

**1999 BAHÁ'Í CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
FOR THE AMERICAS**

TAHIRIH JUSTICE CENTER

PRINCIPAL FACILITATOR: JOHANNA M. MERRITT(U.S.)

FACILITATORS AND REPRESENTATIVES:

ROBERT AHDIEH, LAYLI MILLER BASHIR (U.S.)

ROSHAN BASHIR-ELAHI (U.S.), ANDRA GRANT (U.S.)

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I. "Vision"

A. Mission

The Tahirih Justice Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that offers free legal services to women fleeing international human rights abuses. The Center specializes in complex gender-based refugee and asylum claims, particularly for women from Muslim societies. Its clients face abuses such as female genital mutilation, rape, domestic violence, forced marriage, and sexual slavery and tend to be from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. In addition to legal representation, the Center offers several other

services in an attempt to provide holistic assistance to its clients, including medical evaluation services and social service referrals.

The Tahirih Justice Center was founded on the belief that the achievement of full equality between men and women is necessary if society is to progress. Working towards legal and social justice for women is a critical part of making this equality a reality. The staff, volunteers, and Directors of the Tahirih Justice Center believe that their efforts to assist immigrant and refugee women contribute to human progress by offering the promise of justice and equality to women from countries in which these basic rights are particularly elusive.

B. History

The Tahirih Justice Center was founded in 1997, by Layli Miller Bashir following her involvement as a student-attorney in the high-profile case of Fauziya Kassindja, a young woman from Togo who received asylum in the U.S. because of female genital mutilation. Her case made legal history and resulted in an outcry for assistance from women in similar situations. In seeking to find organizations that could help the numerous women approaching her for help, she came to realize the lack of available assistance to immigrant women, particularly those from predominantly Muslim regions such as Africa, Middle East, and Asia. Seed money, which became available following the media attention in Fauziya's case, enabled the creation of the Tahirih Justice Center in order to address the acute need for *pro bono* legal assistance to women fleeing human rights abuses.

C. Activities

1. Legal Program

The Tahirih Justice Center's core service is the provision of free legal representation in cases that champion the rights of women and protect them from international human rights abuses. Specializing in gender-based asylum claims, the Center's legal services cater to the unique needs and concerns of women fleeing human rights abuses. It focuses on the needs of women from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Since the Center's inception, it has assisted over 180 individuals in their efforts to receive protection in the United States.

Most of the Tahirih Justice Center's cases are handled by the Center's full-time staff under the guidance of Legal Services Director Michael Maggio, Esq. The Center also maintains a roster of volunteer attorneys who are willing to argue women's cases on behalf of the Tahirih Justice Center. The Center's Legal Services Program is enhanced by its cooperative relationships with the Washington, D.C. area law firms, D.C. area law schools, and other legal clinics, which provide the Center with legal fellows and interns.

2. Medical Program

The Legal Services team draws on two other Tahirih Justice Center programs to corroborate women's accounts of persecution. Often, the most convincing evidence that women's claims are valid comes from a medical evaluation of the client by the Medical Services team under the direction of physician R. Martin Bashir, M.D. This evaluation documents physical abuse women have endured, and offers women any necessary immediate care.

3. Country Conditions Resource Project

In addition, the legal team may call on expert witnesses and country conditions evidence provided by the Center's Country Conditions Resource Project, under the direction of anthropologist Dr. Justin Greene-Roesel. She and her team of research interns compile data on the social and legal condition of women in their countries of origin. They identify individuals with expert knowledge of the conditions, customs, and rituals in those countries, who can testify as to whether clients would indeed face persecution if forced to return to their countries.

4. Systemic Change

The Center advocates for systemic change, as well as the direct service of its clients. The Center works closely with the media as well as judicial, Congressional, and State Department channels to promote change on a range of issues affecting women fleeing human rights abuses. In one example, the Center was recently approached by the Fund for a Feminist Majority about assisting with their Afghanistan Campaign by providing legal services to numerous women needing legal assistance. Consequently, in high-level meetings at the White House, State Department, and U.S. Department of Justice, the Center has been advocating for systemic change to enable the efficient processing of women fleeing the treatment of the Taliban in Afghanistan. To this end, the Center also works closely with the President's Inter-Agency Council on Women's Initiatives.

