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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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***"Convey to people: O my servants who have committed excesses against your own selves, do not despair of the mercy of God; surely He forgives all sins; surely He it is who is most forgiving, the Ever Merciful".***

***Quran 39:54***

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***Brenda Qureshi***

***Member of the Board from 1993 -1997, from London, Ontario***

Brenda was "one of us", when we started as a new Executive! She worked hard along with us and was the Board's contact with the chapters. She is an avid collector of newspaper articles on Islam and has promised to continue to send these to us for the newsletter. Brenda also has a wonderful capacity for lugging a huge amount of papers, documents and records so that at meetings, we could count on her to have a particular document!

Naeem and her daughters are likely relieved to welcome her back into the family and not be bugged by the innumerable demands CCMW made on her.

Thanks Brenda also for the work with the London Chapter in organizing the 1997 National Conference.

We will miss you at the Board meetings,...the Toronto trips, the long working hours, the cups of tea, the sense of accomplishment and the humour we shared together

***Love and hugs***

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## **CONFERENCE 1997**

The 14th National Conference was held in London, on October 17, 18 and 19, 1997. The theme was Democratic Leadership: Muslim women as a positive force for change.

The intent was to demonstrate that democratic principles are applicable in every aspect of our lives and the women must exercise their leadership. Democracy, like human rights, does not belong to the East or the West, to the Occident or to the Orient, it is a universal desire in each of us to participate in decisions which affect our lives.

The Plenary session with Fatima Houda Pepin and the afternoon introduction of Rita Deverell set the context for the specific workshops. Professors Sajida Alvi and Zohra Husaini's scholarly presentation on women's equality within the Islamic framework deepened the participants' understanding of the congruence between democracy and Islam.

The Youth workshop was done differently this year. It was 3 hours long and used the medium of art to explore the use of democratic principles amongst the youth. The beautiful and colourful artwork was presented at the end of the day by the youth, to the rest of the conference.

Two of CCMW's projects, the Mentoring program and the Canadian Muslim Pioneer Women, were presented in a workshop to show examples of leadership. One of the pioneer women, Ayshie Hassan, was part of the workshop, as was a video about a Muslim family in Alberta. These projects will be worked on during 1998, with the chapters involvement in the Mentoring program.

There were separate workshops on creating change in the family, in Muslim communities, in society at large and in the workplace. In retrospect, some of these workshops could have been combined so that more participants could have been involved.

There were a number of excellent recommendations made and the CCMW 1998 workplan has incorporated these into actions for the chapters and the Board.

The auction raised about \$4,000.00 due to the quality of the donations, the London chapter's organization and because Nadine Karachi Estrada made the whole experience enjoyable!

The Board thanks the hard working London chapter which assumed the major role at the conference itself and assured its success. Heartfelt thanks to all who came and we hope that each left excited and gained from the learning and the sharing. The Board sees the conference as foundational, and all the input results in an Action plan for the next year.

Madam Fatima Houda Pepin's speech was requested by so many, that she has kindly agreed to mail copies to all the participants at the conference.

A special thanks to Nathalie Jackson of Multiculturalism and Valerie Lavergne of Status of Women for their support and attendance at the conference.

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## **DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES IN OUR LIVES**

The topic is not limited to Muslim women as so many of us are unclear or unaware of how the concepts of democracy, equality, leadership and creation of change apply to our daily lives.

**Democratic principles** of liberty, equality and justice are truly implemented when there is freedom of expression, freedom of association, opportunities for participation and the ability to influence change. There has to be respect and active acceptance of differences, protection of the vulnerable and of minorities. Importantly, all voices, including women's, should count and we should have the freedom to take on leadership functions.

In democracies, citizenship should not be based on qualifications such as property, race, religion or sex and therefore full participation should be open to all.

Democracy is not ideal, it is a human concept and so it is full of inconsistencies and failures, but the alternatives are fearful. As Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentinian author stated:

"Dictatorships breed oppression, servility, cruelty and more abominable is the fact that they breed stupidity."

Not all so called "democratic" countries have all the characteristics of a democracy. There is a continuum, but if there are a greater number of characteristics, such as respect for differences, then true Multiculturalism thrives.

**Equality and freedom** are two sides of the same coin, for without these there can be no social justice nor universal human rights.

