

# ISLAMIC RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

JULY 17-18, 2013  
NEW YORK, NY

HOSTED BY



**IDVAAC**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Institute on Domestic Violence In  
The African American Community



SPONSORED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

## ***As Salaamu ‘Alaykum (May the Peace of God be upon you).***

***The Muslim community is facing a number of challenges both from outside and inside.***

One of the challenges that it faces internally is the fair treatment of women and addressing Domestic Violence (DV). In the Prophet Muhammad's (Peace and Blessings Upon Him, PBUH) farewell khutba (sermon) shortly before his death; the Prophet stated that one of the things that he feared for his community was the fair treatment of women. (Farewell Khutba, Makka)

Gender Inequality has plagued the Muslim community as well as all other communities. There has been an inadequate response to this issue within the Muslim community because on some levels 1) Muslims were in denial of the frequency of incidents of DV, 2) Misinterpretation of the sacred texts that defines the way Muslims should conduct themselves and apply principles of equality to all human beings, 3) Men, without input from women, made non-inclusive decisions without obtaining a consensus of opinion from the community. In a recent online survey 40% of Muslims reported some form of DV by a spouse, and 53% reported experiencing some form of violence from a family member; more definitive studies will need to be conducted. In fact, a verse was considered mistranslated that gave men the right to beat their wives, if the husband was displeased with her. This kind of misinformation

needs to be cleared up.

Many Muslims were reluctant to receive education from non-Muslim who were unfamiliar with various aspects of the faith. Today we salute The Institute of Domestic Violence in the African American Community for recognizing our issues and lending material support to a discussion of how we can come together in the African and African American Muslim community and provide an educative religiously healthy response to the issue of DV. This is a Dawah (invitation) to the right way of dealing with DV with the Qur'an and Sunnah as our guide. Any and all success is attributable to God and any and all mistakes belong to us. We pray this is the first of a series to address Domestic Violence in The African American and African Communities.

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This publication was supported from grant #90EV0412 from the Administration for Children and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The contents are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

# Islamic leaders tackle domestic violence

Several leaders and activists from the Islamic community participated in an invitation-only roundtable discussion July 17-18 to address a critical issue impacting many faith communities around the world – domestic violence.

Convened by the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC), the session was designed to develop ways to effectively lower the rate of intimate partner violence and gender abuse in Islamic and other faith-based communities.

Dr. Oliver J. Williams, co-executive director of IDVAAC, told conferees that the roundtable was convened to understand what Islam has to say about relationships and the use of violence toward women. “Our intent is to understand Islamic responses to addressing domestic abuse and to consider how Islamic leaders can implement more effectively responses that reduce incidents of domestic violence in Islamic culture and religion,” Williams said.

“Christians, Muslims and others in the faith-based community are looking for leadership to help deal with the challenge of domestic violence from a spiritual, philosophical and functional perspective,” Williams said. “In our community, Islam is something to be respected and revered, so what we want to do is to begin to have some conversation and develop a stronger relationship between African Americans and Africans and our Muslim brothers and sisters can be more responsive to domestic violence when it occurs.

“We know there are effective initiatives out there that address the issue of domestic violence in the Islamic community and we want to honor and give them praise for the work that they’re doing,” he said. “The purpose of our forum here is to begin to identify specific steps, even baby steps, around the issue of how Imams can be responsive to and supportive of women who might be victims of domestic violence and how they might confront men who batter – whether it’s in the Islamic community or elsewhere within the African diaspora.”

“Ultimately, we hope to become the grain of sand that starts the flow.”

Williams identified specific discussion points for the roundtable dialogue:

- ▶ What does the Qur’an say about violence and abuse toward women and/or discipline and control of women and what passages from the Qur’an can be misinterpreted around this issue?
- ▶ What can Imams do in the mosque to address domestic violence among abusers and victims?
- ▶ What can Imams do to listen, accurately understand and refer victims to battered women programs or men to batterer programs?
- ▶ What would a good collaboration look like among Imams, mosque leadership and domestic violence programs?

During an introductory session on July 17, activists were unabashed about delving into the sensitive subject.

Several roundtable participants acknowledged that domestic violence and suppression and abuse of women are rampant throughout much of the Islamic community and that many Imams and other Islamic leaders are ignorant on the issue, woefully indifferent or generally insensitive to issues facing women and children.

Other participants went as far as to say that many Islamic men and leaders manipulate or recklessly interpret the word of the Qur'an to control and abuse women.

"Unfortunately, many of our brothers have a skewed view of women's issues and a skewed interpretation of certain ayats (verses) in the Qur'an," said Abdus-Salaam Musa, president of the American Islamic Indigenous Clinical Pastoral Education organization. "They feel that it's justified to beat her if she disrespects him, either publicly or privately. This is not Islam."

Dr. Sunni Rumsey Amatullah, a consultant and longtime gender rights advocate, put it even more bluntly:

"We have to differentiate between what is Islam versus what is Hislam," Amatullah said, coining a phrase that refers to a reckless, male-centric interpretation of the Qur'an and Islamic dictates.

At the end of the day, men and Islamic leaders must understand that power is something to be shared and not something to be used to abuse and control women, participants agreed.

"The most powerful man is the man who opens his heart and exhibits compassion," said Dr. Khadijah Matin, a longtime servant in the areas of history, health and faith-based education.

During sessions on July 18, activists were eager to tackle the subject.

## QUESTION 1

***What does the Qur'an say about violence and abuse toward women and/or discipline and control of women?***

***What passages from the Qur'an can be misinterpreted in this regard?***

Participants agreed that the Qur'an is clear in word that men and women are to be treated equally, and that abuse of women is a clear violation of Islamic law. They agreed that the Qur'an is clear that women have an exalted and revered place in Islamic society and that anything other than that violates Islamic law.

