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Engaging Muslim Women in Civic & Social Change

21st Annual Conference

October 4, 2003

Montreal

“Those who believe and work righteous deeds, from them shall We blot out all evil [that may be] in them, and we shall reward them according to the best of their deeds.”

Qur'an 29:7

Engaging Muslim Women in Civic & Social Change

What: A Forum: To promote effective participation of Muslim women so as to create change.

When: Saturday, October 4, 2003.
8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
7:30 p.m. Dinner

Where: Crowne Plaza Hotel
505 Sherbrooke St. East
Montreal
1-800-561-4644

Program: *Keynote Speakers:*
Prof. Azizah al Hibri
Prof. Homa Hoodfar

Workshops: *Federation of Canadian Municipalities*
“Increasing Women’s Participation”

Council of Agencies Serving South Asians et al
“Social Inclusion & Determinants of Health”

Raheel Raza
“Developing a Media Kit”

Young Women on Their Issues
“In My Own Skin”

Artists: *Jamelie Hassan & Naz Ikramullah*
“Art as a Medium for Change”

Dinner Speaker: Nurjehan Mawani

Please Contact: Farida Ansari (514) 693-3650
Razia Jaffer (403) 243-7995
Farhat Rehman (613) 830-7175

FORUM 2003

InshaAllah, we will have our conference in Montreal, on the weekend of October 3, 2003. The theme of the Forum is "Engaging Muslim Women in Creating Civic and Social Change" and the keynote speakers and workshops will demonstrate how and what women can do to participate fully in various aspects of our lives.

Our keynote speakers are Azizah al Hibri, professor, lawyer and found of Karamah; Homa Hoodfar, professor and activist with the network Women Living Under Muslim Law. Nurjehan Mawani, Federal Public Service Commissioner will be our dinner speaker.

We have speakers from the Universities of McGill and Concordia, as well as speakers from organizations such as the Canadian Federation of Municipalities. A significant workshop will be on Art as a Medium of Change. CCMW wants to emphasize that art, music, sculpture and literature have always been part of Islamic civilization, in all parts of the world, and that negating or frowning on such God given beauty and talent is not true to the history of Islam.

The Ottawa and the two Montreal chapters are hosting the conference and have done a lot of work already to ensure the success of the gathering.

Please come to our conference, meet wonderful vibrant women, learn more about Islam, learn how to create change by being active participants in Canada.

VISION TV Show

In 2003, CCMW contacted Vision TV with the idea of interviewing Muslim children to hear directly from them about the effects of the impending war with Iraq.

Vision interviewed some mothers and children at a Toronto school and the children were remarkable in their openness to discuss their fears and anxieties as well as the ways they were coping. The program has been aired a number of times since. We are grateful to Sadia Zaman of VISION TV, Barbara Siddiqui, President of the Toronto chapter and the parents who let their children speak on national television.

In this same vein, we are grateful to Muhammad Ali Assaf Hassan, aged 8 years old, who has given us permission to publish his poem.

"Life doesn't frighten me
Getting lost in my mind
Get left all behind
Life doesn't frighten me at all.

Flames of a fire all above
Losing someone I really love
Life doesn't frighten me at all
Not at all, not at all, not at all"

National Muslim-Christian Liaison Committee Dinner

On May 21/03, Alia Hogben spoke at the Recognition Dinner of this Committee, where over 100 individuals attended. The Committee comprises of representatives of all the Christian churches and several of the Muslim Centres. Barbara Siddiqui represents CCMW on the Committee.

The United Church draft document "That We May Know Each Other" addresses the history of misunderstanding between Christians and Muslims and then proposes an open, tolerant perspective on which to build common ground.

Ottawa Chapter Representation at the Refugee Board

In May, 03, Farhat Rehman appeared before a Hearing of the Refugee Board on behalf of a Muslim woman. MashaAllah, she was given refugee status.

Remembering Rachel Corrie and Nuha Sweidan

On May 11/03, Nina Karachi Khaled represented CCMW, one of the sponsors, at the memorial service for these two young women who died in the fighting in Gaza.

