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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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"The most gracious has imparted this Qur'an. He has created human beings, He has imparted to humans articulate thought and speech. At God's behest the sun and moon run their appointed courses and before God prostrate themselves, the stars and trees. And the skies has God raised high, thus devised for all things a measure so that you too might never transgress the measure of what is right; weigh therefore your deeds with equity and cut not the measure short."

Quran 55:1-9

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### CONFERENCE 1999:

The national conference was held in Toronto, over the weekend of October 29, 1999. The theme was Muslim Women in Canada: Our Rights and Freedom in the 21st Century.

Masha Allah, it was a great success! This was due to the superb speakers. Drs. Riffat Hassan and Abdullahi an Naim who addressed the issue of rights from a Islamic perspective as well as those enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights. The workshops on FGM, Media and Claiming Our Rights were good and the outstanding session was the youth. A number of young women from across the country spoke courageously about the issues which they face. The session has been put on video.

As with every other year the conference is truly a consultative session of issues of importance for Muslim women. We deliberately ask for input and the outcomes are concrete actions resulting from the conference. As we explain to our funders, the gathering is a means to an end and not a stand alone event with no follow up.

The 1999 Conference will result, insha Allah, in

- a. a Manual of Media Relations

- b. a Position Paper on Claiming of Rights
- c. a Video on the Youth issue
- d. a Booklet on Islam for outreach and
- e. collaborative efforts to address the issues arising from FGM.

The Toronto Chapter hosted the event & sincere thanks to each of you.

### **Media Relations:**

This handbook will guide any group and/or individual in dealing with the media. It provides practical suggestions and its use will be broader than Muslim Women. The writer is Raheel Raza, our Media spokesperson and a consultant in Toronto.

We will distribute the handbook via Raheel, to our local chapters and also by advertising in our website. If you would like a copy, please contact any member of the Board whose names are listed in this newsletter.

### **Claiming our Rights: A Position Paper:**

This is the result of the speeches and workshop of Riffat Hassan and Abdullahi an Naim. These are outstanding scholars in the field of Islamic law and the feminist perspective.

The paper is written by a young friend of CCMW, Emran Qureshi of Ottawa's Second Generation Muslims. The paper will be translated into French and will be distributed to Universities, Faculties of Law, Women's Studies and Libraries.

Again, if you would like a copy, please contact us.

### **Booklet on Islam: Our Outreach**

This booklet, Islam: Its Roots and Wings, has been written by two Islamic scholars from McGill University, Valerie Ann Behiery and Alan Guenther and has been supervised by Professors Sajida Alvi and Lynda Clarke. Lynda Clarke assisted us by facilitating the Conference Workshop and being a consultant to the students. Sajida Alvi also reviewed the document and has kindly written the Foreword in the book.

The intent is that this booklet will be of use in schools, in social services and also to individuals. It presents information which is sound and accurate with an emphasis on the inclusive and dynamic nature of Islam. We think Muslims themselves will also find this information helpful.

### **Video on Youth:**

We are very pleased with the video which has resulted from the Youth session at the conference.

The Board, in collaboration with chapters, has held focus groups in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton. The purpose was to obtain further feedback on the video, so as to design a written resource guide to accompany the video.

We will use the video at our Conference 2000, insha Allah and we would be pleased to provide the video to other groups to foster discussion between generations.

We would like to thank the Chapters and the young women who attended the focus groups. A heartfelt thank you to Yasmine Siddiqui of Toronto and Humera Ibrahim of Edmonton, who have taken a leadership role in the production of the video.

### **Female Genital Mutilation:**

The Peel and Toronto chapters are to collaborate with the established service providers in Toronto. We are still linked to Khadija Khaja who is doing her Ph.D. in this area.

### **Conference Dinner Honouring our Pioneers:**

We celebrated the lives of the women who wrote for CCMW's book At My Mother's Feet. All the women

were invited, the editor- Sadia Zaman introduced them and our young women presented copies of the book to each one. It was a moving experience for all of us.

We also formally introduced our other publication Reading Rights, a legal handbook, written for CCMW by Rahat Kurd.

Please note that both the books are for sale and that they have been distributed to many libraries, so as to make them available to others.

## **Funders of the Conference**

We gratefully acknowledge the funding received from the federal government's Status of Women, Canadian Heritage's Multiculturalism and the Dept. of Justice. Our personal thanks to Suresh Kumar, Nahid Roboubi and Barbara Riley for all their help throughout the year.