"The scripture talks about the high place women have in the Islamic world but it is not being practiced in the way it could and should be practiced," said Imam Luqman Abdush-Shahid, founder of the American Islamic Indigenous Clinical Pastoral Education organization.





Dr. Shaykh Al Hajj T.A. Bashir, president and CEO of the House of Peace in White Plains, N.Y., added that many of the early translators of the Qur'an from Arabic to English were misogynistic, ultimately breeding a historic culture and tradition of oppression and abuse of women.

"So today, many men now justify power and control over women because they believe God said so," he said.

Dr. Ibrahim Abdul-Malik, a professor at North Hudson Islamic Educational Center in New Jersey, said the Qur'an is clear that violence and abuse are not to be tolerated. In fact, he said, Islam is all about peace. He offered several samples from the Qur'an that support the group's contention that women are to be revered and exalted, not abused:

- ▶ "O My servants, I have forbidden oppression for Myself and have made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another." [Hadith Qudsi #17]
- ▶ "... Do not forget to show kindness to each other." (Al-Baqara, 2:237)

- ▶ Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him) said: "Be on your guard against committing oppression, for oppression is a darkness on the Day of Resurrection." [Muslim, 1178]
- ▶ "It is He Who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in love)." (Al-Araf, 7:189)
- ▶ "... and He has put love and mercy between your hearts..." (Y. Ali, 30:21) (He ordained love and kindness between you. – Haleem)
- ▶ "Your wives are as a tilth unto you; so approach your tilth when or how ye will." (Y. Ali, 2:223) (Your wives are your fields, so go into your fields whichever way you like – Haleem)

Abdul-Malik asked whether certain Islamic ayats authorizing men to lead suggest that wives have no power in relationships with their husbands. He offered these responses from the Qur'an:

- ▶ “The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another...” (Y. Ali, 9:71) (The believers, both men and women, support each other – Haleem)
- ▶ “...They are your garments, and ye are their garments.” (Y. Ali, 2:187) (They are [close] as garments to you, as you are to them. – Haleem)
- ▶ “...Nor should you treat them with harshness... on the contrary, live with them on a footing of kindness and equity.” (Y. Ali, 4:19)
- ▶ “To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn” (Y. Ali, 4:32) (“Men have the portion they have earned; and women the portion they have earned. – Haleem)

Shaykh Bashir also quoted from several passages of the Qur’an, including from Al-Nisa and Al-Maidah, suggesting that these passages also confirm that women are to be honored, not abused. Abdul-Malik and others said these ayats in the Qur’an – and scores of others – are unequivocal: Abuse of women is a violation of Islamic law.

“It’s clear from these passages that Qur’an is saying very differently from what many Muslim men believe is their right to beat up on their women and abuse women,” Abdul-Malik said.

“This is about Muslims being kind to people in general and offering no harshness towards women or any other people that Allah has created,” added Abdus-Salaam Musa. “Many of us have gotten it so twisted, are not following the dictate of the word, and are following culture and tradition rather than what dictate says.”

One passage in the Qur’an that many men

***“We have to understand that the Qur’an was written or translated by men.”***

misinterpret is chapter 4, verse 34, Matin said, which reads, in part: “If you fear high-handedness from your wives, remind them of the teachings of God and ignore them when you go to bed, then hit them.”

Matin said, however, that this passage should not be taken literally.

“Every time I read that (passage), from what I understand of the Qur’an, I know it’s not congruent with the theme,” she said, referring to the passage which seems to suggest that men can hit, beat or abuse women. “I’ve never accepted that interpretation.”

Shaykh Bashir said understanding language and context is critical when interpreting Arabic, because Arabic is not as extensive a language as English. He said certain words are given definition and meaning solely by words that precede them. So, a literal interpretation of a specific word in the Arabic Qur’an could be completely inaccurate if its context in the passage is not considered, he said.

Abdus-Salaam Musa agreed, adding that a liberal or male-oriented translation of the Qur’an from Arabic to English has contributed to an inherent conflict between Islamic word and deed.

“By us not being Arabic speaking people, we did not understand that this word did not mean ‘beat,’ in this context, even though the word can mean beat. So what was the context?” he said. “We have to understand that the Qur’an was written or translated by men. Us (men) being who we are, we have a tendency to lean towards us being in power



Fatima Porgo, executive director of an anti-violence nonprofit agency called Nerlow Afriki, said loose and male-dominated translations of the Qur'an – aggravated by historic politics of power and socio-economic realities throughout the African diaspora globally – have spawned a longtime tradition of abuse, control and suppression of women.

Dr. Sidow Abdi-Shariff Mohammed, professor of Arabic language and Middle East and North African culture at the Abubakar As-Saddique Islamic Center in Minneapolis, MN, said a history of colonialism in Africa and complex differences in culture, history and tradition between Africans and African Americans also contribute to a misunderstanding of how women should be treated in Islamic culture.

Imam Charles Aziz Bilal, founder of Masjid Al Hamdu Lillah in Jamaica, NY, agreed, saying that said cultural differences between Imams in West Africa and the United States also contribute to how women are treated in the Masjid (mosque).

“Some Imams from West Africa, their attitude towards women is not too healthy. Imams from America generally are very different,” he said. “Women have a voice in our community. We are much more flexible. If a sister comes to the Masjid, she can speak to the brothers, respectfully, as opposed to not having a voice and being rejected.”

When assessing the translation of the Qur'an from Arabic to English, therefore, devout students must study the translator, participants agreed.

