



W I S E

Women's Islamic Initiative in
Spirituality and Equity 2006

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I. Statement of Need

After 9/11, Islam and Muslims have become the subject of increasing scrutiny both internally by Muslims and externally by non-Muslims. Amongst many, there is the widely held perception that Islam is a religion of violence, and that it subjugates women. Hosted by ASMA Society (the American Society for Muslim Advancement) in Times Square, New York, WISE is the beginning of a vision that will amplify and articulate the voices, thoughts and beliefs of Muslim women in respect to Islam, spirituality, pluralism and human rights through a faith-inspired understanding. These determined women can reverse that perception, calling for peaceful action as well as shedding light on how women are in fact empowering their fellow sisters through Islam's insistence upon social justice and magnifying their voices as exemplified by this initiative.

II. Overview

On November 17-19th 2006 WISE: Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity launched a spectacular meeting of minds comprising of over 150 outstanding Muslim women from 25 countries, spanning from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Senegal and Morocco to Turkey, the Netherlands, Belgium, the United Kingdom and the United States. The weekend was graced with the stunningly powerful presence of several Muslim women leaders, many of whom are pioneers in their own fields. Sharing their wisdom and experience with the riveted audience were Baroness Uddin, the first Muslim woman to enter the House of Lords, Ingrid Mattson, the first female president of the Islamic Society of North America, Fatin Bundagji, the first municipal female candidate in Saudi Arabia and the founder of the Women's section of the Saudi

Chamber of Commerce, Dr. Massouda Jalal, a presidential candidate in Afghanistan, Dr. Nafis Sadik, Special Adviser to the Secretary General of the United Nations and Nogi Imoukhuede from Nigeria, the prestigious lawyer of the Amina Lawal stoning case, amongst many other prominent participants. There were women representing a variety of fields including academics, scholars, spiritual leaders, activists, journalists, politicians, businesswomen, civil society leaders, artists and mothers. Significantly, the participants equally represented the diversity within Islam as they hailed from all major branches of Islam, including Sunnis, Shi's, Ismailis, Sufis, and Ahmadis. A wide base of ideologies joined in open dialogue, promoting the tolerance of perspectives, whether secular, traditional, conservative. or liberal and progressive. Further, a number of prominent interfaith leaders were present including Sister Joan Chittister, Rev. Joan Campbell, and Sister Fund's Helen LaKelly Hunt, who is one of the most vocal advocates of faith-fueled feminism today.

Walking into the conference room, one felt overwhelmed not only by the diversity of the participants, but also by the sophistication of the conversations occurring. Over the course of three days, a consistent surge of energy swept into the corridors where women found each other discussing mutual struggles, concerns and means of empowerment at a more personal level. The conversation style panels followed by discussion with the audience forged an atmosphere of inter-connectedness offering everyone a voice, whether amplified from the stage or heard in response to the erudite panelists. All of this made for a very unique event indeed and a launch with enormous potential for future work and progress in the advancement of Muslim women.

III. Objectives of WISE:

1. To create a space in which Muslim women can actively dialogue, debate, and collaborate on issues of Muslim women's rights and responsibilities.
2. To increase awareness of ongoing advancements in Muslim women's rights in Muslim societies and in the West.
3. To raise awareness of women's power in social change and philanthropy.
4. To reexamine the nexus of culture and religion as a barrier to Muslim women's advancement.
5. To establish a Global Muslim Women's Fund to provide critically needed resources towards strengthening capacity of NGOs working for the advancement of Muslim women in addition to establishing an endowment for creating scholarships for Muslim women to study Islamic law..
6. To develop an International Consultative (*Shura*) Council of empowered Muslim women, working toward gender and social justice through religio-legal proclamations (*fatwas*) and advice on issues of relevance and concern to Muslim women around the world.

