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Letter From the Executive Director



Dear Readers and Supporters,

Over the years, KARAMAH has been proud of the interest you have expressed in our scholarship and activities, and of your trust in the wisdom of our counsel in the various matters that have often affected your lives. We at KARAMAH have made every effort to remain faithful to our cause, namely the service of Muslim women, in particular, and the Muslim community, generally.

KARAMAH is proud to issue its first quarterly newsletter. We intend for this newsletter to be a forum for Muslim women to connect and to debate scholarly issues. We aim to connect grassroots women with Muslim women involved in jurisprudence. We believe that by bridging the divide we can come closer to addressing the real issues that Muslim women face globally.

KARAMAH is committed to supporting the rights of Muslim women domestically and worldwide. KARAMAH (the word means “dignity” in Arabic) involves Muslim women directly in the reinterpretation of Islamic law by advocating their direct participation in the Islamic debate on women's rights and family issues. KARAMAH's goal is to empower Muslim women through education, leadership development, Islamic jurisprudential research, advocacy and network building.

KARAMAH is in the process of creating a network of Muslim Women Jurists in the Middle East and North Africa (the “Network”). This proposal has been accepted and partially funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Based on its experience and large network of contacts, KARAMAH will build its web-based Network and bring Muslim women jurists together in order to initiate a scholarly discussion of the major legal issues of concern to Muslim women. KARAMAH will work closely with selected progressive Muslim women jurists on reexamining and evaluating existing family codes and other related laws from a gender equitable perspective, and propose thoughtful alternatives to existing laws.

In order to connect the Network to Muslim women working on the ground, KARAMAH and the Asian & Pacific Islander (API) Institute on Domestic Violence co-sponsored a national summit of Muslim women activists in the United States (the Summit). The goal of this Summit was to identify and prioritize the key issues that Muslim women face in the United States and abroad. We hope to present these issues to the Network.

We at KARAMAH believe in hard, quiet work in the service of our constituency. In addition, as a non-profit organization, we are completely non-political. If you have ideas that are consistent with our goals and mission, we would be more than happy to hear from you. A quick look at our recent projects listed on our website at www.karamah.org may be informative.

Staying in touch with our grassroots around the world is very important for KARAMAH. Thank you for the years of friendship and support. We still have a lot of work to accomplish. We look forward to accomplishing it together.

Irfana Anwer Esq.
Executive Director

Qur'anic Verse: “The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey God and His Messenger. On them will God pour His mercy: for God is exalted in power, Wise.” (Qur'an: - 9:71)

Source: The Qur'an, Abdullah Yusuf Ali. The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an. Surat al-Tawbah: 9:71. (Maryland: amana publications, 1997).

Hadith: “You will see the believers in their mutual mercy for one another, mutual love for one another, and mutual companion for one another like a body. When one limb (of the body) complains, that affects the entire body by being awake and having fever.” *The Prophet peace be upon him.*

Source: Al-Bukhari, Abu Abdillah Muhammad Ibn Ismail (810-870 CE). *Al-Jami' al-Sahih (the Sound Comprehensive Collection of Hadiths)*, known as *Sahih al-Bukhari*. (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d) Vol 4, Bk. Adab, p: 53.

Muslim Women at Home and Abroad

National Summit of American Muslim Women Leaders

Introduction

KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights (KARAMAH) and Asian & Pacific Islander (API) Institute on Domestic Violence co-sponsored a national summit of Muslim women activists in the United States (the Summit). The goal of this Summit was to identify and prioritize the key issues that Muslim women face in the United States and abroad.

KARAMAH is committed to supporting the rights of Muslim women domestically and worldwide. KARAMAH (the word means “dignity” in Arabic) involves Muslim women directly in the reinterpretation of Islamic law by advocating their direct participation in the Islamic debate on women's rights and family issues. KARAMAH's goal is to empower Muslim women through education, leadership development, Islamic jurisprudential research, advocacy and network building.

API Institute on Domestic Violence is a national network of social justice organizations. It serves as a forum for, and clearinghouse on information, research, resources, and critical issues about violence against women in Asian and Pacific Islander communities.