## **White Ribbon Campaign:**

At the Conference, we had the White Ribbon Campaign Staff publicize their work. The group encourages men and boys to help end violence against women. They have campaigns and we encourage chapters to collaborate with them. Their office is in Toronto, phone number: (416) 920-6684 and email whiteribbon@driect.com

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## **BOARD ACTIVITIES:**

We continue to meet regularly, about every 2nd month. We invite chapters members to join us so that there is increased awareness of the work of CCMW. Also, the Board gains the experience of our members.

We have been proceeding with the follow-up work of the 1999 Conference and will soon be completing the AGM & Conference Reports.

## **CHAPTER ACTIVITIES:**

### **Ottawa Chapter**

We have had four meetings of the local chapter so far.

On February 7, 2000 we accepted an invitation from the Jewish Women's Group in Ottawa to come and speak with them at one of their monthly meetings.

We were asked to talk about our identity as Muslim women in Canada and integration into Canadian society as immigrants. They wanted to know what our issues are and the social challenges faced by Muslim women and Muslim parents. The host Jewish women asked us questions about the portrayal of Muslim women in the media. Was it true, they asked, that there was some verses in the Qur'an that specifically state that Muslims should hate Jews because they are bad. We assured them that was not true. Also, there was a lot in common between the two religions and that God clearly states that He will not judge us as Jews, Christians or Muslims but by our acts and intentions of kindness and justice. They mentioned that Judaism was also historically patriarchal. It was our first inter-faith encounter and both groups learned a lot about each other. We left with the intention of meeting again and collaborating on mutual issues.

We traveled to Montreal to participate in the follow-up meeting for Youth. Some valuable input was given by Ottawa youth.

We are currently planning to hold a Hadith Seminar for women. There exists a great need for women to address issues of Health, mental health, aging nutrition, exercise and recreation. We recognize that there is a large aging population of immigrant Muslim women who do not have the support of a strong community resource to assist in addressing the issues listed above as well as related issues like menopause, empty-nest syndrome, stress and depression. We will organize a panel of experts in these fields to hold a day seminar on these issues and provide a safe space for women to openly discuss issues that are critical to their healthy and happy lives. Insha'Allah this event is planned for the month of May.

We are part of the "Community Cupboard." This successful endeavour was started in Ottawa by Nancy Magued and a group of Muslim women. Needy families are referred here for clothing, food and household needs. After the plans to register are completed, a fundraiser will be held to meet the expenses and organise food basket programs.

On March 10, CCMW Ottawa member spoke on CBC radio (CBO morning) as part of a panel of three women, to give an immigrant Muslim woman's views on feminism. This was a second in a series of subject for Women's Int. Week. This was an interesting but short presentation.

## **P.E.I. Report**

Muslim Community is working hard towards achieving the goal of acquiring a place for worship. Fundraising drive is in full swing. Women are doing Bake sales and auctions to raise much needed funds. If any chapter or individuals would like to contribute, please do so, we are a charitable organization and can issue receipts for Tax purposes. We have collected close to \$50,000 and our target is to raise \$150,000 by the end of April 2000, otherwise we will lose the deal on the property. Please be generous and God will reward you. Cheques can be made out to Muslim Society of PEI, and mailed to my address.

Our sponsored Kosovar family has settled very nicely and two members have also got jobs. Children are enrolled in schools and are enjoying fully. They come to our monthly pot luck dinners.

Jobs for Muslim women are very rare and I, (as president of Multicultural Council) have raised this question with business community and government officials. We pay visits to elementary schools to educate them about our culture.

Farida Chishti (March 2000 )

## **Regina Chapter**

The Regina Chapter has come out of winter dormancy with renewed purpose. The mandate for the Chapter this year is Sisterhood and member recruitment. The executive for the 1999-2000 term was elected in April 1999. The club restructured the format of the executive. The position of Vice-President was eliminated and the position of Social Coordinator was added. The current executive is Erum Afsar (President), Nusrat Jahlil (Treasurer), Naushaba Habib (Social Coordinator) and Aamna Afsar (Secretary). The executive met in early February to discuss the direction of the Chapter for this year. It was decided that the club would take a more relaxed approach by having more social type meeting in order to meet our mandate. This year two meetings have been held and this new format has been very successful. The Chapter is recruiting new members by encouraging existing members to bring a friend to each meeting. The meetings themselves have had short business portions followed by social time to allow for interaction between members. The first meeting, at the end of February, had presentations from the members that attended the National Conference. Two books that were launched at the conference were also presented. One of the members read from the book *At My Mother's Feet* and the response was very positive. After the meeting the Chapter has been actively ordering more of both books. In February, the President attended a Regional Council of Women Meeting. Our second meeting was held in March and had a successful turn-out of 13 members, of which two were new members. In May the Chapter will hold a planning meeting to organize our annual Mother and Daughter Barbeque/Picnic to be held in June.

