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ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE REPORT

FORUM

ENGAGING MUSLIM WOMEN IN CIVIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE

OCTOBER 3 - 5, 2003
CROWNE PLAZA
MÉTRO CENTRE
505, rue Sherbrooke est

Montreal, Quebec

Appreciation

Canadian Council of Muslim Women gratefully acknowledges the support of the Multiculturalism Program, Department of Canadian Heritage and the Women's Program, Status of Women AND Canadian Women's Foundation and its Partners

“Never have we sent forth any apostle, otherwise than with a message in his own people's tongue, so that he might make the truth clear to them.”

Quran 14:4

Shirin Ebadi

Our best wishes to the Irani lawyer who won the Nobel prize in 2003.

To a reporter's question: “Do you have any message for Muslim women?”

Shirin Ebadi responded

“Yes, keep on struggling. Do not believe that you are condemned to inferior status. Look carefully in the Quran so that the oppressors will not succeed in misleading you with their commentary and their selective quotes. Do not let people masquerading as clerics claim that they have a monopoly on understanding Islam. Teach yourself and invest your best efforts in competing in all areas of life. Allah created us equal, and when we struggle for equality, we are doing what Allah wanted us to do.”

Source: Al-Sharq Al-Awsat [London] October 19/03.

Forum:

The conference held in Montreal on Oct 3-5/03, was titled “ENGAGING MUSLIM WOMEN IN CIVIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE.”

The keynote speakers were Professors Azizah al Hibri and Homa Hoodfar. The panel discussion provided the

context for the day with speakers professor Bilal Kuspinar, Hanny Hassan, Noren Majeed and Riad Saloojee. We partnered with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians in Toronto on projects. The plenary on Art in Islam was wonderful as the evaluations stated that it was the first time there was a focus of art and music in Islam at a conference.

The Forum was a great success as demonstrated by the evaluations we received from the 200 participants, and from the follow up work which resulted from the Forum.

We are most appreciative of the Montreal and Ottawa chapters' hosting of the event, and thank our funders, the Status of Women, the Multiculturalism Program and the Canadian Women's Foundation.

CCMW'S WORKPLAN:

ACTIVITY&OUTPUTS TIMELINE

MID TERM OUTCOMES [results achieved while project is on-going.]

Forum:

To increase integration/participation of Muslim Women so that they can be effective agents of change in society.

Planning/Preparation "Engaging Muslim Women in Civic and Social Change"	May 03-Oct 03
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OUTPUTS

Forum held in Montreal Oct 30/03

Follow Up of Forum: Projects&Partners CASSA; Fed Cdn Municipalities	Nov 03/Aug 04
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Forum report completed and submitted	Jan 04
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French translation to be completed.	March 04
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Précis of Report on website	Feb 04
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Capacity Bldg

To increase effectiveness/visibility & provide a voice for Muslim Women:

OUTPUTS

Develop agenda with timelines for capacity bldg activities Regional Mtgs.

Regional Meetings: dates and agenda set. April 2/04 Toronto; April 23 Vancouver; May 28 Halifax; June 11 Calgary; June 25 Montreal.	Jan 04
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Initial Notice provided to chapters	Jan 04
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Agenda set and chapters to be notified.	Feb 04
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Recruit/Select Ex Director and Admin Ass't.	Dec 03
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Board Mtgs Set: Jan 23;March 26;May 7; July 16/04

Increase Use of Technology: Website; list serve;	Ongoing
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Communication: Newsletter, Forum info on website.	Feb 04
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Needs Assessment **2004**

To assess Muslim women's needs and assess increased participation/presence in the community, e.g. in politics, community organizations, educational institutions and business world. As well, to follow up on identified needs.

OUTPUTS

Civic participation survey completed at Forum with chapters	Oct 03
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Strategic Plan implementation to include chapters,	Regional mtgs
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Meeting with Stats Can consultant data collection	Jan 04
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To hire researcher	March 04
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Needs assessment discussion at Regional Mtgs	April on
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Report to be completed	Dec 04
Final report to be submitted to Dept	March 05
Follow Up/Evaluation of Identified Needs	March 06

Media Training

To produce media/communication products to foster a positive awareness of Muslim women as active participants in Canadian society

OUTPUTS

Media training of Board members.	Jan 04
Preparation of Media Kit for Regional mtgs with chapters. Update Handbk.	Regional Mtgs
Board member to train chapters re media relations.	Regional Mtgs
Identify Speakers for Media	Regional Mtgs

Fact Sheets & Position Papers

To foster greater understanding of issues faced by Muslim women by publishing 3 facts sheets and 8-10 position papers on critical issues, e.g. racism/discrimination.

