

# **Voices of Muslim Women: A Community Research Project**

*by*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This is a community participatory research project that investigates the effects of September 11th and its aftermath on Canadian Muslim Women. These results demonstrate that the everyday lives of Canadian Muslim Women have been negatively affected by the events of 9/11. By critically examining individuals, communities and the media, the negative and positive consequences of 9/11 was deconstructed. This report makes several recommendations with the hope of alleviating some of the negative consequences of 9/11.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Tuesday September 11th, 2001 marks the day America's sense of security was shattered. At the mention of 9/11, images of the twin towers collapsing immediately come to mind.

Although the attacks were in the United States, Canada felt it's aftermath. The ramifications of 9/11 in Canada were wide reaching and have been both negative and positive and have had an immediate impact on Muslims and Arabs in Canada because the perpetrators were Muslim and Arab.

Muslims' sympathy for the suffering of the families of the tragedies of the World Trade Centre has been felt all over the world, as has been the blame for the acts of terror committed by few but shared by all Muslims. The ensuing actions of the United States and its partners; the anger expressed by the people of the U.S., and the media coverage, have created high anxiety and realistic fears amongst Muslims in many parts of the world, including Canada.

The recent barrage of media coverage of the bombing of Afghanistan has added to the Muslim women's struggle for equality and social justice. For the last 20 years, women of Afghanistan have remained faceless and voiceless in the media and therefore in the minds of the West, till now. The sudden caring for Afghanistan is viewed with cynicism by many, as part of a 'war' media campaign, and yet there is such desperation that one has to hope that there will be a commitment by world leaders to work towards long term improvements for the country and for the women.

### Community-Based Research Project

Following the events of 9/11, the Canadian Council if Muslim Women saw the need to address the effects on Canadian Muslim Women and so in January 2002, initiated a community-based research, "Voices of Canadian Muslim Women". There was so much happening in the community but women were feeling silenced and so there was a need to hear their concerns in a safe-space and to ensure that these would to recommendations and further actions by partner organizations.

The purpose of the community-based research was three-fold:

- To provide an opportunity for Muslim women to give voice to their own experiences and concerns
- To increase awareness of the impact on the lives of Muslim women
- To develop concrete, practical recommendations directly from the community based research

### Partner organizations

"Voices of Canadian Muslim Women" provided CCMW the opportunity to work with other community groups all across Canada. The project was completed and collaborated with CCMW chapters across Canada: the Afghan Women's'

Organization (AWO), The Somali Youth Association of Toronto (SOYAT), the Canadian Arab Federation (CAF), the Canadian Council of Muslim Communities, and the Montreal Muslim Youth, West Island chapter. These groups provided support and provided participants for focus groups. Each association was instrumental as it allowed for the diversity within the Muslim community, and provided a non-Muslim Arab to be voice heard.

The effects of September 11th are of mutual concern, making this project a useful collaborative effort. Recommendations made to one group can be applicable to all partner-organizations. This allows both CCMW and partner organizations more room for collaborative projects.

CCMW collaborated with AWO on a media project entitled "Muslim Women: Improving Portrayals in Canadian Media, Influencing Media Practices, Building Media Strategies", a project which complements this one.

The Somali Association and the Afghan Women Association will be part of a panel of speakers at one of the workshops at the Canadian Council of Muslim Women's national conference, to be held September 2002-07-1. They will present the effects of September 11th on the communities they represent.

### CCMW Chapters

The chapters are part of CCMW and are involved in all projects undertaken by CCMW. The chapters assisted in organizing focus groups; they will receive the final Report, representatives will attend the national conference and they will be involved in the implementation of the recommendations of the report.

In each city, the work of the local chapters was essential. This project provided CCMW the ability to strengthen ties with local chapters. It has reinvigorated discussion within CCMW chapters and allowed chapters to be involved in a national project.

### Networking

For this project to be successful, it was integral to engage in community outreach via information sharing and networking through a variety of fora, attending conferences, community meetings and events.

In an effort to raise awareness and encourage participation in the project, some preliminary findings of this project were presented at a lecture held at McGill University, sponsored by the Women's Association and at community meetings held by the South Asian Women's Coalition in Montreal. Moreover, the coordinator of "Voices of Canadian Muslim Women" presented more concrete findings at "From Mecca to Montreal" a conference hosted by the Anglican Church in Montreal. The findings of the project were received with both curiosity and concern for the Muslim community in Canada.

The Toronto Peace Action Coalition sponsored a Global War and Peace teach-in. This community event allowed for solid networking opportunities. Representatives from the Federation of Muslim Women, the Canadian Arab Federation and the Somali Youth Association of Toronto made up a panel of Muslim women who presented their personal reactions and that of their communities, to 9/11. Their presentations reinforced CCMW's hypothesis.

Islamic Social Services Association of Canada and the United States held their annual conference in Montreal June 21-23. This year's focus was 'North American Muslims at a Crossroads: Post September 11: A Social Service Response'. Although most of the workshops dealt mostly with improving social services in the Muslim community, those workshops that specifically targeted *September 11th* were key in putting this report together. Two papers that were presented at this conference, "Statistics on the Backlash Against Muslims Post *September 11th*", and "*The Culture of Fear and Hate: The Nature and Impact of Backlash and Community Responses*" written by CAIR-Can and Shahina Siddiqui respectively, acted as supporting documentation for this report. This conference provided great networking opportunities with community leaders and Muslim academics.

The information provided by the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) was instrumental in gathering specific information relating to media bias, hate activity, and new legislations. Their website had accurate information and provided essential supporting documentation.

## **2.0            METHODOLOGY**

The Canadian Council of Muslim Women formulated a questionnaire that served as the basis for this research. Information was gathered by conducting focus groups across the country. To ensure continuity, each focus group followed the same format and was chaired by the coordinator.

### Questionnaire

The Canadian Council Muslim Women's Board of Directors and the coordinator developed the questionnaire. The questions were carefully selected in order to elicit answers on specific events happening in the city, country and the world.

#### **Document 2.1   Questionnaire**

##### **Post-9/11 Personal Impact**

1. What was your reaction to September 11th? As the events began to unfold and the identity of the perpetrators emerged, did your reaction and feelings change?
2. Have you had difficulties when it came to your practices or beliefs prior to and post September 11th?

3. When people talk about September 11th, are you more withdrawn or do you become more involved?
4. How has September 11th affected your family? At work? At school? On your Children? What follow up came out of that?
5. (If applicable) Have you changed the way you wear hijab for fear of harassment?
6. Have you traveled since September 11th? How were you treated? (Probe: Because of your perceived Muslim and/or Arab identity?)
7. In your opinion, what are some negative and/or positive effects of September 11th on the Muslim and Arab communities in Canada? Please give examples.

