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Remembering Srebrenica: A Site of Sorrow and Resolve

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Guarding Youth Against Extremism

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Muslim Women Shattering Stereotypes

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Linking Islamic and Western Minds

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# SOLIDARITY & RESOLVE

The MWL in Eastern Europe



*Our common values are the witness to  
the depth of our human brotherhood and  
the catalyst for our cooperation for a  
more peaceful world.”*

– Dr. Mohammed Al-Issa in Zagreb, Croatia

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# MWL in February & March

Highlights from recent activities

“ This place is a site of sorrow but also resolve for the Muslim world. It reminds us what the forces of hate can do if good people and those in a position of power do nothing to stop them.”

– Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa at the Srebrenica Genocide Memorial and Museum



The President of the Republic of Serbia Aleksander Vučić welcomed Dr. Al-Issa in Serbia.

*In February, His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa traveled throughout Eastern Europe, meeting with religious communities to spread the message of dialogue and understanding to build peace, harmony and national identity. A 2017 Pew Research Center survey found that “religion has reasserted itself as an important part of individual and national identity in many of the Central and Eastern European countries.” Dr. Al-Issa received*

*religious and political leaders at the Muslim World League headquarters in mid-February before traveling to the UN Headquarters in Geneva for the International Conference on Protecting Youth from Extremist and Violent Ideologies. In early March, the Secretary-General embarked on a journey to Indonesia where he laid the foundation stone for the Jakarta branch of the Museum of the Life of the Prophet.*

## FEBRUARY 6

During his visit to Serbia, Dr. Al-Issa met with political leaders including **President Aleksandar Vučić**, **Prime Minister Ana Brnabić**, **National Assembly Speaker Maja Gojković** and **Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić**, as well as **Patriarch Irinej of the Serbian Orthodox Church**. Dr. Al-Issa pointed out that he met a number of ordinary Serbian people and was able to see through them the rich Serbian culture reflecting the harmony among different religious communities.

## FEBRUARY 9

Dr. Al-Issa and the President of the Republic of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, opened the **Muslim World League Conference on Human Brotherhood – the Basis for Security and Peace**. The two leaders discussed the ways faith communities can come together through dialogue.

## FEBRUARY 10

Dr. Al-Issa paid tribute to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide in Potocari by visiting the **Srebrenica Memorial Center in Bosnia-Herzegovina**. He was welcomed in Sarajevo by the President of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

## FEBRUARY 11

**Alpha BK University** in Belgrade, Serbia, awarded the title of Honorary Doctor of Science to Dr.

Al-Issa for his “exceptional contribution and commitment in the field of interpersonal tolerance and understanding among people and religions in the world.

## FEBRUARY 10

Dr. Al-Issa and senior Saudi officials met with the delegation of **The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations** at the MWL headquarters in



Dr. Al-Issa speaks before the Islamic Community in Zagreb.

Dr. Al-Issa met with the President of the Republic of Croatia.



Dr. Al-Issa spoke before a meeting of Members of Parliament, Prime Ministers, political and religious leaders and academics at the UN Headquarters in Geneva.

Makkah. It was the institution's first visit to Saudi Arabia and the first official delegation to the Kingdom of any American Jewish organization since 1994. "We feel it was very productive. Very encouraging," said Conference of Presidents Chairman Arthur Stark, summarizing his organization's visit at a press conference. The talks were mainly focused on countering terrorism and instability in the Middle East.

**FEBRUARY 13**

Dr. Al-Issa received **New Zealand Ambassador James Munro** at the MWL headquarters in Makkah. The two leaders discussed the importance of inter-faith dialogue.

**FEBRUARY 18-19**

Dr. Al-Issa traveled to Geneva for the **International Conference on Initiatives for Protecting the**

**Youth from Extremist and Violent Ideologies.** The event was held at the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva.

A significant number of people participated in the conference, including senior officials working in government and the private sector around the world, religious leaders, political leaders, scholars and academic practitioners in the field of education and psychology.

As a result of the conference, numerous beneficial decisions and recommendations have been issued, including the need for creating a curriculum highlighting the values of tolerance, religious freedom, and the importance of mutual respect between all human diversity. One of the key conclusions was that religious leaders should teach youth about dialogue and partnership for religious and ethnic harmony.

**FEBRUARY 20**

Dr. Al-Issa met with a **U.S. congressional delegation** in Riyadh to discuss the importance of toler-



Dr. Al-Issa met with the New Zealand Ambassador at the MWL headquarters in Makkah.

The International Conference on Initiatives for Protecting the Youth from Extremist and Violent Ideologies at the UN Headquarters in Geneva.

ance between faiths and new ways to combat extremism and promote a healthy dialogue among nations.

### FEBRUARY 25

At the end of the month, HE Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa traveled to Jakarta to receive an honorary doctorate from the **Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University**, one of the most prominent Indonesian government universities. He was honored with an honorary degree from the University.

### FEBRUARY 28

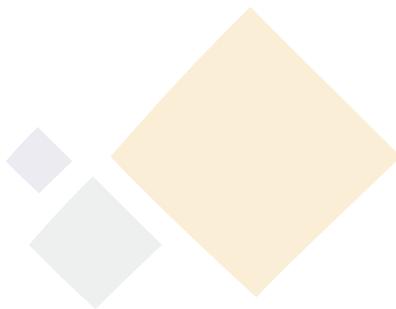
While in Jakarta, Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa met with the **Indonesian Vice President Dr. Maarouf Amin**. Together they laid the foundation stone for a new **Museum of the Life of the Prophet and Islamic Civilization in Jakarta**. The facility will become the first branch of the **Madinah International Museum**, that will host a variety of events, such as debates, conferences, forums, and seminars.

### MARCH 1

HE Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa met with the **President of Indonesia Joko Widodo** to discuss the activities of the Muslim World League in the country. Dr. Al-Issa was welcomed by **the People's Consultative Assembly of Indonesia** to speak before its members.