IV. Opening remarks:

The Conference program began Friday with a Quranic recitation by Seemi Ghazi a Canadian spiritual leader, followed by an opening addresses by the organizer and Executive Director of ASMA Society, Daisy Khan and facilitator Mino Akhtar. She welcomed the forum with her passionate and insightful remarks, noting that the women here have come from such varied backgrounds to form a collective voice. Taking lessons

from her own spiritual journey, she encouraged all of the women present to look deeply within themselves, for the cardinal point of any substantive change is first the self which is then externalized through one's thoughts and actions. In closing, Ms. Khan humbly remarked that, particularly in the global south, the advancement of Muslim women is intertwined with issues such as poverty, poor education and poor health services, and to effectively address these issues, we need to make women a priority.

Open Mike: Introductions & Group Discussion

The floor was then opened up to participants to provide everyone an opportunity to express themselves and learn from the knowledge and experiences of their sisters in faith. Specifically, participants were asked what steps they considered necessary to further the possibility of Muslim women's advancement. The synthesis of their responses is documented in a Section VI – Workshop. The most frequently repeated concern was the need for female perspectives in Qur'anic interpretation and *ijtihad*. The addition of female perspectives to the multitude existing interpretations would not only illustrate the true pluralism of Islam, but would also shed light on the issue custom circumscribing the rights and opportunities afforded to women in clear contravention to the injunctions of the religion. Perverse scriptural interpretations have resulted in the prohibition of female religious leaders, forced marriages, domestic abuse and even terrorism. Pamela Bone of *The Australian* in writing about WISE declared, "If Islam is to be reformed, and the world consequently made safer and happier for all, it is women who will do it. Yes, there are male Muslim reformers, but in general most Muslim men do not see a feminist interpretation of Islam as in their interest. Why should they? Western men didn't see last

century's women's liberation movement as in theirs. It had to be driven by women because the status quo advantaged men”.

V. Panels Discussions:

Artistic Voices in Concert:

Ani Zonneveld-Musician- USA

Anisa Mehdi- Filmmaker- USA

Fawzia Afzal Khan- Poet & Author-USA

Rajae El Mouhandiz- Musician- Netherlands

Aslihan Eker- Filmmaker- Turkey

To welcome the WISE women and create a comfortable environment in a space where the most cumbersome issues facing Muslim women were soon to be discussed, poets, film producers and singers dazzled the audience with flowing stanzas, mind-opening documentaries, slides of art work, cartoons from a Muslim magazine, and sang faith-infused musical lyrics. In addition to showcasing an array of talent among participants, the presentations highlighted the power of media and art to educate Muslim and non-Muslim audiences and transform opinions. Ani Zonneveld and Rajae El Mouhandiz are two emerging artists making a name for the beauty and splendor of Islam. Part of the inertia bringing you in to their music is the self-exploration rising out of their passion for the arts. Rajae, growing up in the Netherlands, has been influenced by so many different sources, whether Islam, jazz and hip-hop not to mention the cultural tradition of the Netherlands itself, and it becomes evident when you hear her music, a *mélange* of

contemporary funk and respect for the divine. Taking from the Islamic tradition of religiously inspired art and combining it with Western-style music, these women are showing the beautiful complementarity of Islam and local cultures while also adding to the cultural production of the West. Joining these two star-studded women were also poet, Fawzia Khan and, Seemi Ghazi, a spiritual leader and singer of devotional songs and film producers Aslihan Eker and Anisa Mehdi. In a similar vein, a special debut of a theater production titled “7Women, 7Heavens,” which presented vignettes of the lives of 7 Muslim women in different parts of the world in abrasive, funny, and soothing dialogue with themselves around personal struggles with faith, community, and relationships. 7Women, 7Heavens was written by Kayhan Irani, directed by Jonathan Cerullo and produced by Daisy Khan. The debut took place on Saturday, November 18th.

Women Empowering Women

Baroness Uddin, House of Lords, UK

Dr. Nafis Sadik, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General, USA

Massouda Jalal, Jalal Foundation, Afghanistan

Fatin Bundagji, Women Empowerment & Research at the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Saudi Arabia

Wendy Chamberlain, Former US Ambassador

Marie Wilson, Founder of The White House Project-

Saturday morning kicked off with a panel featuring empowered women. Dr. Sadiq is currently advisor to UN Secretary General and former Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), with the rank of Under-Secretary-General. Ten years ago, Dr. Sadiq approached organizations and individuals in Pakistan to start a program

for young Pakistani women to study at Al-Azhar for religious studies and training; she was not only greeted with contempt but it was the women who fought her the most. She was, enthralled by the initiative to create a scholarship for muftia to better ensure a woman's voice in religious interpretation. She spoke about the barriers she faced when she began working as a nurse in Pakistan. After repeatedly telling women that they could not continue to have children consecutively because of health risks, she realized that the women had little to no say on reproductive matters in their families. Next she convened the husbands of the women she was working with, but they said that it was the wife's duty to have babies. She recalled one man saying that if his wife died he could just find another. Dr. Sadiq pledged her support for the WISE initiative and offered to help in every way possible. Ms. Bundagji emphasized the need for women to support one another especially in promoting women's interests. Ms. Bundagji spoke of some of the leadership opportunities for women in Saudi Arabia within the segregation. She indicated that women are very involved in civil society and NGO work as well. Shifting the focus upon political relations, Dr. Jalal gave an insider's view of relations within Afghanistan. She spoke about providing medical care in her home without charge under the Taliban. Some of the highlights of her term as Minister of Women's Affairs were pushing for a law against violence against women and a more equitable marriage contract. She said she was eventually pushed out by an "anti-women" element in the government. Dr. Jalal said she thought the Ministry of Women's Affairs would be eliminated and relayed the pressure she felt in the office to step down. When asked, she said the situation of women in Afghanistan is much better than it was under the Taliban but however, unknown to much of the public eye, the Taliban is quickly gaining traction

again and threatening the government to compromise to maintain peace and security. The audience stared, stupefied when she told them of the recent destruction of over 300 girls' schools at the hands of the Taliban. Ms. Chamberlain a former ambassador of US to Pakistan confirmed the tragedies continuing in the region and emphasized the importance of social and economic development as an integral solution. Marie Wilson discussed The White House Project's *Vote, Run, Lead* program which trains 100 future female political leaders per meeting. Marie Wilson regaled the crowd as she recounted how 8 years ago she vowed to work to see the first female president in 2008; since that time she has been instrumental in assisting women become mayors, representatives and senators, amplifying the political influence and voice of women while also preparing them for the responsibility of higher positions as the presidency. In ending, she readily encouraged Muslim women to seek political positions regardless of the level; it is through a strong foundation that Muslim women can develop their voice in governments and effect sustainable change. She highlighted SheSource.org, a database for journalists and others needed prominent women speakers on a wide range of subjects from around the world (www.shesource.org).

Reverend Joan Campbell

Rev. Joan Campbell gave a moving speech about her experience as the first woman executive director of the U.S. Office of the World Council of Churches. She talked about the influence Martin Luther King had on her life and said she thought it was critical to "honor each faith as much as we honor our own." Her words were warmly received by the audience.

Faith Fueled Activism

Nevin Reda, Canadian Council for Muslim Women, Canada

Zainah Anwar, Head of "Sisters in Islam," Malaysia

Ingrid Mattson, President, Islamic Society of North America, USA

*Aisha Jeffries, Global Affairs Vice President, The African American Islamic Institute,
USA*

Wajeeha Sadek, President of Bahrain Women's Association, Bahrain

Fatiha Kaoues, Journalist, France

After a mystical exploration, delving into the living spirit of Islam's message, the women were questioned of their motivation and inspiration in pursuing such a noble cause in their daily lives; most women responded frankly that they have been offended, attacked, victimized or obligated in some way by another's actions to protect their personal dignity and dispel misconceptions about the faith of Islam, which they hold so dearly in their hearts. The panel also highlighted some of the controversies and difference of opinion within the group. Dr. Mattson did not support female imams or women leading mixed-gender prayers and there was clear nervousness from the audience during some parts of this discussion and when she was asked pointedly about her opinion on the two topics she said "we can agree with one another on some issues even though we disagree with one another on other issues."

