



KARAMAH  
MUSLIM WOMEN LAWYERS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



## 2018 Annual Report

"We have given karamah (dignity) to the children of Adam." (17:70)

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## Letter from Our Executive Director

It has been an honor to be the Interim Executive Director and now the Executive Director of KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights in 2018. For over 25 years, KARAMAH: has been at the forefront of educating and advocating for gender-equitable Islamic jurisprudence. 2018 was wonderful year for KARAMAH and I am honored that I was at the helm to guide us through our transition from direct legal services back to our research and education roots.

We were busy throughout the year. In the winter, we released our inaugural paper in our "Debunking the Myth Series" entitled "Debunking the Myth that Islam Requires Female Circumcision." In the spring, we traveled to the Philippines to conduct our Institute of Law, Leadership and Conflict Resolution. In the summer, we welcomed 38 women to our Law and Leadership Summer Program. And in the fall, we released our second paper in our "Debunking the Myth Series" entitled "Debunking the Myth: Angels Cursing Hadith."

KARAMAH continues to lead the way in providing advocacy, education, and scholarship in gender-equitable Islamic jurisprudence. This work is of vital importance in the current climate that we live in. We can not do this important work without the support of our donors, allies, supporters and grantors. This report shares highlights from 2018 but please also check out our 5 year retrospective report as well to see all of the great work that KARAMAH has been doing. Thank you for supporting us as we continue our mission to educate and empower Muslim women around the world.

Sincerely,



Rahmah A. Abdulaleem, Esq.

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### Our Mission

KARAMAH's mission is to educate both Muslims and non-Muslims about the just, gender equitable foundation of Islam. In particular, KARAMAH's mission is to provide the community with Islamic jurisprudence that emphasizes gender equity and encourages intellectual growth, conflict resolution and leadership development. We couple this education with advocacy that promotes our core value: that dignity is God-given.

# Debunking the Myth Series

In 2018, KARAMAH's Research Division launched a new series entitled "Debunking the Myth." The intention behind these white papers is to produce scholarship that bolsters Muslim women and negates deeply-rooted misogyny that is commonly associated with Islamic Jurisprudence. In this series we provide research that debunks false and non-credible information concerning Islam that negatively or unfairly affects Muslim Women. We have completed two issues of this series thus far. The first issue addresses the myth that Islam requires female genital mutilation, while the second addresses the popular hadith referred to as The Angels Hadith. FGM paper is currently available for download on the website. Throughout 2018, two publications have been released along with multiple presentations associated with the series.

The first installment, "Debunking the Myth that Islam Requires Female Circumcision," launched in February with the publication and inaugural presentation located at the El-Hibri Foundation. By adopting a comprehensive approach of the publication, KARAMAH signaled the refusal to view the occurrence of female khitan as an isolated issue unrelated to the overall Islamic architecture of human rights and gender relations and seeks to disprove that the practice is permissible in Islam. In October, KARAMAH's paper was honored with second place in the literary category from the Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation.

In Fall 2018, KARAMAH published the second installment titled "Debunking the Myth: Angels Cursing Hadith." This white paper addressed an issue that is of specific concern to Muslim women who may be unjustly expected to accede their husband's sexual demands in order to prevent being cursed by angels. HEART Women & Girls Director of Sexuality Education and Training Sameera Qureshi, KARAMAH's founder Dr. Azizah al-Hibri, and Associate Director of Research Ghada Ghazal presented the paper for its inaugural presentation at the El-Hibri Foundation in October. This hadith was brought to the attention of KARAMAH's staff when women voiced that they were being unduly subjected to pressure from their husbands. Given the anxieties of some Muslim women about the Angels Hadith and the sense of absolute entitlement some men feel because they misunderstand religious texts, KARAMAH made the Angels Hadith the subject of the second white paper in the Debunking the Myth series. Karamah's Research Division intends to continue publishing the series throughout 2019.