There is a dangerous trend occurring in some circles. It is suggested that equality of women and men is not an appropriate and valued goal. That rather than equality we should be pursuing equity which means justice, fairness and a recognition of differences.

The argument is that the pursuit of equality for women has led to major problems in gender definition and roles, leading to a breakdown of families and, by extension, of society itself.

This is ill informed and dangerous, but sadly this sort of thinking is gaining ground amongst some women. The argument is based on a poor understanding of equality, that is, equality means the "same" and that women want to be like men. They state that men and women are different ... biologically and maybe psychologically.. so therefore equality does not apply.

It is not understood that this kind of reasoning will lead to discrimination based solely on equity without equality. One can be fair and just in a society where there is slavery or where blacks or women are seen as needing equitable but not equal treatment.

**Leadership** is too often defined in a narrow context of one individual or a small group who have power, authority and control vested in them to go forward while others follow. Women, in particular, are either not allowed to demonstrate their leadership abilities or we ourselves view these as gender defined.

Many women continue to be reluctant to be leaders in any sphere of our lives, because of what we have been taught or because we are unclear as to what constitutes leadership. Leadership is rarely seen as a function which can be shared and which does not necessarily have to be based on a hierarchical, patriarchal model.

Democratic, egalitarian leadership is based on the principles associated with democracy itself, and unless we truly understand all that this means, we are unable to act as full citizens of a democracy.

Too many of us accept the narrow definition of "political democracy" and do not challenge ourselves as to how these principles apply to all aspects of our lives. We must understand the concepts and more importantly, the realities of these ideals as they affect us at home, work and in the community.

**The family** is a government in miniature for it has all the facets of a system. The family is

"The focus of the most intimate relationships, those in which the personality of man and woman is most profoundly expressed and most thoroughly tested. It is the primary agent in the molding of the life habits and the life attitudes of human beings."

McIver

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## **WORKPLAN 1998**

CCMW has developed a workplan based on the recommendations arising from the conference. Chapters and the Board will have specific tasks which further CCMW's objectives. As an example, the Board has undertaken projects, such as the Handbook on Canadian Laws, the McGill research on the Hijab. In 1998, we will initiate the Mentoring program, a research study on inter ethnic, inter religious marriages, a book on Canadian Muslim pioneer women as well as setting a committee to produce positive papers on sensitive issues.

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## **CCMW PROJECTS**

Along with our ongoing work, CCMW has initiated a number of projects. Please contact us for further information.

### **Handbook on Canadian Laws**

This is nearing completion and we hope to publish it, insha Allah.

### **McGill Project**

A book edited by McGill professors is proceeding. There will be articles based on speeches at CCMW conferences as well as the research project on the attitudes of Muslim women university students on the Hijab.

### **Mentoring Program**

Chapters, with the help of Nuzhat Jafri, have initiated a program of "coaching" between Muslim women. Many women have expressed interest in participating.

Please contact chapters or the Board if you are interested.

### **Canadian Muslim Pioneer Women**

Insha Allah, CCMW has been provided by the federal government with a small grant, to write personal stories of women who have contributed to Canadian Muslim life. Sadia Zaman is editor and has started work on this project.

### **Position Papers on Issues of Concern to Muslim Women**

We are exploring setting up a committee who will research sensitive issues and draft CCMW position

papers on these subjects.

This is a recommendation from the chapters. We are acutely aware that the topics must be dealt with in a respectful and inclusive manner.

### **Interreligious, inter-ethnic Marriages**

CCMW has initiated discussions with a professor about a survey on such marriages and the effects on families. We think such a research project will be a great interest to all of us.

If you are interested in participating, please contact us.

### **Facts and Myths on Islam**

Zohra Husaini presented some at the 1997 Conference and is continuing to research these.

We hope to publish the findings as a monograph, insha Allah.

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### **BOARD ELECTIONS**

The National Board comprises 6 members but for the last two years, we were only 5 strong. At the 1997 AGM, elections were held as Brenda Qureshi left and so two spaces were open on the Board. Najet Hassan, Mumtaz Ibrahim and Brenda Qureshi were the nominating committee and Najet conducted the election process at the AGM.

We are pleased that two younger members have been elected - Rifat Hussain and Reem Mishal. Rifat, from London, has worked with young people as well as newer immigrants. Reem is a doctoral student in Islamic studies at McGill University.

