

Call to Action: Take a Stand against Domestic Abuse

Muslim Men Against Domestic Abuse (mmada.org)

February 2010

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Dear Community,

Assalamu ‘alaykum; peace be upon you all. Last year, many of you joined Muslim leaders nationally and globally to speak out against domestic abuse. The wake-up call for many was the February 12th murder of Aasiya Zubair Hassan, general manager and co-founder of Bridges TV. Shortly thereafter, Muslim Men Against Domestic Abuse (www.mmada.org) was established to promote domestic tranquility in our communities. As we approach the one year anniversary of Sister Aasiya’s death, and as a means of encouraging communities to continue to speak out against domestic abuse, Muslim Men Against Domestic Abuse is organizing a **Call to Action**.

First and foremost, **we hope that each community will devote one khutba (Friday sermon) this month to the topic of domestic abuse.** To assist imams and leaders, we have created a document entitled **“Talking Points (Khutba).”** (This and other documents were compiled by our board members, a diverse group encompassing professors and students of Islamic studies, domestic abuse activists, and others.)

Attached you will also find **five pledge forms** at the very end of this document. We respectfully request that all communities participating in this campaign organize a **pledge-signing campaign** immediately following the khutba or lecture on domestic abuse. These pledges represent a global Muslim stand against domestic abuse. Please feel free to make more copies if necessary. Once we collect your community’s pledges, all names will be transferred to the MMADA pledge on our website. We would kindly ask that you provide us with the signed pledges as soon as possible. These can be scanned and emailed, or sent to us as is. Our email and mailing addresses are below.

We have also included a **“Domestic Abuse Fact Sheet” flier**. We kindly request that you please hang this or a similar flier on your bulletin boards.

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Finally, you will find two related MMADA articles, “**Women and Men as ‘Garments’**” and “**The Healthy Community.**”

Every community has our permission to copy and disseminate this **Call to Action** packet without limit. With your commitment and, most importantly, Allah’s (swt) permission, the actions suggested above will strengthen our stand.

Sincerely yours,

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About Us

Muslim Men Against Domestic Abuse (mmada.org)

Muslim Men Against Domestic Abuse (MMADA) is an organization dedicated to domestic tranquility. By joining our group, you make a commitment never to engage in, support, or remain silent about the physical, psychological, and emotional abuse of Muslim and non-Muslim women and children.

We aim to provide educational resources and serve as a tool for advocacy. Recognizing that domestic abuse is a symptom of much larger social, institutional, and individual pathologies, we seek to identify and eradicate its root causes. We do so with the belief that our religion calls us to stand for justice and reject all forms of oppression.

Despite our focus on women and children, we recognize that the victims/survivors of domestic abuse include men, and that this is a phenomenon that should not be ignored or overlooked. And though we are an organization comprised of men, we reject the notion that men are the exclusive arbiters of morality.

We pray that our intention in establishing this organization is not to please any particular audience, but rather to work toward the betterment of society for the sake of God alone.

Talking Points (Khutba)

Muslim Men Against Domestic Abuse (mmada.org)

The following are suggestions and recommended talking points for a khutba (Friday sermon) or lecture on the problem of domestic abuse within the Muslim community.

1 → Focus on the positive: The Qur'an describes women and men as "garments" to one another (2:187). One of Allah's "signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves so that you may dwell in tranquility with them. He has put love and mercy between your hearts; in that are signs for those who reflect" (30:21).

2 → There are always going to be family tensions. This was even the case for the Prophets (peace be upon them). It is important to recall, though, their beautiful approaches to these tensions. According to various reports, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) never engaged in domestic abuse – and spoke negatively of those who did. As the Qur'an instructs, either remain together "in fairness" or separate "in a goodly manner" (2:229). Poignant also is the following passage: "Do not hold on to [women] with intent to harm them and commit aggression: anyone who does this wrongs himself" (2:231). Accordingly, the Prophet (pbuh) declared that the best of men are those who do not hit their wives.

