



[CCMW Position Papers](#)

« [Back to CCMW Newsletters/Reports \(Archived Material\)](#)

[CCMW Publications](#)

[Other Publications of Interest](#)

[Websites of Interest](#)

[CCMW Archives](#)

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.



*“O Prophet! Whenever believing women come to you to pledge their allegiance to you, pledging that henceforth they would not ascribe divinity in any way to aught but God, and would not steal, would not commit adultery, would not kill their children, would not indulge in slander, falsely devising it out of nothingness, and would not disobey you in anything that you declared is right---then accept their pledge of allegiance and pray to God to forgive them their past sins, for God is much forgiving, a dispenser of grace”.*

*Quran 60:12*

 <p><b>Canadian Council of Muslim Women</b> Working Towards Equity, Equality, and Empowerment</p>	<p>Come Join Us in a Day of Consultation and Discussion!</p> <p><b>Strengthening Our Voices, Twenty Years of Leadership</b></p> <p><b>Saturday, September 14th, 2002 8:00 am to 5:30 p.m.</b></p> <p>at the <b>Bank of Montreal Institute for Learning</b>, at 3550 Pharmacy Ave, at Steeles Ave</p> <p><u>Keynote Speakers</u> “Muslim Women: Voices of Moderation and Reason” Dr. B. Aminah McCloud, Ph.D., from De Paul University</p> <p>“Reformation within Islam; Focus on Women” Dr. Khaled Abou-el-Fadl, Ph.D., from UCLA</p>
<p><b>Program</b></p> <p>Registration starts at 8:00 am</p>	

# Keynote Speakers begin at 9:15 am

Panel discussions begin at 10:45 am

CCMW - The Beginnings, The Here  
and Now, The Future

Breakout sessions and  
Workshop topics begin at 2:45 p.m.

## **CCMW Action Planning for the Future Report commissioned on the Impact of Post- September 11th 2001 “Voices of Muslim Women & the Media”**

“Breaking Barriers with Technology”

Presentation of Resource Kit for Young  
Muslim Women  
“In My Own Skin”

Website Launch at 4:30 p.m.

## **Silent Auction, ending at 5:30 p.m.**

Dinner program at 7:30 p.m.

Awards, Recognition, Book Launch,

Live Auction

### Tickets

Full Program:

Early Bird registration by Aug.31 \$55, thereafter \$60

Students and Day Program (incl. Lunch):

Early Bird registration by Aug.31 \$25, thereafter \$30

## **Dinner tickets, \$30**

**Please send your cheque or money order  
to the address at the bottom of the page**

### Travel and Accommodations

Razia Jaffer (403) 243-7995 or  
e-mail [jaff1@telusplanet.net](mailto:jaff1@telusplanet.net)

Hosted by the Toronto and Peel Halton Chapters

### Contacts

Barbara Siddiqui 416.769.4500,  
Atiya Ahsan 905.568.1274,  
Nuzhat Haider 905.277.1074,  
Rehana Begg 416.498.4857, [rehana.begg@sympatico.ca](mailto:rehana.begg@sympatico.ca)

### CCMW

2400 Dundas Street West, Suite 513  
Mississauga, Ontario, L5K 2R8  
<http://www.ccmw.com>

## **NATIONAL CONFERENCE:**

CCMW was started by a group of visionary women in 1982, so this year, we are celebrating 20 years of women's devotion, commitment and passion to further the equality, empowerment and equity for Canadian Muslim women.

The conference, “STRENGTHENING OUR VOICES: TWENTY YEARS OF LEADERSHIP” will be held in Toronto over the weekend of September 13/02, at the Bank of Montreal Institute for Learning at Pharmacy and Steeles Aves.

Chapters' members and our out of town friends will gather Friday evening, along with the young women who will be trained as facilitators for the Resource Kit, “IN MY OWN SKIN”.

The actual conference will start on Saturday, September 14/02, at 8 am for registration and the program will begin promptly at 9am. We will have keynote speakers, the launching of the book with the editors, Professors Sajida Alvi, Homa Hoodfar and Sheila McDonough. The book, MUSLIM VEIL IN NORTH AMERICA: ISSUES AND DEBATES is to be published by Scholars Press, and Althea Prince, Managing Editor will attend the conference.

Our keynote speakers are Professors Aminah McCloud and Khaled Abou El Fadl.

Both are writers on Islam, scholars and well known activists. Both have deep knowledge and will address issues relating to Islam and women.

We will have workshops to showcase our recent projects such as, the Resource Kit; the community research: Voices of Muslim Women and a workshop on Technology for Women. As we have collaborated with other organizations, we will have some of them jointly presenting the workshops. The Afghan Women and the Somali Youth Ass'n will be part of the Community research project and Najmi Junaid of Aangen will present the Technology workshop.

There will be workshops for strategic planning and all the recommendations of the day will form part of a Strategic Plan for the next 3 years for CCMW.

At dinner, we will honour some Muslim women who have contributed to Canada, such as Senator Mobina Jaffer; Lila Fahlman, the founder of CCMW; Talat Muinuddin, one of our long standing President and advocate; Nelofer Pazira, actor and journalist; Adeena Niazi of the Afghan Women's Council, Fatima Houda Pepin, MLA in Quebec and Jamelie Hassan a noted artist from London, Ontario.

WE ARE PROUD TO HAVE THE NOOR CULTURAL CENTRE AS OUR CO-SPONSOR FOR DR KHALED ABOU EL FADL.

We thank the Lakhani family and Roshan Jamal for collaborating with CCMW, as we see this as a start for many other joint ventures.

---

#### **OF INTEREST:**

##### ***Noor Cultural Centre, Toronto:***

The well known Lakhani family have purchased the old Japanese Canadian Cultural in Toronto, and are converting it for a Centre of Muslim learning and activities. The values of the Centre will be the fostering of openness, diversity and intellectual development within the Muslim community.

*For further information please contact:*

Roshan Jamal  
email: [rjamal@richter.ca](mailto:rjamal@richter.ca)  
phone 416 932 6227.

##### ***Arab Human Development Report 2002.***

The United Nations' survey, the "Arab Human Development Report 2002" was released in Cairo in July 2002. The report was based on nearly 30 papers from the Arab world and these were narrowed to a core group of experts, who completed the report. The group included Thoraya Obaid, a Saudi who is Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund; Mervat Tallaway, an Egyptian diplomat who heads the Economic and Social Council for West Asia; Clovis Maksoud who directs the Centre for the Global South at the American University in Washington and Nader Fergany, an economist and Director of the Almishkat Centre for Research in Egypt, was the lead.

There are 280 million people in the 22 Arab countries and the positive findings are that the standard of living

has advanced; life expectancy is longer and education spending is higher than elsewhere in the developing world. But although oil income has transformed the landscapes of some Arab countries, the per capita income growth has shrunk in the last 20 years and intellectuals are fleeing a repressive political and social environment.

The conclusion is that Arab societies lack political freedom, there is a repression of women and an isolation from the world

of ideas that stifles creativity. It is not known what will ensue from this report.

[from the New York Times, Barbara Crossette]

***Islamic Circle of North America Brochure on Women:***

We have been sent a brochure entitled "Status of Woman in Islam" produced by I.C.N.A, written by Saleem Kayani. The brochure is accurate and positive in its perspective on Muslim women, however its statement that the husband is the guardian of his family, as a ruler is guardian of his subjects is not only incorrect but detrimental to men and women. There are a number of ayahs in the Quran [e.g. 9:71-72] which speak of the equality and partnership of men and women, [which does not necessarily mean the same] without one being "over" the other, and the statement in this brochure does disservice to the strong message of equality in the Quran.

We point this out not as a criticism of the good brochure but to ensure that Muslim women understand that their only "guardian" is God, and that husbands may be breadwinners and maintainers but so are women in the tasks they do at home for their families.