We welcome them.

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### **GENDER: FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

These concepts are from the Status of Women's "Gender Based Analysis: Guide to Policy Making" March '96.

#### **Key Concepts and Rationale**

Only a small portion of the difference in the roles assigned by gender can be attributed to physical differences based on sex (such as pregnancy and childbirth, or differences in physiology and bodily functions).

#### **About Gender:**

**SEX** identifies the biological differences between women and men.

**GENDER** is the culturally specific set of characteristics that identifies the social behaviour of women and men and the relationship between them. Gender, therefore, refers not simply to women or men, but to the relationship between them, and the way it is socially constructed. Because it is a relational term, gender must include women **and** men. Like the concepts of class, race and ethnicity, gender is an analytical tool for understanding social processes.

**Gender Equity** is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, measures must often be available to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. **Equity leads to equality.**

**Gender Equality** means that women and men enjoy the same status. Gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential to contribute to national, political, economic, social and cultural development, and to benefit from the results.

Originally, it was believed that equality could be achieved by giving women and men the same opportunities, on the assumption that this would bring sameness of results. However, same treatment was found not necessarily to yield equal results. Today, the concept of equality acknowledges that different treatment of women and men may sometimes be required to achieve sameness of results, because of different life conditions or to compensate for past discrimination. It is this notion of equality that is embedded in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

***Equality is therefore the equal valuing by society of both the similarities and differences between women and men, and the varying roles that they play.***

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### **ARTICLE**

#### **SOCIAL JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD**

Dr. Salim Mansur, Professor, Political Science, University of Western Ontario, gave this speech at a Symposium at Queen's University, Kingston, November 1997. We excerpted his speech and reprint with his permission.

"The subject at hand which I have been asked to address this morning is "Social Justice and Human Rights" in Islam and to which I have added the words "Muslim Word" as an appendix. I will approach this subject briefly in three parts: first, relate the axiomatic principle of Islam on which rests the entirety of Muslim faith and practice secondly, discuss broadly what the Quran states relating to "social justice and human rights"; and lastly, consider the state of thinking and conduct in the Muslim world as it is to be found.

### **Axiomatic Principle Kalma**

By axiomatic principle of Islam, I mean precisely that irreducible core of statement and belief which all Muslims affirm irrespective of whatever maybe their subsequent differences in understanding and practicing of Islam in its totality as din or way of life. The axiom is stated in the credal statement *La illaha illalla, Muhammadur Rasul-Allah* and the entire architecture of Islamic civilization in its ideal is derivative from this axiom.

The normal and traditional English translation of the credal statement is "There is no God save God, and Muhammad is His Messenger." But the manner in which the statement reads in Arabic is far more assertive and decisive than the traditional English rendition. It begins with an emphatic negation, *La*, "no"; that there is no other god, or reality, except the One True Reality, God, or Allah in Arabic.

The affirming of this credal statement of Islam leads an individual from non-belief to belief, from being outside of Islam to Islam, from being a non-Muslim to becoming a Muslim.

### **Reality of Allah**

The Reality of Allah is evident in signs across the universe. For anyone who can read these signs, or begin to gradually decode the meaning in the signs evident in the universe, the conclusion is self-evident, that the universe has a Creator, an Author and in this sense the universe is a book full of meaning for a discerning individual. God reveals Himself to mankind through His creation. But God also reveals Himself to mankind through revelations, by sending forth periodically among mankind special individuals, messengers or prophets, through whom He provides mankind with moral instructions on how to arrange their individual and collective lives in order to construct a just social order. The second part of the credal statement, the subordinate clause which states "Muhammad is His Messenger" is, therefore, part of the axiomatic principle for a Muslim. It means that God revealed Himself to mankind through Muhammad in spoken words which forms the Quran, the sacred Book of Islam, the final revelation from the Lord of the Universe to all mankind.