The Tahirih Justice Center has become a recognized leader in women's rights and is often called upon by area universities, law firms, and non-profit organizations for advise on gender-based asylum claims. Staff at the Center are frequently asked to speak at conferences on human rights and the law throughout the U.S. and internationally. Furthermore, media regularly contact the Center to request comment on recent trends in refugee and women's rights.

II. Process

The process of growth for the Tahirih Justice Center has been rapid and, largely, uncalculated. Although the Center seeks to be strategic in its development, those involved are acutely aware that we are, largely, not in control. Its growth has far exceeded the greatest expectations of those involved in the Center's birth.

The tools of prayer, consultation, and frequent feedback (or “taking thyself into account each day” – collectively) provide the backbone of the organization. The Center holds bi-monthly Board meetings, bi-weekly Executive Committee meetings (a committee consisting of the Board’s officers), and weekly staff meetings. Every six months, the staff receive a detailed evaluation. Every year, the Board conducts a qualitative and statistical study of the Center’s growth and development.

The element of divine intervention is palpable in the daily work of the Center. Those involved in the establishment and development of the Center are often awe-inspired by events that appear to catapult it into greater arenas of service. Such divine intervention is so obvious and frequent that the Center’s non-Bahá’í staff have remarked about the clear presence of a higher force providing assistance and direction.

III. Models

Bahá’í principles and institutional examples provide models for the Tahirih Justice Center’s operations. For example, the Board of Directors is currently made up of nine individuals, prays before every meeting, elects its officers by secret ballot, and engages in consultation as a decision-making tool. In addition, the Center’s Board is chosen by the Board making recommendations for new Board members to the Permanent Members (all Bahá’ís) who approve or disapprove of the recommendations. This process protects against electioneering that often takes place on Boards for membership, and it ensures that the Bahá’í vision will not be diluted by a Board that may have large numbers of non-Bahá’ís as members. These models, while familiar to Bahá’ís, may be particularly foreign to the Center’s non-Bahá’í Board Members, who are used to serving on Board which campaign for membership and officer elections and regularly vote on decisions.

Another Bahá’í model, which is particularly instructive for the Tahirih Justice Center, is the model of service. The Center is located in the highly politicized region of Washington, D.C., deals with diverse personalities of people in positions of power, coordinates its efforts with other non-profits who are often competitive about funding sources, and is called upon by the media to take positions on different issues affecting immigrant and women’s rights. In short, the Center must be extremely sensitive to not become enmeshed in common competitive games and power plays. Focusing on service, rather than being able to participate in certain exclusive meetings, or being interviewed by certain exclusive media sources, has been our protection. The Center’s focus on service, and obliviousness to other political complications, has notably distinguished us from other non-profits working in this arena.

IV. Strategies

The Center’s strategies for legal advocacy on behalf of its clients are highly technical and may not be appropriate for this summary. Its overall strategy for assisting its clients is a holistic one, as described above. The Center’s strategies for growth and development rely on the process of consultation, feedback, and divine intervention, as described above.

V. Capacity Building

In order to develop the capacity of individuals working at the Center, the Center allocates funds for training courses and conference attendance in the area of women and immigrant's rights. In addition, where there are high-level meetings, oral arguments, or speeches to be given, we make an attempt to specifically include those staff members who may not be ordinarily involved, so that they can take up those roles in the future.

The Center's inability to fully reach its capacity rests on the fewness of its staff and the limited time available. The number of opportunities for greater service that are presented to the Center, but which it is unable to take advantage of, is often extremely frustrating.

In order to develop the capacity of the Center to hire additional staff and take on additional cases, fundraising is an instrumental component. The Center's fundraising strategy currently consists of limited foundation support, broad individual support, and an annual fundraising banquet that attracts corporate and other sponsors.

