

5<sup>th</sup> International Women & Justice Summit:

# / CULTUREL CODES AND WOMEN



KADEM  
YAYINLARI

**KADEM**

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5<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL  
**WOMEN & JUSTICE** SUMMIT:  
**CULTURAL CODES AND WOMEN**

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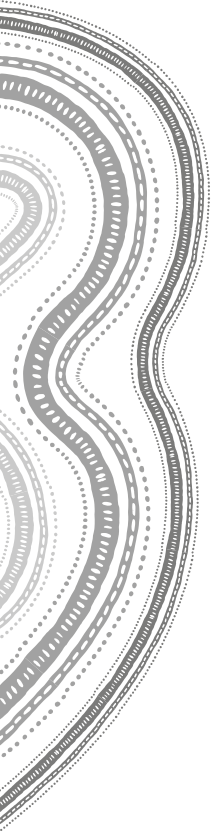
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## INTRODUCTION

The Women and Democracy Foundation (KADEM), in collaboration with the Ministry of Family and Social Services, proudly held the V. International Women and Justice Summit from November 4th to 5th, 2022, at the Atatürk Cultural Center in Istanbul. In keeping with its biennial tradition, the Women and Justice Summit continues to serve as a global platform for thoughtful discourse and transformative insights into the multifaceted experiences of women across the world.

As with previous summits, we were deeply honored by the participation of the President of the Republic of Türkiye, H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and First Lady H.E. Emine Erdoğan, who have been unwavering in their support for justice initiatives. Their presence underlines the significance of the topics addressed and highlights the ongoing commitment of Türkiye to advancing women's rights and opportunities. Since its inception, the Women and Justice Summit has sought to address the most pressing issues affecting women globally, each year delving into a unique and critical theme. This year's theme, "Cultural Codes and Women," delves into the profound impact of cultural norms on women's identities, roles, and opportunities within various societies. By examining these codes, which serve as silent architects of societal perceptions, the summit brought to light how cultural narratives can either empower or constrain women. While some cultural norms uplift women by acknowledging their capabilities and contributions, others rooted in tradition may limit their roles, leading to marginalization and inequality.

This year's event convened a diverse group of ministers, thought leaders, policymakers, academics, journalists, civil society representatives, and activists from across the globe.

Together, we explored how cultural norms intersect with global movements for justice, human rights, and gender justice. Through open dialogue, shared experiences, and collaborative problem-solving, the summit aimed to inspire innovative solutions that honor cultural diversity while upholding the principles of universal human rights.

Cultural codes, which evolve alongside sociopolitical, historical, and religious developments, deeply influence gender roles and societal expectations. By closely analyzing these codes, we not only confront the challenges and barriers that women face but also uncover the opportunities for empowerment and social transformation. Through this summit, we reaffirmed the need to continually adapt cultural narratives in ways that foster inclusion, respect, and equality.

This volume brings together the speeches and discussions presented throughout the summit. It includes the opening addresses, the findings from the Leaders' Session, and the presentations delivered across various panels. These reflections, rooted in the lived experiences of women from around the world, offer valuable perspectives on how we can collectively address the cultural and societal norms that shape the future for women.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all the participants, speakers, and sponsors who contributed to this essential conversation. Your insights and experiences are critical to our collective mission of ensuring that cultural codes no longer serve as barriers but rather as pathways to empowerment for women everywhere.

We are pleased to present this book to the public, hoping it will continue to spark meaningful dialogue and action on the vital issues affecting women globally.

**Assoc. Prof. Saliha Okur Gmrkoglu**

Chair of the Board of KADEM



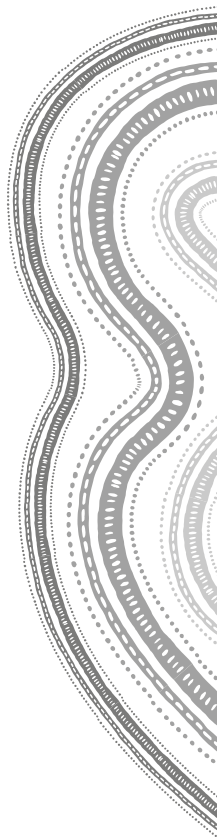


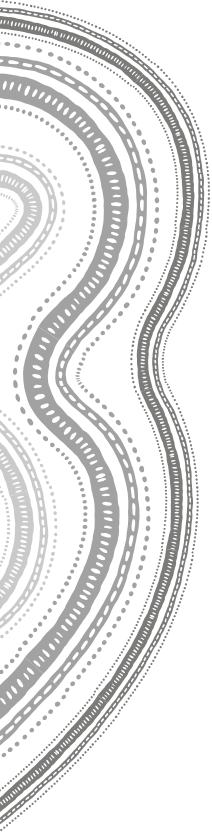


## **KADEM (The Women and Democracy Foundation)**

KADEM is a non-governmental and non-profit organization dedicated to promoting women's empowerment. Established on March 8, 2013, on International Women's Day, KADEM is committed to advocating for women's rights and seeking practical solutions to overcome the problems and obstacles preventing women from enjoying even the most fundamental rights.

One of our key initiatives is the *International Women and Justice Summit*, a biennial event held in collaboration with the Ministry of Family and Social Services. Each summit focuses on a specific theme. The inaugural summit in 2014 centered around "Women and Justice," while the second summit in 2016 emphasized the importance of "Speaking Up for Justice." In 2018, the third summit concentrated on "Family Empowerment", followed by the fourth summit in 2020, which addressed "Maintaining Humanity in the Digital Age." This year's fifth International Women and Justice Summit is being organized with the theme "Cultural Codes and Women."





## CULTURAL CODES AND WOMEN

Socially constructed perceptions of womanhood vary across cultures, shaping expectations and designating certain qualities as either normatively acceptable or unacceptable. These perceptions have led to the formation of standards of judgment, codes of conduct, and societal expectations. The construction of these perceptions, shaped by sociopolitical, historical, and religious-cultural influences, defines gender roles, reinforces social order, and reproduces cultural codes.

Concerning cultural codes, women from non-Western cultures may sometimes be misrepresented as “victims” or “passive followers” of their own culture. Alternatively, they may be idealized as paragons of their tradition or defenders against foreign influences. Cultures are, in fact, diverse and complex rather than monolithic, and reducing women to crude stereotypes undermines their agency and autonomy. Such oversimplified representations prioritize rigid and essentialist views of womanhood, obscuring the complexity of women’s lived experiences and realities on the ground.

The perceptions of womanhood vary significantly across different geographies and cultures, reflecting the richness and contextuality of norms and traditions of each society. However, there are also similarities in the expectations imposed on women among diverse cultures. Today’s global culture presents idealized models of womanhood that evolve over time and come with predefined standards.

Modern, urbanized women, for instance, are often expected to balance multiple roles as a well-groomed wife, a self-sacrificing mother, and a career professional. The tension between traditional norms and the changing definitions of freedom and a good life in contemporary society raises important concerns about authenticity and individual agency.

The expectations imposed by global culture may have an impact on women's self-perceptions and aspirations. There is a need to critically evaluate the extent to which these expectations curtail individual autonomy and perpetuate standardized and universalistic ideals. Local cultures often provide a repertoire of diverse experiences and perspectives, and there is a risk that these rich heritages may be eroded by the uniform and transplanted ideals inflicted by global cultural influences.

*The 5th International Women and Justice Summit*, organized by KADEM in cooperation with the Ministry of Family and Social Services, was held on November 4-5, 2022, under the theme of "Cultural Codes and Women." Our summit explored how diverse cultures and contemporary discourses shape cultural norms surrounding womanhood. It also provided a platform for women to share their life experiences of inclusion or exclusion in contributing to shape these norms. Throughout the event, three primary questions are addressed: How are the norms that negatively affect women's present and future constructed and disseminated? What kind of coping strategies and life skills do women develop in response to these norms, and how do they navigate their lives amidst them? Finally, the summit focused on identifying potential solutions to empower women and create fulfilling lives free from oppression.

*The 5th Women and Justice Summit*, graced by the presence of H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of the Republic of Türkiye, and First Lady H.E. Emine Erdoğan, commenced with the speech delivered by H.E. the President. This was followed by protocol

speeches from Derya Yanık, the Minister of Turkish Family and Social Services, and Dr. Saliha Okur Gümrükçüoğlu, Chairperson of the Board of KADEM. The first day's program included a "Leaders' Session", during which authorities from various countries engaged in discussions concerning national and international policies and initiatives to address relevant challenges.

The second day of the summit featured parallel sessions in two separate halls. These sessions focused on discussing advancements in relevant fields sharing successful case studies, observations, and potential remedies to address the current challenges that were identified in these sessions. The event was conducted in a bilingual format, allowing participants to deliver their papers in Turkish or English. Simultaneous translation services were available throughout the event.

The conference report represents an overview of the proceedings and the talks delivered during the summit. These presentations have been transcribed into text, and the transcripts underwent editorial review and condensation to ensure clarity and conciseness. This process ensured that the core content and intended meaning of the original speeches remained intact and effectively conveyed. Arabic and Turkish transcriptions have also been translated into English with editorial refinement. The views, opinions, and other information expressed in this report are not necessarily endorsed by KADEM unless explicitly put forth by officials of the association.

## **SESSION HIGHLIGHTS**

### **SESSION ONE: Woman as Subject**

Throughout history, gender-based societal perceptions have played a significant role in shaping social hierarchies and determining women's functions, opportunities, and capabilities. These perceptions, manifested as expectations and value judgments, have sometimes resulted in concrete disadvantages and grievances for women. These social constructions are reflected

in language, time, space, and the division of labor, restricting women to specific roles and societal spheres.

On a global scale, power structures and information systems have perpetuated forms of dominance that marginalize, objectify, and alienate women to serve their own agenda. Despite this, women have developed various strategies to persevere and create fair living conditions. Women have sometimes joined together to raise organizational awareness and collectively combat injustices.

This session addresses such inquiries: What does a fair social structure entail? How can women be empowered as subjects in civil society? What challenges lie ahead for the women's rights movement? Moreover, can this movement, by challenging male-dominated public spaces, lead to a re-conceptualization of civil society?

## SESSION TWO: Public Space and Working Life

### A) Women at Work

Economic power is now recognized as a key factor determining women's societal standing. In many countries, women face disadvantages in terms of accessing social security, employment, and education. On the other hand, the norms surrounding professional womanhood are creating different social perceptions and their own marginalized others.

Throughout this session, these questions are addressed: What specific norms influence women's position in the workforce today, and what factors contribute to their vulnerability? What measures could be taken to enhance both the quality and quantity of women's participation in the workforce? In what areas and stages should support be provided to empower women economically? Furthermore, how can a balance be achieved between women's professional and family life?

## **B) Public Space and Market Rules**

The concept of an ideal womanhood undergoes constant redefinition as it perpetuates itself through everyday actions. Some ideals are linked to personality traits, while others pertain to physical appearance and are situated within consumption models that endorse certain lifestyles. The market economy, with its ability to capitalize on everything, supports this production, leaving women who do not conform to these models marginalized and subject to othering. Moreover, in many cultures, the public sphere still revolves around androcentrism, a male-centric ideal subject, which poses various challenges for women, particularly those in positions of power.

This session explores significant questions: How do the seemingly differentiated domains like everyday life and the public sphere collaborate to construct, reinforce, and uphold norms of womanhood within social reality? What challenges do women encounter in their public and professional lives, and how do they overcome them? What mechanisms are necessary to protect and support women in the workplace? How do women who forge untrodden paths succeed in their professional endeavors?

## **SESSION THREE: New Lifestyles and the Construction of Culture**

### **A) The Visible and Invisible Actors of Modern Times**

The media, encompassing traditional and interactive forms, along with the entertainment industry, have become powerful channels for shaping societal norms around womanhood, influencing both market forces and power structures. In pluralist democracies, the media can empower people by giving them a voice and providing them with information, education, and entertainment. On the other hand, the media can also perpetuate paternalistic perceptions of womanhood by normalizing derogatory, discriminatory, and offensive female representations, instrumentalizing violence, and imposing unrealistic standards for the female body.

Consequently, women frequently find themselves physically, financially, and emotionally exhausted as they endeavor to meet a multitude of unrealistic expectations. These demands encompass a range of areas, including but not limited to maintaining a balanced diet, engaging in sports, adhering to beauty standards, indulging in conspicuous consumption, pursuing career ambitions, and conforming to the new norms of housewifedom.

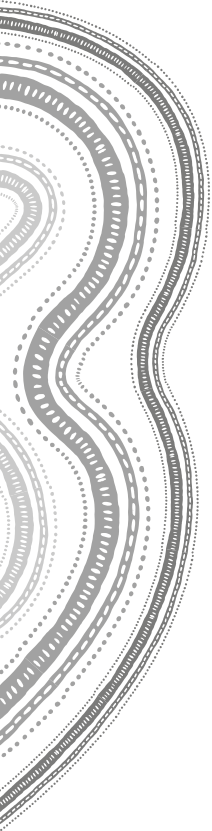
This session explores crucial questions: How do contemporary lifestyles impact existing gender norms? How do these lifestyles ensure their legitimacy and social acceptability? Is this rapid social transformation an opportunity or a limitation for women? How are women's experiences shaped in diverse cultures? What should women-friendly media look like?

## **B) Pictures of Womanhood**

Visual and audio-visual arts serve as projections of the reality surrounding them. As their influence and popularity grow, they become integral to the creation of mainstream narratives. Therefore, it can be argued that these art forms are shaped by imaginings about women throughout different geographies and cultures, and they actively contribute to the formation and evolution of such imaginings. On the other hand, these realms of discourse can challenge the de facto definitions of womanhood or transform them through alternative forms of expression and agency.

This session delves into the inquiries and issues surrounding this topic, raising questions such as: How do women relate to art? In what manner do visual and auditory art forms create and transform images and norms of womanhood? How does art criticism intersect with women's activism?





## OPENING SPEECHES

**Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**

*President of the Republic of Türkiye*

The subject of justice concerning women encompasses a vast array of discussions, spanning from the past to the present and future. Cultural codes, which vary greatly across societies, shape perceptions of women, creating a diverse landscape ripe for exploration. These differences significantly influence the language and practices of women's movements around the world, ultimately impacting how women are perceived across diverse cultures.

However, the rise of global interconnectedness through communication technologies has sparked concerns about a homogenization of the perception of women, eroding the diversity inherent in various cultural contexts. The dominant influence of Western civilization, particularly its mold of womanhood, exerts a universalizing pressure on societies worldwide. This pressure often manifests as a demand for uniform political, social, cultural, and economic roles for women.

This imposition is reinforced by the migration of populations from rural to urban areas, where shared media channels influence lifestyle choices and aspirations across diverse backgrounds. Deviations from these dominant cultural norms lead to a global lynching. The social and cultural impact of social media on women's issues is particularly strong. As a result, tackling these issues requires a multifaceted approach, extending beyond traditional

scientific research and civil society activism to involve all of humanity.

Despite the image the developed countries project outwardly, it is essential to acknowledge that they still face significant challenges in areas such as femicide, domestic violence, and discrimination. We cannot tolerate any form of violence against women, especially the horrific act of sex-based loss of life. Likewise, it is unjustifiable for those who portray our country as a hub of violence against women and rampant femicide to conceal the deep-seated problems and moral decay within their own societies. Unfortunately, distorted and misguided dogmas that victimize women continue to exist in developed countries and all over the world. However, to create a just, equitable, and sustainable society, we must critically examine these distorted assumptions. This requires moving beyond all forms of fanaticism, even those that appear under the guise of modernity. A rigorous and unbiased examination is essential, and it has the potential to reveal valuable insights that will guide us towards a better future.