### **The Quran**

The Quran is the Word of Allah. It constitutes Allah's final message to man; or to put it differently, it is the eternal message that Allah has periodically revealed through His messengers and whom He has sent to all people in all lands and which is for the final time revealed through Muhammad to man. Thus Muhammad is the last of Allah's Prophets, he is the Seal of the Prophets and there will be no Prophet bearing another message after Muhammad, and with the Quran Allah has fulfilled His promise of providing guidance to mankind. The historic meaning of this in secular terms is starkly clear: Islam is the last of the great world religions, and that after Muhammad there is no founder of a world religion. Here I might add in parenthesis that Islam is chronologically speaking the youngest of the three existing universal faiths, universal in the sense of embracing all mankind in its appeal without any distinction of birth as caste, or ethnicity; the other two universal faiths are Buddhism and Christianity in that order of their founding.

A great many Muslims, and following them most non-Muslims, misconstrue what the Quran is and misread its central purpose or aim, which is to awaken man to the Transcendent Reality, Allah, and that all creation is contingent on this Reality. The Quran is not a textbook on economics or sociology or political science, nor is it a textbook on law or constitution of a putative Islamic society. Such a reading is reductive, reducing the Quran to the design of man. The Quran is God revealing Himself in text what He reveals in creation, and this is the Quran's primordial message. It is only when man opens his heart and mind to the to the Transcendent Reality that he becomes receptive to the guidance that the Quran provides. This guidance is moral first and foremost; there is only one universal moral standard, one true measure of justice, as a corollary to the One True Reality, Allah. The Quran states: "If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides God, there would have been confusion in both!"(21:22) Multiplicity of gods mean multiplicity of physical and moral laws from which follow chaos and anarchy. The essential simplicity of this message, one universal law, whether physical or moral, emanating from One Reality as part of His creation, is often lost.

Thus the Quran, as the Quran itself testifies, is a Book with no inner contradiction, consistent for all time and for all people. This needs to be grasped clearly, for while the message of the Quran is consistent, timeless and universal, its revelation to Muhammad is in historical time and place. The Quran descends in parts through the agency of Gabriel, the Archangel, to Muhammad in seventh century Arabia, during the years 610 to 632 C.E. In its particular details the Quran addresses itself to Muhammad, as he is instructed to spread Allah's message and then establish an Islamic order, which he does first in Madina

and then subsequently all across peninsular Arabia. It is the universal aspect we are concerned with even as the particular in historical time remains instructive to all succeeding generations of Muslims after the Prophet, who is an exemplar. For by definition a particular as found in the time of the Prophet may no longer be extant, as for instance in the example of the institution of slavery.

### **Marriage**

Let me very briefly touch upon two subjects to which the Quran provides much emphasis, in the sense of what must be done to achieve a just society. One is on the institution of marriage; and on the desired nature of an economy that emphasizes distributive justice. The institution of marriage is critical since the family is the basic unit of a society. Stability of the family, and equity and righteousness within the family, is the necessary prerequisite for a stable and just social order. There is an oft-quoted saying of the Prophet that half of the shari'ah is in the performance of marriage and the maintenance of a family. In Islam there is no place for monasticism. Marriage is a contractual relationship between two equal persons with obligations, responsibilities and duties involved. The product of marriage is children, and the provision for children, material and spiritual, is directly the responsibility of parents, and the family unit is the school of moral education for the future generation assuming its responsibility. Again as the Quran states creation is not in jest, similarly marriage is not mere sport. Anything that undermines the institution of marriage, and hence subverts family, is forbidden, whether it is clearly proscribed or not. Sexual promiscuity stands at the top of the list of what is forbidden; adultery is the most serious offence that corrupts family and undermines the stability of societies and is to be severely punished once a very stringently required process of evidence has firmly established the guilt of parties involved.

But a marriage is a social contract between two equal persons. And any contract can go wrong, however good the intent, if one or both parties find the arrangement inadequate, unsatisfying, or destructive to their personal growth or any other reason. Marriage is not servitude; again I emphasize the issue of equal partners, for the Quran makes it abundantly clear, there is no ambiguity here in the meaning that Allah has made both man and woman equal in every degree, that neither is superior or inferior to the other sex. And so the provision is made for a marriage that has failed in fulfilling the needs of either or both parties to the contract, to dissolve that contract in a proper manner and what is owed to each other, particularly what the man owes to the woman as part of the marriage contract, be met in full. There are other stipulations about the procedure which I need not go into here. What I may point out, however, is that in the subject of marriage as an institution, a number of things is made clear in the Quran: the equality of sexes, the rights of women that were until the Quranic revelations non-existent, the clear limitation placed on the number of marriages (being four) that a man may contract, and the even clearer instruction that monogamy is the preferred behavior. The disagreement among Muslims on this last issue, the limitation on number of wives, reflects the different readings between those who are conservatives and traditionalists on the one hand, and the modernists and liberal on the other. The conservative-traditional reading reflects the values of a male-dominated society and is inconsistent with the message of the Quran on the substantive equality of male and female. When the Quran mentions male-female relationship in terms of rights as in the following verse: "And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them." (2:228) - the reference on inequality is of a functional nature in society where men are predominantly income earners and women are the anchor of the family, and hence the economic responsibility of men is greater than those of women, and women as the weaker sex in natural terms are to be provided greater protection.