***Contributions of Muslims:***

In an article in the Muslim Chronicle, George Rafael, spells out, alphabetically, the contributions of Muslims and Arabs to the world's civilization.

For example, A is for algebra; B is for backgammon; C is for cough medicine; D is for Dante; E is for equestrian and so on.

***Federal Old Age Security:***

Please contact Canada Human Resources if you are over 65, as there may be additional funds available to you if your earnings are under \$7,000 a year. Contact: 1 800 277 9914 or their website [www.hrhc-drhc.gc.ca.isp](http://www.hrhc-drhc.gc.ca.isp)

***Canadian Breast Cancer Network:***

This is an organization which assists women who have had breast cancer. Please contact them at

602-331 Cooper St  
Ottawa, Ont K2P 0G5  
Phone 1 800 685 8820.

***Project: Employment Discrimination of Muslim women in Toronto:***

A research project is underway, in Toronto, about any discrimination against Muslim women who wear the

hijab.

The researchers would like to hear from you and there are discussion groups being held in a variety of languages, so that Muslim women can speak confidentially about their experiences. CCMW is a member of this task force along with a number of other groups.

Please contact:

Women Working With Immigrant Women

489 College St, #200,

Toronto, Ont M6G 1A5

phone 416 323 0447.

***Women's Alliance for Peace and Human Rights in Afghanistan [WAPHA]***

This is an organization based in Washington, which is advocating for social, political, economic and civil rights for Afghan women and girls.

If you would like to support their work please contact them at:

Phone 202 882 1432 or email [zieba@aol.com](mailto:zieba@aol.com)

***The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence:***

This Government of Canada office has recent publications on family violence which will be helpful for service providers and women themselves. For example, a booklet on Working with Immigrant families on Issues Relating to Child Discipline, Child Abuse and Child Neglect, as well as information on abuse of older adults.

Please contact the office at:

Jeanne Mance Building, 7th floor

Tunney's Pasture Ottawa Ont

K1A 1B4

phone 1 800 267 1291

Website: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/nc-cn](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/nc-cn)

***Children Witnessing Family Violence:***

There is an article in their Fall/Winter 2001 Newsletter about the research regarding Children Witnessing Family Violence.

Statistics Canada released a report in June 2001, examining data from a national survey and the highlights are: children who witness violence can have more aggression and emotional problems than children who are raised in non violent homes.

Of children who witnessed violence in their home, 28% exhibited signs of physical aggression, double that of those who did not witness violence, and 15% of children showed signs of emotional disorders, compared with 8% of who did not witness. 70% of spousal violence was against their mothers and of these 55% of the mothers feared for their lives.

As a community and as families we need to be aware of the damage done to children when there is violence of any kind between the parents.

More information on this report can be obtained from: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Stats Can, phone 1 800 387 2251.

### ***Help Refugees!!!:***

The Niagara Chapter has been involved in projects to assist refugees who are arriving in that area.

Sharifa Al Harazi and AngieValli are requesting chapters and others to help by providing either funds or to make kits for women. The kit has personal care items such as sanitary napkins; deodorant; shampoo; soap; body lotion.

Would you please bring kits you can make up to the Conference and give to Angie or please consider financial aid so they can purchase the items for new immigrant Muslim women.

---

### **BOOK REVIEW:**

A recent publication, "BELIEVING WOMEN IN ISLAM: UNREADING PATRIARCHAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE QURAN" by Asma Barlas, professor at Ithaca College, published by University of Texas, presents a convincing argument that patriarchy is not part of the message of the Quran.

The book is written from the perspective of a "believing woman" and though she acknowledges that there are gender differences, this should not lead to inequalities. She states that "inequality & discrimination derive not from the teachings of the Quran but from the secondary religious texts, the Tafsir [Quranic exegesis] and the Ahadith".