The Secretary-General was honored by the **President of the Renaissance of the Muslim Scholars Association in Indonesia**. HE Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa and the MWL was recognized for their commitment to promoting tolerance and moderation around the world and emphasizing the importance of expanding cooperation in the face of extremism.

HE Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa met with **Southeast Asian Youth in Jakarta**. The focus of the meeting was on how young people can be ambassadors for positive inter-religious dialogue and peace. HE Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa shared important recommendations to enhance the role of young people in representing the tolerance and peace inherent in Islam.



U.S. Congressional delegation visited the Muslim World League offices and met with Dr. Al-Issa and his staff.

Dr. Al-Issa was conferred an honorary degree from the Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University in Jakarta.

Laying the foundation for the Jakarta Museum of the Life of the Prophet.



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The Mostar Bridge in Bosnia and Herzegovina is considered an exemplary piece of Balkan Islamic architecture that was first built in the 16th century. It was destroyed in 1993 during the Croat-Bosniak War, but the bridge was rebuilt and reopened in 2004.

**T**he main focus of this issue of MWL Journal is the Balkans, where religious and ethnic ambitions suddenly exploded into warfare and genocide in the 1990s. It was an area where Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics and Muslims had lived in relative harmony for centuries, although not without tensions and even violence. Still, the scale and intensity of the violence caught the world by surprise.

Bosnia-Herzegovina suffered the most violence. It was the most diverse of the republics of the former Yugoslavia, and ironically, the republic where the three communities seemed to be most in harmony. Neighbor turned against neighbor in an anti-Muslim genocide conducted mostly by Bosnian Serb militias, and the quiet and gentle way of life in the country—long characterized by religious tolerance,

mutual respect and neighborliness—was shattered, perhaps forever.

Muslim World League Secretary General Mohammad Al-Issa's visit to Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina is an attempt to help repair that shattered world, and we recount his meetings with religious and political leaders of the three countries. The conflict in the former Yugoslavia was not strictly religious—that is, it was not over doctrine or disputes over how religious belief would inform laws and customs. It was really ethnic—almost tribal—as some Serb and Croat nationalists began to see Bosnian Muslims not as Slavs, but as a different ethnic group altogether, and began to believe that to be a Slav was to be a Christian. Still, it is up to religious leaders to face squarely the sins of the 1990s and exhort their followers to rediscover the kind of tolerance and respect that once existed.

Islam in the Balkans has existed in a European cultural context and historically has been considered “moderate” and even more “secular”. That led us to seek to examine one aspect of Islam that is often understood: the status of women. We delve briefly into the scriptural and cultural bases for the treatment of women in largely Islamic societies in order to determine what Islam requires and what it does not, and in turn we take a look at Islamic women who are defying stereotypes and accomplishing some extraordinary things.

Finally, this issue also features articles about the unique design features of Islamic architecture and Islamic cities, and how faith, experience and local culture helped to create a unique aesthetic for living at home or in communities.

*The Editors*



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Dr. Al-Issa met with families of the victims of the Srebrenica genocide.

Children in Zagreb sing at a gathering of the Islamic community.



# SREBRENICA: A Site of Sorrow and Resolve

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League



Women share stories in memory of their husbands and sons who were killed in the Srebrenica genocide.

A decade-and-a-half has passed since the killings at Srebrenica – the first genocide on the European continent since World War II – but the scars of the unspeakable horrors remain fresh for all who visit. The white pillars stand row by row, where at least 8,372 people rest beneath the earth. They represent the sons, brothers and fathers of Bosnia’s Muslim community who were slaughtered during the final year of Bosnian War.

They are gone, but not forgotten.



*We will never allow a repeat of what happened at Srebrenica to anyone, anywhere in the world.”*

-Dr. Al-Issa vowed at the Srebrenica Memorial Center in Potocari

“*We remember these terrible crimes because we dare not forget, because we must pay tribute to the innocent lives, many of them children, snuffed out in what must be called genocidal madness*”

– Former U.S. President Bill Clinton

On Feb. 10, just two weeks after his historic visit to the Auschwitz death camp where the Nazis killed more than 1 million Jews, Dr. Mohammed Al-Issa, the Secretary General of the Muslim World League, led a senior delegation of Muslim scholars and other religious leaders to Srebrenica.

His message while visiting the Memorial Center in Potocari was unmistakable: The world can never allow such crimes to occur again.

The Srebrenica Museum should be a center radiating peace, where one can learn from the past,” Dr. Al-Issa said. “The women who lost their husbands and children in that massacre told me they’ve known great sorrow, but they do not bear hatred.”

Declaring his visit a “duty of solidarity”, Dr. Al-Issa paid tribute to the victims and warned about threats to other minorities around the world, echoing the sentiments he expressed when he commemorated the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in late January.

“We will never allow a repeat of what happened at Srebrenica to anyone, anywhere in the world,” Dr. Al-Issa vowed. “This place is a site of sorrow but also resolve for the Muslim world. It reminds us what the forces of hate can do if good people and those in a position of power do nothing to stop them,” he added. “We are obliged to protect the memory and truth of the Srebrenica genocide and the mass atrocities

against Bosnians in the 1990s, not only among Muslims around the world, but for all humanity.”

Dr. Al-Issa was welcomed at the memorial center by Šefket Hafizović, the president of the Memorial Center steering board, as well as Director Emir Suljagić and representatives of the victims, witnesses and family members of those who perished at Srebrenica.

The tragedy occurred in July 1995 after what the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has described as a years-long campaign of ethnic cleansing against Bosnian Muslims in the area.

Bosnian Serb military units and Serbian paramilitary forces had been fighting for the area since 1992, engaging in siege and starvation tactics to win control of the territory, and prompting



Gravestones stand at the site of Srebrenica genocide.



Dr. Al-Issa and Steingrímur J. Sigfússon, the Speaker of the Icelandic Parliament discussed the importance of peaceful coexistence among religions.



