



CCMW

P.O. Box 154, Gananoque, ON K7G 2T7
Tel: (613) 382-2847
www.ccmw.com

Canadian Council of Muslim Women
Conseil canadien des femmes musulmanes

Canadian Council of Muslim Women 2004 Regional Meetings

As part of its three-year strategic plan, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) held a series of regional meetings with its chapters across the country in the spring and summer of 2004:

City	Participating Chapters
Toronto	Toronto, Windsor, London, Niagara Falls, Peel
Vancouver	Vancouver, Victoria
Halifax	Halifax/Dartmouth, PEI, Newfoundland
Calgary	Calgary, Edmonton, Moose Jaw, Regina, Saskatoon
Montreal	Montreal, West Island, Ottawa

Meeting Objectives

The objectives of the meetings were as follows:

- Share information, best practices and build on successes
- Mobilize and build capacity at the local level
- Follow-up on action items from the 3-year Strategic Plan:
 - Increase Muslim women's participation in the civic and political arenas
 - Increase Muslim women's capability to deal with the media and promote a positive, moderate and reasoned image.

Meeting Agenda

The meetings were facilitated by Nuzhat Jafri, one of CCMW's board members. At least two other board members and/or the Executive Director participated as presenters or resource people during the meetings. The agenda for the meetings was as follows:

Time	Activity	Responsibility
9:30	Update on CCMW's current work and accomplishments since AGM <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Including update and survey on Sharia issue	National Board Members, ED
10:30	Break	
10:45	Capacity Building <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Alignment with CCMW strategic and work plan□ Preparation of Chapter work plans	Chapter Members

1:00	Lunch and Salaat	
2:00	Civic Participation Follow-up	Chapter Members
3:00	Break	
3:15	Media Kit Follow-up	Chapter Members
5:45	Wrap-up & Evaluation	All

Update on CCMW's Activities

Participants were informed about CCMW's accomplishments since the 2003 Annual General Meeting and the emerging issue of the introduction of Sharia Tribunals in Canada.

Update on the three-year Strategic Plan:

- Increase integration/participation of Muslim women so that they can be effective agents of change in society
 - Held Forum in Montreal “Engaging Muslim Women in Civic and Social Change” in Oct. '03
 - Follow-up projects continuing with CASSA and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities
 - Forum Report completed March '04

- Build capacity to increase effectiveness/visibility & provide a voice for Muslim women
 - Holding regional meetings to build capacity at the local level
 - Recruited Executive Director/Admin. Assistant
 - Increased use of technology – significant increase in visits to the web site; created list serve

- Assess Muslim women's needs and assess increased participation/presence in the community, e.g. in politics, community organizations, educational institutions, and business, etc.
 - Civic participation survey conducted in Oct. '03 to form baseline
 - 2001 census data from Statistics Canada being gathered and analyzed
 - Researcher hired

- Produce media/communications products to foster a positive awareness of Muslim women as active participants in Canadian society
 - Board members participated in training, *At Ease with the Media* – learning to be shared at the regional meetings
 - Workshop held at the forum on preparing a media kit
 - Media Relations Handbook updated – to be used for training chapters at regional meetings

- Foster greater understanding of issues faced by Muslim women
 - Research/write Fact Sheets
 - Researcher hired
 - Position papers (8-10) to be published in collaboration with an academic researcher

- Advocacy and collaboration with other organizations
 - WWIW, NCWC, NOIVMWC, Afghan Women's Organization, CASSA, Women's Political ConneXion, Karamah, etc.
 - Continue use and promotion of Resource Kit, *In My Own Skin*

Emerging issue:

Implementation of Sharia/Muslim family law in Canada

- Prepared position paper – work in progress
- Extensive media representation and coverage
- Participated in speaking engagements
- Undertaking a research project in collaboration with NAWL & NOIVMWC
- Met with federal and provincial government officials/wrote to politicians
- Planning to hold forum

The CCMW position paper and a summary of our activities on the issue were presented at each meeting.

Pre- and Post-Presentation Survey

To gauge participants' awareness about and attitudes towards the implementation of Sharia (Muslim family law) in Canada, two survey questionnaires were administered at the meetings: one prior to a presentation on the issue and one after the presentation. Analysis of the survey results revealed differences in awareness and attitudes about the possible implementation of Muslim family law before and after the presentation. Awareness of the issue increased and attitudes towards the implementation of Sharia/Muslim family law were also altered as participants became aware of the implications. Results of the survey are summarized below:

- Both prior to and after our presentation, the majority of participants (75 percent prior to and 78 percent post-presentation) believe that implementing Sharia (Muslim family law) will not improve the lives of Canadian Muslim women. After our presentation there was a significant increase in the percentage of participants who **strongly disagreed** (39 percent prior to and 57 percent post-presentation) with the statement "I believe that implementing Sharia or Muslim Personal Law in Canada will improve the lives of Canadian Muslim women." The percentage of participants who **disagreed** with this statement changed from 30 percent pre- and 21 percent post- as the number who strongly disagreed increased after the presentation.
- Most participants are little informed about the Islamic Institute of Civil Justice. They appeared only slightly better informed after the presentation (only 21 percent prior to and 31 percent after the presentation either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I am well informed about the Islamic Institute of Civil Justice"). Information about the Institute was primarily from media reports and a booklet on the project released by its proponents.

