

Findings from the First Shura Council Meeting *WISE Conference, New York 2006*

During a brainstorming session on the last day of the WISE conference, participants identified critical issues facing Muslim women today. In this discussion, which also included articulating specific needs and goals, the participants raised the idea of creating a global women's shura council. Below are the highlights of that dialogue:

Issues and Needs

- Promoting female experts in religion
- Educating and mentoring young, Muslim women
- Interacting and collaborating between and among women's groups and those representing different "perspectives of Islam"
- Revisiting and reinterpreting family laws
- Increasing awareness of women's issues and concerns
- Improving civil rights (not just for women)
- Education for leadership
- Development and outreach for youth
- Development of dialogue and conflict resolution skills
- Education, health, and economic empowerment
- Muslim directory, including resources, organizations, and individuals
- Centralized media voice to answer international issues
- Umbrella organization with local centers
- Intrafaith dialogue

Shura Council Proposal

Purpose/Mission:

- Establish a culture of support for women
- Research and identify contemporary issues facing Muslim women
- Provide religiously grounded opinions on contemporary issues (issuance of *fatawa*)
- Engage in *ijtihad* to construct and redefine *usul al fiqh*
- Explore alternative hermeneutical frameworks of the Qur'an

Structure:

- Financially independent
- Free from governmental influence/alliances
- Use a common language
- Membership:
 - Diverse in all respects (ethnically, nationally, ideologically, etc.)
 - Include men
 - Local, national, and international representation
 - Identify local scholars and engage local communities
 - Members could include representation from the following sectors: Activist, grassroots, youth, professional, private, public, academia, traditional Islamic scholarship, spiritual leadership
 - Democratic (i.e., fixed term, elected, etc.)

- Include issue-based subcommittees
 - Rotational international and regional representation
- Develop regional councils that have credible and well-respected local scholars

Process:

- Establish central repository for questions (i.e., on contemporary issues)
- Communicate opinions through international press, networking, and the Internet (i.e., blogs, podcasts, etc.)
- Use effective traditional channels of communication (i.e., community/opinion leaders use of specific terminology)
- Network w/ non-Muslim organizations that provide services to Muslims
- Partner with other groups who are working on similar goals (i.e., Center for Training Jurists – Amadou Bello University)
- Attract global attention/media
- Lobby governments
- Foster relationships with young populations
- Convene Council every three years