*Dr. Al-Issa and the Muslim World League have been leaders in speaking out for the victims of genocide. He has elevated the essential cause so that it's at the heart of inter-religious dialogue, both here in the region, and everywhere else in the world."*

-Srebrenica Memorial Center President  
Šefket Hafizović

the U.N. Security Council to create a "safe area" around Srebrenica.

But the U.N. failed to effectively demilitarize the surrounding terrain, and the world lacked the resolve to prevent a Serb offensive against Srebrenica. When the Serbs breached the defenses, the so-called "Blue Helmets" stood aside and failed to protect the Bosnian civilians.

In front of Dutch soldiers, the Serbs separated Bosnian Muslim boys and men from women and the elderly. They then killed more than 8,000 in a mass execution and disposed of them in mass graves.

Meanwhile, thousands of women and girls among the refugees were raped or sexually abused. Homes were torched. Even babies were murdered, according to the various testimonies.

Since its establishment in 2003, the Srebrenica Genocide Memorial has been the official point of remembrance for the victims. At its opening, former U.S. President Bill Clinton told the relatives of the victims: "We remember these terrible crimes

because we dare not forget, because we must pay tribute to the innocent lives, many of them children, snuffed out in what must be called genocidal madness.”

Clinton expressed hope that the name Srebrenica would “remind every child in the world that pride in our own religious and ethnic heritage does not require or permit us to dehumanize or kill those who are different.”

Dr. Al-Issa offered a similar message of unity and resolve, drawing praise from the memorial’s top officials.

“The Srebrenica Memorial Center is an institution that has an open door for all people who acknowledge the crime of genocide, want to proactively support our programs of education and dissemination of the truth about genocide, and are willing to work with us to prevent the crime of genocide from happening again,” Hafizović said. “Dr. Al-Issa and the Muslim World League have been leaders in speaking out for the victims of genocide,” he said. “He has elevated the essential cause so that it’s at the heart of inter-religious dialogue, both here in the region, and everywhere else in the world.”



Dr. Al-Issa and the Director of the Memorial Center Emir Suljagić place lilies in memory of the victims of the Srebrenica massacre. Lilies have become a symbol of remembrance, representing the innocence of the victims of the massacre, many of whom were young men and boys.



*The Srebrenica Memorial Center is an institution that has an open door for all people who acknowledge the crime of genocide, want to proactively support our programs of education and dissemination of the truth about genocide, and are willing to work with us to prevent the crime of genocide from happening again.”*

– Srebrenica Memorial Center President Šefket Hafizović



Dr. Al-Issa meets families of the victims of the Srebrenica genocide.



# PROTECTING YOUTH FROM EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League

This February 18-19 2020, the Muslim World League hosted the International Conference on Initiatives to Protect Young People against Extremist and Violent Ideas: Implementation Mechanisms.

Held at United Nations Headquarters in Geneva, the conference gathered together hundreds of leaders from the private sector and government—including MPs, parliament speakers and UN ambassadors—as well as religious leaders, security specialists and academic practitioners, from countries around the world.

Those who attended did so out of a unity of purpose: To protect youth against extremism,

violence, and terrorism; to combat hatred and marginalization; and to promote religious freedom and the values of tolerance and respect.

Over the course of two days, more than 40 expert panelists and keynote speakers shared their insights across these themes and covered topics ranging from the origins of extremist ideology and the role of national identity to the state of Muslim youth in Europe and the role of education, family and other socializing influencers.

While extremism has proven to be contagious among some youth, the outlook of the conference was hopeful. Young people make up one-third of the world's population. While becoming increasingly individualistic, they are also connecting in unprecedented ways through communications technology. Many speakers addressed these shifting social structures and sought to illuminate the root causes of extremism, raising issues of exclusion and other factors that incite conflicts, hatred, racism and enmity.

Among the most common themes was a sense of collective responsibility. Participants echoed the need for solidarity amongst every state, every religion, and every institution to keep economies growing and to create agency among youth. There cannot be development and prosperity without security, and there can be no security with a pervasive threat of terrorism. Religious, academic, and political institutions alike have a place in creating support systems for young people and combatting the influence of extremist ideologies.



The International Conference for Protecting the Youth from Extremist and Violent Ideologies opens at the UN Headquarters in Geneva.



Dr. Al-Issa and world leaders including Isabelle Moret, President of the Swiss National Council, Former Prime Minister of Norway Kjell Magne Bondevik, and the Vice Chairman of the People’s Consultative Assembly of Indonesia make closing statements at the conference.vz

The president of Switzerland’s National Council, Isabelle Moret, welcomed attendees to the host country of the conference. She shared successful Swiss initiatives to foster engagement among the country’s youth and called for increased inclusivity across institutions and organizations.

In his remarks, MWL Secretary-General Mohammed Al-Issa said the initiatives raised would aim to protect youth from extremist ideologies that incite violence, and he shed light on the responsibility of educational institutions in particular. This should be achieved, he said, through the establishment of school curricula with “interactive activities” that focus on exploring differences, diversity and pluralism in the world.

He reaffirmed that religious, ethnic and ideological clashes are a danger to world peace. Regardless



*Religious, ethnic and ideological clashes are a danger to world peace. Regardless of the nature of extremism, whether religious or non-religious, we must encourage trends of moderation for young people to grow into responsible members of society.”*

– Dr. Al- Issa’s closing remarks at the UN Headquarters in Geneva.

of the nature of extremism, whether religious or non-religious, Dr. Al-Issa stressed that we should encourage trends of moderation for young people to grow into responsible members of society. The goal is not to agree on everything but to respect and understand each other.

The problem is complex and the solutions must be multi-faceted. The conference culminated in a call to action for governments, civil society groups, and religious and secular institutions to adopt and enact recommendations, practical measures and initiatives, to conduct research, and to establish global accountability for the future of youth worldwide.



Dr. Al-Issa opens the International Conference for Protecting the Youth from Extremist and Violent Ideologies.

Isabelle Moret gives a closing statement to the conference.



