

= Tahirih Justice Center =

The Tahirih Justice Center , known simply as Tahirih , is a United States @-@ based non @-@ governmental organization (NGO) that provides pro bono direct legal services and social and medical service referrals to immigrant women and girls who are fleeing from gender @-@ based violence and persecution . Tahirih helps women who are attempting to escape from such abuse as female genital cutting , domestic violence , human trafficking , torture and rape . The organization also conducts public policy initiatives designed to achieve legislative change for women fleeing from human rights abuses , to highlight problems faced by immigrant women in the United States , and to end the possible exploitation of mail @-@ order brides by international marriage brokers . In 2007 , the Tahirih Justice Center won The Washington Post Award for Excellence in Nonprofit Management . In 2012 , Tahirih 's executive director won the Diane Von Furstenberg Choice Award .

Layli Miller @-@ Muro founded the Tahirih Justice Center in 1997 following a well @-@ publicized asylum case in which she was involved as a student attorney . Miller @-@ Muro later co @-@ wrote a book with the client she had aided and used her portion of the proceeds for the initial funding of Tahirih . As of 2012 , the organization had assisted more than 13 @,@ 000 women and children fleeing from a wide variety of abuses . The organization played a significant role in the passage of the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act (IMBRA) , which was signed by President Bush in early 2006 and incorporated into the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) . IMBRA gives foreign women important information about prospective American husbands (for a summary , see also Mail @-@ order bride , Legal issues) .

The organization is named after Táhirih , an influential female poet and theologian in 19th @-@ century Persia who campaigned for women 's rights . Tahirih is a Bahá 'í @-@ inspired organization , although its clients and employees vary widely in ethnicity , religious identification , and nationality .

= = History = =

The Tahirih Justice Center opened in September 1997 and has become one of the most prominent organizations in the United States for women seeking justice from human rights abuses . Tahirih continually expanded its number of annual clients and hired more employees as the demand for its services grew in the late 1990s and into the next decade .

= = = Beginning = = =

Fauziya Kassindja was a Togolese teenager who fled her native land in 1994 to escape from a forced polygamous marriage and a tribal practice of female genital cutting . She went through Ghana and Germany before arriving at Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey , where she was detained and incarcerated by INS officials . She spent the next year and a half in various prisons throughout the Eastern United States while her legal team attempted to obtain asylum for her . In a case that made history in immigration law , she was finally granted asylum in June 1996 by the Board of Immigration Appeals . Gender @-@ based violence had been established as grounds for seeking asylum in the U.S.

Miller @-@ Muro had been a student attorney in Fauziya 's case and the two became strong friends . The successful outcome led her to co @-@ author with Ms. Kassindja the book Do they hear you when you cry ? (1998) , about the latter 's case and life . After Miller @-@ Muro discovered that few organizations offered legal assistance to women seeking asylum or refugee status in the Washington , D.C. area , she founded the Tahirih Justice Center in 1997 to build on the accomplishments of Matter of Kasinga and to provide extensive legal coverage of immigrant women and girls fleeing to the U.S. from gender @-@ based violence .

= = = Growth = = =

Tahirih 's creation and growth was fueled by the widespread abuses suffered by women and girls around the world and the limited resources available to them when seeking protection in the United States . According to the United Nations , two million women undergo female genital cutting in Africa every year . A recent CIA report estimated that between 45 @, @ 000 and 50 @, @ 000 women and children are brought to the U.S. every year under false pretenses and are forced to work as prostitutes , abused laborers or servants . UNICEF estimates that more than 200 @, @ 000 children are enslaved by cross @-@ border smuggling in West and Central Africa . Although Tahirih can only provide immediate assistance to immigrant women and girls that are already within U.S. borders , its cases are representative of the types of violence from which women and girls are fleeing . The organization grew consistently over the years : in 2001 , it helped a total of 618 people . In 2011 , Tahirih helped 1 @, @ 051 people .

The continual success of competent legal representation prompted Tahirih 's enlargement . The last publicly reported rate of approval for asylum applications in the U.S. before 2001 was 23 @. @ 3 % . Applications written by the Tahirih Justice Center had a 99 % success rate , a figure it continues to maintain . The organization hired its first paid staff in August 1998 and had expanded to 36 employees by 2010 . The organizational structure has grown and Tahirih has expanded nationally , adding an office in Houston , TX in 2009 and one in Baltimore , MD in 2010 , all while assisting more than 13 @, @ 000 people since opening its doors . Tahirih clients come from five continents ? North America , South America , Europe , Africa , and Asia , and from nations such as Mexico , Argentina , Algeria , Mongolia , Turkey , South Africa , Iran , and Syria .