Nevin Reda said that it is critical for women to be Imams, spiritual leaders, and said that there are hadith that run contrary to the Qu'ran. For example, she mentioned that there are hadiths that say women cannot be leaders or positive influences but there were several

very important women leaders in Prophet Muhammad’s life. The other major question raised was whether faith-based arbitration should be legally binding. Ms. Reda said this had been discussed in the Canadian Muslim community and felt that it should not be legally binding because of the difficulties in implementation and enforcement. Ms. Kaoues mainly addressed the economic discrimination against Muslims and particularly Muslim women, in France. Ms. Jeffries said that there are 500,000 members of The African American Islamic Institute and stressed the importance of Muslim women uniting across racial as well as geographic lines.

Women Spiritual Leadership

Sheikha Fariha, USA

Camille Helminski, Threshold Society, USA

Sohna Aminata Lo, Senegal

Naheed Angha, USA

Aisha Rafea, Egyptian Society for Spiritual and Cultural Research, Egypt

Simi Bushra Ghazi, Canada

This panel focused mainly on the power of *Dhikr* (a meditative act of remembering God) for healing and opening hearts. The panel presented 6 humble and illuminated female spiritual leaders from the sufi tradition. Dilshad Ali, a WISE participant and a contributor at Beliefnet, the world’s largest spiritual site, remarked, “The Sufi scholars on stage almost seem like they live in a different, ethereal world. They look like they’re high on God, and they want to help us achieve that feeling. Do they know some spiritual secret that we don’t?” Sohnna Aminata Lo is a member of the most well-known and powerful

Muslim family of sufi lineage in Senegal said that her country provides an important example for other Muslim countries. Senegal recently elected a Catholic leader even though 95% of the country is Muslim. If there was any doubt that Islam promoted tolerance and love, the patience and compassion of these figures on stage melted all prejudices away. Aisha Rafea, a spiritual leader from Egypt, spoke on the growth of political Islam and literalist scriptural interpretations. She recounted that dogmatism and stagnant tradition often imprison the human being, veiling their mind's eye to the fathomless beauty and wisdom inherent in divine teaching. Blinded, followers are unable to distinguish the eternal basic principles from their ephemeral expressions. In this confusion, followers are unable to differentiate between the means and the purpose of the divine teachings. Misconstruing the process for the end goal, Ms. Rafea characterized the worshipping of words as a new form idolatry. A simple example can be seen in fasting practices in the Muslim world; it is not uncommon for a country's population to consume more food during the month of Ramadan than during any other month. The purpose of this holy month is to learn discipline and self-restraint; not to starve oneself all day long only to give in to gluttony at night.

One of the British participants asked for advice on reaching out to young, angry Muslims with positive messages of religion and other ways to channel their anger. The spiritual leaders response focused on the power of religion to open hearts but did not offer any tangible solutions.

Ijtihad: Women re-interpreters

Asifa Qureishi, Assistant Professor, University of Madison-Wisconsin, USA

Nogi Imoukhuede, Project Coordinator, Women's Rights Watch, Nigeria

Farzana Hassan, freelance writer, Canada

Ziba Mir Hosseini, UK

Aisha Shaheed, Women Living Under Muslim Laws, Canada

Laila Al Zwaini, academic and advisor, Netherlands

The principle of self-help and knowledge-sharing overflowed into the “Ijtihad” panel, where scholars showed that the faith of Islam never restricts the interpretation nor expression of the faith to only men, it only stipulates knowledge of Arabic and the Qur’an. Muslim women driven in this field need to receive proper training and education so that they not only fulfill the qualifications but that their opinion is accepted by other scholars and followers. It’s ironic that the freedom provided by the faith is one of the largest obstacles for women to overcome; with a host of sexist interpretations, women often have to clamor more vocally than the crowd of men yelling back. One of the panelists noted that “gender equality” is a relatively new idea so it is not surprising the original laws did not include it. Al Zwaini agreed with the other panelists that women interpreters of Islamic law were critical but added that changing cultural understanding was equally important. During her field work in Yemen, where there are strong laws to protect women, severe inequality remains. Nogi Imoukhuede is a Christian woman from Nigeria who discussed the differences in laws between the North and South of Nigeria. For example, adultery has been a crime in the North but not in the South. In 2001, a governor in the North put into place full Sharia Law and the first case was a thief that had his hands cut off. News of the incident sent a surge through the country and set off riots and protests. Imoukhuede talked specifically about the work of her NGO human rights

law firm for a young girl, Amina Lawal, sentenced to death by stoning for alleged adultery. This case received international attention.