### **Impact of 9/11 on Canadian Communities**

8. Are you satisfied with the role the Canadian Muslim community has played throughout the events of September 11th? Do you have any recommendations?
9. Regarding the greater interest in Islam, Muslim and Arabs, have you been called upon to respond to it? What have you done about it?
10. We have heard of some incidents where Muslims, Arabs or people of South Asian decent have been targets of racism or hate crimes. Have you or someone you know experienced any racism or discrimination since 9/11? Did you report these incidents, and to whom? What kind of response did you get?
11. Has there been a change in your religious and/or cultural community involvement (Islamic centers, Arab groups, etc..) since 9/11? Has there been a change in your mainstream community involvement?
12. Has there been a change in the way your family is treated by Canadian society at large since September 11th? Please give examples.
13. In Canada, do you feel public support exists for Muslims or Arabs by the government or in schools? Please give examples.
14. Are you aware of any laws or policy changes being implemented by the Canadian Government since September 11th? How do they affect the community?

### **Role of the Media**

15. What is your main information source (newspapers, radio television)? Please be specific (BBC, New York Times, CBC Radio...). Do you differentiate between American media and Canadian media?
16. Since September 11th, are you reading, listening or watching more news?
17. Do you feel the media coverage of September 11th has been balanced? Why or why not?
18. Has the coverage of September 11th made you a more critical consumer of the news?
19. Have you reacted in any way to the media's coverage of September 11th (written a letter to the editor, called your local television station, etc...)?

### **Conclusions**

20. What actions have you taken since September 11th? What

recommendations do you have for us for future action?

### Focus Groups

The coordinator contacted CCMW chapters and partner organizations in January 2002. A schedule was quickly devised, one that allowed for time to be maximized and that was convenient to all organizations. One representative from each organization was deemed the contact person for this project. Each contact person received a copy of the questionnaire and was instructed not to distribute copies to participants. Each contact person also received guidelines on the project, which served as an information leaflet for participants. The coordinator was readily available by phone and email should there be any problems, questions or concerns.

In total, 15 focus groups were conducted, 3 took place in Montreal, one in French and two in English. Another 5 were conducted in Toronto, each by a different partner organization. Halifax, London, Niagara Falls, Ottawa, Regina, Edmonton (Participants also came from Calgary) and Vancouver each hosted 1 focus group, for a total of 15 groups and 181 participants (Please see table below).

**Table 2.2 Focus Group Breakdown**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location and organization</b>	<b>Num</b>
February 8 2002	Montreal: Montreal Muslim Youth, West Island Halaqaa	
February 10 2002	Toronto: Somali Youth Association of Toronto	
February 16 2002	Halifax: CCMW chapter	
March 9 2002	Montreal: active youth	
March 16 2002	Niagara Falls: CCMW chapter	
March 17 2002	London: CCMW chapter and mosque volunteers	
March 23 2002	Toronto: Canadian Arab Federation	
March 27 2002	Telephone meeting: Canadian Arab Federation executive	
April 6 2002	Regina: CCMW chapter	
April 13 2002	Vancouver: CCMW chapter	



April 14 2002	Edmonton: CMMW chapter	11
April 18 2002	Toronto: Afghan Women Organization (AWO)	14
April 20 2002	Toronto: Council of Muslim Communities of Canada (CMCC)	8
April 28	Ottawa: CCMW chapter	14
June 29 2002	Montreal: French-Arab communities	8

### Limitations of the Research

Statistical accuracy was weakened due to the following factors:

1. Fluctuations in size of focus groups

Attendance in some groups varied from 26 participants to 5.

2. Attendance sometimes difficult for women

In an effort to maximize the potential of each participant, we accepted secondary sources as truth (The experiences of other women, retold by the participants).

3. In some focus groups, language barriers existed

To counter any language barriers, translators were designated for each session that merited one.

4. People were sharing their stories in a group setting

This may have intimidated some participants. Fluid flow of discussion was encouraged. During the analysis, comments were placed in the relevant answer categories. Also, there was usually more than one person taking notes during the groups, which were then cross-referenced.

5. Participant comments were hand written

The coordinator avoided using tape recorders in an effort to make participants feel at ease, hence discussions were not recorded verbatim. There was already some concern due to the topic of research, having documentation made participants nervous.

6. Initial questionnaire was too long and had too much overlap

In subsequent focus groups, the coordinator used judgment. As discussions tended to touch many issues, most questions from questionnaire were dealt with informally. The coordinator would still ask each question, in case a participant felt that their voice was not heard.

7. Groups were selected

The focus groups were not a random sampling of Canadian Muslim women since

CCMW chapters and partner organizations organized groups.

#### 8. The answers were not anonymous

Many women took the opportunity to speak to the coordinator in private after the focus groups, and others emailed additional comments.

#### 9. Confidentiality

It was key to the success of the project that the anonymity of participants was protected. At the beginning of each focus group, the coordinator had participants write their contact information on sheets of paper along with assurances that the information would not be seen by anyone other than the coordinator and CCMW Board of Directors.

### **3.0 FINDINGS**

The questionnaire was divided into three sections: Post 9/11 Personal Impact, Impact of 9/11 on Canadian Communities, and the Role of the Media. The findings will be discussed in the same order they appear in the questionnaire.

#### **3.1 POST-911 PERSONAL IMPACT**

##### Stereo-Types

A Gallup poll released during the first week of October 2001, cited in an article written by Edward Said, stated that 49% of the American people believed that Arabs, including those who are American citizens should carry special identification; 58% insist that all Arabs, again including American citizens, should undergo special, more intense security checks in general.<sup>i</sup> This type of poll is indicative of a fear that exists within the American people. The assumption was that all Muslims, including American Muslims were pleased and supported the attacks on the World Trade Centre. This inaccurate assumption was exacerbated when CNN repeatedly showed images of a few Palestinian children from the West Bank celebrating the attacks. Participants were deeply disturbed by these images since it was seen as representative of all Muslims.

Focus group participants were frustrated that the media did not report on the contributions by the Muslim community. The Muslim loss of life in these attacks was ignored as 300 Muslims died in the attacks on the World Trade Centre and there were countless number of Muslims working at ground zero; blood drives held in various mosques across the country, including Arizona and Arkansas." Toronto Star editor Haroon Siddiqui wrote "... it is un-Canadian and un-American to assume that those two groups of citizens [Law abiding Muslims and Arab Christians] are any less outraged at the perpetrators of September 11th, or that they have any less interest in seeing the terrorist network smashed.""" Media misrepresentations such as these and others lead to a variety of sentiments in and out of the Muslim Communities.

