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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.



"For all men and women who have surrendered themselves to God, and all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word, and all men and women who are patient in adversity, and all men and women who humble themselves before God, and all men and women who give in charity, and all self denying men and self denying women, and all men and women who are mindful of their chastity and all men and women who remember God unceasingly: for all of them has God readied forgiveness of sins and a mighty reward."

Quran 33:35

NATIONAL NEWS

President

It is with deep disappointment and regret that we inform you of the resignation of the President, Talat Muinuddin.

Talat is one of the original members of CCMW and has worked hard with great diligence for the cause of Muslim women. One of Talat's interests has been the forging of close links with other organizations and she has represented CCMW on many of these groups. Recently, she represented CCMW at the

preparatory meeting in Amman, Jordan, for the International Conference on women in Beijing, China. Talat has promised that she will continue to be an active member and we will count on her extensive knowledge, expertise and commitment to work for Muslim women, inshahla.

The Executive, on behalf of all CCMW members wish her success and happiness.

Solmaz Sahin has kindly agreed to be the Interim President.

Presidents Report

The last three months have been very busy with several national and international events taking place:

I hosted an Eid reception for national interfaith officers of the Canadian Council of Churches, the Anglican Church of Canada, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United Church of Canada. We discussed the urgent need, scope and mutual benefits of closer cooperation between Christians and Muslims in Canada. I presented CCMW brochures and the 1994 Annual Report (Ottawa Conference to the four national church groups). I also pointed out this is a priority with us and it was affirmed at our annual conference in Ottawa. CCMW was asked to identify and recommend participants from local chapters who are willing to take active role in local Christian-Muslim liaison committees which are being established across Canada under the joint auspices of the Canadian Council of Churches

and Council of the Muslim Community of Canada.

I represent CCMW (National) along with Dr. W. Azzam (Toronto Chapter) at the quarterly meetings of the National Christian Muslim liaison Committee which has been meeting in Toronto since 1976.

As Chair of the International Womens Day Committee of the Womens Intercultural Network. I organized the second awards evening at the Scarborough Council Chambers where Dr. Roberta Bondar (1st Canadian women astronaut) and Priscilla George (Native literacy advocate) were honoured and spoke. More than 200 women from different cultural backgrounds participated including Maria Mina, M.P., Elinor Caplan, M.P.P., Dianne Poole, M.P.P., Honourable Anne Swarbrick, M.P.P., Shireen Khan (Scarborough Councillor), the Counsel Generals of Jamaica and Pakistan and the Deputy Mayor of Scarborough. The event was well covered by the media. About thirty members of the CCMW participated.

I strongly urge that all chapters should hold International Womens Day programs and CCMW National Executive should assist local chapters with arranging displays and speakers.

Participated in the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination organized by the Ontario Multicultural Association. I was a member of the panel. I later attended a program of Urban Alliance on Race Relations.

Met with the Executive of the Toronto Chapter and the Representative of the Ontario Anti-Racism Secretariat who are the funders of the Referral Line pilot project in Toronto. \$27,000.00 have allocated and first instalment received but no action has been taken by the Toronto Local Chapter to implement it. It was agreed that the post of a staff person should be advertised immediately.

This was a National pilot project which the present Executive has divested and gave up responsibility to the Toronto Local Chapter against my strong opposition.

Co-hosted a reception for Mr. Gerry Weiner, former Minister of State for Multiculturalism Canada, and discussed emerging concerns for women and visible minorities.

I received the CITIZENSHIP AWARD for 25 years of volunteer service from the Minister of Citizenship of Ontario. Six other CCMW members were also recognized.

As a member of a panel on Citizenship and Seniors, I spoke on volunteerism at a workshop organized in Markham by the Council of the Muslim Community of Canada and the National Association of Canadians of Origin in India. 70 participants, including 22 women.

Intervened with the city of Scarborough to secure exhibition space for a calligraphic display by a local artist. Mr. Musa Reza is the organizer and Dr. Wegdan Azzam chaired the meeting. I have since learned that the exhibition space has been approved though earlier the city had declined.

Met with Doryn Kirby of the Canadian Religions Conference to organize Muslim womens participation in a program of solidarity with women in Beijing, September 4-15, 1995. I referred her to contact Dr. Azzam. We discussed the contents and format of the required prayer. As Dr. Azzam is not willing to take this responsibility, Miss Kirby has approached me again and I am working on this request. DEADLINE IS JUNE 13, 1995.

Once again, local CCMW chapters should be directed to find local solidarity with Beijing Conference events and participate.

Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Beijing International Womens Conference, Amman, Jordan. On May 26, 1995, I left for Amman, Jordan, to participate in the above preparation committee meeting which was sponsored by the International Islamic Council of Dawa and Relief, Jeddah. I was invited in my personal capacity as a women-leaderactivist, along with other national representatives for the USA, the UK, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, India, Pakistan, Egypt, UAE, Yemen and others. I spoke on the mission, goals and activities of CCMW and distributed and displayed brochures, annual

reports (5th, 10th, Ottawa) and established contacts. I worked on workshop plans for Beijing so that Muslim women NGOs can make effective use of the international event to promote the rights and concerns of Muslim women. I was able to make a private visit to Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron.

I strongly recommend that we should develop working relations with Muslim women organizations abroad. In particular, we should keep in touch with sister Saleha Abedeen in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The preparatory meeting was widely covered by the media.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

September 29, 30 & October 1, Edmonton

The theme of the Conference is Women's Identities: Focus on Youth & Seniors. We based this on the recommendations of the 1994 Conference & also wrote to the chapters for their input.

The Edmonton Chapter has started planning, mashahla, & we look forward to seeing many of you at the conference.

We have had excellent discussions with our funders who have strongly recommended that the objectives of the conference should be:

- a. to increase Muslim women's understanding & knowledge so that we can participate more fully in mainstream society,
 - b. to increase the knowledge & understanding of service providers so that they can serve Muslim women in a sensitive & culturally appropriate manner.
 - c. CCMW & its chapters devise strategies to implement the recommendations of the participants.
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Lila Fahlman, one of our founding members has requested that she represent CCMW. The Executive is pleased to have Lila represent Canadian Muslim women & she will speak to us on the conference at our National Conference.

We expect that the recommendations will also apply to CCMW as a National organization.

The Beijing conference is on the status of women across the world. The focus will be on issues such as poverty of women, inequality & access to services, economics & politics, effects of armed conflicts on women & the lack of awareness & commitment to women's human rights.

There is also a lack of recognition of the contributions of women. The expectation is that governments & non governmental organizations will devise strategic objectives to address these issues.

CCMW has contributed to a video on Violence vs Women, especially of South East Asia, & hope the video will be shown at Beijing. This work is in collaboration with consultant, Aruna Papp.

WORK PLAN

The National Executive continues to address the tasks of our 1994 workplan. We have written to Provincial Ministries of Education & provided them with names of our chapters so that they can work directly with them to address issues for Muslim students.

We met with funders regarding a workshop on fundraising & they suggested that this be best done at the local chapter level. They recommend that National continue its role of providing leadership on integration/participation issues, networking, lobbying for change & assisting in the follow up activities which stem from our conference.

We have written to mosques so that we could co-operate in Muslim issues, but sadly have received no response.

The 1995 conference will follow the recommendations in the 1994 one, which were to emphasize issues related to seniors & youth.

We urge chapters to please review the Workplan (March 95 newsletter) as there are tasks to be done specifically by local communities.

We have tried to maintain communication by correspondence, distribution of our meetings minutes & by the newsletter. This is our second newsletter of 1995 and we hope to concentrate on the conference in the next one, inshahla.

CONFERENCE PLANNING BOOKLET

We have had very positive feedback from our funders & the Edmonton Chapter on the booklet. Edmonton is using the document in planning the '95 conference & the funders have said they will distribute the booklet to other organizations similar to ours.

If you would like a copy, please contact Alia Hogben, 613-382-2847.

On a beautiful afternoon, on Sunday, June 4th, 1995, the Edmonton chapter of CCMW gathered along with a women's group from the United Church at the country home of CCMW founder, and member, Lila Fahlman. Lila's home at Seba Beach, is located an hour's drive west of Edmonton, and is an idyllic weekend retreat.

The women from the United Church, and CCMW have met on several occasions over the past four years to discuss interfaith issues. These dialogues have been enlightening, and empowering. On this particular Sunday, Lila had invited us to have a dialogue on the front lawn of her lovely home, on the rights of women in Islam and Christianity. This dialogue was filmed by Vision TV as part of documentary on the Interfaith Movement.

We sat in a circle, a symbol of our commitment to acknowledge our unique role in the discussion and our mutual respect for the contribution and role of others. The dialogue began with a discussion of the rights granted to

women through the Qu'ranic verses, and Bible scriptures. The discussion then led quickly to more personal thoughts on women's rights. Although the cameras were rolling, the discussion was not hesitant, and soon we forgot about the men from Vision TV milling around our circle. It was acknowledged that women's rights were dictated largely by cultural norms, with the scriptures often being quoted with a male bias. And though this process we all discovered our individual biases as well.

