

DAWN – Pakistan

First Muslim women’s consultative body planned

By Our Correspondent

NEW YORK, Nov 20: One hundred Muslim women religious leaders, human rights activists, scholars and artists from around the world on Sunday resolved to create the first women Shura council (consultative body) to correct two stereotypes about Islam – that Islam oppresses women and Muslims are terrorists.

At the end a three-day event on Sunday, they launched the Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity (WISE) and decided to create the council to help redress grievances of its members in keeping with Islamic law.

"This is a historical and critical event in the history of Islam," said Daisy Khan, executive director of the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA), the chief organiser of the event.

"WISE will provide a much-needed platform for diverse Muslim women to discuss global Muslim women's issues, assert our rights through the use of and in accordance with Islamic law, and build a coherent movement that empowers and connects Muslim women everywhere."

Talking to Dawn, Ms Khan said: "We have taken the important step of creating a women's Shura council that will seek social justice for Muslim women the worldwide."

As to the assertions by some at the conference that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was the first feminist in Islam, Ms Khan said: "The Holy Prophet (PBUH) treated his wives and daughters with utmost respect and had really uplifted women. He could be called the first social reformer."

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, a founder member of ASMA, said: "The women also want to break down myths that exist, particularly in the West."

"Two misconceptions about Islam are that it is associated with terrorism and that Islam oppresses women. These are two myths that we seek to demolish. We need to change the perception of Islam in the West and this cannot be achieved without the participation of women," said Abdul Rauf.

Prominent among those who attended the three-day event were Pakistan’s Mukhtaran Mai, Baroness Uddin, the first Muslim woman to enter Britain’s House of Lords; Dr Nafis Sadik, the UN chief’s special adviser; Asra Nomani, author of Standing alone in Mecca; and Afghan presidential candidate Massouda Jalal.