OUTPUTS

Recruit/Select researchers for FACT SHEETS Research/Writing of Fact Sheets:	Jan-Feb/04
1.Data and Facts about Muslim Women in Canada; 2.Political Participation of Muslim Women; 3.Bias and Discrimination Against Muslim Women.	July 04
Position Papers with McGill's Institute of Islamic Studies. e.g. on gender equality, ,leadership, dress code, segregation.	Dec03-Dec 04
Distribution/circulation to educational facilities, libraries, Faith organizations, community agencies, media and gov't.	2004-05

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

To achieve CCMW's objectives to assist Canadian Muslim women, we developed a Strategic planning to identify and meet the needs and the means to achieve these, e.g. advocacy/collaboration.

Advocacy/Collaboration

OUTPUTS

Collaborate on project re Employment of Muslim Women with WOMEN WORKING WITH IMMIGRANT WOMEN.	Jan-Dec 04
Collaborate with other women's groups, e.g. newly formed Women's Political ConneXion [lobby for increased women in politics] Afghan Women's Organization, NOIVMWC, NAWL, NCWC etc.	
Continue with Kit: In My Own Skin to increase awareness of issues facing young women.	Ongoing

Emerging need: the proposed implementation of Shariah in Canada.

Develop position paper on the issue.	
Initiate project in collaborate NOIVM & NAWL.	Dec 03 on
Apply for funding from Status of Women for project.	Jan 04
Hire legal students for research.	
Write final paper in accessible English, translate into Urdu, Arabic, Farsi Somali.	
Set up a list serve of interested parties.	
Respond to media requests.	
Other activities will be identified after research completed.	

Report On The Shariah Issue: Summary Of Activities

“The Law is not a still pool merely to be tended and occasionally skimmed of accumulative debris, rather it should be looked upon as a running stream, carrying society’s hopes, and reflecting all of its values, and hence requiring a constant attention to its tributaries, the social and other sciences, to see that they feed in sustaining elements”

Chief Justice Bora Laskin.

Background

In December 03, we heard via the media that a group of Muslims, in Toronto, were proposing the implementation of arbitration boards for Muslims, and that these boards would use the Shariah for personal law matters.

The board quickly drafted a Position paper because it was necessary to have a cohesive approach to the questions from the media.

The Paper has been revised as of Feb 12/04, is on our website and has been distributed widely.

CCMW Position

The paper outlines our concerns and has been used as the basis for discussion with the media.

Contact with Mumtaz Ali

A long discussion with Mr. Mumtaz Ali, the founder of the Islamic Institute of Civil Justice [arbitration board] did not assuage CCMW concerns.

The motivation for this proposal is unclear, only that he believes that Muslim should live under Shariah laws wherever they reside.

If it is correct that Muslims should live under Shariah {Muslim law} then why focus on only some aspects of personal law, why not all the other laws, such as criminal law as well? Unanswered questions are regarding which and whose Shariah will be applied in Canada, what will the training be of the arbitrators and most fundamental of all is the question of how Muslim women will be better served under Shariah as distinct from Canadian law?

Chapters

The paper and later an update has been provided to all chapters with the request that media inquiries be directed to the board for consistency of the message.

Collaboration

CCMW will collaborate on the Shariah project with NAWL [National Ass’n of Women and the Law] and with NOIVMWC [Nat’l Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada].

We want to proceed with legal research on a number of related issues. The intent is to produce some papers resulting in one paper which will be in easy to read English, translated into a number of other languages and distributed widely. The paper will provide Muslim women with sound accurate information on which they can base their own decisions.

We have also heard from the group of Irani women who are against the Sharia implementation and have put a petition on the internet. We understand that over 1,000 people have signed the petition. CCMW’s concern is that the petition’s language can be seen as anti Muslim and we have expressed our concerns to the organizers.

They are holding a day of speakers in Toronto, on March 7/04, and have invited CCMW to speak as well.

We have also heard from the Humanist Ass’n who are also against the Sharia because their perspective is that religion and state should remain distinct.

