



A TOOLKIT FOR ADVOCATES

SHARING THE MUSAWAH FRAMEWORK AND KEY MESSAGES



musawah

To Promote and Protect Equality



Musawah sees itself as part of global movements to promote and protect equality in the family. It believes that Qur'anic teachings reflect universal norms and are consistent with contemporary human rights standards.

Promoting equality includes supporting campaigns and advocacy for an end to discriminatory family laws as well as discriminatory practices in Muslim contexts.

Protecting equality includes supporting campaigns and advocacy to resist demands from conservative groups within Muslim societies for regressive amendments to existing family laws that advance rights.

In different contexts, Musawah Advocates may be working to reform discriminatory laws and practices, protect existing laws, or both. Where laws offer women some protection of their rights in the family, practices are often discriminatory.

Campaigning and advocating for laws and practices that promote and protect equality in the family in Muslim contexts requires addressing both state and non-state actors.

Regarding states, as the [United Nations](#) explains:

By becoming parties to international treaties, states assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, to protect and to fulfill human rights. The obligation to respect means that states must refrain from interfering with or curtailing the enjoyment of human rights. The obligation to protect requires states to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses. The obligation to fulfill means that states must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights.

From these international obligations to respect, protect and fulfill rights, you can see that states are obliged to actively ensure equality in family laws.

It also means that states have to take steps to ensure women are protected from the abuse of their rights in the family by non-state actors, such as families, communities, religious, cultural or political organisations.

To talk about



In your context, are women's rights activists or your organisation mainly focusing on promoting rights, protecting rights, or both?

What aspects of which laws and practices do you think need to be reformed or protected?

In your context, how far is the state helpful in promoting and protecting rights in the family? Are there different parts of the state that are more or less helpful?

In your context, which non-state actors help promote and protect rights in the family and which obstruct advances towards rights?

To do



Try mapping the areas of family laws that need protecting and those that need reforming towards equality. Which areas are the top priorities in your context and which actors can you work with to achieve your priorities? You could try the same exercise with practices related to rights in the family.

Read Musawah's report [*CEDAW and Muslim Family Laws: In Search of Common Ground*](#).

The Musawah website has several resources and links that may be useful for building advocacy and campaigning on equality in the family.

The Musawah website also has several resources and links relating to international human rights and equality in family laws.

Led by Muslim Women

Musawah is a movement for all who share Musawah's principles and vision for change. While women and men of all religions and beliefs make up the Musawah community, Musawah is led by Muslim women so as to reflect women's particular need for equality and justice in the family and to highlight our efforts to show that this is possible within Islam.

In early Islam, women such as the Prophet's wife Aisha and the mystic Rabia al-Basri were accepted as authorities regarding the texts. There are also historical examples of women as leaders in Muslim societies. But these practices were lost and for centuries women were excluded from Muslim scholarship and leadership of the community. This tradition is now changing and it is time to reclaim women's potential as leaders in their communities.

Across the globe, women have been actively campaigning for equality in the family for decades, even centuries. Musawah's effort focuses on Muslim contexts and its holistic Framework includes reclaiming Islam's spirit of justice. So it is to be expected that Musawah is led by women who identify themselves as Muslim.

The term 'Muslim women' means different things to each of us, and the diversity within Musawah's original Planning Committee and its current International Advisory Group reflects these various meanings.

Musawah International Advisory Group (IAG) (2013-2015)

- *Asma'u Joda, Chair (Nigeria)*
- *Azza Soliman Hashim (Egypt)*
- *Cassandra Balchin (United Kingdom)*
- *Djingarey Maiga (Mali)*
- *Hatoon Al-Fassi (Saudi Arabia)*
- *Isatou Touray (Gambia)*
- *Johaira Wahab, Commissioner (Philippines)*
- *Marina Mahathir (Malaysia)*
- *Marwa Sharafeldin (Egypt)*
- *Nani Zulminarni (Indonesia)*
- *Omaima Abu Bakr (Egypt)*

- *Ratna Osman (Malaysia)*
- *Shaista Gohir (United Kingdom / Pakistan)*
- *Zainah Anwar (Malaysia)*
- *Ziba Mir-Hosseini (United Kingdom / Iran)*

Musawah International Advisory Group (IAG) (2010–2012)

- *Amira El-Azhary Sonbol (Egypt / Qatar / United States)*
- *Asma'u Joda (Nigeria)*
- *Azza Soliman (Egypt)*
- *Cassandra Balchin (United Kingdom)*
- *Djingarey Maiga (Mali)*
- *Isatou Touray (Gambia)*
- *Kamala Chandrakirana (Indonesia)*
- *Marwa Sharafeldin (Egypt)*
- *Pinar Ilkkaracan (Turkey)*
- *Zainah Anwar (Malaysia)*
- *Ziba Mir-Hosseini (United Kingdom / Iran)*
- *Ratna Osman (Malaysia)*