Notably, when asked about the *nice*, the panelists disagreed about whether or not it should be banned in European countries. There was visible discomfort in the room when Ziba Mir Hosseini said she agreed with Jack Straw, that *nikab* separates people. However, an overall consensus developed from the discussion irrespective of whether or not they agreed with Mr. Straw's comment that the face veil is a "visible statement of separation and of difference" that critiques of Muslim religious expressions should come from within the Muslim Community instead of from the outside. Asifa Qureishi, an expert in Islamic and U.S. constitutional law, made the most telling remark on the hijab debate.

"This debate makes me sad. I don't like women's dress being a topic of public debate at all," she said, adding that the true problem is that a non-Muslim made this into a matter of public debate, when Muslims themselves should have been hashing it out.

One of the most controversial verses, from the Qu'ran 4:34 appears to condone domestic violence which customarily is translated as, "Husbands who fear adversity on the part of wives, admonish them, leave their bed, and beat them." Laleh Bakhtiar, whose English translation of the Qur'an (the first done by a woman) is due out in the spring discussed what she learned about the Qur'an through personal study. After consulting numerous Muslim scholars and conducting her own in-depth study, she concluded that the Arabic root word "drb" (which has always been translated to "beat") also means "to go away." Ms. Bakhtiar struggled to comprehend how a faith which preaches that killing a human being is like killing all of humanity could order men to harm their wives. Building on numerous consultations with Qur'an scholars in addition to noting that the Prophet never

beat his wives, she concluded that the accurate translation of the verse should be “Husbands who fear adversity on the part of wives, admonish them, leave their bed, and go away.” “We must deal with inconsistencies in the Qur’an,” she said, because the Qur’an is not wrong. “The mistakes come in how we interpret it.”

Frameworks for Social Justice

Margot Badran, USA

Anisa Abd Al Fattah, USA

Nogi Imoukhuede, Nigeria

Najia El Boudali, Morocco

D. Sharifa Khanam, STEPS Women’s Development Organization, India

Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, assistant professor of religion, USA

One of the highlights of the panel was Ms. Khanam from India talking about her efforts to build a mosque for women in India led by women Imama’s and showing a documentary on her project. Daisy Khan stood up and said that they hoped this project would be one of the first the Global Fund helped pay for once it was established. In Morocco, a number of NGOs have formed the “Spring of Equality,” a collaboration of women’s groups, to work toward ending domestic violence and repudiation. They are looking for more scholars to help and have created a center of information including statistics on Muslim women’s issues.

Special Guest Appearance:

Mukhtaran Mai, Pakistan

Mukhtaran Mai, an illiterate saint of Pakistan, enlightens all open ears and eyes to the struggles of Muslim women across the world. A victim of gang rape publicly carried out by order of her local village council, Mukhtaran Mai has dedicated her life to pushing for the advancement of women and children in her local community, which she has refused to leave even after continuous being threatened for speaking out. She has since mobilized resources to build a school for girls, a school for boys, a health clinic, a police station, a women's crisis center, bought an ambulance and is now in the process of constructing the first high school in her community. Ms. Mai both humbled and empowered the enraptured audience with her simple wisdom, "Our only hope is the fight for justice. End oppression with education. To remain ignorant is a crime. To remain apathetic is a crime. To remain silent about a crime is a crime". Ms. Mai, with only an elementary education, is now providing schooling to over 300 girls and proves that a reservoir of love, a belief in oneself and the strength of God can overcome all obstacles.

Many were moved to tears by her experience, and the moment was deeply emotional, such that Ms. Mai concluded her remarks to room full of WISE participants giving her a standing ovation, after which and many lined up to speak with her directly.

