

A LETTER FROM ALGERIAN WOMEN

The following letter, which was received in WGNRR's Coordination office in January 1995, was written and signed by "The Women of Algeria" who, for fear of their lives, need to remain anonymous. (ed.)



Dear Sisters,

Thank you for publicizing the appeal from the Global Sisterhood Institute and the Women Living Under Muslim Laws regarding Ms Darabi and the Hidjeb in Iran (Newsletter 47). This is a very important step in support of all women for whom the Islamic veil is a symbol of oppression. The attempts to impose the Islamic veil in French schools constitute a revealing insight into the clandestine work going on among migrants in the West and give a good idea of what will happen in countries like Algeria or Egypt if the Islamic fundamentalists ever take power. It is regrettable that you were not aware of this situation earlier.

Events are taking a dramatic turn in Algeria, where the directors of schools, universities and other institutions regularly receive letters commanding them to impose the Hidjeb on all women and girls from the age of ten onwards. In the so-called "liberated" zones controlled by the FIS (Front for Islamic Salvation), the Hidjeb is compulsory and sports and songs are forbidden in the schools where, of boys and girls are taught separately, with the best teachers being reserved for the boys.

But there are worse evils afoot. "Ethnic purification" is not confined to Bosnia. Nobody speaks of the collective assault which terrorize the inhabitants of small, isolated villages in the mountains of Algeria; of the armed gangs of fundamentalists who regularly descend from their hide-outs in these regions to raid and plunder the defenseless villages, stealing whatever they need and raping the women, all in the name of Allah. No one dares to travel by road anymore for fear of the "false roadblocks" set up by the "madmen of Allah" who, disguised as policemen, carry out searches, kill whomever they please and kidnap young girls. In the villages, parents are afraid to send their girls to elementary or high school; adolescents are kidnapped, many disappear; sometimes their mutilated bodies are discovered, sometimes they survive; but those who return to their families alive have undergone physical and psychological traumas which will mark them for life.

We count on you to inform women all over the world, and particularly in non-francophone countries, of what is happening in Algeria, the country which, 20 years ago, was a beacon for all Non-Aligned and Third World nations."

