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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.



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### Editorially Speaking

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#### **The Status and Role of Canadian Muslim Women**

The status and role of a Muslim woman is frequently under discussion. Does she have a voice in the purchase of the family car or the selection of her mate? Is she permitted by religion to seek employment outside the home and to work with other men and women? Can she participate in labour union or other political activities? Is she an independent person who has inalienable rights and responsibilities? To the best of my understanding as a Muslim woman, the answer to these questions is YES, provided her dignity is not compromised.

It cannot be otherwise. Islam is a universal faith, not a religion for men only. The objective of all Islamic teaching is to glorify God Almighty by making all human beings decent, peaceful, just and responsible. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught us that all humans, man and woman alike, are endowed by their Creator with dignity, talents and strengths which are necessary and sufficient to lead a full life as an individual, in the family and in the community if they follow Divine guidance. Each one of us is personally accountable for our deeds. Our acts will be justly rewarded regardless of our sex. Muslim men and women are required to seek knowledge, to practice righteousness, to promote justice, goodness and generosity and to prohibit obscenity and mischief. In the Islamic scheme of things, matrimony is the ideal state and it is sacred, permitting no extramarital liaisons whatsoever. In the family, the husband and wife share the joys and chores of self fulfillment, maintaining the household and the upbringing of children. It is a challenging task and not an easy one.

Traditionally, the Muslim society provided for separate facilities for female education. Further, as the

responsibility for the full maintenance of women (as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers) rested on men, the main focus of women's interests was household management and childcare. A good wife was respected as the greatest gift of God and the mother's feet were held higher in esteem than the heaven. But with the changed sociocultural environment in Canada, and elsewhere, Muslim women today have greater opportunities for using their talents beyond the home as workers, creative artists, engineers, community leaders and missionaries of peace and justice (Dai's of Islam). Such participation is not only permitted in Islam but it is also considered as an act of worship if the interactions are governed by modesty, integrity and submission to God in the service of human kind. The noble examples of Khadijah, Ayesha and Fatimah (may God be pleased with them) reassure us that Muslim women have a legitimate role to play in business, national affairs, and in the struggle against oppression and injustice.

At the same time, we must recognize that because of the many physiological-psychological differences which exist between men and women, the rights and obligations of men and women are not identical in all respects, but they are appropriate and equitable. In general, man is recognized as head of the family and he is responsible for the maintenance and protection of the family and its dignity. He is thus accorded a degree of esteem above that of the wife. But it does not make woman inferior or subordinate as it is often misinterpreted or misrepresented by some. Muslim history abounds in instances when the decision of a woman prevailed over the opinions of numerous scholarly and respected men. Today, when women are better educated and more competent in their selected fields, their contributions and judgments have to be recognized. Family decision making is much more mutual and interdependent today than it has been before.

Canadian Muslim women have a unique responsibility to study, understand and assert their role in the family and in the community. They can and must do so through mutual consultations, guided by the spirit of the Al-Quran and the Sunnah (the Prophet's way) as it applies to our times. In this search for identity, we invite Muslim sisters from home and abroad to work toward a functional, moderate and rightful consensus.

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### **A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT**

***Dr. Lila Fahlman***

In the last ten years since the International Year of Women, women around the world have come a long way in developing coping skills to make the most of the problematic society in which they live. Muslim women in Canada, particularly since the formation of the C.C.M.W. in May of 1982, have also increased their level of consciousness; have interacted with other Muslim women in their communities and other centres in Canada; have presented briefs to the Committee on Visible Minorities, to the C.R.T.C.; have developed the courage to discuss sensitive issues; have reached out to other women's groups and to Muslim women in general. We are only three years old and can be proud of the accomplishments of our women in our Chapters across Canada. Let me stress the need to COMMUNICATE. For only 34¢ we can share ideas from Vancouver to St. Johns, Newfoundland. What a tremendous challenge! Take time now, ask your council member to put you in touch with another community. Let's reach out, NOW.

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### **THE CANADIAN COUNCIL OF MUSLIM WOMEN**

On April 24, 1982 Muslim women came from across Canada to a Founding Conference, in Winnipeg, Manitoba of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women. The Council presently has twenty Chapters in operation or in process of formation, extending across Canada, from Vancouver, British Columbia to St. John's, Newfoundland.

C.C.M.W.: Box 128, Seba Beach, Alberta, Canada T0E 2B0

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### **Council News**

#### **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**

The Executive of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women met on June 29-30, 1985 at the University of Guelph, concurrently with the Annual Convention of the Council of Muslim Communities of Canada. The meetings were attended by Dr. Lila Fahlman (Chair, Edmonton), Omaira Mansi (Vice Chair, Montreal), Nejat Hassan (Vice Chair, London), Talat Muinuddin (Secretary, Toronto), Raffina Ali (Treasurer, Toronto), and Kausar Chaudhry (Asst. Secretary, St. John).

Dr. Fahlman chaired the meetings. The agenda included the following:

1. Organization and Communications
2. Finances

3. Newsletter: The Canadian Muslim Woman

4. Affiliation with C.M.C.C.

5. Future Plans

#### Summary of Decisions

1. a) Dates for meetings should be set up and communicated to the members at least one month in advance, giving details of place, dates, times and agenda. Notice of any items to be added to the agenda should reach the secretary one week before the meeting.

(b) If two or more members of the Executive cannot attend the full meeting (at least 1.5 days), the meeting should be rescheduled.

c) Delegates should make their own travel arrangements and make use of special reduced rates.

d) Meetings should be conducted according to Roberts' Rules of Order.

e) No member of the executive can overrule an executive decision.

f) All records should be handed over to the new Executive within 15 days of election. Dr. Fahlman will help secure the records from previous secretary.

2. a) Travel expenses should only be paid to the delegates who attend the full meeting unless exceptional circumstances curtail the attendance and the Executive makes special authorization.

b) Members are responsible for any phone calls which they make due to failure to meet deadlines.

3. a) Next issues of the newsletter, The Canadian Muslim Woman, should be out in July and October. b) The final issue should focus on Muslim Youth.

