



musawah

For Equality in the Muslim Family

Musawah Vision

Issue 15: March 2014

An update on Musawah issues and activities

I. Muslim Family Law News

- Afghanistan:** Activists welcome president's intervention on domestic violence law - [The Guardian](#)
- Bahrain:** Cabinet approves a proposal to lift CEDAW reservations - [Gulf Daily News](#)
- Iraq:** Activists denounce Cabinet's approval of regressive 'Ja'afari' personal status law - [Reuters](#)
- Jordan:** Civil rights granted to foreign spouses, children of Jordanian women - [The Jordan Times](#)
- Pakistan:** Religious ruling to allow child marriage stirs up controversy - [Siasat Daily](#)
- Saudi Arabia:** Saudi women petition Shura Council to end men's absolute authority - [The National](#)

II. International Advocacy

Musawah Oral Statement to UN Working Group

In January 2014, Musawah delivered an [Oral Statement in New York](#) at the 9th Session of the [UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and in Practice](#). Musawah urged the Working Group to recognise and examine the structural roots of inequality in Muslim family laws, and linked structural discrimination within the overall legal framework to specific discriminatory laws and practices. Musawah further recommended that the Working Group consider the possibilities for reform of family laws from within given religious or cultural traditions. Finally, Musawah encouraged Working Group members to take advantage of the resources and findings from Musawah's [Knowledge Building](#) activities and publications.

The 9th Session of the Working Group aimed to shape the process of inquiry and strategic theoretical framing of its 2015 report on discrimination against women in family and cultural life. Within this broad area of research, the Working Group will pay particular attention to equality and non-discrimination in marriage, rights and responsibilities in the

family, and participation in all aspects of cultural life including the arts, sports and cultural activities.

Currently, Musawah is strategising a series of interventions to impact the drafting, outcome, and implications of the Working Group's 2015 Annual report, including preparation of a written submission to the 10th Session of the Working Group in Geneva in May 2014. The Working Group will present its final Annual report to the Human Rights Council in June 2015.

See past UN Working Group Annual reports [here](#).

Musawah at the 57th UN CEDAW Session

Musawah challenged the ways the Governments of [Bahrain](#), [Qatar](#), and [Iraq](#) use religion to justify discrimination and non-compliance with treaty obligations at the 57th UN [CEDAW](#) (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) Session in Geneva in February 2014.

Musawah provided the UN expert committee on women's rights (CEDAW Committee) and local NGOs alike (1) comprehensive pictures of marriage and family relations on the ground that counteract Government claims and discourses, (2) alternative arguments within Islamic legal theory that challenge the Islamic basis of discriminatory arguments used, and (3) recommendations for reform based on examples of 'good practices' in Muslim contexts. Research, analysis, and recommendations take a critical look at the status of marriage and family relations, as encapsulated in [Article 16 of the CEDAW Convention](#).

Strategic interventions in Geneva included submission of Thematic Reports on Article 16 for Bahrain, Qatar, and Iraq. Musawah also delivered two Oral Statements that linked key discriminatory laws and practices, as defined by local Advocates, with the structural roots of inequality in Muslim family laws, and urged the CEDAW Committee to recognise the possibility and necessity for reform. Finally, Musawah supported and complemented the advocacy efforts of national-level NGOs representing civil society in Bahrain, Qatar, and Iraq.

In growing recognition of Musawah's research and advocacy, the CEDAW Committee's [Concluding observations](#) on Bahrain, Qatar, and Iraq all reflect critical issues raised in Musawah Thematic Reports and Oral Statements. The Concluding observations are used as a critical resource by national-level NGOs in local advocacy efforts, and allow the CEDAW Committee to hold Governments accountable to progress made at future CEDAW sessions.

It is hoped that Musawah's engagement with the CEDAW review process will continue to promote human rights standards as intrinsic to the teachings of Islam, national guarantees of equality and non-discrimination, and the [lived realities](#) of women and men today.

Musawah at the 58th UN Commission on the Status of Women

Musawah supported the efforts of rights campaigners, and presented at a parallel event during the 58th Session of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) (CSW), which took place at the UN Headquarters in New York in March 2014.

The priority theme for this year's gender equality talks was challenges and achievements in the implementation of the [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) for women and girls. Women's rights campaigners welcomed '[milestone](#)' agreements, including a stand-alone equality goal in post-2015 development targets, and strong language against violence against women and girls, child marriage, and female genital mutilation. (See advance unedited [Agreed Conclusions](#).)

A particularly contentious sovereignty clause in the document was withdrawn. Such a clause would have allowed governments to ignore the recommendations that could interfere with their own 'traditions and practices'.