Background and Need for the Summit

KARAMAH has formulated a proposal to create a network of Muslim Women Jurists in the Middle East and North Africa (the “Network”). This proposal has been accepted and partially funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Based on its experience and large network of contacts, KARAMAH will build its web-based Network and bring Muslim women jurists together in order to initiate a scholarly discussion of the major legal issues of concern to Muslim women. KARAMAH will work closely with selected progressive Muslim women jurists on reexamining and evaluating existing family codes and other related laws from a gender equitable perspective, and propose thoughtful alternatives to existing laws.

To date, attempts to improve the legal realities of Muslim women's lives have focused largely on national education and advocacy efforts, however it is at the grass root level that change is greatly needed. This change is needed in everyday matters marriage, divorce, child custody, domestic violence, education, political participation, and economic rights. It is at this level that KARAMAH proposes to work. We will achieve this goal, first, by working with Muslim women activists on identifying

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and prioritizing major issues facing Muslim women around the world. We will then initiate a discussion of these issues within the Network. The jurists will be encouraged to reexamine traditional interpretations and applications of Islamic law in light of the Qur'anic worldview and the tradition of *ijtihad* (interpretation). We hope that this discussion will lead to the development of a thoughtful, creative and gender-balanced jurisprudence that will serve as a tool for Muslim women activists in their struggle for change.

It is important that Muslim women jurists have a scholarly forum that allows them to exchange their views on Muslim women's rights. It is also important that they have a safe space to discuss these views and the changes they wish to see in their legal and social systems to establish and protect those rights. KARAMAH will afford them this opportunity within a common and well-articulated Islamic framework, but with respect for each culture's varying priorities and approaches.

American Muslim Women's Summit

The Summit was a part of a long term and gradual change for the betterment of Muslim women globally. The immediate goal of this Summit, organized by KARAMAH and API Institute on Domestic Violence, was to prioritize the key issues that Muslim women face in the U.S. The Summit sought to gather information on matters of concern to Muslim women, stimulate discussion among the participants, and evoke independent conclusions on matters of vital interest to Muslim women. We invited American Muslim women leaders who are at the forefront in advocating the rights of Muslim women, primarily from within an Islamic perspective, through one of the following ways: community leadership, academic research/scholarship, or professional services.

We framed a variety of broad issues through brief presentations and prior mailings of articles that set the tone of the Summit and the discussions to follow. The main focus of the Summit was to allow the participants to articulate what they believe are the key issues that Muslim women in the U.S. face, according to their understanding and experiences with their local communities. The discussion will then focused on separating the core issues that require jurisprudential solutions from those that require policy or societal changes. At the close of the discussion sessions, the participants agreed on a list of issues facing Muslim women that require Islamic jurisprudence.

The outcomes of this Summit will be used as a platform for the conference funded by NED of Muslim women jurists in KARAMAH's Network. Input from Muslim women activists living in different parts of the world, including the West, will be beneficial and vital to the jurisprudence undertaken by the Network. This process will allow the jurists to consider and evaluate issues emanating from the grass root level, making their insight into the issues more meaningful and effective, and linking the theoretical and scholarly effort of these jurists to the realities of Muslim women worldwide.

Ultimately, we want to organize a broad based, participatory international conference for the global Muslim women community. In this conference we hope to launch grass root and policy level campaigns to inform Muslim communities globally about the various problems we would have identified, the insights and solutions the Network would have developed, and generally women's rights in Islam. We plan for this larger international conference to be the culmination of the Summit and the Network conference. We envision that the international conference will include educators, policy makers, lawyers, judges, government officials, journalists, and grass root organizers from throughout the Muslim world. Given the dearth of serious scholarship in the area of Muslim women's rights, we believe that the participants will appreciate, even embrace, the jurisprudence of the Network. KARAMAH will also facilitate for them the process of developing the knowledge and tools needed to begin an educational and activist process in their home countries.

A Gathering of Powerful Women

By: Firoza Chic Dabby¹

The Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence was honored to be invited by KARAMAH to cosponsor the National Summit of American Muslim Women Leaders. The Institute is a national organization that serves as a forum for, and a clearinghouse on information, analysis, research, resources and critical issues about violence against Asian and Pacific Islander women. We provide training and technical assistance to advocates and activists from domestic violence organizations serving our communities.

In our work around domestic violence, we see how culture is used to justify traditions and practices that cause harm. But culture is not the sum of tenaciously maintained traditions – it is the intersection of dynamic forces that include social and political histories, practices, and ideologies that are defined and redefined by its many institutions and members. It is not merely the site where multiple oppressions are enacted; but rather where many of us engage in resistance and change through radical or reformist agendas, through negotiation and subversion, within and without existing state and community institutions.

