



Global Meeting on Equality and Justice in the Family
13-17 February 2009
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Organised by Sisters in Islam, Malaysia

PRESS RELEASE

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UN Special Rapporteur Yakin Ertürk attends Global Movement on Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family

KUALA LUMPUR – Professor Yakin Ertürk, the United Nations Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women whose ground-breaking report stated that culture and religion should not be used to justify violence against women, will deliver the keynote address at the Global Meeting on Equality and Justice in the Family to be held from February 13-17 in Kuala Lumpur.

Prof. Ertürk, who has been championing women's rights and advancement worldwide for over two decades, says culture is often interchanged with the word religion, to invoke violence and discrimination against women.

Her findings which have taken her to Muslim and non-Muslim countries worldwide was highlighted in her 2007 report to the UN General Assembly on Intersections between Culture and Violence Against Women.

Prof. Ertürk will join about 250 academics and activists from 49 Muslim countries and minority communities who will discuss necessary reforms to laws that bind, shape and affect the lives of Muslim families, bringing Malaysia to the international forefront of the new wave of Muslim scholarship and activism that emphasise equality and justice within Islam.

The Global Meeting will launch Musawah, a Global Movement for Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family, made up of an international network of activists and scholars who have been working on family law and issues of justice and equality in the Muslim world. Musawah is led by an international planning committee of 12 scholars and activists from 10 countries.

Musawah contends that in the 21st century there cannot be justice without equality. In a world which considers women's rights as part of human rights, where modern constitutions recognise equality and non-discrimination, and where women's daily realities make them providers and protectors of their families, the continuing discrimination found in many Muslim family laws is untenable and indefensible.

For decades now, women activists and rights groups in Muslim societies working towards law reform have faced strong opposition from powerful forces in the name of religion and state-sanctioned patriarchy.

Muslim women who seek to reform discriminatory laws and practices are often told that these are part of 'God's law' and are therefore unchangeable. They are told that questions, challenges or demands for reform run counter to the Shari'ah and will weaken the faith of Muslims.

The 2004 success of the Moroccan women movement's comprehensive reform of the Moudawana (personal status code) that recognized marriage as a partnership of equals generated new hope that change is possible.

Several scholars at the forefront of progressive scholarship in Islam will be attending. Among them are Muhammad Khalid Masud who heads the Council of Islamic Ideology in Pakistan, Farida Bennani from Morocco, Sana Benachour from Tunisia, Kyai Hussein Muhammad from Indonesia, and Ziba Mir-Hosseini from Britain.

The five-day meeting will launch the Musawah Framework for Action which was conceptualized through a series of meetings, discussions and feedback from Islamic scholars, academics, activists and legal practitioners from over twenty countries.

The framework will guide the work of Musawah, bringing together Islamic teachings, universal human rights principles, fundamental rights and constitutional guarantees, and the lived realities of women and men today.

A book of seven papers, which will serve as a resource for the movement, will also be launched. The papers will demonstrate the possibility of finding justice and equality for women within Islam, how reform and protection of rights are possible within Muslim contexts and how justice and equality are necessary given the realities of women's and men's lives today.

Topics to be discussed will include why equality is possible and necessary in the Muslim family, feminism and religion, successful campaigns and strategies for reform, and ensuring equality without exception.

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