NATURE OF THE KEY PROBLEMS FACED BY THE PROJECT

VI. The Tahirih Justice Center's greatest challenge has been meeting the demand for its services. This challenge is exacerbated, in part, by lack of funds. Fundraising is a very challenging process and requires a great deal of time and effort. We continue to strive to better enlist the assistance of Board members, general supporters, and volunteers in the fundraising process.

Key Questions for Discussion

1. How do we bring the spiritual solutions, contained in the writings of Baha'u'llah, to the world's ills through the establishment of Baha'i non-profit organizations while guarding against becoming a charity, undistinguishable from other non-Baha'i organizations, as warned by Shoghi Effendi.
2. How does a Baha'i-inspired non-profit, primarily serving non-Baha'i populations, uphold and develop Baha'i standards of excellence and professionalism, where these qualities may not be well developed in some Baha'i communities?
3. What should be the relationship between Baha'i-inspired non-profit organizations and the Baha'i community and its institutions? Particularly, as it relates to fundraising, membership, public relations, and general participation.

BAHÁ'Í REFERENCES

How does a Bahá'í-inspired non-profit, primarily serving non-Bahá'í populations, uphold and develop Bahá'í standards of excellence and professionalism, where these qualities may not be well developed in some Bahá'í communities?

This brings to mind the quote from our beloved guardian, from Bahá'í Administration

"One thing and only one thing will unfailing and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.

-Shoghi Effendi Bahá'í Administration pg.66

"From the beginning of His stupendous mission, Bahá'u'lláh urges upon the attention of nations the necessity of ordering human affairs in such a way as to bring into being a world unified in all the essential aspects of its life. In unnumbered verses and tablets He repeatedly and variously declared the 'progress of the world' and the 'development of nations' as being among the ordinances of God for this day. The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of His Revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth."

- Universal House of Justice Ridván message 1983

"The beloved Master, through His illuminating words and deeds, set the example for the application of this concept to the reconstruction of society. Witness, for instance, what social and economic progress the Iranian believers attained under His loving guidance and, subsequently, with the unflinching encouragement of the Guardian of the Cause."

- Universal House of Justice

Ridván message 1983

"The fourth Taraz concerneth trustworthiness. Verily it is the door of security for all that dwell on earth and a token of glory on the part of the All-Merciful. He who partaketh hath indeed partaketh of the treasures of wealth and prosperity. Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it. . . . Trustworthiness is in truth the best of vestures of your temples and the most glorious crown for your heads. Take ye fast hold of it at the behest of Him Who is the Ordainer, the All-Informed."

-Tablets of Baha'u'lláh pg. 37-38

What should be the relationship between Baha'i-inspired non-profit organizations and the Baha'i community and its institutions? Particularly, as it relates to fund-raising, memberships, public relations, and the general participation.

We here at the Center realize from the Writings that our purpose is one of servitude to God and humanity, and to acquire virtues as individuals. With the Center's overall goal of servitude in mind all our perceptions, thoughts and actions are somehow directly or indirectly related and thus unified.

". . . Shut your eyes to estrangement, then fix your gaze upon unity. Cleave tenaciously unto that which will lead to the well-being and the tranquility of all mankind."

- Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh pg. 67

". . . Above all else, the greatest gift and the most wondrous blessing hath ever been and will continue to be Wisdom. It is man's unfailing Protector."

- Tablets of Baha'u'llah pg. 66

furthermore,

"Ultimately, the call to action is addressed to the individual friends, whether they be adult or youth, veteran or newly-enrolled. Let them step forth to take their places in the arena of service where their talents and skills, their specialized training, their material resources, their offers of time and energy and, above all, their dedication to Bahá'í principles, can be put to work in improving the lot of man."

- Universal House of Justice
Ridván message 1983

"The problems which confront the believers at the present time, whether social, spiritual, economic or administrative will be gradually solved as the number and the resources of the friends multiply and their capacity for service and for the application of Bahá'í principles develops. They should be patient, confident and active in utilizing every possible opportunity that presents itself within the limits now necessarily imposed upon them. May the Almighty aid them to fulfill their highest hopes."

