

# CANADIAN MUSLIM WOMEN WHO INSPIRE

*Monia Mazigh*



MONIA MAZIGH was born and raised in Tunisia, she immigrated to Canada in 1991. Fluent in English, French and Arabic, she led a relatively quiet life as a stay-at-home mother with hopes of one day becoming a university professor. However, in 2002 she was thrust into the national and international spotlight when her husband, Maher Arar, was deported to Syria by the US Government on suspicion of terrorism. A Canadian citizen, he was tortured and held in a Syrian prison for over a year without being charged.

Monia, who has a PhD in finance (McGill), joined forces with a number of human rights groups and individuals, and untiringly campaigned for her husband's release and return to Canada. Looking back she says, "I was thrown into the situation and there was a lot of confusion. But I did not try to hide from it...I had to move forward and speak out about the injustice." During this time she appeared frequently in the media, at demonstrations/protest rallies and garnered much public support. Having successfully stood up to various international governments, her husband was released in 2003. In 2006 he was exonerated of all charges and in 2007 the Canadian government issued a formal apology.

Monia's ordeal ignited in her a passion and

empathy for issues and challenges faced by immigrants in Canada, specifically women. She says "After my husband came back, I didn't want to lose the energy and commitment". Approached by the Liberals and the NDP to be one of their star candidate, Monia ran in the 2004 federal elections on an NDP ticket. Although she did not win, she nonetheless captured a record number of votes for the party. Monia worked as a policy researcher at the NDP headquarters in Ottawa and in 2006, fulfilled her dream when she became a professor at the School of Business at Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops. Speaking of Muslim women, she says "Even if things appear impossible, even if it doesn't seem to fit us as Muslim women, we can do it and we should do it"

Her determination to speak out against injustice, defiance of gender and ethnic stereotypes and tenacity in the face of adversity, makes Monia a role model not only for Muslim women, but an inspiration for all.



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