4. a) We appreciate the final ratification of our status as a full voting member of the Board of Directors of the Council of Muslim Communities of Canada.

b) Whenever possible, we should hold meetings concurrently with C.M.C.C. conferences or convention to maximize interaction and mutual consultation among all Islamic workers.

5. a) The Executive discussed future projects and asked Nejat Hassan to explore available grants. Other members of the Executive were urged to look into alternative sources of funding.

b) Next meeting of the Executive will be held in London toward the end of October, 1985.

c) Talat Muinuddin informed of her appointment as a member of the Ontario Advisory Council on Multiculturalism and Citizenship and of the National Christian and Muslim Liaison Committee. She will be away from Canada during July and August, 1985, visiting Pakistan and performing the Hajj.

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#### **C.M.C.C. ELECTIONS**

The C.M.C.C. Board of Directors elected Dr. Ahmed Fuad Sahin (Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.) as chairman and Mr. Haroon Salamat (Toronto) as treasurer for a two year term. Dr. Sahin has served the Muslim Ummah, in Canada and abroad, for twenty years in many roles. He has always supported C.C.M.W. Mr. Salamat is the chairman of Toronto and Region Islamic Congregation.

Dr. Sahin's address is R.R. 1, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario LOS 1JO - Tel. (416) 262-4103.

#### **DR. FAHLMAN, PRESIDENT OF C.C.M.W. AT THE CONFERENCE ON IMMIGRANT WOMEN**

Dr. Lila Fahlman, President of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, participated in the conference on Immigrant Women in Ottawa in June, 1985. Dr. Fahlman, Christine Lasalle, and representatives of other women's groups met with Multiculturalism Minister, Jack Murta, Immigration Minister, Flora MacDonald and Secretary of State, Walter McLean.

Dr. Fahlman emphasized the need for English language instruction for immigrant women at home or in the neighbourhood. Fluency and facility in English or French is vital for the employment or promotion of immigrant women who are often underemployed. She pursued this theme with Honourable Jack Murta at the dinner meeting which followed.

#### **ONTARIO ADVISORY COUNCIL ON MULTICULTURALISM AND CITIZENSHIP**

Talat Muinuddin, editor of The Canadian Muslim Woman, has been appointed to the Ontario Advisory Council on Multiculturalism and Citizenship. Council members are appointed by Order-in-Council. They meet regularly, monitor government policies and programs which deal with multicultural concerns and citizenship and advise the Government of Ontario. Honourable Dr. Lilian Munroe is the new Minister for

Multiculturalism and Citizenship, with Honourable Tony Ruprecht as Minister of State. We welcome these appointments and promise them full cooperation in making Ontario a better place to live and work for all.

## **Acknowledgement**

The report on C.C.M.W.'s Conference on Elderly Women in a Multicultural Society which was published in the spring issue of the Canadian Muslim Woman was prepared by Mrs. Ayesha Khan (Toronto). We regret the omission of her name with the report in the earlier issue. Mrs. Khan is an active member of the Toronto Chapter of C.C.M.W.

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## **Brief to Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission from Canadian Council of Muslim Women**

In the Islamic culture, the women have a privileged role in sustaining and promoting the psycho-social, educational and spiritual integrity of other family members particularly the children. Therefore some of their concerns expressed below will center around issues related to the raising of Muslim children in a non-discriminatory environment.

It is the sincere hope of the C.C.M.W. that the issues, views and suggested actions articulated below be perceived and acted upon within the context of all the above circumstances.

## **MAJOR ISSUES AND CONCERNS**

### **Media and Performing Arts**

We are deeply concerned about the severely distorted picture of the Islamic culture and its racial factors which is relayed to the public by mass media.

It is a well known fact that mass media, particularly television, is the most powerful vehicle for propagating knowledge, introducing sense of proportion to the news, conferring status, labeling behaviour, legitimizing issues, shaping what we believe about our world and therefore, affecting attitudes and values of the public. Media is a deadly weapon in the wrong hands and if the information is inaccurate. In short, mass media is the quickest and best vehicle for creating, and for adding to, social justice.

Currently the media's treatment of Muslim women and culture is characterized by severe omissions and inaccurate commissions or additions. The media fluctuates between

- a) omitting to communicate any information about Muslim and Muslim women, OR
- b) focusing on misconceptions and inaccurate information derived from unauthorized translated material, frequently obtained from non-Muslim sources and through a third party.

The media has not caught up yet on the existence of some people called scholars in Islam who would provide accurate sources of information and appropriate clarification.

The social role of Muslim women has been particularly misconceived and publicized. The Honourable members of this committee would undoubtedly recognize the extent to which the notions of Polygamy and Harem are being unjustly publicized as forming the crux of, and the characteristic core of the man/woman relationship in the Islamic culture.

Muslim women and girls are being socially victimized as a result. The following incident is presented in order to illustrate the magnitude of this social injustice.

In the week of September 12th, 1983, on a regular day program specially for women, on one of our French Canadian television networks, a journalist who traveled through Muslim countries was interviewed by the host of this particular program. In the course of the interview she shared at least three radically inaccurate pieces of critical information pertaining to the above mentioned misconceptions when discussing the annual pilgrimage to Mecca - which is one of the five pillars in Islam and in which certain rituals are observed as part of the prayers and ceremony. She declared that the frequency with which the man performs this ritual is related to the number of women he is married to or his Harem. The higher the number of women he is married to, the higher the frequency with which he performs this particular holy ritual. In other words, a man who engages in polygamy has a higher status in the religion and the Muslim community and insinuating a false image of women as objects to be acquired for status. To say the least this violates the essence of Islam, for polygamy is religiously prohibited except in certain well defined situations and its intent is to protect certain categories of men and of women from having to resort to adultery, other category of women from being dumped by their husbands in search for satisfactions these

women cannot provide during prolonged illness. Polygamy is only allowed when fairness is insured and women may willingly accept to remain married to the man or request divorce and remarry as they have the right to.