- Universal House of Justice
Ridván message 1983

EVALUATION PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

OVERVIEW:

At its most fundamental level, the Tahirih Justice Center exists to provide protection to women from around the world who are suffering from human rights abuses. In this respect, it is both a “**service-driven**” and “**mission-driven**” organization. At numerous points throughout each year, the Center conducts a comprehensive series of evaluations of its work to bring itself to account in the achievement of these goals: How have its activities brought justice and freedom to women’s lives? Has the Center effectively maintained its service orientation?

In many respects, the processes through which the Tahirih Justice Center achieves its mission are as important as what it has achieved, and considerable attention is paid in the framework of evaluation to the methods through which the Center’s core programs and administrative management are orchestrated. Indeed, the Center gives considerable priority not only to the provision of direct services to its clients, but to cultivating in its daily activities a spirit of service towards the members of its permanent and volunteer staff, to the surrounding communities, and to members of the world community. Work in the spirit of service is one of only several principles around which the Tahirih Justice Center’s activities are built: these principles constitute the Center’s third critical orientation: it is “**values-driven.**”

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES:

The values which shape the Tahirih Justice Center’s activities include:

Service Orientation: Focus on the establishment of ideas, institutions, processes and relationships which contribute to human social, material and spiritual advancement.

Consultation: Appreciate the tremendous value brought by the interface of a diverse range of ideas, experiences and perspectives, recognizing that the more widely one seeks the truth, the more likely one is to approach it.

Unity: Work to build unity within the organization, especially through the consultative process. Consult in an atmosphere of service, detachment and humility, which enables people with a range of communication styles to share their views freely, which deconstructs any individual’s ownership of or attachment to a particular idea, and which encourages the group’s ownership of the ultimate decision regardless of personal preference. Identify activities that build unity, and rely on them consistently—opening

activities and consultations with prayer can be especially effective. Identify areas which discourage unity, competitiveness or hostility and work to reform them.

Participation: Encourage all stakeholders in a process to participate in its construction and review. Acknowledge the value that people at all levels of a process, from volunteer to CEO, have to offer.

Ownership: Facilitate, through consultation and participation, the development of ownership of the organization by stakeholders at all levels. Encourage individuals to take responsibility for pieces of the organization or specific projects, and remind them that their input and effort make a substantial difference in “their” organization. The words “we” and “ours” are essential.

Trustworthiness: Deliberately create an environment of transparency among the staff, with the governing board, with funding bodies and with the general public. Provide complete and accurate, readily available information, and descriptions of the processes used to obtain and verify it. Ensure that commitments are honored. Act responsibly in every arena of activity.

Affirmation: Acknowledge the power of praise. Remind individuals of their value to the organization and as individuals, and the degree to which their efforts are appreciated. Provide criticism in a constructive, positive manner, prefaced with an affirmation.

Work in the Spirit of Service: Encourage a spirit of dedication both to the organization’s efforts to promote human progress, and to the efforts of individuals to be generous and supportive of their co-workers; build positive, enabling and affirming relationships, structures, and processes in the workplace.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK:

1) Annual Report

At the close of 1999, the Tahirih Justice Center will publish its first annual report, for which preparations have already begun. The report will be available to the general public, and will cover the Center’s first year of operation with full time staff (its second year since incorporation). The annual report will review the Center’s mission and key principles, discuss highlights of the Center’s achievements during the year, discuss the Center’s existing programs and the directions planned for those programs in the coming year, and will provide an audited financial statement for 1999.

2) Quantitative Summary of Achievements

Approximately every quarter, the Tahirih Justice Center conducts a statistical study of its client service database to document the ways in which its services have been utilized. The study, which is available to the public, reviews the number of people receiving assistance from each of its programs, the ways in which assistance has been rendered (through litigated cases, non-litigated cases, the provision of legal advice, etc.), and provides a demographic overview of its services. The demographic overview identifies the proportions of its activities which deal with different types of claims, which pursue protection under various laws, the regions and individual countries from which its clients come, the gender of its clients, the sources of client referrals, and many other variables. The overview also identifies relationships between the different variables. For example, during our last statistical evaluation, it became apparent that an unusually high proportion of domestic violence inquiries do not become cases. Because victims of domestic violence often fall out of contact or return to their husbands, it was clear that we needed to modify the way we handle such cases accordingly.