= = Goals and organization = =

The Tahirih Justice Center is " founded on the belief that the achievement of full equality between women and men is necessary for society to progress . "

As part of this mission , the organization litigates in gender @-@ based asylum , gender @-@ based persecution , and domestic violence cases . The organization has urged what it believes are repressive , negligent or dismissive governments throughout the world to take responsibility for acts of gender @-@ based violence and persecution by providing victims with shelters and ensuring prompt , responsive police forces , all while doing more to eliminate overt and harmful policies designed to suppress and incite fear among women .

The Tahirih Justice Center is governed by a 16 @-@ member Board of Directors that oversees the organization 's functions . Each board member serves a two @-@ year term and has the option to remain for an indefinite number of terms if repeatedly elected . Board members are individuals usually concerned or involved with issues pertinent to Tahirih . A 17 @-@ member Board of Advisors , composed of lawyers , judges , and human rights activists , helps the organization by making recommendations .

= = Strategy and programs = =

To fulfill its objectives , the Tahirih Justice Center is involved in legal services , fundraising , public policy advocacy , and reaches out to other international groups and organizations .

= = = Legal services = = =

Tahirih conducts a wide array of legal services to help its clients . The Pro Bono Network , a network of pro bono attorneys and referral resources for clients , is the largest and most important . In 2010 , Tahirih received US \$ 6 @, @ 813 @, @ 094 in donated professional services , including from pro bono lawyers representing Tahirih clients . In 2010 , 77 % of Tahirih 's income came from donated professional services with slightly more than 23 % from grants , corporations , and individuals . The program offers individual and group training for pro bono attorneys , and connects clients with other community resources such as peer support groups , medical and mental health

services , housing , and public benefits . The Pro Bono Network allows staff to engage in educational initiatives to immigrant community groups , social service programs , and legal service providers . These are designed to highlight Tahirih 's services and the special rights and needs of immigrant women and girls fleeing violence .

The organization aids clients holistically , trying to connect women with community resources that may improve the quality of their lives in addition to dealing with their legal problems . Tahirih 's referral programs direct women to literacy programs , English language instruction , day care , and job skills training . Tahirih maintains a core of medical volunteers who evaluate the conditions of clients to support their legal claims and assists clients in accessing psychological counseling in the United States .

= = = Fundraising = = =

The Tahirih Justice Center holds the Annual Fundraising Benefit to highlight its accomplishments over the year and promote its issues by having former clients share their stories . The Benefit features speakers closely associated with Tahirih issues and awards to recognize important and groundbreaking work in helping women fleeing from gender @-@ based violence . For the 2005 Annual Benefit , Queen Noor of Jordan was the keynote speaker . The Center founded the Washington Lawyers ' Network (WLN) to mobilize and sustain a philanthropic network of Washington @-@ area attorneys that promote awareness and provide funding for Tahirih . In 2003 , Tahirih raised over \$ 12 @,@ 000 through WLN fundraising events and membership drives . However , the vast majority of the organization 's revenue comes from non @-@ fundraising sources .

= = = Public policy advocacy = = =

The Tahirih Justice Center conducts national and regional advocacy campaigns to educate the public and law enforcement institutions about the threats faced by immigrant women and girls who do not have easy access to legal services . Tahirih employees have given presentations in universities and public forums throughout the United States on issues ranging from the equality of men and women in religious traditions to gender @-@ based violence and persecution . Tahirih has set focused primarily on four public policy areas over the past decade : (1) Forced Marriage Initiative ; (2) Campaign to Prevent Abuse and Exploitation through the International Marriage Broker Industry ; (3) Protecting and Promoting the Rights of Immigrant Survivors of Crime ; and (4) Protecting and Promoting Access to Asylum for Women and Girls Fleeing Gender @-@ Based Persecution .

Tahirih has highlighted the possible dangers of recent , post @-@ 9 / 11 Congressional initiatives to enforce federal civil immigration law that may make immigrant women reluctant to report crime to authorities for fear of deportation . Specifically , Tahirih is concerned that the deputization of state and local police as immigration agents by the Clear Law Enforcement for Criminal Alien Removal (CLEAR) and Homeland Security Enhancement Acts would increase the barriers some women face to reach safety . After the CLEAR Act was reintroduced in June 2005 , Tahirih spearheaded a sign @-@ on letter to Congress from nearly 100 organizations that advocate for immigrant survivors of domestic violence , sexual assault , human trafficking , and other crimes . Tahirih works with other non @-@ governmental organizations like Amnesty International to promote its issues and advocate on legislative agenda .

One of Tahirih 's largest and most successful public policy initiatives has been the Campaign to End the Exploitation and Abuse of Women by International Marriage Brokers . A 2003 Tahirih survey of 175 legal service providers revealed that more than 50 % were serving or had served women who met their spouses through a broker . Tahirih joined other like @-@ minded organizations in this campaign and led a four @-@ year effort that culminated in the passage of the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act of 2005 (IMBRA) when it was attached to the bill that reauthorized VAWA . IMBRA provides foreign women with important information about their prospective

American husbands , such as whether the men have violent criminal histories . The law mandates that foreign women know the rights and resources available to domestic violence victims in the United States . Through this law , foreign women who marry American men will be given critical tools to protect themselves and their children from domestic violence .