# Visit to Quezon City, Philippines

## The Institute on Law, Leadership, and Conflict Resolution

In March, KARAMAH representatives and board members participated in a joint three-week Institute in Quezon City, Philippines. The Institute on Law, Leadership, and Conflict Resolution was organized in partnership with Miriam College along with their Women and Gender Institute.

37 participants from the Philippines along with others from Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Singapore engaged in lectures and teachings foundational to the Islamic faith. Dr. Azizah al-Hibri, Dr. Zainab Alwani, and Imam Mohamed Magid lectured on various areas of Islamic Jurisprudence Professor Amr Abdalla conducted a three-day workshop on Conflict Resolution. KARAMAH's Interim Executive Director Rahmah Abulaleem presented Leadership lectures.

Along with the Institute, KARAMAH held a conference for Imams which brought over 100 Imams from around the Philippines. KARAMAH also participated in multiple parallel events along with the three-week program. Dr. al-Hibri was interviewed for television and print media about Karamah's trailblazing work. KARAMAH staff joined in a roundtable discussion regarding the justice system and Muslim communities in the Philippines; met with civil leaders; gave a keynote address on Muslim women's civic engagement at the Commission on Elections;



participated in roundtable discussion with family court judges; presented a half-day workshop at the University of the Philippines Law School; facilitated a cultural competency training to legal service providers for domestic violence survivors; presented to US Embassy officials on engagement with Muslim communities; and conducted a session on leadership with Muslim youth university leaders. KARAMAH's time in

the Philippines was fully booked and there were many opportunities that the team had to contribute to Islamic Jurisprudence overseas. The relationship was furthered by a follow-up visit from a State Department delegation in April and KARAMAH has been invited back for institutes in the future.



# U.S. Commision on International Religious Freedom

In April, KARAMAH staff attended the United States Comission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). This summit was hosted to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the passage of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. The summit included a plenary session to explore the “State of the Union” of international religious freedom which was preceded by two panels discussions on strategies for achieving positive change for religious freedom and prisoners of conscience around the world. KARAMAH was happy for the opportunity to attend this summit as well as participate in the panels, particularly the one on women and religious freedom. The panels were led by distinguished guests, who are experts of strategies for conflict resolution in their field namely, Farahnaz Ispahani, Wilson Center Global Fellow and ISCRIF commissioner Thomas Reese.



## Presentation to Philippine Delegation

Interim Executive Director Rahmah Abdulaleem, Esq. presented a report to a State Department Delegation from the Philippines in April. The delegation included mayors and vice governors who traveled to the United States. KARAMAH's Institute on Law, Leadership, and Conflict Resolution which took place in the Philippines served as a launchpad for this event. Ms. Abdulaleem led a discussion on the work that KARAMAH has done to serve both domestically and for the international community as well as what it is like to be a Muslim in America and the nuances of that identity. She championed KARAMAH's domestic and international presence at the presentation.



# Law and Leadership Summer Program

## Advancing Muslim Women Leaders in the Field

KARAMAH held its 16th annual Law and Leadership Summer Program (LLSP) from July 9th - July 27th, 2018 in Washington, DC. This flagship program draws Muslim women from around the world to study together and learn from each other in many areas including Islamic jurisprudence, conflict resolution, and leadership. KARAMAH's mission has been to give women tools to strengthen their academic and leadership skills while creating lifelong friendships and connections with leaders in DC.

This summer, 38 women gathered to attend the program from all over the world, including Poland, the Philippines, France, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. Lectures were conducted by esteemed scholars, professors, lawyers, and religious leaders including Dr. Azizah al-Hibri, Dr. Amr Abdalla, Dr. Zainab Alwani, Professor Abed Awad, Ms. Ghada Ghazal, Imam Mohamed Magid, and Professor Saleema Snow. The three-week program covered in-depth discussions regarding Muslim Women's Rights, Islam and Domestic Violence, Interfaith Relations in Islam and Women in Paradise: The Puzzle of Hoor Eine, Spiritual Leadership and Sufism. Dr. Amr Abdalla conducted the annual Conflict Resolution workshop - a highlight of the program every year.