“We have to study where the translator is coming from, the culture that they're coming from and the era and time that they're doing the translation,” Abdush-Shahid said. “What were the issues? How were women being treated?”

Participants also agreed that translators typically are not religious people; they're good at language. As a result, there are hundreds of translations of the Qur'an that exist, some of which are more accurate and precise than others.

“Arabic is so rich, it is the tongue of the angels. We’re trying to translate something that was written in Arabic and adapt it to our culture,” Abdush-Shahid said. “We need more people of our culture to translate the Qur’an and look at it within the text of our culture” if we are to get a truer, more enlightened understanding of the Qur’an.

Amira Ahmed, founder of Midwest Community Development in St. Paul, MN, said the larger issue in interpreting the Qur’an is not simply the abuse of women, but what the role of women should be in Islamic life, culture and religious institutions.

“We all know what our God told us to do. The question is not the religion, we are all clear on that,” she said. “The issue is, ‘Where is our voice as Muslim women?’ ”

Women in some African cultures are not allowed to go to school beyond a certain grade level because men believe if women are too educated, they will resist efforts to control them, Ahmed said. It is this suppressive and superior attitude about the role of women that are gateways to issues of control, discipline, violence and abuse, she said.

“That’s what our Imams need to address,” Ahmed said. “They need to address the cultural, historical and religious aspects of the role of women in Islamic society.”

Participants agreed that when dissecting the role of women in Islamic society, analysts must differentiate between religious, cultural and historical practices and develop specific, individual strategies for addressing each. Until these critical issues are resolved, many said, the Islamic family and the culture will never fully flourish.

## QUESTION 2

### ***What can Imams do in the mosque to address domestic violence among abusers and victims?***

As the spiritual leaders, Imams are duty-bound to address accusations of domestic abuse among members of the Masjid – either directly or indirectly, participants agreed. However, Imams must first develop a clear definition of abuse, taking into account the historical and cultural context of how men and women interact. The Imam then must acknowledge that domestic violence is taking place and take assertive and proactive steps to end it, they said.

While Imams are the leaders of their particular Masjids, however, they may not have the capacity, experience or the commitment to gender equity to fairly mediate conflict between Muslim men and women, participants said.

“Many Imams may have the spiritual knowledge, but they don’t have the skillset to deal with these types of issues,” said Abdus-Salaam Musa. “And unfortunately, for many of them, their egos will not allow them to say, ‘I don’t have the experience in this matter, so let me refer this issue to someone in the Masjid who is qualified to address these issues.’ ”

Participants agreed that most Imams should appoint or identify someone in the mosque who is qualified to adjudicate issues of conflict and/or accusations of domestic abuse. Other participants said pro-women advocates should address their concerns to the board of directors at the Masjid,



many of which have more influence and control than the Imam himself.

When Imams are confronted with accusations of domestic violence, however, they should address those allegations directly and without gender bias (to the best of their ability), some participants said.

Abdul-Malik offered this roadmap:

**I. When responding directly to the accusations or incidents of domestic violence:**

- a) Listen carefully and without condemnation.
- b) Help the victim find immediate relief (refer to outside agencies or professionals if the situation is beyond his skill level).
- c) Maintain confidentiality
- d) Seek domestic violence training to enhance his counseling knowledge and skills

**II. Proactive strategies to reduce/prevent domestic violence:**

- a) Create programs that promote gender equality
- b) Educate about the misogynist behaviors of many Muslim men, and expose the hypocrisy by comparing the word of the Qur'an to their actions.
- c) Stop giving mere lip service to the Qur'anic concept of equality of men and women and replace the words with actions.
- d) Stop hiding behind the fact that Prophet Muhammad brought emancipation to women in the 7th century. The position of women in early Islam cannot justify their deteriorated status in our time.
- e) Examine his own attitudes about, and behaviors toward women, to make sure that he is not harboring vestiges of male superiority.

**III. Cultivate an environment of safety, equality and understanding**

- a) Provide forums in which young people (and adults) feel free and safe to ask their questions, express their concerns and find/confirm their dignity.
- b) Be as attentive to the needs of the girls and young women as you are to the needs of the boys and young men.
- c) Organize classes (for the young people and adults) that directly address the issues of relationships between girls and boys and between women and men. And in those classes, arrange seating such that girls are not automatically behind the boys.
- d) Deliver khutbas (sermons) on the issue of gender equality and the exalted role of women in Islamic life referred to in the Qur'an.

Several participants said because Imams come from various cultural and geographical backgrounds – with varied understandings about the role of men and women in society – pro-women advocates should approach Imams in love and with caution so Imams will not resist efforts to address domestic violence. Approaching the issue as a way to strengthen the family and the community and provide a healthier environment for children will be more effective than challenging or confronting Islamic leadership on the issue of domestic violence, many participants said.

Porgho said approaching Imams diplomatically – and somewhat strategically – might produce better results when seeking to reduce domestic violence. For example, rather than asking Imams to create programs to reduce domestic violence, activists might suggest that Imams create programs to help Muslim women become better wives. Explain that in order to become better wives, women should be treated well and respected as the Prophet stated, allowing them to be happier with

their husbands and more caring for their children – something that benefits the entire family, Porgho said. The program would make clear that a happy wife has more to offer her husband and her family than a stressed and miserable wife.

Imams are more likely to support such an initiative, Porgho said, and such a program could be used to export critical messages and/or advance a social cause. She also encouraged IDVAAC to reach out to African Imams to begin to cultivate understanding about domestic violence issues in their countries.

Other participants said Imams and Masjids should reach out to various cultural, civic, educational or youth-based organizations outside the Islamic community to help cultivate strategies for reducing domestic violence inside the Islamic community.

