

**CONFERENCE ON “WOMEN IN ISLAM: UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHTS AND
IDENTITY OF WOMEN IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD” ON THE
SIDELINES OF 67 CSW**

Concept Note

8 March 2023,

Venue: ECOSOC Chamber, UN Headquarters

The general perception that Muslim women are oppressed and discriminated against is misplaced. Islam guarantee equal rights for men and women. However, as is the case with other religions and societies, perceptions about the rights, identity, and roles of Muslim women are socially constructed and culturally defined.

2. Islam gives women the right to make their own choices, the right to education, and the right to be involved in political, social, and economic activities. Islamic history is replete with examples of iconic women who broke the glass ceiling. The contributions of Hazrat Khadija and Hazrat Fatima, Prophet Muhammad’s wife and daughters, respectively, in the economic, political, and social fields are well acknowledged.

3. Islam places highest emphasis on education. Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) directed that “[t]he pursuit of knowledge is a duty of every Muslim, man and woman”¹ The beloved Prophet’s own daughter, Fatima (Allah be pleased with her), was highly educated and respected.

4. In modern times, Muslim women such as Princess Alia bint Hussain and Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, have been agents of change in their societies. Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was not only the first Muslim female Prime Minister but has been an inspiration for women around the world. New Zealand’s former Prime Minister Jacinda Arden at her Harvard University commencement address (May 27, 2022) in an emotional tribute to the Mohtarma, said that the “path she carved as a woman feels as relevant today as it was decades ago, and so too is the message she shared here, in this place.”²

5. OIC member states remain committed to the empowerment of women and gender mainstreaming in all spheres: social, legal, economic, and political.

6. The Cairo Declaration of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Human Rights Article 1 (a) states, “All human beings form one family. They are equal in dignity, rights and obligations, without any discrimination on the grounds of race, color, language, sex, religion, sect, political opinion, national or social origin, fortune, age, disability or other status.”

7. Article 6 of the Declaration highlights a number of rights given by Islam to women and unequivocally states, “Women and men have equal human dignity, rights and responsibilities as prescribed by applicable laws.” It emphasizes that “the State shall take all necessary legislative and administrative measures to eliminate difficulties that impede the empowerment of women, their access to quality education, basic healthcare, employment and job protection and the right to receive equal remuneration for equal work, as well as their full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms”. In addition, it clearly outlines that “Woman and the girl child shall be protected against all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and harmful traditional practices” by the state and the society.

¹ Ibn Maja

² “**At Harvard, Jacinda Arden pays glowing tribute to late Benazir Bhutto**”, 27 May 2022, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2022/05/27/new-zealand-pm-jacinda-ardern-pays-glowing-tribute-to-late-benazir-bhutto/>

8. The OIC Action Plan for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) outlines 9 priority areas which can effectively contribute to empowerment of women and gender mainstreaming in OIC member states. However, concerted efforts are required for the effective implementation of OPAAW.

9. Muslim women are actively and increasingly promoting their political, cultural, social, and economic rights. OIC countries are taking several initiatives to support them. Yet, Muslim women face multiple challenges in securing their rights within the Islamic countries as well as in non-Muslim countries and societies. The Gender Development Index (GDI)³ for OIC countries remains unchanged at (0.87), less than the global average (0.94).⁴

10. Mindful of the potentially crucial role that OIC can play in the empowerment of women, Pakistan as the Chair of 48 CFM is leading an effort to highlight the identity and rights of Muslim women in Islam. Against this backdrop, recognizing social, political, legal, and economic empowerment as being fundamental for the empowerment of women, there is an imperative need to strengthen the political will and economic, institutional, and financial support to enable Muslim women across the world to achieve their rights and emerge as agents of progress through leadership, inclusion, and participation.

11. In order to address the ever-growing challenges – in the economic, cultural, and social spheres – facing Muslim women, it is essential to consider the policies and actions required to overcome these challenges and make sustainable progress towards advancing the rights and role of Muslim women across the world. The High-Level Segment and the Policy Dialogue will provide an opportunity to take stock of challenges and obstacles in the way of empowerment of women and their mainstreaming in societies.

Guiding Questions / Discussion Points

- The rights and role of Muslim women in Islam.
- Why are there gaps in perceptions regarding their rights and role both in the historical and current context?
- Traditional or current cultural practices which may pose a challenge to the realization of the rights of Muslim women.
- What steps are needed to contribute to their empowerment and gender mainstreaming?
- How can Muslim women contribute more effectively to their empowerment and achievement of their rights in Muslim and non-Muslim countries and societies?

Format

12. The High-Level Segment of the Conference will be chaired by Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. The Policy Dialogue will be moderated by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, H.E. Hina Rabbani Khar. Both the High-Level Segment and the Policy Dialogue will be held in person.

Outcome

13. The outcome of the Conference will be a Chair's Summary of the High-Level Segment and the Policy Dialogue.

³ GDI measures three basic dimensions of health, education, and command over economic resources.

⁴⁴ OIC Women and Development Report (2021), Statistical Economic, and Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESRIC).