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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

"AND THUS DOES THEIR SUSTAINER ANSWER THEIR PRAYER; I SHALL NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THE LABOUR OF ANY OF YOU WHO LABOURS IN MY WAY, BE IT MAN OR WOMAN, EACH OF YOU IS AN ISSUE OF THE OTHER. "

Quran 3:195

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Alhamdulillah, the past year brought many recognitions and some changes to the Canadian Council of Muslim Women. The Tenth Anniversary Conference at the Royal York, Toronto, on April 24, 1993, was attended by more than 200 delegates, members and friends from 11 Chapters. We focussed on achieving equity and equality and the Conference Report was released in June 1993. In September, 1993 we co-hosted the 20th Anniversary Conference of CMCC on developing Family Support Services. A new Executive was elected in October, 1993 and I appreciate your confidence in re-electing me as President for a second term. I thank the outgoing members of the former Executive for their leadership in CCMW's drive to make Canadian Muslim Women better organized and to ensure equity, equality and empowerment for all; Saeeda Bhatti (Ottawa), Nejat Hassan (London) and Sabiha Janjua (Sudbury). We count on their continuing involvement in the service of Allah and women's rights. I also welcome the new members of the Executive who bring a lot of expertise, enthusiasm and commitment. Alia Hogben (Kingston), Brenda Qureshi (London) and Razia Jaffer

(Edmonton). Nina Karachi-Khaled (Mississauga) has been appointed as Corresponding Secretary. Solmaz Sahin continues as Treasurer. It is a great team.

Nineteen Ninety Four (1994) is the International Year of the Family and I am honoured to be a board member of the Canadian Committee for the International Year of the Family. The new CCMW EXecutive has developed a program to strengthen the Canadian Muslim Family. A pilot Family Education and Referral Service Program is in place in Toronto. 1994 Annual Conference will deal with the concerns of the older Muslim women and girls and intergenerational linkages between them for mutual benefit. As the family has always been the foundation of the Muslim Ummah, I urge all Chapters to develop initiatives which enhance family solidarity and quality of life. Please join other women's groups, seniors' organizations and youth in the local community and send regular reports to our newsletter. InshaAllah, three issues of the Newsletter are planned for 1994. Help the editor, Alia Hogben, to make it an effective voice of CCMW.

CCMW is primarily an educational agency, an advocacy group and a forum for generating Islamic thought and action. Each Chapter should select an aspect of family life and hold a seminar for members and friends. Study the mandate and services available to seniors and youth in your region and sensitize them to the needs of Muslim female clients. Join them as volunteers, monitor the media, network with churches and Interfaith groups. Become part of the political scene, regularly visit your M.P., M. P. P., M. L. A., Municipal Councillor and School Board Trustee and keep them informed of the CCMW mission and activities. You will be pleased to know your Executive hosted receptions for Jean Augustine M.P., Maria Mina M.P., Derek Lee M.P., Gurbux Malhi M.P. and Jag Bhaduria M.P. as we celebrated the International Human Rights Day on December 10, 1993 and International Women's Day on March 8, 1994. Another great opportunity to build networks are the Eids. Celebrate with the community, media and other decision makers.

CCMW is actively participating in many other national and regional coalitions to promote mutual understanding and equity like the National Christian Muslim Liaison Committee, the National Labour Force Development Board, Interfaith Board for Religious Education in Ontario, Interfaith Education Association and the Bosnian Children's Relief. Under the leadership of our Founding President, Dr. Lila Fahlman, we are also a partner in establishing the World Council of Muslim Women. We are also co-sponsoring projects with the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, Toronto, and University of Ottawa.

We face many challenges. There is a lot of work to be done to promote a better understanding of Islam and Canadian Muslims. I sincerely invite all of you to join Canadian Council of Muslim Women in the continuing struggle for equity, equality and greater family solidarity for all, Insha Allah.

NEW EXECUTIVE

There is a new Executive which hopes to further the goals of the organization, with Allah's and your help.