Both sessions of LLSP, the Executive and the General were well received by the participants. There were 12 Executive session invitation acceptances and those women were in DC for the first week of LLSP. The Executive

session is for women who are mid-career professionals who want to participate in the program but cannot be there for the entire three weeks. These two sessions were incredibly memorable for both the lecturing professionals and for the participants. The participants embodied diversity in every sense of the word, in terms of race, nationality, regional, academic and career backgrounds, and age. With no specific target age, KARAMAH's LLSP contained candidates ranging from ages 17 to 65. KARAMAH does not have a specific age range in hopes to gain a wealth of information from many generations and not just one.

The religion of Islam has been persistently hijacked by a variety of its adversaries including terrorists and misogynists and LLSP helps to reclaim it. There was substantial knowledge delivered by the lawyers, professors, deans, Imams and Islamic scholars debunking myths about Islam and Sharia, and educating these women on their rights. LLSP successfully cultivated an environment where Muslim women could feel safe and express their beliefs and ideas freely." KARAMAH is thrilled to announce that the organization will be conducting the 17th LLSP in 2019 and are currently accepting applications.

## History of LLSP

For the past 14 years, the Law and Leadership Summer Program (LLSP) brings together a select group of Muslim women from around the world to study law, leadership, and conflict resolution from an Islamic perspective. LLSP teaches advanced courses in Islamic law, focusing on family law, Shariah (the interpretation of Islamic law), women's rights, and comparative international law. Additionally, students participate in interactive trainings in leadership and conflict resolution and develop strategies for applying their new knowledge of Islamic law to real-life situations. Women leave the program not only with an advanced understanding of Islamic law, but also with the leadership and interpersonal skills needed to put that knowledge to use.

LLSP cultivates a global network of leaders at the forefront of a grassroots movement devoted to advancing the rights of Muslim women. LLSP alumnae share ideas, expertise, and knowledge to collectively improve their lives and their communities.

## Faculty

Each year the LLSP has attracted a distinguished faculty who enhance and refine the program. These professors, leaders, and dignitaries hail from prestigious institutions such as Harvard Law School, the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, University for Peace, Costa Rica, University of the District of Columbia School of Law—among others.

# Law and Leadership Summer Program

Advancing Muslim Women Leaders in the Field





## History of KARAMAH

Over 25 years ago, three Muslim women lawyers sat together in a Manhattan coffee shop. They were all disappointed in the way that Islam was portrayed in the public square, particularly as it related to women. Immigrating from different Muslim countries, they knew that the Islam they knew and practiced was not being discussed, taught, or written about in the U.S. So they formed KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights.

KARAMAH was incorporated in 1993 by Dr. Azizah al-Hibri. The name KARAMAH, which means "dignity" in Arabic, comes from the Qur'anic verse 17:70 which reads: "We have given dignity to the Children of Adam." This verse establishes the fact that human dignity is bestowed upon all human beings by God, regardless of gender. Dr. al-Hibri wanted to make this idea known, especially to Muslim women, and advance the view that Islam doesn't require a choice between human rights and faith.

In creating KARAMAH, Dr. al-Hibri's foremost goal was to advance Muslim women's knowledge of their rights and to empower them in the march towards greater participation in their civil societies and the global community.

Throughout the years, KARAMAH's views on legal issues related to Islam have been solicited by various audiences, including branches of the U.S. and other governments, the media, academics, and a host of other human rights and grassroots organizations. Today, KARAMAH has a talented team based in Washington, D.C. focused on expanding both the educational programs and research endeavors in the U.S. and around the world.

Learn more at [KARAMAH.org](https://KARAMAH.org)

