



Concept note for the Rabat+5 Symposium (6-7 December 2017)

Musawah is global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family. It is a knowledge building movement to build feminist, rights based knowledge to uphold and promote the necessity and possibility of equality and justice for women living in Muslim contexts.

With regard to the Beirut Declaration and its 18 Commitments on “Faith for Rights”, our approach and activities notably fall under the following commitments:

- Commitment 3: promoting **constructive engagement** on understanding of religious texts
- Commitment 5: ensuring **non-discrimination and gender equality** with a commitment to **revisit religious understandings and interpretations** that perpetuate gender inequality and harmful stereotypes
- Commitment 7: refining **curriculum, teaching materials and textbooks**
- Commitment 12: exchange of **good practices** and skills building

We do this through three key areas of work:

1. Knowledge building – We have just completed a 5-year research project on *qiwamah* and *wilayah* - twin legal concepts that justify male authority over women – which until today underpin a discriminatory legal framework that regulates the relationship between men and women in law and practice. Our ground breaking book: [Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition](#) is now used in over 20 universities in various Islamic studies courses in at least eight countries. Our [Knowledge Building Briefs](#) provide concise quick understandings of legal terms and concepts and key issues that make reform possible in Islam.

2. International Advocacy – We intervene in the CEDAW process, working with civil society and CEDAW Committee on how best to hold governments accountable to their treaty obligations by challenging the ways they use Islam to enter reservations and justify their failure to comply with treaty obligations. We provide legal concepts, arguments and good practices in Muslim family laws to break Government assertions that they cannot reform the discriminatory laws because they are divine and therefore unchangeable. Our interventions, through Oral Statements and [Thematic Reports](#) have enabled the CEDAW Committee and activists to engage more critically and constructively with governments and propose specific recommendations towards the possibility and necessity for reform.

3. Capacity building – We regularly conduct an 8-day short course on [Islam and Gender Equality and Justice](#) which provides intensive training to women’s rights activists and policy makers who understand human rights and gender principles, but have little understanding of

Islam from a rights perspective. Experts in Qur'an, Fiqh, Hadith help participants understand how knowledge is produced in the classical Muslim tradition, that it is socially constructed and how given a different context and times, it can be reconstructed to advocate for equality and justice. This "life-transforming" course enables Muslim feminists to recognize and argue for the possibility of reconciling Islam with human rights and women's rights.

End result: to democratise the production of knowledge in Muslim contexts and to expand the public space for debate on matters of religion – that Islam is not the sole monopoly of any group of people. In Muslim countries where religion is used as a source of law, public policy and daily practice – everyone has a right to speak out and challenge the ways it is used to justify discrimination against women or minorities and violate fundamental liberties.

We need to build a counter narrative that upholds equality and justice and make this the dominant narrative where religion becomes a source of solutions and not problems. To do this **knowledge is important**. Everyone talks about the **knowledge deficit** in matters of religion. People don't know how to counter the extremist intolerant voices when they use religion to shut up dissenting voices. The rights-based knowledge Musawah produces, the trainings we conduct, the advocacy we do with the CEDAW process all contribute to building knowledge, courage and confidence to articulate a just and empowering vision of Islam that upholds rights and enable activists to stand their ground when they are criticized.

Future projects:

- **Transfer the Musawah Course *Islam & Gender Equality and Justice* (I-nGEJ) into an online course.**
- **Work at national level in selected countries to build capacity and develop strategies to follow up on CEDAW Concluding Observations on family law reform.**
- **Good Practices Table in Muslim Family Laws – interactive world map being developed to show the possibilities of reform towards equality and justice.**

www.musawah.org/