TALAT MUINUDDIN - PRESIDENT

Talat is a founding member and current president of Canadian Council of Muslim Women. She is a former board member of International Development and Refugee Foundation, Women Intercultural Network and National Christian Muslim Liaison Committee. She is chair of Women's Committee to National Visible Minority Labour Force Development Board and a Board member of Canada Committee on the International Year of the Family. She served on Canadian Multiculturalism Council, The Ontario Advisory Council on Multiculturalism and Citizenship and the Adhoc Advisory Committee to the Minister on Gulf Crises.

BRENDA QURESHI - 1st VICE PRESIDENT

Works part time as an R.N. in Geriatric nursing; part time University student; has been a Brownie leader for 7 years; member

at her children's school; regular volunteer helper in daughter's Grade III classroom; active member of Pakistan Canada Association; recipient of volunteer service award; lived in Winnipeg, Ottawa and London, Ontario as well as 7 years in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; a mother of 3 daughters - Anika, Nazia and Noreen.

ALIA HOGBEN - 2nd VICE PRESIDENT

A social worker by profession and a mother of 3 children. Alia lives on a farm near Kingston, Ontario. She has been involved in Islamic activities for many years and is very keen to make CCMW a vibrant, exciting organization for Muslim women.

RAZIA JAI FER - SECRETARY

A legal assistant by profession, has two children. Razia has been a very active member of the Edmonton Chapter serving as its current Treasurer and has served as President from 1988 to 1990. Razia has also served on various councils, boards and sub-committees. She is committed to reopen communication between and with Chapters across Canada and thereby building support and network amongst the sisterhood.

NINA KARACHI-KHALED - CORRESPONDING SECRETARY

Born in Canada of Turkish and Bosnian decent, Nina is a new mother of 1 year old Yaseen. She studied Child Psychology at Brock University and obtained a B.Ed. from York University. Presently Nina volunteers with Muslim youth groups in Toronto.

SOLMAZ SAHIN - TREASURER

A homemaker and mother of 4 grown children and 3 grandchildren. Solmaz has been Treasurer of CCMW Executive since its conception and an active member of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Chapter. Muslim youth are of major importance in her service to Allah (S.N.T.). Ever since she came to Canada in 1961, she has worked in the way of Allah.

The new Executive thanks the out-going Executive for their contribution and particularly for their advice and recommendations to the new Executive. We hope they will continue to assist us.

LOOKING BACK

DR. LILA FAHLMAN FOUNDING PRESIDENT

Assalamu Alaikum!

In 1980 when I was the advisor to women for the Council of Muslim Communities in Canada (CMCC) I became dissatisfied with a position which had no real purpose and no opportunity to vote on ideas put forth by the men. So I offered my resignation to the surprise of the male board. Discussion ensued wherein I said the position was a waste of my time. I proceeded to tell them what my own vision was: to meet with Muslim women across Canada and find out their concerns and needs and desires.

After using up all my holidays over the next two years, I called women from St. John's, Nfld. to Vancouver, B.C. to meet with me in Winnipeg. That same year the black women met in Winnipeg also, for their first time. We formed Chapters and decided to incorporate. At the next Board meeting of CMCC, the men were furious to learn that we were not only well organized but also incorporated. We were beholden to no one but ourselves. We had 18 Chapters and twice a year we had a conference somewhere in Canada, on the east coast, including St. Johns' Nfld. all the way to Vancouver, B.C. Our Chapters were full of energy. We faced issues and discussed them openly before the youth and the men. Issues such as abuse, pornography and rights of women led the agendas. The last few years have brought about much apathy in our Chapters. Our leadership has struggled hard. A lesson has been learned. Whoever takes on the role of National President must divorce herself from her local Chapter. A National President belong to Canada, not to one city or one province.

I pray to Almighty Allah that we will be stronger soon, and that our 15th Anniversary will give us cause to rejoice again from the Pacific to the Atlantic. I pray we will see Chapters in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, even if small Chapters.

GOALS

The new executive members have set themselves some goals for 1994:

Goal	Responsibility
Communicate with Chapters	Razia
Publish two newsletters	Brenda and Alia
Obtain funding and organize the annual conference	All
Expand and diversify membership	All
Obtain charitable status number and seal	Razia and Nina
Relate with external organizations	All
Meet four to six times per year	All
Identify and deal with issues relating to women, Muslim women in particular	All
Organize files and records	Razia and Nina
Build consensus within the group	All

APPEAL

We think there are many Muslim women, young and old, Canadian-born and immigrants of various ethnic backgrounds, who are seeking a forum with which they can identify and which will allow them to participate in a discussion of issues dear to the hearts of Muslim women.

