

[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.



"Read! for your Lord is the most bountiful One who has taught the use of the Pen, taught humans what they did not know."

Quran 96:3

We are so concerned about the many tragic events occurring amongst Muslim peoples.

The battles in Afghanistan continue and peace seems slow in coming. The devastation in Palestine is heartbreaking and the west does not want to understand that bombing and razing of people's homes leads to young people willing to kill themselves.

Muslims are also not always blameless and our condolences go to the Christians in Pakistan who were attacked in their places of worship. We pray that the "new" Afghanistan will learn tolerance and acceptance of those Afghanis who are Christians, Hindus and Sikhs.

Islam teaches tolerance and Muslim history is full of examples of leaders and individuals who have fostered tolerance to all peoples and all faiths.

CONFERENCE 2002:

The conference, titled "STRENGTHENING OUR VOICES: TWENTY YEARS OF LEADERSHIP" will be held on the weekend of September 13/02, in Toronto at the Bank of Montreal's Institute for Learning, Pharmacy Ave.

We regret that a conference was not held in 2001. We had to work on many projects and were involved in so many activities, that the Board could not also organize a conference.

We are sad that there had to be a break in the annual national gathering of chapters and our friends. However, we are excited about the upcoming conference as it marks 20 years of work by CCMW on behalf of Canadian Muslim women.

It is a major achievement, for the organization and for Muslim women, that there has continued to be a group focusing on issues of interest to women. CCMW has tried to provide a pro faith, pro woman voice which has endeavoured to be inclusive, valuing diversity yet fostering our common shared values.

The purpose of the conference is to provide an opportunity for our members and interested partners to assist CCMW to review its beginnings and to plan for its future.

CCMW must examine its role critically, its past achievements and explore its future, so that we can continue to be essential and relevant within the Muslim and mainstream communities.

Please join us to hear a keynote Muslim scholar, to learn about our projects and to assist us in identifying future strategies necessary for the advancement of Muslim women.

We thank the two Toronto area chapters who will host the conference and we look forward to working closely with them.

PLEASE NOTE THAT A NEWSLETTER WITH DETAILS ABOUT THE CONFERENCE WILL BE PUBLISHED IN LATE SUMMER.

PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO CALL ON MEMBERS OF THE BOARD, OR LOCAL CHAPTERS FOR INFORMATION.

COMMUNICATION/PUBLICITY/ADVOCACY:

The Board has continued to respond to the media and to requests from the community to speak about Islam and women.

For example, Nuzhat Jafri was on a panel on Islamic Feminism, at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law, in March 2002, and at the Interfaith Dialogue in Toronto, on Scriptures in Every Day Life.

Nina Karachi Khaled represents CCMW on a Committee of Women Working with Immigrant Women, and with the Body Shop staff and the Afghan Women of Toronto.

Iman Zebian has been invited to speak on Islam at the London YMCA.

We have been interviewed for a magazine, FAITH TODAY, from Vancouver, and understand that it will be published soon. The Montreal Gazette contacted us about Female Genital Mutilation and we were able to refer the journalist to other sister organizations. The National Archives have asked for information/documents on CCMW for their files.

We were pleased to be listed in the Winter 2002 Newsletter of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women [CRIAOW]

CCMW had been a member of the Advisory Committee, [regarding the effects on Muslims and Arabs of Sept 11/01] to the Secretary of State, for Multiculturalism, with Dr Hedy Fry. There has been a change in ministers and so we have written to the new minister as we have not heard about the status of this Committee.

We are grateful to Professors Sheila McDonough and Sajida Alvi for writing an article about CCMW for the renowned journal, Muslim World. The article will be published in the May, 2002 issue.

CCMW PROJECTS:

"Voices of Muslim Women"

CCMW in partnership with several organizations initiated a community research project in Jan 2002, titled "Muslim Women's Voices" The partners are the Canadian Arab Federation; the Somali Youth Ass'n of Toronto; the Council of Muslim Communities of Canada and the Afghan Women's Organization. The

purpose of the project is to assess the impact of Sept 11/01, on Canadian Muslim women and their families. It provides women an opportunity to give voice to their own experiences and concerns, and to develop concrete and practical recommendations for all the partner organizations. The information gathered will be used in media relations and to increase awareness in the broader community. The Co-Ordinator, Samira Hussain of the Montreal chapter, has held several focus groups and will be holding others through April 2002.

The results will be published in a report by June 2002.

"In My Own Skin: Muslim Women Creating Their Own Identity"

The Resource Kit, "In My Own Skin" dealing with issues facing young Muslim women has been shown in many groups. Recently, we held a session with the Irani community in Toronto where over 60 people gathered for an excellent discussion. Another session was held at a Toronto high school under the auspices of the women's organization, Aangen.

At the conference in Sept. 2002, there will be a presentation of a workshop as well as training for trainers. This allows for more young women who can be trained to facilitate more workshops across the country.

"McGill CCMW Book"

InshaAllah, the McGill/ CCMW collaboration of a book on Islam, is nearing completion and a publisher has agreed to have it published by this fall, hopefully in time for our 20th anniversary conference. We are immensely grateful to the number of scholars who have written for this book and to the hard work of the editors, Professors Sajida Alvi, Homa Hoodfar and Sheila McDonough.

OF INTEREST:

The Guyana Caribbean Muslim Association of Ottawa held a successful session in Ottawa, at Parliament Hill, on "**WOMEN IN ISLAM: Beyond the Images**" on March 14/2002. The women speakers were Drs Riffat Hassan, Leila Ahmed, Tyseer Aboulnasr, Heshmat Mousavi, Sallama Shaker and Ms Amina Sharazee. Congratulations to the organizers, Nazreen Ali, Chair, Jane Tallim, Co-Chair and Fauzya Talib, Naomi Ali, Bibi Patel, and Almas Abdulla.

March 14: The Guyana Caribbean Muslim Association presented an event at Parliament Hill entitled, "Women in Islam: Beyond the Images - An evening of discussion and reflection on the role of Muslim women in society." Fauzya Talib of the Ottawa chapter was ADD on the team who organized this Event. The team consist of Ms. Nazreen Ali, Chair, Jane Tallim, Co-Chair, Naomi Ali, Bibi Patel, Almas Abdulla.

The panel of speakers were Dr. Leila Ahmed, Dr. Riffat Hassan, Dr. Tyseer Aboulnasr, Dr. Heshmat Mousavi and Ms. Amina Sherazee. Dr. Sallama Shaker, the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt was the Panel Moderator.

Sufi Women Organization

This is a department of the International Association of Sufism, and they publish information. They can be contacted by email: Sufiwomen@ias.org

Court Case regarding the payment of Maher.

We have heard from a Muslim woman who has won a case in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice that she must be paid her maher as a "breach of contract"

Nimet Mawani has given us her permission to inform other women about her court case and she is willing to speak to anyone interested in learning more about the proceedings.

She may be contacted at 519 896 6162 as of July 2002.

We are grateful to Nimet for sharing her own problem and its resolution to assist others.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: SOME INTROSPECTION FOLLOWING SEPTEMBER 11/02:

No one can escape the media coverage of the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York. The reprisals on Afghanistan, the detention of Muslims and Arabs in the United States and the horror stories of bad treatment at airports are known to all of us. The terrible tragedies in the Middle East seem to have heightened rather than decreased and one wonders if there will be a resolution in the near future.

In Canada, the enactment of Bill C-36 has happened. We have heard of cases of harassment and fear but the media has mostly been silent about the effects of this Bill on Muslims and Arabs. Fortunately, Muslim organizations, such as CAIR and the Canadian Islamic Congress, have been advocating on behalf of Muslims.

Amongst Muslims, there have been divergent reactions, with some focusing on the victimization aspect, others reacting angrily against the West, and others making an effort to examine our own behaviour, as the Muslim ummah.

It is so important that we, as Muslims, try to understand the total context of the anger and bitterness amongst Muslims; the attitude and actions of the "west"; the corruption of Muslim states and the lack of intellectual advancement and understanding within the Muslim ummah.

Many Muslims have addressed the issues of the West's manipulations and prejudices, some have tried to discuss the state of Muslim countries, and there have also been some writers/scholars who have spoken out about the issues within ourselves.

Scholars such as Farid Esack, Ziauddin Sardar, Khaled Abou El Fadl and Nikki Keddie have written and spoken on the sensitive issues facing Muslims from within the community. El Fadl's articles have been published in several journals and newspapers and in his recent book, *SPEAKING IN GOD'S NAME: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, he addresses the current narrow and regressive interpretations of Islamic subjects.