Meeting with The Honourable Bill Graham, Minister of Foreign Affairs, The Honourable Jean Augustine, Secretary of State.

CCMW was invited to a meeting with the two Ministers for a "Dialogue on Community Relations" on April 27/03 in Toronto.

Nina attended on our behalf and expressed our views on the status of community relations since the onset of the crisis in Iraq.

Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan

This non profit women's organization is sending books for the education of Afghani women. The project is "Libraries for Afghanistan" and individuals such as author Deb Ellis, journalist Michelle Landsberg and activist Sally Armstrong are strong supporters of this project.

Please contact the group at W4Wafghan, P.O.B 32014 Bankview, Calgary, Alta, T2t 5X6. Or the website www.w4wafghan.ca

Canadian Lawyers Magazine, May 2003.

There is an article of interest to Muslims written by Judy Van Rhijn about "Islamic Law in Canada". Judy contacted CCMW and has quoted us along with other Muslims.

SALAM: Rehma Foundation

An organization has been started in Toronto to provide services to Muslim elders. A Forum was held in April 03, entitled "Aging With Dignity."

They have trips and hold a women's group called "Saheli".

Please contact them for more information.

REHMA Foundation, 875 Don Mills Road, Unit 7, North York Ont M3C 1V9. Phone 416 510 0880.

CRIAW FACT SHEET

CRIAW, the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, has published a FACT SHEET titled "Women's Experience of Racism: How Race and Gender Interact" It is full of information on how racism affects housing, jobs, self-esteem, health and every other aspect of life.

For more information contact: CRIAW at their website www.criaw-icref.ca. or phone 613 563 0681.

NOIVM RESEARCH ON IMPACT OF BILL C 36.

NOIVM [National Organization of Visible and Immigrant Minority Women] in partnership with CRIAW and NAWL [National Association of Women and the Law] is embarking on a study of the impact of Bill C36 on the lives of Muslim, Arab and South Asian women. The research will be confined to a sample of 70-80 women from three major urban centres and one semi rural area.

CCMW has contacted NOIVM to inform them that CCMW has done a community research, in 2002, with focus groups of 120 women, across Canada, and our Report provides solid information on the effects of September 11/01 on the lives of Muslim and Arab women. This related research should be of help to their project.

WOMEN'S LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

We were pleased to receive the Annual Report of WLP. This is an organization, founded by Mahnaz Afkhami, which is committed to teaching women of the "global south" to facilitate sustainable development, promote peace, to empower women and strengthen their ability to participate in civil society building. They have partnered with several NGOs of many countries and have provided leadership development programs.

For further information contact them at 4343 Montgomery Ave #201, Bethesda, Maryland 20814, U.S.A. or phone 301 654 2774.

ASSESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A STATISTICAL PROFILE:

This is a report, published in 2002, of the Federal-Provincial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women. It is a rather weighty document with lots of information.

For example, it has excerpts of the federal Criminal Code, lists of the provincial court systems and statistics broken down by provinces.

The basis for the Canadian law is that:

"Violence against women in society seriously affects the ability of women to achieve equality.

It is not only the incidence of violence against women which limits women's lives, but the fear of violence which affects their daily existence, how they dress, where they go, with whom they associate, and their mode of transportation."

A Supreme Court Justice, in 1990, stated in one of his decision:

"Laws do not spring out of a social vacuum. The notion that a man has a right to "discipline" his wife is deeply rooted in the history of our society. The woman's duty was to serve her

husband and to stay in the marriage at all costs...and to accept as her due any “punishment” that was meted out for failing to please her husband”

The Report states that the focus on women does not deny or diminish the rate of violence against men and boys; however women are the majority victims of sexual and spousal assault.

It is difficult to assess the economic costs of violence against women, but the psychological consequences are described by women as feeling upset; suffering from lowered self-esteem, depression, shame, having sleeping problems and fear for themselves and their children.

Copies of the Report are available from Office of the Status of Women, Canada.

WIFE BEATING?