### **Just Society**

The ethical vision of Islam and the normative commands of the Quran, point to the construction of society oriented to the Transcendent Reality of God.

The Quran is concerned with ultimate values. There is an urgency with which the Quran relates Allah's message to mankind about meeting one's obligations, about being prepared to account for one's deeds, and here the individual and the society are the two correlates, both essential for the unfolding drama. Thus the ethical norms that the Quran prescribes, the moral framework it urges mankind to adopt, follows from the simple idea that man is a social being, that he is shaped by his environment as much as he shapes and must shape his environment. In Islam, which is not merely a religion as religion is understood in the Western context of separating what is Caesar's and what is God's, but a way of life, there is no separation of the sacred and the profane, for all act has consequence and there is a seamlessness to life. Wherever two individuals get together, a society in potential takes shape, and thus in this relationship enters the sacred dimension for Allah is never missing in that relationship.

### **Society**

People in a social order that they have constructed have an obligation to each other. The pursuit of wealth in itself is vigorously condemned in the Quran, though wealth itself is Allah's bounty and Allah gives wealth to whom He pleases, it is a sign of His blessings, reward for those who endeavor in righteous living. But wealth brings responsibility, and in Allah's sight the best are those who provide from their wealth for the poor, the weak, the indigent. In verses after verses in the Quran, Allah demands that those who have the resources are obliged to place those resource in part or full in the way of Allah, that is in the provision of those who are unable to take care of themselves. It is for this purpose the Quran makes it obligatory to pay zakat, a tax on capital on those who have the resources for the social improvement of a tax on capital on those who have the resources for the social improvement of the social order. Zakat thus is one of the main pillars of Islam along with prayer, fasting and pilgrimage.

The heavy emphasis on distributive justice as a necessary condition for establishing a just social order is not, however, at the expense of the rights of individuals, men all women, their personal dignity, their honor, their private property. These are all to be protected, for ultimately the purpose of a just social order is to assist individuals to rise to their fullest potential as representatives of Allah on earth, not to obliterate individuals by emphasizing some melange of collective ideology as modern day totalitarianism of the left and the right sought to do with the appalling results of gulag and concentration camps that litter twentieth century history.

### **Human Rights**

On the issue of human rights, the same principle outlined above in terms of social justice stands. The principle being, to remind ourselves, that the Quranic message is timeless and universal. Hence, in principle, all the present day arguments of Human Rights embodied in the various documents of the United Nations, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, all the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights also of 1966, can be located and derived from the Quran. The question, therefore, becomes how is the Quran read. And here the matter passes from the domain of theory to the domain of politics and the political interests of ruling authorities in Muslim countries.

On the theoretical side, the key issues that are most often raised pertain to: (1) religious freedom, or the matter of an individual choice or responsibility in choosing for himself to what religious group he will belong or not belong; (2) political rights, including all those rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of association, freedom of political organizations and participation, and freedom from unjust political persecution; and (3) the rights of women, including the rights of women to hold public offices and participate in the economy as full members. In each of these issues, the message of the Quran is positive. Religious freedom is something the Quran insists upon, and the oft-quoted verse, "There is no compulsion in religion: (2:256), is unambiguous. Those Muslims who will abridge this right, it is upon them the responsibility to explain what authority they possess to bend the message of the Quran to suit their interests by denying freedom of religion. The problem is with the notion of apostasy, and here too the normative reading of the relevant Quranic verse (47:25) suggests that the matter of guidance and faith is ultimately a matter between an individual and Allah, for Allah does not guide those whom He lets fall prey to evil.