Women are a powerful force in all communities. KARAMAH, and especially the leadership of Azizah al-Hibri, has to be applauded for bringing this group of Muslim women leaders together. By providing a forum for exchanging ideas, learning and networking, the Summit strengthened our collective understanding of the issues Muslim women in the U.S. face; and the issues they face universally in upholding and practicing their faith.

The summit surfaced the following broad areas of concern that are interconnected, stitched together by the strong threads of faith. Relationships within the family: between prospective and married couples; parents and their young, teen, or adult children; and among extended family members. These concerns included marriage and divorce, violence against women, temporary marriages, sexuality, sexual orientation, adoption, inter-generational issues, and gender roles.

Relationships within Muslim communities: between imams, masjid and lay members; between immigrant, refugee, and U.S.-born Muslims - including African-Americans and other converts; between leaders from grass-roots organizations, academia and cultural/religious institutions. Concerns included racism, interacting with and adapting to U.S. culture, empowering Muslim women, women's roles in religious institutions and organizations; and interfaith issues.

Relationships between Islamic and American cultures and systems: with particular emphasis on the interaction of Islamic and American law; decisions about health care; access to such social services as mental health programs; child-rearing and child removal; and how cultural differences are negotiated.

I was struck by how readily our wide-ranging discussions flowed toward one of the hopes of the summit “. . . that the discussion will lead to the development of a thoughtful, creative, gender-balanced jurisprudence that will serve as a tool for Muslim women activists in their struggle for change.” May this collective ijihad empower such change.

* Firoza Chic Dabby is the director of the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence (API), San Francisco, California. API cosponsored KARAMAH's Natinal Summit of American Muslim Women Leaders, December 4 5, 2004.

¹I attended the Summit as the Director of the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence, rather than as a Muslim woman.

²I wish to thank Shamira Abdullah, Azizah al-Hibri and Irfana Anwer for inviting the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence to collaborate on this important summit.

³To contact the API Institute for technical assistance or materials from our Resource Center, Telephone: 415-568-3315; Email: apidvinstitute@apiahf.org; Web: www.apiahf.org/apidvinstitute

A Place at the Table

By: Al-Hajjah Khalilah Karim-Rushdan, MSW, LCSW*

In the book, *Windows of Faith*, Gisela Webb asks the question “May Muslim Women Speak for Themselves, Please?” On December 3-4, 2004 at KARAMAH headquarters in Washington D.C. her question was answered by the National Summit of American Muslim Women Leaders. Yes, we can and did speak for ourselves through intense deliberations and a process of consensus. As Muslim women we raised our authentic collective voices to produce a document that addresses clearly our concerns.

Our collective voices as Muslim women represent diversity in all its many forms. Over the last decade or more we have seen an influx of Muslims from all over the world immigrating to the United States. At the same time the United States has an indigenous group of Muslims, mainly African-American, that dates back to the early 1600's. It is no secret that an un-Islamic and divisive tension exists among the groups. Historically, these tensions existed during the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Bilal Ibn Ribah was an Abyssinian slave who converted to Islam and was a companion of the Prophet. He was noted for his military leadership, love for the Prophet and his beautiful voice as a *muadh'dhin* (the one who calls prayer). Yet, he often was a victim of racism and racial insults. We also have examples of great love in the Muslim diaspora. Hagar, the mother of Ishmael is revered in Islam so much so that during our most scared of times, Hajj, we reenact her struggle. Our Prophet Muhammad in his last sermon addresses clearly for us “race” relations, forbidding superiority based on race or nationalism stating “that there is no superiority except by piety and good action.” This is evidenced best in the verse: “Oh mankind, we created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other not that ye may despise each other.” (Qur'an 49:13)

Exploring race and ethnicity is complex and at times frustrating and painful. However, working through the complexity enables us to unify our ummah. Through the process of self-reflection and mutual consultation we can begin to examine the impact of race/racism, ethnic arrogance, and civil rights on our own lives as well as the implications for our ummah. We cannot permit the complexity of the subject matter to paralyze us, as it is important to act even in the absence of complete knowledge and understanding. Only Allah has complete knowledge. To work competently with any cultural group we need to have respect and some familiarity with the culture and lifestyle of the group.

