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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.



"We call to witness the passing time, that surely humans suffer continuous loss, except those who believe and work righteousness, and exhort one another to hold fast to the Truth, and exhort one another to be steadfast."

Quran: AL-Asr

Democratic Leadership : Muslim Women as a Force for Change

National Conference
October 17, 18 and 19, 1997
London, Ontario

CCMW Internet Email Address info@ccmw.com

NATIONAL CONFERENCE 1997

We are pleased to invite you to our Conference on October 17th, 18th and 19th, 1997, to be held in London, Ontario. The theme is *Democratic Leadership: Muslim Women as a Force for Change.*

Although we live in a democratic country, many of us are unaware of the concepts of democracy, leadership and our own role in creating change. This is made more urgent when we hear of Muslim women in many other countries whose lives are tragically changed by the whims of despotic groups.

Democratic principles of liberty, equality and justice are truly implemented when there are opportunities for participation and the ability to influence change. Freedom and equality are two sides of the same coin

for without these there can be no social justice nor universal human rights.

The Conference will focus on these themes. The Keynote Speaker will be Madam Fatima Houda Pepin, the Member of the National Assembly of Quebec; Professors Sajida Alvi and Zohra Husaini will address Women's Equality and Leadership within the Islamic framework. Ms. Rita Deverell, Executive Producer and media personality of Vision TV, will speak on Women as a force for change. These will be followed by workshops on democracy within the family, in Muslim communities, society and at work. There will be a special workshop for young women.

For Further Information please contact members of the London Chapter Coordinating Committee:

*Razia Ali Hassan
Najet Hassan
Rifat Hussain
Foizea Dean
Brenda Qureshi*

Please come and bring your families and friends!

UPDATE SON PUBLICATIONS

The Handbook on Canadian Laws & Policies Applicable to Women is nearing completion and will be launched at the conference, inshaAllah.

We are very excited about this Handbook as it will be very useful to all and the hard work of the Ottawa Chapter will be well rewarded.

The project of publishing the speeches of last year's conferences well as the research on the Hijab is also Masha Allah, proceeding well. We are honoured that McGill & Concordia Universities professors Sajida Alvi and Homa Hoodfar are taking the responsibility of editing this compilation of essays.

Professor Zohra Husaini is researching Facts & Myths about Islam and Women, and will be presenting her findings at the Conference. We hope to also publish this.

Our proposal to the federal government to publish a book on Canadian Muslim Pioneer Women is with the federal government. We have initiated some work as Sadia Zanar has agreed to edit the collection and a number of women have agreed to be the subjects.

OF INTEREST

A magazine called Community Digest is now available. It has news on multicultural issues.

It is available in:

Ontario Phone (416) 283-3373
Alberta Phone (403) 271-8275
B.C. Phone (604) 875-8313

Islamic School of Ottawa is requesting donations so that they can advocate for holidays at schools for minority faith communities.

The Islamic Association of Sudbury held a conference in November 1996 called challenges faced by Immigrant Muslim and Non Muslim Women and Youth in N.E. Ontario.

From their special edition newsletter it appears that the conference was a success. Congratulations!

The Canadian Women's Foundation which provides funds for projects on violence vs women has moved to:

133 Richmond St. West, #504

Toronto, Ontario M5H 2L3

Quran in CD Rom is available in Arabic and other languages such as English, German, French, Spanish, Turkish and Persian. It is illuminated with decorations. Please contact Demir@dial.pipex.com.

Afghan Women Need Your Help!

a) The Toronto Centre is asking for donations to purchase essential articles for refugee camps. Please help by calling (416) 588-3585.

b) Many of you probably read the article on Afghani women in the Homemaker's magazine, Summer 1997. The magazine is asking you to advocate on behalf of Afghani women by writing, faxing or e-mailing them so that they can forward your petition to the U.N. Please call.

Homemaker's Magazine
25 Sheppard Ave. W., #100
North York, ON M2N 6S7
Fax: (416) 733-8683
email: homemakers@telemedia.ca

c) We have also been asked by the organization Women Living Under Muslim Laws to adopt a petition and forward to the Centre for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University. The request is to advocate our own governments to aid Afghani women.

Female Genital Mutilation in Gambia and Egypt

In May 1997, the Gambian Telecommunications Broadcasting Services announced a policy which states that there will be no programs opposing fgm, and its medical hazards.

In June 1997, an Egyptian court rejected a government ban on fgm. Please help, by writing to:

Mr. Bakary Njie
Managing Director of GAMTEL
Banjul , The Gambia
Fax: 220 226 699

and to:

President Hosni Mubarak
Presidential Palace
Heliopolis, Egypt

MUSLIM MARRIAGES

A marriage bureau has been initiated by a Maryan Jamilah, called Muslim Marriage Service.

For details please contact

via email address: marriages@aol.com

or by mail

13618A County Road 748
Rosharon, TX 77583 U.S.A.

ARTICLE

"Power of Women in Islam"

by **Raheel Raza**, Journalist

The focus of my talk is not EQUALITY of Muslim women because I hope we have crossed that bridge. I want to take my talk one step beyond the traditional and stereotypical role of Muslim women as presented by the masses and the media. Based on the presumption that we know who we are and where we're going, I wish to focus on our strengths, not our weaknesses, to draw examples from history and most of all, to celebrate our own brand of feminism ... because I truly do believe that Islam does not shackle us - society does.

At this early stage of my talk, I feel it's extremely important to clarify that a true understanding of our

position in Islam can only come when we have total faith and conviction in Allah subhanawa tala and the message. Once we have that, then we can begin to understand that if we accept Allah's adal (justice) and mercy, we must realise that He in His infinite wisdom would never relegate women to a lower status than men. In fact Allah has given women a revered status in life - the details of which I'll touch upon later. Let it suffice to say, that the constant exploitation of women in Islamic societies has been routinely ignored by the Muslim community at large. This springs from ignorance of Quranic injunctions and blatant misinterpretation of Islamic commands.

Dr. Hassan al Turabi, secretary general of the Arab Islamic Congress, who has a doctorate from the Sorbonne, writes in his paper titled "Women in Islam and Muslim Society" - "whenever weakness creeps into the faith of Muslim men, they tend to treat women oppressively ... but weak commitment to religion tends to cultivate unjust treatment of women"

The Prophet of Islam, remained concerned all his life about the status and treatment of women, because at the time of the reevaluation, women were buried alive, treated as chattels and at one point considered to be inhuman without a soul. In his last sermon, the Prophet clearly asked men to treat women with kindness. The Quran says in 2:228 "and they (women) have rights similar to those of men over them ... treat them in a just manner.

I believe the position of women in Islam has also been misunderstood due to lack of proper education and knowledge of our history and past. We, who are so impressed by biographies of Joan Collins and Princess Diana, rarely take out time to study the lives of women in Islam. I don't mean this as a criticism because I too, am a product of the same pseudo-western cultural revolution where Shakespeare and Bach took a higher priority than Sumayya or Bilal. (Incidentally Sumayya was the woman who became the first martyr of Islam).

Let's take a minute to study some of our role models. The first woman of Islam, is the perfect role model for us as a women of this world. Hazrat Khadijah, also called Umm al Momineen (mother of believers), was a woman without whose patronage and support, the message of Islam would not have gained momentum. History records that Khadijah represents all that is best in woman-kind and she becomes a standing testimony to the revolutionary role of women in human affairs. Khadijah was a successful business woman who sent a proposal of marriage to the Prophet, became the first Muslim and devoted her life to supporting Islam. Regarding her wealth, I've heard an interesting anecdote which I'd like to share with you.

Those of you who are successful businesswomen know the importance of stocks, bonds and investments. I'm not too sharp at finances, but I know that if, what you invest grows, the value of your wealth grows. At the time of early Islam, there was a severe famine and drought in Meccain which the small group Muslims were in danger of being wiped out. Khadijah donated her entire wealth to the Muslim community and helped it survive and restructure itself. Some aalims say that the wealth of the entire Muslim ummah today, represents Khadijah's investment, paid back with full interest!