- Participants' awareness about the issue did improve after the presentation but only 42 percent of them indicated that they were well informed about it (prior to the presentation only 28.5 percent either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "I am well informed about the implementation of Sharia or Muslim Personal Law").
- The majority of participants (84 percent prior to and 88 percent after the presentation) indicated that they do not feel compelled to go to a Muslim arbitrator to settle their family or other civil law matters.
- The majority of participants have not consulted an Imam or other Muslim leader to settle their family or other civil law matters (79 percent prior to and 81 percent after the presentation).
- The majority of participants would prefer not to go to a Muslim arbitrator to settle their family and other civil law matters (66 percent prior to and 75 percent after the presentation).
- The majority of participants would prefer to go through the Canadian legal system to settle their family or other civil law matters (78 percent prior to and 81 percent after the presentation) and believe that the current Canadian legal system is fair to Muslim women in family and other civil law matters (75 percent prior to and 81 percent after the presentation).
- A minority of participants believes that Sharia/Muslim personal law will be fair to Muslim women (13.5 percent prior to and five percent after the presentation).

It is clear from the survey that more information needs to be gathered and provided on the issue so that Muslim women may make informed choices and decisions.

Capacity Building

At each regional meeting chapters developed their own action plans by selecting three priority areas from CCMW's three-year Strategic Plan. For each priority area, they identified three activities that the chapter will undertake, how the chapter will accomplish these activities and what the outcomes and resulting change will be from each activity. The chapters were also asked to identify emerging needs of Muslim women.

Highlights of the chapter action plans include:

Toronto, London, Niagara Falls, Peel

- London – participate in women's history project; outreach to UWO journalism school and local media
- Niagara – educate Muslim women about their rights; establish sub-committees to carry out activities

- Peel – hold monthly book club discussion series; organize seminars to reach out to Muslims and broader community
- Toronto – screen documentaries relevant to Muslim women; interfaith dialogue; outreach to media and community organizations

Vancouver, Victoria

- Work with West Coast LEAF on arbitration/Muslim family law issue; reach out to Muslim women running in federal election; establish communication channels, i.e. list serve for local chapters

Halifax/Dartmouth, PEI, Newfoundland

- Halifax/Dartmouth – establish chapter and hold regular meetings
- PEI – assist with settling new immigrants; educate Muslim women about their rights
- Newfoundland – outreach to newly arrived Muslim immigrants; education on human rights in Islam

Calgary, Edmonton, Moose Jaw, Regina, Saskatoon

- Calgary – book club/film nights; continue outreach/collaboration with community organizations; collaborate with Edmonton chapter to celebrate achievement/contribution of Muslims during Alberta Centennial
- Edmonton – mobilize community around Islamic funeral services project; work on Alberta Centennial with Calgary
- Regina (includes Moose Jaw & Saskatoon) – increase awareness regarding Sharia/Muslim family law issues; identify youth to receive media training and become spokesperson; continue with outreach to broader community

Montreal/West Island, Ottawa

- Montreal/West Island – support/join campaigns against racism/discrimination, human rights violations against women; train bilingual media spokesperson; increase outreach and collaboration with other organizations
- Ottawa – organize events to engage community (e.g. Books and Biryani); hold seminars on topics such as Sharia/Muslim family law; collaborate with other organizations and develop information materials on women's health, domestic violence, etc.; continue interfaith dialogue

More detailed chapter plans are available upon request. There will be quarterly follow up with the chapters on their progress towards achievement of their plans. Chapters are encouraged to share information about significant achievements and upcoming events by forwarding information to CCMW's Administrative Assistant for dissemination through the list serve. Information will also be posted on the web site.

Civic Participation Follow-up

Results of a baseline survey of Muslim women on civic participation conducted at the 2003 AGM were shared. Results are summarized below:

Question	Participation rate
Have you ever taken part in a federal, provincial, municipal and/or school board election?	46.6%
Have you been a member of a governmental agency, board or commission?	23.3%
Have you taken part in any federal, provincial, municipal and/or school board consultation?	43.3%
Have you been involved in your local school, e.g. member of school council, PTA, etc.?	53.3%
Have you been involved in a community or non-governmental organization?	93.3%

Update on Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Project: Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Processes

Project sponsored by Status of Women Canada; five main strategies:

- Building and strengthening partnerships;
- Surveying the "state of the art" of gender-inclusive participatory practices at the municipal level;
- Participatory action research in six Canadian communities;
- Developing national action plans, and
- The creation of a "Tool Kit" of gender inclusive public participation tools for municipal governments and women's groups

