



Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

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Working session 7

English

On behalf of International Civil Liberties Alliance I would like to suggest that the United Kingdom consider the immediate implementation of one very practical step in order to ensure the effective protection of Womens' Rights for one of the most vulnerable part of its population : Muslim women.

The International Civil Liberties Alliance ask for an immediate banning of all Sharia courts in the United Kingdom which deal and give judgments about family matters and private conflicts.

Sharia courts apply sharia rules which are denying equality of Right between men and women and generally disregard any kind of compliance or compatibility with Human Rights.

Tolerating the existence of Sharia courts and allowing them to arbitrate in private family conflicts constitute a gross violation of UK commitments in regard to gender equality and women's protection.

In theory, any woman unhappy with a Sharia court decision has the right of appeal to a British court. But actually, we know that Muslim women are very often prisoners of family and community, bonds which deny them any real possibility to contest a Sharia court decision.

The international Civil Liberties Alliance fails to see how United Kingdom can allow Sharia courts to operate on its territory and at the same time pretend to uphold its OSCE's commitments promoting Women 's Rights or Muslim women's right to a fair trial as defined by the European Convention of Human Rights article 6:

I quote : *" In the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law."* End of quote.

Sharia courts are by no way impartial toward women and will never be so because they apply Sharia regulations. It is impossible to see how such tribunals could ever have anything other than a negative impact on the promotion of Women's Right in UK Muslim communities.

Recommendations

International Civil Liberties Alliance recommendation to United Kingdom :

First:

To immediately deny Sharia courts any competence in family matters and private conflicts.

Second :

To adopt policies aiming to permanently ban Sharia courts from UK.

International Civil Liberties Alliance recommendation to OSCE participating states :

ICLA also ask from all participating states a renewed vigilance about any attempt to create Sharia courts or equivalent institutions whatever name they use. Please remember your commitments to protect Human Rights, Women's Rights, Children's Rights and firmly reject any such future attempts.