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المجلس الكندي للنساء المسلمات

CANADIAN COUNCIL OF MUSLIM WOMEN
LE CONSEIL CANADIEN DES FEMMES MUSULMANES

IN THE NAME OF GOD

The Canadian Council of Muslim Women is a national non-profit organization established to assist Muslim women in participating effectively in Canadian Society and to promote mutual understanding between Canadian Muslim women and women of other faiths.



Changing The Image Of Muslim Women In Canada

Dear Sisters in Islam:

Assalamu alaikum

Talat Muinuddin is away on her trip so I am sending you:

1. a "mini newsletter" about Chapters,
2. a small supply of stationery for your use, 3. President's message.

Razia Jaffer is producing the Council's Report of our 5th Anniversary Conference held in Toronto, April 8 - 10, 1988. You will be receiving a copy shortly.

In July the CMCC elected me to be Vice President. My first task was to ask the Chapters across Canada to do some fund raising for the CMCC's program on Vision T.V.

Edmonton Chapter declined because this is the 50th Anniversary of the Al Rashid Mosque - the first mosque in North America and the Chapter is raising funds to restore and preserve the old mosque. THE CHOICE IS YOURS but Edmonton Chapter wishes the other Chapters across Canada to have one fund raising event to help save our very first mosque. Please help and please help as soon as possible.

Assalamu alaikum.

Dr. Lila Fahlman

President

NEWS FROM THE CHAPTERS

1. Vancouver

Mobina Jaffer leads a hardworking Chapter. Inshallah, I will be able to accept their invitation this fall. Mobina attended a conference in Saskatchewan. She gave our brochures to two women interested in CCMW and who live in Winnipeg.

2. Edmonton

Razia Jaffer is Edmonton's new President. We congratulate her and her Chapter's efforts this fall for their plans to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Al Rashid mosque in Edmonton which was the first mosque in North America.

3. Swift Current

Fakhr Afsar formed a new Chapter in December 1987. The sisters meet monthly to discuss and learn Islam. Fun raising for- the mosque and community participation such as Folkarama, a multicultural event are recent activities of the Chapter. They are actively working to increase their membership.

4. Regina

Naushaba Habib reports a slow time at present but the Chapter lends support and encouragement to Swift Current Chapter.

5. Sudbary

Sabiha Janjua and her Chapter are working on a Fall Conference for which they received funding from the Secretary of State. I will be speaking there (September 17, 18).

6. Toronto

No report. We Congratulate Yasmin Ratansi who has won the Libral candidacy to run against Conservative Dave Collinette (formerly Minister of Multiculturalism)

7. Niagara and St. Catherines

Solmaz Sahin and her Niagara Chapter of CCMW put on a fund raising dinner in support of CMCC's project Vision T.V. and raised \$5 000.00. CMCC needs \$95 000.00 a year to participate in this interfaith T.V. network for half an hour each week. Congratulations Solmaz!

8. Halifax

Cidgem Ketene reports her Chapter is doing well, put on the Eid supper, working with youth program, and involving University students. Her membership is small but eager, and put out a newsletter to members.

9. Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Shahida Chishti has sent a contribution to our newsletter Muslim Woman. They are involved in working with and teaching the youth. She is in need of suitable books for this purpose. Any help will be most appreciated. Keep up the good work Shahida.

10. St. John's NFLD.

I attended a conference in July in St. Johns and was hosted by Mona El Tahan and her Chapter at Mona's home. We spent a pleasant evening reading and discussing Koranic verses and the Council. The Chapter is exciting and has much potential. Special thanks to Mona and Ann Snellen.

If I have not mentioned your Chapter, it is because you have not given me anything to report. I trust all Chapters will supply Talat, our editor, with information, big or small.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT ON CONFERENCE:

WOMEN IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

In June 1988 I attended, along with 49 other women from eight religious traditions, the first worldwide conference for women of religion.

The discussions converged on important areas.

1. Interpretation

The women felt that there was a need for their own interpretation of religion. Men have always been the translators of various religions and this fact, it was felt, resulted in a negative view towards women. This view was ingrained over the hundreds of generations, a view which often aroused the ire of men throughout the centuries. Interpretation of scripture becomes the foundation of Judaism, effects every aspect daily life and becomes the way to solve a dilemma. Women stand in the outer circle at Sinai, are invisible in the census and only a few women are referred to in the Talmud. Interpretation becoming more open, delving through the layers of meaning and through the hidden meaning. Original language of scriptures must be maintained. Women see a need and a benefit in spirituality if interpretation is made through female eyes. Covenant responsibility is a partnership between the individual and God. Christian views were that Paul was a product of his time or time-bound when he made women obedient to husbands, akin to a slave/master relationship. Christian women are searching the scriptures to find for themselves the role of women in the time of Paul. Women appear to be hidden behind the texts. Jesus himself in his parables provided an example for men and an example for women.

Authoritative teaching was directed towards teaching and leadership by and of men and women. By viewing the scriptures in a different perspective, the "lost" women of the scriptures are being "found".

Many learned to be an interpreter of scripture providing a new model and new roles. Martha visibly provided for the comforts of Jesus. Both women were perceived as a threat to the church and to the women serving within the church as subordinates. Christian women calling for negative view of women to be removed from scriptures. Women are still viewed as objects of history. As agents of transformation, they are being criticized. Patriarchy has, they believe, overlooked the "motherhood" of God. In the prodigal son story - where is the mother? Would the story be changed if she were made visible? The women believe that women have always interpreted the apostles etc. and thus need to regain or resurrect their place.

2. Identity

Jewish women indicated that the rituals in the synagogue split the community into two halves, rather than one whole. Jewish women sensed a definite boundary between themselves and others at the conference, and that dialogue represented a risk when that boundary was reached; insecurity was evident and felt as to the "sure footing" as women crossed these boundaries to reach each other in dialogue.