The same journalist went further in that interview to indicate that the Arabic name HARAM given to the holy mosque at the pilgrimage site is named after the word HAREM commonly portrayed by the media to mean the women who belong to man through marriage. HARAM and HAREM are two different Arabic words. Knowledge of linguistic differences would eliminate at the outset any imaginary confusion. HAREM in Arabic is a synonym for women, HARAM is the name given to the holy mosque and its meaning relates to part of the act of pilgrimage.

To put it politely, this whole set of information given to the public is full of inaccuracies and reflects ignorance of the worst kind. To name specific problems:

a) The mass media has managed to create an image of the Muslim woman as a passive individual, a property to be owned by Muslim men and the more he owns of them the better. She is of an inferior status, has no decision making power, is vulnerable to her husband's indulging activity of acquiring other harems anytime. The place where she is of use is at home, cooking and washing diapers and she has neither the right to full education nor is she allowed to become an active participant of the working force at large. This image has resulted in stereotype which precedes Muslim women and girls wherever they go. Women who adhere highly to the principle of modesty in clothes are labeled in the streets as harem one sees in the movies who lack sophistication of the modern world despite the fact that there are many of them who are part of the highly educated strata of the society. Rarely has this been mentioned in the media.

b) The mass media has been portraying the Arabs as both Muslims and as aggressors who have been associated with terrorist activities. In addition to that with the political unrest in some of the Muslim non Arab countries, some Muslim leaders and quickly Muslims in general, are coined with cruelty, violence and practice of unjustifiable killing. And news of Islamic culture and practices are visible only when there are major difficulties. The implicit conclusion is that Muslims are mostly Arabs and generally non-peaceful, aggressive people. Muslim women are victims of polygamy with no rights to request divorce and remarry and men have unlimited rights with no corresponding responsibilities. A humiliating picture of social injustice to all Canadians and landed immigrants of all races with an Islamic background.

A - The effect of the interplay between school and the media on young Muslim children and adolescents.

The message from the media also gets to the children. As their school material basically lacks information about the Islamic culture or presents it in the context of the Arab world, the children like adults including their teachers get their general information from the media. Therefore, Muslim children get two opposite sets of information, one from the media and one from home. For example, on television, they only see violence displayed by Muslims on the news. At home, they are taught to live up to the spirit portrayed in the usual greeting of all Muslims "May peace be upon you" and that violence and aggression are prohibited except in self defense. But, non-Muslim peers fear the aggression they see on television and treat their Muslim colleagues accordingly.

Subsequently, many of the Muslim children are scared of who they are. No girl wants to associate herself with such an image of Harem. The young men start to believe what they are illusioned to think as their privilege and unlimited rights of polygamy.

The net results are many dimensional:

1. Islam is coined with the dark ages and is perceived to be difficult to carry on with its cultural aspects in Canadian modern society. So, we have a large group of young Muslim children and adolescents who do not like what they are, but are not sure what else to be psychologically. Their identity is unfairly and unduly chattered beyond the realistic lack of clarity which occurs as part of the normal development that all children go through in the process of forming their own identity.

2. We have a large group of Muslim mothers who feel and behave as failures in their role as mothers and socializing agents as they literally do not have a clue as to how to help their children in the face of this major dilemma.

3. We have a group of highly discontented fathers who treat their wives as if the latter should come up with a miraculous solution. What a social injustice.

## **Media and Performing Arts**

a) The directors of any radio or television program whose content is relevant to the Islamic culture, religion, values, ethics and knowledge should be held accountable to the society at large for insuring accuracy of that content. This may be achieved through the following vehicle:

i) Guests who deal with the above content should be Muslim Scholars or at least reputedly knowledgeable Muslims;

ii) Names of guests suggested in (a) above should be cleared first with registered Muslim organizations either local, provincial or federal;

iii) Invite guests of the calibre mentioned in (a) to publicly correct misconceptions given on the air in the past.

b) Network directors should in the future be made aware of their social responsibility of insuring that there are sufficient number of programs which are geared towards increasing the public's accurate knowledge about the Islamic culture, ethics and values as well as others housed in our society. These programs may be subsidized by appropriate government agencies and at the appropriate level i.e. federal, provincial, etc.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Canadian Council of Muslim Women believes that the most beautiful dimension of our Canadian Society lies in its multicultural flavour.

If the Canadian Society has to have one thing it should be the ability of the individual to enjoy being different on some dimensions of self yet similar on other dimensions to all fellow Canadians. It is this unique mix that makes us as rich as we are as Canadians and as different as we could be from the rest of the North American Continent.

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Canadian Council of Muslim Women (Quebec)  
**Montreal and Suburbs Spring Conference**  
**MUSLIM WOMEN - AN ETHNIC MINORITY IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY**

OMAIMA MANSI

The CCMW - (Quebec) Montreal and Suburbs Conference took place in Montreal on May 4th and 5th, 1985. A total of 70 women participated in the sessions held over two days. Participants involved both Muslim and non-Muslim women and included adolescents, adults and middle aged as well as elderly women. These women came from ten different cultural backgrounds including Canadian born Muslims. Some were housewives, others were students or career women.

### **Conference Attendees**

The conference was also attended by the following officials: Mrs. Fatima De, the field officer, Secretary of State, Ministry of Multiculturalism; Mrs. June Bertly, President of the Quebec Task Force on Immigrant Women; Mrs. Mary Robinson, the national Chairperson of the Committee on Immigrant Women; Mrs. Mary Ellen Boyle, Vice-president of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Government of Canada, who also participated as a speaker.

### **Saturday, May 4, 1985**

Speakers: Marie Ellen Boyle, Canadian Council on the Status of Women, Lynn Fostati, Islamic Studies, and Zubaida Bairminia, lawyer (Toronto).

The presentations were made by both Muslim and non-Muslims depending on their areas of expertise. The quality of the presentations was excellent, each speaker supported her ideas with hard facts and evidence from statistics, medical knowledge, statements of the Canadian and the Islamic law, case histories of court judgments representing the interpretations of the laws and printed material collected over time when appropriate.

