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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.



"Consider the sun and its radiant brightness, and the moon as it reflects the sun! Consider the day as it reveals the world, and the night as it veils it darkly! Consider the sky and its wondrous make and the earth and all its expanse! Consider the human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be, And how it is imbued with moral failings as well as with consciousness of God!"

Ash-Shams/The Sun, Sura 91.

SALAAMS AND GREETINGS

We have just completed Ramadan and we wish you and your families Eid Mubarak.

This is our first National Newsletter for 1995. In 1994, we published two newsletters, an informational package for the Conference and the actual Report of the National Conference of October 1994.

We are in the process of publishing a booklet on [Conference Planning](#) which we hope will help Chapters and the National in the organization of conferences. Copies will be forwarded to the Chapters soon and if individuals would like a copy, please contact Alia Hogben, 1-613-382-2847.

We have also kept regular communications with Chapters by sharing the National Executive's meetings minutes with you. We hope Chapter members have found these useful and we would be pleased to receive comments and feedback from you.

CCMW President Talat Muinuddin continues to represent us in many national organizations of religious and governmental partnerships.

The October 1994 Conference resulted in a CCMW Workplan based on the recommendations of

participants. The Workplan is part of this newsletter.

The Conference Report copies have been sent to Chapters, speakers, facilitators and our funders. Due to the expense of the productions (\$12-\$15 per copy) we are unable to send them to all on our mailing list. However, if you would like a copy, please contact Alia Hogben at 1-613-382-2847 and we will try to provide you with one.

EDITORIAL

So many of us, Canadian Muslim women, are first generation immigrants who come from diverse backgrounds and bring our own cultural understanding of Islam.

There is in our lives a constant dilemma about who we are and although most of us individually come to an understanding and acceptance of the various strains in us, collectively we are still in the process of searching. Undoubtedly, there will be, in Canada as elsewhere, a spectrum of interpretations of Islam for Canadian women. Hopefully, the CCMW will have a major role to play and will give voice to the moderate, reasonable understanding of Islam. We have to set ourselves the vision that, Insha'Allah, Canadian Muslim women will be a light and power for all Muslim women. That there will be an understanding which embraces the fundamentals of Islam and also the values and freedoms of Canadian society.

There are so many issues here in Canada for us, that it is appropriate to focus on these. However, we cannot isolate ourselves from what is occurring in "Muslim" countries to women.

As Dr. Zaki Badawi, head of the Muslim College, London, states:

"Very few Muslim countries have given women their full rights, and both Islamic law and the message of Islam have been violated... The movement (fundamentalism) is pushing the doctrine that is anti-woman, anti-intellectual, anti-progress and anti-science." (Goodwin, Jan. Price of Honour. Little Brown & Co., 1994, p.27).

Akbar S. Ahmed, an Islamic scholar, adds:

"The position of women in Islamic society mirrors the destiny of Islam: When Islam is secure and confident so are its women; when Islam is threatened and under pressure, so too, are they." (Goodwin, Jan. Price of Honour. Little Brown & Co., 1994, p.47)

Hasan Turabi, a Sudanese scholar who is a leading power in Sudan, wrote a booklet, Women in Islam and Muslim Society, because women were not joining the "Islamic" movement and he wanted to convince them that:

"the limitations on women's freedom in traditional society had nothing to do with Islam." (Turabi, Hasan. Women in Islam and Muslim Society. Milestones Publishers, 1991, p.3)

Turabi presents an enlightened perspective, but also quotes some Hadith which affect women negatively. For example, he quotes the hadith from Muslim in which the Prophet was reported to have said that most of the inmates of Hell will be women. Another hadith he uses is that women should not walk in the middle of the road and must bear to the sides, close to the wall.

There are blatant contradictions like these in his booklet but on the whole Turabi speaks eloquently about the rights and freedoms of Islam for women.

He uses early Muslim history to make his points, for example that many women embraced Islam independently of their men folk and continued to be married to Christians, atheists or polytheists; women attended all public meetings, festivals and congregational prayers; and the Prophet met with women in their homes, at the mosque and in public.