Musawah presented during a parallel event entitled 'Women's Rights: Culture Specific?' organized by the [Centre for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance](#) (CEWLA). In an overview of the unique spaces that engagement with religion engenders, Musawah connected challenging the Islamic basis of discriminatory arguments used by Governments with (1) Muslim women's active agency in defining faith and culture, (2) challenging the modern Muslim state's claim to religious authority and knowledge, and (3) disrupting the dichotomy often forced between 'cultural relativism' and 'universal human rights'.

The CSW is instrumental in promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women. Representatives of Member States, UN entities, and ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from all regions of the world attend the session annually.

III. Building Our Movement

Musawah news and events

Musawah celebrates International Women's Day

In celebration of International Women's Day (IWD), Musawah engaged followers on Twitter with its popular [tweet seminar](#) '*Reading for Gender from the Qur'an*' on 8th March 2014. With an estimated reach to over 300,000 Twitter users through the hashtag [#femquran](#), Musawah virtually celebrated IWD with Advocates and Allies all over the world. The seminar is a recurring event on Twitter that is based on the scholarship of author and Musawah Advocate [Amina Wadud](#).

Musawah Director and Co-Founder conferred the ‘Legion of Honour’ by the Government of France

Musawah Director and co-founder, Zainah Anwar, was named Chevalier de la Legion d’Honneur (Knight of the Legion of Honour), at a ceremony conducted by Martine Dorance, the French Ambassador to Malaysia, on 7 March 2014 in Kuala Lumpur. The insignia of Chevalier, was conferred upon Zainah in recognition of over 20 years public service as a women’s rights activist, and as a co-founder of Malaysian women’s rights group [Sisters in Islam](#).

“What women want is to be treated as human beings of equal worth and dignity. Why is that still so difficult?” Zainah asserted in her acceptance speech.

The National Order of the Legion of Honour is the highest decoration in France and is a symbol of talent, courage and dedication to the nation. Foreign nationals are also awarded on the basis of “eminent merit” in civilian or military life.

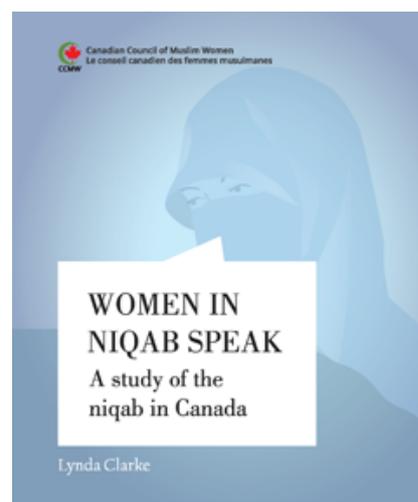


Musawah Advocate updates

Canada

Musawah Advocate in Canada, The [Canadian Council of Muslim Women](#) (CCMW), has concluded a study about [Muslim women and the niqab](#). CCMW initiated the study to offer a response to the growing national conversation on niqab, including the proposed Bill 94 to ban face veil in public in Quebec and the recent federal decision to ban the niqab during citizenship ceremonies. Apart from reflecting CCMW’s values and continued commitment to the plurality of Muslim communities, CCMW’s study aims to ensure that the voices of Muslim women are heard and that they ‘speak for themselves’.

The study, which was based on surveys and focus groups of women who wear the niqab, was led by Lynda Clarke, Professor of Religion and Islam at Concordia University. A publication based on the study, [Women in Niqab Speak: A Study of the Niqab in Canada](#), was released in January 2014 and can be downloaded [here](#).



Updates from allies

Maldives



Musawah Advocates in the [Maldives](#) released a Maldivian [madhaha music video](#) with the theme 'Equality for Women is Progress for All' on International Women's Day 2014.

Musawah Advocates in the Maldives had participated in the Musawah Course [Islam & Gender Equality and Justice \(I-nGEJ\)](#), pronounced 'I-engage' in November 2013. This video

was inspired by the original Indonesian 'Shalawath' promoting gender equality.

More information on the Musawah course [I-nGEJ](#) can be found here:

<http://www.musawah.org/i-engage>

Musawah in the news

[maslaha](#) has featured Musawah and some Musawah Advocates in its recently launched resource website [Islam & Feminism](#). The website looks at what feminism in Islam means to different people and how it might challenge stereotypes both in Islam and feminism. Their page on [Musawah](#) can be found [here](#).

[BuzzFeed](#) featured Musawah Director, Zainah Anwar, in its article [Feminism In Faith: Zainah Anwar's Quest To Reinterpret The Qur'an's Most Controversial Verse](#). Journalist Rafia Zakaria previews Zainah Anwar's journey to find a different option other than rejecting Islam or rejecting feminism. To read the full article, click [here](#).