Musawah Planning Committee (2007–2010)

- *Amal Abdel Hadi (Egypt)*
- *Amira El-Azhary Sonbol (Egypt / Qatar / United States)*
- *Asma'u Joda (Nigeria)*
- *Azza Soliman (Egypt)*
- *Cassandra Balchin (United Kingdom)*
- *Isatou Touray (Gambia)*
- *Kamala Chandrakirana (Indonesia)*
- *Pinar Ilkkaracan (Turkey)*
- *Rabéa Naciri (Morocco)*
- *Zainah Anwar (Malaysia)*
- *Ziba Mir-Hosseini (United Kingdom / Iran)*

To talk about



What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of publicly claiming women's right to leadership in matters regarding equality and justice in the Muslim family?

How can a movement like Musawah be clear about its specific focus on Muslim societies and at the same time also be inclusive of people who may not be Muslim or who may not identify themselves as Muslim?

What kinds of qualities, skills and backgrounds do you think the leadership of a movement for equality and justice should have?

To do



Have a look at some of the examples of women leaders from Muslim history.

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, Yale University Press (1993)
- Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, University of Minnesota Press, (1997)
- Farida Shaheed with Aisha L.F. Shaheed, *Great Ancestors: Women Asserting Rights in Muslim Contexts, Women Living Under Muslim Laws* (2005)
- Shayan Afzal Khan, *Unveiling the Ideal: A New Look at Early Muslim Women*, Sisters in Islam

Annexe 1 gives examples of training material on advocacy. Many of these also have sections about leadership.

Women and Men



Musawah is led by women, but as a movement it includes men. Musawah reaches out to men as well because, according to the Musawah Framework for Action:

Many laws and practices in Muslim countries are unjust, and the lives of all family members are impaired by these injustices on a daily basis.[...] Women and men alike are entitled to equality and justice within the family, as well as respect and recognition for their contributions.

Men have made a significant contribution to Musawah, as scholars and activists who have contributed their knowledge and time to developing the Framework, to the launching - and to building the movement.

However, Musawah will always be led by women and mentions women first because women's suffering due to the current lack of equality and justice in the Muslim family is greater.

To talk about

Do you think Musawah should include men? How are they affected, if at all?

These are comments from some Musawah Advocates interviewed in August 2010.

Do these comments apply to your work or community too?



Tasneem Chopra, Australia:

Q: Musawah works with men. Do you see that as important in your context?

A: Definitely. They are half the equation and by continuously working with women we do make progress with changing mindsets. But the full benefit of that change will only come when they come onboard and do their part as well.

Djingarey Maïga, Mali:

Q: Musawah says we're a movement of women and men. What does that mean for you in Mali?

A: A movement of women and men means we don't just want to work with one part of the population, i.e. the women, and leave out the other part, i.e. the men, or just work with men. So it's better that we work together, that we pool

our ideas-: that we think together and come up with a solution that will be everyone's solution for equality and justice.

Nur Rofiah, Indonesia:

Q: What is changing in the context of Indonesia that makes it possible to demand equality and justice?

A: Now you can find many female Islamic or Muslim scholars, and even you can find male, gender-aware Muslim scholars and we didn't find this ten or twenty years ago.



Asma'u Joda, Nigeria:

Q: What in your context makes equality and justice necessary and possible today?

A: A lot of fathers are breaking the rules. Most fathers think their daughters are special — unfortunately they don't think their wives are special—but they think their daughters are really special. So we have situations where they marry off their daughters, their daughters are not happy and they're doing everything to make sure that she's happy, even if they don't want a dissolution of that marriage, they'll make sure that she's happy in her home.



Hatoun al-Fassi, Saudi Arabia:

A: I was raised in a very equal family. My father, I consider him very different. This is a very essential thing in Saudi Arabia ... if you don't have a supportive man in the family, it is very difficult to pave your way. So my father was a role model, in the way he treated my mother, in the way he treated us. And then even when I got married, alhamdulillah luckily I am supported also by a similar man who believes very much in equality and sharing, and he shares with me, for example, the care of our children to the maximum. Now I'm here in Indonesia and he's babysitting the children back in Saudi.

To do

Rifka Annisa Women's Crisis Centre in Yogyakarta has a programme for working with men and boys towards preventing domestic violence. You can read a newspaper article about this [here](#).

Find out more about engaging men through [ENGAGINGMEN.NET](#): a Gender Justice Information Network.