But sadly instead of taking a "conscientious pause" to consider "faith based objections" as recommended by Abou El Fadl, too many of us have reacted in a hostile manner, unwilling to do any self introspection.

In his book, *SPEAKING IN GOD'S NAME*, Abou El Fadl recognizes that Islamic jurisprudence is one of the crowning achievements of Islamic civilization, but he "does not believe that this richness has survived the trauma of colonialism and modernity". Instead he sees "the spread of a trenchant authoritarianism in contemporary Islamic legal determinations". He is trained in the classical legal tradition which allows him to "recognize the remarkable amount of evidence ignored or suppressed by some organizations which present opinions as if they are the one and only will of God". He differentiates between "authority and authoritarianism" and states that if scholars and jurists would have as their guiding principles "five contingencies of honesty, self restraint, diligence, comprehensiveness and reasonableness" then many of the fatwas expressed as the will of God would not be so easily accepted.

Abou El Fadl, along with many others, is concerned about the wealth of oil rich Saudi Arabia and the dissemination of their version of Islam. He says, "Although I cannot empirically verify this claim [the reemergence and near dominance of the puritan Wahhabi movement] my own distinct impression is that the symbolisms, logic, and language of the Wahhabi movement are exceedingly widespread in the Muslim world".

In his studies, he finds that the method and processes of the Wahhabi school are quite dissimilar to the methods and processes of classical Islamic law.

Nikki Keddie, another scholar, has an article on the Gulf 2000 List Server, which is worth discussion.

She defines "fundamentalism" as the "political use of conservatively interpreted religion and not merely the kind of religious adherence to doctrines considered foundational or fundamental, which is how the term was first coined in the early 20th century United States".

She goes on to say that "In no country where Islamists have taken power or increased their power has the result been greater freedom for all or rights for women; only in the sphere of social equity can some Islamists claim to have advanced over what formerly existed".

She warns that "It is the purest of wishful thinking to believe that if an Islamist group comes to power, however many liberals and leftists have rallied to it, that the result will be an increase in freedoms for women or for anyone who espouses ideas disliked by the government ... The danger of leaving power in Islamist hands, have been amply demonstrated by the spread of Islamic madrasas in Pakistan, often financed by Saudi Arabia, which have spread the most reactionary and aggressive forms of Islam..."

Another scholar, Abdal Hakim Murad, a Research Fellow at Oxford University, in *Islamic Spirituality: The Forgotten Revolution* argues that Muslims must revive the spiritual life rather than being "fixated on visible manifestations of morality". He states that a response to "fanaticism" must be "grounded in an act of collective muhasabha, or self examination".

In contradiction to those who argue against any changes, or "bida", he thinks that "knowing Islam's ability to acknowledge and assimilate novelty" ... "we can understand how Muslim civilization was able so quickly to produce novel academic disciplines to deal with new problems, as they arose".

His opinion is that the current antagonism against any innovation is based on misunderstanding of Islamic thought and due to "the influence of the well financed neoHanbali madhab called wahabism, whose leaders are famous for their rejection of all possibility of development".

He answers the question as to why young Muslims are attracted to "ferocious activism". The rationale is because "The Islamic world is passing through a most devastating period of transition. A history of economic and scientific change which in Europe took 500 years, is, in the Muslim world, being squeezed into a couple of generations..the dislocation of modernity are common to every Muslim society". This insecurity and a loss of life's signposts are often filled by instant certainty, feelings of being born again and of belonging to a group of "revivalists".

He concludes that this is inadequate and that a realistic hope for Muslim survival is to restore a "middle way" by acknowledging the importance sufism and the "poverty of fanaticism".

These are some opinions and there is room within Islam for diversity and discussion without being rigid or judgmental. We must have open dialogue if we are to progress.

SOME NEW BOOKS

El Fadl, Abou K.: **Speaking in God's Name.**

One World, Oxford, 2001.

El Guindi, Fadwa: **Veil: Modesty, Privacy & Resistance.**

Berg, Oxford International Publications, Oxford, 1999.

Fernea, E.W. **In Search of Islamic Feminism.**

Bantam Doubleday, N.Y., 1998.

Menocal, M.R. **The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain.**

Little, Brown & Co., 2002.

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