Amongst the groups who are supporting us, are Rights and Democracy in Montreal, the MCC [Muslim Cdn Congress] and WLUML [Women Living Under Muslim Law].

A board member, Nina is to be on the Muslim T.V program hosted by Tarek Fatah, in mid February/04.

Individuals have also come forward to support CCMW, such as young Muslim lawyers, a young man from the U.S and a journalist from Pakistan.

Media

There has been an extraordinary amount of interest from the media and what has been positive about this is that CCMW has now increased visibility and journalists are phoning for other stories as well.

The list of contacts includes:

CBC radio and TV; French and English.

Vancouver's CKNW

Il Manifesto newspaper in Rome.

Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, German and Austrian journalists.

Reuters and Time magazine.

Toronto Star, The Hamilton Spectator and so on.

Politicians

We have written to ministers of justice of the federal and provincial gov'ts but have not heard back.

Alia had the opportunity to speak at the 15th Anniversary of the Multiculturalism Act in Feb 0, at the Parliament Building and did raise our concerns about the proposed implementation of Shariah personal law.

Jurisfemme Journal

CCMW article will be published in this journal in March/04.

Alia is also attending a conference of NAWL, in March, on issues of law and women.

Next steps

- To proceed with the legal research with NAWL and NOIVMWC.
- Wait to hear from the politicians, if not soon, contact them again.
- Continue media coverage and discussion with other groups.

Other Board news

The board was invited to the CANADA AND ISLAM IN ASIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY conference held in Montreal 24-26/03. This was sponsored by the Department of Foreign Affairs, CIDA, the Aga Khan Foundation and the McGill University Institute of Islamic Studies. It was a very interesting conference as it gathered Muslims from all over South and South East Asia.

In Febraury 04, Alia was invited to be one of the speakers at Parliament Hill on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Multiculturalism Act. The Minister is the Honourable Jean Augustine.

Nina Karachi Khaled will be on the Muslim Chronicle TV show, in Feb 04.

Nuzhat Jafri will represent CCMW at a meeting arranged by the Dept of Foreign Affairs for Muslim journalists from across the world.

Forum and AGM Reports

The reports have been mailed to the funders, chapters and speakers.

There will be a French translation of the Plenary session and this will be on our website.

If you would like a copy of either reports, please give us a call or email us.

Chapters News

A member of the Edmonton chapter, Kishwer Ghani, is active in the Edmonton Multilingual Library, through the group called Bazm-e-Sukhan Literary and Cultural Society. The group promotes Urdu and works for better communication and between scholars, writers and other artists.

A Regina chapter member, Nargis Bhimji, talked about Ramadan at a news conference at the Bay, one of the stores, along with IKEA, which recognized the fasting of Muslims during Ramadan. Nargis was quoted in the Press Release of The Bay in Regina.

Dr Naiyer Habib, the Regina President, Naushaba's husband, was quoted in the Toronto Star, saying that he appreciated this initiative to recognize Muslims in Canada.

Erum Afsar, a member of the Calgary chapter was a speaker at the conference CANADA AND ISLAM IN ASIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY. The conference was held in Montreal on September 24-26/03 and was organized by the Department of Foreign Affairs and CIDA.

Donation for Books for Libraries.

CCMW is grateful to the Noor Cultural Centre of Toronto for their generous donation of funds which enabled us

to place 40 copies of the book MUSLIM VEIL IN NORTH AMERICA in main libraries across the country.

Please let your communities know that these books are available so that they are well read!

Congratulations Ayshi Hassan!

Ayshi Hassan of London, Ontario, was honoured by the Mayor of London as a humanitarian. Ayshi has helped refugees for 16 years at the Cross Cultural Learner Centre.

Ayshi is the mother of a number of well known children, amongst them the artist Jamelie, the author Marwan and the social activist Hanny.

Book: Muslim Veil in North America

This is the book which was edited and written by scholars from Concordia and McGill Universities.

MashaAllah, we have heard that a number of universities are using the book as a text.

For example, Ziba Mir Hussein is using it as the New York University and Kisha Ali is using it as Harvard.

Congratulations to the editors, Sajida Alvi, Homa Hoodfar and Sheila McDonough as well as the writers!

Of Interest:

Student Loans for Refugees.

The federal law changed so that refugee students now have access to deferral student loans.