Publicly Reclaim Islam's Spirit of Justice



The Qur'an notes that all human beings, men and women, are agents (*khalifah*) of God

The Musawah Framework for Action points out the right and duty of all people to publicly debate the question of equality:

The Qur'an notes that all human beings, men and women, are agents (*khalifah*) of God, charged with realising God's will on earth. In countries where Islam is a source of law and policy, as well as communities in which Islam influences customs and traditions, it is the right and duty of all Muslims—and all people—to openly contribute to laws, policies and practices in order to achieve justice and equality within their families, communities and societies.

One of Musawah's principles also emphasises how full and equal citizenship means having the right to participate in all aspects of society.

In many Muslim societies, a large part of the population or community (particularly women) is in practice discouraged from trying to understand

religious texts for themselves. Some Muslims have accepted this and blindly follow those who claim authority. The public voice of Islam has come to be dominated by authoritarian figures that reject diversity of opinion. These figures also seek control over national policies concerning the family and gender equality.

So it is important to publicly reclaim the right to understand the texts and it is also important to hear voices that offer a variety of alternative visions of justice and equality.

As Musawah's Strategic Direction document puts it: Musawah's efforts are based on simple but strong assertions: Islam, indeed all religions, can be a source of empowerment, not a source of oppression and discrimination. Given their impact on our rights and our daily realities, all laws and public policies—whether based on religion, customs or any other norms—must be open to public debate and must advance equality and justice for all.

To talk about



What obstacles do women and other disadvantaged groups face in publicly claiming their right to engage in understanding religious texts?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of publicly debating how Islam's message can apply to today's world and the need for equality and justice in the family?

Should religion influence public policy?

To do

At Musawah's first Global Meeting in 2009, roundtable discussions on Day 4 included one on *Getting Ourselves Heard: How to open up public debate on Islam as a source of law and public policy*, and another on *Sisters Doing it for Ourselves: Approaching the holy texts as non-experts*. You can read summaries of these discussions [here](#). Participants in the meeting also have a longer version of this report.

Do you have any examples of successful strategies you have used locally to open up debate about Islam as a source of law and public policy? Other Advocates could benefit from hearing how this worked, so please share your example—either through the website discussion platform or our Facebook pages or by e-mailing us at musawah@musawah.org.

BRIDGE is a research and information programme which specialises in resources on gender equality and social justice. They have a *Cutting Edge Pack on Gender and Citizenship* which looks at practical ways to use the idea of citizenship to bring about gender equality. You can download the Pack [here](#).

There are many publications which discuss the rights of non-experts to interpret and understand Islam's texts. Examples you can read include:

- [For Ourselves: Women Reading the Qur'an](#)
- Khaled Abou el-Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic law, Authority and Women*, Oneworld Press, Oxford (2001)



Musawah is a movement for all who share Musawah's principles and vision for change. Musawah is led by Muslim women, but as a movement it includes men as well as people who belong to other religions or who have no religion, or who do not come from a Muslim background, or who do not describe themselves as Muslim.

This relates to one of Musawah's principles which emphasises full and equal citizenship as the right of every individual. Citizenship is not just about holding a passport of a certain country. It is more broadly about being able to participate fully in a society and about having equal rights in that society. Non-Muslims, either as family members or as citizens generally, can be affected by the current lack of equality and justice in the Muslim family. Therefore, the Musawah Framework for Action speaks in the name of Muslims and all citizens affected by the issues:

We, as Muslims and as citizens of modern nations, declare that equality and justice in the family are both necessary and possible.

The Framework also points out that:

Islam teaches that all human beings are born equal in worth and dignity, which is echoed in universal human rights principles. [...]

As human beings of equal worth and dignity before God, and as citizens of modern states, all individuals are entitled to exercise equal rights to political participation and leadership, equal access to economic resources, equality before the law, and equal autonomy in the economic, social, cultural and political spheres.

To talk about



How are non-Muslims or people who don't see themselves as Muslims affected by Muslim family laws and practices, if at all?

How can Musawah ensure that everyone affected by injustice and inequality in the family is included in the movement?

What do you think is meant by 'full and equal citizenship'?

Do you think your country or your government ignores some citizens or excludes some people from full and equal citizenship? If so, how does this relate to equality in the family?

To do



Can you share a case study of how people of other religions or beliefs are affected by Muslim family laws and practices, and of how activists have tried to address this? It is important to share the voices of all people affected by existing inequality and injustices in the Muslim family. This can be shared via the website, the Musawah Facebook [page](#) or by e-mailing us at musawah@musawah.org.

What do family laws in your context say about marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims—are they possible? Is the law clear?

You can read some sources about marriages with non-Muslims [here](#).