As we have consistently emphasized, a world that excludes women renounces the potential contributions of half of humanity. This exclusionary perspective contradicts the principles inherent in nature, our faith, and the dynamics of life itself. Those who alienate women, beginning with the family structure, and involve them in deviant movements inflict the greatest harm upon women. We firmly believe that any area devoid of women's involvement hinders the attainment of beneficial outcomes for humanity and impedes sustainable development. Guided by this understanding, we firmly implement policies aimed at empowering women. We are confident that, with the unwavering support of women, we will achieve even greater success in various realms, ranging from politics to the economy. We will continue to work toward the same purpose as we have rectified past deficiencies, disruptions, and mistakes through revolutionary transformations for our nation and its women. Our commitment to this struggle remains resolute,

owing to our faith, civilization, culture, and, above all, our status as the most honorable of all beings: humans.

Through our extensive efforts and diverse range of services, we strive to address all facets of life and enhance the well-being of all our fellow citizens. These efforts have been made possible thanks to the remarkable progress recorded by Türkiye through democratic and developmental advancements. This progress allows us to look towards the future with optimism and confidence. One of the most commendable accomplishments during this process has been the revolutionary strides taken to enhance the rights and freedoms of women. Significant changes have occurred in societal mindsets and attitudes, accompanied with a thorough revision of our legal framework, starting with the Constitution. To demonstrate this commitment to equality, Article 10 now enshrines the principle that "Men and women have equal rights. The State must ensure that this equality exists in practice."

We further strengthened our commitment by introducing a constitutional provision that explicitly clarifies: "Measures taken for this purpose shall not be interpreted as contrary to the principle of equality." This amendment allows for the implementation of positive discrimination policies. Before coming into power, we had already promised our nation that we would address violence against women most effectively. In 2005, we enacted substantial legal reforms, marking the most significant advancements in our history. These reforms have significantly curtailed honor killings through increased penalties for such crimes.

Moreover, we have taken critical steps to combat domestic violence, violence against women, and sexual assault. We have also outlawed sex-based wage gaps and termination based on sex. To further empower mothers, we have implemented programs that support and protect them throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing, including financial assistance. Enhancing the conditions for working women and improving their rights, such

as maternity leave and breastfeeding support, have expanded the impact of our efforts in this domain. Our services targeting disabled individuals and older adults have primarily benefited women, who have acted as both direct recipients and caregivers. Acting Law No. 6284 to Protect Family and Prevent Violence against Women in 2012 is another crucial reform in this sphere. The latest judicial reform package has expanded the scope of crimes against spouses to encompass offenses committed by former spouses.

Besides, we have formulated and implemented four national action plans to prevent violence against women. The current action plan, covering the years 2021-2025, aims to safeguard women not only from physical violence but also from assaults on their honor and dignity. Through the Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers (ŞÖNİMs), established across all eighty-one provinces in Türkiye, we have served one million citizens to date. The Women's Emergency Support Application (KADES) has been instrumental in enabling swift intervention by authorities in cases of violence against women and children. Additionally, electronic monitoring bracelets, integrated with probation strategies, offer further protection for female victims of violence. This system's success has been recognized as a best European practice by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean.

Family courts have been established to ensure the resolution of domestic cases by specialized judges. In the Grand National Assembly, we have launched the Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, providing a permanent platform within the legislative body. Our development plans have been devised with an understanding that promotes increased participation of women in the professional sphere while also improving the quality and quantity of services designed to benefit women. We have removed obstacles for girls at all levels of education, resulting in remarkable progress in their schooling rates and employment opportunities. As a testament to our efforts, the number of female university students has now surpassed that of male students.

We support female entrepreneurs and women's cooperatives through grants and offer additional credit opportunities to enterprises employing women. For the first time in our history, female employment has reached approximately one-third of total work. Women's representation in politics has also been compared to its highest level in the history of the Republic, with over 17 percent of MPs being women. These efforts, among numerous others, demonstrate our commitment to raising the living standards for women across all aspects of life, as they rightfully deserve.

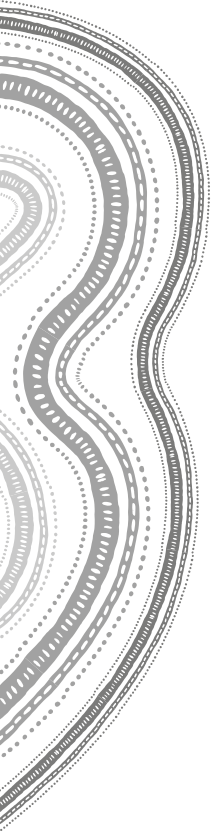
Our women have been among the most affected by the hostility directed at pious groups in our country, which was particularly pronounced during a specific period in our national history. Our women, who were denied education, barred from employment, and excluded from the public sector, were oppressed in the name of modernity. Were these women deemed unworthy of anything beyond toiling in the fields or performing menial cleaning tasks? Indeed, we witnessed the hardships endured by our women, who were pushed around in university corridors, denied access to high school entrances, and even banned from entering certain public buildings, let alone pursuing employment. The unjust treatment of women for their choice to wear headscarves, including instances of forced removal, has become a dark chapter in our country's history. The most concrete outcomes of our struggle against military tutelage can be clearly seen in the lives of these women, who are no longer subject to such oppression or injustice in any sphere of life, be it education or employment.

While introducing a climate of freedom to our country, which seemed unimaginable twenty-five years ago, I encountered numerous challenges, including the threat of party closure. Our nation is well aware of these struggles. Recently, the leader of a political party, who symbolized tutelage and fascism throughout these struggles, reignited the headscarf issue concerning women. It is the most natural right of women to decide whether to cover their heads. Just as fundamental rights encompass breathing

air, drinking water, dressing according to one's preferences, and practicing religious beliefs, so too should the freedom for women to choose head coverings based on their convictions be respected. This right should not necessitate legal regulations in the Constitution or other laws. The presence of hijab-wearing individuals across public institutions – judges, prosecutors, policewomen, soldiers, governors, and academics at all levels – demonstrates that allowing women to express their faith through head coverings does not impede societal progress. In fact, Türkiye's current state of peace and tranquility underscores this point. It is a testament to the possibility of positive change while respecting religious freedom.

Building a stronger future for our country requires leading the way and paving the path forward. We had hoped the distressing scenes and debates of the past were relics of a bygone era. Unfortunately, recent disputes reveal a persistent and harmful mindset we hoped had long been eradicated. To battle this, we now propose a constitutional guarantee. We demonstrated our sincerity by sharing it with all parliamentary parties. I even further suggested, "If you are sincere, we shall have a referendum and ask our people if we cannot resolve this issue in the parliament. Our people tell us the right thing to do. Let's ask our nation and see what they have to say." However, there is a noticeable hesitation to engage the public in consultation, as certain parties are reluctant to confront the potential results of the ballot boxes.

If we can build broad public support for our proposal, it will significantly benefit both women and our country. We aim to achieve a lasting solution through constitutional amendments in order to relieve our country of the shame associated with discussing such matters. Having broken free from the constraints of one-party fascism, we have successfully transformed our country into what it is today. As part of our "Century of Türkiye" program, we are committed to working together with all our citizens to address the challenges faced by all women in Türkiye, (regardless of attire).



## Derya Yanık

*Minister of the Turkish Family and Social Services*

Türkiye has made a significant progress in advancing human rights over the last two decades. The country has experienced improvements in welfare and overall quality of life. Embracing the principle of welfare state, Türkiye has established a social service system that prioritizes the equitable distribution of generated wealth across society. Women are a vital focus group benefiting from these initiatives. It is crucial to acknowledge that women's rights are an integral part of human rights, which are indispensable, inalienable, and inalienable. Within the realm of women-specific activities, our Ministry's priority objectives include ensuring equal access to rights and opportunities across all spheres of life. The key focus areas encompass empowering women individually and socially, providing enhanced educational opportunities, facilitating active participation in decision-making processes, and fostering increased economic contribution through female employment and entrepreneurship.

The prevention of all forms of discrimination and violence against women, which remains an urgent issue in Türkiye and worldwide, occupies a central place on our agenda. In line with a zero-tolerance approach to violence, we implement policies targeting victims as well as perpetrators of violence separately. Efforts are made to reach every woman in Türkiye by conducting door-to-door visits, and ensuring access to social services and welfare. These visits serve as an opportunity to introduce women to the services provided by the Ministry, address any existing challenges,

and make referrals to other government bodies when necessary. Through these comprehensive endeavors, we aim to ensure that the government is able to reach every woman, leaving no woman feeling isolated or helpless.

Türkiye stands out with its unique historical and cultural background. Inspired by this robust and deeply-rooted civilization, Türkiye's path forward has been defined, albeit not without significant struggles. These struggles have included challenging the status quo, overcoming military tutelage, and confronting unjust stereotypes and prejudices. Nonetheless, tireless efforts have been made to surmount these obstacles, and this commitment to progress persists. Every man and woman continue to fulfill their duties without differentiating between major or trivial tasks.

It is essential to acknowledge the indispensable role of women in a nation's progress. The contributions of mothers are equally significant to those of fathers in raising children. Just as a child's healthy development depends on the presence of both parents, countries cannot thrive and progress successfully without the participation of women. To build a happy and prosperous society, equitable support must be extended to all members of the community. This perspective reinforces the importance of women and aligns with our enduring goal of "strong women, strong family, strong Türkiye."

Societies that fail to recognize and respect women, who play an enormous role in shaping and preserving culture, encounter challenges in completing their development. Women today assume roles specific to the modern era while their traditional responsibilities remain intact. This reality is experienced by women actively participating in contemporary life. Urban women, in particular, are expected to juggle multiple roles, including that of a career-driven professional, a well-groomed wife, and a devoted mother. Women often endure an unsustainable work pace to meet these expectations, resulting in imbalances between multifaceted commitments and responsibilities.



In this context, it is essential to introduce arrangements that facilitate women's professional lives and encourage shared household responsibilities among family members. Accordingly, Türkiye intensifies its efforts to empower women and girls while striving to remove obstacles hindering their chosen life paths, irrespective of their cultural background, age, or profession. We aspire to ensure that the courses of all hardworking women who contribute through their labor and dedication remain free of obstacles.

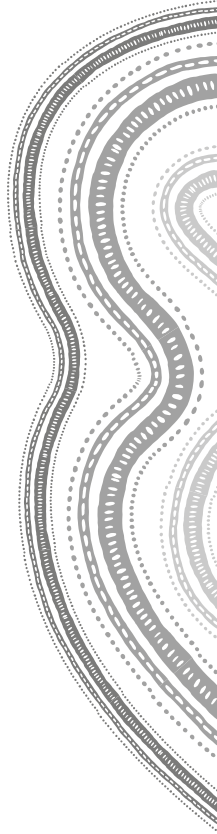
## **Dr. Saliha Okur Gümrükçüođlu**

*Chairperson of the Board of KADEM*

KADEM, a women's association established in 2013, has been firmly dedicated to advocating for women's rights. Guided by "the principles of equality in existence and equity in responsibility", our organization strives to foster a safe society and a fair future where women can live with dignity. By addressing discrimination in various realms such as education, healthcare, business, and politics, KADEM endeavors to ensure women's unhindered presence in all sectors. Central to its mission is the pursuit of equal opportunities and balanced participation for women in social life.

Recognizing the lack and insufficiency of available resources in the field of Women's Studies, KADEM focuses on conducting scholarly research and contributing to the existing literature. This dedication is manifested through the publication of the Journal of Women's Studies biannually. Rights advocacy is a core value of our organization. It empowers individuals, particularly abused children and women who have experienced violence, by providing them with legal support. This is part of our comprehensive effort to address the diverse needs of women. In essence, KADEM vigorously opposes rights violations and all forms of violence.

Over the past nine years, KADEM has implemented numerous projects with several ongoing initiatives. Notable endeavors include the "Women in Innovation" project, which supports female entrepreneurs; the "Job for the Future"



project, dedicated to empowering young girls who have grown up under state protection; and the "Women Support Center", which contributes to the well-being of women. It is worth mentioning the diverse range of activities organized through KADEM Art, including competitions, academic congresses, and international summits, as well as the initiatives carried out by its representative offices. With a cohesive team united by a shared vision and ambitious aspirations, KADEM collaborates with its media, legal, academic, and business boards, fifty-three representative offices, the Young KADEM team, volunteers, and members.

Committed to building a comprehensive and inclusive organization that empowers all women in Türkiye, regardless of their background, beliefs, or lifestyle choices, KADEM embarked on this journey to counter the problem of monolithic representation of women in Türkiye. KADEM undertakes a rights-based struggle that does not pit men and women against each other but emphasizes "the principle of equality in existence." KADEM deems any ideas, systems, or traditions contradicting this principle as human rights violations. It embraces universal human values across cultures and asserts that discriminatory practices stemming from culturally imposed norms should not diminish women's worth as human beings. As a pioneering women's association in its region and a global exemplar, KADEM prioritizes amplifying the voices of more women, shaping a brighter future for Türkiye, and eliminating obstacles that hinder women's collaboration with men in building a shared "Turkish century."

The theme of this year's summit, "Cultural Codes and Women", has been selected to address some fundamental issues. We aim to explore how conceptions of womanhood are shaped in diverse cultures and the purposes they serve. Additionally, we seek to understand the adverse effects of certain norms on women's present and future, along with the life skills women cultivate to withstand discriminatory norms and assert their rightful presence. Throughout the summit, we will delve into the influence of cultural

codes on women and society, endeavoring to find answers to these and numerous other inquiries. Throughout history, every community has developed its own culture, which in turn has shaped definitions of womanhood and the roles women play within those societies. The various definitions of the ideal woman across different geographical and historical contexts have given rise to value judgments, codes of conduct, and expectations. Cultural norms can also lead to rights violations, victimization, and practices that undermine women's dignity, sometimes entirely excluding them from social participation. Historical examples abound: Medieval witch hunts condemned women as sinners, 16th century Europe deemed them non-human, and traditional Indian culture ostracized widows. These instances highlight how cultural codes, across East and West, can disadvantage women.

In present-day Türkiye, practices such as honor killings and bride exchanges between families have fortunately diminished, yet some patterns *continue* hinder equal opportunities. These include factors such as early marriages occurring as young as thirteen years old in certain regions, girls leaving school earlier than boys, girls trailing behind in social activity and sports, the normalization of sex-based violence by certain groups, societal biases against female divorcees in comparison to male divorcees, and the prevalent inclination for men to be favored over women in decision-making processes. As observed in numerous European countries, women in both public and private sectors face wage disparities for comparable work. Furthermore, in many nations, women experience financial loss during pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. In some parts of the world, women are even barred from places of worship. Modern urban women are also expected to conform to unrealistic beauty standards, slimness, and perfection. In South Korea, for instance, women are frequently denied employment opportunities due to non-compliance with beauty standards, and sometimes even facing pressure to undergo aesthetic surgery.

In general, these global norms of womanhood standardize and subjugate women, fostering dependence on others while prescribing criteria for their behavior, appearance, attire, and lifestyles. Considering these circumstances, a pressing question arises: "How can women safeguard their nature, uniqueness, and freedom amidst the imposition of idealized definitions of womanhood?" It is noteworthy that while the role of urban women in traditional societies was often limited to domestic duties and caretaking, contemporary urban women are expected to be educated, work, and generate income in addition to shouldering their customary obligations. Over time, women's roles and responsibilities have expanded both within families and society, yet a fair distribution of tasks within the family remains elusive for women.

Recognizing the impact of culture on women's experiences, this summit will delve into diverse perceptions of womanhood. Through our speakers' life experiences, we will explore both the formation and challenges to these perceptions. Our objective is to identify strategies to empower women to lead productive and peaceful lives free from coercion. Serving as a multicultural platform for exchanging ideas, the summit will introduce novel avenues for discussion related to these pertinent topics.