### QUESTION 3

***What can Imams do to listen, accurately understand and refer victims to battered women's programs or men to batterer programs?***

Dr. Ruqaiyah Nabe, an interfaith minister and independent practitioner in Fort Lee, NJ, reiterated that Imams will not be able to effectively respond to allegations of sexual assault or abuse until they first acknowledge that problem exists.

“If it’s not identified as a problem, then you’re not going to search for a solution,” she said. “They have to be approached in a non-threatening way, because the minute they feel they’re being threatened, they’ll shut down.”

Abdul-Malik said Imams may be the spiritual or theological leaders of the Masjid, but they don’t necessarily control the administration or operation of the Masjid.

“The more common model these days is a board that will direct the Imam as to what he must do,” he said. “It is the board that carries the big hammer. So, if we are hoping to introduce any kind of change or different way of thinking and we wish to succeed, it is incumbent on us to make sure that our model does not limit us only to communication with the Imam.”

Mohammad agreed, adding that education is the key element in preparing Imams to respond to issues of domestic violence, sexual assault and gender and cultural roles. “We need to educate our community and our Imam,” he said. “We need to get inside the Masjids and begin to educate.”

Abdush-Shahid agreed that education is a key weapon in the fight against domestic violence in Islamic culture. He said developing and distributing literature throughout the community could help educate people about the issue. He also said that urging writers in the community to write about the issue also could spark a movement toward change.

“This group here could get to our writers and begin to talk about some of the things that some of us are doing – and borrow from the identified Christian ideas too in churches that address domestic violence – and then saturate the community with literature, media, mini-conferences, etc.,” he said. “Therefore, we could



to give a face to this issue rather than ignoring it or doing nothing about it. It's just a tool."

Matin said activists also could take advantage of Muslim radio programs – such as New York's "Muslim State of Mind" – to help export the message of non-violence against women. She also said Imams might consider looking at successful programs that address domestic violence and see how those models could be replicated within the Islamic context.

"The human experience is pretty consistent. If something is already proven and working as a model, it may need to be tweaked a little bit here or there (or) it might be what you call or name things or protocol," but successful programs could be adapted and implemented in the Masjid, Matin said.

Abdul-Malik and other participants also said focusing on the youth – who represent the future and may not be as set in their ways – is an important long-term strategy toward changing Islamic culture as it relates to gender roles.

Shaykh Bashir said there must be a common-sense approach to educating some Imams and Islamic leaders about change because culture – not the literal word of the Qur'an – is their religion.

***"Some people are not going to deal with it (domestic violence) at all because their culture is the real religion for them."***

"Some people are not going to deal with it at all because their culture is the real religion for them," he said. "Their attitude is, 'My father did this with my mother, my grandfather did this with my grandmother, and you Americans are not going to change us.' "

Matin agreed, adding that, in some cases, Imams have to get past the denial about domestic violence.

“When you’re talking about the systemic evidence of domestic violence, it’s not just who is beating up on who,” she said, but it’s all the other social issues about discriminating against women and oppressive gender roles that feed into that. “At some point, the validity of the message has to be what carries it.”

Shaykh Bashir and other participants said Imams could reduce domestic violence in some cases simply by cultivating an environment of gender equality and intolerance for oppression of women. He quoted liberally from a booklet entitled *Women Friendly Mosques and Community Centers: Working Together to Reclaim Our Heritage* (produced by the Islamic Social Services Association and Women In Islam, Inc.) that addressed the treatment of women in the Masjid and Islamic community-based organizations and was intended to initiate dialogue, educate communities, and promote healing. (1) Its recommendations included:

## Access to Masjid Facilities

- ▶ If your Masjid already does not do so, make dignified accommodations for women to attend Friday services.
- ▶ Make available designated space for women in the main prayer hall.
- ▶ If resources permit, also provide a separate space for women who need or prefer greater privacy.
- ▶ Check that both separate and shared spaces allow people to hear speakers properly, such as by investing in and maintaining the sound and video systems.
- ▶ Provide a safe entrance for women.

- ▶ For women who may wish to leave after the compulsory prayer, give them enough time to exit first. This will also increase the community’s sensitivity to proper adab regarding sharing the Masjid space.
- ▶ Announcement boards and zakat (charity/alms) and donation boxes should be accessible to women. Many women are independently wealthy and able and willing to make their own contributions.
- ▶ If there are several rooms available in a Masjid, hold lectures outside the main prayer area as a way to promote participation. Throughout the world, the kursi, or scholar’s chair, for regular lectures is at the side of the Masjid, and the front is reserved for prayer, indicating that the adab for prayer is different than the adab for other educational sessions. If lectures are held in the musalla, or prayer area, the lecturer can stand or sit at the side of the musalla. Since the rules for standing behind men are specific to prayer, educational programs at the Masjid can seat women in rows parallel to men, with appropriate separation in between.
- ▶ Make sure that shared and separate spaces are clean, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing. Encourage men, women, and children to participate in the upkeep of spaces.

## Program Planning and Participation

- ▶ Offer regular education programs for women of all ages on all aspects of Islam.



- ▶ Design and offer such programs for female and male youth that are sensitive to their needs across age groups.
- ▶ Invite appropriate women scholars and community activists to give seminars at the Masjid.
- ▶ Invite women to organize community programs, introduce speakers, offer opening and closing dua or prayer during educational programs, moderate panels, and direct question and answer sessions.
- ▶ When the Masjid offers educational programs to the community, encourage everyone, including sisters, to ask questions.
- ▶ Where resources permit, offer play areas or child-care facilities so that women with children are not prevented from participation.