= = Issues = =

The Tahirih Justice Center deals with a number of human rights issues related to women and girls . The organization focuses on cases that fall within the scope of its mission and goals . In particular , accepted requests must involve the protection of women from persecution , although men may be eligible for assistance to protect their female family members from abuse . Women who wish to receive Tahirih 's services free of charge must demonstrate that they are not able to afford to pay for such services . When requests for assistance fall outside Tahirih 's scope , staff members attempt to locate other legal service providers who can offer the prospective client assistance .

= = = Domestic violence and genital mutilation = = =

Women who come to the United States with immigrant husbands or who marry American citizens once they are in the country are vulnerable to domestic violence because of their unfamiliarity with legal rights in the United States . Many Tahirih clients are women who have suffered from domestic violence and whose cases can be covered under VAWA . VAWA allows immigrants who can prove they have been victims of domestic abuse and would otherwise be able to gain legal status the ability to self @-@ petition for a green card . Tahirih attempts to help these women by making them lawful permanent residents independent of their husbands . Tahirih has initiated the Battered Immigrant Women Advocacy Project to advocate before the INS and immigration courts on behalf of battered immigrant women seeking lawful permanent residence .

The Tahirih Justice Center considers female genital cutting , which " comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or other non @-@ therapeutic reasons , " a violation of human rights . The Tahirih Justice Center 's pioneering work in gender @-@ based asylum law attempts to find protection for women fleeing from the practice to the United States . Tahirih staff have received media requests to comment on matters surrounding the issue , and the organization frequently publicizes the issue in annual reports , brochures , and other informational material .

= = = " Mail @-@ order " brides = = =

In recent years , the organization has worked to protect women from abroad who are unfamiliar with the English language and the U.S. legal system from abusive marital relationships that have been arranged by international marriage brokers . The international marriage broker industry has grown in response to a demand by American men , some of whom turn out to be sexual predators , for traditional wives from countries such as the Philippines , Russia , and Ukraine . Tahirih 's Campaign to Prevent Abuse and Exploitation through the International Marriage Broker Industry advocates for the accountability of marriage agencies , seeks legislative change , and engages in litigation and public outreach to protect women from abuse . The Tahirih Justice Center was instrumental in Washington , D.C. law firm Arnold & Porter 's successful fraud lawsuit against international marriage broker Encounters International on behalf of Nataliya Fox . The Tahirih Justice Center helped draft the International Marriage and Broker Regulation Act (IMBRA) and continues to work with other human rights organizations to ensure its implementation .

= = = Trafficking of women = = =

The Tahirih Justice Center works within the legal confines established by Congress to ensure the safety of women and girls who are trafficked , defined as " the recruitment , harboring ,

transportation , provision , or obtaining of a person for labor or services , through the use of force , fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude , peonage , debt bondage , or slavery " to the U.S. The organization has pushed for legislation and regulations to protect and assist trafficking victims , such as the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) and the Women Immigrants Safe Harbor Act (WISH) . Partly through Tahirih 's efforts , in the 2005 fiscal year , the United States Department of Homeland Security issued 112 T @-@ visas to foreign survivors of human trafficking identified in the United States .

= = Controversy = =

Criticism of the Tahirih Justice Center and other like @-@ minded organizations often involves the manner in which they portray information . In particular , Tahirih 's work against international marriage brokers , especially its leading role in supporting IMBRA , has drawn castigation from some who believe American males are being characterized in an unfairly negative light . International marriage broker agencies cite the alleged low levels of divorce among their clients , compared with the American national average , as proof of success . Tahirih counters that many of the men who use these brokers are repeat abusers looking for their next victim . Tahirih claims that international marriage brokers market and advertise mostly to men who are potentially dangerous . Miller @-@ Muro , Tahirih 's Executive Director , stated that " The agencies have a financial incentive to ensure the satisfaction of their paying clients ? the men ? but there is no comparable incentive to safeguard the woman . "

Scholars are worried about the mental images and conceptions that the general public forms about the origins of practices that Tahirih condemns . When describing the Matter of Kasinga and the associated media attention , historian Charles Piot was concerned about the perpetration of possibly negative and racist stereotypes about Africa . In an analysis of several New York Times articles about the case , Piot called the " evocation of images of the immutable nature of patriarchal tradition " in Africa " extraordinary . " Tahirih argues that several cultural practices throughout the world have adverse health effects that often go unnoticed because of poor education among the local community . Tahirih posits that many of the subjects who undergo practices such as female genital cutting are uninformed about the potential pain and other consequences that result from the procedure . Since Tahirih views these issues as ones relating to human rights , it believes in the protection of individuals who may experience these acts .