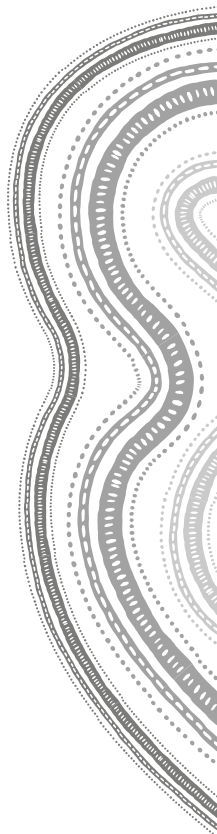
## LEADERS' SESSION: TOWARDS MORE INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES: WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Derya Yanık

*Minister of the Turkish Family and Social Services*

The Ministry of Family and Social Services acknowledges the significance of collaborating with civil society organizations, academia, the media, and other public institutions to advance social services and policies. This cooperation is crucial in formulating accurate and effective policies to address humanitarian issues. Embracing multiple perspectives allows us to offer the most suitable solutions to these challenges. The Women and Justice Summit, held under the central theme of “*Cultural Codes and Women*,” is an excellent example of our commitment to fostering dialogue. This panel, dedicated to examining the roles and representations of women in different cultures, aims to broaden our horizons and provide valuable insights.

With the rapid advancement of communication technologies and the proliferation of the online world, individuals are now simultaneously confronted with an influx of cultural information. The steady stream of data accentuates cultural and class disparities, potentially leading to mental and emotional confusion. We firmly believe that preserving one’s cultural heritage contributes to the richness and diversity of our global society.



Within this cultural tapestry, it is imperative to maintain a balance between men and women based on the principles of justice and equity. In some cultures, natural differences between men and women are interpreted in ways that undermine equality and justice. Historically, a distorted balance of power between men and women has been heavily influenced by scholarly ideas. The perception of women as inherently flawed –sinful, untrustworthy, or incapable– fueled the belief that societal control over women was necessary. This perceived need for control became pervasive, hindering women’s participation in society across the globe. Unfortunately, this expedient and pragmatistic process led to exploiting women’s productivity free of charge.

Today, the dynamic representation of women in public and social life is considered an inalienable tenet of democracy. Democracy safeguards fundamental rights and freedoms, particularly women’s rights, and is indispensable for human and social development. The values that can rejuvenate cities and nations can flourish within this democratic and inclusive environment.

Our efforts to cultivate such an inclusive atmosphere have a dual focus: We aim to preserve and nurture the ecosystem we have established over the two decades, and on the other hand, we strive to avert humanitarian crises stemming from conflicts, terrorism, the consequences of climate change, natural disasters, and global migration movements. Unfortunately, the current situation in Ukraine is a stark example of these challenges. Under the leadership of our President, Türkiye is actively engaged in humanitarian diplomacy, working tirelessly to mitigate the adverse effects of war on innocent civilians.

Similarly, women in Syria, Palestine, and East Turkestan continue to face obstacles in realizing their most basic human rights. My Palestinian counterpart would have been physically present at this summit, but due to unforeseen circumstances in her country, we will only have the opportunity to hear her through video conference.

In many parts of Africa, women and children struggle to access clean water as a result of adverse climate conditions, impeding their ability to meet even the most basic needs, such as health, education, and safety. Discrimination against women based on their beliefs persists in Europe, often considered the birthplace of advanced democracy, as well as in various countries worldwide. While international human rights documents guarantee equal dignity and rights for all, often a gap exists between theory and reality. These documents emphasize equal opportunities and access to fundamental freedoms, free from discrimination.

The progress of the world and the development of nations can only be realized when fundamental rights are ensured, and all segments of society actively engage in social life, with opportunities distributed fairly. Our primary emphasis is on enhancing the social standing of women in our country, eradicating all forms of discrimination against them, and promoting their equal involvement in social, political, and economic realms, along with decision-making processes. We firmly believe that men and women complement each other and are essential elements for achieving social justice and harmony. The notion that a strong family begets a strong society can only be realized when the disparity of opportunities between men and women is eliminated. To this end, we have bolstered our legal and social service infrastructure to ensure equality in rights and responsibilities, safeguard and enhance women's rights, combat violence against women, and elevate women's social status in all domains.

Today, as the Ministry of Family and Social Services, we provide systematic, permanent, and accessible services across all eighty-one provinces of our country to support and empower victims of violence. We go beyond legal reforms to create lasting change. Our comprehensive approach includes social awareness initiatives and perpetrator rehabilitation and education. This holistic strategy fosters sustainable solutions to eradicate violence.



Over the past twenty years, Türkiye has continuously enhanced its measures in the field of human rights, particularly in the realm of women's rights. Since 2007, we have implemented "National Action Plans on Combating Violence against Women" along with the principle of "Zero Tolerance to Violence." In collaboration with the Ministries of Justice, Interior, National Education and Health, and the Presidency of Religious Affairs, we develop and implement policy documents to combat violence against women. We remain committed to not only tackling violence but also improving the status of women. We firmly believe that empowered women create strong families, which, in turn, contribute to robust societies aligned with the principles of human dignity.

History has taught us that societies that marginalize women and dismiss their victimization do not thrive. When we look back at our past, particularly the early Turkic communities, we discover that compared to their contemporaries, women in early Turkic communities enjoyed a remarkably positive status. Historical accounts depict them as active participants in social life, standing alongside men. This tradition of female agency continues in Anatolian cultural heritage, where women symbolize well-being and action. Their dynamic involvement across various domains, their productivity, and their versatile roles have been woven into the very fabric of our culture.

The recurring presence of the "hands-on-hips" ("eli belinde") figure in our tangible cultural artifacts exemplifies this cultural heritage. Unlike the medieval Western mindset, which debated for centuries whether women possessed souls, the earliest Turkic inscriptions mention the name of Ilterish Khagan, the leader of the nation, together with his wife, El Bilga Khatun. In the stories of Dede Korkut, an ancient storyteller, women emerge as household heads and significant decision-makers in both social and familial spheres. Understanding these historical foundations helps us comprehend why it was never challenging for Turks to embrace a religion preached by a Prophet who, out of respect, stood up to welcome his young daughter, Fatima, when she visited him.

Throughout history, it has been the wisdom of women that has bridged cultures. *Bacıyan-ı Rum* (Anatolian Sisters) organization, originating from Muslim Turkish culture, epitomized the remarkable solidarity of women based on sisterhood. *Bacıyan-ı Rum*, within the context of its time (12th and 13th centuries), constituted a momentous step in women's participation in social life. Another significant symbol from our cultural heritage that shaped our identity is the purple coat worn by Turkish nomadic women. Women experiencing marital problems symbolically declare their need for assistance by donning the purple coat. Subsequently, a natural system of social sanction comes into play. The husband of a woman wearing the purple jacket becomes ostracized by society, and even remarriage becomes challenging for him. The purple coat has been documented as one of the important symbols of the fight against domestic violence in our traditional records. Today, through our Ministry's initiatives concerning women, we draw inspiration from these examples rooted in our cultural heritage.

Women assume prominent roles in shaping and reshaping culture, norms, social roles, and their transmission to future generations in all societies. They also contribute to countries' achievement of sustainable development goals. Today, women's expertise and social prominence allow them to unlock their potential across various domains: commerce, politics, culture and arts, education, and health. This progress demands their increased participation in decision-making. However, despite their substantial influence in building and preserving cultures, women still face obstacles in the social sphere. Specific cultural norms and perceptions often hinder their equitable access to opportunities. Irrespective of their notable efforts, women often need help accessing and enjoying these opportunities thoroughly.

Therefore, we must continue to pave the way for women in all sectors and empower them to shape their own narratives and journeys. Through knowledge and experience sharing, innovative approaches, and novel ideas, we strive to foster an environment

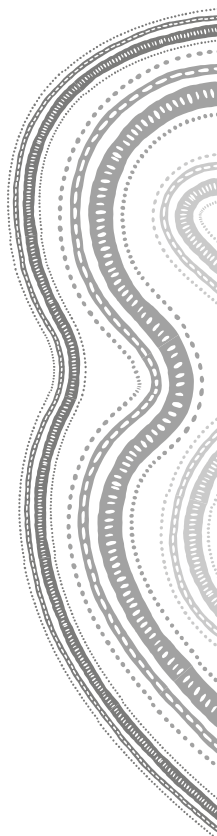
where women can be role models in high-value domains. We are dedicated to encouraging more women to pursue careers in science and technology. Drawing strength from our Constitution and laws, we continually endeavor to support not only women but also all marginalized groups, including children, individuals with disabilities, victims, the oppressed, and senior citizens. We firmly believe that Türkiye can only achieve peace, strength, happiness, and prosperity by adhering to the principle of leaving no one behind and embracing an all-encompassing understanding. Indeed, our aspirations for social welfare extend beyond our own country; we aspire to contribute to the well-being of the entire world. We are ready to collaborate with all those who share our mindset, as we are actively doing so.

**Dr. Kaoutar Krikou**

*Algerian Minister of National Solidarity, Family, and the Status of Women*

Throughout Algerian history, women have played significant roles alongside men during pivotal moments and times of upheaval. They have exhibited unwavering dedication and made substantial sacrifices in service of their homeland. The annals of history abound with accounts of Algerian women's enduring heroism and extraordinary accomplishments. Algerian women are achieving remarkable academic success and taking on positions of authority and responsibility across diverse fields. From soldiers and doctors to ministers, presidents of the Council of State, parliamentarians, ambassadors, and judges, their presence is felt in all corners of Algerian society.

On International Women's Day, the President of the Republic of Algeria honored female entrepreneurs and investors who shattered barriers, defied challenges, and built successful ventures. This act symbolizes the new pro-women vision of political leadership. The achievements and contributions of Algerian women would not have been possible without the political determination to combat all forms of gender discrimination, a core principle enshrined in the 2020 constitution. Moreover, legal initiatives have been launched in both the political and social arenas to promote equality, prevent discrimination against women and girls, and enhance women's economic empowerment. Algeria has also introduced a range of programs and measures to facilitate increased participation of women in the business world.



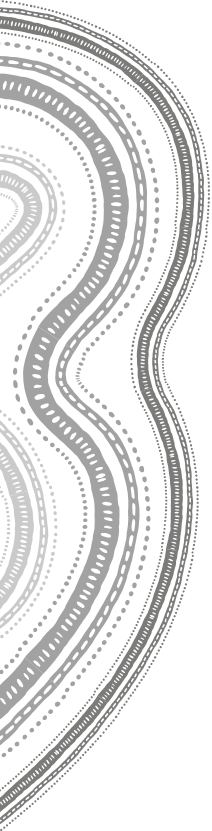
The struggle and sacrifices made by Algerian women in the quest to regain national sovereignty have played a crucial role in complementing the efforts of men in establishing and strengthening national independence. Consequently, Algerian women have assumed important positions in various aspects of public life and have become role models. The upward mobility, growing influence, and increasing significance of Algerian women in public life have become a focal point of state policy, which embraces the principles of gender equality and equal opportunities. Algeria has ratified various international human rights conventions and agreements in pursuit of women's rights and development, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals. The principle of gender equality is recognized as an international goal in the global literature. As a testament to the importance of equal opportunity for justice, all countries have agreed upon the 2030 vision embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals, promoting the slogan "Planet 50-50."

Algeria has enshrined the principle of gender equality in both its political and professional spheres. Legislation and local election laws guarantee women equal opportunities, while labor laws ensure equal pay and paid maternity leave. This policy has also enabled Algerian women, both within the country and abroad, to secure pension rights. President Abdelmadjid Tebboune recently affirmed this right through a decree published in the Official Gazette. This reformed legal framework has demonstrably increased Algerian women's presence and influence across various domains. Now holding key roles in ministries, national and judicial bodies, and even the military, women are acting as both innovators and key contributors to Algerian life.

Algeria actively promotes women's participation in national development, recognizing them as essential partners. This encouragement extends across various fields. This has been achieved through programs promoting female entrepreneurship, providing support to rural women, and encouraging homemakers

to engage in social life. Productive families have also been incentivized to contribute to projects focused on food security, judicial stability, and local economic development. Algeria's focus on quality and accessible education for all citizens and its measures to strengthen national solidarity for families in need have yielded these achievements. As a result, girls currently constitute approximately 65 percent of graduates from institutes and universities each year. Prominent Algerian women who have demonstrated leadership and excellence in science and culture have received numerous international accolades. In the realm of commerce, women entrepreneurs account for more than 8 percent of the total number of registered tradespeople. We aim to enhance the productivity of Algerian women and women worldwide, as we hold great confidence in their exceptional qualities.

Algeria's constitution and legal system enshrine the principles of social justice and gender equality. This commitment has ensured the protection of women's rights since independence and fostered equal opportunities in education, employment, and other areas. An effective social policy framework further strengthens this aim by preventing marginalization. These institutional advancements align with the UN Vision 2030 sustainable development goals, which embrace inclusivity for all. Finally, I would like to underline the importance of peace and security in achieving development and establishing justice, particularly in implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, on women, security, and peace. I would also like to thank the distinguished and courageous women fighting against oppression worldwide.



## **Bahar Muradova**

*Chairperson of the Azerbaijan State Committee on Family, Women, and Children's Issues*

In the contemporary era, Azerbaijan has made significant contributions towards promoting global justice and women's empowerment, particularly for those who have faced injustices and various forms of aggression, including genocide. The women of our nation, who uphold the shared culture and values of Turkic nations, have played an essential role in preserving and developing our heritage over centuries. This summit provides a valuable platform for in-depth discussions on how national and global transformations impact women's lives. This allows us to confront contemporary challenges effectively and identify and resolve any inconsistencies or inaccuracies. Unfortunately, negative stereotypes about women persist all over the world, and this issue has already been comprehensively addressed in the initial part of the summit. For this reason, we must constantly challenge our existing attitudes towards women, recognizing that cultural codes can be a powerful foundation for progress.

The Azerbaijani state places great importance on safeguarding women's rights. It has implemented a comprehensive policy aimed at achieving gender equality and promoting women's equal participation in all spheres of social and public life. Presently, girls and women make up 50.5 percent of the students enrolled in general, secondary, and higher education institutions in Azerbaijan, reflecting a longstanding commitment to girls' education. This accomplishment is praiseworthy, as women have surpassed men's educational attainment by 0.5 percent.

Women are increasingly asserting their influence in the fields of health and science. Their participation in socioeconomic and political life is steadily rising, with increasing representation in parliament, municipalities, and emerging technical fields. The government has taken specific measures to facilitate women's participation in social and political life, particularly in rural areas, while improving their access to healthcare services. Traditional and digital media have the potential to contribute significantly to achieving gender equality as sources of both information and opinion. However, media portrayals of women can sometimes reinforce stereotypes that undermine their rights and create unfavorable situations in daily life. Therefore, it is essential to thoroughly discuss the need to pay special attention to the language used in journalism, adopt a gender-sensitive discursive approach in the media, and combat all forms of gender stereotypes.

Azerbaijan introduced a new Media Law that establishes a comprehensive legal framework to address these issues, with a specific focus on promoting equal representation of women and men in this field. As a result of such initiatives, by 2022, women had reached a representation of 43 percent among journalists and media workers, with men making up the remaining 57 percent. Civil society also plays a crucial role in combating negative stereotypes, and the Azerbaijani state values its collaboration with these organizations, engaging in joint projects.

Experience has shown that safeguarding women's rights necessitates reducing their economic dependence while increasing the representation of women in the labor market, managerial positions, business, and government. Official statistics from the previous year indicate that women's representation in decision-making bodies reached 21 percent in Azerbaijan. Additionally, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals aim to ensure equal opportunities at all stages of life, and there is still work to be done in this regard. Accordingly, Azerbaijan implements organizational mechanisms to enhance women's economic empowerment and increase their presence as small and medium-sized entrepreneurs.



For promoting gender equality, resource centers have been established in various regions to expand employment and freelancing opportunities for women. The enlargement of women entrepreneurs' networks and the establishment of associations positively impact this process. For instance, associations for female entrepreneurs and rural women in Azerbaijan support women-owned entrepreneurial and agricultural businesses, fostering their contributions to regional economic development. These mechanisms significantly address various violations of women's rights, particularly domestic violence. Azerbaijan enacted the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence in 2010, complemented by the 2020-2023 National Action Plan for Combating Domestic Violence, which allows for comprehensive and effective interventions in this area.

