

**Testimony of Ms. Hayat Imam before the Massachusetts Joint Judiciary Committee
Hearing on the *Human Rights for All Bill (HB706)*, June 7, 2005**

Good Afternoon. My name is Hayat Imam. I work as Director of Special Projects at the Boston Women's Fund. For the past twenty years, the Boston Women's Fund has provided grants and technical support to projects by low-income women's groups that are working for social change. My work history also includes eight years of international experience as a consultant on implementing one of the most important human rights instruments, the Convention to End all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The countries in which I have worked are the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Lao People's Republic.

At the beginning of the 21st century, there is no effort as worthwhile as ensuring the dignity and prosperity of the citizens of this earth. I am absolutely delighted and proud of Massachusetts for its initiative and leadership in considering this crucial Bill, HB706, which has at its heart the well-being and protection of the most marginalized and vulnerable members of society. The passage of this Bill will have two huge impacts. The first is that the laws of Massachusetts will be enriched by the body of international human rights documents that have taken decades to craft and the thoughtful participation of thousands of global citizens. The second is that the decisions that we make in Massachusetts will be an example to other States in the USA, just as we have been inspired by Pennsylvania and the cities of San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago. But more than that, I think our actions will be a beacon and blueprint to all other nations hoping to meet international human rights standards of justice and equity for its people.

I have the highest hopes that the members of this august body will move the Bill out of committee with a favorable recommendation. I add my personal appeal to you for a positive outcome of this Bill and look forward to the creation of a special commission to investigate and integrate international human rights standards into Massachusetts laws and policies.

My next few remarks will focus on how such a commission can have maximum impact. The commission will be faced with the complex task of assessing the human rights needs of residents of the Commonwealth and advancing a set of pro-active standards that conform to international human rights standards in sectors such as housing, healthcare, education and employment. A key lesson learned in my work of implementing CEDAW in Asia is that the work of similar bodies, such as the commission, is immeasurably strengthened through collaboration and participation of community based representatives. We have an important opportunity here in Massachusetts to plan ahead to ensure inclusion, diversity and civil society participation in the work of the commission. Transparency and a shared process will be the firmest foundation for the extension of human rights in Massachusetts

I hope these comments are helpful. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have today or later on in your process. I thank you for the privilege of joining you here today.

Hayat Imam
59 Edwin St.
Dorchester, MA 02124
w. 617-725-0035 X 3008
h. 617-822-9474
<imamhayat@hotmail.com>