3 → Note that domestic abuse is not just physical. It can also be emotional, psychological, etc. (Humiliation can also be a precursor to physical abuse.)

4 → If we leave aside sensationalist portrayals of Muslims, we are nevertheless confronted with the fact that this crime occurs in our Muslim communities, as it does in all human communities. It is a real problem, and if we are people of the truth, we must stand for the truth - even if it is against some of our own. And we do so for the sake of Allah (SWT) alone.

5 → In order for a community to deal properly with domestic abuse, it has to be a healthy community, where each individual feels a sense of belonging. Reflect on the Prophet's (pbuh) leadership and wisdom in dealing with people who had been rejected by society (e.g. Julaybib).

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6 → Victims/survivors of domestic abuse should never be silenced, and should never feel that they must accept their condition. (Victims/survivors should be addressed directly at some point during the khutba.) Accepting abuse – either by the victim/survivor or the community – is contrary to the Islamic spirit of commanding the good and forbidding the evil. As the famous hadith indicates, we must change wrongdoing first by hand, then by tongue, then by heart (and that is the weakest of faith). (It would be helpful to identify a go-to brother and sister, so that those seeking assistance can find the support they need in private, in case they prefer not to speak directly to leaders of the Muslim community.)

7 → During the lifetime of the Prophet (pbuh), the Muslim community needed both men and women. We need each other. And we need to be able to trust one another and believe that we are truly brothers and sisters.

8 → If the Prophet (pbuh) is our role model, let us follow his example so we can develop healthier communities and healthier families so we can treat and hopefully prevent problems like domestic abuse. And that requires that we all pledge never to engage in, support, or remain silent about the physical, psychological, and emotional abuse of Muslim and non-Muslim women, children, and men.

Domestic Abuse Fact Sheet

Muslim Men Against Domestic Abuse (mmada.org)

- 1 in 3 women will experience domestic violence (DV) in their lifetime.
- DV is a cycle that can include periods of physical, psychological, and emotional abuse in which abusive people attempt to gain power and control over their victim(s).
- Victims include women, children, and men.
- DV is not particular to any one group of people—we see this problem in *every* community, even if it looks different in each.
- When seeking support, victims/survivors of domestic abuse should never be silenced, and should never be made to feel that they must accept their situation.
- In keeping with the beautiful example of our Prophets (peace be upon them), our community is responsible for eradicating this social problem and helping each other feel safe in our own homes.
- If you are experiencing abuse, please visit mmada.org or peacefulfamilies.org. The National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-7233) can help to find resources in your area.

Women and Men as “Garments”

Muslim Men Against Domestic Abuse (mmada.org)

The Qur’an has a beautiful passage that describes women and men as “garments to” one another (2:187). What does it mean to be a “garment” – an article of clothing – to someone else? What is the function of a garment? It covers what is private to you, makes you look nice to others, remains close to you, and keeps you warm. But there is another important function that garments serve, and it appears in a striking manner in the 12th Sura of the Qur’an, the Sura of Yusuf (Joseph, peace be upon him).

In this Sura, we find several references to Yusuf’s garments, particularly his shirt (qamis). One day, his jealous brothers leave him stranded in a well. They return to their father Ya‘qub (Jacob, peace be upon him) and tell him that a wolf had devoured their younger brother. To support their claim, they display Yusuf’s shirt stained with “false blood,” as the Qur’an puts it. However, with Yusuf’s shirt in front of him, Ya‘qub sees through their lies; he knows that Yusuf is alive.

Later in the narrative, Yusuf becomes a slave in Egypt. The wife of his master tries to seduce him. Despite his attraction to her, Yusuf rejects her advances and turns away from her. In the process, she tears his shirt from behind. She then lies and accuses Yusuf of wrongdoing. A member of her household states that if the shirt is torn from the front, she is telling the truth, but if it is torn from behind, she is lying. It thus becomes clear that Yusuf has been falsely accused. Again, the shirt functions as a witness. It is through the shirt that God protects Yusuf, not necessarily from the schemes made against him (as he later finds himself in prison), but from the filth of falsehood. A simple shirt. And yet, in accordance with God’s will, it protects and supports Yusuf.