## Masjid Governance and Management

- ▶ Develop governance structures that allow women and youth to have an input in decision-making, such as through the use of suggestion boxes, bulletin boards, or meetings that allow them to provide feedback to Masjid leadership.
- ▶ Ensure that women are represented on governing boards. And if your Masjid is already doing so, collectively strive for greater equality and quality of representation.
- ▶ Advocate for and be a leader in implementing women's rights to vote in matters that affect the Masjid and the community as a whole. Stand up for and

implement women's rights to have official membership in the Masjid. Your active support and commitment to this issue will set an example for other leaders, and help others take up the cause.

### QUESTION 4

*What would a good collaboration look like among Imams, mosque leadership and domestic violence programs?*

Matin said before the Islamic and domestic violence communities can effectively collaborate, each must acknowledge and respect the cultural and historical differences between Muslims and Christians and/or between immigrant Africans and African Americans.

“There are some very real cultural differences that we cannot ignore, but if our intent is to create healing in our community, then we need to focus on intent,” she said. “What do we have in common? How can we begin to heal? That’s how we can build some of the bridges we need to build, and our intent will help us keep listening to each other.”

Matin also said that as Islamic leaders and domestic violence organizations look to collaborate, they should expand their focus beyond what is happening between one man and one woman and look at how sexual assault breeds conflict and violence into the culture – especially

among young people who perhaps are just starting to develop a sense of self, and an understanding of human and gender interaction.

“We need to begin to teach children about what are healthy relationships, what are healthy conversations, what are healthy ways to interact with one another,” she said. “So when we look at violence and abuse in our community, we need to focus on what will nurture us and what will sustain us for generations to come.”

Shaykh Bashir agreed, adding that collaborations should focus on educating youth about domestic violence, partly because they are still developing their identities and partly because they are the ones who can change the culture in the future.

***“We need to begin to teach children about what are healthy relationships, what are healthy conversations, what are healthy ways to interact with one another.”***

Participants said collaborations that focus on teaching children about more intelligent means of settling differences and resolving conflict ultimately will be most effective in creating a healthier culture in general.

Nabe said collaborations also will be more effective if Muslims, Christians, Africans and African-Americans study one another more carefully and come to realize that they have more things that unite them than divide them.

“We have to move beyond the misconceptions,”

***“Muslims of good faith must accept the mantel of healing the Islamic community throughout the world.”***

she said. “We need to realize that, despite our differences, we’re all in the same boat.”

Matin said domestic violence organizations could help develop a curriculum for Imams and other Islamic leaders to help export the message of how to develop healthy relationships between men and women. Domestic violence groups also could study the sermons of Imams and other Islamic leaders and retro-fit them to include the message of healthy relationships within the Islamic context, she said.

Amatullah said IDVAAC and the roundtable participants might form a task force that could seek funding to train peer educators to go into the Islamic community and – using the Qur’an as a guide – begin to educate people about domestic violence and its toxic impact on the community as a whole.

Porgho said roundtable participants should commit to forming the nucleus of such a task force that would grow as participants learn more about one another and as the momentum of the movement grows.

Amatullah agreed, adding that all Muslims of good faith must accept the mantel of healing the Islamic community throughout the world.

“This is the month of Ramadan and the angels are looking down on us and challenging us to step up to a higher level, rely on Allah and pray for guidance,” she said. “And pray that, insha Allah, we will be successful.”

# Addendum

**A**fter the roundtable discussion, conferees eagerly agreed to participate in an ad hoc task force to continue to dissect and provide solutions to the problem of domestic violence in Islamic society. Participants recommended that the task force be allowed to grow organically as needed to address the problem.

Conferees said the roundtable discussion convened by IDVAAC was a significant step in the right direction and that they looked forward to continuing to work toward building peaceful means of interaction between men and women in the Muslim community.

During a separate session, co-moderators Fatima Porgo and Shaykh Al Hajj T.A. Bashir offered specific steps for what Imams and mosques could do to protect and support victims of domestic violence AND educate men about how to be non-abusive and non-violent.

## Fatima Porgo

*What specific steps could Imams take to protect and support victims of domestic violence AND educate men about how to be non-abusive and non-violent?*

- 1) Be aware and informed about the consequences of domestic violence on families, women and children – both as Muslims and as American residents.
- 2) Acknowledge the issue in his mosque and begin to raise awareness and concerns about domestic violence during religious services.
- 3) Invite mosque members to a dialogue around the issue, beginning by engaging men and

women separately in order to get a fuller picture of the problem.

- 4) Educate members about how mothers, daughters and wives should be treated in Islamic society and – with the help of a trained professional – about how U.S. law treats abuse and physical conflict between men and women.
- 5) With the help of the mosque board, create an intervention structure and intervention process for addressing domestic violence.

*What specific steps could mosques take to protect and support victims of domestic violence AND educate men about how to be non-abusive and non-violent?*

- 1) Train mosque board members and leaders about trauma and domestic violence and be supportive of any domestic violence initiative raised by the Imam.
- 2) Include at least one woman on the board to help interpret critical issues from a woman's perspective.
- 3) Help the Imam identify families suffering from domestic violence and be accessible to victims when they want to discuss their abusive situation.
- 4) Sponsor counseling sessions for abusers, urging them to seek a better understanding about the impact of domestic and family violence.
- 5) Make domestic violence a community issue and encourage abusers to realize that their violent actions have consequences for the abused women, the family and the broader community.
- 6) Create a domestic violence referral system in order to promptly and adequately intervene and support victims.

