

ANNEXE 2: ABOUT MUSAWAH

About Musawah

Musawah is a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family. It was launched in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in February 2009, bringing together over 250 activists, scholars and policy-makers from 47 countries, including 32 from the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation).

Initiated by Sisters in Islam, a long-established Malaysian NGO that works on women's rights within the Islamic framework, Musawah was launched to address the compelling need for women's groups working in Muslim contexts to come together to share strategies, build scholarship and promote best practices to advance the rights of Muslim women to equality and justice. We wanted to bring to international attention that there is already a 'paradigm shift' in Muslim theological and jurisprudential scholarship, that there is the possibility to reconcile the teachings of Islam with human rights and women's rights. We also wanted to build an international discourse and public voice to assert that equality is possible within Islam and build the momentum to propel forward our efforts to protect existing rights in Muslim family laws and practices against rising extremism and promote our demands for reform of discriminatory laws and practices.

I. Goal and Objectives

Musawah's goal is to build a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family, which advances human rights for women in Muslim contexts, in both their public and private lives. Its objectives are:

- To build and share knowledge that supports equality and justice in the Muslim family using a holistic [Musawah Framework for Action](#) that combines Islamic principles, international human rights standards, national laws and constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination, and the lived realities of women and men.
- To support the work of human rights mechanisms, as well as groups and individuals working with these processes at the international, regional, and national levels, to advance equality and justice and end discrimination against women in the name of Islam.
- To build a critical mass of organisations, groups, and individuals that support, use, and promote the Musawah Framework for Action and are empowered to engage in a constructive and informed public discourse on Islam and women's rights.

These objectives guide the development of Musawah programmes and activities, which are focussed on building knowledge and capacity to promote a progressive understanding of Islam that recognises equality and justice, and to argue that reform to end discrimination against women in Muslim family laws and practices is possible.

II. Key Areas of Work

Musawah works in four key areas— knowledge building, capacity building, international advocacy, and communications and outreach.

(i) Knowledge Building – facilitates access to existing knowledge and the creation of new feminist knowledge within the Musawah Framework for Action. We seek to apply feminist and rights-based lenses in understanding and searching for equality and justice within Muslim legal tradition. Such lenses help reveal the tension between the egalitarian and hierarchical voices in the tradition. This creates awareness, but also space for the emergence of women's voices, which were for so long silenced in the production of religious knowledge, so that women's concerns and interests can be reflected in the law and policy-making process.



We believe that the production and sharing of knowledge should be participatory, recognize non-traditional forms of expertise, and begin from contexts rather than texts. In this way, the knowledge produced will be grounded in the lived realities of women and men, with such realities informing the approach to the issues and the questions being asked.

(ii) Capacity Building – The Musawah short course on Islam and [Islam and Gender Equality and Justice \(I-nGEJ\)](#) is designed for women and human rights activists working in Muslim countries and communities throughout the world who wish to play a critical role in offering an alternative discourse on an Islam that upholds the principles of equality and justice, building a tradition of public debate on religion and public law and policy, and advocating for women's rights in Muslim contexts.

It addresses the knowledge gap of participants with no formal or traditional education on Islam, but who are keen to understand the differences and diversity of Qur'anic interpretations and juristic opinions and the conceptual tools that exist within the tradition that makes reform possible in Islam. It will build the knowledge and courage of participants to critically speak out on laws, policies and practices justified in the name of Islam and their impact on women's rights and fundamental liberties, and build a public voice of women leaders demanding an alternative understanding of Islam that recognises equality and justice in the context of changing times and circumstances. All participants must already have grounding in gender and human rights principles and issues.

This course is very much in demand. Over the years, we have trained about 312 participants from 35 countries in three international-level courses, four at country-level and seven at regional levels for Advocates in South Asia, the Horn of Africa and the MENA region. There are also further demands for regional trainings for Francophone Africa, West Africa, Southern Africa, Central Asia and Minorities North (Muslims living in the West). Musawah is raising funds to conduct an annual international I-nGEJ course.

(iii) International Advocacy – Musawah supports the work of international human rights mechanisms, as well as NGOs and individuals working with these processes, by providing concepts and language that bridge the perceived gap between Islam and human rights. Its report [CEDAW and Muslim Family Laws: In Search of Common Ground](#) critiques the use of Islam and *Shari'ah* by key OIC governments to justify their reservations and resistance to demands for compliance with international human rights treaty obligations. It offers the holistic approach of the Musawah Framework for Action to push for the possibility of reform and for equality and justice in Muslim laws and practices. It also highlights a list of best practices in Muslim countries to show the diversity of Muslim laws and thus breaks the myth that these laws are divine. The OHCHR, UN Special Rapporteurs, the CEDAW Committee and NGOs working on their shadow reports use the Musawah report as an important resource to justify the necessity and possibility of reform of discriminatory Muslim laws.

Musawah today regularly issues [Oral Statements and submits Thematic Reports](#) on Article 16 on Marriage and Family Relations to the CEDAW Committee when major OIC countries and countries with significant minority Muslim communities report to the CEDAW Sessions. Since 2011, Musawah has intervened in the CEDAW process for 25 countries.

(iv) Communications and Outreach – serves the information and knowledge needs of Musawah Advocates, reach out to potential Musawah allies, and raise Musawah's visibility and the visibility of its messages. Activities include a quarterly e-newsletter entitled [Musawah Vision](#), a resource-rich [Musawah Website](#), the [Musawah Toolkit](#) of key messages, and videos related to Musawah activities. Musawah's outreach work also includes country visits that offer a range of activities, including public forums, seminars and meetings with national-level activists to introduce Musawah and build the movement. Selected Advocates are also invited to attend conceptual meetings to develop and get involved in multi-country research projects. Musawah outreach aims to build networks globally and act as catalysts for change at the local level.