Siddiqui echoes the feelings of focus group participants. The reality is that they felt the same range of emotions as Canadians. "I felt very depressed, like it was a personal tragedy." "I was shocked, sorry and saddened for what happened." "I cried when I saw it on television, I felt helpless." Feelings of sadness and despair were so strong in some women, or those they know that they were unable to leave their homes for days. An Afghani woman grieved with the families of those who lost loved ones in the attacks. During the 10 years of brutal war in Afghanistan she has become familiar with the effects of violence, after she lost members of her family in the span of 10 years.

The assumption that all Muslims were pleased with the attacks was falsely propagated. Some people in the Muslim community felt a sense of collective guilt. Muslims are armed with a strong sense of community (*ummah*). The Qur'an states that Muslims are a community of believers. Muslims are led to believe that they are all united in their faith, irrespective of what country he or she is from. On the one hand, this creates the sense of a larger global community. By virtue of their religion, every Muslim belongs to a larger group of men, and women. On the other hand, what has been exacerbated in the wake of 9/11 is the feeling that all Muslims are responsible for the actions of any one person who claims to act in the name of Islam. Muslims were made to feel responsible by association. In this case, the Muslim community feels guilty because a small group of people acted in the name of Islam, notwithstanding the fact that the perpetrators of 9/11 were misrepresenting Islam by committing suicide and killing innocent people. The kind of reasoning that claims that Canadian Muslims are responsible for the atrocities of 9/11 is illogical. Focus groups questioned why white Christians were not held responsible for the actions of Timothy McVeigh. Essentially, collective guilt demonstrates the sentiments of sadness and despair that Canadian Muslims felt due to 9/11.

### Fear and Anger

Two prevalent emotions evident in all focus groups were those of fear and anger. Participants expressed feelings of fear on all levels: potential terrorist attacks in Canada, personal safety, backlash, future of their children in Canada, the effect this would have on their country of origin "Negative effects of 9/11... will my children be able to get a job in Canada without being subjected to racism because they are Muslim and Somali?".

A common initial reaction was the fear that the perpetrators could be Muslim. At least two participants in each focus group expressed that initial reaction, that "Oh my God, I hope it is not a Muslim. Such sentiments are a direct result of a fear of a backlash. Canadian history proved that the fears of Canadian Muslims are justified. What was unknown was the size and scope of the backlash. Participants cited the example of the internment of Japanese Canadians during WWII. The most recent example of backlash being the lived memory of the Gulf War and the Oklahoma City bombing, which further exacerbated feelings of fear and alienation.

President Bush's national address "You are with us or against us", created two camps: the good guys and the bad guys. This statement had a profound effect on Canadian Muslims. A study released November 2001 confirmed that in the aftermath of September 11th, Canada's diversity model could have been at risk. "We have to be careful not to reduce the space for democratic politics and cross-cultural discourse in our rush to strengthen public security in the wake of September 11th. But once these two camps were created, the potential for discourse was reduced. Canadian Muslims no longer felt that they were part of the 'us'. Because they shared the same religion as the perpetrators of 9/11, the feeling was that they were no longer able to be Canadian. Their sense of attachment, sense of belonging to Canada was being challenged. For many, this was the first time their Canadian identity was being challenged. Furthermore, the notion that all Muslims were happy with 9/11 also contributed to feelings of alienation. It was almost as if Muslims were not allowed to mourn with the rest of Canada.

I was shocked. How can we do this to innocent people? When I realized that they [perpetrators] were Muslim, I felt that I was no longer able to feel like everyone else. I am not responsible, that is not my Islam. I was all of a sudden part of the 'other' category. Since the first time I came to Canada, I did not feel welcome, I felt fear.

"You couldn't offer anything against the media. If you did your Canadian-ness would be challenged. The risk to Canada's multicultural society is clear when looking at sentiments expressed during the focus groups. Some respondents felt that their patriotism had been challenged in the aftermath of 9/11.

Many respondents also expressed feelings of anger. Other atrocities of this magnitude or even greater, have been committed around the world. Yet none of them incited a global response that comes anywhere close to matching that of 9/11. To the people, it translates as "An American life being worth more than that of another.

The Federation of Muslim Women (FMW) released a report in November of 2001 that maintains the findings of this report. "FMW was inundated with crisis calls from its membership and the larger community." FMW constituency members and the larger community expressed feelings of fear for personal safety and a tremendous sense of emotional loss.

The Afghan community was particularly affected by the events of 9/11. They felt the same range of emotions as the rest of the Muslim community but they were dismayed at the ramifications of 9/11 in Afghanistan, especially in light of the 'War on Terrorism' that was launched in Afghanistan. The most common comment from Afghan participants was that "Afghans had nothing to do with 9/11, but we were targets." The truth is that none of the perpetrators were from Afghanistan. Osama Bin Laden is not an Afghan, so from their point of view, Afghanistan is being targeted for crimes that were not even committed by their own people.

The Afghan community was in mourning: they mourned the lives of those that perished in NYC and they mourned the loss of their brothers and sisters in Afghanistan. The Afghan community is too well aware of the ruthless crimes and destruction the Al-Qaida network is capable of. Due to this experience, the Afghan community greatly empathized and mourned the loss of those innocents killed in the World Trade Centre, Pentagon and in Pennsylvania.

### Religious Freedoms

One major impact of 9/11 was the immediate restrictions Canadian Muslims felt in freely practising their faith. The Council on American-Islamic Relations Canada (CAIR-CAN) is a national, non-profit organization whose mandate is to empower the Canadian Muslim community through activism in media relations, human rights and public advocacy. They recently did a study that examined backlash against Muslims post September 11th. According to their interim report card on Anti-Muslim hate, between September 11th and November 15th 2001, there were a total of 12 attacks on mosques and Islamic centres across Canada. This is particularly alarming since the report admits that the 'dark figures' could be as high as 98% since most hate-activity goes unreported. The Toronto Police Service Hate Crime Unit reported 14 attacks on places of worship in 2001.

In every focus group, from Halifax to Vancouver, there was at least one incident of vandalism on the local Islamic centre. These attacks on places of worship acted as a deterrent for Muslims to go to the mosque. People stayed away from mosques and Islamic centres in fear of personal safety. In Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan regular Friday prayers were discontinued due to hate-activity. This decision was taken because of the threat to the physical safety of worshippers. In the weeks immediately following 9/11, almost every city reported a police presence in the local mosque for Friday prayers. Just as a precaution, the Halifax Police patrolled the local mosque. The reduced access to places of worship is just one example of 9/11's direct effect on the religious freedoms of Muslims.

The following table illustrates 9/11's effect on the religious freedoms of Muslim Canadians. The question posed to participants was whether or not they had difficulties practising their faith before September 11th and did that change after September 11th. Table 11.1 looks at the comments made by participants who felt that they encountered difficulties practising their faith both before and after 9/11. Table 12.1 explores the comments made by those participants that felt they encountered few or no difficulties practising their faith prior to and post 9/11.