She says,

*"The Quran's importance for women is magnified by the fact that Muslims believe that the legalization of sexual inequality found in the Shariah is in conformity with the Quran's teachings even though the Shariah departs from these teachings in significant ways."*

*P32*

This is because the historical contexts of its interpretations were done by men in a period of great misogyny. She thinks that sadly the "texts have come to eclipse the Quran's influence in most Muslim societies today" *p9* She quotes that Al Shafi, an influential Arab jurist and founder of one of the four legal schools in Sunni Islam, resolved the tensions [between Ahadith and the Quran for Tafsir] by decreeing in favour of the Ahadith and thus of the Tafsir.

Barlas argues that the fundamental error in patriarchy is to view God as "male" "he" or "patriarch" and thus to follow through with the idea that the father/husband is representative of God, as in a patriarchy. But she demonstrates that in the Quran, God's Self Disclosure is based on principles of Divine Unity, Justness and Incomparability, with no mention of God as male or female. If God is incomparable then there are no parallels between God and males, and any implication of this is heresy.

*"As Divine Discourse, the Quran is inimitable, inviolate, inerrant, and incontrovertible; however, our understanding of it is not, which is why Muslim theology distinguishes between divine speech and its earthly relationship."*

She goes on to quote other Muslim scholars that *“it is the interpretive process, both imprecise and incomplete, that is open to critique and historicization.”*

P34

Classical Tafsir provides more insights into its own social, historical and linguistic contexts than it does to the Quran.

P41

Part of the reason for the Muslim reluctance to critique classical Tafsir is its formidable hold on their consciousness.

*“Muslims view it as an integral element of the process...and is not only a commentary on the Quran, it also is a historical record of the circumstances in which a community ... emerged and developed.”*

P43

The fear is that opening up the Tafsir may open up the Sunnah/ Ahadith to a similar critique. But she thinks that there are grounds for an open discussion regarding some of the hadith which are from the 11th CE and influenced by the customs and civilizations of the new Muslim empire.

Another point she makes, as do Leila Ahmed and Amina Wadud, is that there has been a tendency to make a particular into a general practice. She uses the example of the “veil” and the rationale stated in the Quran, which have been ignored.

She concludes that as a Muslim woman, *“I have a great deal at stake in combating repressive readings of the Quran and also in affirming that Islam is not based in the idea of male epistemic privilege, or in a formally ordained interpretive community or clergy.”*

P210

---

#### **ARTICLE WORTH DISCUSSION/ CONSIDERATION:**

Afra Jalabi, who lives in Montreal, is a journalist and writes a weekly column for Al Jadeedah magazine.

#### ***TO VEIL OR NOT TO VEIL, THAT IS THE QUESTION***

by Afra Jalabi

The Oprah Show did an introduction of Islam on October 5, 2001, which was called Islam 101. Oprah, whose program is broadcast to most of the world, wanted to introduce Islam to the American public.

“Since our world was horribly shaken three weeks ago,” she told her viewers, “all eyes have focused on a part of the world and a set of beliefs that many of us know very little about. We're told that terrorism violates the teachings of Islam, but what is Islam? Who are Muslims? What are their practices?”

This was promising. Moreover, Oprah was friendly and open to what Muslims, who constituted the majority of the audience during that show, had to say. Even the expert she had asked to the show, anthropologist Akbar Ahmed, was Muslim. But did we discuss the meaning of being Muslim, or the problem of violence, or even the rage caused by American foreign policy in the region? No, the Muslim audience had more pressing things to discuss. The show proved to be a mirror of our intellectual bankruptcy, a mirror of our true obsessions and



fixations, because after a quick discussion of what Islam was about, the show veered off to discuss women in Islam, particularly the dress code. The “after show” segment, which the program puts daily on its website after the

live recording in the studio, was entirely about “Hijab.” This was both insightful and disheartening. It seemed that the gender question in Islam had become the central issue and what Muslim women wear the core of the debate on Islam, both internally and externally. It was disgraceful to see how our contemporary discourse as “modern Muslims” has become so focused on the scarf at the expense of the real paradigms that define Islam, its history and its universal values.