IV. Building Our Knowledge

Documentary: Making Waves

[International IDEA](#) celebrated International Women's Day with its new documentary [Making Waves: Expressions of Gender Equality in the Sacred Texts and Islamic Tradition](#). The documentary is based on case studies of 'women and men as scholars and activists promoting interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadiths that empower women



and promote justice, equality and dignity'. It features several Musawah Advocates in different regions, including [Isatou Touray](#), Gambia; [Ziba Mir-Hosseini](#), Iran/UK; [Ratna Osman](#), Malaysia; [Asma Lamrabet](#), Morocco; Amina Hanga, Nigeria; and [Zainah Anwar](#), Musawah Director.

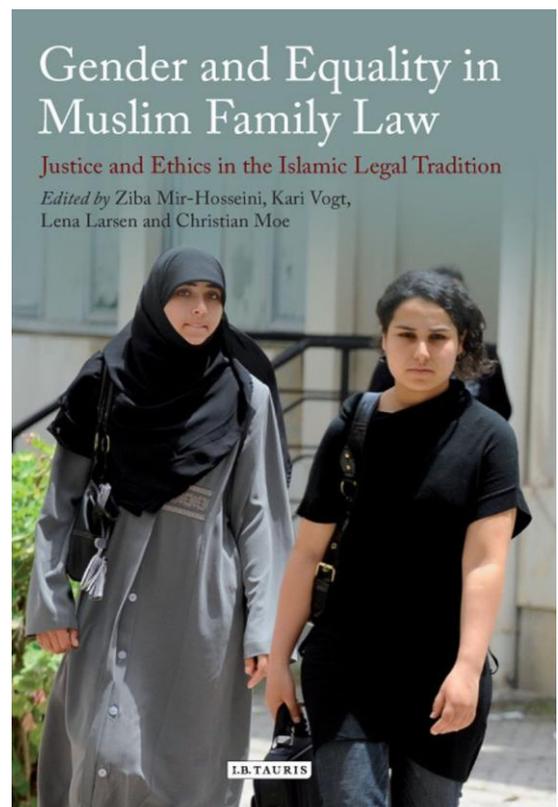
Book review: *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law: Justice and Ethics in the Islamic Legal Process*. Edited by: Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Kari Vogt, Lena Larsen and Christian Moe. I. B. Tauris, Library of Islamic Law Series, 2013.

Review by Musawah [Visionaries](#): Camille Ewers & Paulina Fröhlich

This ground-breaking edited book by Ziba Mir-Hosseini et al. offers new perspectives towards gender equality in Muslim family laws by bringing together collective knowledge on various grounds (Qur'an, *fiqh*, lived realities, human rights) through diverse modern and traditional methods of inquiry. With a strong, accurate, critical voice, this book confirms that a large and visible group of Muslims claiming gender equality as a basic Islamic principle cannot be ignored anymore.

Fourteen scholars, researchers, activists and pioneers are directly involved in the publication of this book. However, there are numerous other individuals behind the 258 pages, as nearly every author mentions his or her research team, NGOs, and/or personalities with whom knowledge has been gained. The book, divided into three main parts (Perspectives on Reality, Approaches to Reform, and Instead of a Conclusion), engages intensively with the concepts of [*qiwamah and wilayah*](#) from various perspectives. Exemplary Personal Status Law reforms are introduced and critically discussed on national and international basis. The book also includes the work of women's rights NGOs plus a review on gender equality in general.

Those who are new to the subject of gender equality in Islam are advised to start with chapter 5 to have a gentle and comprehensive idea of how everything started. Others who are familiar with the thoughts and methods but who have been longing for a more practical approach with concrete results from field studies can read chapters 2 and 3 carefully. Chapter 8 provides a new and useful approach towards *hadith* with regards to gender equality. The final chapter basically questions the common understanding of equal treatment, which gives the book a serious and witty wrap up.



New book: *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition*

Musawah Advocate and University of British Columbia professor Ayesha Chaudhry offers non-violent readings of a key Qur'anic passage about male authority, Verse 4:34, in her new book [*Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition*](#) (Oxford University Press). The book explores this hot topic from legal, religious, political and gender studies perspectives and offers a new pedagogical tool to teachers of the Qur'an as scripture.

For more information about the book, click [here](#).

V. Contact Us

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Join us on [Facebook](#)

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VI. Young Women's Caucus

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To submit Advocate updates or ask questions, write to Musawah at: info@musawah.org