The first American Muslim women's leadership summit has made a commitment “to promote respect and understanding within our community and the society around us.” In these troubled and troubling times, we as Muslim women must step forward collectively, like the *Sahabiyat* (female companions) of the Prophet lifting our own voices and setting our own agenda for the development of a balanced jurisprudence that will aid Muslim women in our struggle for change.

*Al-Hajjah Khalilah Karim-Rushdan is a chaplain to the Muslim community at Smith College, Massachusetts.

Paradigm Shift: Muslim Women Reclaiming Our Islamic Heritage

*By: Aisha H. L. al-Adawiya**

My heart leaped when KARAMAH invited me to participate in an all-Muslim women's summit. Invitees from around the country were called to discuss pressing issues we encounter in our work as scholars and activists, and to set an agenda for Muslim women jurists in different parts of the world to consider. It was a dream come true!

For decades I have been searching for ways to address the oppression of women from an Islamic perspective. I pursued male presenters at conferences, seeking their “scholarly” advice, and appealed to them to at least mention the plight of women. All too often Muslim women were either not represented at such forums or they had a token presence. When questioned, some scholars tried to respond, but inadequately, while others ignored the issue altogether. Precious few (who can be counted on one hand!) confronted the issue and earnestly tried to provide meaningful input. Fewer still possessed the knowledge and courage to begin to address some of our concerns as Muslim women.

The two days spent at KARAMAH's headquarters in Washington, DC in December were well worth it. We should have put a sign on the door that read: “Women at Work!” We discussed everything, and I mean everything! Try to imagine a room full of physically, intellectually, and spiritually high-powered Muslim women, informed by a range of experiences and imbued with the spirit of Islam, working toward a common goal: to please Allah (S.W.T) by returning to our sacred traditions and collectively seeking viable solutions to the challenges we face. That was us.

Our charge was to identify and prioritize critical issues, then, select the top twenty. This was no easy task, since all 84 issues we identified were pressing! Nonetheless, we persevered and got the job done. And we enjoyed each other's company in the process. It was especially gratifying for me to be in the company of so many talented young Muslim women, because as a leader of Women In Islam, Inc., I seek young Muslim women who are advocates for positive social change, and who are committed to educating others about the need for productive change in our society today.

After September 11, 2001, the ball fell squarely in our court. With the guidance of the glorious Qur'an, we intend to work until our collective efforts transform the lives of women in every hamlet, town, and city so that our progeny will understand and benefit from Islam through the example of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W).

The summit brought to my mind a gathering of members of Women In Islam, Inc., at the reinterment ceremony in Lower Manhattan in October 2003, at New York City's 17th Century African Burial Ground. We made du'a' for our enslaved Muslim ancestors. While acknowledging that we can never know the horrors of chattel slavery (including being gang-raped and having one's children stolen, killed or sold into slavery, never to be seen again), we imagined our ancestors appealing to Allah (S.W.T.) to enable us, their offspring, to know Islam. On that autumn day in 2003, we, their decedents, said: “Surly Allah heard your prayers for we are here, and we are Muslim!”

The path stretches before us, and there is no time like the present to live the reality of Islam. Insha'allah, we shall overcome!

*Aisha H. L. al-Adawiya is the executive director of Women In Islam, Inc.

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

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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.

The KARAMAH Family

On Being an Intern at KARAMAH

By: Shama Farooq*

I interned at KARAMAH for about eight weeks during the summer of 2002. It was the summer following my first year at Tulane Law School, and I was fortunate enough, *alhamdulillah*, to come across an organization that fit my interests like a glove. Needless to say, it was a very challenging internship and the experience has had lasting positive effects. I am still receiving the benefits of that summer in many ways, including the knowledge I acquired about Islamic law and its interaction with the American legal system, the skills I attained in office management and organization as well as the rewarding friendships I made during the internship.

I joined KARAMAH while it was undergoing a period of rejuvenation and while it was moving from a small office in Virginia to its current headquarters in Dupont Circle, Washington DC. There was a lot of activity at DC think-tanks and Islamic organizations for various reasons and much of it was centered around the need for strategizing in the post 9-11 environment and the need for moderate Islamic leadership in the country which paid proper respect to individuals' rights. Accordingly, not only did I get a lot of experience in setting up an office infrastructure, I also gained invaluable insight into the politics of various DC nonprofits. It was and still is a tricky course navigating the waters of national human rights nonprofits. During my time at KARAMAH, I picked up a few pointers on navigating this course.

