

## **Behind Walls.**

From kick boxers and golfers in **Iran** to government ministers in **Sudan**, from the director of television news in **Oman** to karate champions in **Jordan**, from bus drivers, footballers and war heroes in **Algeria**, to shopkeepers in the remote mountains of **Yemen**, from a veiled student studying to be an actor in Indonesia to political scientists and basket sellers in **Egypt** – women in Islamic countries reveal lives previously unseen on our screens in the West.

**Behind Walls** is a major new internationally-significant series that provides a stunning and vibrant insight into the lives of women across the globe in Islamic countries. The series, which took 3 years to make, will be premiered here at the UK's largest international documentary festival – **OXDOX** starting March 10<sup>th</sup> 2007.

Tired of the stereotypes, prejudice and the monolithic image of victim, that Islamic women have in the western media, women Turkish filmmakers, **Ayse Bohurler**, **Aslihan Eker** and Sureyya Onal have produced the 14 programmes of the '**Behind Walls**' project.

Insiders, themselves, to the experience of being Muslim women, they show the dynamic struggle for gender equality of women in Islamic countries that stands in stark contrast to a representation of Islamic women as a passive, oppressed and silent mass.

**Ayse Bohurler** explains, "*We spoke to many western journalists after 9/11... Their questions were always the same, so were their prejudices. What they knew about women was limited to the headscarf, the veil and polygamy....we wanted to bring the viewers face to face with a view of women through a different lens.*"

In Yemen, once ruled by the Queen of Sheeba, they found that a profound struggle was taking place for gender equality in a country where it is impossible to see a woman without a chador or veil on the streets. In Syria 50% of the engineers are women. Pakistan has more women MP's than Westminster. In all 14 countries, visited, there were more women than male students in the universities.

In Oman, in stark contrast to the urban women of Muscat, fully masked desert women still hold on to traditions a thousand years old, but drive huge jeeps across the sands to tents with satellite dishes.

**Aslihan Eker.** "*Our research showed that women face oppression and inequality in Islamic countries not because of Islam but because of cultural and national traditions and a domestic patriarchy that uses Islam to justify their repressive actions and to maintain power and control. So we found huge variation and difference in the position and rights of women in each country.*"

In West Sumatra with a matriarchal tradition, women inherit all the property and men cannot own any property through inheritance. It is obligatory to wear headscarf in Iran in public places whereas in Turkey it is forbidden for women to wear headscarf in schools, parliament universities or public office.

Ayse Bohurler and Aslihan Eker who speaks fluent English will be attending the two weeks of screenings of Behind Walls. For further details please contact:

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