



## **CSVGC Speakers' Mini-Series** **Dr Fawzia Al Ashmawi**

Representative in Geneva  
International Islamic Relief Organization  
Saudi Arabia (IIROSA)  
Ashmawi7@ yahoo.com

### **Women Rights & Human Rights in Islam**

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Islam means to believe in Allah as the only one God who created the heavens and the earth and to submit oneself to His will. The Muslims, men and women, has a firm belief that Islam is the last Divine message and that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the last prophet who came to call to the worship of God alone and to complete and conclude all other messages of God's prophets who came before him.

Islam as the other heavenly religions calls for goodness, love, tolerance and respect of the others, Muslims or not Muslims and coexistence with them in the same society as brothers in humanity even though they do not hold the same faith. Islam as the other heavenly religions is based on a number of ethical values which may be the same in each. These are: human dignity, respect of human life, freedom, justice, equality, brotherhood, mercy, good treatment, forgiveness, tolerance and cooperation.

Those basic values are common in all religions. They are propagated in the Torah, the Ten Commandments, the Gospels and the Quran. Those common values can be used as a basis for the human relations that bring all people together regardless of their beliefs, languages or cultures. Prophet Muhammad applied these basic human values in the first Islamic society in Medina without difference between Muslim, Jewish and Christian population of this first Muslim State. The Islamic law (Sharī`a ) is based on the divine source, the Quran and the Hadīth (sayings and tradition of the Prophet Muhammad ).

Muslim woman, as all other women, has the same human rights, specially the rights of economic independence and the right to keep their birth name and not to be in the shadow of their husband and losing her identity behind the name of her husband. Muslim women, through the centuries, have worked as a factor of the development, stability and prosperity of the Muslim societies. Islam guarantees equal rights to women and men but has defined a complementary role for each of them in the family and in the society. Some Quranic verses consider men and women as equal in their nature and in their relationship to God: “ *O mankind, be careful of your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate...* (Quran 4:1). This verse defines clearly the equality of man and woman and rejects any claims that men are superior or better than women. Another verse confirms that they are both responsible and accountable for their beliefs and actions:” *Whosoever does right whether male or female and is a believer, God shall quicken with good life and God shall recompense in proportion to the best of what they do* (Quran, 16:97)

Unfortunately, one of the most understood aspects of Islam is the status of Muslim women and their social and political role. It is widely believed in European countries that Muslim women are repressed and oppressed. It is too little known in Europe that Islam grants women the same human rights, mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): the right to life, freedom, education, inheritance, divorce, social rights and political rights. Whenever, it is repeated by European media that Muslim women are totally submitted to their husbands and some ancient ethnic traditions are presented as religious prescriptions: sexual mutilations of girls, forced marriages, ignorance etc...

If we compare the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) with the Quranic prescriptions and rules determining the status of Muslim woman, we can confirm that there are only 3 articles which represent some incompatibility:

- **The 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Declaration** prescribes a total equality between men and women but Islam gives men a pre-eminence in inheritance and in testimony.

- **The 16 Article of the Declaration** grants the right to each person to choose a spouse but Islam allows men to be married with a non-Muslim woman but Muslim woman cannot be married to a non- Muslim man.

- **Article 18 Article of the Declaration** grants the right of men and women to change their faith but Islam forbids this right because a Muslim person, man or woman, has a firm belief that Islam is the last Divine message that completes all previous religions; given that, it is illogical that a person embraces the complete and last true religion then gives it up.

Apart those 3 Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the 27 articles are compatible with the prescriptions of the Quran related to the status of Muslim Women. In fact, Muslim woman is free to choose her husband and cannot be forced into marriage against her will as said in this verse: *“Don’t prevent them from marrying their husbands when they agree between themselves in a lawful manner.”* (Quran, 2:32). Furthermore, Islam treats woman as a completely independent entity. She can carry out trade and business, make any contract and bequest in her own name independently from her husband and not been liable for his debts. Muslim woman has similar access to divorce as man and she is free to remarry if divorced or widowed.

Unfortunately, the reality of Muslim women’s lives in Islamic societies is different and ancient traditions prevailing and depriving women of their divine rights prescribed by the holy Quran. The number of Muslim women who play an important role and represent Muslim women in political, social and cultural fields, in the Arab Islamic world, is limited. Most of the Muslim women, who are into leading posts through the world, do not give the proper image of the Muslim woman.

A negative image of a veiled and submitted Muslim woman prevailed in the media in Europe. The veil is considered as a symbol of oppression and not as a Quranic prescription covering the entire body of woman preventing her to be considered as a sexual object. This negative image must be changed and replaced by a positive image reflecting the multi-dimensional Islamic culture. Some Muslim women, who choose a political career and who are engaged in the service of the society must not hide after her gender. They must have equal

social and political rights as determined by the holy Quran and must be allowed to prove their professional abilities in the same conditions as every man.

The Muslim world must allow women and girls to display their abilities through a new moderate education, which prepare them to be able to fulfil the duties defined for them by the Quran and to assume the great role they must play in the Muslim family and in the Muslim society. We must encourage and assure a vast participation of Muslim women of different ages and strata in the agendas of social and political activities in the Islamic societies to promote the development all over the Islamic world.

We have to concede more importance to the second generation of Muslim women in the European countries and encourage them to integrate into European societies although preserving their cultural specificities and Islamic values; to encourage the western media to observe the standards of ethics and religious symbols and not to seek gains by publishing material which may offend Muslim sensibility.