The definition of pornography, its content and message, battered women and children in our society, factors contributing to these phenomena and current approaches to dealing with them were addressed by Mrs. Mary Ellen Boyle, the Vice-President of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Government of Canada. An analysis of the current Canadian Criminal Law and examples of its application relative to pornography and prostitution was dealt with by Zubaida Bairminia and also touched upon by Mrs. Boyle. The analysis of the Islamic law, its preventative and regulating mechanisms relative to the pornography, prostitution, use of violence, battering and sexual abuse were dealt with by Lynn Fostati a graduate scholar in Islamic Studies.

A second scholar appeared on a pre-videotaped interview.

### **Sunday, May 5, 1985**

Speakers: Marie Ellen Boyle, Deborah Trent, Coordinator Montreal Sexual Assault Center, Sekina Mita, physician.

The phenomena of sexual abuse of women and children in our society, its magnitude, factors contributing to it, and resources available to its victims was dealt with by Deborah Trent, Coordinator of the Montreal Center for Sexual Abuse. The needs of the elderly women were addressed by Dr. Mita, a Muslim physician.

### **Evaluation**

The conference was successful particularly in increasing the awareness of the participants about the following issues:

- a) The great size of the pornographic industry, its far reaching effects on human integrity, its violence containing messages and the inadequacy of our current criminal law in regulating the activity of this industry. This is evident in its failure to use the word pornography, it uses the term obscenity. It is also evident in failure of many municipalities to create bylaws to regulate marketing of pornographic material.
  - b) The heavy emphasis placed on using contemporary Canadian standard of tolerance as a guide in deciding what is acceptable conduct, or material to produce and market. Who defines "contemporary Canadian standard of tolerance"? It is the public, thus as responsible citizens we must do our share in shaping the standards both at the local level as well as at the policy making levels.
  - c) The strong educational, self-discipline, and preventative approach the Islamic law assumes towards pornography, prostitution, women's battering, child abuse and use of violence in general and in the family. The Islamic Law not only condemns these practices but it has very sound and comprehensive methods of preventing them. As opposed to most of the current approaches these phenomenon focus on dealing with these practices after they emerge.
  - d) The presence of very strong Islamic practices, of caring for the elderly members to the point that none of them are reported to have been placed in long term institutions or homes for the elderly, and the importance of insuring their continuous participation in the community and their communication with others of their own age group.
- As a result of increased awareness about the above issues the participants took several steps towards acting upon the information shared.

### **Publicity**

Media coverage was made by C.B.C. radio community events, by interviews, and by C.B.C. Daybreak program. A correspondent who attended a full day of the conference reported on the event.

### **Recommendations**

Several resolutions were passed and two committees were formed to deal with these issues.

1. To forward a very firm statement to the appropriate authorities, on behalf of C.C.M.W., condemning pornography.

2. To nominate a Muslim lady to the local committee on pornography, which is supported by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. (The committee is fighting to get the City of Montreal to establish bylaws which regulate pornography).
3. To ensure that a Muslim women's name(s) be submitted for nomination to the National Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Government of Canada.
4. To form a committee with representatives from each suburb and the Montreal chapter to work on identifying, networking and facilitating the participation and fulfillment of the needs of our elderly Muslim members.
5. To form a group of women and adolescents from one of the suburbs to work together towards examining the whole area of pornography in their neighborhood including the high school system.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the outcomes of the conference expressed above are but some evidence of its success. The funds made available by the Secretary of State, Multiculturalism, have been essential in mounting this two day conference. Without funding it would have been impossible to reach this target population and the key people that it has reached. Attendance at this conference was very good given that there were four other major events taking place in the Muslim community on the same weekend.

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### **Canadian Council of Muslim Women (Vancouver Chapter)**

#### **Spring Conference**

**May 11-12, 1985**

**Kwantlen College, Richmond, B.C.**

**Conference Theme: The Essence of Harmony in the Midst of Diversity**

#### **Saturday A.M. Session:**

#### **Theme: Pornography and Prostitution**

Approximately fifty women registered for the sessions at a cost of \$5.00 per person (\$2.50 for youth). The Conference was opened by the Chairperson Tazul Ali who introduced the national President of CCMW Dr. Lila Fahlman. Dr. Fahlman gave a brief summary of the background and history of the Council.

#### **Violence against Women and Children:**

Joan Wallace, consultant on women's issues and a freelance writer, talked about the needs to define pornography, so that what is considered as "wrong" today, does not become "right" tomorrow. The three tiers of pornography were viewed as (1) Children, physical harm; (2) rape, violence, bondage or mutilation; (3) erotica, consensual sex. There is need for a change to the Criminal Code to insert "sex" or "gender", in hate literature section. Women are not treated as equals. New Charter of Rights ensures womens' rights as equals. Concerning prostitution, Joan Wallace said prostitution has never been illegal and that the laws are hypocritical. Prostitutes need to be viewed as victims who are school drop outs without job skills, not as criminals. Several myths were uncovered: prostitutes do not spread disease, do not make big money (pimps do), victims in court due to male dominated legal system. Due to inequality in the work place, women are drawn to prostitution. There is a need for refuge homes, for education on human sexuality, for community support, and research on prostitution. Violent pimps need to be prosecuted. Escort services and massage parlors usually involve prostitution. Federal Minister Crosbie wants briefs from women on the above topics.

Dr. Lila Fahiman, President of C.C.M.W., spoke on Islamic laws regarding pornography and prostitution. Dr. Fahlman indicated that there are many kinds of violence or abuse - sexual, verbal, and physical abuse, incest, rape, pornography and prostitution. It is an abuse of an individual, a disregard for the dignity of a human being. This kind of violence and abuse is increasing around the world. Women are not protected as they were during the time of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.). From the principles of human rights in Islam flows the dignity of men and women. Of the five bases upon which dignity is founded, Dr. Fahlman emphasized the gift of free will and the faculty of reasoning. "The first thing created was reason", "Allah has not created anything better than reason" (Sunnah). In the Quran we read: "Read in the name of your Lord, who taught man the use of the pen and gave him the knowledge of things." Man prays "O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge." The meanings of the revelations become manifest to those who have knowledge and who have understanding. Whosoever has been given knowledge has been given abundant good. It



is by knowledge that man is made superior to the angels and has been made the Khalifah of Allah on the earth. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"The seeking of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim, male or female... It enables us to distinguish right from wrong. It is a friend, security and a companion. It is an ornament among friends and leads to happiness. It is an armour against enemies and sustains in adversity... Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave. . . He or she dies not who seeks knowledge."