**Question:** *Have you had any difficulties when it came to your practises or beliefs prior to and post- September 11th? The answers fell into two categories, those who have had difficulties (YES) and those who have not (NO).*

**Table 11.1 Participants that had difficulties practising their faith YES**

**PRE 9/11**

**POST**

Able to pray in peace

Hijab has always been misunderstood

Able to pray in peace anywhere

Confidence in my faith.

Drinking alcohol is an important part of social norm. Can I fit in and not drink?

Police presence at Friday prayers

Women who wore the hijab feared for their safety, some removed it, others wore hats so that they were not stigmatized as Muslim.

Hesitant to pray in public

Did not want to identify myself as Muslim

Changed my perception of Islam as painted by media

Eid prayer affected due to fear and vandalism

Did not feel comfortable giving information

Media was manipulating what was in the Qu'ran

Islam and politics are too intertwined.

Reluctant to take Eid day off

**Table 12.1 Participants that had no difficulties practicing their faith**

	<b>PRE 9/11</b>	<b>POST</b>
	Many misconceptions of Islam existed prior to the religion being debated on National TV.	
	Did not notice a difference	Did, not notice a difference
		It was easier to practice Islam learning about the religion
	Easy to affirm faith; did not allow others steer me astray	Faith became stronger. I had religion in order to effectively
		Did not allow my practices a change

Decided to wear the hijab to demonstrate :

The tables highlight salient comments participants made regarding religious freedoms: on the one hand, there was a reluctance to talk about Islam, and on the other, some people felt comfortable responding to the increased interest in Islam. Although there were concerted efforts at all levels to dispel myths, the fact remained that the images of the twin towers falling resonated whereas words that described Islam as a religion of peace fell to the wayside.

Some women used religion as a coping mechanism. Many found that they sought solace in the company of Muslims or by practising their religion. They also took the opportunity to learn more about Islam so they could properly answer questions, and more often so they could properly defend their faith.

Muslims reluctance to take Eid day is key to an examination of religious freedoms. There are two celebrations in the Muslim calendar: Eid-ul-Fitr, which celebrates the end of the month of Ramadan, the month of fasting, and Eid-ul-Adha, which celebrates the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Eid-ul-Fitr was the first celebration post-9/11. Some respondents expressed reluctance when attending morning prayers. A few participants admitted not taking the day off to celebrate with their families for fear of future repercussions.

The perpetrators responsible for the September 11" attacks violated Islam, actions which have placed Muslims in North America in a defensive position. Canadian Muslims are forced to enter discussions about Islam not in an open and free forum but one that automatically assumes that Islam is responsible for 9/11.

### Headscarf (HUab)

The hijab is directly linked to the previous section on religious freedoms. The hijab has always been a contentious issue, a separate heading was needed to effectively address the issue. Although it is positive to see discourse on a religious practice, the issue of hijab continues to dominate religious debates within Muslim and non-Muslim communities. October 5th 2001, Oprah Winfrey dedicated an entire show to, what she called 'Islam 101'. This was promising but as one young Muslim woman wrote, "after a quick discussion of what Islam was about, the show veered off to the discussion of women in Islam, and particularly the dress code. The 'after show' segment was entirely about the hijab. The undue emphasis on hijab needs to be put to rest so that more pressing matters like "why our young men are turning themselves into bombs, why we do not have democracy in Muslim countries, whether American foreign policy is based on principles of equality and liberty for all.

Within this context, it is imperative to look at the women who wear the hijab and how they were effected by 9/11. Some North American Muslim organizations, like the Islamic Services Association of the United States and Canada and imams of local mosques advised women to take off their hijab. Some women removed their

scarves and others wore hats so that they were not stigmatized as Muslim. A few women admitted to not leaving their homes for days because they were afraid of being targeted because they were visibly Muslim. Some participants said that they were advised by their non-Muslim co-workers to remove their scarf, for fear that they would be harassed.

Most people can easily make the connection that a woman wearing the hijab is Muslim, making Muslim women an easy target for harassment but also an easy source of information on Islam and its practices. Many women who wear the hijab, especially young women in high school and college felt a tremendous amount of responsibility was placed on them as teachers, colleagues, friends would come to them for answers on Islam. These women were forced into a position where they had to talk about Islam and more often than not, defend Islam. Although some women accepted the task, some felt that they were being forced into a more vocal position, one that they did not necessarily want to assume.

However, 9/11's effect on women who wear the hijab was not all negative. Many women felt their determination grew stronger, that they wore their veils tighter and with more pride. As an expression of her Islamic identity, one Vancouver woman wore the veil post-9/11.

### Opportunity for Dialogue

Many participants were reluctant to engage in conversations about 9/11. Overall, more participants commented that they were more withdrawn when discussing 9/11, if they enter the discussion at all. Their reluctance was a result of fear. Fear that their opinion would be interpreted as support for the attacks, fear that the conversation would be monitored in some way, and unsure of who to trust.

Many people congratulated CCMW for spearheading a project of this nature because it gave women an opportunity to speak their mind. They were able to discuss 9/11 openly and freely. This is significant because of the long-term risks a lack of dialogue could have on Canada's diversity model. "In the past, each time democracy has been sacrificed to security, as it was in the War Measures Act in the World Wars and 1970, the long-term consequences have enfeebled, rather than strengthened Canada's capacity to manage the diversity in our midst." This same study warned of the effects that a lack of dialogue could have on Canada's social framework. Although Canada did not implement the War Measures Act, the lesson remains the same. If we do not encourage open dialogue at all levels, we are risking Canadian values of respect and belonging.

The Afghan community was particularly affected by a lack of opportunities for dialogue, and although members of the Afghan Women's Organization said they took advantage of every opportunity to rectify misconceptions about Afghanistan and Afghans, individuals were still very fearful to do so.

The French Muslim community, comprised primarily of Arab Muslims reacted



differently to 9/11 compared to the rest of Canada. The atmosphere in the French community was far more conducive to dialogue. Participants found that it was not as difficult to talk about 9/11 with the general public since the French community, in general is far more aware of the global anti-Muslim, anti-Arab bias. Some participants believed that this is due in large part to the media in Quebec, which has been known to be less racially prejudiced than the English media. At the same time, there were very few participants who actually read or watched French media on a regular basis. Most women admitted that their main information sources were Arab news stations.

## Racial Profiling

Racial profiling is a tactic that has been used in the past and is still being used today. Britain uses racial profiling during periods of IRA terrorist activity. There are examples of Northern Irish born Canadians who have been stopped in the United Kingdom. We understand that El Al, Israeli national airline openly uses racial profiling, by placing passengers in low risk or high risk categories.