Quote from guest at last meeting: "I've lived in Regina for 3½ years and have never heard of the CCMW"

Comment from the President: "This is something we are actively working to change by telling one person at a time about the CCMW and what it represents to Muslim Women across Canada."

## **Vancouver Chapter:**

The new year started with energy and enthusiasm for Vancouver Chapter. On February 26th, our chapter had a pot luck dinner. Three potential new members were invited to the dinner. We also had four male participants in our meeting. Getting a male perspective into women's issues was a significant event for our Chapter.

In March, Vancouver Chapter recruited 8 Muslim youth for the focus group. These youth offered some creative ideas for the upcoming Conference in Calgary. We had four young male youths and four female. The open discussion in the focus group made the youth feel safe and comfortable. They have indicated an interest in becoming regular members of CCMW Vancouver Chapter. *Rahut Kurd's Book* continues to gain publicity and our members are also brainstorming for further ways of promoting the book. Most non-profit organizations in Lower Mainland now have a copy of *Reading Rights*.

Shahnaz Rahman (Vancouver Chapter)

## **Niagara Chapter:**

In December 1999, Sister Angela Valli volunteered her time at the conference of Canadian Council For Refugees which took place in Niagara Falls.

We have been distributing non-perishable food items to different food banks all over the Niagara region. This has been made possible by the generous donations of members of the Islamic society of Niagara Peninsula. This project has helped us to be known as active participants in the region.

We have also been participating in the monthly community coffee hour. This gives us a chance to mingle with women of other faiths. We also attended a dinner which was organized by the Fort Erie Multicultural Women's alliance. That dinner was attended by about 65 ladies of different ethnic background and was a very enjoyable evening by any account.

We have assisted Fort Erie Heritage Council to develop the volunteer policy. These volunteers helps the new comers to integrate in the Canadian society.

Hasna Tayyeb

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## CONFERENCES:

Razia Jafter and Pervina Khan, Calgary Chapter will attend a conference, May 2000 in Human Rights organized by an umbrella group of agencies, the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies.

The organizers have invited us and are willing to publicize our book Reading Rights at the conference. This is very rewarding for CCMW and for the writer Rahat Kurd.

Alia Hogben has been asked to be in a workshop at the conference, May 2000, on Women & Spirituality, to be held in London, ON. Last year Munawar Ahmed, Halifax, attended another conference on behalf of CCMW. Thank you.

## NOMINATION OF "FRIENDLY MOSQUE":

The Canadian Islamic Congress took the initiative of a campaign to select a mosque or Islamic Centre which is open, friendly and pro-active in involving women and children. CCMW has joined with CIC by providing a small sum for the winner.

The Niagara Falls mosque has been nominated and the selection will occur in May 2000.

## CONFERENCE 2000:

Insha Allah, the Conference will be held in Calgary and the focus will be on Youth. We are working on the application to our funders.

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## OF INTEREST:

Conference, May 26-28/2000, London, ON

### "Finders Keepers: A Passion that Transforms"

This conference is about Women and Spirituality. For Further Information, please contact, P O B 1819, 515 Richmond Street, London, ON N6A 5H9 Phone: (519) 439-5664.

Conference, May 13-18, 2001, York University, Toronto

### "The 9th International Women & Health Meeting"

An international Conference on Women's health issues. Please contact:

IWMH  
366 Adelaide St. W., #706  
Toronto, ON M5V 1R9  
Phone: (416) 971-6333  
website:[http://www.iwhm\\_rfs.org](http://www.iwhm_rfs.org)

Dinner, April 22, 2000, Toronto

A fund-raising dinner is organized for Women in Pakistan, with Professor Riffat Hassan, as a speaker. This will be very worthwhile and exciting, please attend! For information contact: Huma Ahmad (416) 802-5583 or (905) 826-8262 email: [huma.ahmad@aventis.com](mailto:huma.ahmad@aventis.com)

Conference, May 7-9, 2000, Banff, AB

### "Building a Human Rights Culture"

organized by Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies. Contact <http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca> or Phone: (780) 437-8013.

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## ARTICLE

**Men And Women In Islam**

[Dr. Al-Qaradawi is a world renowned Muslim scholar. He is the author of more than 100 major reference books on Islam, most of which are translated into English. He is Dean of the Faculty of Religious Studies, University of Qatar, Qatar. he has been an invited keynote speaker in more than 50 countries, including Canada. This article is slightly adapted from its original publication on his web page.]