Turabi also discusses the aspects of the hijab and its special applicability to the wives of the Prophet:

"The commandments regarding confinement were sent down in the month of Dhul-Qaidah in the fifth year of the Hijrah. It did not affect the position of the generality of Muslim ladies."

The interpretation of "lower their outer garments on their person" is that by covering themselves, it identified Arab women as "freeborn women of good standing." (Turabi, Hasan. Women in Islam and Muslim Society. Milestones Publishers, 1991, p.24)

He further states that "Islam does not call for segregation between men and women." (Turabi, Hasan. Women in Islam and Muslim Society. Milestones Publishers, 1991, p.25)

Turabi agrees with Badawi, Ahmed and Sharabi that:

"Whenever weakness creeps into the faith of Muslim men they tend to treat women oppressively and seek to exploit them." (Turabi, Hasan. Women in Islam and Muslim Society. Milestones Publishers, 1991, p.38)

NB: Some Muslims object to the term "fundamentalism." The Oxford Dictionary defines it as

"maintenance, in opposition to modernism, of traditional or orthodox beliefs such as the inerrancy of scripture and literal acceptance of the creeds as fundamentals." This definition is not derogatory and is used by Muslim scholars such as Fazlur Rahman, Hisham Shurabi and Zaki Badawi. Some Arab countries are translating fundamentalist as "usuliyun" from "usul," meaning fundamentals. The misuse of the term is when the press describes extremists as fundamentalists.

He concludes that:

(a) many later "juristic rules and stratagems have been adopted to qualify the Shariah to suit customs and traditions;"

(b) "to broaden the scope of rules granting authority to men, while reading literally and strictly those imposing limitations on women;"

(c) "another aspect of this tendentious jurisprudence is to generalize the provisions of the Quran and Sunna that were meant to apply exclusively to the Prophet and his wives due to their unique position."

(d) "The thought and practice of Muslims have come lately to misrepresent most of the doctrinal and normative teachings of Islam on female affairs."

(e) "Traditional Muslim society, which is overimpressed by its historical decline, had developed a general preference for circumspection and cautiousness."

Turabi sees the West as degenerate and bad for women, and it is not known to me if in reality women in Sudan have gained from Turabi's theoretical views. There is another Sudanese writer, Abdullahi an-Naim, who spoke out against the actuality and implementation of Turabi and others and was exiled from Sudan.

We in Canada must be knowledgeable and vigilant about perspectives which are harmful to women because:

(a) many people/groups are trying to impose these views in Canada, and

(b) we belong to the community of Muslim women who are experiencing in their lives the implementation of such views.

Alia Hogben.

Comments and feedback are appreciated.

CHAPTERS' NEWS

Halifax

The community tried to purchase a building but it was not successful. A few women go to the gym together and hope to start other activities.

Montreal

A young Muslim woman wrote to the Quebec Human Rights Commission regarding the banning of the hijab in schools. The Commission has stated strongly that it is the right of Muslims. The Commission also criticized a Muslim school for compelling non-Muslims to put on the hijab. Although the decision has no legal weight it does have political implications for the Quebec government.

There will also be an annual blood drive for the Muslim community.

Retina

There was a workshop on budgeting and another one planned on investments. A mother and daughter tea was held and the daughters presented a skit and issues were discussed.

Networking is occurring with various groups such as the Immigrant Women and the Regina Council of Women. Jewish women were invited to the mosque and it was a successful event.

London

Elections were held in December, 1994. A pot-luck dinner was held for Ramadan and the Chapter is planning a tea and fundraising event in May. There was a pot-luck Iftar party. Bimonthly Sunday meetings are planned, with speakers.

Ottawa

In January 1995, the Chapter and area Muslim groups raised funds for the Muslim Youth of Ottawa. The Chapter also participated in the International Women's Week activities. The Annual General Meeting will be held in April 1995.