Finally, as Yusuf acquires enormous power and success after having been oppressed, he runs into his brothers. This time, however, they are in the inferior position. At one point, Yusuf gives them his shirt and tells them to place it on their father’s face in order to restore his sight, which he had lost over the years. Here, God uses the shirt of Yusuf to bless what is dear to Yusuf. And the shirt, like the truth, provides sight.

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Spouses, both male and female, are blessings from God. They protect us, support us, and allow us to see with our hearts what we would otherwise miss. And if we abuse them in any way, then not only do we cease to play our assigned role, but we become blind – blind to the truth, God’s wisdom, and the beauty before our eyes. Indeed, “it is not people’s eyes that are blind, but their hearts within their breasts” (Qur’an 22:46).

The Healthy Community

Muslim Men Against Domestic Abuse (mmada.org)

In February 2009, a Muslim woman named Aasiya Zubair was murdered by decapitation in the state of New York. Her husband has reportedly confessed to the crime and has been arrested. What makes this tragedy peculiar is the fact that this same man had launched a television network dedicated to countering the negative image of Islam. (The very idea of establishing the network, however, was that of Zubair, the victim.) The media ran with this story precisely because it seemed so ironic; it seemed to confirm many of the stereotypes people have of Muslims, particularly the stereotypes of misogyny, violence, and barbarism.

Needless to say, we know better. We know that this tragedy has nothing to do with our faith; it is antithetical to our faith. And we know that there is nothing particularly Muslim about any of this. As such, there is no reason why we should be on the defensive.

But if we leave aside the sensationalism that this incident has attracted, we are nevertheless confronted with the fact that this crime occurred in an American Muslim community. If we begin to dig beneath the surface and examine the social, institutional, and individual pathologies that may have led to this crime, we find that there is much that we have to confront if we seek to be an honest, healthy community.

We have good reason to believe that the confessed murderer had a long history of domestic abuse. And domestic abuse not only paves the way to gruesome acts like the one that occurred, but is evil in and of itself. And it is a problem that is more common than we may care to admit. Every single day, countless women, children, and, yes, men are abused throughout the world and right here in the United States – not just among non-Muslims, but also among Muslims. I will never forget speaking to a group of well-educated American Muslim women who recounted the numerous cases of domestic abuse they and others experienced and witnessed.

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This is not something I like writing about. And this is not something many like to read. The truth hurts sometimes, and as the Qur'an tells us, many people hate the truth. But as the Qur'an also makes clear, we have to stand for the truth. And if we are people of justice then we have to reject oppression, regardless of who is involved. "You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives" (Qur'an 4:135). This is the Islamic message. It is about going beyond *'asabiyya*, the tribal mentality where we only do and say what is apparently good for our own people. If we ignore the problem of domestic abuse publicly then it will only fester beneath the surface and get worse privately, and there are many examples of this phenomenon. So we must confront this problem head on, not because others want us to, but because it is our duty before God.

But in order for a community to deal properly with domestic abuse, it has to be a healthy community. In this regard, the most successful communities are those in which its many individuals feel a sense of belonging. And not just belonging, but a sense of ownership. When you feel that you at least have the potential to play an important role in your community, it allows you to take your community seriously. There are many Muslims who choose not to be a part of their Muslim community because they simply do not feel that they belong. Some might say that that is their problem. But I do not think that would have been the attitude of our Prophet, peace be upon him.

In fact, there are countless examples of the Prophet going out of his way to reach out to others, be they children or former enemies. After he conquered Mecca, he forgave many of the same individuals who oppressed him and his followers. And, to the shock of some of his followers, he gave them unusually large shares of spoils after the battles at Hunayn and Ta'if. He wanted these new members of his community to develop a sense of belonging and ownership – and that they certainly did.