The balance that Canada needs to achieve is one that ensures the security and safety of all citizens without violating fundamental human rights, such as targeting and profiling based on presumed ethnic and racial origins.

Faisal Kutty, general counsel at the Canadian-Islamic Civil Liberties Association has said "They are profiling at the airport right now. Profiling by name. Muslim workers there have told us." Based on this community research, racial profiling has taken place. Out of all the participants, 34 people had travelled since 9/11 and 23 people had negative experiences. The Afghan community had 9 people who had travelled since 9/11 and 8 negative experiences along with many anecdotal issues.

## Positive effects of 9/11

There has been some positive change as a result of September 11th. The positive effects have been seen both in individual cities and nationally. 9/11 has acted as a mobilizing force as more people see the importance in becoming pro-active. In Edmonton, the Muslim community created an umbrella organization of all Muslim groups working in the city, a feat that could have never been realized pre 9/11. In each city, the Muslim community has demonstrated its ability to perform during a time of crisis. Muslim professionals held a series of workshops entitled Islam 101, which were very successful.

It has given Muslims the opportunity to dispel some myths surrounding Islam. Many people have been asking questions with the intent to learn more about Islam. Many mosques have held open houses, inviting the public to discover what Islam is about. More people are buying Muslim literature, reading the Qur'an, which was on the New York Times best-seller list post-9/11. People are more curious and are taking the initiative to educate themselves.

9/11 has allowed the moderate face of Islam to be seen. In the past, extremism has dominated perceptions on Islam, and now the opportunity exists for the peaceful religion to be heard. CCMW received innumerable correspondence of support. Especially young Muslims, born and raised Canadians said they feel a sense of responsibility to advocate Islam.

The Afghan community too has seen the positive side of September 11th. People have a greater understanding of Afghanistan and the political forces at play. AWO took advantage of opportunities, even if the media often misrepresented them, although individual members were afraid to take an active role for fear that they would be misquoted or targeted.

### **3.2 IMPACT OF 9/11 ON CANADIAN COMMUNITIES**

#### Muslim Community Activism

Most participants felt that the Muslim communities reacted well, but there is much room for improvement. Actions initiated in individual cities were well-timed and well-thought. For example, the mosque in London Ontario was very pro-active by inviting the local community to an open house held at the mosque. This Muslims community conducted many radio and television interviews and took this as an opportunity to become more involved in the greater London community.

Participants listed numerous activities that they have been involved in since 9/11: candle light vigils, multi-faith prayers, speaking events at churches, open house at mosques. Negative comments regarding the communities response was more on a national level. There was no unified, concerted voice speaking for the Muslim community. In the focus groups, each community talked about actions they took in their local community but were disappointed with the lack of a national response. "The community needs to be on a united front. Let's put our differences aside for the greater good. We must deal with this as a community."

One respondent felt that Muslims did not effectively utilize existing community resources. This comment turned into a recommendation for future action: that the Muslim community should support structures that have already been put in place and only build new ones when needed.

#### Individual involvement

9/11 acted as a mobilizing force for Canadian Muslim communities as members of the community felt that this was the time to become more involved. In every focus group, participants discussed their response to the greater interest in Arabs and Muslims by non Muslims. They engaged in public discourse, spoke to the media, established anti-war coalitions, and spoke to church and women's groups.

Moreover, since 9/11, respondents have affirmed that they have become more involved in either religious/cultural organizations and mainstream community activities. "I started participating in more anti-racist groups."

## Hate Activity

Efforts by CAIR-Can have been made to document hate activity in Canada. The major problem with this sort of research is the lack of information. With the limited data available, the numbers are alarming. Between September 11th and November 15th 2001, there have been a total of 110 incidents of hate activity reported to CAIR-Can. There were 33 cases of verbal harassment followed by 13 cases of physical harassment and 10 cases of death threats and 10 cases of hate messages (For a full breakdown, please see Appendix C).

Police statistics support these claims. "Within a 30 day period, police in Montreal reported 40 cases of hate crimes related to September 11th; in Calgary and Ottawa, 24 and 44 hate related incidents were reported, which is double what is normal." The Toronto Police Service Hate Crime Unit released the 2001 Hate Bias Crime Statistical Report earlier this year. There was a 66% increase in hate crimes in 2001, compared to the previous year. "The 66% increase in reported hate crimes was largely a result of the September 11th, 2001 attack on the United States." Toronto Police received 121 hate occurrences directly related to 9/11. Of these crimes, 48 cases were threats, 39 cases of mischief and 16 cases of assault.

In these focus groups alone, participants reported 40 cases of hate-activity, of which only two were reported to police. These activities ranged from phone calls, name calling in the street to more serious crimes of vandalism and physical assault.

## Kindness of Canadians

A recent IPSOS-Reid poll showed that a strong majority of Canadians demonstrate concern and support for members of Arab and Muslim communities. "82% of Canadians worried that Arabs and Muslims would become victims of racism." The results of this poll are representative of Canadian values of tolerance and respect.

There has been a strong show of support from the mainstream community towards Muslim communities. Almost every focus group had examples of Canadians reaching out to local Muslim communities. Particularly in smaller cities like Halifax and Niagara, the Muslim community received many messages of concern and sympathy, such as letters of support, flowers and phone calls. This is a true demonstration of the Canadian spirit. In fact, most people felt that the kind of strong community support by Canadians might be different elsewhere, as one Arab woman said, "Canadians have been very supportive of me in my small town... I just think, if this happened in an Arab country, would we [Arabs] do the same thing for a [Non-Muslim] Canadian?"

## Public support

Some participants felt there was a lack of support by the government and within the school system. Both institutions could have done more to ease fears and minimize backlash in the aftermath of September 11th. "There is public support by

the people but not by the government. There has been lots of superficial support, lots of words.”

Participants appreciated the leadership shown by the Prime Minister when he visited an Ottawa mosque in the first week of the attack, calling for solidarity. In his speech, the PM said "I wanted to stand by your side today. And to reaffirm with you that Islam has nothing to do with the mass murder that was planned and carried out by the terrorists and their masters." There is a clear sign from the Canadian people that we want to see Canada uphold Canadian ideals and principles instead of following George Bush's lead. It is no surprise that PM Chretien received a standing ovation from Parliament October 15th 2001 when he spoke less of his primary theme of fighting terror and spoke more of his new theme: battling discrimination. This is indicative of the Canadian spirit, one that firmly believes in principles of strength within diversity.

Many Canadian schools seemed ill prepared to deal with this sort of trauma. Teachers were misinformed and targeted Muslim students in the classroom. Some teachers and school boards hid behind a 'no religion in schools' policy, preventing community leaders from properly informing students. One participant, a student teacher reported that her colleagues in the classroom showed CNN footage of cheering Palestinian children at the news of the attacks, and passed it off as an accurate representation of all Muslims. It seemed to parents that teachers could have been more sensitive that sweeping generalizations are unfair and damaging to the students and the community.