It is truly sad to see a certain culturally and historically specific edict –with controversial roots and implications-- becoming the *raison d'être* for contemporary Muslims while the larger parameters of Islam and its challenges are rendered into obscure shadows in the background.

In a previous show, a woman from Oprah’s audience, asked if Muslim women could take off their scarves, at least until things calmed down. Oprah had to apologize in this show for that question after a big amount of mail from Muslims was sent to her (When did Muslims start writing so much mail? If it is about the Hijab, I guess, we will write). But, Oprah did not have to apologize for something the very religious establishment in the Middle East had raised in the months following the September events. This was a legitimate question, although it was received with hostility, even when it came from Imams in the form of affirmative fatwas in the larger community, --published in *Al Majalah* magazine-- allowing women to remove their scarves in the wake of recent events.

I understand Muslim women’s sensitivity regarding the recent fatwas or the question on Oprah’s show. They feel this is who they are and they are not about to quit when the going gets tough. They perhaps even feel somewhat betrayed by such fatwas, since wearing the Hijab has not always been easy anyway in a society which has equated it with gender oppression and fanaticism. But for Muslim women living in North America, keeping the Hijab in the current crises has also represented a spirit of defiance against racism and ignorance. This shows the contextual nature of Hijab, which could be a symbol of oppression or courage and independence, depending on the circumstances. In fact, an American women organization called for American women to cover their hair on October 8th as a sign of solidarity and protest against racial harassment.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that the scholars acted out of concern and open mindedness. But I also find it interesting how, for the first time since the Hijab has become central to our identity in the last few decades, the scholars suddenly realized the relativity and conditional nature of the verses dealing with covering, and the principles of recognition and safety implied in them. --In the case of early Islam, free women were asked to cover to be distinguished from slave women while slave women were not allowed to. I do not think the well-meaning Muslim women in Oprah's audience knew anything about this or even wanted it aired in front of Oprah.

I have always hesitated to discuss the issue of Hijab in public, or its controversial historical roots I had come across in my reading of classical Islamic texts for fear of falling into the same hole of centralizing this marginal edict of Islam. I also did not want to associate myself with an issue that I consider marginal, yet so sensitive to the entire Ummah. In fact, I adopted a culturally specific code of dress for myself. I cover in Muslim circles and the Middle East and do not in the West. If I do otherwise, I will put too much time into having to explain why I am not wearing it or why I am wearing it, depending on where I am. By adopting a chameleonic way of dressing, --and not a chameleon character-- I have reduced the amount of time and energy spent discussing the scarf while creating a different context to discuss things other than what I am wearing. I also did this because, while I believe in modesty, I do not define myself through the scarf, nor shy away from it. It is simply a way of dressing that can be beautiful, empowering and protective but also, at times, limiting, misleading and impractical.

In addition, I felt, by discussing the juristic and historical facts, which informed my decision, I would be digging out some trivial nuances while invoking tremendous opposition from the community.

But after the Oprah Show, I was so disturbed that I realized this issue, at least regarding its centrality in our contemporary discourse, has to be questioned. Muslim women are still forming their identities and no one should have the final word on how we should come to terms with being Muslim in this age.

It was interesting to see the Muslim women in Oprah’s audience appeal to the ideals of pluralism and civil liberties in defence of their visibility and difference. However, when Queen Rania of Jordan appeared via satellite, there was a murmur in the audience and some of the Muslim women said that the Queen should be



covered. Is it possible that Muslims think it is acceptable to use civil liberties to practice their truth, but if given the power to decide, they will coerce others to wear and do what Muslims want? These kinds of questions are far more pressing. We have to create internal debates about liberties, democracy and the need for various efforts of interpretation within the Muslim communities. Such debates should replace the non-issues of dress codes and small edict matters in mainstream Muslim communities.