Among other things, I helped establish networks with other women's rights groups in the area, met with government officials from the Women's Affairs office in the State Department, and helped to organize a fundraiser and networking reception. The networking dinner was a memorable event and proved to be quite a challenging endeavor. I still recall my dear friend and fellow intern Kulsum leading the way while we trekked around various DC restaurants and I watched her trying to secure donations for the dinner so we could cut down on costs. I even remember her friendship with the flower seller around the corner who donated a large bag of wild flowers for our dinner. The event proved to be a sparkling little evening and we did an incredible amount of networking.

Another memorable part of the summer was attending Azizah's sessions on Islamic law. At least once a week, we would sit down with her at the conference table while she would go over the foundations of Islamic law and the notions of mercy, justice and compassion in Islam. That window into Islamic law has given me a basic idea of *sharia* concepts as they come up now. Today, because of that basic understanding, I find it relatively easy to understand the nuances of Islamic law as they have come up in the *zina* cases in Nigeria. Also that summer, this exposure to Islamic law helped us answer the numerous questions we received through email on a myriad of Islamic family law issues, including polygamy in Islam, Islamic marriage law and the concepts of the *wali*, and *khul'*.

I also learned other important things about running nonprofits, for example applying for grants from foundations or conducting needs assessments, such as KARAMAH's conflict resolution survey of local *masajid* and Islamic centers. I learned to network and attended meetings and seminars with Washington DC law firms, think-tanks and non-profits on issues ranging from national security and civil rights to the place of religion in American civil society.

Alhamdulillah, it was a memorable summer. I loved running down to the Whole Foods for a smoothie in the hot weather, or grabbing a great sandwich from Café Luna around the corner, or meeting up with other interns for one of the outdoor movies being shown on the DC mall. I made lasting friendships, and in fact met one of my best friends at KARAMAH. Today, I am working as the civil rights director of a civil rights organization, and I know that my internship at KARAMAH is one of the major reasons I am doing well in my current position. I am grateful to KARAMAH for learning some of the political insight I need for running such an organization in today's environment.

*Shama Farooq is a 2004 graduate of Tulane Law School, New Orleans, Louisiana.

On Being an Intern at Karamah

By: Fatema Merchant*

The charming brownstone that is home to “KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers For Human Rights” was now filled with equally charming people. The building had come to life! The first day of the National Summit of Muslim Women Leaders hosted by Karamah and the Asian and Pacific/Islander institute on domestic violence was filled with excited voices and an explosion of ideas. The animated exchange between these women was the product of like minds and like goals. Despite the divergent backgrounds, races, beliefs, and cultures, these women came together on their passion and commitment to Muslim women's rights. The unspoken bond these women shared in their support and acceptance for one another's different opinions was evident in their easy manner while having their morning coffee, and in the passion on their faces even late into the night. The intense two-day summit that brought together these activists to identify issues facing Muslim women is only one of many experiences that I will cherish from my internship at KARAMAH.

Each day as I walk into KARAMAH's headquarters in Washington, DC, I feel excited and hopeful. As a woman who was born and raised in the West and studied Arabic and Islam in the East, I have always been interested the rights and roles of women in Islam. My passion for Islamic legal matters made an internship at KARAMAH a unique opportunity and invaluable experience. From the first day, I felt at home with the women who work at KARAMAH. The chance to interact and share ideas and experiences with other Muslim women was incredibly fulfilling, and I was able to see what brings us together as a community and the similar goals we share for Muslim societies at large.

During my internship, I have had the opportunity to work on a number of interesting cases which revealed the dynamic interactions between Islamic and U.S. law. I have also had the opportunity to meet with delegations from around the Muslim world, ranging from Uzbekistan to Uganda. Hearing first hand accounts of what many Muslim women face around the world brought home the value of KARAMAH's efforts elevate the status of Muslim women around the world through gender-equitable jurisprudence.

My internship at KARAMAH has given me much greater insight into the issues Muslim women face here at home and abroad. I believe it will be a valuable resource to draw from when I attend law school in the fall (Inshallah). I hope to continue working with KARAMAH in all my endeavors and contribute to the great work they do. Thank you KARAMAH for making my internship such a rewarding and unforgettable experience.

