The Canadian Press
National News, Saturday, January 22, 2005

Iranian activist fears Ontario passage of Sharia law for family disputes

The Canadian Press

EDMONTON (CP) - The Ontario government would endanger the rights of women and children by allowing Islamic **Sharia** law to be used in the resolution of **family** disputes, an activist said Saturday.

Homa Arjomand said in a speech to human rights groups that women are not treated equally under **Sharia** law, a code of conduct based on the Koran which has been in use for more than 1,200 years.

Under Ontario's Arbitration Act, parties who wish to avoid the courts by choosing arbitration to resolve **family** law and inheritance issues may be allowed to make use of religious tribunals.

However, former NDP attorney general Marion Boyd, who wrote the report for the Ontario government, said she avoided the term "**Sharia** law" because as practised in Middle East countries it combines criminal and civil laws, and allows the death penalty for adultery. It also considers a woman's testimony to be worth half that of a man's.

Arjomand said many Muslim women she counsels in Toronto are victims of abuse. She said they have been forced into marriage at the age of 14 or forced into polygamous arrangements which, while not recognized in Canadian law, continue to oppress them.

Salim Patel of the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada said there is a lot of "misinformation and scaremongering" surrounding the tribunal proposal.

He said violations against women in Islamic states do not reflect the teachings of the faith which are the foundation for the arbitration tribunals.

"Things that happened in Iran, happened because of the regime there, not because of **Sharia** law, not because of what the Koran teaches but because of the people in power," he said.

"That's what gives Islam a bad name. It's regimes in the name of Islam or Muslims doing things which are totally un-Islamic."

Patel said the arbitration tribunals would be similar to those which have already been established by other faith groups. They would have to work within the framework of Canadian law.

The tribunals could only deal with a dispute with the consent of both parties but Arjomand questioned whether many women who will be subject to their decisions can freely consent.

"These women, their rights have been taken away from them from birth," she said. "They were sent to Islamic school at the age of five and at the age of 14 are forced to marry. Most of my clients are like that."

Boyd's report noted that "religious arbitration can allow the people in dispute to select a shared set of values and rules that may be different than Ontario law."

However, she recommended a number of safeguards be put in place, including bringing the arbitration agreements under the province's **Family** Law Act to help ensure decisions are made in the best interests of children.

Arjomand, who has lived in Canada since 1990, said Alberta human rights groups must start organizing in case there is an attempt to follow Ontario's lead.

Arjomand has launched an international appeal to prevent **Sharia** courts in Canada and is collecting signatures on a petition opposing them. So far, she has gathered more than 7,000 names.

"This has nothing to do with the faith of Islam," she said. "It has something to do with political Islam. They want their share. They want influence. So far they want it in the Middle East but now they want it in the West."

(Edmonton Journal)

Category: News
Uniform subject(s): Laws and regulations; Human rights and freedoms
Subject(s) - The Canadian Press : JUSTICE; RELIGION; POLITICS; INTERNATIONAL
Hour of publication: 22:09 EST
Length: Medium, 461 words

© 2005 The Canadian Press. All rights reserved.

Doc. : news·20050122·CP·0CP×2G8519

Ce matériel est protégé par les droits d'auteur.Tous droits réservés.
© 2001 CEDROM-SNi