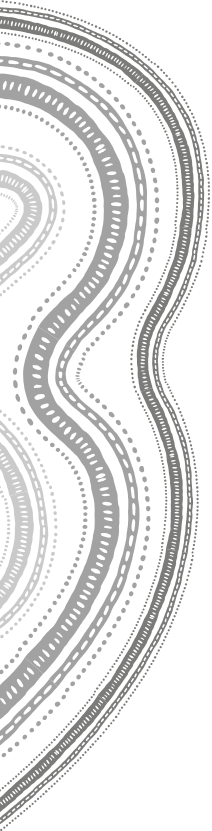
Another crucial aspect to highlight is the significance of local groups monitoring gender-based violence and violence against children, as well as the helpline and support services provided by both state and non-state organizations. The Social Services Agency ensures improved efficiency and accessibility of social services for female victims, including rehabilitation programs. Municipalities have established gender commissions to promote systematic and coordinated approaches to gender issues. Similarly, most state and private enterprises have designated gender focal points. Creating the "Gender Azerbaijan" electronic portal has further strengthened the coordination and interoperability of these initiatives, enhancing transparency in their activities. Additionally, guidelines and curricula on gender equality in public service have been developed.

Amidst the challenges of armed conflicts, it is crucial to recognize the intersection with violence against women. Such difficulties mark Azerbaijan's history. In a recent battle, Armenia pursued territorial expansion, leading to the Patriotic War in September 2020. Azerbaijan's resilience and support from Türkiye resulted in a historic victory, reclaiming the occupied territories. Armenia's

actions caused civilian casualties, including twenty-seven women killed and one hundred and one injured. A trilateral agreement in November 2020 ended the conflict, but Armenia violated commitments with another provocation in September 2022. Despite this, Azerbaijan remains dedicated to a peace treaty, upholding peace and stability.

Currently, Azerbaijan is engaged in restoration and construction work in the liberated territories to facilitate the return of internally displaced persons to their homes. Hundreds of thousands of women have been profoundly affected by thirty years of conflict and attacks, having lost their loved ones and endured immense suffering. Our ongoing efforts focus on restoring their rights and enhancing their resilience in the face of various traumas. We sincerely appreciate Türkiye's comprehensive engagement and support in this area as well.

When examining our individual histories, we encounter numerous challenges. It is essential to contemplate these challenges within the context of the prevailing national interests and remain open to contemporary developments while upholding our cultural values. Azerbaijan adheres to this approach as a multicultural nation open to progressive change. We emphasize the rights of women and mothers from the standpoint of justice, guided by laws and moral principles while remaining committed to our historical traditions. This stance aligns with the political path and state traditions established by Heydar Aliyev, the founding father of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan maintains a balanced approach to these critical matters as a nation that consistently advocates for territorial integrity, sovereignty, the rights and freedoms of individuals, and the preservation of security and identity.



## **Wafaa Abu Bakr Muhammad Al-Kilani**

*Minister of Social Affairs of Libya*

I firmly believe in women's transformative power and ability to shape promising and innovative policies for the betterment of their nations and humanity. To secure a brighter future for generations to come, we must pave the way for a world free from violence and war. This requires a new vision, and women's leadership in crafting a roadmap to achieve it. Their unique perspectives can be instrumental in dismantling the conflicts that plague our world and fostering a more peaceful future. Together, let us outline the intricate details of such a roadmap, standing shoulder to shoulder in our endeavor. Throughout this summit, we will address numerous issues that lay the groundwork for building the world we aspire to. This aspiration encompasses women's empowerment in education, healthcare, and decision-making processes, all crucial for societal progress.

The Government of National Unity has ardently incorporated gender concerns into its executive policies since its formation. As a result, issues related to women's empowerment serve as the cornerstone of numerous programs for Libya's future. Policies to support and promote women, girls, and families' well-being have been prioritized. Key ministries such as Foreign Affairs, Justice, Family and Social Services, and Tourism and Culture have been entrusted to women, alongside the Ministry of Women. In a short period, this has yielded numerous achievements, catering to the demands and aspirations of all Libyan women. One notable achievement is the establishment of a commission to incentivize productive families, leading to a

significant national project on women's economic empowerment. This project empowered women to enter specialized investment fields, create financial institutions, and lead impactful projects that contribute to the national economy.

As a result, women have made significant achievements in this area toward becoming economically independent. Particularly in Libya's rural regions, female-led business has developed, generating remarkable economic activity. Witnessing the positive impact of these endeavors on families in various regions, the government has introduced legislation to guarantee financial and social security for housewives and their children through grants. In this context, the Ministry of Family and Social Services has prioritized the immediate disbursement of grants to over 1.3 million housewives and adult daughters.

Given the current challenges to forming a government in Libya, I would like to emphasize the urgent need for the development of a women-led roadmap to address these obstacles. The women ministers of the Government of National Unity have proposed a timely emergency action plan. This plan aims to empower Libyan women to participate actively in the political process, strengthening their decision-making rights, coordination, and cooperation. This emergency action plan entails collaborative efforts of both women and men to prioritize national priorities. It also seeks to develop legal and institutional mechanisms that swiftly advance women's human capital, enhance their productivity within various state administrative units, and promote their representation in international forums.

Unfortunately, violence against women is a pervasive global phenomenon that often escalates during crises, conflicts, and natural disasters. For instance, the number of female victims of violence has increased since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. A report prepared by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, based on

data from thirteen countries, reveals that two out of every three women have experienced some form of violence during this period. Additionally, women have been disproportionately affected by food insecurity. The United Nations has designated November 25 as a day to combat violence against women, accompanied by a 16-day campaign from November 25 to December 10 (Human Rights Day). This campaign, operating under the theme "Unite to end violence against women", emphasizes awareness and the promotion of human rights within natural and social crises. Libyan women, civil society organizations, and governmental institutions actively participate in this campaign under the auspices of the Ministry of Family and Social Services. Last year, we illuminated the Red Castle, an iconic historical landmark in Tripoli, with an orange hue, the symbol of the fight against violence against women. Cities and villages united in adorning themselves in orange, garnering support and appreciation for this initiative. This year, we are preparing to reenact those days through numerous programs designed to remind women of their rights, combat all forms of violence against them, and encourage them to utilize the 24/7 emergency hotline for assistance and support.

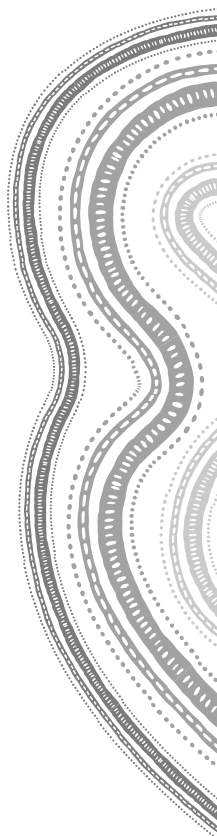
Libya has proposed a pioneering law recognizing victims of sexual assault. This law would grant them rights comparable to those of war victims and establish an emergency fund to address their needs. In a recent decree, the Government of National Unity has granted women convicted of political dissent and thought crimes during the revolution the same rights as male convicts. This builds on efforts by the previous Government of National Accord to secure justice and compensation for all victims of the clashes, with a particular focus on women who suffered harm. We express our deep appreciation to the Libyan women who continue to play a significant role in national reconciliation and rebuilding the country, fostering a future grounded in stability, justice, and equality.

## Masagos Zulkifli

*Singapore Minister of Social and Family Development*

I just came from Morocco. During my trip, I had the opportunity to visit the Caribbean University, which was established a millennium ago by a female entrepreneur. The Caribbean University exemplifies the significant contributions that women have made across the globe throughout history. However, in today's world, women face a multitude of challenges, often experiencing disproportionate hardships compared to men. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a stark reminder of these disparities. Thus, the conference's focus on cultural codes and women is essential and timely. I am delighted to share Singapore's perspectives and approach on this matter.

Achieving independence in 1965, Singapore is a young nation with a rich history. With a 96 percent literacy rate among women, Singapore has high literacy rates despite its youth. Moreover, 75 percent of women are employed, and women constitute 30 percent of our parliament, surpassing the international average of 25 percent set by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In the latest Human Development Report, Singapore ranks 7th globally regarding gender equality. This remarkable progress starkly contrasts the situation 50-60 years ago when only 50 percent of women above the age of 15 were literate. Shortly after gaining independence, Singapore took a significant step forward in 1961 by passing a seminal law known as the Women's Charter. This legislation established the principle of gender equality in marriage and provided safeguards for women's welfare in Singapore.



While Singapore has made substantial progresses in women's empowerment, our commitment to progress remains unwavering. Singapore published the White Paper on Singapore Women's Development earlier this year. This document functions as a proposal to the Parliament. Upon approval, it initiates a process of reporting our progress every five years thereafter. Notably, the White Paper resulted from extensive consultations with 6,000 male and female participants representing all segments of society. This comprehensive approach ensures that the government's actions align with the aspirations and expectations of our citizens regarding women's future roles.

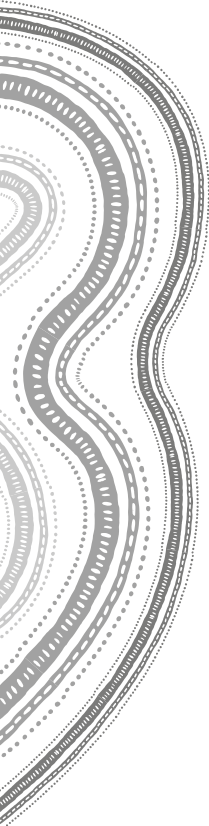
The White Paper particularly emphasizes equal opportunities for women in the workplace. While Singapore boasts the highest percentage of women CEOs globally, we acknowledge that women still face disadvantages in their career progression. Thus, the White Paper aims to collaborate with employers and unions, including legislative measures, to enhance workplace fairness.

Family is regarded as the cornerstone of Singaporean society. Discussions surrounding women center on how they can be supported within the family unit and how they may contribute to its development. The White Paper highlights the critical role of men in fostering an equal partnership between genders, acknowledging that men and women are partners in all aspects, including family life. Singapore actively institutionalizes flexible work arrangements, allowing men and women to share caregiving responsibilities within families. The burden of childcare and eldercare should not solely fall on women; rather, men should have equal participation in fulfilling these roles. The family occupies a central position in nurturing individuals, fostering a strong society, and inculcating values that prioritize respect for all, irrespective of gender.

Another significant concern is violence against women. Singapore has recently strengthened its response to domestic violence by increasing penalties for sexual offenses and establishing a coordinated framework involving police, social workers, and employers. This framework aims to address the challenges faced by women who experience violence within their homes or marriages. Moreover, we recognize the importance of education and have initiated efforts to teach children the values of respect and equality both at home and in schools, focusing on prevention rather than remediation.

The implementation of these policies facilitates Singapore's progression into a modern, open society. It necessitates a change in the perspectives from all stakeholders, with a particular emphasis on men, to better support and engage in caregiving responsibilities. Strengthening families through the utilization of each member's strengths ultimately contributes to a society characterized by mutual respect between men and women. *Role models are also significant role in inspiring* young entrepreneurs and career-oriented women, and successful women are actively involved in mentoring the next generation. These examples represent a fraction of the initiatives undertaken in Singapore, highlighting the government's commitment to overseeing and promoting the advancement of women in the country.





## **Dorothy Onesphoro Gwajima**

*Tanzanian Minister of Social Development, Gender, Women, and Special Groups*

Tanzania is actively tackling biased cultural norms that hinder women's full participation in leadership and decision-making roles. These initiatives draw strength from the Tanzanian Constitution, which guarantees equality, and respect, and prohibits gender discrimination. Tanzania recognizes that gender equality, equity, and women's empowerment are crucial pillars of inclusive societies. As a testament to this commitment, Tanzania has signed, ratified, and domesticated numerous international, continental, and regional agreements, conventions, treaties, and protocols on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Education is widely acknowledged as a key factor in achieving sustainable, inclusive, and meaningful liberation for women and girls in economic, political, social, and cultural spheres, as well as their full participation in leadership and decision-making positions. Recognizing this, under the leadership of Her Excellency Samia Suluhu Hassan, the first female President of the United Republic of Tanzania, the government implemented a free education policy from primary to high school levels. This policy ensures equal access to education for boys and girls, resulting in a remarkable achievement of equitable enrollment ratios

between the two genders. Furthermore, special measures are being taken to promote girls' participation in STEM fields. This includes establishing specialized science secondary schools for girls across all twenty-six regions of the country. These efforts aim to empower women in education, with a particular focus on STEM disciplines. Constitutional amendments in 2004 introduced an affirmative action provision guaranteeing women 30 percent of seats in parliament and 33 percent in local government councils. This commitment has led to an increase in the number of women holding leadership positions at all levels, including the historic appointments of the first female President and female Speaker of Tanzania. The proportion of women MPs has risen from 21.5 percent in 2005 to 37 percent in 2020, while the number of female judges has increased from 24 to 33 percent during the same period. The progress is also evident in the growing number of female ambassadors, from 9 in 2015 to 33 in 2020, among other notable achievements. Additionally, women now hold key cabinet positions, and last year saw the first-ever appointment of a female defense minister.

Despite these efforts, Tanzania still faces challenges. Harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation persist. Deeply rooted traditions and norms also place a heavier burden of household and caregiving duties on women. This hinders their opportunities for income-generating activities and their economic empowerment. Limited access and control over resources, such as land and productive assets, further restrict women's financial capacities. Despite progress, gender-based violence remains a serious concern, fueled by social norms. Tanzania's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment is evident in its active implementation of the Generation Equality Program alongside other initiatives.

A nationwide action plan is being carried out in Tanzania to stop violence against women and children. However, it is imperative to stress the necessity of male participation in removing cultural obstacles standing in the way of progress for women. Men's active involvement in breaking these barriers is essential if gender equality in decision-making is to be achieved.

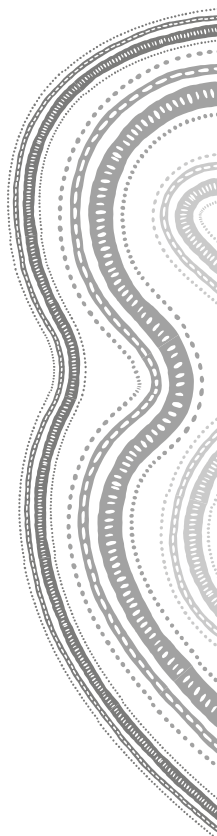
This includes speaking out against practices like female genital mutilation and unfair inheritance practices that disadvantage widows. By building a platform for common understanding and cooperation between men and women, we can work together to achieve gender equality.

**Dr. Amal Hamad**

*Palestinian Minister of Women's Affairs*

Palestine and its people have endured the oppressive effects of settler colonialism for many decades, resulting in not only occupation but also the erasure of their culture. Palestinian women, in particular, have suffered the occupying power's theft and appropriation of their cultural heritage. Palestinian women's rich traditions and crafts, such as their culinary expertise and traditional dressmaking, have been wrongly attributed to Israeli culture. Additionally, the cultivation of Palestinian lands through the hard work of Palestinians is now falsely credited to Israel's supposed land democratization efforts. These examples represent only a fraction of the ongoing cultural violations committed by Israel against the Palestinian people, with a specific impact on Palestinian women.

In addition to the external challenges of occupation, Palestinians face internal struggles within their communities due to the rise of extremism and radicalization. The widespread promotion of oppressive ideologies, particularly those rooted in religious extremism, can be partly blamed for this internal degeneration. These ideologies harm women and entrench patriarchal traditions and legislation. Palestine has inherited a complex legal framework stemming from various historical periods, including the British Mandate, Egyptian, Jordanian, and Israeli military orders. Consequently, laws are often perceived and interpreted differently based on individual beliefs and regional contexts. Today, the rise of extreme and radical movements has led to misconceptions and misinformation



about the amended laws aimed at protecting families, particularly women. It is crucial for the community to support and back central decisions to counter these misperceptions effectively.