It is perhaps unsurprising that after the Prophet passed away there was much debate over who was his dearest friend. This debate did not simply involve the well-known companions, but a wide variety of people. In fact, the Prophet was even good friends with the kind of people that society rejected.

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Memorable is the story of Zahir. He was poor, physically small, and many considered him ugly. He was often disrespected. And yet, our Prophet, peace be upon him, was very fond of him and thought of him as a good friend. One day, he saw Zahir at the market and, like friends do, came up from behind him and covered his eyes. Zahir tried to get away. Perhaps he thought this was yet another heckler coming to harass him. But then he discovered that it was the Prophet, and he became happy. Instead of trying to escape, he leaned back against the Prophet's chest. Zahir then said that he was worthless. The Prophet corrected him, saying that his "value in the sight of God is great."

There was another companion named Julaybib, who is described as being very ugly and deformed – that is actually how he is described – and he was constantly mocked. And yet our Prophet was loving and kind with him. During one of the battles, Julaybib was killed. And when the Prophet inquired as to who had been killed, people listed their relatives and friends, but no one mentioned Julaybib. And so the Prophet said, "But I have lost Julaybib. Search for him on the battlefield." When the Prophet found Julaybib lying dead, he declared, "This man is of me and I am of him", and he repeated this 2 or 3 times. The Prophet then took him in his arms and embraced him. He then buried Julaybib himself.

Even though he was an active leader of a growing community, the Prophet made it a point to make the many individuals of his community feel that they belonged – even when no one else would do the same. He reached out to people of all races. There is a reason why the heroes of early Islamic history include Bilal the Abyssinian, Salman the Persian, and Suhaib the Greek (literally "the Roman").

The Prophet, peace be upon him, also made it a point to reach out to both men and women. There is a reason why we have reports of women filling the mosques during the time of the Prophet. There is a reason why we have reports of the Prophet making sure that both men and women heard his sermons. There is a reason why we have reports of the Prophet devoting time each week to providing religious instruction just to women. As a community, we need each other. We need men and we need women. Was it not a man who delivered God's final message? Was it not a woman who became the first believer and pushed that man to go on when he was weak? Was it not a man who helped save the Prophet from assassination in Mecca by taking his place in his bed? Was it not a woman who

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saved the Prophet on the battlefield near mount Uhud? Was it not a man who accompanied the Prophet as he emigrated from Mecca to Medina? Was it not a woman who refused to give up her faith and became the first martyr of Islamic history? Was it not a man who led the Muslim community politically after the Prophet's death? Was it not a woman who became the scholar of Medina after the Prophet's death? Men and women are integral to the history of our faith, and we must make it a point to develop a strong sense of trust of one another.

What is unhealthy is when we begin to regard those of the opposite gender with suspicion, and then disrespect them. What is unhealthy is when – and this certainly happens – brothers are rude and ignore their sisters, while acknowledging and having lively conversations with other women. What is unhealthy is when sisters assume that brothers are nothing more than shallow women-haters. Brothers, if you want a healthy community, you must sincerely love your sisters and assume the best of them. Sisters, if you want a healthy community, you must sincerely love your brothers and assume the best of them. We are a single unit. It is not us versus them, brothers versus sisters.

We have to be inclusive. Along these lines, we must develop communities in which we can safely ask sincere questions without feeling that our status as Muslims is going to be questioned by an arbitrary morality police that was never commissioned by God. A truly healthy community is one in which its members feel at home. To be sure, only such a community can succeed in tackling a problem like domestic abuse. It is one in which its members can talk openly about controversial issues without resorting to unfounded apologetics (claiming, for example, that domestic abuse does not exist among Muslims). It is one in which victims can find the help they need without being shunned.

In Islamic Law, there is a category called *fard kifayah*, which refers to those obligations that are the responsibility, not of individuals, but the community as a whole. If Muslim communities fail to fulfill their communal duties, then the individuals of those communities are held responsible. The problem of domestic abuse concerns us all. The failure to address it is a victory for the agents of oppression. We must turn to God for forgiveness and start anew. Life is short. The time for action is now.

