

*"Woman throughout the ages has been mistress to the law, as man has been its master."*  
*Freda Aklen*

Laws for the most part are written rules that have kept women in their place, whether it be in the home or in the fields, tending the children and animals. Laws bar women from exercising basic rights especially the unwritten rules. Take for instance the murmuring in Iran, that women are routinely raped while held in detention or prison. Officials claim that there are no such written policies to this act but women will whisper to the opposite. Even developmental policies dominating Asia hold a double standard for women. Across Asia, the indicators of modernization and success are the incessant erecting of tall concrete buildings, the number of Mercedes on the road, the wide use of cellular phones, hoarding of guns and weapons, but when it comes to the human rights and individual freedoms for women, the "evils of the materialistic west" are quickly invoked.

As women we know early on that certain rules are for men and others are for women, even if the same law is supposed to be across gender boundaries, the application depends on your gender and/or class. Case in point is the article "till Divorce do us part" which looks at the divorce laws in Asia.

But have we sat around and just let these patriarchal system run roughshod on us? Our gains --- the right to vote, the right to education, the right to work --- will prove that for centuries we have been challenging these laws. The most difficult legal terrain has been the laws that rule the personal domain and our sexuality. But we continue to push, analyze, question, redefine and enlarge both 'the spirit and letter of the law'.

In compiling this issue we found that women are creating many changes, especially in the area of our sexuality and in the personal domain. Take for instance, the Philippines, where women successfully passed a sexual harassment bill as well as redefined old colonial Spanish laws on rape.

In India and Japan, women lawyers are analyzing the existing laws through feminist lens. They are working with

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other women's groups to change laws and to hold governments accountable to newly signed pro-women laws.

In Sri Lanka, women have used the existing bribery laws to prosecute against sexual harassment in the absence of harassment laws.

In South Korea, women are organizing and changing old laws discriminating against women.

In the U.S.A., female employees of the CIA have won a landmark case against one of the U.S. oldest and exclusive 'good old boys network.' The list goes on.

The power of law and military rule have long been the prerogative of the patriarchal system, but just as we see women challenging the legal arena, we see women taking on peacemaking roles in times of conflicts. In our special feature **Women Waging Peace**, we focus on women who are trying to change the ravages of war with waging peace. In the same section, we take a look at the current war in Algeria that has targeted women as the main casualties of a largely religious conflict. We listen to refugee women testifying against war atrocities.

In this **Women in Action** issue, we added a second special feature. We could not resist the idea of passing up the opportunity of sharing with you a few interesting articles on **Language and Sexism**. For example, Tomoko I. Sakita takes a look at how in Japan Nippongo and English languages carry sexism further.

In **Conversations**, two Muslim women, an Iranian and a Bangladeshi share with us their thoughts on Islam, the west, and women. Grace Molisa writes about the women in **Vanuatu**.

As in our past issues, our resource center staff invite you to take a look at the new books from the **Isis Shelves** through the book reviews. Inspiring poetry and tasty recipes are featured too.

**In Action** highlights dynamic women making news. One of them, we are proud to feature is Yayori Matsui, who is a member of the Isis International Advisory Council.

Finally, we have added a new section, **What do you Think?** We are encouraging dialogue on issues women have suggested. The topic in this issue is donor based funding vs income generating and program independence. Women want to know what you think. We will publish your responses and comments in upcoming issues.

We look forward to seeing you in Beijing where all 40,000 of us will meet, speak out and remind the world one more time that we are -- **WOMEN IN ACTION!**