

FINAL REPORT OF THE FIRST AMERICAN MUSLIM WOMEN LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

December 5, 2004

“...those who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation”
Qur’an 42:38

“O people, reverence your Guardian Lord, who created you from a single *nafs* (soul)
Qur’an 4:1

Preamble

We, the participants in the First American Muslim Women Leaders Summit, in recognition of the critical challenges facing the American Muslim community in general and American Muslim women in particular, have come together to communicate, deliberate, and make our voices heard across this nation.

We reaffirm our commitment to basic Qur’anic principles which state that males and females are created from the same *nafs*, and that the most honored amongst us in the sight of God are those who are most pious (49:13). We are also guided by the Prophetic *hadith* (saying) that women are the split halves of men, and that education is the duty of every Muslim, male or female.

We recognize the fact that we live in a society whose cultural, technological, social, legal, and economic conditions differ markedly from those of countries where most of Islamic jurisprudence has been developed over the centuries. We also recognize that our community has a substantial immigrant population that came from these other countries, and a substantial indigenous, especially African American, population that has helped build the United States.

We come together at this moment, because the time has come for us to determine collectively our priorities as Muslim women in the United States. So far, priorities have been attributed to us by others. It is now imperative that we speak clearly in our own voice. While this summit did not include all American Muslim women leaders, it contained a substantial number and quite a diverse group of participants who came together from all over the United States.

The participants, who are grass root community leaders and Islamic scholars, included women from the legal, medical, educational, social services, and other professions. It was agreed that many of the issues raised will need to be treated from all these

professional perspectives and that therefore continued collaboration and coordination was of the utmost importance.

During this weekend of intense deliberations, these priorities have emerged through a consensus process. We hope to further develop and address these priorities in a way that serves our community and constituencies. We also plan to pool our resources and expertise to reach our desired goals. To this end, we are forming a coordinating council that will follow up on the recommendations of this Summit. We call upon other American Muslim women to join our effort. Below are the priority issues raised during the Summit in the following order.

The Family: Marriage and Divorce

Summit participants are most concerned about the preservation of the family, and about issues facing the Muslim woman within the family. In particular, we would like to know more about the Islamic jurisprudence of marriage and divorce to better understand the rights of Muslim women in these two arenas. Cases were mentioned at our meetings where Muslim women were seriously disadvantaged by not being properly informed of their rights.

We have a related concern about the need to better understand the interaction of Islamic and American family law. Again, cases of Muslim women being adversely affected by this lack of understanding were mentioned at our meetings.

We are also interested in addressing and finding solutions for such matters within these topics, as the problems of men entering religious but not civil marriages, and therefore denying their wives important protections under American law. Other problems include those of husbands hiding their assets before divorce, or seeking divorce abroad to avoid American divorce courts.

Violence Against Women (National and International)

We are alarmed by the rise in violence at home and abroad. We are particularly concerned about women in vulnerable situations, such as women in poverty, refugee women, and women in war zones, especially since rape is being used as a tool of war.

We are also concerned about the misinterpretation and misapplication of *hudud* laws in certain Muslim countries, and call for rectifying this Islamically indefensible situation. Our concerns also include female genital mutilation, honor killings, and trafficking in women, which are abuses and crimes that are inconsistent with Islamic values.

Empowerment of Women Through Education

We recognize the importance of education in empowering women. We therefore plan to pool our resources to provide a more responsive Islamic education for the new (as well as older) generation of Muslims. We are aware that this education must take into account a variety of urgent issues on the individual, familial, and social levels. In particular, it is important to develop a body of educational material that properly reflects Islamic values in treating issues of sexuality arising in our American society, such as sex-education, family planning, premarital relations, temporary marriages, and sexual orientation. On the familial and social level, we need to be better informed through Islamic jurisprudence about the proper roles, rights, and duties of husbands and wives, and men and women.

To this end, we will examine *zakat* funds as possible financial sources for helping women achieve their educational goals, and to organize workshops, and leadership and mentoring programs.

Interaction of Islamic and American Law

We would like to closely examine the interaction of Islamic and American law in several significant areas, such as domestic violence in its various forms, child custody, and inheritance laws. This will involve also a study of choice of law for cases which cross jurisdictions.

We are concerned about achieving the proper interaction between Islamic and American law. We believe that this proper interaction is currently hampered by various elements, ranging from the simplest to the most complicated. For example, we note that the inaccurate and biased language interpretations and translations in American courts have resulted in adverse decisions contrary to Islamic law or to the interest of Muslim women. We draw attention to this problem which is easily correctable with some due diligence.

Domestic Violence

We advocate the Islamic model of marital relations, which is based on affection, tranquility, mercy, and partnership. We consider domestic violence within our community, and the American society, as a very serious matter. Domestic violence includes not only physical violence, but also sexual violence, such as marital rape. It also includes legal abuse, such as immigration abuse, and cultural, religious, spiritual, psychological, emotional, and financial abuse.

We recognize that adultery often results in psychological and emotional abuse within the family unit, as well as potential adverse health consequences to the wife. We also recognize that some extended families have condoned rather than prevented domestic violence. This problem must be addressed through education, legal action, mental health

care, social services, as well as other approaches. We must also familiarize the community with relevant protective laws.

We stand united to protect our women, children, and other vulnerable segments of our community from abuse.

Other Issues

We consider the issue of racism and other forms of discrimination within our community, such as those based on class and ethnic identity, to be of great importance. In addition, we are concerned about the erosion of civil rights that specifically affect our community today. We resolve to conduct meetings, conferences, and seminars on these subjects to promote respect and understanding within our community and the society around us.

Throughout our deliberations, we identified a number of additional issues important to us, and each of these issues will be pursued and developed by our inter-organizational council and its subcommittees in accordance with the priority we assigned to it.

Conclusion

As American Muslim women, we will work together to rectify the problems within our communities and the larger society. These problems are multifaceted, and each of us has expertise that is needed for this process.

Recognizing this fact, we are hereby committed to working together for the good of our sisters, and our community. We believe in equity and justice, in education as transformation, and in faith as a constructive force in society. We invite our sisters to join us in this historic task we are shouldering.

Wassalam alaykum wa rahamatullah wa barakatuh.