# SHATTERING STEREOTYPES: MUSLIM WOMEN BREAKING BOUNDARIES ACROSS THE GLOBE

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League



Indian and Emirati Artist Haafiza Sayed's *The Invisible Muslima*.

Every year on March 8, International Women’s Day offers an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of women and to undermine the harmful stereotypes that hinder progress on achieving equality. Each day, women are challenging these stereotypes, fighting biases and broadening the perceptions of what it means to be a Muslim woman in modern society.

## Challenging Stereotypes

In communities across the world, Muslim women are participating in daily life by engaging energetically in a variety of sectors and personal pursuits – from technology and science to the arts and athletics.

Cairo-based engineer Samira Negm stands out as a shining example of a Muslim woman leveraging her skills and creativity to make a difference in her community. Drawing on her experience in IT, Negm created a carpooling app that would go on to reduce the amount of time that Egyptians are stuck in Cairo’s notorious traffic while simultaneously providing a safe car-sharing option for women. Notably, *The New York Times* called Negm the “new face of tech entrepreneurship in the Muslim world.”

Negm's story reflects a larger trend: Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education for women in the Muslim world is on the upswing. This is particularly true in Brunei and Kuwait, two Muslim-majority countries where women currently outnumber men in STEM education. This means that women are innovating in the tech space at unprecedented rates, and Muslim women are a large part of this sea change.

Beyond the tech sector, Muslim women's artistic pursuits are driving cultural inclusion and adding a critical perspective to social spaces. This dedication to the arts is demonstrated by *Muslima: Muslim Women's Art & Voices*, a global online exhibition presenting a groundbreaking collection of artwork by Muslim women who are defining their own identities and shattering pervasive stereotypes. The online gallery alone shows the scope of talent and expression that Muslim women are putting out into the world, from compelling photographic imagery to watercolors and portrait work. Each piece of art presents a different viewpoint on what it means to be a Muslim woman in the modern-day world.

Nadia Helmy Ahmed, a Muslim woman and boxer from Denmark, highlighted her own efforts to challenge stereotypes in a conversation with the Global Fund for Women: "I try to challenge the cultural discourse about what Muslim women should act like. And exhibit leadership through my sport and encourage other women to be strong norm breakers."

Further shattering stereotypes, Khadijah Diggs' – the only Muslim member of the U.S. triathlon team – competed in her first triathlon in 2012 at age 43 and rose through the ranks of the triathlon world through determination, conditioning and performance. She has done all this and become a standout in her sport while wearing her hijab and partnering with companies who support her apparel needs.



*My Muslim woman is amongst the millions of unsung and often ignored Muslim women in global societies. These are women that are strong, liberated, awakened in all senses, exercising their rights, voicing their opinions; they are the leaders, educators, doctors, writers, artists, activists and so on"*

– Artist Haafiza Sayd of the UAE

"People's perception of Muslim women is changing because the world is changing," Diggs told Global Sport Matters. "They used to see us and say, 'Oh, that poor oppressed Muslim girl.' When I first started, people kind of talked to me like I was visiting the triathlon world. But now they know I'm coming to compete."

### **Fighting Bias**

Empowered Muslim women are taking the workplace by storm, and increased visibility at work helps to combat structural biases against Muslim women at every level. Within the past 15 years, millions of Muslim



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The combined earnings of Muslim women in the workforce would make them the world's 16th largest country.

women have joined the workforce for the first time. Notably, the combined earnings of Muslim women would make them the world's 16th largest country.

The urgent need to combat biases in the workplace and beyond cannot be overstated. As underscored by the World Economic Forum, "One in ten of us on the planet is a Muslim woman. There are 800 million in total ... their economic fortunes will determine the prosperity and stability of their own countries, and, by consequence, of the global economy."

Muslim women in the workplace add unique perspectives that enable others to follow their example, multiplying the impact that successful women can have. In Indonesia, Diajeng Lestari used her social science background to identify a need and fill it by building an online fashion marketplace catering specifically to Muslim women.

Lestari tapped into her Muslim identity for inspiration while creating her platform, which she branded Hijup. "It was first triggered by my own needs as a professional and woman who wears hijab," Lestari

explained. "When I was still working in the corporate world, I found it difficult to find good and qualified Muslim fashion products both online and offline ... One of Hijup's values is to empower."

Recognizing the economic potential that gender equality offers presents another strong case for fighting the bias against Muslim women in the workplace.

### **Broadening Perceptions**

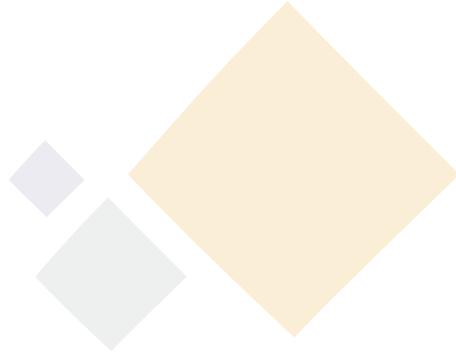
Like other communities, Muslim women are not a monolith. They hail from a variety of countries, offering varying life experiences and outlooks on society.

As Haafiza Sayd of the UAE explained it: "My Muslim woman is amongst the millions of unsung and often ignored Muslim women in global societies. These are women that are strong, liberated, awakened in all senses, exercising their rights, voicing their opinions; they are the leaders, educators, doctors, writers, artists, activists and so on."

This diversity is not a new phenomenon. Muslim women throughout history have made their mark on society.

Take Wallada bint Al-Mustakfi, a well-known Andalusian poet of the eleventh century whose work was highly influential in Spain in her lifetime and the centuries that followed, or Khadija bint Kuhwaylid, wife of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who was considered a successful businesswoman. Khadija is often referred to as the “First Believer,” or the first follower of the Prophet Muhammad’s teachings on earth. Both women represent the true breadth of experience that Muslim women can and do represent throughout the world.

Muslim women have left a long legacy of positively impacting the societies around them, and a historical perspective offers a wealth of material from which perceptions of Muslim women can be further broadened to benefit the cause of promoting equality.