Despite facing daunting challenges, Palestine has taken steps to protect women's rights by ratifying several treaties and conventions. To improve women's rights in the workplace and about family issues, amendments have been made to the penal code, the family protection bill, and other pieces of legislation. There have been initiatives to involve religious leaders in conversations on gender equality. Education is pivotal in molding young minds, with school curricula and extracurricular pursuits designed to cultivate a passion for the homeland and instill a sense of Palestinian identity. We have also revisited our school curricula to include a gender perspective. Colleges and universities have also introduced courses addressing human rights and gender equality.

These endeavors contribute to a proposed three-pronged approach to highlighting these challenges. Firstly, there is a need to advocate for a unified, modern, and revised Palestinian legislation that accurately represents the Palestinian identity. Second, engaging and educating communities, religious leaders, schoolteachers, and principals is crucial to increasing their understanding and knowledge of gender equality. Finally, mainstreaming gender in curricula, budgets, programs, strategies, and plans is necessary to ensure that gender equality is ingrained in all aspects of Palestinian society.

In conclusion, the efforts made by the international community to support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state are deeply appreciated. The road to achieving an independent Palestine, free from occupation and cultural appropriation, requires collective action and commitment to safeguarding the rights and empowerment of Palestinian women.

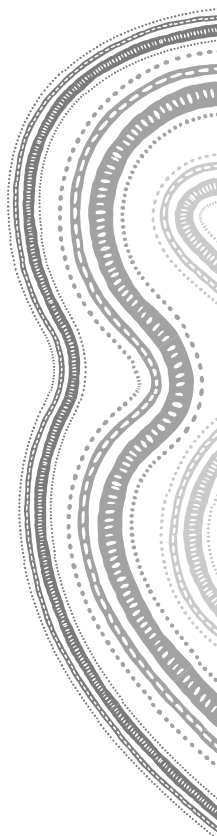
## SESSION I: WOMAN AS SUBJECT

**Fatima Gailani**

*Afghan Peace Negotiator, Women's Rights Activist*

When we reflect upon the situation of Afghan women, the prevailing image that comes to mind is one of immense suffering and hardship endured over the past forty-four years. As someone who has experienced life before the onset of war, I can testify to the drastic changes that have unfolded. Remarkably, Afghan women defied expectations by pursuing higher education in Türkiye over a century ago. I can still clearly recall, at the age of 68, the time I saw the first women appointed as ministers. I was only eight years old at that moment. The excitement that radiated from my mother, aunt, and grandmother made me realize, even as a child, the great significance of this development.

It was sixty-one years ago when men and women in Afghanistan gained the right to vote and be elected. Considering the state of Afghanistan today, one finds it difficult to comprehend that there was a time when women exercised this right while women in Switzerland and many European countries could not. The presence of female ministers, senators, and parliamentarians in Afghanistan during that period was a concept that seemed unimaginable to most European nations. In Afghanistan today, the struggle for women to attain a secondary school education persists amid the impacts of war. Women have borne the brunt of cultural exploitation by politicians and external forces.



Though Queen Soraya's influence led to many Afghan women being named after her, more substantial positive changes for women came about during King Zahir Shah's reign. He understood the role of religion in society and ensured changes aligned with religious beliefs. For change to be accepted, it needed the support of religious leaders and the consensus of the majority of people. However, the landscape of Afghanistan has transformed dramatically since then. Afghanistan, a mere forty-four years ago, a destination for tourists eager to explore its historical sites, is no longer recognizable. The nation fell victim to the Cold War, becoming entangled in a conflict with no roots in its domestic situation. An occupying superpower invaded Afghanistan, prompting our righteous resistance. I am honored to serve as one of the spokespersons in the Western world, shedding light on the atrocities that have transpired. Yet, it is disheartening to see how easily we forget the two million lives lost due to the Soviet invasion, overshadowed by subsequent events. The decision to invite disgruntled individuals from regions like the Arab world, Chechnya, and Kurdistan to fight in Afghanistan directly contributed to the formation of Al-Qaeda, further victimizing the already war-torn nation.

We must not lose sight of this historical context. While Afghanistan has witnessed gruesome wars, the civil war remains a stark reminder of its most shameful and dreadful era. Internal violence, linguistic conflicts, and division along religious and ethnic lines characterized this period. Afghanistan's beauty does lie in its rich tapestry of diverse ethnic groups, such as Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Turkmens.

Moving forward, I firmly reject succumbing to pessimism after forty-four years of tirelessly striving for peace. Before I depart from this world, it is a personal promise to witness the attainment of peace in Afghanistan. Additionally, we must acknowledge that Afghanistan has a history of missing opportunities. While external factors are often blamed, we must also accept responsibility for our

failures. A significant missed chance occurred with Qatar's peace initiative for Afghanistan, where the talks in Doha were hindered by the sudden departure of the former president, which prevented the potential success of the negotiations. I was one of four women out of twenty-one members of the negotiation team. We cannot afford another missed opportunity. Regardless of our feelings toward the Taliban, the responsibility for national dialogue rests jointly with the involved countries and the Taliban themselves. We must begin this process.

It has been a recurring theme in my life that I find myself working in male-dominated fields. Even if coincidental, growing up in a culture where girls could choose between a privileged life of marriage or charting their own course likely played a role in shaping me. I opted for the latter, driven by a sense of duty to other women and a desire to pave the way for those who followed. A pivotal moment occurred when the Soviet invasion began, and the jihad against the Soviet Union commenced. At that time, accepted for a Ph.D. at Cambridge, excitement for this academic journey thrummed through me. My father, then visiting London, implored me to enter politics rather than pursue a Ph.D. He explained that unless women like me stepped forward, the doors of opportunity would remain closed. Accepting his challenge, even though it was the most difficult decision I had ever made, ultimately set me apart and defined my character.

Consequently, when I joined the Afghan Red Crescent Society, I made it my mission to elevate the status of women within the organization. I was astounded to find that even women volunteers were not counted among the organization's ranks. Through my efforts, the Afghan Red Crescent Society rapidly evolved and gained recognition as one of the top fifteen Red Crescent organizations globally.



My subsequent position as a commissioner in the constitution further advanced the cause of women's rights in Afghanistan. Realizing the importance of comprehending the Islamic legal framework that would empower me to advocate for women's rights, I set out on a path to study Islamic studies. This included studying under the supervision of Sheikh Zakir Badawi, a prominent figure in the Ikhwan movement, and Dr. Jamal Mina, my professor of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), who later served as the chief of staff for Sheikh Tantawi. Equipped with Islamic studies, I assumed the role of an advocate for women's rights in specific and human rights in general. Also became a spokesperson for minority communities, a platform that encompassed people beyond women while still empowering women's participation. Today, those who have left Afghanistan, myself included, must exercise caution when expressing what we believe is best for women there. Instead, we should prioritize amplifying the voices of the majority who remain in Afghanistan. It is the media's responsibility to provide them with a platform to express their concerns.

In conclusion, the future of Afghan women demands our attention. Decades of seeking peace cannot be extinguished by pessimism. Afghanistan must grasp available opportunities, acknowledge internal issues, and call for global action to mend the wounds inflicted. We, the Afghan people, must take charge of our destiny and build sustainable peace. We deserve nothing less.

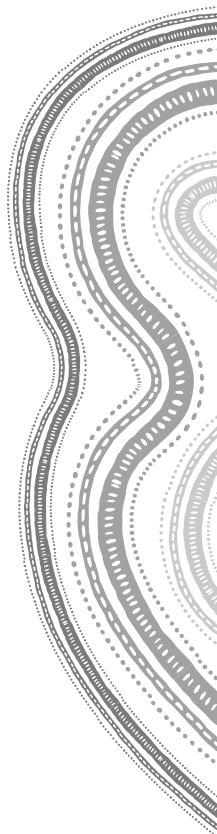
## Dr. Tesnim Khriji Chirchi

*Lecturer, Ibn Haldun University, Executive Director,  
Jasmine Research Foundation*

Tunisia has long been acknowledged as a progressive country in the region regarding women's rights and gender equality. The prevailing narrative suggests that Tunisia stood out among other Arab nations due to the presence of what was referred to as an "enlightened dictator." These dictators recognized that modernity and modernization hinged on two crucial pillars. The first was women's rights, and the second was secularism. These two pillars formed the foundation of the Tunisian state, setting it apart within the region.

As a Tunisian woman, I can attest that the actual implications of this narrative differed from the perceived progressiveness. Tunisian state feminism has often prioritized narrow legal reforms for women's rights, overlooking the interconnectedness of gender equality with broader human rights principles. This approach failed to acknowledge women's right to wear the hijab and perceived modernization as a total break from traditional norms in the public sphere. State feminism, on the other hand, imposed restrictions on women's rights and a specific pattern of appearance behavior in public.

Women who sought social and economic rights or the right to choose their representatives in decision-making were denied those rights. Behind the veneer of openness and progressivism, the reality for many Tunisian women, including myself, was repression, persecution, and



inequality for daring to demand democracy. In fact, Tunisia has achieved parity in the number of female and male human rights defenders. This achievement stems from historical movements that embraced reformist Islamic interpretations, recognizing women's rights as compatible with cultural norms.

Centuries before modernization efforts, Tunisia's Qayrawani marriage contract allowed women a voice in choosing their spouse. The country boasted a rich history of women's movements advocating for girls' education and defending Muslim women's rights. These antecedent movements, building on Islamic principles of equality and inherent human dignity, laid the groundwork for a vibrant feminist movement even before independence. Led by doctors and professors, these pioneers challenged prevailing patriarchal norms. The eradication of polygamy, for instance, was a noteworthy accomplishment facilitated by the introduction and enforcement of a new personal code by the first president following independence. While this personal code was presented as a product of modernity, a deeper examination reveals the influence of Islamic *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). However, these advancements were stifled under the banner of modernity and French ideals. French secularism, with its emphasis on a strictly secular public sphere, sought to marginalize traditions and religion, creating a tension that continues to this day.

Despite these challenges, women's rights movements rooted in religion, which persevered against all odds, received support from the historical context of women's movements and the potential for democratization in Tunisia. In 2010 and 2011, the ordeals faced by women who suffered imprisonment and torture while advocating for equality gave rise to a range of women's movements. Efforts to impose a singular, dominant cultural model on women proved resistant in the face of their diverse appearances, backgrounds, and experiences. Women's rights are fundamental and non-negotiable. The goal is to achieve modernity while respecting cultural traditions and empowering each woman's individual journey.

Tunisia's social progress and dismantling of barriers to women's potential hinge on integrating a strong human rights culture. Democracy's arrival opened the public sphere to previously marginalized women, allowing them to pursue political careers. The gender parity law, mandating 50 percent female representation on party lists, further facilitated their participation in decision-making. This law even included efforts to have women lead half the lists, maximizing their parliamentary chances. Tunisia's quota system demonstrably succeeded, with women comprising 47 percent of local councils a remarkable achievement surpassing many European nations. However, skepticism and criticism remain, underscoring the ongoing need for individual support for women in leadership roles across civil society and politics.

Legal frameworks, while essential, are insufficient alone to drive societal change. True transformation necessitates education, behavioral shifts, and evolving attitudes. Thua, achieving women's equality requires a multi-pronged approach: education, solidarity networks, and fostering agency. Women's rights are fundamental to societal progress and deserve active support and championing.

The objective of the Jasmine Foundation is to empower women aspiring to leadership roles. While research identifies obstacles hindering women's participation in decision-making, we provide training and support to help them advance in leadership. Our goal is to address these obstacles and promote women's contributions to decision making processes.

Solidarity networks are essential for women to learn, grow from mistakes, and find support. By offering opportunities for women to take on smaller leadership roles, we can help them overcome self-doubt and societal pressures. Leadership does not require perfection. As women mature, they recognize their rights and potential for power, understanding that mistakes are inevitable for growth. Self-compassion is crucial during this journey. Balancing multiple roles, like motherhood, decision-making, entrepreneurship, or academia, requires strategic prioritization.

Opportunities can arise in an era marked by uncertainties and risks, especially for marginalized groups. Empowerment involves seizing opportunities despite uncertainty. Waiting for rights is insufficient; women must claim their space, exercise freedom, and assert themselves for true empowerment. Encouraging the involvement of new generations is crucial in defending rights and democracy. They hold the potential to innovate and adapt to change. With democracy globally threatened by authoritarianism, inclusive discussions are essential, valuing women's rights, democracy, and socioeconomic rights. The rise of extreme right discourse requires a counter-narrative that embraces inclusivity, gender equality, and changing demographics. Such inclusivity is pivotal to counterbalancing authoritarian ideologies. The democratic transition in Tunisia over the past decade is an example of how civil dialogues may address societal issues.

To conclude, the future will be shaped by the choices we make today. Challenges remain, but hope and global shifts offer opportunities. Tunisia shows the power of active participation, inclusive dialogue, and perseverance in securing women's rights within human rights and democracy. Lasting progress requires collaboration across ideologies. Platforms for faith-based and secular women are indeed crucial.

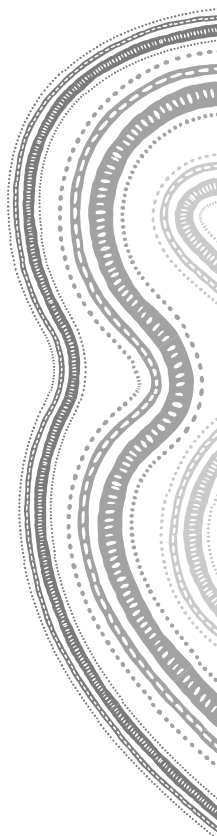
**Dr. Sharifa Noaman Al Emadi**

*Executive Director, Doha International Family Institute*

The Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) conducts policy- oriented research to strengthen the Arab family. As a global institution, DIFI champions and promotes best practices in family support. This approach, referred to as familialism, emphasizes the empowerment of families as a means to empower society as a whole. This perspective is rooted in the belief that when families are empowered, society as a whole benefits.

My personal experience growing up in a large family with nine girls and two boys highlights the emphasis our parents placed on nurturing and supporting all their children, regardless of sex. While my sisters and I had graduate and post-graduate education, completing master's and doctoral degrees, our brothers did not pursue the same level of education. This was not due to policy limitations but rather individual choices. In fact, the policy framework in Doha provided equal opportunities and support for everyone and encouraged all citizens to pursue their goals, including studying abroad.

My personal experience, alongside comparisons with others, reinforces the importance of supportive family structures and policies. While some friends possessed greater skill in their work, a lack of family support hindered their ability to fully achieve their potential. This realization prompted me, now working at DIFI, to focus on holistic policies that support families and enable their children to thrive, such as parenting programs.



Social protection policies must be inclusive, ensuring they consider the needs and rights of all family members. While gender-responsive policies have addressed women's issues effectively, other family members -children, the elderly, and men- may be overlooked. To ensure that no one is left behind, DIFI, in collaboration with ESCWA (The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), advocates for a family-focused social protection system that supports children, women, men, and the elderly throughout their life journey. This initiative aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to leave no one behind.

DIFI's work emphasizes the importance of family empowerment and inclusive policies that consider the well-being and rights of all family members and create supportive environments for individuals and families to thrive. DIFI conducts research focusing on policy-oriented approaches to strengthen families for the betterment of society. I am particularly concerned that some measures in this area are overly influenced by external forces, neglecting both the rich local culture and the rights of women enshrined in Islamic law.

Islamic law grants women a wealth of rights that empower them as family leaders. However, an overemphasis on Western-style gender equality can overshadow these existing Islamic provisions. My own experience underscores the importance of supportive family structures and inclusive policies. These allow women to thrive in their careers while fulfilling their familial roles. As the first Qatari woman people with an addiction, I witnessed firsthand how societal support and well-designed policies empower individuals to reach their full potential.