For more information please contact:

Getting_landed@cpj.ca or studentloans@cpj.ca

New website on Fundamentalisms

A joint initiative of the Association of Women's Rights in Development [AWID] Women Living Under Muslim Law [WLUML] and Rights and Democracy has launched a website on fund-amentalisms.

Please visit the WHRnet site at

<http://www.whrnet.org/fundamentalisms/> or email: wluml@wluml.org

The Feminist Alliance for International Action [FAFIA]

The group works to further women's equality in Canada through implementation of international human rights agreements.

For further information contact:

Nancy Peckford 613 232 9505 # 222 or via email npeckford@fafia-afai.org

or their website <http://www.fafia-afai.org>

United Church of Canada

A draft on Muslim- United Church dialogue was approved for study and feedback across the church by the 38th General Council on August 13/03.

The statement says that the church "acknowledges a long history within Christianity of hostility and misunderstanding toward Muslims and Islam and seeks to commit itself to a journey of reconciliation with Muslims..."

This remarkable document was developed with Muslims and one of these was Hanny Hassan of the Canadian Council of Muslim Communities.

Canadian Arab Federation

This organization is offering language instructions to newcomers [LINC] as well as job search workshops.

Please contact CAF at 416 493 8635 or linc@caf.ca

REHMA Foundation.

This is a community service of Muslims and other seniors in Toronto, located in North York. They provide a number of services free of charge and in different languages so please contact them.

Phone 416 510 0880 or email Rehma@rehma.org

Mariam Bhabha

Mariam was written up in Homemaker's Magazine, Oct 2003, because of her work in Palestine. Mariam and her husband has returned to Palestine to work on human rights issues.

We pray that her work is successful and that they return safely to Canada.

StatsCan Report

A recent survey by StatsCan showed that discrimination is faced by a number of minorities in Canada. Arab Canadians are targeted due to the attack in the U.S in 2001.

Audrey Jamal of the Canadian Arab Federation is quoted as saying that children want to change the colour of their skin and their names. About 3 million Canadians call into the category of "visible minority." Blacks and native people were also included in the survey.

Indian women build their own mosque

In December 2003, the Hindustan Times newspaper reported that women, in the village of Parambu in Tamil Nadu state, have formed a group and has acquired land to build a mosque. The women state that they are fed up with sexist decisions made by male authorities, called jamaats, particularly in divorce cases.

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board vice chair Maulana Kalbe Sadiq said the women had every right to construct a mosque.

Dial a Fatwa

A member of CCMW, Raheel Raza, a journalist in Toronto, has for many years held a celebration for the Prophet, Milaad un Nabi. Raheel had heard that the "grand mufti" of Saudi Arabia had pronounced that any celebration of the Prophet's life was heretical.

She was notified in October 2003, that a fatwa had been issued against her because she celebrated an occasion for the Prophet's life. The fatwa came from an American organization, Al Amana [American Muslim Association of North America-the Islamic Centre for Reaching and Preaching] who boasts of issuing fatwas. Raheel was even given a number for her fatwa and a 1 800 number.

We are appalled and wonder at the intimidation and waste of time of such people.

On a Pleasanter Note

A good male friend of CCMW [thank you, Shahbaz] sent us this message and we pass it on to you for a laugh.

Rules from a male perspective:

Learn to work the toilet seat. You are a big girl. If it is up, put it down. We need it up, you need it down. You don't hear us complain about you leaving it down.

Ask for what you want. Let us be clear on this one: subtle hints do not work. Strong hints do not work. Just say it.

Come to us with a problem only if you want help solving it. That is what we do. Sympathy is what your girlfriends are for.

A headache that lasts for 17 months is a problem. See a doctor.

Anything we said 6 months ago is inadmissible in an argument. In fact all comments become null and void after 7 days.

If you think you are fat, you probably are. Don't ask us.

You can either ask us to do something or tell us how you want it done. Not both. If you already know best how

to do it, do it yourself.

Christopher Columbus did not need directions, neither do we.

All men see in only 16 colours, like Windows default settings. Peach, for example, is a fruit, not a colour, pumpkin is also a fruit. We have no idea what mauve is.

If we ask what is wrong and you say “nothing” we will act like nothing is wrong. We know you are lying but it is not worth the hassle.

If you ask a question you don’t want an answer to, expect an answer you don’t want to hear.

When we have to go somewhere, absolutely anything you wear is fine.

I am in shape. Round is a shape.

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
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