Illiteracy was rampant in the pre-Islamic era. There was a need to combat this illiteracy. the prophet encouraged the people to study and learn. The Quran asks us to ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth and all that is between. In the creation we will see evidence of a Master Creator, a Master Engineer, a Supreme Intelligence Unfortunately many in society have turned away from this concept of creation.

Education opens our minds to the realities of life and the universe and man's relation to the Creator and to other human beings in it. It is this faculty of reasoning which provides us all with dignity.

In considering the rights of women in Islam let us reflect upon the world of pre-Islam.

1. The love, virtue and justice as taught by Jesus had given way to infidelity, immorality and injustice. Women suffered the most. They were neglected, ignored, abused and debased. Women had no voice, or position but were regarded as property or chattel to be bought or inherited.

2. In the Old Testament Period, Mosaic law stated that marriage was the acquiring of a woman as a possession, in exchange for money. Women did not need to consent to marriage. The right to divorce was held by the man, as his privilege only.

3. During the New Testament Period, Paul in his letters, regarded woman as a temptress. He blamed woman for the fall of man and the genesis of sin. "Let women learn in silence with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach nor usurp authority over man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in transgression". (Timothy 2: 11-14)

"For the man is not of the woman, but the woman is of the man. Neither was man created for the woman, but the woman for the man". (Corinthians 11: 8-10).

Certain medieval theologians called into question the very humanity of woman. Was she a person or a thing? Did she have a soul? If so, was it akin to that of a man or more akin to an animal? Some said she had no soul and therefore not to be resurrected. Does some of this kind of thinking still prevail?

4. In Arabia (pre-Islam) many tribes held women in subjection and degradation. They were property to the inherited. They were considered a disgrace. Therefore, infanticide prevailed. Burying female daughters was also practiced by the ancient Greeks and the Romans. The laws which condemned infanticide were avoided. Emperor Constantine, when he became a Christian, decreed against this evil practice.

The Quran denounced infanticide. "When news is brought to one of them of the birth of a female child, his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief. He hides himself from his people because of the bad news . . . evil is their judgment."

The Quran makes it clear that both men and women are capable of virtue or weakness, are equally sensitive or meritorious. The Prophet Muhammed (P.B.U.H) called women the sisters of men, indicating the oneness of humanity. Women were free to talk with the Prophet in the mosque. Women became members of society with full human rights.

What a contrast to the statement of Paul when he commanded women to be silent in the churches, to not speak and to be obedient. The Quran asserts the rights and duties of women are akin to those of men but men must maintain and protect women. Islam emphasizes the role of husband and wife and the importance of joint consultation, mutual consent and agreement in all family decisions. Man as head of the family to maintain and protect women does not imply a superiority in knowledge or in piety.

Great stress is laid on good, kind treatment of a wife. "Keep them in fellowship. Treat them kindly even if they are disliked." "It may be that you dislike a thing while Allah has placed abundant good in it."

So that the home is a haven of peace for all, Islam raises the moral status of society and minimizes the chances of illicit sexual relation between the sexes. Men and women are to "lower their gaze and guard their modesty."

The Quran granted women equal status with men, freed her from being a chattel, and allowed her to attain her own individuality, unsubmerged in the personality of a man. Consent to marriage by the woman was declared necessary.

In addition to revolutionizing the temporal position of women, Islam gave an impetus to her intellectual status. "Women are the twin-halves of men and the acquisition of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim, both male and female. Spiritually women were on a par with men also. Women were elevated from a condition of utter contempt to the height of dignity.

We know from studies on prostitution that a poor education can create an inferiority complex in women.

Studies also indicate that there is an economic rationale, which may or may not be influenced by a lack of education, behind prostitution. Islam recognizes woman as a free person who could own property, inherit property, and wealth of father or husband, and to dispose or keep it as she wished. This gave her equal status to man. Ideally in an Islamic society or in a world which shares these basic principles there should be no pornography, no prostitution and no abuse of or violence towards women.

However in the past fourteen hundred years women's status in Islam has deteriorated. A middle east journalist researched the status of women in Islam today. He concluded that the status of many women in Islam has slipped back into that of the pre-Islamic era.

If this is true then the Canadian Council of Muslim Women has an even greater responsibility to ensure that Islam is practiced within the homes, that women are knowledgeable, capable of discerning what is custom and what is religion. We must reach out not only to our Muslim women but to our youth and to Canadian society wherein we make our home and raise our families. We cannot permit double standards to occur or to exist. We have a responsibility to improve our society, to make it a better place to live for our children. Women must ensure that they have the education to care for themselves and to be responsible for their own lives.

The base of violence against women stems from pornography. Women are now facing this issue with greater honesty and a willingness to examine the feelings and attitudes towards it of both men and women. The amount of pornography is increasing rapidly. It takes many forms. Some people view pornography as "respectable," or "entertaining" rather than abusive. Pornography is a multimillion dollar business in Canada. It affects our ideas about human sexuality, men's ideas of women, women's image of themselves and the way women are treated in our society. Women and children are the victims of pornography which presents a hostile, degrading, false image of human sexuality. The liberation of women in the west is more a liberation of men. Pornographers depict themselves often as the champions of women's freedom. Freedom for what? To be bound, gagged, abused, humiliated, to be an object of amusement, for the financial gain of the pornographic multibillion dollar industry (in the U.S.A.).

Ethnic and cultural minorities object strongly to hate filled images of themselves created by those who wish to humiliate, destroy or dominate them. Why should women be so subjected to such hate-filled images of themselves?

Pornography does not arise from the higher inclinations of mankind such as love or compassion but is derived from the base instinctual realm. Islam does not permit the display of the body in any way to arouse the baser instincts of mankind. Islam stresses modesty in dress for men and women so as not to arouse someone even unintentionally. Staring at the opposite sex, to provoke desire, is forbidden for both men and women.