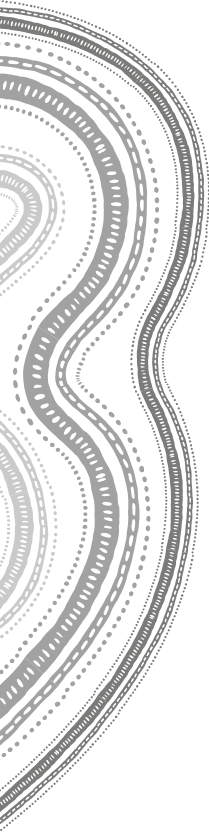
We consider marriage within the framework of family-focused policies. Marriage has positive implications for health and well-being. Studies indicate that married individuals, especially women, experience longer lifespans and better mental health outcomes than to their unmarried counterparts. Research shows a clear link between stable family structures and financial well-being. Women

and families in such structures are less likely to experience poverty. Dual-earner families, for instance, tend to have higher incomes and wealth than unmarried households. This highlights the positive impact of supportive family environments. Furthermore, the importance of marital stability is underscored by the fact that divorced women are five times more likely to face poverty than married women.

DIFI's research focuses on family-oriented policy implementation, including initiatives like promoting part-time employment and flexible work schedules. In the region, high divorce rates are usually linked to communication and relationship issues, not women's employment as usually suggested. We need to prioritize programs that strengthen communication skills and foster healthy relationship dynamics. In addition, research is crucial to debunk stereotypes portraying working women as harming the well-being of their children. Highlighting the historical roles of women in various fields, like farming and fishing, serves as a powerful reminder of the need for research-based approaches that support women's rights. Research also advocates for maternity and paternity leave policies, promoting shared responsibilities in families. DIFI's efforts in to encourage work-family balance highlight the vital role of research in policy advocacy.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the importance of embracing Islamic rights for women, conducting research to inform evidence-based policies, and promoting familialism to empower families and support women's roles. Pursuing gender equality should not neglect the unique cultural context and the rights already established by Islam.





## SESSION II, HALL A: PUBLIC SPACE AND WORKING LIFE

### **Ruha Shadab**

*Founder & CEO, LedBy Foundation*

My career path has been richly diverse, encompassing roles as a medical practitioner, a management consultant specializing in global health, and a social entrepreneur. These careers may seem unrelated, but they all have one thing in common: my lifelong commitment to positive societal impact.

During my master's program, my research revolved around improving healthcare accessibility for Muslim women in India. Unfortunately, Muslims in India encounter socioeconomic obstacles and alarming disparities, evident in education, employment, and healthcare. While researching ways to expand access to healthcare, I identified a critical question: How to empower women, particularly Muslim women, to take on leadership roles? This question arose from the apparent underrepresentation of women in leadership positions across various institutions and organizations.

These reflections gave birth to the LedBy Foundation, a platform that nurtures professional leadership within Indian Muslim women. The primary objective of this foundation is to foster greater representation of Muslim women in leadership roles? The foundation pursues its mission through three fundamental approaches: firstly, providing

training and mentorship to young college-going Indian Muslim women; secondly, collaborating with organizations to augment Muslim representation and promote inclusivity concerning religious diversity; and finally, conducting research.

The justification for my focus on Muslim women is a question that is frequently asked, especially in India. Despite a two-percentage-point decline in global female labor force participation ratio between the 1990s and 2017, underemployment remains a major concern for women. The disparities in socioeconomic status experienced by women in India, particularly those in lower economic and employment segments, demonstrate the importance of intersectionality in tackling gender inequality. Deeper scrutiny of subgroups underscores that distinct root causes contribute to these disparities. My research endeavors are geared towards quantifying such disparities and generating substantive conversations about potential avenues for rectification.

My research utilized a comparative analysis of two hypothetical resumes to explore concerns about discrimination against Muslim individuals in India. One resume belonged to Habiba Ali, and the other to Priyanka Sharma. Both resumes were submitted to "1000 jobs", a platform designed for early-career job applicants, specifically targeting candidates with zero to three years of experience. Surprisingly, the observed difference in job callbacks between the two comparable resumes was notably more significant than anticipated—a substantial 50 percent difference. The Hindu woman's resume elicited two hundred callbacks, while the Muslim woman's resume only garnered one hundred. Additionally, a noteworthy discrepancy emerged in the enthusiasm level displayed by recruiters. The Hindu woman received congratulatory calls for advancing to the next round in 40 percent of instances, while the Muslim woman received such calls merely 15 percent of the time. These findings can spark dialogues about discrimination in public spaces and encourage stakeholders to develop corrective actions. To create an impactful CV that minimizes discrimination, one should

focus on two key aspects. Firstly, consider the visual presentation of your CV. A picture should not be used as it can create bias and subjectivity. Pay attention to formatting and consult reputable resources like Harvard's recommended formats. Secondly, emphasize the content of your CV. Highlight relevant experiences and achievements that align with the job description. Your chances of making an impression on the reader enhance if you customize your CV for a specific position. As many CVs are rejected without giving them enough consideration, make sure that the people you apply to are aware of your application. Active networking is crucial throughout the job application process because recruiters often spend just six seconds scanning each CV. Seek help, reach out to people, and craft a strong resume.

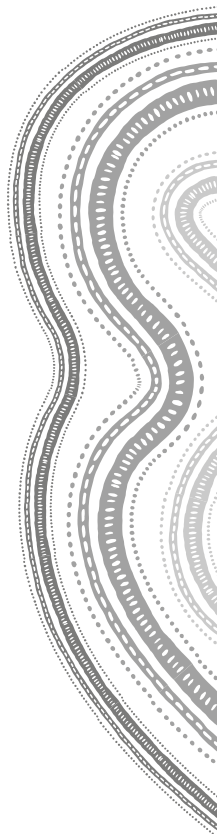
To conclude, my professional journey, driven by my dedication to leading social change, led me to establish the LedBy Foundation, with a focus on empowering Indian Muslim women to occupy leadership roles. Through training, collaboration, and research initiatives, we aim to address the challenges Muslim women face in India, like employment barriers, and foster inclusivity. Our research on resume hiring biases sheds light on the pressing issue of discrimination, paving the way for informed conversations and developing effective solutions to combat this social injustice. As we strive for greater representation and gender equality, I remain committed to leveraging my expertise in medicine, management consulting, and social entrepreneurship to drive positive change for marginalized communities.

## Yasemin Gür Solmaz

*Member of the Board of Directors, Gürmen Group*

As a second-generation member of my family's business, I have harbored a lifelong dream: sitting in my father's iconic green chair, a symbol of leadership within our company. Now, seated in that very chair, I will not deny the weight it sometimes carries. Executive, wife, daughter, mother, activist – I champion women's empowerment and education. My diverse roles extend across business and social sectors. Today, I am involved in multiple industries, including energy, retail, manufacturing, agriculture, and technology. This wide range of responsibilities gives me a comprehensive understanding of four major sectors within the industry. Additionally, I oversee all our companies' financial aspects and strategic development.

My engineering studies at Queen Mary Westfield University in the UK during the early 1990s immersed me in a male-dominated environment. Despite this, I persevered, driven by the belief that women can excel as engineers and make significant contributions through their innovative abilities. This experience fuels my desire to be a role model for more women pursuing careers in engineering and other fields traditionally dominated by men. Gender should not determine one's ability to succeed; we need to focus on nurturing talent and promoting equal opportunities for all. By embracing diversity and fostering inclusivity in all sectors, a more equitable and prosperous world for everyone is achievable.



While the energy sector favored coal and thermal energy then, I spearheaded our company's shift towards renewables. Today, we are a leader among Turkish companies, powered entirely by renewable sources. We generate 50 percent more than our supply chain needs and contribute 10 percent of Türkiye's thermal energy production. It brings me great joy to note that one-third of our engineers are women, and I take pride in fostering gender diversity and inclusion in all areas, including decision-making roles.

The textile industry, largely employing women, is known for its labor-intensive nature. Unfortunately, it also suffers from a significant gender pay gap, particularly at lower wage levels. While Türkiye has strong labor laws ensuring equal pay at minimum wage, systemic challenges within the industry contribute to this disparity. The textile sector often operates under a highly structured, assembly-line model. This structure struggles to accommodate absences for maternity or childcare, as the production line necessitates immediate replacements. Consequently, women who work fewer hours due to these needs face reduced pay. While policy changes are crucial, understanding the root causes, such as the lack of flexible work arrangements, is essential to address this issue effectively.

Education plays a pivotal role in empowering women and improving their position in the labor force. Women need access to education, empowerment, and training. Additionally, when women return to work after giving birth, they require support and flexibility to reintegrate smoothly. Addressing these concerns requires policy changes and cannot solely be left to the discretion of employers. However, once such changes are implemented, the impact can be significant, fostering a more inclusive environment where women can thrive.

With women comprising 53 percent of our workforce, 24 percent currently hold upper management roles. We are committed to achieving gender parity in upper management by 2026, building

on our current success of 22 percent female representation. In my experience, having women in leadership positions makes a tangible difference. They bring diverse perspectives, promote inclusion, and drive positive organizational change. For instance, a female employee with a child with special needs requested leave. While her husband also worked here, he was not involved in childcare. We implemented a policy requiring equal parental leave for such situations. This fostered better family dynamics, empowered women, and created a more positive work environment.

Understanding and appreciating everyday situations where women navigate challenges can provide valuable insights for driving change. As role models, we can highlight these instances and advocate for policy changes that promote greater female workforce participation. Strong employment laws and effective policy reforms are essential steps towards empowering women.

The business world, traditionally dominated by male decision-makers and driven by key performance indicators (KPIs), needs to revisit its approach to achieve true gender equality. Many KPIs, formulated in the early 1900s, prioritize productivity and efficiency, reflecting a male-centric perspective. While new global standards acknowledge the importance of women and the environment, integrating these values into daily strategies remains a challenge. Increasing female representation in decision-making, policy formulation, and leadership roles is crucial. This shift, although requiring time, will pave the way for the necessary evolution of KPIs towards a more inclusive and sustainable future.

SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analyses often reveal a gendered difference in perspective. Men tend to focus on strengths, while women often prioritize potential threats. While these contrasting views can be complementary, achieving a balanced approach is critical. Identifying and mitigating threats is crucial, but so is capitalizing on opportunities. Data, hard work, and a commitment to excellence are all tools in our arsenal to

overcome challenges and drive progress. Disappointments should not discourage us; they can be catalysts for positive change. Even to truly promote gender equality and foster meaningful conversations, engaging with male-dominated audiences is essential.

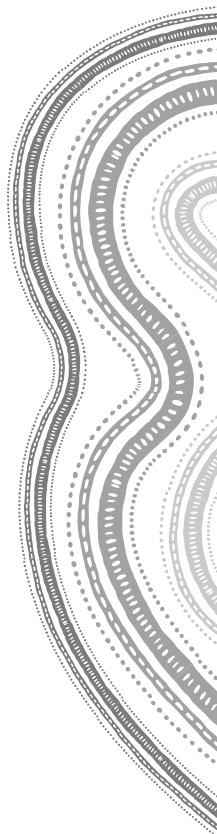
I advocate for meritocratic selection processes free from discrimination. The best person for the job, regardless of gender, should be given the opportunity. Entrepreneurship thrives on a combination of innate qualities and nurtured skills. It is about identifying opportunities and embracing calculated risks. In Türkiye's burgeoning economy, brimming with potential, entrepreneurship is a viable path for everyone. While overt gender discrimination may be less prevalent, particular industries or businesses might pose challenges that require resolve to overcome. To empower women in all areas, fostering a network of highly visible and accessible female role models is essential.

**Marlyse R. Ndjenga**

*Publication Editor, Valeurs Ajoutees Magazine*

I am the CEO of “Group of Fiscal.com”, a company specializing in assisting enterprises in regulating their tax laws based in Cameroon, Congo, and the Central Republic of Africa. Driven by a relentless passion for helping businesses thrive, I am committed to empowering women-led enterprises and bridging the gap between business law and practice across Africa and Europe. My ultimate vision is to leverage our magazine and expertise to assist the African continent. From helping companies find opportunities in Morocco to offering strategic development advice, we aim to empower businesses to achieve cross-border success.

When I founded my company in 2011, I focused on working only with large corporations. However, I soon realized that even medium-sized and smaller enterprises faced challenges that required assistance. In 2017, our company expanded to include tax advisors, financial experts, account specialists, and lawyers. We then contacted the government to establish an authorized management center to assist small and medium-sized businesses. Since its inception, the center has worked with 350 such enterprises, with 205 of them being women-led businesses. We aim to empower these companies to grow by providing management training, accounting services, and guidance in financing and marketing.





To accomplish this, we organize training sessions four times a year, seeking support from sponsors and larger customer companies in Cameroon. Experts in various fields contribute to the training, covering topics essential to the success of these enterprises. Our ultimate goal is to enable these businesses to expand and thrive within the African market. As we continue our work in Cameroon, Congo, and Central Africa, we have observed that different regions present unique challenges. Many entrepreneurs start their companies with little experience, often without fully understanding business law and practicalities. Thus, we created a magazine to help companies navigate the complexities of investing and growing.

*Valeurs Ajoutees* magazine, which covers topics related to Europe and Africa, is a tool to convey vital business knowledge. It does not only provide valuable information but also acts as a platform for networking and collaboration. Through the magazine, we have built a network of over 2000 experts in various strategic fields across Europe and Africa. This network allows us to guide businesses in their growth plans, facilitating investments and market expansion.

According to statistics representing 10.000 enterprises in Cameroon, 37.5 percent are women-owned. However, my experience working with these women-led businesses has highlighted some critical areas that need attention to ensure their success. Firstly, many women entrepreneurs tend to choose the individual form of business, which may not be the most advantageous in the long run. To make decisions that are well-informed and in line with their objectives, they must take into account the many legal forms that are available and seek advice accordingly. Secondly, there needs to be more investment in digital technology and sound accounting practices among women-owned businesses in Cameroon. For instance, computer access is essential for competitiveness and financial clarity in today's digital age. Lastly, the human resource aspect of their enterprises needs careful consideration.

Women entrepreneurs need to adopt a more structured approach to recruitment, defining specific criteria for each role and finding the right individuals to contribute effectively to their business based on meritocracy.

Many women entrepreneurs attribute their management challenges to tax issues or financing difficulties. However, strong management practices are the cornerstone of overcoming these obstacles and attracting financing opportunities. Women entrepreneurs in Cameroon have made great strides, but there is still significant room for further development. By focusing on key areas like choosing the proper legal structure, investing in digital tools and accounting software, and refining human resource practices, women-led businesses can achieve sustainable success and make a substantial contribution to their country's economy.

Achieving work-life balance is equally important. The key lies in effective prioritization. By identifying and focusing on what truly matters, women can avoid rigid schedules and free up time for other commitments. This may involve making tough decisions and saying no to less important tasks. I prioritize both my family and my business. To ensure quality time with my children and involvement in their education, I dedicate one week per month to working from home. This approach fosters happiness and fulfillment, as prioritization allows me to optimize my time and energy, making me an effective businessperson and a dedicated, attentive mother.

My husband's unwavering support has also been invaluable. Having a partner who respects my career aspirations has significantly impacted my professional journey, boosting my confidence to pursue my goals. Effective organization, coupled with a strong support network, is key to maintaining work-life balance. I have delegated household tasks and childcare, allowing me to focus my energy on both work and family. To ensure my children's educational success, I have built a strong rapport with their teachers through regular communication, leveraging technology

like WhatsApp for updates. This collaboration allows me to provide them with individualized support and interventions.

Overall, a successful work-life balance for women requires thoughtful prioritization, a supportive family environment, and effective organization. By embracing these principles, women can thrive in their personal and professional lives, making meaningful contributions to their families, communities, and careers at the same time.