*Fatema Merchant, currently working as an intern at KARAMAH, is a graduate student at George Mason University, VA

KARAMAH's Halqah: A New Step in a Positive Direction

KARAMAH hosts a biweekly “*halqah*” to discuss issues pertaining to the Muslim community. Research Director Raja El-Habti proudly describes it as “a forum for Muslim women, by Muslim women.” The *halqah* or circle, which is usually held on Fridays, serves as a safe space where Muslim women can voice questions or concerns about everything, from being a good Muslim in America, to the science of Hadith narration. El-Habti stresses that this gathering is informal and open, “participants come to share their experiences and learn from each other, KARAMAH acts as a moderator to help guide these women.” Those who are interested are informed by E-mail. Once the women arrive, a topic is presented by a moderator and the discussion begins. Are definitive answers always reached? “No,” says El-Habti “and that is OK. We are not imposing a vision; we are engaging in an ongoing dialogue to communicate our understandings.” This group of women is united in its purpose of understanding Islam, and is becoming more aware of the social, religious and cultural elements which shape the lives of Muslim women today. To be part of this discussion, contact

karamah@karamah.org or call (202) 234-7302

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM 2005

KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights is currently accepting applications for its summer Leadership Development Program. The program will take place from July 11 through August 5, 2005. We are looking for highly motivated and dedicated women who have a commitment to women's issues as well as to the civil rights of ethnic and religious minorities, especially the Muslim community in the United States. Candidates should possess an interest in community development and advocacy and possess strong writing and editing skills. Positions are not restricted to law students or lawyers.

KARAMAH is a non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to supporting the human rights of Muslims in the United States of America and internationally. We provide this support through education, grassroots organizing, advocacy, and activism. We are an educational, charitable organization of Muslim Women Lawyers focused on domestic and global issues of human rights in Muslim communities. One of our goals is to ultimately transform the conception of women's status within Islamic communities to both improve the treatment of women and to ensure that women take an active part in governing their lives. We firmly believe that dialogue, peaceful conflict resolution, democratic structures and active involvement can counter the destructive effects of ignorance, silence and prejudice.

Despite the fact that women are being educated and trained in numbers equivalent to men, leadership and power tend to be male dominated especially when it comes to bringing about change in social, political, and religious fields. This is particularly true for Muslim Women in the U.S. and elsewhere. Many negative cultural messages have a strong impact on Muslim women, keeping them from playing an active role in their community's social development.

To deal with this situation, KARAMAH has formulated leadership development programs and created a forum for women to network and share their experiences to empower Muslim women and enhance their leadership qualities. By encouraging women to be active and reflective participants in their communities, KARAMAH plays a key part in developing strong women leaders in Muslim communities. The overall philosophy for KARAMAH's Leadership Program and workshops is that social, religious, and political leadership empowers women, enables them to play a pivotal role in bringing about change, and leads to the positive development of their community.

This summer will be the third Leadership Development Program that KARAMAH has organized. The Program will offer very unique and effective classes in Leadership development. During the workshops, trainers will present scenarios on conflict-resolution and negotiation, systems thinking, and leadership styles. The exercises and discussions that will follow will focus on enhancing participants' facilitation skills and developing cultural-specific solutions that incorporate alternative leadership possibilities.

The second part of the Leadership Program will be focused on Islamic law. We will revisit the basic and fundamental principles of Islam and Islamic jurisprudence. The objective of the course is to help the participants understand the foundations of Islam and Islamic law, especially as they pertain to women.

The aim of both parts of the Leadership Development Program is to instill leadership qualities in a core group of women and to provide them with the basic tools to understand and articulate the guiding principles of Islam. These women will then be able to play an active role in the positive development of their communities and to articulate their rights within their own religious and cultural contexts. Armed with adequate leadership skills and jurisprudential tools they will be able to bring about progressive and peaceful change within their communities.

Please send a resume and cover letter to: karamah@karamah.org

Profiles of Muslim Women

Profile of Sharifa Alkhateeb

By: Marha Alkhateeb

After a lifetime of social advocacy, Sharifa Alkhateeb passed away at age 58 on October 21, 2004 from pancreatic cancer. She will long be remembered as a tireless and outspoken advocate for women's rights who worked for many national and international causes. She will be equally missed by America's Muslim youth, as she served for over 20 years as a youth advisor for the largest Muslim youth organizations in the U.S.: MSA, ISNA, and MYNA. She was a writer, researcher, and international public speaker with 40 years experience in cultural communication and cultural competency who devoted her life to community building and the promotion of social justice.

