

Canadian Council of Muslim Women

Acceptance Speech for the Peter Gillespie Award

April 24/17.

Delivered by Alia Hogben, Executive Director

Thank you for choosing the Canadian Council of Muslim Women as the first recipient of the Peter Gillespie award. As you can understand, our work is done without thought of fame or recognition, but because of our passion and commitment to make women`s and girls` lives better. But oh what joy, to be recognized by Inter Pares! Along with feeling honoured, we are tickled pink that you have selected us out of many!

I did not know Peter, but from the information on him, I hope he will be pleased that we were selected. His advocacy and activism to help people far away from Canada shows the kindness and compassion he must have had.

Your organization`s international work is also founded on the qualities of compassion and justice, as you strive to advance peace and democracy, health, migration and women`s equality.

Our organization`s values of compassion and social justice are based on Quranic principles and on the Declaration of Universal Human Rights. The exhortation of “do unto others as you would have them do to you” sounds simple but as we all know, demands a great deal of selflessness and compassion to practice.

As Nelson Mandela said, “Our human compassion binds us one to another – not in pity or patronizing, - but as humans who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.”

CCMW was founded 35 years ago, and its values and objectives continue to guide us today. We try to assist women and girls to integrate so that they can participate fully in all aspects of living. We do this through education of women and through advocacy on their behalf. We believe in the family as the context for us and so some of our projects have been with youth. We proudly proclaim that we are Canadians and we are Muslim and that this must be foundational to all our work with women and their families.

One of our objectives is to recognize that as we are a minority in Canada, we must stand up for other minorities in the Muslim majority countries. For example, we are appalled with the killings in the community of Egyptian Christians, or the discrimination against Christians in Pakistan or Malaysia.

We face many challenges, from within Muslim communities and from without. The prejudice and discrimination are hard to overcome, but fortunately in Canada, we do

have laws such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which help combat some of this.

The other challenge for us is to ensure that the true message of Islam is based on compassion, tolerance and social justice. This sometimes seems impossible because of the other interpretation which emphasizes patriarchy and a measure of intolerance which to us is total anathema.

We are keenly aware of our context, not only in Canada but in the world. You know well the sufferings of Muslims all over the world, including the tragedy in so many Muslim majority countries. What is truly tragic is that so much is caused by the mixing of religion and politics, and dictators and neo imperialism.

With the influx of refugees to Canada, we hope that their settlement will be done in ways that integrates them and provides them with opportunities for social inclusion.

I will conclude with a quote from the Dalai Lama who says, ``If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion. ``

I admit that one of my favourite concepts/values is compassion and as I practice Islam I am obliged to say, many times, "In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful." If I believe that there is a Creator and that God is full of mercy then I too must try to practice something similar!

Again, sincere thanks for this honour and we look forward to working with you in the future.