Subhanallah! Such is the power and glory of the first woman of Islam and when we read her life history, we find, much more to learn, respect and revere.

The pitfalls and challenges faced by the first women of Islam, are no comparison to how passively we live our lives today. Despite threats to their lives, property and families, they grew strong and confident in their faith. While we balk at a simple controversy over our head covering to such an extent, that we'll argue till we're blue in the face to prove whether the hijab was meant to be or not to be, the women of Islam have bigger and better things to deal with.

We need to clear our minds and instead of getting bogged down in matters which lead us nowhere, we need to harness our inner strength and move on to issues that matter. We have become too concerned with outward appearances. Our strength however lies not in our way of adornment, but deep in our *ruh*, our soul which for the interest of feminists, has no gender. Every man and woman has a soul and the person closest to Allah is the one who is pious. The Quran say INNA AKRAMAKUM INDA ALLAH ATQA KUM

"Indeed the most noble of you from Allah's perspective is whoever has the most taqwa."

A woman has many roles and although it's not fair to present one role as more compelling than another, life is after all a measure of levels. A woman is born as someone's daughter, Islam gives her equality and there are various verses of the Quran that prove this. This is a separate topic but let it suffice to say that while the Quran acknowledges the anatomical differences between males and females, it talks at length

about the compatible, mutually supportive functional relationship between men and women with regard to society. (To get a better insight into the role of women, may I recommend that you read Amina Wadud Mohsin's book called *Quran and Woman* and everything that you have ever been told about women in Islam, will be changed for the better it's like a light at the end of the tunnel).

A woman becomes a wife and Islam gives her the freedom to choose a life partner, to propose marriage and the freedom to get a divorce. In her relationship as a wife, the woman is judged for her spirituality and not her submission. There are no rights of women distinct from rights of men although the responsibilities may vary in different societies.

At this point I should mention just one of many recurring misrepresentations in Islam that people believe. Allah promises that he will reward his faithful servants with pleasing spouses in Paradise. Most scholars have interpreted this to mean that men will get beautiful women as companions and some men wishfully also believe that they will have more than one woman at their beck and call. Not only is this a misrepresentation of the verses, its also very sexist. Allah says true believers, men and women will have faithful companions in paradise.

This brings me to the third and most revered role of a woman that of a mother. In Islam, the most power of a woman is vested in her capacity to reproduce. Motherhood is considered the climax of a woman's life which does not in any way belittle her contribution in any other role.

One alim has likened the role of a mother with attributes similar to those of Allah. While Allah is the creator, a mother gives birth to another life; Allah provides sustenance to his people, a mother provides nourishment to child without being asked; Allah is merciful and forgiving the same way a mother is with her child, Allah forgives first and punishes last, a mother does the same. In essence, a mother is the pivotal pointing the circle of life, where all humanity is connected to the core - if she moves or is misplaced, the entire circle moves and if she is put out of sync, the circle is broken. While this a metaphor, please try and appreciate the power of a woman through this example.

There are numerous hadith about reverence for mothers. Most of them we know like heaven at the feet of the mother. Another hadith is that aman came to the Prophet and said, I have carried my mother on my back and performed Haj with her. Have I repaid her for bringing me up? The Prophet replied, if you carried your mother around the Ka'aba 365 days a year, you still would not have paid back one tenth of what she has done for you in her life.

If we were to truly appreciate and understand the power vested in us by Allah Subhana wa talla, we would draw upon it and use it positively to instill confidence and a sense of identity in ourselves and our daughters.

Let's reflect for a moment on a few distinctive women mentioned in the Quran. There is a widespread belief that in Islam, the female is hardly ever religiously addressed except through the mediation of a male, and as an addendum to him. In the Quran however, it is clearly stated in sura28:7 that Umm Musa (mother of Moses) received wahy, which is divine communication (not to be confused with risalat which indicates divine communication received with the purpose of transmitting the information to humanity). Again, Maryam (Mary) is mentioned by name in the Quran and an entire chapter is named after her. Mary's predicament is described in detail and all it takes is one reading to truly understand the magnitude of a woman's courage and forbearance, based on her trust and faith in Allah's will. If we allow ourselves to be misused or believe we are inferior, we doubt our faith and Allah's blessings.