We would like to be the voice for a moderate, balanced perspective of Islam. We would like to raise difficult, sensitive issues, and be courageous enough to take positions on these.

We would also acknowledge that numbers do not necessarily translate into an effective organization. However, we would like to strengthen the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) by inviting you to join, either as individuals or by organizing Chapters in your own communities.

CHAPTERS

We will contact each Chapter and ask for your co-operation in sending us your information, any issues you have dealt with, any news articles you think we should share with all our members, and any books or journals.

Please feel free to pass on this newsletter to other interested women or send us their names and addresses.

ISSUE DISCUSSION

What Does Multiculturalism Mean to Muslims?

How should we define multiculturalism for Canada? As you may have noticed, recently there has been a spate of media stories about multiculturalism, its meaning to new Canadians and to those who have settled here many generations ago.

During the recent elections, there was controversy as to whether multiculturalism should be an "official" government policy with funds attached to encourage minority and ethnic groups. Many feel strongly that the policy leads to a fragmented society of too many identities - Indo-Canadian, BritishCanadian, etc. People feel the policy has led to minority groups clamouring for and demanding rights which are alien to "Canadian" culture and norms. Many argue that if a group wants to keep their cultural traditions, all taxpayers should not fund these, as each group should fund their own activities.

There is a backlash and hostility which is based on the perception that "special groups" are getting not only privileges but preferred treatment in Canada. The Ontario employment equity policy has created negative feelings amongst "older" Canadians towards new minorities.

A newspaper article (Toronto Star, Sunday, December 12, 1993) quotes a confidential federal document which states a belief that Canada is accepting too many immigrants from ethnic minorities appears to be hardening," and there is a "growing concern over the perceived failure on the part of immigrants to adapt themselves to the Canadian way of life." Hanny Hassan, president of the Ontario Advisory Council of Multiculturalism and Citizenship is quoted as saying "We should worry less about cultural retention and concentrate on equality of access to services. "

When we come to Canada, we must accept the historical realities of Canada, for example that the native population has special status, that the French heritage is a strong identity, and that many of the institutions are modelled on British examples.

Can we demand as our right that there be a government policy to encourage and support the retention of our culture and religion? For example, there is a movement that Canada should practice Islamic law for Muslims. Not only does this raise a lot of animosity amongst other Canadians, but more importantly, it would affect us Muslim women dramatically. We need to seriously examine such issues.

We are indeed fortunate to live in Canada where there is no religious persecution and we can practice our religion. Rather than "demanding" rights, should we not focus on objectives such as "equality of access to services" and correct the perception that we are failing to adapt to Canada? Should we not be focussing on presenting a balanced, moderate Islam, so that other Canadians, and more importantly our young Muslims, see another face of Islam than the one so often projected?

As we are trying to encourage discussion and establish CCMW positions, please write to us about your opinions on multiculturalism. Please also let us know if you would like some discussion on any issue.

MEDIA REPORTS

If you hear of any articles concerning Islam and women, please send us copies.

RECENT STORIES

Bengali feminist Taslima Nasreen being threatened in Dhaka by clerics for speaking out on behalf of women's rights.

A Muslim stepfather sodomizes his stepdaughter and the mother hugs him as he is taken into custody. The Quebec judge gives him a light sentence because he "spared her virginity, which is important to Muslims." Fatima Houda-Pepin, president of Centre maghrebin de recherche et d'information said the judgment left her "triplely indignant - as a woman, as a mother and as a Muslim." Later articles have condemned the judge.

BOOKS OF INTEREST

Sharabi, Hisham: Neopatriarchy, Oxford University Press, 1988.

Shaaban, Bouthania: Both Right and Left Handed, Women's Press, London, 1988

Mernissi, Fatima: Beyond the Veil: MaleFemale Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society, Indiana University Press, 1987, plus several other books.

Rahman, Fazlur: Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition, University of Chicago Press, 1982.

FOR YOUR VIEWS OR INFORMATION PLEASE WRITE TO:

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