Not all schools and school boards were negative. Some welcomed the community initiative. Some schools held open discussions on 9/11 and Islam. One participant spoke of her Childs' school, which sent a note home to all parents immediately after 9/11 urging parents to be careful when laying blame for the attack.

### Laws and Policy changes

Participants were aware that the Canadian government is making changes to policy. One participant felt that "C-36, C-11, these laws are designed to end civil liberties in Canada." However, respondents were unaware of the exact details of the new laws and amendments to previous legislation, and how they will affect the Muslim community. Most participants connected new legislation laws with potential harm to the community, for example changes to the Immigration Act have affected refugee claims by Afghans, or the connection between C-36 and the potential to tap phones.

CAIR-Can has created a small fact sheet entitled "Know Your Rights", available on their website, which was distributed to all focus groups participants. The pamphlet outlined the rights as a Canadian citizen, such as expectations as an airline passenger and what steps Muslims should take if CSIS or the RCMP contacts them. This was a helpful tool that was warmly received by participants.

Due to perceived levels of anxiety in Canada, the government quickly enacted new laws to fight against perceived terrorism, in an effort to reassure Canadians. This was done without adequate public input, little or no community involvement, and poor communication between the government and communities.

The lack of information on these policy changes and the need for the government to rush them through parliament contributed to participants' lack of information and increased their fears. The Canadian Bar Association, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Privacy Commissioner, the Information Commissioner, the Bloc Quebecois and the New Democratic Party have contested to some of the content. "The bill's loose definition of terrorism, it's proposed powers of arrest without warrant, detention without charge and compulsory testimony without the right to remain silent, along with scary provisions for unprecedented electronic surveillance are not only too broad for comfort for law-abiding citizens but inimical to our mature democracy. These new laws have left participants with many questions and no answers from the government.

A positive government initiative was the formation of a Community Advisory Committee to the Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women) to provide feedback and advice on the effects of 9/11 on Muslim and Arab communities. CCMW was a member of the Committee and at a meeting with the Minister of Justice, recommended that the Department devise information sheets in diverse languages and easy to read English which would greatly assist in alleviating anxiety and providing accurate information.

### **3.3 ROLE OF THE MEDIA**

#### Media Choices

The first person to call the attacks 'an act of war' was not the President of the United States or even a member of the American government. As the first plane hit at 8:45am, NBC's Tom Brokaw was the first man to call it an act of war. The media played a powerful part in 9/11 and its aftermath, which we are still living today.

Participant complaints of the media can be broken into 4 groups: the media did not provide balanced coverage of 9/11 and its aftermath, the media bias was obvious, the language barriers were not handled with diligence and the media was not always accurate in their information.

Media choices of participants varied from local programming to satellite television. 20% of groups stated that the internet, both websites and list-servers were their main source of information. 11% of groups watched Arabic television (via satellite). 10.3% of participants watched the BBC followed by CNN and CBC at 8% and 7% respectively.

The internet has been an important tool in providing alternative news choices. Every focus group expressed the need to get away from mainstream media and that the internet has been key in disseminating information.

Those respondents that preferred Arabic news stations felt that the mainstream media was unable to provide them with accurate, up-to-date news. "Afghans are frequently misquoted and misrepresented on television." This is particularly true when referring to translations. Many Arabs and Afghans complained of errors in translation on networks like CNN. Interviewees were often misquoted, sending a different message to North Americans.

The research for CCMW and AWO's collaborative media project, "Muslim Women: Improving Portrayals in Canadian Media, Influencing Media Practices, Building Media Strategies" has just been completed, and an interim report has been assembled. The preliminary findings of the media project concur with the findings of this community research:

They [Muslim and Afghan community leaders] believe, and the research reflects, that their voices are not always heard and their perspectives not always validated within the Canadian mainstream media. This project has demonstrated that the media too is concerned about how the Afghan and Muslim community feels about their portrayal and that the media is willing to work with the community to build a more trusting relationship. The media is obviously a powerful institution and a more positive portrayal of Canadian women, who are also Afghan and Muslim, will improve the way they are regarded by mainstream Canadian society.

### CBC versus CNN

According to participants, there is a noticeable difference between American and Canadian media. Throughout the events of September 11th, Canadian news was ready to ask why this happened while American networks relied on the patriotism of its citizenry. One participant, who was a non-Muslim, American woman commented on the difficulty in getting information in the US. "There is a huge difference between Canada and the US." Finding information that deviated from mainstream media, information that questioned America's role on the international stage, specifics on American foreign policy that infuriates the Arab world, and more balanced coverage of Afghanistan was difficult to obtain. Participants felt that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) aired accurate and balanced coverage throughout the events of 9/11. Their dedication to maintaining an open forum for dialogue and debate has been evident in their programming. "The CBC's The National and The Passionate Eye are fair and play an important role in bringing awareness to Canadians.

### Media Bias

The Canadian Islamic Congress (CIC) conducted their fourth annual media-watch that examined nine major Canadian newspapers. For the second consecutive year, The National Post was ranked as worst by far in its persistent use of anti-Islam terminology. The findings of their study support the results of this research. There is an overall increase in anti-Islam tone and usage following the tragic events of September 11. Compared to the pre-September 11 study period, for example, the

National Post showed an increase of 22.1 times, while the Globe and Mail and Toronto Star showed 18.7 times and 10.1 times more occurrences, respectively.

The stereotypical images on television add to the negativity shown against minorities. For example, Sikh men and Sikh places of worship have come under attack in the aftermath of 9/11. The media bombards viewers with images of Muslim men all of whom look like Osama Bin Laden. His style of dress resembles that of practicing Sikhs. If someone's main information source is television then he/she is correct to make the connection between a Sikh man and Osama Bin Laden. If someone sees a woman wearing the hijab in downtown Halifax, he/she would connect that image with the one he or she has been seeing continuously on their television screen. Instead of seeing the woman for she really is, it is assumed that she is oppressed, probably uneducated and being beaten by her husband.

The Canadian Islamic Congress' annual media watch looked at the negative language being used by the media. Participants in every focus group asked questions like "Why do they always say Islamic militants and never a Christian militant? I wish we could change the words being used by the media." Or look at the media coverage of Afghanistan. "The destruction portrayed is detrimental to Afghans moral and the images do no justice to the pre-war era (10 years ago). People have even asked if we have cities and buildings.