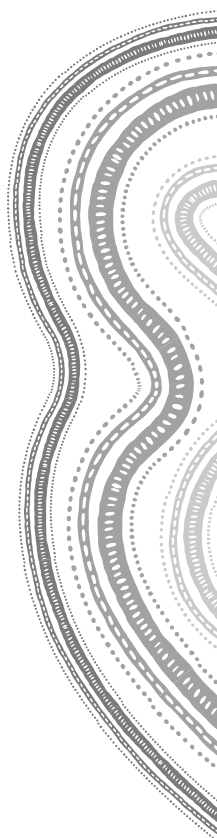
## SESSION II, HALL B: PUBLIC SPACE AND MARKET RULES

### **Nazma Khan**

*CEO, World Hijab Day Organization*

When I was eleven, I moved to America from Bangladesh with my parents. Growing up in New York City, I experienced severe verbal and physical discrimination because I was the only student in my school who wore a headscarf, the hijab. At school, I endured mockery, insults, and hurtful names such as "Batman", "Ninja", and "Mother Teresa." Students would even spit at me, pull off my hijab, and subject me to bullying during gym class. The situation worsened after the tragic events of 9/11, when I faced increased harassment on the streets, being labeled as a "terrorist" and linked to Osama bin Laden. Despite the challenges, in 2013, I initiated a global movement called World Hijab Day to unite women from all walks of life, regardless of their faith or background, wearing the hijab on February 1 as a show of solidarity with Muslim women worldwide. I intended to combat discrimination and prejudice faced by hijab-wearing individuals.

Muslim women who wear hijab in public and workplaces often face significant challenges and discrimination. My sister, who wears hijab, recently experienced a disturbing incident while commuting on a public bus in New York City on her way to work. She was the target of an assault. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident, as many Muslim women who wear visibly religious attire often



face discrimination. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, 69 percent of hijab-wearing women reported incidents of discrimination, in contrast to 29 percent of non-hijab-wearing women.

Similarly, the workplace can also be an unwelcoming environment for Muslim women with hijabs, reflecting a broader issue of Islamophobia in the workplace. A 2022 BBC report found a disturbing trend: 69 percent of employed UK Muslims experience Islamophobia, with Muslim women disproportionately targeted. The hijab's visibility often fuels unfair stereotypes of unprofessionalism or Islamic extremism. This discrimination against Muslim women in the workplace also hinders their chances of getting hired in the first place. A study conducted by the University of Windsor in Canada showed that Muslim women wearing hijabs had a 40 percent lower chance of being hired compared to their non-hijab-wearing counterparts in the West.

This ongoing discrimination has forced many Muslim women to make challenging decisions, such as modifying their hijab's appearance or even removing it altogether, to avoid discrimination and assimilate into their environments. A 2016-2018 Pew Research Center study found that Europe has the highest number of Muslims, originating from forty-four to forty-five countries. Muslim women there frequently face discrimination, mistreatment, and even physical attacks simply for wearing the hijab.

To address this discrimination against Muslim women, we must confront its root causes. Tackling Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism through legislation is a crucial step. Policymakers should monitor and regulate Islamophobic remarks made by politicians, as these remarks can incite and fuel anti-Muslim discrimination on the ground. For instance, when former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson made derogatory comments about veiled Muslim women, the following week led to a staggering 375 percent increase in anti-Muslim verbal discrimination and physical attacks.

The media also plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions. The media should be held responsible for disseminating misinformation and engaging in defamation against Muslims and Islam. A study conducted by Hudson Community College in the US found that 46 percent of hijab-wearing Muslim women faced workplace discrimination directly linked to negative portrayals of Muslims in the media. Equal employment opportunity laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, skin color, national origin, gender, religion, age, and genetic information must also be enforced effectively, and this is important at both the municipal and state levels. Companies should take proactive steps to foster inclusive environments by offering ethnic and cultural workshops and diversity and inclusion training, which can enhance understanding and appreciation of Muslim cultures in general and the hijab in specific. Such initiatives can play a pivotal role in combating Islamophobia in the labor market and creating safer and more inclusive work environments for Muslim women.

In this context, I initiated World Hijab Day in 2013, which has gained substantial momentum and support over time. During the first year, women from sixty-seven countries joined the initiative, and by 2014, our social media outreach expanded to reach forty-four million people. It gained considerable attention in 2015, even outpacing the Super Bowl's coverage in some instances. In 2016, *Time* magazine officially recognized February 1 as World Hijab Day on their calendar. Media coverage continued to increase in the subsequent years, with global news outlets such as CNN and *Time magazine* reporting on the movement.

The impact of World Hijab Day transcended mere social awareness. In recognition of World Hijab Day on February 1st, resolutions were adopted in various states and countries to celebrate hijab-wearing women. Prominent companies like American Airlines and Meta (the parent company of Facebook and Instagram) joined the movement to foster inclusivity in workplaces and combat discrimination against Muslim women. Despite facing personal

challenges and initial difficulties finding employment due to my hijab, my determination to change perceptions and foster understanding has fueled my efforts. Even in the face of hardships, challenges, and opposition, individuals can achieve their goals by embracing their identity and sincere intentions, understanding one's 'why,' and staying connected to inner strength can guide them through adversity.

Overall, a strong sense of identity is vital. Preserving it in the face of external pressures empowers future generations and shapes a brighter future. The rise of Islamophobia makes protecting our heritage and values even more important. I urge everyone to embrace their unique identities, confront discrimination head-on, and pursue their dreams with courage and optimism.

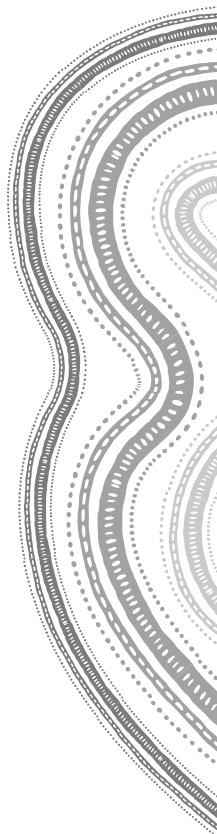
Together, with unwavering resolve, we can create positive change in the world.

## Ebru Baykara

*Chef, Social Entrepreneur*

In Eastern cultures, sons traditionally embody strength and family lineage, making their birth a cause for great celebration. As the third daughter in my family, my arrival was met with criticism and bullying from extended relatives. Yet, my father defied tradition, choosing to nurture his daughters with the same educational opportunities and life chances typically reserved for sons. This decision empowered us to pursue higher education in Istanbul, becoming the first in our family to do so. This experience underscores the profound impact of cultural codes and prejudices. Addressing these challenges is essential for societal progress and ensuring a more equitable future.

Having lived in Mardin for twenty-three years, my initial assumptions were pleasantly challenged. Arriving in 1999, I found myself the only female driver there. Despite the region's patriarchal leanings, I encountered less discrimination than I anticipated. While women were valued within families, broader social recognition seemed limited. Certain expectations confined them to traditional roles within the home. A powerful statement from a woman in Batman province during a women's gathering exemplifies this. When asked about entrepreneurship, she replied that simply being born a woman in Batman was "entrepreneurial enough." This captures both the obstacles women face and their remarkable strength and determination.





Though my background is in tourism, I now work as a chef, which is gaining increasing popularity in Türkiye. However, the professional kitchen remains primarily considered a man's domain, making it challenging for women to break into the profession. New graduates, especially women, report harassment and age-related discrimination that deter them from pursuing culinary careers. The male-dominated sector fosters an environment of exclusivity. Successful female chefs frequently experience discrimination from their male counterparts who conspire to maintain their collective power and advantage over one another. The dynamics of this exclusionary male alliance are disheartening to witness.

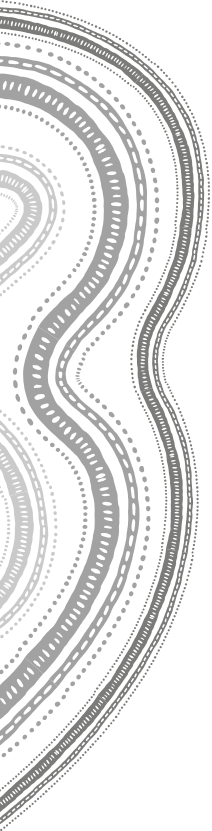
Additionally, the decision of some women to wear the hijab has presented an additional challenge for them in the kitchen. Male chefs frequently hesitate to accept hijabi women in their kitchens, often using the need to maintain a specific appearance as an excuse. Discouragement during internships disproportionately pushes aspiring female chefs out of the industry, highlighting the need to dismantle the prevailing male hegemony in this sector. Adile, a hijabi woman who sought work at my restaurant after her husband left her, exemplifies this potential for transformation. Through sheer determination and with our support, she thrived as a chef, providing for her five children and eventually forgiving her husband. Her story underscores the power of opportunity and encouragement for women.

As a female entrepreneur, I have also encountered gender biases within the culinary field, where being a female chef remains an anomaly. We persevered through initial resistance in Mardin, gradually earning the community's trust. This journey solidified my belief in the transformative power of women's unity and support. By empowering each other, we can shatter barriers and achieve great things, as our success in Mardin undeniably proves. Actions speak louder than words; respect is earned through competence and the accomplishments we achieve together.

Despite the ongoing challenges within the culinary realm, my commitment to my profession remains unwavering. Through persistent efforts and unwavering initiatives, we can dismantle obstacles and pave the way for a surge of female success in the culinary sector. I am proud of my role in propelling Mardin's tourism industry forward, which has unlocked doors for women across various domains. We are shattering traditional norms by offering support and empowerment, fostering a thriving environment where women actively participate in business, education, and decision-making.

The women of Mardin have been my unwavering support system, a source of strength during hardships, and key collaborators in my successes. As we move forward, we actively build expansive support networks, celebrating our shared struggles and triumphs. United, we can tackle any challenge in public spaces, be it acceptance, cultural norms, or anything else. Women are architects of positive change, shaping families and, ultimately, society. As Turkish women, we are fortunate to see our struggles reflected in government policies that create opportunities for meaningful transformations.





## Rowaida Abdelaziz

*Award-Winning Journalist*

Journalism remains a male-dominated field, especially in American media. As a Muslim woman of color who wears a hijab, I confront numerous challenges inherent to both my identity and the stories I choose to tell. Media portrayals of Muslims in the US are often reductive and stereotypical, perpetuating harmful generalizations about our diverse communities. These narratives overlook the cultural nuances and socioeconomic backgrounds that define us. Misleading portrayals persist across news outlets, movies, and even platforms like Netflix, where strong female characters are sometimes forced to abandon their faith or heritage to be relatable. My mission as a journalist is to create impactful, authentic narratives that inspire and challenge such perceptions. My stories aim to dismantle demeaning narratives and highlight the complexities within Muslim communities.

Only one percent of Americans are Muslims, but despite this, stereotypes about us are frequently perpetuated in the media, including news reports, movies, and television programs. Representation is essential, not just in what we consume but also in how our bodies and identities are perceived. Being an Arab Muslim woman, my identity embodies resilience, pushing back against preconceived notions about my intelligence, faith, and cultural background. As a female in journalism, I encounter the usual challenges women face, such as the lack of equal

pay, workplace discrimination, and being overlooked in high-level meetings. However, being a woman of color and a Muslim adds additional complexities. Frequently, women like me exert tenfold effort for a mere fraction of recognition, skillfully navigating through diverse identities within our newsrooms and professional domains.

In my work, I strive to amplify the voices of the countless women I meet. By interweaving text, visuals, and storytelling, I capture the essence of their triumphs, challenges, and the intricate tapestry of their lives. However, capturing their full narratives within a single medium is a constant obstacle, especially in a culture brimming with stories that contradict their own realities. But the powerful sisterhood I forge with these women deeply motivates me. Honoring them through my work becomes an act of self-discovery, a celebration of my own identity as a woman, while simultaneously elevating the perspectives and experiences of these extraordinary individuals.

The expectation that women should single-handedly overcome systemic disadvantages is deeply problematic. This common suggestion places the responsibility on those already fighting against a historically biased system. While sisterhood and support are crucial, real progress requires dismantling the structures that perpetuate these injustices. We must challenge those who create the rules, cultural codes, and societal norms that hold women back.

To achieve these changes, we must involve men, including those within our families, workplaces, and communities. Discrimination, pay equity issues, gender-based violence, and other forms of inequality are systemic problems that need systematic solutions. In the workplace, men should openly share their salary information, and their allyship should extend beyond mere words of support,

encompassing concrete actions. They must actively open doors, provide funding, and support women's voices and initiatives. Shattering glass ceilings starts at home. We must challenge traditional mindsets that limit women's capabilities. Empowering women to make their own choices in their personal and professional lives should be embraced and encouraged without resistance. Men within our families should actively support this journey, identifying and removing barriers that hinder women from realizing their full potential.

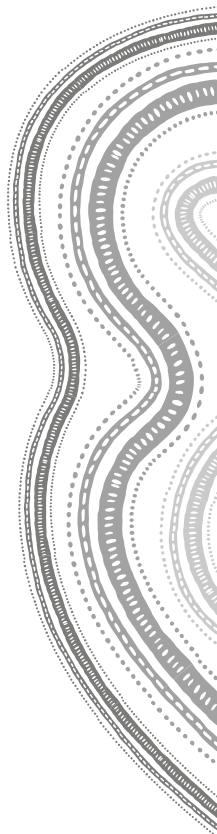
*Tomorrow Inshallah* is an online community established over a decade ago on Facebook. It aims to provide a platform for Muslim Americans to share their diverse perspectives and counter mainstream media's one-dimensional portrayal of Muslim women. This initiative was born out of frustration with prevailing stereotypes and narratives that marginalized Muslim women's agency. While the page's activity has waned, its influence persists through the emergence of other platforms led by women, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, reshaping narratives and representation. The core message champions restoring women's agency and celebrating their authentic identities. This freedom breaks free from the constraints of uniform and hegemonic norms. It amplifies their multifaceted identities –religious, ethnic, and gendered– while challenging stereotypes by empowering them to express themselves freely on their own terms. Though challenges exist, the most important matter is the potential to influence other women for the better. Embracing each other's achievements, providing mutual support during difficult moments, and fostering a solid sisterhood all contribute to achieving this objective. Together, with unwavering belief and a spirit of collaboration, women can achieve lasting progress and empower each other to reach their full potential.

## Sultana Tafadar

*King's Counsel at the Bar of England & Wales*

Discrimination against women is widespread in both public life and workplaces. Recognition of the intersectional discrimination faced by minority and religious women, particularly Muslim women who wear hijab, is essential. Unfortunately, the escalation of Islamophobia in Europe has resulted in widespread discrimination against Muslim women, impacting their everyday lives and legal standing. Recent European Court of Justice decisions allowing employers to request the removal of religious symbols have particularly negative impacts on Muslim women.

An ongoing case involving French lawyer Sarah Asmeta exemplifies the challenges hijab-wearing women face. Despite being called to the bar, she was restricted from speaking in court unless she removed her hijab. This decision, justified by secularism, restricts her from speaking in court unless she removes her hijab. This contradicts human rights laws, specifically freedom of religion and freedom of expression. It is crucial to challenge such decisions and advocate for Muslim women's rights in the legal profession and beyond. Asmeta's case prompted the formation of a Pro-Bono Team of lawyers in the UK, who submitted arguments to the European Court of Human Rights. The case hinges on a novel perspective: a violation of Article 6 (the right to a fair trial) in conjunction with religious freedom. While the final outcome remains to be seen, this situation reflects the rise of debates on religious expression in Europe.



Laws and policies must be in place to protect women's rights, but implementation is equally crucial to ensure respect for human rights. Muslim women simply seek equality. They deserve the same treatment as any other woman: equal access to opportunities, career progression, promotion, and a seat at the table. When addressing discrimination, it is essential to consider an intersectional perspective encompassing gender and religious identity. Unfortunately, institutions, lawmakers, and human rights bodies often exploit loopholes to continue discriminating against Muslim women. These specific issues of discrimination must be addressed collectively to ensure adequate domestic laws protect Muslim women.

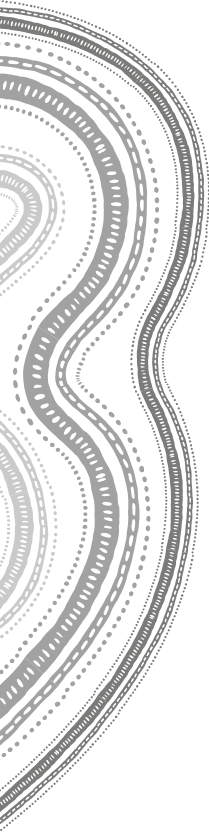
While the UK has anti-discrimination laws, their enforcement falls short. A proper definition of Islamophobia is necessary, one that encompasses the additional layers of discrimination faced by hijab-wearing Muslim women. Women's organizations, human rights organizations, feminist movements, and society as a whole must recognize that Muslim women face some of the most widespread discrimination globally. Feminist campaigns for women's rights often fail to include Muslim women, disregarding the fact that wearing a hijab is a personal choice and should be respected as such. Both feminism and initiatives to end sex discrimination should support a woman's right to wear a hijab.