We can no longer afford to have the scarf as the core of the debate on Islam, nor as the symbol by which the level of a Muslim woman's piety or commitment to Islam is measured. We can no longer afford to have every opportunity and discussion about Islam turn into a conversation on dressing, nor can we afford as Muslim women, in our communities, to be judged and awarded degrees and ranks of religiosity according to the level of the dress code we abide by. The darker the color the better, the bigger the garment the more pious. The race of ranking morally high through fabric has no end in a path where the Taliban model seems to be the only logical conclusion. It makes more sense to judge women on matters relating to the basic tenets of Islam: regular prayer, fasting, paying alms. But even such things were not acceptable to the Prophet as criteria for assessing a person.

When one of his companions praised another companion, the Prophet said to him it was not enough to see him going up and down in prayer at the Mosque. The Prophet asked him: Have you traveled with him? Have you dealt with him in matters of money? Have you seen him angry?

When people are not noble enough to resort to the Prophetic method of assessing a person, I try to bring them back to the basic requirements, without getting lost in juristic and historical details, by citing the story of the Bedouin man who came to the Prophet and asked him what makes a good Muslim. The Prophet then listed for him the five tenets of Islam, while the Bedouin was saying, at each tenet, he would do it, but would not do more, or less. After the Bedouin left, the Prophet said, "he will succeed if he is truthful."

Interestingly, an African American woman in the "after show" segment asked precisely about this, how the list of the basic commands and prohibitions of Islam, which the show presented at the beginning, did not deal with the scarf, and I guess for her, did not reflect the level of Muslims' obsession with it. But it is not enough to have such questions thrown at us from others. Muslim women need to start thinking for themselves and learn the difference between a command and what is a social practice open to different interpretations.

The challenge, however, is that most Muslim women are not equipped to stand up and provide an alternative juristic view of the matter, and the scholars who do are not willing to discuss it in public out of concerns of inflaming Muslim sensitivities about an issue which they, and rightly so, believe is not a pressing one. Even those who are brave enough to dissent like Jamal Al-Banna face rejection and opposition from mainstream Muslims, despite being a scholar whose views are rooted within traditional Islam.

The centrality of the scarf reduces Islam to a piece of garment and places Muslims perpetually on the defensive explanatory panel. De-centralizing and de-romanticizing the scarf, I am afraid, is fast becoming increasingly urgent and necessary. The recent fatwas are revealing. The scholars would not ask Muslim women or men, to compromise easily in something they believed to be a core command of Islam. The events of the last months have, it seems, started to urge us to rethink our priorities and what defines being Muslim. This is in itself a big step.

However, for the moment, until those who are politically and juristically mature and sophisticated want to discuss this matter openly without getting bogged down by the many implications and problems it will raise, we will remain hostage to the centrality of the scarf. And until something is done, we will be stuck with the rosy and romanticized views of the sweet Muslim ladies on Oprah's show and forever caught up in the centrality of the scarf.

I am afraid that, for eternity, the question will not be for us, Muslims, why our young men are turning themselves and others into bombs, or why we do not have democracy in Muslim societies, or whether American foreign policy is based on principles of equality and liberty for all. The question will be, it seems, for a long time: To veil or not to veil.

---

#### **CHAPTERS CONTACT**

Calgary	Pervina Khan
Edmonton	Soraya Hafez
Halifax	Munawar Ahmed

London	Zanifa Ali
Montreal	Sajida Hussain
Montreal	Fehmida Khan
Niagara	Hasna Tayab
Ottawa	Farhat Rehman
Pr. Ed. Island	Farida Chishti
Peel	Atiya Ahsan
Regina	Naushaba Habib
Toronto	Barbara Siddiqui
Vancouver	Shahnaz Rahman

**BOARD**

Solmaz Sahin
Razia Jaffer
Nina Karachi Khaled
Iman Zebian
Nuzhat Jafri
Alia Hogben
Humera Ibrahim

**Canadian Council of Muslim Women  
Le Conseil Canadien des Femmes Musulmanes  
2400 Dundas Street, W., Suite 513  
Mississauga, Ontario L5K 2R8**

*E-Mail: [info@ccmw.com](mailto:info@ccmw.com)*