Finally for those who believe that a woman should not be a leader, please refer to sura 27:23 which is the story of Bilqis, the queen of Sheba who was a ruler of an unconfirmed location said to be somewhere in Yemen. Bilqis is referred to as powerful, strong and possessing a magnificent throne. The story of Bilqis as it unfolds in the Quran, telling us how Solomon invited her to Islam, reveals characteristics of an adept politician and diplomat, who would be at home ruling any country today.

These are only some of our role models and if we do a factual study of the history of Islam, the Quran, hadith and tafasir, we will find many more. Having said this, let me caution that a study of these subjects has to be undertaken with great care and wisdom. A little knowledge is a dangerous weapon and we are already suffering the backlash of interpretation out of context. It's important to recall that the Quran was not revealed in one day. As issues arose: social, religious and those dealing with jurisprudence, Allah sent corresponding verses over a span of 23 years. Every verse, every ayah has a specific relation to time and history and most importantly, to prior text i.e. a connection with the verses that came before.

Therefore if read or interpreted out of context, one verse can be understood to mean two entirely different things. In relation to social issues regarding women, this has constantly been the case. A second drawback for many of us interpreting the Quran without benefit of the actual language because a translation loses much of the original context.

Therefore the onus of making an effort to correct our ignorance falls upon us. You have heard it said that if you educate a child you have educate done individual, if you educate a woman you have educated an entire nation. This education does not refer to secular education alone but the knowledge and study of our history and faith as Muslims.

I end with a relevant dua from the Quran: *Rabbi Zidni Ilman*- Allah increase us in knowledge. Jazak Allah Khairan.

BOOKS

Elmasry, Mohamed Ibrahim: 1000 Questions on Islam, K.W. Islamic Association, 402 Clairbrook Cres., Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5V7.

A book of relevant questions and answers providing details about Islam. Chapters are on the Quran, Hadith, Seera, Iman, Ibadat, Stories of Prophets, Islamic History and Halal and Haram.

Vakili, Valla: Debating Religion and Politics in Iran, the Political Thought of Abdolkarim Saroush. Council on Foreign Relations, 58 East 68th Street, N.Y. 10021, 1996.

A thought provoking and controversial book on Soroush's concepts of Islam, Politics, the place of religion in politics and democracy. Soroush is a renowned Irani scholar and the book is well worth reading.

Hoodfar, Homa: Shifting Boundaries in Marriage and Divorce in Muslim Communities. Women Living Under Muslim Laws, France, 1996.

The organization, Women Living Under Muslim Law is a world wide group of scholars who study the various aspects of law and its effects on women. The editor of this Special Dossier is Concordia University (Montreal) Professor Homa Hoodfar.

For More Information Contact Them At:

B^oite Postale 23
34790 Grabels, France.

Afkhani, M. Faith and Freedom Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World. Syracuse University Press, 1995.

The editor is the Executive Director of the organization in Washington, D.C. , called Sisterhood is Global. The collection of essays range across the world and worthwhile reading for all who are interested in issues of Islam, interpretations and its effects on women.

Nasr, S.H. Ideals and Realities of Islam. Aquarian Press, London, 194.

This book outlines essential traditional aspects of Islam, for Western and Muslim readers who want a solid basis of knowledge.

Hamid, A.W. Islam the Natural Way. MELS (Muslim Education and Literary Services), London, 1996.

A book of introductory topics on Islam which is useful for those who want practical knowledge of living a Muslim life. The book's layout makes for easy reading with topics such as "You and Your condition", "You and your Family".

The address of the organization which publishes the book is:

61 Alexandra Road
Hendon, London, NW4 2RX

CHAPTER NEWS

We are thrilled to announced the formation of a second chapter in Toronto, the Peel Chapter.

The chapters continue to be actively involved in a number of issues and their annual activities will be presented at the Annual General Meeting on October 19th, 1997. A report will follow on the Annual General Meeting, if you would like a copy, please contact us.

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