3) Evaluation of Population Being Served

On an annual basis, the Center conducts a review of the general population it serves. How many potential clients are there? From which countries do they come? What are the trends in the need for the types of services the Center provides among the group of potential clients? Are changes in the regulations affecting other organizations (service organizations, governmental organizations, etc.) changing the demand for the Center's services? Are new issues emerging within this population which indicate a need to adjust the Center's service programs? The results of this analysis are also available to the public.

4) Internal Evaluation / Process Evaluation

On an annual basis, the Tahirih Justice Center conducts an internal process evaluation which addresses in an open, honest way the strengths and areas for improvement of the organization as a whole and for each of its individual programs. In 1998, Emily Mohajeri Norris (who later became a Board of Directors member) completed a report entitled *Process Evaluation of the Programs and Overall Organization of the Tahirih Justice Center – A Reflective Report of the First Year of Operation 1997-1998*.

Process: Members of the Center's Executive Committee consult to identify potential authors of the evaluation who have knowledge of the organization and a firm understanding of its mission and values, but who have not been associated with it in a direct way. Qualities of detachment, attentiveness, patience and confidentiality, in addition to good listening, questioning, writing and organizational analysis skills are also sought. Once an individual has been selected, the Executive Committee meets with him or her to discuss the objectives of the evaluation, discuss and review a proposed research strategy, and to review the final document for accuracy of content and presentation. The evaluator then conducts interviews with each of the Center's program directors, executive committee members, full time staff members, and a sample of Board Members, volunteers and interns. Interviews may be conducted individually or in groups as

appropriate. The interviews cover the objectives of the programs and the organization as a whole, the ways in which those objectives have been met, each program's strengths, and areas in which improvement or adjustment may be required. Other topics for discussion include ways in which the Center's mission and its core values have or have not been realized, the structure, organization and administration of the Center's affairs in a positive, effective manner, ways to work more effectively as a team, and progress on building relationships within the Center and with like-minded or charitable organizations and with local communities. This document is intended for an internal audience and for purposes of the Center's organizational learning. It is available to any of the groups of people consulted in its preparation; it may, in special circumstances, be shared with select individuals or organizations not directly affiliated with the Center.

5) Client Evaluation

For clients on whose behalf the Center actively litigates cases, an evaluation of the Center's services is requested at the close of the case. Clients are asked to complete a questionnaire (or provide verbal commentary if writing is difficult) in which they summarize their experience of the Center's services, especially the quality of service, and ways in which the provision of services can be improved.

6) Bi-annual Staff Evaluations (and Exit Interviews Upon Departure)

On a bi-annual basis, and upon a staff member's departure from the organization, the Center conducts an evaluation designed to facilitate communication and to create healthy, affirming workplace relationships. The following procedure is used:

a) Written review:

One or more supervisory personnel is assigned responsibility for each staff member's evaluation. The individual or team ("review committee") conducts personalized interviews with each of the supervisory personnel and co-workers with whom a staff member interacts most closely. Other co-workers—for example, interns and volunteers, may be sampled for comment as well. Each person interviewed is asked to discuss, briefly, his or her experience of working with the staff member under review—to offer general observations, to identify strengths and "best qualities", and to identify any areas which may need attention. The review team compiles the results of all of the interviews into a deliberately positive, affirming report with the following format:

EMPLOYEE NAME:

SOURCE OF REVIEWS:

OVERALL COMMENTS

VII. Greatest Strengths

GENERAL STRENGTHS

AREAS FOR GROWTH

DISCUSSION OF SPECIFIC AREAS OVERALL

WORK PERFORMANCE WORK QUALITY WORK RESPONSIBILITY WORK ETHIC

RELATIONSHIPS WITH CLIENTS WITH SUPERVISORS WITH CO-WORKERS

PERSONAL ATTITUDE FLEXIBILITY COOPERATIVENESS

The completed report is then sent to the individuals who contributed their feedback, so that they may check that the report accurately reflects their comments.