Purpose of project:

- To contribute to changing municipal consultation practices and policies so that the full diversity of Canadian women have a meaningful voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

Workshop at CCMW Forum to share and gather information on:

- Muslim women's experiences with municipal consultations and municipal government;
- Barriers that make it difficult to participate;
- Enablers to help Muslim women participate in municipal processes

Ideas for follow-up:

- Develop an information package for Muslim women on municipal government and how to get involved – leverage Tool Kit being developed and hold train the trainer at next conference.
- Organize workshops through CCMW chapters to explore barriers more fully and develop strategies to increase participation – involve local municipal officials.
- Provide leadership training to focus on mobilizing Muslim women at the community

level and advocate at the municipal level.

Participants at the regional meetings were asked to:

- Prioritize ideas for follow up mentioned above for CCMW to undertake
- Identify actions your local chapter can take and include in your chapter work plans

Participants overwhelmingly identified the provision of leadership training while leveraging the FCM tool kit as their top priority.

Update on Media Relations Training & Kit

Participants were provided with clarification of the roles and responsibilities for media relations:

- National board is responsible for media relations at the national level
- When members of the media contact chapter members asking for CCMW's position on an issue, refer them to national spokesperson
- Local issues should be handled at the local level
- If you are uncertain about your chapter's position on an issue, formulate your response – by all means, feel free to consult with the national board, and then respond.

Information was shared from the 2003 Forum on developing a media kit (proceedings from the session were shared with the participants at each regional meeting). A high level refresher was conducted on media relations using CCMW's *Media Relations Handbook*.

Learnings were shared from the course, *At Ease With The Media*, attended by the Executive Director and several board members. Highlights included:

- Difference between broadcast and print media
- Reporters attempt to create polarization – your job is to keep your wits about you – stick to your logic
- Provide clear, concise and focused answers
- Treat reporters like “valued customers”

Next Steps

- There will be quarterly follow up with the chapters on the progress of their work plans.
- Regional meetings will be held next year for follow up on the three-year Strategic plan, on-going capacity building and mobilization at the local level.
- Information from the regional meetings and other CCMW activities is being shared with all of the chapters to keep up the momentum.
- The national board is providing advice and guidance to women in other locations regarding the establishment of new chapters, e.g. Kitchener/Waterloo, Winnipeg, Fredericton and Moose Jaw.

Regional Meeting Evaluations

At the end of each meeting participants were asked to provide feedback on the sessions. The feedback was very positive with constructive suggestions for improvements. Results of the evaluation are provided in the appendix.

APPENDIX – FEEDBACK FROM 2004 REGIONAL MEETINGS

TORONTO REGIONAL MEETING

PARTICIPATING CHAPTERS:

PEEL/HALTON, TORONTO, LONDON, NIAGARA

DID WELL

- room
- food, accommodations
- background info on Sharia
- facilitation
- handouts
- strategic plan
- opportunities to give input & do chapter level work

CAN DO BETTER

- provide time to get acquainted
- media section needs to be re-thought
- more advanced notice of meetings
- send material ahead of time

CALGARY REGIONAL MEETING

PARTICIPATING CHAPTERS:

CALGARY, EDMONTON, REGINA

DID WELL

- well organized
- exercises were excellent
- information useful
- right length
- openness
- good location
- good food

CAN DO BETTER

- more interaction and networking
- expand agenda to include expert on Sharia so we learn
- post agenda on website, include in e-mail text

HALIFAX REGIONAL MEETING

PARTICIPATING CHAPTERS:

PEI, NEWFOUNDLAND, NOVA SCOTIA

DID WELL

- gained more information today
- well organized
- good participation
- structured but informal / relaxed
- good raising a Muslim voice from a woman's perspective
- showing that Muslim women are strong
- learn about how to interact with media
- impressed by the website
- good info on Sharia issue

CAN DO BETTER

- have overheads
- more connection with CCMW

VANCOUVER REGIONAL MEETING

PARTICIPATING CHAPTERS:

VANCOUVER

DID WELL

- eating
- well-planned
- excellent materials
- flexibility at the local level
 - prioritization
 - not top-down
- strategic plan is really good
- good that Board Members came here

CAN DO BETTER

- more people involved
- presentation folders/ binders
- some topics not interesting (civic participation)
- meeting checklist (pictures)

MONTREAL REGIONAL MEETING

PARTICIPATING CHAPTERS:

MONTREAL, MONTREAL WEST ISLAND, OTTAWA

DID WELL

- calmly, quietly, and smoothly
- good handouts
- good facilities
- presentation of material
- good time management
- very interactive
- good size of group
- diversity of participants
- orderly presentation
- respectful
- professional
- welcoming
- progressive
- productive

CAN DO BETTER

- more time
- French
- anti-men feeling
- encourage positive reinforcement
- send strategic plan ahead of time