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Fashion is one industry in which Muslim businesswomen are making their mark –encouraging and supporting women joining the workforce around the world.



# MUSLIM WOMEN LEADING THE WAY

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League



The Qarawiyin Mosque and University in Fez, Morocco was founded in the year 859.

Upon its founding 1,500 years ago, Islam was revolutionary in its recognition of women as moral equals to men in the eyes of God. Islam forbade female infanticide and expected that women fulfill many of the same duties as men, allowing women unprecedented autonomy.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) actively supported economic and intellectual opportunities for women during his lifetime. His first wife, Khadija (RA), was a wealthy and successful businesswoman who supported him morally and financially after his call to prophet hood. The Prophet's wife Aisha bint Abu Bakr (RA) acquired a great deal of wisdom from the Prophet, growing into a renowned jurist and scholar. After the Prophet's death, she became a war hero and Muslim leader through her mastery of public speaking and political and military strategy.

The Prophet's belief in women's potential was not limited to his household; Nusayba Umm Amara, the first female Muslim soldier, personally defended the Prophet when his archers deserted their posts, contradicting beliefs that women belonged solely in the household. Shafa Bint Adwiya, a successful physician, was encouraged by the Prophet to teach one of his wives to read and write. The second Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab, widely known as "rightly guided," nominated Shafa to be the first female marketplace administrator in Medina. Prophetic positions on female Muslim scholarship and professional achievement were consistently positive, informing contemporary efforts to recognize women's rights in the Islamic world.

The historic actions of Muslim women have also contributed to Islam's global influence and growth. In 859, Fatima al-Fihriyya founded the Qarawwiyyin mosque in Fez, Morocco. The Al-Qarawiyin Library, associated with Al-Qarawiyin University's teaching of Islamic studies, languages, and sciences, is the oldest in the world, housing Islam's most valuable manuscripts.

Through the mosque, Arabic numbers became known and used in Europe.

Over the next several centuries, however, prevailing social customs influenced re-interpretations of the Qur'an, effectively shutting women out of many aspects of society and Islam. Muslim women would not begin to regain their status until the twentieth century, when increased literacy rates, the inclusion of girls in education, expansion of job opportunities for women, and increasingly common conversions to Islam in the West led many Muslim women to seek an equal voice in the interpretation of their faith.

Throughout the twentieth century, women applied their beliefs to the world around them. Noor Inayat Khan was the female wireless operator sent from Britain to Nazi-occupied France in WWII. Though Khan staunchly believed in the values of religious tolerance and non-violence, she was motivated by her staunch opposition to fascism and dictatorial rule to become Britain's first Muslim war heroine. Khan posthumously won several decorations, including the George Cross, the highest civilian decoration in the U.K., and a French Croix de Guerre.

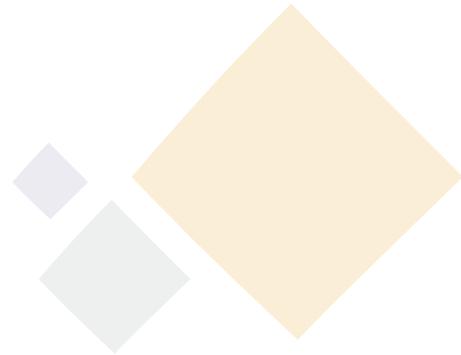
Several groups in Indonesia were founded to encourage women's participation in Qur'anic studies, many of which later became educational institutions. These schools have produced master reciters of the Qur'an, including Hajjah Maria 'Ulfah, the first woman to win the International Competition in Qur'anic Recitation in 1980, as well as academics and activists with expertise in Islamic studies and Islamic law and interpretation. Many women also applied their Qur'anic teachings to advocate for women's human rights.

In Saudi Arabia, women serve as female representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs, representing mothers in hearings and court cases related to children in order to advise male judges. Saudi women

have also successfully expanded the grounds on which they may file for divorce as well as their rights during the divorce process. As a result of their assertion of the Qur'anic value of preservation of human life and child welfare and safety, mothers have successfully challenged fathers' rights to custody in cases in which the father has a history of domestic violence or unsafe lifestyle choices that could potentially endanger the child or the child's development.

Today, the Muslim World League advocates Muslim women's equal participation in society and the affairs of their faith. As it is with all vulnerable groups, the Muslim World League is committed to ensuring that women are protected and guaranteed equal wages

and opportunities. All of society suffers when women are marginalized, their contributions are devalued or they are denied full participation in religious, academic, political or social life.



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A Muslim woman draws in her journal.



**... Be you, male or female, you are equal to one another.” (Qu’ran 3:195)**

There is no doctrine of gender disparity in Islam. Although faith and culture are deeply intertwined in many traditions, and particularly in Islam, secular laws in Islamic countries that restrict the rights of women stem from culture, not scripture. Gender equality in Islam is expressed clearly in the Qu’ranic text and the words of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who emphasized the importance of gender equality and specifically commanded the faithful to treat women with dignity and respect.

Muslim women, according to many freedoms outlined in Islam, are allowed to feel empowered, independent and valued. Women and men enjoy equally the freedom to obtain an education and pursue a career, which inherently gives women the opportunity to have financial freedom and independence. Islam grants women the right to accept or reject marriage proposals and to seek divorce if they are dissatisfied with their marriages.

Women in most Islamic countries and organizations are active participants in political and social life and are encouraged to express their opinions freely and offer solutions. Any form of emotional, physical or psychological abuse is prohibited in Islam, whether it be toward a man or a woman.

Yet Islam also highlights the significance of women’s security and the responsibility of men to ensure that women feel protected and safe. Islam offers women dignity and security with the aim of allowing many women to feel empowered and exercise their God-given rights.

**“Observe your duty to Allah in respect to the women and treat them well.”  
– Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)**



# IBN SINA: LINKING THE ISLAMIC AND WESTERN MINDS

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League



A portrait of Ibn Sina, also known as Avicenna.