### 1. The Spread of Hardline Ideas:

I must say frankly here that Islamic work has been the scene of spreading hardline ideas governing the relationship between men and women... Some of the strictest opinions ever to be found on this issue have been adopted.

This is what I saw for myself in many conference and symposiums, even in Europe and the United States. During the mid-1970s, for several years in a row, I attended annual conferences of Muslim Student Associations in the United States and Canada. Both men and women attended the lectures and debates, listening to comments, questions, answers and discussions on every major Islamic issue, including academic, social, educational and political fields. The only sessions restricted to women were those allocated to questions that concerned women alone.

In 1980 however, I attended similar conferences in the United States & Europe and found that women were kept away from a good number of the important lectures & debates. Some women complained they had become bored with lectures focusing only on women's roles, rights, responsibilities & positions in Islam & had come to regard the repetition of such lectures as a sort of punishment imposed on them.

I denounced that in more than one conference I attended, telling organizers that the rules of worship & religious learning stressed participation & that there never existed in Islam a Mosque that had been reserved for women alone, and not visited by men. Women attended sessions in which the Prophet taught Muslims the Religion. They also participated in (or at least attended) the Jumaa' (Friday), the two Eids, & congregational prayers together with men. They asked questions about female matters without being prevented by shyness from learning the Religion, as Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) herself said.

The books of Sunna abound with questions that were directed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) by women, including those asked by women who wanted answers to questions that concerned only themselves, as well as those asked by women on behalf of all women, as the woman who said, "O Messenger of Allah, I have been sent to you by women". Women also asked the Prophet to allocate a separate day just for them, without the men, so they might have the time and privacy to ask whatever they liked without being inhibited by their presence. This was another privilege given to women, besides the public lessons they attended together with men.

## 2. Community Work by Women

The problem with women's work in Islam is that men mostly direct it and are careful to maintain their grip on it, so that female leadership is not allowed to emerge. Men impose themselves even on women's meetings, exploiting the shyness of their more reticent sisters and never letting them take command of their own affairs. This way, female talents are not given a chance to prove themselves in the pursuits of the Islamic Movement, or to be seasoned by the experience and struggle taught in the school of life...

However, our Muslim sisters are not wholly blameless, for some have surrender to this sorry state of affairs, contenting themselves with a life of ease and tranquility in which men do the thinking and decision-making for them. It is high time they took the initiative, opened the wide the doors of effort and work for the Call, and silenced those self-appointed voices that have imposed themselves on the doctrine, laws and values of this nation. These strange voices, loud as they are, represent only defeated, down-trodden minority that has no weight, either in religion or in worldly affairs.

I was invited to give a lecture to female students at an Algiers University last year. As is customary after lecturing, I started taking questions from the women, in written or oral form. Some young men were also present, and one of them took it upon himself to collect the questions, sort them out, and pass along to me those he thought should be answered and abandon those he felt unworthy. I objected to his conduct, asking "Why doesn't one of the women do that on behalf of her colleagues? Why do you men have to 'poke your noses' into women's affairs? Take your hands off them! Let them do whatever they like, sorting out their own questions, choosing what they deem fit and then having one of their peers read them aloud." It was as if I had lifted a heavy burden from these women; and one of them hurriedly came forward to assume the role that the man (had been playing).

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## PUBLICATIONS OF CCMW

### All Available from CCMW

Behierry, Valerie Anne and Guenther, Alan  
**Islam, Its Roots & Wings, an introduction to Islam, its beliefs and proactives.**  
Useful guide for service providers, teachers, and those interested in Islam.

Kurd, Rahat  
**Reading Rights. A legal handbook**  
Quarry Press, 1999  
A practical guide for women about the laws.

Querishi, Emran  
**Claiming our Rights. A Position Paper, based on the 1999 Conference**  
A concise discourse on human rights in Islam, with a focus on women.

Raza, Raheel  
**Media Relations**  
a handbook on how to address issues of interest to Muslims, especially women in the media.

Zanan, Sadia ed  
**At My Mother's Feet, Personal Stories of Canadian Muslim, Women Pioneer**  
Quarry Press, 1999.

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#### CHAPTER CONTACTS

|                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
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| Halifax        | Munawar Ahmed    |
| London         | Zanifa Ali       |
| Montreal       | Sajida Hussain   |
| Montreal       | Fehmida Khan     |
| Niagara        | Hasna Tayab      |
| Ottawa         | Farhat R. Kurd   |
| Pr. Ed. Island | Farida Chishti   |
| Peel           | Atiya Ahsan      |
| Regina         | Erum Afsar       |
| Toronto        | Nafees Syeed     |
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