On the issue of political rights, the matter enters the grey area between religion and the authority of those in control of political power, the state. Since the Prophet combined both religious authority and political authority, and in Islam the distinction between the two realms, religion (din) and politics (siyasa) is negligible, the political history of Muslims after the Prophet and the Rightly-Guided Successors to the Prophet, the four Caliphs, is a tortured story of political power institutionalized in tribal monarchy which then uses Islam as a legitimating ideology for its own purpose. What we have in the modern time across the Muslim world is a patchwork of political systems that seek to go under the name of Islam and practice contradictory policies, thus going against the axiomatic principle of Islam that Allah's message is internally consistent and universal.

### **Women**

The same situation applies to the question of women. As I have already pointed out, there is nothing in the Quran upon which can be constructed an argument as conservatives and traditionalists do, to deny women their rightful place in society as completely equal to men. Without going any further, I should point out here that all governments of Muslim majority countries as member states of the United Nations are bound by the human rights documents of the United Nations as they are bound by the Quran. The Organization of Islamic Countries which represents Muslim countries, Arab and non-Arab, as a multilateral organization and recognizes the authority of the UN, clearly indicates in the preamble of its own charter the following:

**RESOLVED** to reserve Islamic spiritual, ethical, social and economic values, which will remain one of the important factors of achieving progress for mankind.

**REAFFIRMING** their commitment to the UN Charter and fundamental Human Rights, the purposes and principles of which provide the basis for fruitful co-operation amongst all people.

It is of some historical interest to note here, and it illustrates the problem of the cross-cutting nature of politics and religion, that at the time of the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, Muslim countries were greatly involved in the process. The Iranian intellectual Fereydoon Hoveida, who later became his country's permanent representative to the UN, closely worked on the drafting committee with his French law professor, Rene Cassin, considered the most influential person on that team. The Saudis were opposed to the Declaration, their UN representative suggesting that provisions of religious liberty violated Islamic law. This view was strongly opposed by the Pakistani representative, who argued that Islam unequivocally affirmed religious liberty. Thus we see the divergence of opinions and readings of the Quran existing among Muslims then as it exists today.

Such divergence of opinion is both natural and reflective of the contemporary state of affairs in Muslim countries. Muslim countries almost without exceptions are late developing societies, many are post-colonial societies, and not a few are failed societies with nothing constructive to offer either to their own citizens or the world community. In the language of political sociology a majority of these countries, all of them with the recent exception of Bosnia, are located in Asia and Africa, are dual societies of one type or another, wherein the predominant economic sector is pre-industrial, agricultural of one sort or another,

with islands of modern economy hemmed in from all sides by values inconsistent with the requirements of the modern age. Democracy is mostly absent; representative government are almost entirely missing, and again the exception is noticeable by the distance it holds from those Muslim countries that are deemed of strategic value to Western powers, a country like Bangladesh for instance. On the contrary, Muslim countries holding strategic value for the industrial and democratic West, the oil rich states of the Persian Gulf, are all authoritarian states of one type or another, and the anomaly of Arab monarchies stand out in the political landscape of the new millennium just ahead as so many leftovers from a bygone era when political democracy is the norm.

To conclude, we have glaring anomaly between the practice of many Muslims and Muslim countries, and the excellence of Islam that stands on its own term. The gap between the excellence of Islam and the practice of Muslims emerged immediately after the demise of the Prophet as witnessed in the wars that Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, fought against those who reneged on Islam and their obligations to pay zakat. This gap has grown over time. And yet Islam remains as an overarching moral principle challenging Muslims and non-Muslims alike to recognize the One True Reality and then adapt to the logic that follows. In many ways western democracies in constructing social order that strive for establishing justice and equity are implicitly consistent with the values of Islam. Let me end with an anecdote from recent time. Maurice Bejart is a well respected French choreographer and Muslim by faith. While being interviewed on French TV even as great upheaval and much violence were taking place in Iran, this interview took place as the Iranian revolution of 1979 was unfolding in all its grisly details in front of us, Maurice Bejart was asked why he chose to convert and profess a religion that lent itself to so much bloodshed. He replied, "Why? I hold to a vision of the world, to an ethic and not to the acts of men in power." I imagine as I read these words of Bejart that some place where our indestructible souls continue to live beyond our material body, the souls of Mansur al-Hallaj and Hafez, Omar Khayyam and Rumi, ibn Sina and ibn Rushd, al-Kindi and al-Biruni, all names from the pantheon of the Golden Age of Islam, must have felt a deep kinship with the French choreographer who could penetrate through the inessentials and arrive at the substance of the ethical vision, Islam, which sustains Muslims as a people, joined by faith in Allah despite many a perversity that is part of their historical record. In this respect the history of Muslims is no different than the history of people of other faiths. This is not a comforting way to conclude, but it is, I believe, in keeping with the teachings of the Quran, to acknowledge facts with humility and to learn from what is common in the historical records of all people."