The discussion was very empowering, and rather exhilarating. It had been a wonderful opportunity to think about my own preconceived notions of women's rights, and to share with others the message of the role we can play, as individuals, and groups in empowering other women to claim their power. It also renewed our commitment as CCMW members to continue to enjoy multi-faith connections.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING October 1, 1995 Edmonton

As usual, the Annual General Meeting will follow the Conference. Please note that the expectation of chapters' delegates is that they must commit to staying till at least 2:00 p.m. on October 1, 1995, so that a full & valid meeting can occur.

The agenda will focus on items such as last year's workplan & actions, activities of the chapters, the development of strategies from the '95 conference & the election of members of the Executive.

MEDIA

Globe & Mail March 25, 1995 on Abuse of Elderly.

A nation wide study found that most abuse of elders is by their loved ones. Most common perpetrator was a son (27%), a husband (24%). or a daughter (11%). The other cases involved maltreatment by grandchildren, neighbours & caregivers. The study recommends that there should be more intergenerational mixing to make life better for seniors.

Globe & Mail, March 17, 1995 on Genital Mutilation.

The Quebec Human Rights commission has issued a public warning that it will prosecute parents & doctors who subject girls to female circumcision. They rejected the argument that this is a religious freedom right. A Montreal doctor said last year a dozen or more operations are performed to reopen the vagina of girls after circumcision.

Ottawa Citizen, April 1, 1995 on Genital Mutilation.

The article reports on a video shown on Newsworld TV called "Our Daughter's Pain", shot in Ethiopia by the InterAfrican Committee on Traditional Practices affecting the Health of Women & Children.

The Toronto Star, May 14, 1995, had a full page article on Women Cast Off in Homeland.

The article focuses on wives who say they have been abused and returned to their countries of origins by their husbands & how difficult Canadian immigration makes it for these women to return. Because the women are "sponsored" they are placed in a position of dependency. Many of these women do not speak English and do not understand Canadian rules and state that their husbands kept all their documents.

Toronto Star, April 16, 1995 Fear Mounts as Nations' Pull Back Welcome Mat.

The article is on race & hate in Europe. In 1995, France has introduced laws which allow for routine & random checks for papers of non white residents. There have been incidents of shootings of Muslims and the right wing party is wanting to return the African French citizens to their countries of origin.

Toronto Star, May 14, 1995, An Act of Faith or a Veiled Threat to Society?

The article is about Egypt's ban on the hijab (head scarf) in all primary schools. The Minister of Education states that he does not see this as a religious issue but rather a fight for freedom of choice against fundamentalism. He sees the hijab as a "political weapon" and that the "fundamentalist community wants to impose the hijab as a symbol of their political power".

London Free Press, May 5, 1995 Controversial Book wins non fiction prize.

Neil Bissoondath's book Selling Illusions has won the Gordon Montador Award. The book argues that Ottawa's encouragement of ethnic differences divides Canadians rather than uniting them.

London Free Press, May 13, 1995 The Islamic Faith's Best Hope.

The article is an Abdol Karim Sorouch, a scholar living in Iran. "He affirms that the tenets of Islam are open to interpretation in the light of present knowledge & events." "People's actual understanding of texts has always been filtered through their own consciousness which is always age bound". He believes that each age has its own interpretation, and the modern age can & will produce a modern, democratic Islam.

He spoke of other scholars such as Hassan Hanafi of Egypt & Rashid Ghannouchi of Tunisia who are also writing in this area.

The writer, Gwynne Dyer states that there is a semi conscious attempt in the west to shift the focus of

paranoia from communism to the Muslim world & he pleads that we also listen to people like Soroush in Iran.

London Free Press, April 25, 1995 People too quick to blame Muslims for bombing.

The tragic Oklahoma bombing was immediately assumed to be the work of Mid East, Muslim terrorists. This led to many Muslim individuals being badly treated not only in the States but in Canada, creating fear on the part of Muslims. The writer says it is "symptomatic of the persistent xenophobia about immigrants & foreigners, with all its attendant, nostalgia ridden rhetoric decrying the loss of mythical pure values & lifestyles".

Edmonton Journal, May 27, 1995, Behind the Veil. Living Islam as a Woman.

A page long article on a number of Edmonton Muslim women & how they express their religion. The author had read Geraldine Brooks book, "Nine Parts of Desire" which paints a disturbing picture of Islam & especially Muslim women. The Edmonton women show a variation of how they practise their faith, from one wearing a hijab & others not. For each, Islam plays a major role in their daily lives and they have had to make adjustments. For example, the woman who wears the hijab, is a physician, and had to come to terms with the issue of examining male patients.

Globe & Mail, June 15, 1995 Egyptian Court tells couple to divorce.