Learning from the struggles of others

Helen Kelly Hunt, Sister Fund, Author of Faith & Feminism

Sister Joan Chittister, Benedictine Nun

Devorah Zlochower, Drisha (Jewish) Institute

Hyun Kyung Chung, Buddhist/ Christian theologian

Ranya Idliby, Author, Faith Club

This was fascinating panel made up of women of different faiths discussing their personal struggles and some of the controversies within their own faith tradition. Helen LaKelly Hunt who recently wrote “Faith and Feminism” discussed the foundation of the abolitionist movement in the US with women in the church. She described how 180 women, black and white had met in Philadelphia in 1838 to condemn the evils of slavery and call for its abolition. They were driven by a faith in a just God and a belief that a country founded on the ideals of Justice and liberty for all must see all men and women as equal.. At the first anti slavery convention these women issued the following inspiring statement:

The time has come for women to move in the sphere which providence has assigned her, and no longer remain satisfied with the circumscribed limits with which corrupt custom and perverse application of scripture have encircled her.

Sister Joan Chittister shared her struggle to bring change within institutionalized faith of Catholicism. She has called for the ordination of women in the catholic church and said “If no leader objects and no leader rebels, then the wrongs will continue for all times.”

Ms. Zlochower is training orthodox women to become rabbis at the Drisha Institute which opened in 1979. While female rabbis are currently not recognized, they are continuing to push for this right and have young women among the rabbinical staff and entering into roles similar to rabbis. Ms. Schlower drew several interesting parallels between Islamic law and Jewish law over the course of her remarks.

Hyun Kyung Chung, is going to 12 Muslim countries over the next year to write about the women she meets. She spoke of her struggle as a feminist theologian in Korea and the ostracism she faced. Ms. Chung made the interesting analogy of the necessity of many faiths to the world's need for biodiversity to sustain itself.

Following Ms. Chung, Ranya Idliby spoke of her recent book where she partnered with a Christian and Jewish women after 9/11 to write "The Faith Club" which documents their discussions on various issues in each of their faiths, particularly sensitive issues around interfaith relations.

Creative Ways to affect change

Rima Khoreibi, children's comic writer, Dubai

Marina Mahatir, HIV/AIDS activist, Malaysia

Fareena Alam, Q Magazine, UK

Bilkisu Yusuf, journalist, Nigeria

Maria Ebrahimji, CNN Producer, USA

Ms. Mahatir started a television program called "Goalposts and Lipstick" for teenage girls to serve as an education tool and medium for raising awareness about sensitive issues such as rape and HIV/AIDS. The show has been extraordinarily successful and won awards for being the best TV program in Malaysia.

Maria Ebrahimji reiterated the importance of Muslim women in the media to reinforce accurate and well-informed portrayals of Islam.

Muslim Women's Global Funding Movement

Zaina Zatari, Global Fund for Women

Hind Jarrah- Texas Muslim Women's Fund

Sayyeda Mirza-Jafri- One Nation: Liberty & Justice for all

Pursuant to one of WISE's main goals, this was a discussion on approaching funding sources and crafting a successful long term global fund strategy. Participants were asked by facilitator Mino Akhtar to brainstorm in groups about their funding needs for one year. The group discussion resulted in a detailed project list individually presented by each participant. Two interesting albeit expected trends emerged from this exercise: many European/North Americans participants were seeking funding for strategic , institutional building projects that will change perceptions about women; while many African/Asian participants requested funding for direct service projects that meet basic needs, such as education, health care, etc. What was clear, however, was that everyone was seeking capacity building funds to strengthen and expand their own initiatives. The overarching theme, if there was one, was education, or expansion of knowledge, and this request was made in myriad of ways, from grassroots education for girls and women to funding for scholars. The total budget requested was \$ 40Million for all participants. (\$10mil of which was for one Museum).

Mobilize for action- Forming a Shura Council

The whole weekend, the women debated, conversed and brainstormed energetically, displaying tolerance at its best, but the sparks started flying when the women began strategizing on the structure and members of the Shura Council. It was an extraordinary site to see such energy, as a couple of women jumped on their chairs to get their voices heard over the 150 voices in the room. Divided by regions of the world, their brains churned and their patience was tested as they attempted to democratically agree upon the development and process of a woman's religio-legal voice, breaking the long-standing silence.

