

India: state and national laws against amnio-centesis

Rajasthan is the third Indian state to pass legislation banning the use of amniocentesis for fetal sex determination. Similar measures have been adopted in Maharashtra and Gujarat.

India's lower house of parliament (*Lok Sabha*) has passed a law to ban the misuse of medical tests which have led to thousands of abortions of female foetuses. The law is expected to be endorsed by the upper house. Genetic counselling centres are to be registered and will face closure if there are complaints of abuse. Doctors will be forbidden from disclosing the sex of a foetus and the advertising of sex tests, currently widespread, will be prohibited.

Women's groups have criticized loopholes in both local and national provisions, such as regulation of public but not private clinics. Widely available since the mid-1970s, amniocentesis has been used with increasing frequency to detect fetal sex and one study estimates that between the years 1978 and 1982, 75,000 females were aborted. The prevalence of these tests has contributed to a growing discrepancy in India's sex ratio, which fell to 929 women per 1,000 men in the 199 census.

Sources: *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, Vol. VI No.2, 1994; *Everywoman*, Freepost, London N1 8BR, U.K.

Call to defend book on violence against women

The Muvman Liberayson Fem in Mauritius is calling on women's organizations to protest the government repression of a novel, *The Rape of Sita*, written by the President of their Association. Acclaimed as an in-depth fictional study of rape and violence against women upon its release in December 1993, the book was immediately denounced as an attack on Hinduism by members of the Hindu Council in Mauritius. The Prime Minister spoke against it in

Parliament, labelling the book "an outrage to religious morality" and asked the police to pursue punitive measures against its author, *Lindsey Collen*. The author and publisher have withdrawn the book from circulation. Contact: Muvman Liberayson Fem, Lakaz Ros, 8 Celicourt Antelme Street, Forrest-Side, Republic of Mauritius.

Source: *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, Vol. VI No. 2, 1994.

In the Philippines, no coffee with condoms

In the Manila suburb of Makati the cries of scandalized residents and religious groups were heeded by the Makati local government on October 11, 1994 when it ordered the closure of the *Condom Cafe* barely a day after its grand opening. Operators said the bar is meant to be a venue for AIDS awareness.

Five policemen sent by the Makati municipal administrator padlocked the C.C. Bar and Restaurant - the name adopted by the cafe following the uproar over its original name. A huge sign was posted at the bar's restaurant, saying, "This establishment has been closed for violating existing municipal ordinances..."

The municipal administrator said the bar's operators committed certain violations such as failing to get a certificate of occupancy from the engineering department of Makati. But there is another reason, he admitted the Makati

mayor's office has refused to issue the cafe a permit because its name and interior could set a precedent for other 'indecent establishments'.

When the cafe opened about 100 people bearing anti-condom placards held a rally, reciting the Rosary and carrying placards bearing messages such as 'Condom Immoral' and 'Save our Children From Scandal.' The cafe's interior is embellished with condom-shaped mirrors and psychedelic paintings of condoms.

But some turned out in support of the cafe. "I think it's a bold move to promote a safer, sex-positive attitude in a sex-negative society," said the Rev. Richard Mickley, pastor of an ecumenical church in the capital which includes gays and lesbians in the congregation.

Source: *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Report by *Dona Pazzibugan*, October 13, 1994.

Central American women's human rights data base created

The Inter-American Institute of Human Rights in Costa Rica is engaged in creating a database containing the material available in the Central American region on the human rights and social status of women. The first of its kind in the region, this resource, which will be connected to Internet, will provide electronic access to the enormous number of gender-specific experiences, studies, methodologies, teaching materials, newsletters, laws, videos and events that have been produced or have taken place over the past five years. Contact: Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, P.O. Box 10.081, 1.000 San José, Costa Rica. Tel: (506) 34 04 04; Fax: (506) 34 09 55.

Source: *Worldwide Network*, 1331 H Street, N.W., Suite 903, Washington, D.C. 20005, USA.