In a case brought forward by some Muslims, an Egyptian court ruled that a couple must divorce against their will because the husband's writings show he is not a Muslim. The couple are shocked & angry as they are happily married. The order is that the couple, married for over 20 years must now live apart. The case has become a cause celebre as those who took the case to court had nothing to do with the couple. The husband, a professor who is knowledgeable about Islamic theology has argued that Iman al Shafie imposed a narrow interpretation of Islam. This has angered the more conservative people.

Globe & Mail, June 24th, 1995, International Laws will protect Salman Rushdie, Iranian MP says.

A leading MP from Iran, Mohammed Javad Larijani, said on Irani television that Iran will not kill a citizen of another country & embark on an act against international regulations. This has been reiterated by the Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, who said Iran "is not sending anyone to kill anybody in Europe". However, some Irani newspapers criticized the MP & Foreign Minister for saying that their government will not try to kill Rushdie.

Event of Interest August 26, 1995

There will be a fundraising dinner for Bosnia on Saturday, August 26, 1995 at 5:00 p.m. at the Skyline Brock Hotel, Niagara Falls. The speakers will be the Bosnian Foreign Minister, Muhamed Sacirbey & Ambassador

Nedzib Sacirbey. Please contact Nadine or Ahmet Karachi at 905-356-1581 or Nina & Mohamed Khaled at (905) 639-1115.

BOOKS

Ahmed_ Akbar Post Modernism & Islam,

Routledge, 1992 Wadud-Muhsin, Amina, Quran & Woman,

Kuala Lumpur, 1994 Esposito. John. The Islamic Threat

Oxford Univ. Press, 1993

MAGAZINE

Islamic School of Ottawa: EMAN

CCMW highly recommends this new magazine of interest to children aged 9-13 years.

It is full of fun & information & parents too will enjoy reading the articles in it.

Please obtain copies from P.O. Box 2364, Stn D, Ottawa, Ont. K1P 5W5. Phone: 819682-4855.

Cost is \$18 for 12 issues.

BOOK REVIEW (Alia Hogben)

Amina Wadud-Muhsin: Quran and Woman

The book is by a Malay scholar who analyzes the concept of woman drawn directly from the Quran.

Wadud-Muhsin's framework is the hermeneutics of the text, which examines a) the context of the text; b) grammatical composition of the text (how it says what it says); c) the whole text & its world view.

She argues that with the spread of Islam, many disciplines developed such as the Shariah & these began to overshadow the Quran's text itself. The author's thesis is that in order to remain relevant, the Quran must be "continually re-interpreted" and secondly "the progress of civilization has been reflected in the extent of the woman's participation in society."

She is convinced that the Quranic guidance is for all times & is as relevant today as it will be in the future, but she also states that the Quran responded to particular circumstances in Arabia & the reforms introduced were related to existing Medina practices. She illustrates her discussion with the examples of divorce, polygamy, inheritance & patriarchy.

Wadud-Muhsin states:

"It is clear through chronological progression of the text, that the Quran sets out guidelines. Following these guidelines to their natural conclusions will not lead backwards in time... Rather the Quran guidelines should lead the various communities towards progressive change within the context of universal Quranic guidance" (p.81).

She also says:

"Although in some instances the Quran proposed immediate abolition of certain ill practices, most of the time it advocated gradual reform. Few reforms were completely implemented before the final revelation (p. 82).

Her argument is that the evolution of reforms follows the spirit of Quran & that is why many Muslim countries have instituted further legal & social reforms with regard to women.

"These reforms operate outside the literal contents of some Quranic passages & make modifications in the basis of greater Quranic intent with respect to issues as repudiation in divorce, polygamy, inheritance etc." (p. 82).

Another example of this evolutionary reform is that slavery was not abolished but there are clear indications of the direction the Quran intended.

She contends that the existence of so many exegetical works (tafsir) shows that the interpretation process has existed & will continue to exist. Most of the tafsir has been done by men & therefore there is a specific perspective in the interpretations. No records exist in our Islamic legacy of a "meaningful discourse between the perceptions, experiences & reflections of women & men about both their different & similar understanding of the text." (p. 96).

She challenges the narrow interpretations or misinterpretations of the Quranic text which "ignore the basic social principles of justice, equality & common humanity." (p. 96).

She adds that sadly the lives of women have been comprehensively, adversely affected by such interpretations.

The author firmly believes that the Quran emphasizes principles of social justice, equity, mutual honour, moral responsibility & consultation for all persons. She thinks patriarchy should not be replaced by matriarchy but rather with a co-operative, egalitarian system which maximizes men & women's participation. She sees this as the Quranic vision.

The author concludes that the Quranic guidance & its world view demands such a society.

The book is worthwhile reading as the author is knowledgeable & presents a positive counter argument which is enlightening for both men & women & is founded on the Quran.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE:

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