Much is made of the difference between the Islamic and Christian worlds, between east and west, between the Middle East and Europe. Yet ultimately, we hold many similar values, an appreciation for science, a belief in tolerance and opposition to extremism. As we reflect on how much we have in common across religions, societies, and countries, it's important to look back on our common heritage

and how different cultures have influenced each other throughout the ages.

European and Islamic thought have interconnected and merged for thousands of years. The great works of the ancient Greek thinkers were valued in the Middle East, surviving there while they were lost to Europe after the fall of Rome. These writings had a significant impact on Islamic thought and in turn the thinkers of the Islamic world would come to influence in European thought as well.

No one has exemplified this cultural diffusion more than Ibn Sina, one of the most significant thinkers of the Islamic Golden Age. A student of the ancient Greco-Roman philosophers he would go on to become a major influence on European philosophical and medical thought for centuries, and was known in the west as Avicenna.

Born in the year 980 outside of Bukhara, the capital of the Persian Samanid Empire, Ibn Sina was a gifted child. He memorized the entire Qu'ran by age 10 and then studied Islamic jurisprudence and Indian arithmetic, which he learned from a local Indian greengrocer, Mahmoud Massahi. Still a child and hardly content with his learnings so far, Ibn Sina delved into the study of classical philosophers, including Euclid, Ptolemy, Aristotle and Porphyry. He became engrossed by *Metaphysics*, one of Aristotle's principal works, but struggled to understand the concepts involved. It is said he read the work

forty times, to the point he could remember much of it, and yet the meaning of Aristotle's words were still a mystery to him. Such was his frustration he would sometimes leave his books, perform ablutions and then go to mosque, praying until he could find clarity in his studies.

Eventually he came across the work of renowned philosopher Al-Farabi, who wrote a commentary on Metaphysics. Thanks to the work of Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina was finally enlightened to the meaning of Aristotle's work, and he gave thanks to God for his discovery.

At age sixteen Ibn Sina turned his focus to medicine. He was not solely focused on theory and took time to attend this sick. He considered medicine to be an "easy" discipline. When the Sultan of Bukhara fell ill and none of the court physicians could heal him, Ibn Sina was called to his aid and managed to assure the Sultan of his mysterious illness. In thanks the Sultan gave him full access to the royal library. At age eighteen Ibn Sina became a fully qualified physician. His writing career began at age 21, and he would go on to write over 400 works across a range of fields including medicine, mathematics, astronomy, metaphysics, and even music. Some 240 of these works survive to this day.

His treatises Logic and Metaphysics were heavily influenced by classical thought, endorsing the law of non-contradiction proposed by Aristotle and utilizing concepts from the Platonic and Stoic doctrines. His theology carried a devotion to Allah as Creator and a celestial hierarchy, allowing his philosophy to be easily imported into medieval European thought. Both of these treatises would be extensively reprinted in Europe, with Metaphysics still being printed in Venice over 500 years after his death.

Ibn Sina's work on medicine was equally significant. Islamic medicine had long been dominated by the Greco-Roman traditions of Galen and Hippocrates. He sought to fit these traditions into Aristotle's natural philosophy.

Modern evidence-based medicine is derived from his influence on medical practice. He introduced the concept of finding a consistently effective remedy based directly upon experience, which encouraged testing and confirmation of cures when the cause of an illness is known. This rational approach to medical science was revolutionary in the Islamic world and continues to influence medicine today.

His work The Canon of Medicine was an authoritative



work on contemporary Islamic medical knowledge and built upon the earlier traditions of classical Europe, China, India, and the Middle East. European medical scholars would continue to use the text almost two hundred years after Ibn Sina's death, and it would continue to see use for medical education throughout Europe until well into the 18th century. For his contributions Ibn Sina is known as the father of modern medicine.

Today we live in an increasingly interconnected

world. It is often easy to suppose that the different societies and cultures around the world were isolated and disconnected from each other until modern times. The life and legacy of Ibn Sina show that different civilizations have been influencing each other for far longer than we might suppose. An Islamic scholar dedicated to the study of the great thinkers of ancient Europe, who would go on to become an influence on Europe long after his death, Ibn Sina serves as a testament to the importance of sharing ideas and values across cultures.



Though one of the best known, Ibn Rushd was not the only influential Muslim thinker and philosopher of the Middle Ages. Many other scholars had a great influence on the world of science and philosophy, including the Persian scholar Ibn-Sina (ca. 970–1037) and the Arabian Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, who preceded Ibn-Sina by about a century.

Al-Farabi spent most of his life in Baghdad with Christian scholars. In Islamic philosophical tradition he is known as "the second teacher", following Aristotle, "the first teacher". Despite being greatly influenced by Aristotelian logic, he also included other elements and Neoplatonic thought in his work.

Not only is he credited with preserving original Greek texts in the Middle Ages through his commentaries, he also influenced many other prominent philosophers who followed him, including Ibn-Sina (known in the West also as Avicenna) and Maimonides. Furthermore, he was very interested in music and wrote books on music therapy and the philosophical principles of music.

Ibn-Rushd, who was also known in the West as Averroes, was just as heavily influenced as Ibn-Sina by classical Greek thought. He also wrote extensive commentaries that were inspired by Aristotle and other Greek philosophers. This led to him being often

referred to as "The Commentator". Ibn-Rushd was an especially strong proponent of Aristotle's philosophy, and his commentaries helped reawaken interest in Aristotle and other Greek thinkers. Ibn-Rushd strongly opposed the Neoplatonist tendencies of Al-Farabi and defended the pursuit of philosophy against the critics of his time who believed that philosophy was not permitted in Islam.

The 13th-century Christian school of philosophy known as Averroism was derived from his work.



A statue of Ibn Rushd, also known as Averroes, stands by the ancient city walls in Cordoba, Andalusia, Southern Spain.



# MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS IN THE BALKANS: A BROKEN HERITAGE

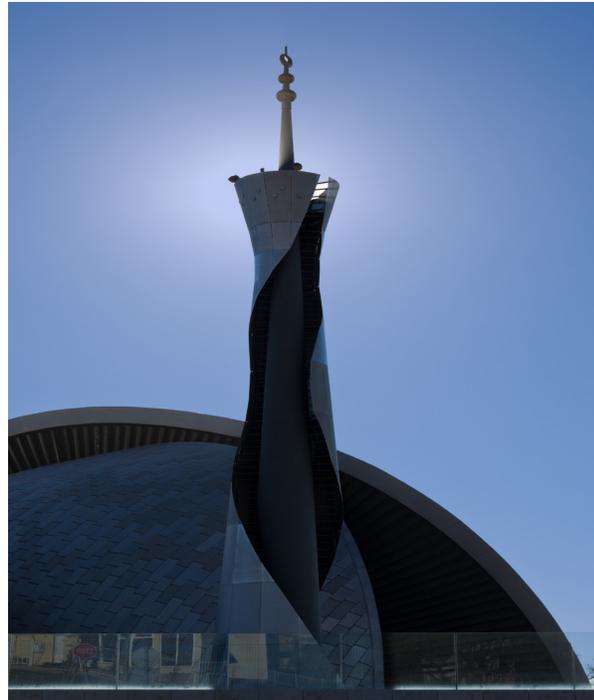
Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League |

Ethnic and religious tensions in Yugoslavia had been held in check for many years under a delicate system of power sharing and autonomy by the government of President Josip Broz Tito. The Yugoslav republics enjoyed certain autonomy, and care was taken to ensure that no one republic gained political power at the expense of the others.

Ethnic and nationalistic ambitions arose again during and after the dissolution of the Yugoslav Republic as attempts were made to unite Serbs and Croats and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo sought greater autonomy from Serbia. These were long-held ambitions to create a Greater Serbia, Greater Croatia and Greater Albania. Bosnia-Herzegovina was the most diverse republic—about 50% Muslim, 30% Orthodox Serbs and 20% Catholic Croats.

Feeding these tensions was an ideology, mostly among Serbs but also with adherents among Croats, that held that Slavs were Christian by nature and that any conversion from Christianity would be a betrayal of the Slavic race. Termed Christoslavism by historian Michael Sells, it views Slavic Muslims not as ethnic kin, but as Turks by virtue of their conversion to Islam. This philosophy helped fuel a concerted effort to eradicate or drive out Bosnian Muslims. Communities that had long lived in harmony as Serb and Croat militias attacked Bosnian communities and people turned against their Muslim neighbors.

Ethnic Slavic Muslims in the Western Balkans follow Hanafi, a subcategory of Sunni Islam, and are among the most liberal and secularized Muslims in the world.



The Rijeka Mosque was designed by the prominent Croatian sculptor Dušan Džamonja.

Muslims arrived in the countries of the former Yugoslavia with the Ottoman invasions of southeastern Europe that began in the fourteenth century. At its high-water mark, the Ottoman Empire extended to the gates of Vienna, where its attempt to conquer the city was turned back in 1623.

The Ottoman armies were followed by Muslim settlers and Sufi missionaries, who brought with them a tolerant form of Islam. Conversions to Islam were generally voluntary and lasted into the nineteenth century in some places. The number of conversions was higher in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania owing



The Zagreb Mosque is also home to one of Croatia's two Islamic Centers.

to the weak identification of the people with the Christian churches and the friction between the orthodox and Roman branches of Catholicism.

### **Expansion of Islam into Southeast Europe**

Conversion to Islam also had its advantages: Christian boys were forcibly conscripted for special military and governmental service, and Muslims were exempted from the head tax and given special opportunities to own land and hold positions in government and the military. With neither orthodox or Roman Catholicism well established in Bosnia and Albania and the Sufi missionaries offering a tolerant form of religion, converts easily found a home in an Ottoman system based broadly on a common religion.

### **History and Main Developments**

From the fourteenth century to the early twentieth century, the Ottoman Balkan cities of Edirne, Sarajevo, and Salonika were rich cosmopolitan centers of trade and learning that contributed significantly to the empire and boasted impressive structures of Islamic style and construction. As the Ottoman Empire declined and began to lose territory to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the position of Muslim communi-

ties gradually declined as well. As new nation states grew at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, Muslims endured forced migrations, expulsions and even massacres, because the new states identified themselves as ethnically based and Christian. In that context, many Balkan Muslims were seen not as part of the new state but as allied with the Ottomans, who had been increasingly ineffective and oppressive in the last century of their rule. Thousands of Muslims were forced to flee to Turkey.

This would continue throughout the twentieth century with Balkan Muslims from Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Bulgaria emigrating to the more welcoming environment of Muslim Turkey. Muslims from the western Balkan lands of Albania and Bosnia were exceptions, and most stayed in the Balkans throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Most Bosnian Muslims, who were Slavs, continued as landowners and free peasants under Austria-Hungary's rule, and remained later as part of Yugoslavia. Albanian Muslims made up 70 percent of the new independent state of Albania and were heavily involved in the Albanian nationalist movement. There were also smaller communities of Slavic Muslims, Albanian Muslims, and Roma Muslims who stayed where they were and thus became minorities in different Balkan lands.

Before World War II, Bosnian Muslims were considered a religious community, but the post-war secularization of Yugoslavia under Communist Party rule and the growing importance of the different “nationalities” that comprised Yugoslavia meant that they would inevitably be considered an ethnic group under the label “Muslim” which became official in 1968. “Muslim” came to have both ethnic and religious meaning in Yugoslavia, and eventually the term “Bosniak” came into being during the wars of the 1990s to distinguish Bosnian Muslims from the Bosnian nationality.

## Cultural Achievements

Muslims created outstanding literature and some remarkable and characteristic architecture in the Balkans, including the older sections of cities with their bazaars, mosques, fountains, hamams (baths), türbes (mausolea), madrasas (schools) and old Ottoman homes. One of the masterpieces of Ottoman architecture is the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne, in Balkan Turkey (1575). Bosnia boasts the Ferhat Pasha Mosque of Banja Luka (1579), the Aladza Mosque in Foca (1550) and the Gazi Husrevbegova Mosque of Sarajevo (1530).