b) Staff pre-review letter:

Each staff member under review is asked to write a 1-2 page letter to the review committee which provides an overview of his or her experience of working with the Center during the time period in question. The overview is followed by a discussion of what the individual thinks his or her most important achievements or contributions were, and what he or she is most proud of. It also addresses areas the person feels he or she could improve, and in which more attention is needed, in addition to any goals he or she might have for the next period of time. The staff members are asked to identify ways in which the supervising committee or other members of the staff could help facilitate the achievement of these goals or improvements. For example, the staff member may suggest adjusting communication styles, supplementary training, or the purchase specific materials. The next section of the letter should discuss the staff member's views of the progress of the organization as a whole, and include any ideas or observations, the performance of the organization and the achievement of its mission. He or she is then asked to comment on ways the supervising or other staff members could improve or adjust their activities and strategies to create a more positive or effective working environment.

The letters from staff persons have followed this format:

SUMMARY AND GENERAL REFLECTIONS

PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENT

STRENGTHS

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

WAYS THE CENTER / SUPERVISORS CAN IMPROVE

OTHER FEEDBACK

c) Staff review meeting:

The review committee meets with the staff member in the evening after work. Members will have read the staff member's letter in advance of the meeting. After beginning with a prayer, the committee opens the review with a discussion of the process used to prepare the evaluation. The committee may wish to draw out the most positive comments received from the individuals with whom the person worked, to create an overall atmosphere of affirmation and appreciation. In particular, the committee should explain the general and specific ways in which it values the individual's contributions, and highlight with examples the way that contribution and the individual's personal qualities have been especially important. One committee member then reads out loud a copy of the written report that has been prepared. The discussion concludes with any additional comments or feedback from the committee or from the individual, and consultation about ways the individual and his or her supervisors can work together to facilitate the achievement of goals and develop areas for growth. The individual is provided with a copy of the evaluation, which is also kept in a confidential file at the Center. The committee then takes the individual (and any other staff members who have been evaluated at the same time) out to dinner.

The committee should periodically review the results of the evaluation to ensure that any requests by the individual, or areas for improvement designated by the individual or the committee, and any supporting actions necessary, have been taken well in advance of the next evaluation.

6) Consultation

At a very basic level, the Center relies upon constant consultation and feedback amongst Board Members and staff members to "evaluate" ideas and approaches presented to it on a daily basis. Reliance on a thorough process of consultation with people from a diverse

group of backgrounds, skills and interests helps identify problematic issues and approaches in advance of their implementation, and bring a richness of detail and affirmative process to those ideas and approaches which are in fact implemented. The process of consultation is in many respects one of daily “evaluation.”

STATISTICAL PROFILE OF THE TAHIRIH JUSTICE CENTER LEGAL PROGRAM

- The Center has assisted a total of 147 people seeking legal assistance since its inception.
- The Center has taken on a total of 33 legal cases since its inception, with 6 cases having been resolved, all with favorable outcomes. This includes 18 ****litigated** and 15 ****non-litigated** cases.

*****Litigated** signifies that the TJC has or will be the attorney of record for the case, or has signed an official retainer agreement with the client.*

*****Non-Litigated** signifies that an attorney/client relationship has been established between the TJC and the client, the TJC has taken a specific, outcome-oriented action on the client’s behalf, the client’s case does not require litigation, the TJC has done thorough legal intakes/consultations/ given thorough legal advice to the client, and/or the TJC has sought out and provided a specific legal referral.*

- Currently, the Center has 23 active cases.
- The Center has a total of 79 legal clients, 44 of which are litigated, 24 of which are not litigated.

VIII. TAHIRIH JUSTICE CENTER

IX. Open Cases and Inquiries by Year

This table reflects the number of cases and inquiries which were open in each calendar year. Cases which were open in multiple calendar years are part of the tally for each year for which they were open.

X.

	XI. Total	Case	Other Legal
XII.	Inquiries	Taken	Assistance Offered
1997	6	5	1
1998	67	20	47
1999 (first four months)	70	26	44

* Please note that the Center has changed its reporting to document achievements by calendar year, rather than from mid-year to the following mid-year, the format previously used.