Toronto

The President, Wegdan, was a panelist in a seminar on Unity and Diversity where the Minister of Multiculturalism, Ms. Sheila Finestone, was the main speaker. The Chapter also presented a deputation to Metro Council on multicultural grants, asking that grants be sustained. An information session was held by Mariam Bhabha regarding the conference "Uprooted Muslim Women" held in Dubai.

Niagara Falls

The Chapter participated in the International Women's Day and were greatly helped by the youth. **Due** to Ramadan, it was a quiet time for the women.

THE CCMW WORKPLAN

CCMW FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

(Based on Recommendations of the 1994 National Conference Ottawa)

CCMW (National & Chapters) to ensure education issues are dealt with for Muslim students.

a) Inform Ministries of Education (Provincial) of CCMW and offer assistance to clarify issues on Muslims and Islam.

b) Notify them of local chapters.

Create links with other faith communities.

a) local initiatives such as family to family b) participate in interfaith activities

Educate/Inform other **Canadians re: Islam & Muslims**

a) media contacts

b) invite non Muslims to conferences t workshops

c) local initiatives

Maintain links with media to provide information on Islam & Muslims

a) press releases on critical issues.

b) letters to editors

c) media watch activities

d) join other Muslim organizations, e.g. Voice of Islam, Toronto.

Involve Youth in CCMW

a) introduce idea of penpals across country via newsletters

b) involve youth in conference planning

c) have youth related topics at conferences

d) chapters encourage youth participation/activities

e) mentor/buddy system in local communities.

Identify funds for scholarships for women to pursue Islamic studies.

a) local chapters collect funds, set-up eligibility criteria and set confidentiality policies

Fundraise for Specific Purposes

a) obtain local directories, names of Muslim businesses and individuals

b) explore possibility of workshop on fundraising

Explore Possibility of Links with Mosques and Women's Groups

- a) obtain names/addresses of mosques in Canada
- b) write to mosques requesting their assistance to create links
- c) network via CCMW newsletter

Explore possibility of Links with International Women's Organizations, especially Muslim Women.

- a) discuss feasibility of workload for National
- b) explore possible organizations

Possibility of a Directory of Professional Muslim Women

- a) ask chapters, if possible and interested b) request chapters to compile information and forward to National.

More Emphasis on Seniors' Issues

- a) in newsletter
- b) in conferences
- c) in chapters' activities

Plan 1995 Conference with consideration of recommendations of topics and formats

- a) Edmonton Chapter has agreed to host
- b) Initiate Planning Soon.
- c) Topics such as racism, violence vs women, etc.

One of the recommendations of the 1994 Conference was that we encourage young Muslims to become pen pals with others in different cities. We will be pleased to publish any letters or names so that others can respond, via the Newsletter. Please contact Alia Hogben at 1-613-382-2847.

We would also like to hear from seniors about their issues. We urge you to write to us. Thank you.

ORGANIZATIONS OF INTEREST

Ottawa Muslim Community Circle,
P.O. Box 5706, Merivale Depot, Nepean, Ont., K2C 3M1.

Islamic Centre of Southwest Ontario,
951 Pond Mills Road, London, Ont., (Code?)

London Muslim Mosque,
151 Oxford St. West, London, Ont., N6H 1 S3.

Islamic Canada Reflections,
Box 40052, 75 King St. South, Waterloo, Ont., N2J 4V1. Ms. Noor Grant, Editor.

Islamic Society of Niagara Peninsula,
6768 Lyons Creek Road, Niagara Falls, Ont., L2E 6S6.
Tel: 416-295-4845.

There is also a directory of Muslim organizations and mosques of Toronto which is provided free of charge:

Muslim Directory,
Jamiatul Muslemin of Toronto, 1015 Danforth Ave., Toronto, Ont., M4J 1M1

ORGANIZATIONS OF INTEREST TO WOMEN

Match International,
1102-200 Elgin St., Ottawa, Ont., K2P 1 L5.
Tel: 613-238-1312

Sisters in Islam,
172 Lorong Ma'arouf, Bangrarak Park 59000, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Attn: Sharifah Zuriah Aljeffri.