## Shaykh Al Hajj T.A. Bashir

*What specific steps could Imams and/or mosques take to protect and support victims of domestic violence AND educate men about how to be non-abusive and non-violent?*

- 1) Be educated and oriented about domestic violence and its spinoff impact on the family and the community.
- 2) Stop treating domestic violence as a private, one-on-one issue between a man and a woman.
- 3) Distinguish between "couples' counseling" and "domestic violence counseling." Many Imams have received training in counseling but few have received counseling about domestic violence and its impact on victims, children and offenders.
- 4) Meet the people where they are. Stop relying on religious doctrine alone to try to understand and treat domestic violence. Such approaches could cause a guilt-and-shame response and prevent positive issues or solutions from emerging.
- 5) Use your authority to empower men and women with mutual respect for one another. Modify the "power differential" that exists in a racist and patriarchal society by holding men accountable for negative actions and behaviors and by empowering women to express their feelings without filtering. Men need to know that just because they are going to counseling does not mean automatic reconciliation. It's her decision and that needs to be spelled out in clear and specified terms. Head of the family does not mean "dictator-in-chief."
- 6) Interview children to see what the impact of violence has been to their psyches. Unless checked or explored, abusive behavior can be passed down from generation to generation.
- 7) Appoint women to mosque boards to share their ideas and experiences, reflect a broader perspective on critical issues facing the mosque and help bring issues to the surface before they fester.
- 8) Always focus on safety, accountability, education and parity.



Bottom left-Abdus Salaam Musa, Amira Ahmed, Fatima Porgo, Dr. Ruqaiyah Nabe, Dr. Khadijah Matin, Dr. Sunni Rumsey Amatullah-Top Left-Shaykh Al Hajj T.A. Bashir, Luqman Abdush-Shahid, Dr. Oliver J. Williams, Dr. Ibrahim Abdul-Malik, Imam Charles Aziz Bilal, and Imam Dr. Sidow Abdi-Shariff Mohammed.



# Resources



**interfaith partnership  
against domestic violence**

because no one should have to  
choose between faith and safety

**Helping Victims of Domestic Abuse: A Guide for Imams and Community Leaders** By Shahina Siddiqui, Tempe, AZ: ISSA (Islamic Social Services Association), 2005. Price: \$3.00

For purchasing please contact the publisher:  
ISSA, 1030 E. Baseline Road, Suite # 105 , PMB  
955, Tempe , AZ 85283-1314. Phone:888.415.9920.  
Email: info@issausa.org

**What Islam Says about Domestic Violence: A Guide for Helping Muslim Families**, by Zainab Alwani and Salma Abugideiri. Herndon, VA: FAITH (Foundation for Appropriate and Immediate Temporary Help), 2003.  
Price: \$10.00 info@faithus.org or 571-323-2198

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**peacefulfamilies.org**

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Seattle, WA 98102 • 206-634-1903 tel



Bonita R. McGee serves on the board of the Islamic Social Services Association-USA (ISSA-USA), a national organization addressing social issues and promoting social work and related fields in the Muslim Community and provides trainings and assessments for communities in need to address the issue of domestic

violence. She is also a former board member and co-founder of the Muslim Family Services of Ohio (formerly the Muslim Women's Network and Community Services), a social service organization serving the Muslim community in Greater Columbus and surrounding areas.

Previously Bonita worked at a full service domestic violence shelter, and volunteered at Sexual Assault Response Network of Central Ohio (SARNCO) in Columbus, Ohio. Bonita served as Program Chair for Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) Domestic Violence Awareness Activities and developed a website on domestic violence for ISNA. She continues to provide trainings and assessments for communities in need to address the issue of intimate and sexual violence.

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*Violence in Muslim Communities*, eds. Maha B. Alkhateeb and Salma Elkadi Abugideiri, 235-245. Great Falls, VA: Peaceful Families Project.

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## Participant Bios



### **Dr. Sidow Abdi-Shariff Mohammed**

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Dr. Sidow Abdi-Shariff Mohammed is a professor of Arabic Language and Middle East and North African Culture. He specializes in language acquisition, technology for instructional purposes, and cross-cultural communication in Arabic. He also teaches culture classes on the Middle East and North Africa, focusing on Islam and society. In addition, he also gives sermons in the Shafi'i, Abu Bakr, and Dar al-Hijira mosques, and the Brian Coyle Community Center located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Furthermore, Dr. Sidow Abdi-Shariff Mohammed gives lectures to Somali groups that have recently immigrated to Minnesota. These lectures consist of human rights, women and child abuse, and Islamic perspective on integration into American society.



### **Dr. Ibrahim Abdul-Malik**

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Shaykh Ibrahim Abdul-Malik, Ed.D., Ph.D. was born in New York City. He earned his first doctor's degree in Science and Education at Harvard University in 1971, and his second in Islamic Studies from Graduate Theological Foundation in 2007.

He is a Certified Master Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Ericksonian Therapeutic Hypnosis, a qualified nutritionist, and a member of the World Health Community of NLP Practitioners. Shaykh Ibrahim is a co-founder of Imams Council of New York, and Associate Director of the UN Summer Internship Program, Geneva, Switzerland, sponsored by Malik Shabazz Human Rights Institute. Immediately following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, he served for several months as a Volunteer Disaster Chaplain with American Red Cross, at and near ground zero, and as a Trauma Counselor, with selected community organizations. Shaykh Ibrahim is constantly invited to lead inter-faith activities, particularly those seeking to improve relations among Jews, Christians and Muslims.



### **Luqman Abdush- Shahid**

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Imam Luqman Abdush-Shahid is a native New Yorker with strong family roots from southern parts of the United States. Imam Luqman is the founder of the American Islamic Indigenous Clinical Pastoral/Training and a Vice President of Operations. He is a Supervisor-in-Training under the auspices of the College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy (CPSP). He supervised many chaplain training groups Muslims and persons of other faith.