Participants were divided by region and asked to discuss the following questions:

- 1) What are the major concerns of the region?
- 2) What are enablers that will make collaborative work more effective?
- 3) What are the 3-5 top priorities needed for women's empowerment?
- 4) What is the best way to organize a Shura Council? What should the form and function be?

The idea behind a Shura Council is to have scholarly women representatives representing each region. The courts decisions would be non-binding but would offer recommendations, opinions for Muslims. Groups discussed the need for religious diversity (across sects) and ethnic diversity and regional representation and stressed the need for buy-in or participation of men.

Further details are posted on the website at the following URL:

<http://www.asmasociety.org/wise/council.html>

Summary

Experts and experienced activists graced this weekend with profound insight and shared their knowledge with their fellow WISE women, whose next goal as a group is to establish a Global Muslim Women's Fund to provide critically needed resources to Muslim women all over the world and to found the International Women's consultative (Shura) Council, providing religio-legal positions and studies on the most pertinent issues and conflicts facing Muslim women around the world.

The weekend brought some of the most powerful and brightest Muslim women in the world to unite, reflect and strategize together and to breathe life into the vision for an Islamic expression of gender equality and justice. A male non Muslim observer noted that he felt this meeting was akin to "a meeting of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women." Like the first American church going activists, these unstoppable Muslim women are taking their rightful place, no longer to be oppressed by tradition and injustice, but rather to stand on equal footing as a human being and a gift of God like every other soul.

VI. Workshop Results

Most Cited Issues:

(x29) ~ 27.8%:

Promote female perspective or a more gender equal interpretation of Qur'an that allows for women's rights as understood through the faith – Empower Muslim women (jurists and khateebas) to be interpreters and presenters of Islam (x4)

(x16) ~ 15.2 %:

Combat traditional and cultural view of women's roles so as to allow women in religious leadership positions/End Patriarchy –

(x15) ~ 15%

Provide proper education or vocational training for women, equal opportunity for education –

(x10) ~ 9.5%

Empower Muslim women, instill self-esteem and self-confidence in women and leadership training

(x10) ~ 9.5%

Address sexual and domestic violence within relationships and marriages

(x9) ~ 8.5%

Build bridges between Muslims of diverse backgrounds in honoring of our collective self and embracing of one Ummah –

(x6) ~ Illustrate how honor killings are a violation of the 1st maqsd of shariah –

(x5) ~ Understand faith in its true pluralistic nature as exemplified in “no coercion in faith” –Use ijthid to reopen discussion of women's rights

(x4) ~ Family law reform in a framework of justice and equality –Women's laws of inheritance and evidence

VII. WISE participants Evaluations:

Rated -overall assessment

40% as excellent
 39% very good
 15% as good
 4% as average.

Rated -overall Effectiveness

35% as excellent 34% very good
 23% as good
 4% as average

Rated -Take home value

40% as excellent
 31% as very good
 17% as good
 5% as average

Top three aspects that the participants enjoyed:

93% for networking
 72% for motivation for action
 48% for best practices and knowledge-transfer
 46% for personal empowerment
 17% for spiritual development

Category	Average - 1	Good - 2	Very Good - 3	Excellent - 4	
Overall Assessment	3 - 3.9%	12 - 15.7%	30 - 39.4%	31 - 40.7%	
Effectiveness	3 - 3.9%	18 - 23.6%	26 - 34.2%	27 - 35.5%	
Take-home	4 - 5.2%	13 - 17.1%	24 - 31.5%	31 - 40.7%	
Top three aspects	Networking	Personal Empowerment	Motivation	Best Practices & Knowledge Transfer	Spiritual Development
	71 - 93.4%	35 - 46%	55 - 72.3%	37 - 48.6%	13 - 17.1%
Total Evaluations:	76				
40% of participants rated the overall assessment as excellent, 39% as very good, 15% as good and 4% as average.					
35% of participants rated the effectiveness as excellent, 34% as very good, 23% as good and 4% as average					
40% of participants rated the take-home value as excellent, 31% as very good, 17% as good and 5% as average					
93% of participants enjoyed the conference for networking, 46% for personal empowerment, 72% for motivation for action, 48% for best practices and knowledge-transfer and 17% for spiritual development					