



WISE: Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity

On **November 17-19** at the **Westin in Times Square, New York City**, WISE will convene over 100 distinguished Muslim women leaders from academia, civil society, art, politics, and religion to **network, strategize, and share best practices** around the **joint mission of advancing the rights of Muslim women**. WISE is a first-of-its-kind global Muslim women leaders' initiative, as its goals extend beyond simply furthering mutual awareness of ongoing advancements and building a shared experience and affinity. WISE's underlying aim is to **create a legitimate and coherent movement that empowers Muslim women and leverages the strong future network we are building**. Toward this end, while pursuing our mandate of educating others and increasing awareness, we will also **work within an Islamic legal framework to advocate for greater rights**.

The attendees at **WISE** will be an extremely diverse group that is **varied** not only by ethnicity and profession, but also by **ideology, religion, and individual politics**. They will all, however, be individuals who hold in common two things: **a nuanced understanding of the issues faced by Muslim women in specific locales, and a demonstrated commitment to working toward change**. Women with strong interfaith backgrounds will also participate as featured speakers at the conference. In involving these dynamic women, our goal is to create a learning environment in which personal accounts of **mutual struggles and aspirations between women of all faiths are shared**. Significantly, the **WISE** conference will lay the foundations for a number of landmark outcomes that will resonate globally, including:

- ❖ The launching of an **International Shura (advisory) council of Muslim women leaders** to put out recommendations to political and religious leaders on global issues of relevance and concern to Muslim women, but also for specific cases that become publicized.
- ❖ **The debut of a theater production entitled 7WOMEN, 7HEAVENS, Portraits of Muslim Women**, a play by internationally recognized playwright, Kayhan Irani that juxtaposes stories of seven Muslim women in abrasive, funny, and soothing dialogue with themselves around personal struggles with faith, community, and relationships. As directed by Broadway director and choreographer, Jonathan Cerullo, the world premier will take place Saturday, November 18 at 8:30pm during the WISE conference and is open to the public.
- ❖ The **publishing of An illustrated book to showcase participants' profiles and their personal and organizational work in improving the lives of Muslim women**. Given that few books have highlighted Muslim women's initiatives from around the globe, this book will play a crucial role in adding complexity to public awareness of who Muslim women are and what strides they are making.
- ❖ The establishment of **an endowment to provide scholarships for 10 Muslim women to become Muftia's** (one licensed to render religious judgments or *fatawa* within an Islamic legal framework) around the globe.

The vision behind convening such a group of disparate voices is the following insight: While each group may assert its position differently, there are shared concerns that need to be uncovered, negotiated, and agreed upon. By undoing the fragmentation that exists amongst these groups and building momentum around a singular *Muslim women's movement*, we can create substantive change that will percolate to the grass roots level. Assembling key thinkers and doers is essential to providing strategies for intra community partnerships, evaluating outreach methods while candidly discussing shortcomings, and implementing programs to empower and advance Muslim women. More specifically, our programming and network building has the following objectives:

1. The development of an international council of empowered Muslim women as an institution, working toward **gender and social justice** who will put out positions on issues of relevance and concern to Muslim women globally.
2. To create a space in which Muslim women actively dialogue debate and collaborate on issues of Muslim women's rights and responsibilities.
3. To increase awareness of ongoing advancements in Muslim women's rights in Muslim societies in the West.
4. To reexamine the nexus of culture and religion in it's capacity as a barrier to Muslim women's advancement.
5. To build solidarity with the forum representatives who come from fragmented movements
6. To raise awareness of women's power in social change and philanthropy.

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