XIII.

XIV. During the 1998 calendar year, the Center had 67 open inquiries into its legal program, and had 20 clients with open cases. To the remainder, legal advice was offered. During the first four months of the 1999 calendar year, the Center had 70 open inquiries in which it offered legal advice and had 26 clients who had open cases. At this rate, the Center will receive 210 inquiries during the 1999 calendar year, a significant increase from the previous year. The number of clients with open cases during the 1999 calendar year has also grown, up 30% in the first four months of the year alone. The final figures for clients with cases open will depend on the Center's ability to expand its legal services program and meet the demand for representation.

XV. The figures named above do not include advice and assistance offered to individuals or organizations through the Center's other service programs. The Center has provided 8 clients with medical services, and 11 clients with social services.

Approximately 20% of inquiries the Center receives both warrant litigation and fall within the Center's scope of legal expertise. These cases involve highly complex and novel legal issues which typically take several years to resolve. The Center deliberately focuses on taking cases which are too complex and labor intensive for other legal aid providers to address.

The number of individuals helped by the Center's Legal Program is significantly greater than the number of clients or cases taken, as frequently a single inquiry for a case will involve more than one individual, and will have significant consequences for immediate family members.

A. Regional Trends

The Center's clientele are primarily residents of Africa. Since its inception, 44% of legal inquiries and 57% of cases taken came from Africa. No other region featured significantly.

B. Country Trends

C. To date, few countries have produced a disproportionate number of inquiries or cases. Leading figures include:

4% of legal inquiries and 17% of cases taken have come from Algeria.

11% of inquiries and 25% of cases have come from Nigeria

7% of inquiries and 8% of cases have come from Ethiopia.

D. Topical Trends

11% of the Center's inquiries and 8% of cases taken involve **violence against women**

16% of inquiries and 39% of cases taken involve **female genital mutilation**; these cases are concentrated in Africa, especially in Nigeria

Cases and inquiries involving the **persecution of women** are concentrated in central Africa, with the Center's cases coming from Algeria as well. About one fifth of the Center's inquiries (21%) have involved the persecution of women, as have 16% of the cases taken. Countries from which inquiries have been received include Congo, Sudan, Algeria, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Liberia, Somalia, Uganda, Angola and Nigeria.

Inquiries involving **torture and rape** comprise 7% of contacts with the Center, but 32% of cases taken. Such inquiries have come from countries including Afghanistan, Algeria, Somalia, Nigeria, Cameroon, Congo and Ethiopia.

Legal Remedies

The Center most commonly seeks protection for women under **asylum law** (38% of inquiries, and 58% of cases taken). Other laws through which protection is frequently sought include the **Violence Against Women Act** (9% of inquiries), **Withholding of Removal** (4% of inquiries, 8% of cases) and **Suspension of Deportation** (9% of inquiries, 8% of cases). Asylum requests are tendered with disproportionate frequency by residents of Africa, with small groups from North Africa / Middle East, South / Central America and Eastern Europe.

1. _____

2. Gender Distribution

Among the Center's clients are 7 men and boys who have sought legal assistance either with or on behalf of women. The Center has received inquiries from an additional 17 men.

E. Inquiries Which Do Not Become Cases

Of those inquiries which are not taken as cases, 28% fail to become cases because they fall outside the scope of the Center's mission. An additional 12% present weak cases, 14% lose contact with the Center (especially women who have experienced domestic violence) and 20% already have an attorney but are seeking the Center's assistance in legal consultation.

In many instances in which the Center does not take an inquiry as part of its case load, especially when the case falls outside the scope of the Center's mission, the Center none-the-less assists the individual in other ways. For example, the Center might locate appropriate, often pro bono representation for the individual, or provide extensive documentation of country conditions. In a notable example, the Center provided a Kenyan woman with information about FGM in Kenya with only a day's notice, as she was scheduled to be deported the following morning. This information proved to be very helpful, and the woman was given more time to present her case as a result.