Serbian and Croatian nationalists sought to erase the Islamic heritage of these regions of the Balkans in the fighting between 1992 and 1995. As a result, the mosques of Banja Luka and Foca and other Islamic sites in Bosnia were destroyed, and the Gazi Husrevbegova Mosque in Sarajevo suffered severe damage. The famous bridge at Mostar, and the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo, where important historical documents of the Ottoman period were housed, were both deliberately targeted and destroyed. The war in Kosovo (1999) led to the destruction of many Islamic monuments and documents there as well. Belgrade was once home to many mosques, most of which were destroyed in the late nineteenth century.

Islamic populations exist in smaller or larger numbers throughout the Balkans and into Romania and Hungary. Ironically, the attempt by Serbian and Croatian nationalists to eradicate Muslims and all traces of their history and culture has led to a reinvigoration of

Islamic practices. But the long tradition of tolerance and mutual respect for which Sarajevo had become famous has been broken.



The Bajrakli Mosque in Belgrade, Serbia was built around 1575.  
Source: BelaSova

The Emperor's Mosque in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina the first mosque to be built (1457) after the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia.



# THE ISLAMIC CITY: AN EXPRESSION OF MUSLIM COMMUNITY

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League

## Islam as an Urban Religion

The traditional Western-Christian city featured a market square dominated by a striking cathedral, with the commercial life of the city extending from that center. Not so the Islamic city. The renowned French scholar of Arabic dialects William Marçais argued that Islam is essentially an urban religion despite its history of being “carried by nomads.” He noted that the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) was an urbanite “suspicious of nomads” and that the leadership of the early Islamic proselytizers consisted of members of “the urban bourgeoisie.” Furthermore, the requirement that the Friday communal prayer be solemnized at a congregational mosque made city living necessary for the full Muslim life. He quotes the historian Ernst Renan saying: “The mosque, like the synagogue and the church, is a thing essentially urban (citadine). Islam is a religion of cities.”

New cities were usually founded by new powers and dynasties in the expanding Islamic world, thus underscoring the comprehensive role of the faith in individual life. We speak of Islamic civilization because Islam is not merely a “set of beliefs and laws” but also provides a mean of organizing a functioning society. It requires not just believers but people who are active and engaged in civic life. City life was never viewed as a potential “corruption” to the purity of the faith, but as the environment in which Islam’s central mission was to flourish. North African Muslim cities are different from Gulf cities, which are in turn different from cosmopolitan centers like Cairo or Damascus, which are different from Hindu-Muslim hybrid cities in India. But there are key elements that must be present in each case, no matter local idiosyncrasies.

The typical Islamic cities always tended to lack what today we would consider municipal organization, substituting instead ethnically-specialized quarters, each presided over by its own sheikh with certain guild-like organizations helping to keep social organization together. The cities were generally laid out haphazardly and asymmetrically with paths intended to subdivide space into relatively permanent quarters. Medieval European towns were also organized without right angles and through streets, but with different physical patterns and, of course, a somewhat different social organization. Certainly, one of the great charms of Islamic cities today is how diverse they are: Cairo is an aesthetic world away from sleek, smart-city Abu Dhabi; multicultural Aleppo before its destruction and Damascus are not multicultural Istanbul; Samarkand and Tunis are both Islamic, but hardly blood relatives.

Still, the Islamic city has three essential components: a congregational Friday mosque, a nearby market or chief bazaar, and a *jami-souk* or mosque-market complex that must include a public bath or *hammam*—this being of significance to prepare believers for the Friday prayer.



The Kaaba, Makkah, during the Hajj.

## The Modern City

And what of modern Islamic cities? The “smart” cities of Dubai, Abu Dhabi; those planned for the ‘Vision 2030’ of Saudi Arabia? These cities have risen along the lines of a classic “city-state” model, bringing to mind the power centers of ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy—or contemporary Hong Kong and Singapore—as urban centers—small in size yet of great cultural influence and commercial wealth. Joel Kotkin, R.C. Hobbs Professor of Urban Studies at Chapman University in California and author of *The Human City*,

wrote in Forbes 2010, “The Persian (or, as some like to call it, Arabian) Gulf constitutes the other hot bed for 21st Century city-states. Over the past decade, a string of once obscure cities from Dubai and Abu Dhabi to Qatar and Bahrain have risen to positions of global significance.” Qatar, a tiny emirate with roughly 1.7 million people, will host the 2022 World Cup; Abu Dhabi, a desert metropolis of some 2 million people, has undergone the largest cultural development project on the planet; Saudi Arabia will expand the smart-city concept to its Red Sea tourism development.



## Jean Nouvel and Richard Serra: West Meets East in Modern Islamic Architecture

### Western Builders Adopt the Modern Islamic Aesthetic

The modern Muslim architectural aesthetic has been expressed elegantly by a French architect, Jean Nouvel, and an American sculptor, Richard Serra. In 1981, Nouvel’s firm, Architecture- Studio, won the design competition for l’Institut du Monde Arabe (Arab World Institute) building in Paris, whose construction was completed in 1987 and brought the Beaux-Arts trained architect international acclaim as well as the Aga Khan Prize for architecture. (The Aga Khan Award for Architecture was established in 1977 to identify and reward architectural concepts “that successfully address the needs and aspirations of Muslim societies.”)

Richard Serra, the San Francisco-born artist known for his immense steel sculptures, sought to portray the significance of the number 7 in Islam through his work at the plaza in Doha harbor in Qatar. Commissioned by the Qatar Museums Authority and titled simply “7”, the 80-foot high sculpture is composed March 2014, Serra unveiled East-West/West-East, “a site-specific

sculpture located at a remote desert location” stretching more than a half-mile through Qatar’s Brouq nature reserve.



The Arab World Institute in Paris France was designed by Jean Nouvel, winner of the Aga Khan prize for Architecture.

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