

CANADIAN MUSLIM

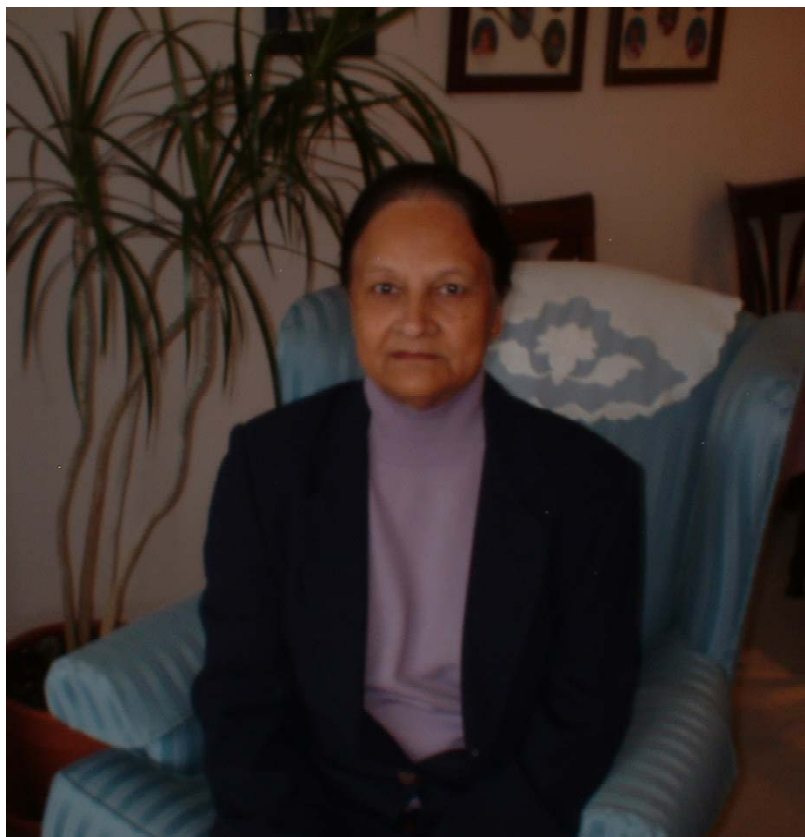
WOMEN WHO INSPIRE

ZIA AFSAR is a tireless advocate of women's rights.

Her activism began at an early age. As a young woman in the 1960s in Pakistan, she raised a constitutional challenge for women to be granted admission into engineering institutions. Her advocacy received national media attention, and as a result, in the years to follow, young women in Pakistan have been able to study engineering.

Zia strongly believes in and encourages women to seek equality through education and financial independence. She herself has a master's degree in nuclear physics, and her two daughters, inspired by their mother, are trained in engineering and law.

Zia promotes understanding and respect for diversity both within Muslim communities and the broader Canadian society. While living in Saskatchewan, she helped build bridges between Muslim and non-Muslim women's groups by spear-heading the creation of an umbrella organization, Women United. It provided a forum for coordinating action on women's issues at provincial, national and international levels. Zia also firmly believes that diversity is the basic characteristic of humanity as recognized in the Quran. This has led her to promote, in her personal and professional life, the concept of unity within diversity, one which is central to Canada's multicultural ethos.



She volunteers with a variety of Muslim and larger civil society organizations, including women's or immigrant centres and an old people's home. As such, she continues to do what she's accomplished all her life: to break down stereotypes of Muslim women that her colleagues may have held and to show by example through her personal achievements that Muslim women can achieve whatever they set out to do.

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