fiqh, Islamic jurisprudence

Shar'a, law

Ulama'a, Islamic scholars

Qur'an, Islamic scripture

Hadith, the Prophet's Sayings

El-Tajdeed, renewal

Amir Al Mouminine, the Prince of Believers

Anwal, the journal of the Organization of Action for Democracy and the People (OADP)

Imams, the mosque preachers

Fatwa, religious ruling

Welaya, male guardianship over women

Jama'a, the Commune

Umma, the Islamic community
Ijtihad, interpretation

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