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## **OF INTEREST**

### **An Organization:**

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants  
110 Eglinton Ave. W., #200  
Toronto, Ontario M4R 1A3

Phone: (416) 322-4950

**Information Pamphlets**, e.g. Sponsored Immigrants, Right at Work, How to Write to your MP are available from:

Community Legal Education

Ontario (CLEO), Toronto.

An excellent **Fact Sheet on Letter Writing** Guide is available from:

Media Watch National Office  
517 Wellington St. W., #204  
Toronto, Ontario M5V 1G1

Phone: (416) 408-2065 Fax: (416) 408-2069

This fact sheet will help you write to any media; especially as it relates to the portrayal of Women & Girls.

**The Ontario Women's Directorate** has many publications, for example on Sexual Assault - Wife Assault and Pamphlets on Urdu and other languages. Please order from:

Ontario Women's Directorate

Education Wife Assault  
427 Bloor St. W., Box 7  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1X7

Phone: (416) 968-3422  
Fax: (416) 968-2026

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**CAUTION! CAUTION! CAUTION!**

One of our members found a very lengthy article on the Internet called "**The Place of Women in Pure Islam**" by M. Rafiqul Haqq and P. Newton. The article appears as an academic, researched paper with lots of quotes. The thesis is that women are considered inferior, deficient and toys for husbands.

The Board reviewed the article and has a response, however, the original article has now been removed from the Internet. If anyone hears of it, please let us know as it is most destructive of Islam and the role of Muslim women.

**CAUTION! CAUTION! CAUTION!**

Please note that the Federal Reform Party is very active in maligning the Multiculturalism Act and there has been some negative media coverage. We all need to give thought to what we mean by Multiculturalism and how it affects our lives. We also need to write to MPs on this matter.

**HOORAY! HOORAY! HOORAY!**

Almost two years ago, we had contacted Tim Horton's as we knew they were using lard in the baked goods. Here is their response. Eat and enjoy!!!

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**GLOSSARY OF SOME ISLAMIC TERMS**

We were asked to list some for Muslims and non-Muslims

<i>Allah</i>	Arabic for the one and only God.
<i>Islam</i>	Peace, submission to the will of God.
<i>Quran</i>	Revelations from God to the Prophet Mohammad.
<i>Hadith</i>	Sayings or traditions of the Prophet Mohammad.
<i>Shariah</i>	Ethical and moral code of Islam, based on the Quran and Sunnah.
<i>Sunnah</i>	Path, example. To follow the example of the Prophet Mohammad.
<i>Ummah</i>	Community, usually means the Muslim community.
<i>Fiqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence.
<i>Fatwa</i>	Legal opinion
<i>Jihad</i>	Struggle. Any earnest striving in the way of God, for righteousness and versus oppression.

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**BOOKS**

Sabbah, Suha, ed.:

**Arab Women**

Olive Branch Press, N.Y., 1996.

A collection of essays.

Lings, Martin:

**Muhammad**

Inner Traditions International, Rochester, Vt., 1983.

A biography of the Prophet, written in a mystical, mythical way.

Abbasi, S. M. Madni

**Daughters of the Holy Prophet**

International Islamic Publishers, N. Delhi, India, 1984.

A small, factual book with chapters on each of the Prophet's daughters.

Smith, Margaret

**Rabia**

One World Publications, Oxford, 1997.

A lovely book on a great sufi

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**WASHING OF THE DEAD**

Niagara Chapter has details on how to wash a body. We are forwarding copies to each chapter to share locally. If anyone would like a copy please call the Niagara Chapter.

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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