## Amira Ahmed

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Amira Ahmed is a native of Somali Mai in southern Somalia. She earned a BA degree in Business Admin/Accounting from Somali National University of Mogadishu, Somalia and holds a MA in Public Affairs. She is also the founder of MWCD, a non-profit 501 (c) (3) agency led by refugee women who are dedicated to empowering Muslim and East African women and their children to be active, independent and self-sufficient partners in society. The organization obtains these objectives through education, training, research, leadership and providing positive examples. Amira Ahmed has remained steadfast in committing herself to the larger opportunity of creating a vehicle for Muslim and East African women to reach their highest potential.



## Dr. Sunni Rumsey Amatullah

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Dr. Sunni Rumsey Amatullah has been a human, health and gender rights advocate for over 40 years. She was a regular writer for the progressive magazine Dialogue, an international Islamic publication based in England. She was the first woman to become a NGO-UN representative for the internationally based Al-Khoei foundation. She has traveled extensively nationally and internationally speaking on the complex social, education and health issues impacting Muslim women in the 21st century.

Dr. Amatullah received her Ph.D. from the University of Canterbury in International Studies (NZ/UK campus) in 1995. Her MS and BS with honors are from Adelphi University.



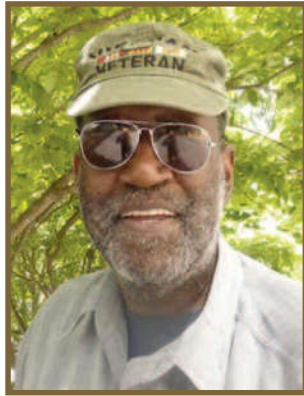
## Imam Charles Aziz Bilal

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Imam Charles Aziz Bilal earned his Associate degree in Liberal Arts from Dutchess Community College, where he was presented an award for outstanding "Leadership and Achievement." He also studied and achieved a certificate for Therapeutic Crisis Intervention at Cornell University. He was awarded Outstanding Young Man of America honors in recognition of his distinguished professional achievement, superior leadership ability and exceptional service to the community. He also worked as a social worker at the Lakeside Treatment Center, and in later years at the Angel Guardian Society.

In 1994, Imam Charles Aziz Bilal founded Masjid Al Hamdul Lillah in Jamaica, New York. With his excellent leadership abilities, Imam Charles Aziz Bilal has guided the Islamic community of Masjid Al Hamdul Lillah to steady and progressive growth. Blessed with great patience and vision, he has been noteworthy for his steadfastness and consistent efforts towards establishing Al Islam.

Since establishing Masjid Al Hamdul Lillah, Imam Charles Aziz Bilal has been instrumental in the development of programs that have been beneficial to the community.



## Shaykh Al Hajj T.A. Bashir

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Shaykh Al Hajj T.A. Bashir  
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of the House of Peace (HOP), started in September 2001 to address domestic violence and other issues in the Muslim community. Shaykh Bashir has a graduate degree in psychology, and has provided Chaplains services at St. John's Hospital. He has also studied at the School for Arabic & Islam Studies under the tutelage of Allama Shaykh KA Tawfiq, who had received various degrees from Al Azhar University in Egypt. Shaykh Bashir has a Doctorate in Multi Faith at New York Theological Seminary (NYTS).



## Dr. Khadijah Matin

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Dr. Khadijah Matin has  
combined over 30 years  
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history, health and faith-based education.

Bringing together her sense of social justice and faith, Dr. Matin is part of the national dialogue, lecturing and working with various organizations that address culturally competent health care and education; creating 'Green' works within faith organizations and developing organizational programs that respond to current urban challenges. Her research focus areas include an examination of faith and family history in the shaping of identity and community, and the varied ways in which service and spirituality intersect. Presently, Dr. Matin serves on the national and Journal editorial board of the Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society.

Dr. Matin has an MS in Education from Fordham University. At One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, she received her ordination in Interfaith Ministry in 2006 and her Certificate in Interspiritual/Interfaith Counseling in 2010. She earned her D.Min. from New York Theological Seminary in 2012, with a specialized focus in multi-faith ministry. Dr. Matin is also a member of the Association of Muslim Chaplains.

Called by some as a "woman who walks through walls" Dr. Matin sees her works as her calling and a continuation of her family's traditions in the ministry, education and health, fulfilling the civil rights and social justice dreams of her ancestors.





## Dr. Ruqaiyah Nabe

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Dr. Ruqaiyah Nabe is an  
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Minister and interspiritual counselor. Serving in the capacity of independent practitioner, she performs life cycle events and responds to requests for speaking engagements and interfaith dialogue.

Dr. Nabe earned her certificates in interfaith ministry (in 2006) and interspiritual counseling (in 2009) from One Spirit Interfaith Seminary. She earned her doctorate degree in multifaith ministry from New York Theological Seminary in 2010, becoming the first of One Spirit's graduates to do so, as well as becoming one of the first two Muslim women to earn a doctor of ministry degree – and to earn it from New York Theological – in its 110-year history. She is also a semi-retired Registered Professional Nurse.

Dr. Nabe has also served as a crisis intervention counselor for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following the disaster of September 11, 2001. She served on the board of directors of the Muslim Women's Institute for Research and Development for seven years and remains its supporter. She also is a board member of Chrysalis Healing Light Ministries; a member of the Interfaith Women's Initiative in Bergen County, New Jersey and a mentor in One Spirit's Interfaith Seminary's mentoring program.