Sharifa was the founder and president of the North American Council for Muslim Women (NACMW), an educational non-profit organization, and the president of the Muslim Education Council (MEC), a mid-Atlantic educational non-profit organization, aimed at educating public school administrators and teachers about Middle Eastern culture. In 1993, NACMW became the first national Muslim organization to address violence against women in a conference. As an educational consultant and training specialist, Sharifa addressed many concerns voiced by Muslim women, as well as issues facing Muslims in general, including domestic violence, religion in the workplace, and religious diversity.

She had an M.A. in comparative religion, edited the Marmaduke Pickthall translation of the Qur'an, coauthored the Arab World Notebook used in public school history classrooms nationwide, and served as editor and reader for several book publishing companies who specialize in social studies. She was a staff reporter for the Saudi Gazette (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia) in the late 70s, and the managing editor of the American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences (AJISS) in the early 90s. She also worked as an occasional journalist for the Connection Newspapers of Northern Virginia. From 1993 - 1997, she produced, wrote and hosted a monthly television program (which is still aired) for Virginia's Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) called "Middle Eastern Parenting." She also worked for five years as a diversity trainer for the FCPS by teaching courses on Middle Eastern culture to re-certification bound teachers.

As an independent researcher, she conducted the first nationwide survey of domestic violence in the Muslim community from 1998-2000. Due to her growing concern with domestic violence in Muslim communities, Sharifa established in 2000, the Peaceful Families Project (PFP), a nationwide family dynamics and violence awareness program within the Muslim community funded by the U.S. Dept. Of Justice, Violence against Women Office. The PFP, conducted in eight cities, was created to help the Muslim community deal with issues of domestic violence and address them publicly. This three-part training program that helped professionals in the Muslim community how to network with professionals in the larger American society, taught violence awareness to Muslim religious leaders (Imams) and community leaders in particular, and educated the Muslim public in general, about violence awareness and prevention, as well as conflict resolution.

Sharifa also conducted numerous trainings for criminal justice and civil justice communities including police academies. She was also an expert consultant with the U.S. Office for Victims of Crime and the Maryland Crime Victims Resource Center. She served as the Middle Eastern/Muslim team leader for the Community Resilience Project, a post-9/11 crisis counseling and referral program in Northern Virginia funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

In addition to being a member of the Board of Advisors for KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, and the Editorial board of the Journal of Religion and Abuse, Sharifa served on the Bi-National Advisory Committee of The Faith Trust Institute in Seattle, WA, and the Advisory Panel on Diverse Communities of the STOP Violence against Women Grants TA Project in Washington, D.C. Sharifa also served as the chair of the Muslim Caucus at the U.N. 4th World Conference on Women on Beijing.

Sharifa was frequently interviewed by such news media outlets as NPR, Worldnet Television, Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, and Voice of America. She had participated in policy development with the Aspen Institute, the American Assembly, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. She was also a consultant for the Pew Forum, the Ford Foundation, the National Council for Community and Justice, the National Cathedral, the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, Afghanistan Libre, the Communications Network, Fairfax County and Montgomery County Public Schools, the Council on Islamic Education, IQRA Foundation, and the U.N. Women's International Peace Initiative.

* Sharifa Alkhateeb is survived by her husband, Mejdi, three daughters: Layla, Maha and Nasreen; a brother, two sisters and a grandson.

Legal Cases and Issues:

KARAMAH Case Note No. 1 9/11 Backlash: Anti-Muslim Curriculum

To commemorate the tragedy of September 11, 2001, a course, which was designed as part of an elementary school curriculum, became the setting for this case. Unfortunately, the children in a public school district of Sussex County, Delaware, became the victims of this case, which addressed the demonization of Islam and Muslims.

In addition to teaching her students that the 9/11 attacks took place because the "Qur'an teaches war and hatred," the 4th grade teacher also taught them that "Christians went to Afghanistan to help the people, and in return, the Muslims bombed the Christians."

On a daily basis, during the month of December 2002, the teacher read two different books about Christmas and Jesus Christ, and told her 4th grade students that only Christians were "going to be saved." When she read *September 11, 2001* by Steck Vaughn in class, she slandered Islam and incited hatred against Muslims and Arabs. This, of course, resulted in violence, harassment, and hatred toward Muslims and Arab Americans.

As a direct result of this curriculum, two Muslim Arab-American children who attended this elementary school, a nine year-old girl in 4th grade, and her six year-old sister in 1st grade, were harassed. They became victims of violence and suffered from emotional distress.