Media images of Muslims were not all negative. The CBC's City Hall was quality programming as it accurately represented the diversity of Muslims. Many participants felt that could not always believe what they saw on television. If we look to the Arab and Somali communities, both of which watch programming in their native languages, all commented on the differences in mainstream media and international media. "Images seen on Somali television never make it on to mainstream media. The media bias has directly led to the feelings of mistrust found in the Muslim community.

Media interviews were not always conducted with articulate and educated Muslims who could effectively deconstruct the events of 9/11. When the media contacted Muslims to respond to the greater interest in Islam, participants sometimes felt that the media chose members of the Muslim community whose first language is not English and were therefore difficult to understand. One woman commented on her embarrassment when she saw David Coran interview a religious leader from the Toronto community who was not well versed in English and at a disadvantage. His words were twisted and he was unable to appropriately defend himself. These sorts of interviews harm the Muslim community since it does no justice to Islam and Muslims. In the same respect, the Muslim community also has a responsibility to elect leaders that can effectively meet the needs of the body they represent and act as a liaison between them and the mainstream community. In this case, proficiency in English is essential.

Media plurality

There is a need for more diversity in Canadian media. CanWest, owned by the Asper family controls Southam newspapers and Global Networks which accounts for over 50% of Canadian media, whose combined reach potential is 97.6% of English speaking Canadians. The recent examples of the owners' firing of Russell Mills of the Ottawa Citizen, the dismissal of a native reporter in the West and the instructions to all their newspapers that the same editorials will be printed, have been viewed by many as interference in the freedom of the press.

Muslim advocacy groups such as the CIC and CAIR have made complaints about CanWest and their anti-Muslim/anti-Arab bias. According to CAIR-CAN

The owners of CanWest, Winnipeg's Asper family, are using their virtual media monopoly to thwart freedom of the press. Canadians must act to protect such freedom and ensure that their voices are not silenced. From repeatedly silencing respected journalists who have spoken out against Israel to the recent firing of Russell Mills for criticizing the Prime Minister, it is evident that CanWest's media ambitions demonstrate a callous disregard for any voices that deviate from the Asper's program of promoting a narrow and self-serving political agenda.'

### Reacting to the media

A high number of focus group participants had responded in some way to the media's coverage of 9/11, by writing letters to local MLA's and MP's, CBC Ombudsmen, and letters to the editor. The CBC, both local and national, had interviewed some respondents. One woman described her reaction to 9/11 in an email addressed to CBC online. The initial email was posted on their website and sparked immediate reaction from visitors. Interest in this woman's point of view was so great that the CBC offered her a 6 month position writing a weekly article for their website.

Those that did not respond explained that they were lazy or apathetic, but some participants felt that they would be misrepresented. The Afghan Women's Organization had a few examples of interviews that were manipulated to fit journalistic bias. One woman said she was "scared that they'd [letter to the editor] be marked in some way." Another felt that because she had no connections, her reaction would be ignored. One went as far as saying "I don't think the media would care about my reaction.

## **4.0 PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

This was a community participatory research project. The aim was to report the feelings of Canadian Muslim women in the aftermath of 9/11 and to offer recommendations for future action. The following recommendations have been broken down into three sections: post 9/11 personal impact, impact of 9/11 on Canadian communities and the role of the media.



## **i. Post 9/11 Personal Impact**

- a. Education at home
  - i. Encourage discussion of world events at home
  - ii. Encourage children to be proud of their Muslim identity
  - iii. Encourage children to learn more about Islamic History
- b. Career Diversity
- i. Encourage young Muslims to follow non-traditional career paths, become politicians, journalists, lawyers, public servants. This will allow a Muslim voice at a variety of levels.
- c. Individual Involvement
- i. Encourage more people to become involved in local organizations

## **ii. Impact of 9/11 on Canadian Communities**

- a. Muslim Representation
  - i. Some respondents felt that it was important to have one voice that represents the Muslim community whereas others felt it was more important to have a myriad of speakers that accurately represents the diversity in the Muslim community.
- b. Skills Needed
- i. There are some skills that the Muslim community lacks. An educational seminar should be put in place that teaches community groups how to organize effectively, how to lobby the government, how to agree to disagree, writing letters of support and concern to MP's and the media, how to disseminate information efficiently, how to be more approachable.
- c. Non- Muslim Community
  - i. Encourage networking outside the Muslim community
  - ii. Encourage more Muslims to become involved in community
  - iii. Activities, reach out to other communities that have the
  - iv. Same concern for social justice issues
- d. Increased Knowledge of Islam and Islamic Practices
- i. There is a general lack of awareness of Islam within the Muslim and mainstream communities. Increase the level of debate within the community. More discussions about Islam that are not related to 'hot issues' like hijab and terrorism
- ii. Disseminate accurate information to mainstream community about Islam that also attempts to dispel prevailing myths and misconceptions
- e. Cohesion Within
  - i. The Muslim community has always been plagued by disunity. In order to demonstrate a united front, the community should create an umbrella organization of all-Muslim groups.
  - ii. Strengthen already existing organizations like CCMW,
  - iii. FMW, AWO by supporting them financially or in kind
  - iv. Encourage individuals to make recommendations to
  - v. Organizations

- f. Public Sector
  - i. School System
  - ii. It is imperative that school boards receive information about Islam. Have community groups go into schools and talk about Islam. Also provide schools with resources: information packages for teachers, books for library
  - iii. Government
  - iv. Encourage Muslim community to be more politically active
  - v. Encourage Muslim community to be proactive by creating a Muslim lobby group
- g. Youth Involvement
  - i. Encourage the youth to become more involved in their community by having more youth chapters of organizations or include the youth in regular projects.
- h. Religious Institutions
  - i. Encourage mosques to be more approachable by having
  - ii. More open houses at mosques or community events where
  - iii. The larger Canadian community is welcome
  - iv. Encourage public discourse about Islam in the mosques
- i. Role of Women
  - i. Women need to raise their profile; encourage women to be more active. More organizations should be in place to increase the role women play in the community, a place where women can explore internal issues
- j. Increase Participation
  - i. More volunteers
  - ii. Must widen the network of volunteers; get more people involved; the resources of regular volunteers have been tapped out, few people doing the work of many.
  - iii. Government funding
  - iv. Have government funded paid positions in order to increase participation

### **3. Role of the Media**

- a. Education
  - i. The mainstream media must change its coverage. The media needs to be more aware of Islam the religion
  - ii. Provide the media with contact names of Muslim organizations and community leaders who can best fulfill the needs of the media
- b. Support Media Advocacy Groups
  - i. Groups such as CAIR and CIC are doing great work; we should support these groups financially or in kind
- c. Alternative Media
  - i. Encourage the community to put together their own newspaper or newsletter
  - ii. Encourage the Canadian community to get news from alternative media sources (Internet, satellite television, specific programs)