Thus both men and women are encouraged to respect each other's human dignity, through modest dress and modest behavior. In Islamic terms, the fight against this increasingly prevalent pornography, must begin from within the individual. Self discipline of mind and body, as advocated and stressed in the Quran, is necessary in a society which is becoming so corrupt that it fails to see its vulnerability. Muslims need to educate themselves and their children to understand the implications of pornography. Freedom without responsibility, based on self-gratification of the senses, can only lead us to degradation.

Prior to Islam, prostitution prevailed in Arabia. Islam brought about a radical change. Women were to be protected from birth to death from the necessity of prostituting themselves in order to live. Islam broadened the definition of illicit sex to encompass the idea of sex in exchange for money, sex in exchange for personal pleasure and any sex outside of marriage.

Islam prohibits mistreatment of women from physical abuse to disrespect. Women are to be protected and treated kindly and fairly. Men are responsible for women and answerable to Allah for any negligence.

### **Research on Aging**

Dr. Beverly Burnside, Mature Women Support Center

Midlife and Early Aging: Mature Women's Network for women 40 years and over was started 18 months ago. Physical and mental illnesses are tied to a lack of friends, social support and family support. Many women are isolated in the community - families are gone, or husbands are not supportive. Why is there this large group of women who are unconnected to society? the demographics have changed. Women today live 30-40 years past their family life. Often they are poor, bored and depressed. The Social Health Outreach Program is part of Mature Womens Network. It is the lack of structure which is causing problems, and a deficiency in social world. Women feel insecure. The Program helps to give them self-confidence and sharpen their skills, to examine their social world. Need to free themselves from their pre-formed ideas.

Discussion Session:

Within Muslim communities there is a multicultural problem. Women may feel rejected by other ethnic Muslims. Need for social component to religious gatherings. Need to consult with the elderly. They have talents so use them. Tendency for younger generations to shut off the elderly. People who watch TV. alone are prone to illness. They need a successful experience. English as a second language classes use family members teaching each other. Middle generation says we make the older generation the way they are; we overprotect them. Older men are able to leave the home to explore their environment. Women are reluctant to leave their homes.

### **Sunday A.M. Session Theme: Family Violence**

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#### **Battered Women**

Nancy Butler, Battered Women Support Center, commended the Chapter for their "bravery" in approaching this topic and in having this conference, and felt it was most appropriate to have this session on Mother's Day.

For 3 years, Nancy was co-coordinator of Womens Shelter.

Women tend to feel it is their fault when they are abused by men, in particular the husband. Wife assault is more common than we think. Some studies say as many as 1 in 10 are battered. Sexual assault often occurs when a wife refuses sex, and so battering follows. Verbal threats can be most abusive. There is no stereotype of a battered woman. It is not restricted to a certain class or culture. Myth: women like abuse or they would leave. Economics and lack of education play a major role in a woman staying in such a situation. Love is a basic factor. Men take on a Jekyll and Hyde personality. Women try to remember only the kind and loving times. Children also keep many women in a marriage. Fear of being killed is another factor keeping women under the power of an abusive husband. Women who leave are often harassed. This fear is always present. There is also the fear of being alone. The transference of power occurs. The woman thinks the man has placed her in this situation and only he can get her out. Alcohol is a factor. Often men use it as an excuse for their actions. Men are not labeled as mentally ill but are found to have difficulty in coping. Often as a child, the husband may have witnessed or experienced violence. Women are often accused of having affairs or being lesbians. Eye contact with another man is often reason for a man to beat a wife.

Why do men batter wives?

- because of social custom
- confused about religion
- law
- we live in a world which says men are the authority
- they regard it as their duty and their right to discipline and control their wives and children

- in some religions the woman looks to her husband and he in turn looks to God
- Greeks and Romans beat their wives
- women were battered in the Middle Ages
- in England laws gave men the right to beat their wives with a stick as thick as their thumbs

Women often press charges and then change their minds. There is a need for women to be treated honorably as human beings who are free to seek their destiny. Women who do leave their husbands suffer a loneliness, clinical depression, financial difficulties, harassment, coercion, social pressures due to culture or religion. Often women would have experienced beatings as a child, from brothers or a father. Such women are often rescued by similar men. When a woman leaves, she has a feeling of worthlessness.

Film Shown: "Loved, Honored and Abused"

Discussion Session:

Social problem: men tend to bond and form images of women. Power and authority is vested in men. Muslim women at the conference agreed abuse and battering happens in Muslim homes but women have not gained the courage to admit it or to do something about it. Center will train women to be a support group. Transition houses in B.C. are funded by Ministry of Human Resources. Mosaic helps women also.

### **Sunday P.M. Session**

Youth Session: Growing Up in the Canadian Society

Panel: Razia Sattar, Akram Bahrami, Zureen Buksh

Razia Sattar: Islam places many moral restrictions upon all youth, including females. Not all of the activities in the major society are wrong. Camping is not something bad for a Muslim youth to experience when properly supervised.

Akram Bahrami: Too much freedom may lead to family break-up. Family solidarity is important. It provides support and understanding during crises. Other young people have similar problems. Both parents and children have difficulties when they come to Canada. Additional problems occur when both parents have to work. Peer pressure is great. we need to inform others and show them what Islam is all about and who we are. Identity crises occur within a family. We can grow and develop in Canada and maintain our Islamic heritage.

Zureen Buksh: Parental pressure has increased to force young people to excel. Peer pressure is strong to make them do what they do. Only we are responsible for our actions. Youth are afraid to discuss problems with parents. This should not happen. Mosques restrict females and our youth. Youth are discouraged from going to the Mosque. All events at the Mosque are male oriented. No activities are planned for females. Computers have decreased the employment possibilities for youth. As we grow up we need to exercise caution.