Since the teacher knew that the 4th grader's mother wore a hijab, she insisted on telling the class that the "hijab was the oppressive dress forced by Islam." The 4th grader was ridiculed and insulted by her teacher. As expected, the class pointed out that since the Arab-American girl's mother wears the hijab, she is "one of them."

The children in this classroom followed the teacher's example and began harassing and tormenting the girl. Their hostility was outright: she was told that, "she did not belong in the class because she was not a Christian" and that she should "get lost," and that other students "don't want [her] here" and that "no Muslims [are] allowed." As a result of repeated similar incidents, the 4th grader was no longer able to attend school. In addition to suffering from nightmares, she was unable to sleep, and got frequent headaches and stomach pains. Eventually, she got a cluster of gray hair on the right side of her head.

Her younger sister in the 1st grade was also facing physical and psychological abuse from her fellow students: she was kicked and punched in the nose by some, while other children pretended to urinate on her. The first grader's repeated attempts to report these incidences were ignored, ridiculed, discredited and disregarded by the teachers and principal.

In January 2003, the children's parents contacted the ACLU in Delaware since they were unable to reach a solution with school district officials. In an attempt to resolve this matter, ACLU director, Ms. Drew Fennell, accompanied the parents and the 4th grader to a meeting with the principal and her teacher. After the meeting, the principal promised to resolve the issues between the child and her teacher. When the girl returned to school, the teacher ordered her, in front of her classmates, to transfer to another class. Although she transferred to another class, nothing changed because the former teacher happened to be one of the "new" teacher's friends.

Are you a Muslim Woman who...

Wants to help other Muslim women in your community to help other Muslim women in your community but lack the Islamic knowledge that qualifies you to do so?

Is a law student interested in understanding the basics of Islamic law and jurisprudence, especially as it pertains to women?

Then KARAMAH's Leadership Program is for you!!

Spend a summer in the nation's capital surrounded by Muslim women, authors, attorneys, activists and scholars!

Increase your knowledge of the basics of Islamic law!

Widen your horizon as to how to bring about change from an Islamic perspective in your community and in Muslim women's lives!

Strengthen leadership skills by learning about advocacy tailored to your religious and cultural communities!

Network with other Muslim women professionals and meet women like yourself from all over the country!

Registration.....	Deadline
Early Bird Registration....	Before February 28, 2005
Final Registration.....	June 30, 2005
Late Registration*.....	After July 1, 2005

FAQ's

How much does it cost?

The registration fee is \$100. This helps us defray some of the expenses of the workshops. However no qualified person will be turned away for a lack of funds. If you would like to obtain a fee waiver, please write to us a letter explaining your situation.

Where do I stay?

The program will be held at KARAMAH in Washington, DC. KARAMAH will not cover participants living expenses but can help you find housing and make reservations. Please let us know as early as possible whether you need help in finding a place. We will try to obtain a group rate for the participants who have applied by the registration deadline.

How long is the program?

The program lasts for four weeks from July 11th to August 5th. Seminars are from 9 am to 5 pm including breaks for lunch, coffee, and prayers. Participants are required to attend all sessions.

Can I get course credit?

Although this is not an actual course, but a series of lectures, we are willing to work with you if you would like to compose a final report for credit as an independent research and study for one of your classes.

What do I have to do to register?

Please email us the attached application, a resume and letter stating why you wish to attend the 2005 KARAMAH Leadership Program at karamah.org. Our selection committee will review the application and contact approved applicants by May 10th. Only those approved will be contacted.

KARAMAH MUSLIM WOMENS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM 2005 APPLICATION

Name: _____ Phone: _____
 First Last

Title: _____ E-mail: _____

Occupation: _____

Address: _____
 Street

_____ City State Zip code

Affiliation (if any): _____

How did you learn about the program?

E-mail list serve: _____

Personal contact: _____

Web site: _____

University: _____

Other (please specify): _____

Additional Information:

The following is not a prerequisite for eligibility to participate in the Program but will help us shape the Program to fit the level of knowledge and experience of participants.

1. Please list and describe any previous leadership workshop attendance:

2. Knowledge of Islamic law: have you ever taken classes in Islamic law?
If yes, please give more details.

3. Knowledge of Arabic:
Written:
Spoken:

Also available at:
www.karamah.org/Leadership_application.pdf