Women were and are still often referred to as the daughter of so and so, or the wife of so and so, even in Christianity.

Native women suffered a total loss of identity when the white race oppressed the natives, their religion and society in general. It was a form of "holocaust" for the natives to remember and mourn. They were to emulate the white supremacists to institutionalize and to upset the balance between man and the environment. Today's hope for the future of natives in North America is through their women who represent their first teachers and their help-mates. They emphasized the need to find their roots, to hang on to those roots which includes their religion, if they are to have their own identity.

3 Equality in Religion

Jewish women indicated the need to improve equality for women was through interpretation. The laws concerning women need to be re-examined. They Tarah needs to be taught to female as well as male children. Today's daughters are studying the Talmud. According to Rabbivic Law no hand of a woman is given in marriage without her permission. Past Talmud Law says a woman can initiate a divorce but cannot be divorced against her will. Much change has occurred over the past twenty years.

Last June I was invited to attend an interfaith Conference in Toronto sponsored by the World Council of Churches (Geneva). Forty women representing 8 religions attended.

The following is my report on this Conference "Ritual and Worship: Our Experience".

President's Presentation to Interfaith Conference June 1988

Assalamu alaikum

As President of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, I am indeed honoured to have the opportunity to attend this Conference, to share concerns, to learn, to communicate and to network with the various sisters at this conference and to make this presentation.

Since 1975, International Women's Year, communications and networking has increased significantly. Muslim women, the pioneers, not only of Islam in Canada, but as tillers of the soil, have made an immense contribution to the fabric of Canada. I recall my mother's stories of the long trek into Canada from the Nebraska, where my father a Lebanese Sheikh had taken her hand in marriage. At 16 years of age, a Methodist, arriving on a farm in Saskatchewan and hastily helping to build a sod house before the Canadian winter set in. The trials and tribulations, the need for and dependence upon one's neighbours

gave a special meaning to the words communication and networking as a means of survival.

Muslim women in Alberta faced similar situations in places like Lac La Biche, Yellowknife, Chip Lake and Edmonton where in 1938 the first Mosque in North America was built. Networking with the major provided a handful of women the courage and the means to raise funds for the Mosque.

Muslim women in Canada have always been very active as auxiliaries or societies in Mosques.

In 1980 I was appointed to the Council of Muslim Communities in Canada as advisor to women. I saw the need to strengthen the bonds between the communities of women. I travelled from coast to coast, meeting and talking with women and in 1982 we came together at our first conference in Winnipeg. Since then we have had numerous workshops and conferences and seminars in and with the growing number of Chapters across Canada from St. Johns, Nfld. to Vancouver, B.C. Each Chapter has its goals according to our constitution and networking with women locally, nationally and world-wide is a major emphasis. But the key to the future which is our prime objective, is education. The education of our women about Islam, about their rights and their obligations in Islam and the future of their children as a result of their own self-development in Canadian society.

The Council reaches out and includes all Muslim women as stated in our Constitution, as members. Each Chapter not only reaches into the Muslim community, but extends into the major community.

Multiculturalism in Canada has assisted people from various ethnic and religious communities to come together. Many of our Chapter Presidents are directly involved in Provincial and National Multicultural Councils. I myself have been an executive member of the Alberta Cultural Heritage Council for several years. The past two years I had the privilege of serving as Chairperson of the Council. When I first was appointed to the Council by the Minister (who is now the Trade Commissioner in London) there were only 5 women on the Council. I expressed my disappointment to the various community representatives and asked them to try to change the situation in their communities and encourage women to be elected to the Council. Today half of the 60 member council is women.

Many of our members are involved in Immigrant and Visible Minority groups across Canada and we network at regional and national meetings with this group of women.

Our women are active in other areas of concern - medicine, health care services, social services, politics and education. Political activities are to the success not only of Muslim women in Canada but also for their families. Several of our women are seeking nominations in Federal ridings across Canada now. I myself was a candidate in a Federal and in a Provincial and in Civic elections in Edmonton.

Networking has given our women a strong base throughout the major communities. We attend and support the functions and efforts of other women and they in turn support us. Recently we had a Day of the Land event to remember the Palestinians. We brought guest speakers from the West Bank and invited women from various communities and from the peace movement organizations. It was a very successful event in many of our communities across Canada.

We meet and work with the Women's Advisory Committee on Status of Women to voice our position and our concerns for Muslim women in Canada and on these occasions we learn about our sister organizations and their concerns and the issues they face.

Education is a key area where much needs to be done, particularly with our new Canadian Muslims. This is the area of my own expertise. I am into my second year as President of the Canadian College of Teachers. My Ph.D on Islam in Canada was a study of Lebanese Muslim students and their teachers in the high schools of Edmonton. One of my findings resulted in my organizing parents and creating the first private Arabic Kindergarten in Canada. Subsequent contact and discussions with the Edmonton Public School Board initiated an Arabic bilingual program within the public school system. Today we have 300 children from Kindergarten to Grade VI, this fall who will have been in the program two years. I was persuaded and elected trustee of the Edmonton Public School Board. I work hard for all the six bilingual programs of which our School Board is most proud. This provides another area for our Muslim women in

which to be effectively active. Encourage to be educators.

Be it in the professions, industry or business, Muslim women are very much aware of the political process and its effect upon our lives. Networking and communications in this area is undeniably a struggle but has been very effective and must continue to be so for our future generations. It is an effort, a struggle which must continue for the generations of our children and our grandchildren.

I am very hopeful of peace in the Middle East with increased understanding and support of my Jewish cousins.

**Canadian Council of Muslim Women
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