### **Question Session:**

Need for youth to explore various fields of endeavors. Youth experience coping problems. Youth feel that in Canada we need to adjust to the society. Re school camps: parents need to talk to principals and teachers before sending students. Students resent strict code of dress required at Mosques. Students acknowledge the dress requirements for prayer. Students were advised to become knowledgeable about the Quran, to defend their views: Need for honesty, confidence and trust: Need for communication between parents and youth. Youth are not for arranged marriages in Western society. Other view - parents do research before arranging the marriage. Less is acceptable in a fixed marriage; more is expected in a love marriage. Multiple family activities are needed to bring boys and girls together in an Islamic setting. Conferences and seminars involving boys and girls are needed. Youth clubs should be initiated in Canada.

## **Concluding Remarks: Dr. Lila Fahlman**

Parents tend to please neighbours or relatives, etc. in raising their children. Dr. Fahiman emphasized to mothers and the youth, that we try to please Allah, not man. If youth aim to please Allah they will automatically please their parents. If the parents raise their children to please Allah, they will have no fear for the future of their children. Communication is vital. Youth must realize mother is your best friend, she loves you and wants only the best for you. She was once young too. By pleasing Allah youth will never bring shame to their families. Live to the Glory of Allah.

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## **Canadian News and Views**

### **WORLD PEACE AWARD FOR LOIS WILSON**

The World Federalists of Canada held their Annual Conference in Waterloo, Ontario, June 14-16, 1985. They presented the 1985 World Peace Award to the Very Rev. Dr. Lois M. Wilson, the Co-director of the Ecumenical Forum of Canada and a friend of CCMW. In her banquet address Lois said:

- there is no peace without economic justice and social justice.
- there is the need to work harder at releasing moral energies into the secular structures, from whatever faith base we have or whatever ethical base we have.
- using whatever institutional clout and connections we have in the political arena.
- Finally - and this is the one I like the best - we need to be working at creating an alternative culture ... in which peace with justice is attainable and in which we will be able to stand each other in our differences.

Dr. Wilson is also coordinating an interfaith women's study group in Toronto.

### **EDMONTON CHAPTER**

The Edmonton Chapter took the initiative in 1984 to host the viewing of the film "A Tale of Two Mosques". Application was made to the Secretary of State; funding was received to host a reception following the viewing of the film (July 1984). In the fall, the Chapter continued to meet each month, to assess the needs of the women in the community and to determine how the Chapter might best answer those needs.

The Chapter reaches out to all Muslim women and to women from other groups and communities. We have a great role to play in this community. We need to educate Muslim women in terms of their rights and their obligations as Canadians. We need to help them develop a positive self-concept, to acknowledge with pride their differences, to appreciate the similarities with other women in Canada. Many of the women in the community are recent immigrants, or immigrants in the last ten years. The community tends to be male dominated, "old country" customs are reflected through this domination, and often enforced under the guise of religion. The Chapter sees its role as that of an educator. Following the stimulation of an awareness level, the work of the Chapter must be to reach women through newsletters and monographs on their role as Canadian Muslim women. The future of the children in the community as Canadians is dependent upon our success. To sensitize the community, to instill pride in the past and hope for the future as Canadians we will use our resources from our newsletters and the research from our monographs and our Aid Book for Muslim Women.

On June 22, 1985 we held an Intercultural Exchange Tea. The objectives were to reach out to other women's groups and to sensitize the community to our condition and to our goals. The tea also honoured the pioneer Muslim women of Alberta whose efforts led to the establishment of Al Rashid Mosque in 1937 - the first in North America. About 100 women participated.

The Chapter produced Happy Holiday Cards to celebrate the Eid. Art work was created by our children in the Arabic Language Program, Edmonton Public School Board. The proceeds will be given to the Arabic Language Program.

The Chapter plans to stage a play to tell the story of Muslim Women in Canada. It may also become a film.

## **International Women's Conference**

Halifax, N.S.

A big international conference entitled "Women's Alternatives for Negotiating Peace" was held at Mount St. Vincent University in Halifax June 5-9. Participants included 350 women from 34 countries. Each spoke from her own vivid experience. The program included screening of the new hour-long film from the National Film Board of Canada, "Speaking Our Peace" and a deeply moving interfaith service. The conference had travel funds from the Canadian Government (Disarmament Fund of External Affairs).

### **TORONTO CHAPTER PLANS THE SERIES: MUSLIM WOMAN TODAY (1985-86)**

The largest Muslim community of Canada lives and works in Metropolitan Toronto. They come from various linguistic and ethno cultural backgrounds. They belong to different theological schools. Their life styles and expectations are also considerably different. Muslim women differ in backgrounds, hopes and concerns just as much as their men, with one major difference. Muslim women do not have any regular and systematic forum or a resource centre of their own to study the crucial issues and challenges which confront them.

The Toronto Chapter of CCMW has held several consultations on the needs of Muslim women in Metropolitan Toronto over the past two years. We have reached a consensus on expanding the base and to offer a monthly series of study sessions on MUSLIM WOMAN TODAY: IDEAS AND TOOLS FOR TOMORROW. Individual sessions will focus on the following themes:

1. METRO TODAY: A sociological overview.
2. OUR ISLAMIC HERITAGE: Faith, Culture and Traditions.
3. THE MUSLIM FAMILY: Islamic perspectives on husband-wife relationship and raising children.
4. THE SINGLE WOMAN: The young and unmarried; single parents.
5. THE WORLD OF WORK: Employment and Career Development; English language training; Childcare; Equal pay for work of equal value; Small Business.
6. AVAILABLE HELP: Government agencies; other women's groups.
7. PUBLIC LIFE: Community and political arenas; volunteerism.
8. NETWORKING, Lobbying and Resource Building for Change.
9. RECREATION and CULTURAL ACTIVITIES.
10. IMMIGRANT WOMEN: the most disadvantaged of all.

Each session will last 90 minutes with a refreshment break. For more details please contact Talat Muinuddin at 493-0547.

### **Canadian Interfaith Network (CIN)**

Canadian Interfaith Network held a series of seminars across Canada to inform and get feedback on the proposed religious television network. Nabila Karimi (Newfoundland), Kausar Chaudhry (New Brunswick) and Talat Muinuddin (Ontario) participated in these consultations.

The Council of Muslim Communities of Canada is a founding member of CIN.