Ain o Salish Kendra, Bangladesh.
Attn: Salma Sobhan - an organization dealing with women living under Muslim law. Address obtainable from Match International.

BOOKS OF INTEREST

Kandiyoti, Deniz, ed. Women. Islam and the State.

A collection of articles on women in Turkey, Egypt, Yemen, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Goodwin, Jan. The Price of Honour.

An American journalist who lived and travelled in Muslim countries writes about the changes in women's lives and the rise of fundamentalism.

Shahrur, Muhammad. Al Kitab wal Ouran.

In Arabic only, this book is a linguistic analysis of the Quran and the author concludes that the Quran is in tune with modern philosophy and science. The book has been banned in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and Egypt. It is sold in Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Jordan.

Armstrong, Karen. Muhammad. A Biography of the Prophet, Harper, 1992.

MEDIA

"Salaam," on Vision TV, Wednesdays at 10 p.m., sponsored by the Islamic Media Awareness Group, P.O. Box 3021, MIP, Markham, Ont., L3R 6G4.

ARTICLES

Weaver, Mary Anne. "**The novelist and the sheikh**," The New Yorker, Jan. 1995.

On author Naguib Mafouz and the political situation in Egypt.

Bordewich, Fergus M. "**A holy war heads our way**," Reader's Digest, January 1995.

On the "rising tide of Islamic radicalism."

Canadian Press. "**Female circumcision believed done in Canada**," The Globe and Mail, Oct. 1, 1994.

This is a report on a conference held by the World Health Organization. The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada condemned the practice as "a violation of the female body." The WHO Conference adopted a resolution recognizing the procedure as a violation of basic human rights.

Canadian Press. "**Extremists distorted Koran's words,**" The Kingston Whig-Standard, May 7, 1994.

A Muslim feminist, Fatima Ibrahim, the president-in-exile of the Sudanese Women's Association, spoke in Toronto about the distortion of Islam by terrorists and extremists. Ms. Ibrahim was an MP in Sudan but in 1969 women's rights were cancelled and she has spent the last 16 years in and out of prison.

Braggs, Rebecca and Allan Thompson. "**Algerians appeal for Canada's aid in democracy quest and fugitives caught in crossfire between military and Islamists,**" Toronto Star, December 1994.

Algerian rights activists Khalida Messaoudi and Ghania Khelfi visited Canada to ask for help. Ms. Messaoudi talked of the extremes of the Algerian government and Islamist political faction.

There has been a lot of press coverage on the ban of the hijab in France and Quebec. One article says that in France the fears are that the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front is urging young women to wear the hijab and so the dispute will come to France. In Quebec, the immigration policy asks newcomers to recognize the predominance of the French language, the secular state and the equality of the sexes. The wearing of the hijab is seen as contradictory to this policy. Quebec does not accept multiculturalism and stresses the separation of church (religion) and state.

Another article raises the issue that the Muslim school of Montreal, which is partly government-funded, requires non-Muslim women staff to wear the hijab. This caused Frank Jones of the Toronto Star, Jan. 5, 1995, to write about tolerance: "I look for tolerance in those who demand my tolerance."

Lemon, Michelle. "**Understanding does not always lead to tolerance,**" Globe and Mail, Jan. 31, 1995.

Ms. Lemon is tolerant of the headscarf but is appalled at the women in Toronto who are totally covered, including hands and face. She views this as an affront to human dignity and self-respect of all women. She is shocked at the scene occurring in Canada as out of the cultural context.

Kurd, Rahat. "**My hijab is an act of worship - and none of your business,**" Globe and Mail, Feb. 15, 1995.

Ms. Kurd, a young Canadian Muslim, who wears the hijab, takes offence at Ms. Lemon's intolerance. She sees both the male bastion and women like Ms. Lemon as dismissing a Muslim woman's ability to act for herself. She argues that the hijab is now part of the Canadian context and is not alien.

BOARD:

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