CCMW was informed that there is an article on the website which is disturbing, as it has a specific narrow and somewhat inaccurate interpretation by Jamal Badawi.

As Professor Badawi is well known, we have decided to question some of his comments in the article. We do so without malice or rudeness but we can not ignore his article as the topic is extremely important for Muslim women, esp. those of us living in Canada, under Canadian law.

Jamal Badawi states, that a man after using reason, persuasion, separation of beds may resort to hitting his wife. “There are cases,

however, in which a wife persists in deliberate mistreatment and expresses contempt of her husband and disregard for her marital obligations. Instead of divorce, the husband may resort to another measure that may save the marriage. Such a measure is more accurately described as a gentle tap on the body, but NEVER ON THE FACE [his italics] making it more of a symbolic measure than a punitive one.”

He goes on to say that this is a rare exception, but it can be used in cases of “lewdness on the part of the wife or extreme refractoriness and rejection of the husband’s reasonable requests on a consistent basis [nushuz] ” Professor Badawi does state that the Prophet Muhammad never hit any of his wives.

His conclusion is that it is permissible to hit one’s wife, and that the qualifiers such as, no hitting on the face and a light tap, will ensure how the hitting is to be done and therefore this does not come under the heading of violence against women or physical abuse.

1. Professor Badawi must be aware that, in Canada, what he is espousing is defined as both physical abuse and violence against women which is against the law. He is providing grounds to strike a woman which is against the Cdn Criminal Code.
2. Why would a woman who has not listened to “persuasion, reason and separation of beds” be affected to become a “good” wife by a “gentle symbolic tap” which is not seen as punitive? It seems that he is basing his argument on the principle of “progressive discipline” and somehow the last and most severe is a gentle tap?
3. When he uses the word “nushuz” he needs to explain what he means by it, as there are several interpretations of the word. If he means that the wife is refusing sex or is committing adultery, will a tap effect any change?
4. He does not address what can be done with a husband who may be guilty of nushuz, lewdness, adultery or withholding from his wife?
5. Some “interpreters” state that Muslim husbands can not ask their wives to do any housework, cook for their husbands, breastfeed the children, or provide any of her funds to support the household. The question then arises what exactly is she contracting in her marriage? There are some who say that the meher is paid by the husband for his conjugal claims on the wife. Is this what Jamal Badawi accepts as the fundamental nature of the marriage contract?
6. It is true that parents are allowed a limited form of physical discipline of their children. So this physical discipline should also be applied to one’s partner in life? Is she to be treated as if she is child-like? What does it say about a marriage of partnership? What example does this provide to children that the father can hit his wife, albeit “a gentle tap”?
7. There is enough recent research that children who even witness physical abuse have a higher chance of becoming abusers themselves. Provincial laws, such as Ontario’s Child and Family Services Act take into consideration any violence in the family when they assess the welfare of the children.
8. Has Mr. Badawi read any of the recent scholarship by renowned Muslims on this subject and their sense that there is ground for much more intense interpretation and review of the Quranic word “daraba?” The point is that there can be different interpretations to the traditional one he is using.
8. As a “preacher” Jamal Badawi could make statements which would be beneficial to Muslim families and women instead of the topic of “hitting, striking” of one’s wife. We pray that what he preaches as being Islamic is not from a narrow perspective and that he will take into consideration what is permissible in his country of adoption.

We think he could so easily be a source of re-thinking which is Islamic and pro-woman.

MAPLE LODGE FARMS

This meat company is now providing zabiha halal meats.

Please contact them at zabihahalal@maplelodgefarms.com.

PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDAR TO ATTEND CCMW FORUM, OCTOBER 3-5/03 IN MONTREAL AT THE CROWNE PLAZA HOTEL IN DOWNTOWN MONTREAL!

APPRECIATION

We gratefully acknowledge that we will be funded for our Forum by the Dept. of Multiculturalism & the Women's Program of the Status of Women. We appreciate their continued support of our work on behalf of Muslim Women.

Please visit our website or contact any of us for information.

Thank you.

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