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### **The International Refugee and Relief Program**

Most of us have donated from time to time and have participated in fund raising activities. Some of us have initiated relief and aid projects. It is natural for us to be part of such noble and charitable causes. It is in our nature to show love, kindness, and concern for those who have no access to basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and education. Refugees suffer from ill-health, malnutrition, and fear of persecution. They deserve kindness and support.

Over 12 million refugees in the world today are Muslims. The majority are women, children, and the aged. The Council of Muslim Communities of Canada has initiated a project for refugees and people who are facing natural and man-made disasters. Through this project, it is possible to sponsor refugees to come to Canada. Through contributions from us and assistance from the Canadian government, they could find in Canada a hospitable environment.

Through the International Refugee & Relief Program, we could also send funds and relief supplies to countries like Bangladesh, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Lebanon. These funds are usually matched by the Canadian International Development Agency. The CMCC has already raised \$15,000 for the Eritrean famine relief program, which was matched by Oxfam-Quebec. Assistance to cyclone victims in

Bangladesh is in the final planning stage. Priority is also given to Sudan, to Lebanon, and to Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Various projects for \$240,000 are being considered for four countries. The Muslim community needs to come up with \$60,000 to get matching grants between \$60,000-\$180,000. The Canadian Muslim Women have raised \$1,000 for the program. Other churches and charitable organizations, female volunteers, and children have been playing an important role in the sponsorship and international development areas, but our response to these causes is still casual or non-committal.

Through the IRRP, we have a great opportunity to pool our resources and show we care. We must educate our children about the religious obligation towards fellow Muslims and other human beings. We must also encourage our sisters to be part of this worthy cause.

Two Muslim Community Organizations have appointed sisters to co-ordinate these programs. The CMCC has appointed Sister Afshan Khan as Program Director for the IRRP. We strongly urge our sisters to join either existing committees or to form their own, so that an initiative could take place as soon as there is an opportunity.

We hope that you will give this serious appeal a consideration. If you would like further information on the program, please call Sister Afshan Khan at (416) 529-2621 (office) or 528-2801 (home) or write to:

Br. A.H. Shaikh  
International Refugee & Relief Program  
203-500 James Street N.  
Hamilton, Ontario L8L 1J3

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### **Islamic Perspectives**

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#### **A. Guidance from the Al-Quran**

1. O humankind! We have created you all from a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you may know one another. Verily the noblest of you before God is the one who is most deeply conscious of God. Behold, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (Chapter 49, verse 13)

2. And if you fear a breach between a man and his wife, then send an arbitrator chosen from his family and an arbitrator chosen from her family. If they desire agreement, God will effect a reconciliation between them. Verily God is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (Chapter 4, verse 126).

#### **B. From Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights**

##### **1. Right to Found a Family and Related Matters**

a) Every person is entitled to marry, to found a family and to bring up children in conformity with his religion, traditions and culture. Every spouse is entitled to such rights and privileges and carries such obligations as are stipulated by the Law.

b) Each of the partners in a marriage is entitled to respect and consideration from the other.

c) Every husband is obligated to maintain his wife and children according to his means.

d) Every child has the right to be maintained and properly brought up by its parents, it being forbidden that children are made to work at an early age or that any burden is put on them which would arrest or harm their natural development.

e) If parents are for some reason unable to discharge their obligations towards a child it becomes the responsibility of the community to fulfill these obligations at public expense.

f) Every person is entitled to material support, as well as care and protection, from his family during his childhood, old age or incapacity. Parents are entitled to material support as well as care and protection from their children.

g) Motherhood is entitled to special respect, care and assistance on the part of the family and the public organs of the community (Ummah).

h) Within the family, men and women are to share in their obligations and responsibilities according to their sex, their natural endowments, talents and inclinations, bearing in mind their common responsibilities toward their progeny and their relatives.

i) No person may be married against his or her will, or lose or suffer diminution of legal personality on account of marriage.

## **2. Rights of Married Women**

Every married woman is entitled to:

a) live in the house in which her husband lives;

b) receive the means necessary for maintaining a standard of living which is not inferior to that of her spouse, and, in the event of divorce, receive during the statutory period of waiting (Iddah) means of maintenance commensurate with her husband's resources, for herself as well as for the children she nurses or keeps, irrespective of her own financial status, earnings, or property that she may hold in her own right;

c) seek and obtain dissolution of marriage (khul'a) in accordance with the terms of the Law. This right is in addition to her right to seek divorce through the courts.

d) inherit from her husband, her parents, her children and other relatives according to the Law;

e) strict confidentiality from her spouse, or ex-spouse if divorced, with regard to any information that he may have obtained about her, the disclosure of which could prove detrimental to her interests. A similar responsibility rests upon her in respect of her spouse or ex-spouse.

## **3. Right to Education**

a) Every person is entitled to receive education in accordance with his/her capabilities.

b) Every person is entitled to a free choice of profession and career and to the opportunity for the full development of his/her natural endowments.

## **4. Right of Privacy**

a) Every person is entitled to the protection of his/her privacy.

*(Source: Islamic Council of Europe)*

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## **N.G.O. FORUM IN NAIROBI**

An international conference will be held at Nairobi, Kenya, to review the progress made during the International Decade for Women. Concurrently, plans have been finalized to hold an N.G.O. Forum in Nairobi to which approximately 30 representatives of Canadian Women's groups have been invited under the Women's Program of the Secretary of State.

Canadian Council of Muslim Women also applied for representation at Nairobi. However, we regret to inform that our application was turned down even though we were the only national Muslim organization. Dr. Lila Fahlman made a personal representation in Ottawa but to no effect.



Further, the attitude of some officials in the directorate of women's programs was rather deplorable.

We plan to pursue this matter with the Honourable Walter McLean who is the Minister responsible for the Status of Women. The Canadian Council of Muslim Women is a national organization which is actively promoting the involvement of Canadian Muslim Women in a broad range of issues and activities. We had worked hard to prepare briefs and presentations for presentation at Nairobi where delegations from at least fifty Muslim nations will be present. Our participation will have given a much higher profile to the Canadian delegation, but this opportunity has been lost and Canada is the loser.

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

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