## Fatima Porgo

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Fatima Porgo studied  
International Affairs and

Contemporary Diplomacy in Burkina Faso (Africa) and Malta (Europe) and got her Master's in International Affairs. Having achieved many goals in her career in Governmental Services (in Burkina Faso) and Multilateral Diplomacy (at the United Nations), she expanded her professional interest in new challenges in the areas of community organizing, protection of women rights and victims of abuse. Ms. Porgo was a victim of domestic violence for more than 14 years while living with her ex-husband in Saudi Arabia and Burkina Faso. She was helped by the InterAfrican Union of Human Rights. Since her escape, she dedicates her time in helping prevent all manner of abuses against women. She has worked for not-for-profit organizations in New York City and specialized in the issue of domestic violence. She represents the African Council of Imams on issues related to domestic violence and women. She assists community based-organizations, groups and grassroots associations in New York City with strategies to self and economic empowerment. In recognition of her efforts, the African Diaspora in the USA granted her with the African Community Award 2011 - Community Leader. Ms. Porgo was recently appointed as the United States Representative of the Foundation for Research, Promotion of Human Rights and Development in Africa. She recently launched Nerlow Afriki, a not-for-profit organization based in New York City promoting social and economic empowerment as a tool of prevention of domestic violence, child abuse and human trafficking.



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Abdus-Salaam Musa is a graduate of the Hartford Seminary with a Graduate Certificate in Islamic Chaplaincy. He holds a Bachelor's Degree from Audrey Cohen College of New York. He accepted Islam in 1988 and joined the organization of the Islamic Circle of North America in 1996 with the Message Magazine and the Relief Department in 1998, heading two programs. Those programs were the United Muslim Movement Against Homelessness (UMMAH) and the Muslim Women's Help Network (MWHN), which started the first Muslim women's shelter in Queens in 2000.

Mr. Abdus Salaam is also a certified Pastoral Counselor and Chaplain under the auspices of the College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy. Currently he is a Supervisor In Training (SIT) with the Episcopal Health Services at St. John's Hospital in Far Rockaway, New York. Mr. Abdus Salaam endeavors to journey with and train individuals of all faiths to become institutional chaplains. He is the President of the American Islamic Indigenous Clinical Pastoral Education organization and a former board member of the Association of Muslim Chaplains. He holds credentialing as a Disaster Response Chaplain, Domestic Violence facilitator, individual, family and youth counselor. He is a qualified facilitator and trainer of MAPP/NYC Administration of Children Services (ACS), teaching individuals to become foster or adoptive parents. Mr. Abdus Salaam holds various certificates in Male Batters Intervention, Domestic Violence, Substance Abuse, Crisis Intervention, HIV, and group facilitation. He has conducted numerous workshops and seminars to raise awareness about domestic violence in Muslim communities.



## Gregory J. Huskisson

Gregory J. Huskisson is a former Knight-Ridder Inc. executive who has managed, trained and recruited news staffs at daily and community newspapers in Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Los

Angeles, Miami, Columbus, Ohio and Daytona Beach, Florida. A 25-year media veteran, Huskisson is a graduate of Morehouse College in Atlanta and holds a master's degree from the prestigious Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University in north suburban Chicago. Committed to training the next generation of journalists, Huskisson is a former director of the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund's Summer Internship Program in Detroit, and former director of high school journalism programs for the Detroit Free Press newspaper and for the National Association of Black Journalists (Detroit Chapter). Huskisson currently is a writing, editing and media relations consultant for several non-profit organizations, including IDVAAC. A "Who's Who in Black Chicago" honoree, Huskisson also is a contributing author of "Chicken Soup for the African American Soul," and is an executive producer of the widely acclaimed docudrama, "Sister, I'm Sorry." He is a member of the National Association of Black Journalists and the National Association of Multicultural Media Executives.



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Oliver J. Williams, Ph.D., Professor of School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota, in St. Paul. From 1994 to 2011 he was the Executive Director of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC). In October 2011 he began serving as Co-Executive Director of IDVAAC. He has also served as the Director of the Safe Return Initiative that addresses the issues of prisoner reentry and domestic violence from 2003-2014. He has worked in the field of domestic violence for more than thirty years. Dr. Williams has been a clinical practitioner; working in mental health, family therapy, substance abuse, child welfare, delinquency, sexual assault, and domestic violence. He has worked in battered women's shelters, developed curricula for batterers' intervention programs and facilitated counseling groups in these programs. He has provided training across the United States and abroad on research and service-delivery surrounding partner abuse.

He has been appointed to several national advisory committees and task forces from the Center for Disease Control, U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Office on Women's Health, and the U.S. Department of Education. He has been a board member of various domestic violence and human service organization including the early days of the National Domestic Violence Hotline. In 2000, he was appointed to the National Advisory Council on Domestic Violence by the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services and U.S. Attorney General. In 2010 he participated in a Roundtable with the U.S. Attorney General on issues related to fatherhood and participated in a Whitehouse Roundtable on Fatherhood and Domestic Violence. He has conducted training for the U.S. Military Family Advocacy programs and presented to numerous Family Violence, Research and Practice organizations in the United States and Abroad. Dr. Williams' research and publications in scholarly journals, books and DVD's have centered on creating service delivery strategies to reduce violent behavior. Dr. Williams has also received many awards among them include an award from the American Psychological Association, a International "Telly Award" for his documentary work; the National "Shelia Wellstone Institute Award" related to his National work on Domestic Violence and a Distinguish Alumni Award from the University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work. Dr. Williams received a bachelor's degree in social work from Michigan State University; a Masters in Social Work from Western Michigan University; a Masters in Public Health and a Ph.D in Social Work both from the University of Pittsburgh.

# ISLAMIC RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**ROUNDTABLE BRIEF  
FROM DISCUSSIONS HELD ON  
JULY 17-18, 2013  
NEW YORK, NY**



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