## **5.0 NEXT STEPS**

1. The recommendations made in this report will be sent to all partner organizations (AWO, SOYAT, CAF, CMCC) so that they may assist in transforming these recommendations into actions. Furthermore, all partner organizations will select recommendations that they feel they can undertake in order to effectively implement recommendations.
2. The recommendations made by participants will act as a foundation for an action plan to be devised at a workshop to be held in September at CCMW's annual national conference. Both the Somali Association and the Afghan Women's Organization will be represented on the panel at this workshop. All other partner organizations will be informed that this workshop will be taking place.
3. Further collaborative projects may ensue from the final Action Plan, which will result from the Conference Workshop.
4. In the following weeks, this report will be translated into French.
5. Recommendations made by the Federation of Muslim Women, in their report "Muslim Women Organizing in the Wake of the Events of September 11/01" and the AWO/CCMW report "Muslim Women: Improving Portrayals in Canadian Media, Influencing Media Practises, Building Media Strategies Interim Report" will be incorporated into the action plan.
6. The Action Plan, will be submitted to funders and shared with partner organizations.
7. A copy of this report will be sent to the following organizations: funders, CCMW Chapters, contact persons for focus groups, partner organizations, and the media. Associations that have expressed interest in the final results of this project will also receive a copy, which include the Islamic Social Services Association, the Anglican Church of Montreal, Canadian-American Islamic Relations of Canada and the Canadian Islamic Congress. This report will also be available on the Canadian Council of Muslim Women's website, in both English and French.

## **6.0 EVALUATION**

The coordinator opted for a verbal evaluation rather than a written one since a written evaluation would single out those focus group participants who were not proficient enough in English or French to write their responses. Those participants who felt that they wanted to send a written evaluation emailed it to the coordinator. Those emails can be found below. In order to protect the anonymity of the respondent, only the location of their focus group was noted.

At the end of each focus group, the coordinator would ask respondents for an evaluation of the focus group: what people liked about the sessions, what they didn't like, areas that they felt could be improved on.

Overall, participants were very pleased with the initiative taken by CCMW. They appreciated having a safe space to discuss 9/11, a space that would not judge them based on their opinion. Moreover, respondents felt that it was important to have the voice of Muslims women to be heard, a voice that is often muted, misrepresented and ignored.

Some groups felt that the coordinator should have taken a more active role in the discussions. Usually, the coordinator would pose a question and let the discussion progress naturally. This meant that the coordinator could go 10 to 15 minutes without interfering in the discussion.

Other respondents felt that visual aids might have been helpful. Since discussions to last 2 to 3 hours, some felt that a change in format for variety's sake could have helped liven up discussions at the midway point when people's energy levels tended to wane.

Most respondents felt that they would have liked to see more focus groups. Instead of just one focus group in each city, have two or three. A wider network of individuals would have been consulted and participants would have benefited from the discussion.

The following are email evaluations of the focus groups.

*I would have loved to see more people attend the focus groups. For some, it was difficult to meet at this time and place... it is difficult to accommodate everyone. Attendance at the focus group would have been better, but there is really a lot of fear in the community. After all, we are talking about 9/11.*

### **Regina, SK**

*I really felt good after the discussion, and in fact, I feel I could go for another few hours talking about some of the ideas which were thrown out during the afternoon. It made me feel that we can still 'do' something about how Muslims and Islam are perceived amongst non-Muslims, and that the energy that got rolling after 9-11 hasn't necessarily stopped. We can keep it going, and individually keep being active about educating people about Islam.*

### **Vancouver, BC**

*I thought the focus group was excellent - I was pleased to see the women involved in discussion and openly sharing their thoughts. I have wondered if a flip chart and notes would have been helpful. That way you could have focused on the group and you would have had notes prepared by someone else. I know that you did not want to lead the discussion - but a comment from you every now and again would have been helpful - even in the context of clarification or to reiterate a point. The time allocated was too short - people wanted to talk more - but I understand the limitations.*

## **London, ON**

*The process of having a free space to talk freely about 9/11 was therapeutic. There were so many things that we all kept to ourselves. It was an opportunity to talk about it all. It makes me feel better, ready for more action.*

## **Toronto, ON**

*I think the focus group went well. I don't think any other group has done what you guys did- giving Muslims in general and the women in particular an opportunity to air their grievances and learn from one another. For me, it also sort of renewed my faith in Muslim groups i.e. there are groups out there concerned about what happens to Muslim women, since some of us are a walking billboard of Islam (due to the head covering). Although the focus group went well, I have few recommendations for future such forums: I know you tried this, but I think it is better for you as the facilitator to take an active (even aggressive) role in encouraging participation. I know there were a few people that didn't say anything through out the session while some of us (myself included) talked a lot. So maybe in the future the facilitator can take an active role in engaging discussions by even pointing to specific people in the group and asking for their input. I was also thinking maybe next you should get a recorder as I think it was hard for you to try and get what everyone was saying but I also see the problem with this- most people won't want to be tape--recording. One other thing I forgot to mention is that there is a high level of mistrust in the community even regarding fellow Muslims. I mean, I had to go to great lengths to convince some of the people in the group that you are not an informant and the only reason why you and your organization is doing this is because you care.*

*Did the focus group help me personally? Yes. I think I got a chance to vent out my frustrations concerning this society's mentality regarding the events of September 11th. I just don't understand this invocation of collective guilt thing, despite the fact that many in this society philosophize so much about individual responsibility.*

## **Toronto, ON**

*The input of youth is key. We are making all these efforts for our children. There were some youth who attended this focus group but it would have been nice to hear some more of their reactions, how they felt about 9/11.*

## **Vancouver, BC**

*Je suis interese a voir comment cette recherche sera utilise. Est-ce que ca va etre disponible sur l'internet? En Anglais et en Francais?*

## **Montreal, PQ**

*Thank-you! I really appreciated the opportunity to participate on Sunday last. For me, this was perhaps the most beneficial exercise since Sept 11. In fact, I found it*

*therapeutic! The questions were excellent - very well thought-out and they provoked such excellent responses. I can't wait to see how they were answered by others across Canada. Samira Hussain was very good. My congratulations to you, to Humera and to all who helped organize this worthwhile occasion for Muslim women in the NCR. I look forward to seeing the report. It promises to be both a timely and a powerful instrument for Muslim women across Canada! I wish Humera and Samira the very best in putting it together! Congrats also to the CCMW for supporting such an excellent initiative!*

## **Ottawa, ON**

*The effort by CCMW is great but it is imperative that some sort of follow up exists. I'd like to know what will happen to this report?*

## **7.0 ENDNOTES**

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xxxviii. SOYAT focus group

xxxix. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

xl. Ibid

xli. SOYAT focus group

xlii. Halifax focus group