Education is critical in addressing discrimination in the workplace. People need to understand that wearing a hijab does not impact a person's ability to perform their job. Attitudes and biases, not the hijab itself, negatively affect both women and others in the workplace. For instance, the Bar Standards Board in the legal profession has formed a task force on religion and belief discrimination, which I chair. We have developed a toolkit to educate lawyers about different faiths. Understanding and respecting each other's beliefs is essential, and it is important to dispel misunderstandings about the hijab, which is often misrepresented in the media as a symbol of oppression.

The Modest Fashion Festival, an international platform showcasing luxurious modest fashion brands, highlights the neglect Muslim women have faced in the fashion industry, exposing a significant market gap. Their London fashion show emphasized the necessity of addressing Muslim women's needs within mainstream fashion. The festival's success reached a global audience of 1.6 billion, sparking a vital conversation about diversity and inclusivity in fashion. This viral impact strengthened the call for increased visibility and representation of Muslim women in mainstream spaces. The ultimate goal of such initiatives is to ensure that Muslim women have recognition in every sphere of public life, and fashion plays a crucial role in achieving this significant societal change.

Intersectional discrimination faced by Muslim women highlights the need to dismantle the barriers that limit their success. Facilitating their path requires a joint effort to combat Islamophobia and safeguard Muslim women's rights, including their religious expression, in line with global human rights norms. By advocating for equality and dismantling these discriminatory structures, we can establish a more inclusive society that honors the rights and dignity of every woman.





## SESSION III, HALL A: THE VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE ACTORS OF MODERN TIMES

**Bilqis Abdul-Qadir**

*Athletics Director, International Motivational Speaker*

When pursuing a career as a professional basketball player in FIBA (The International Basketball Federation) leagues, I encountered a demoralizing obstacle. FIBA expressed concerns that wearing my hijab could pose a safety risk to other players during games. This stance contradicted my four years of experience playing university basketball in the US while wearing a hijab without any safety incidents. Faced with this impossible choice between my passion for basketball and my faith in Islam, I had to make one of the most challenging decisions of my life. Ultimately, I chose to stand up against FIBA's ban and fight for its overturn. This process, however, took four long years, demanding significant sacrifices for my athletic career while I navigated the complexities of faith and sport.

One remarkable outcome of this struggle was that it allowed me to break stereotypes and challenge the norms prevalent in the US sports world. Uniforms have been a primary concern for Muslim women in sports. The standard uniforms often contradict Muslim women's modest dress codes in various sports, such as volleyball, basketball, soccer, and tennis. It should not be required for athletes to present proof of their religious affiliation to dress according to their faith.

Stepping onto the court in my hijab, long pants, and long sleeves not only allowed me to compete according to my faith, it also empowered me to educate the audience about Islam. Initially, some spectators were visibly surprised by my attire, questioning it and perhaps even my capabilities. However, once they saw me play skillfully, their perception changed. They began to inquire about the reasons behind my attire, opening a pathway for open conversation and a deeper understanding of Islam.

Playing under tense circumstances brought immense pressure, but I harnessed that pressure as motivation to perform at my best. Though at times I faced ridicule, mockery, and disparaging remarks from the audience, I fueled those emotions into my game, proving my worth and demanding respect through my skillful performance. When you stand out and embrace your distinctiveness, as a Muslim woman or anyone else, it takes tremendous internal strength to persevere. As an athlete, having this inner drive is crucial to keep pushing forward. If I had allowed FIBA's discriminatory decision to stop me, I would not be here today, speaking about breaking stereotypes and challenging norms. Overcoming these barriers will be a demanding journey. However, with unwavering determination and resilience, we can create lasting change by shattering the barriers to inclusivity and acceptance in all aspects of life.

My greatest motivation comes from witnessing the spark of empowerment in young girls who are experiencing something new, like playing basketball for the first time. The joy of teaching a girl to shoot, a skill she has never had the chance to learn, and witnessing its transformative impact fuels my passion. I firmly believe that immigrant women like us are not bringing problems; we are claiming our power and changing the game in every aspect of life, both within and outside the US. This change occurs across various fields, from medicine and law to engineering and education. When women like us stand out and break stereotypes with our hijabs, we represent ourselves and our entire community. Embracing our uniqueness and passion, we are rewriting the

narrative and shattering the stereotype that we are a burden. Every time we pursue what we love, we change the game.

In my four-year battle against FIBA, I worked to overturn the hijab ban and pave the way for Muslim women to play basketball without discrimination. There were moments when I felt isolated and alone in this fight. However, two powerful forces kept me pushing forward. First and foremost, it was the strength and resilience of my mother, who faced numerous challenges as a single mother of six, working overnight and homeschooling all of us. Witnessing her determination, I knew I could not give up; I had to keep moving forward. Secondly, I realized that my actions could make a difference for future generations of girls who would look up to me. During a speaking engagement at a Masjid's Sunday school, a young girl wearing the same basketball uniform I used to wear looked at me with awe and admiration. Seeing her excitement, I understood I had to persevere. I could not succumb to doubt or loneliness because I knew these girls were counting on me to pave the way for them.

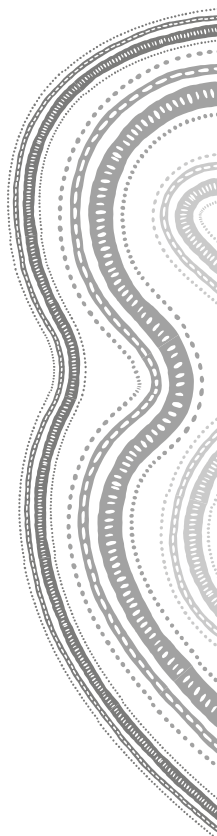
To those who may feel isolated or lonely in their journeys, think beyond yourself and consider the impact you can have on others. Please focus on the individuals who will follow in your footsteps, and let their hopes and dreams strengthen you. By being resilient and determined, we can create a path for those who come after us, inspiring them to break barriers and achieve greatness.

## Rizwana Hamid

*Journalist & Filmmaker Director, Media Monitoring Center*

The media exerts substantial influence in shaping perceptions, opinions, and lifestyles through its diverse platforms like social media, mainstream media, film, entertainment, arts, and more. Thus, vigilant monitoring becomes vital in this domain. The media's portrayal of Muslims and Islam can have a profound impact on how people view them. At the Center for Media Monitoring, we witness this firsthand. We meticulously analyze a vast amount of media, exceeding 50,000 articles and television clips daily, to build a comprehensive record of how Muslims and Islam are represented. This evidence is crucial in our mission to engage with media outlets and challenge the persistent stereotypes and negative narratives about Muslims and Islam that permeate the media landscape. By shining a light on these harmful portrayals, we aim to foster more accurate and respectful representations in the media.

A specific image of Muslim women is perpetuated by a range of institutions, including the media, social media, celebrities, influencers, governmental organizations, and education. This portrayal often depicts Muslim women, particularly those who wear the hijab, as lacking agency, oppressed, voiceless, confined to their homes, and seemingly excluded from contributing to society. These persistent stereotypes create an incomplete and twisted representation of Muslim women. While these stereotypes may have previously been confined to far-right platforms in the darker corners of the web, we have witnessed a concerning shift in recent years as these narratives infiltrate mainstream media. Politicians



and influential opinion leaders disseminate these stereotypes, exerting a tangible impact on people's lives.

Common media tropes misrepresent Islam as a threat to the West, labeling Muslims as terrorists and depicting women as oppressed. A particularly dangerous trope is the far-right conspiracy theory of the "grand replacement." It alleges that Muslim migration into Europe and Britain is part of a grand plan to increase the population and impose Islam on the populace. Globally, Islamophobia has surged, affecting both men and women. For women, this manifests in human rights abuses like forced sterilization and marriage (as seen in China's policies towards Uyghur Muslims) and restrictions on religious dress (such as hijab bans in India, France, and some cantons of Switzerland). It is crucial to acknowledge the rise of Islamophobia and its various forms of discrimination.

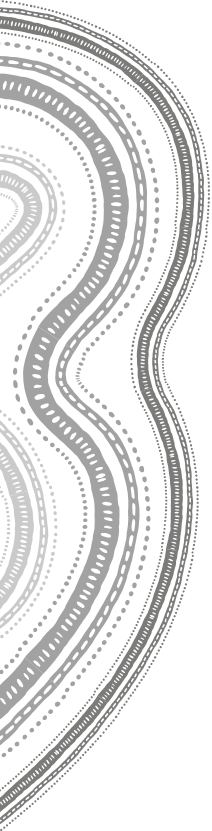
By meticulously monitoring media coverage and gathering a robust evidence base, we can move beyond simply claiming that media outlets generalize about Muslims or present negative images of women. When we present concrete examples and data, we can directly confront media organizations with the ways they perpetuate false narratives, "other" Muslims and Islam, and ultimately contribute to societal divisions. This data-driven approach tackles one of the most significant global challenges we face today – combating Islamophobia and fostering more inclusive media portrayals.

As a filmmaker and journalist with a broad global perspective, I have seen countless remarkable Muslim women defying stereotypes and achieving greatness. My mother embodies this spirit. A homemaker, she provided unwavering support, education, and instilled strong values in my siblings and me, empowering us to pursue our dreams. Her influence enabled us to pursue our desired professions and make meaningful contributions to the world. However, mainstream media excludes narratives that challenge Muslim women's preconceived notions. Accomplishments, pioneering roles, and stories of strong women fighting for their families often remain

overlooked. Instead, we are often confined to discussing topics like honor killings or forced marriages, perpetuating the stereotype of powerlessness and lack of agency. Varying interpretations of women's rights within Islam, often influenced by cultural norms, can create challenges for Muslim women navigating their faith and place in society. Living in Muslim-majority countries can offer a sense of belonging and cultural familiarity, but it may also come with limitations on freedoms, such as driving bans and restrictions on travel without a male guardian (mahram).

The Center for Media Monitoring engages in two essential approaches. Firstly, we monitor the media and gather evidence to challenge the existing stereotypes and push for more accurate representations. Secondly, our approach involves empowering Muslim organizations and women to participate actively in media interactions. We equip Muslim women with the skills to create impactful press releases, navigate interviews with confidence, and convey their messages effectively. Our goal is to counteract the media's influence by empowering women to share their diverse perspectives and voices. By telling our stories and demanding more accurate portrayals, we can challenge ongoing stereotypes and foster a more inclusive and empowering representation of Muslim women in the media and beyond.

Shifting our mindset from victimhood to empowerment is vital. Embracing our identity, standing confidently, and defining ourselves on our terms bring empowerment. Each person holds untapped potential that deserves respect and nurturing. As women with power and voice, we must work together to dismantle the barriers that hold all women back, from educational inequality to workplace discrimination. Unity provides strength, but it is achieved through active collaboration. By acknowledging the power of sisterhood and actively collaborating, we can drive collective progress. When women collaborate and prioritize each other's well-being, we go for positive change and elevate all women. It is not just individual success but collective empowerment and advancement that matter.



## Waad El-Kateab

*Award-Winning Filmmaker, Activist*

My journey began eleven years ago during the Syrian Revolution. I actively participated in the protests, standing alongside fellow Syrians chanting for freedom and dignity. Despite Syria's difficult and dire situation, I have maintained hope throughout the years. For me, the documentary *For Sama* is not just a film -it encapsulates my life and the lives of countless Syrians. *For Sama* chronicles the lives of my family, including my daughter, husband, and others who were connected to the hospital where my husband worked, the schools I attended, and the wider community. We endeavored to build an alternative life amidst the relentless shelling and bombings carried out by the Syrian regime, as well as by Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia. Through this film, people can gain insight into our collective experiences as individuals, a community, and a nation. I also believe it can help future generations understand the profound impact of our struggles.

Creating the documentary proved to be an arduous journey, riddled with challenges. I frequently felt like everyone was watching but indifferent, leaving me to question the point of sharing my story if the situation was already known. Discouragement mounted as I was repeatedly told that audiences wouldn't connect with another Syrian film, especially one depicting the harsh realities of war. There were moments when giving up felt like the easiest option.

However, a powerful shift took hold. Despite the difficulties, reflecting on my journey sparked an immediate fire within

me to speak up. I felt a responsibility to capture the simple truth of my experiences. Life is a tapestry woven with both joy and hardship, and my story reflected that ongoing dance. I wanted to shine a light on this truth, embracing its complexities and challenges.

Doubts about my capabilities frequently emerged, particularly after losing Aleppo and being uprooted from Syria. Nevertheless, the film evolved into a powerful motivator, a tool that fueled my determination. This overwhelming determination propelled me to pursue the creation of the film. Following our displacement, the main challenge became finding purpose and preserving the reasons we endured. Even if my story resonated with no one else, I had to create it for the sake of my daughters and for all those who shared the brutal realities of Aleppo. Uprooted and stripped of our homeland, language, and community, the question of identity became a constant battle. Yet, in the face of immense hardship, our resilience bloomed. We refused to be defined by displacement, clinging to the hope of returning home.

For Sama garnered an exceptional response from people. Even after its 2019 release, it continues to be screened globally. There is a persistent global interest in understanding the events in Syria and situations in other countries. This ongoing engagement empowers me, not just personally, but also because it allows me to make a tangible difference in the lives of refugees. Having escaped the war in Syria with my

family, I consider myself fortunate. Many have not been as lucky. People must understand that refugees, whether from Syria or other countries, primarily need safety, stability, and a small space to live their lives. It will never be the same as before, but for their children's sake, they have no choice but to move forward.

While we all face challenges daily, the struggles of refugees are immense. Consider their ordeal: fleeing unimaginable horrors, leaving behind cherished memories and the life they built,



burdened by trauma. We must foster empathy and embrace our common humanity. My hope is that by witnessing this film's journey, viewers will be compelled to take action and support refugees in need.

A gathering like this is a powerful platform for sharing stories. Every woman here likely knows a Syrian or someone from another country who has made Türkiye their home, whether temporary or permanent. It has been eleven years since the start of the Syrian Revolution. It serves as a potent reminder that life can unexpectedly turn upside down. When such a transformation occurs, no one wishes to be left alone or feel threatened every single day. Therefore, I ask each one of you to reach out to those around you and increase awareness about the reasons behind their presence. Please encourage children's education to include guidance on two important issues: avoiding discussions of repatriation with Syrian children, a sensitive topic that may cause them anxiety, and recognizing and rejecting racism. By equipping them with the tools to navigate diverse environments with respect, together, we can make a real difference in fostering a more inclusive and supportive world.

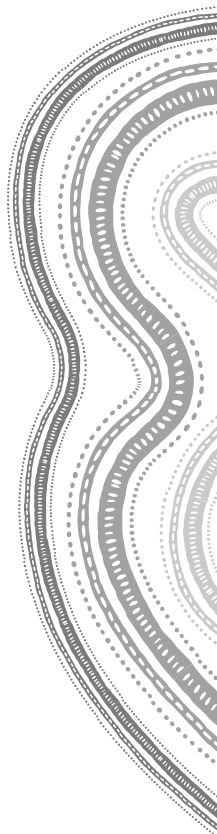
starkly contrast the Western world's constant pursuit of more, driven by worldly expectations and the so-called American dream.

## Reshad Strik

*Actor and Filmmaker*

My background reflects a unique blend of cultures. My father, who immigrated to Australia from Bosnia in 1965, met my mother from an affluent Australian family with Irish-Welsh roots. Their marriage formed a culturally rich household, where uncommonly for the time, my mother embraced Islam. Growing up, our home bustled with international guests, a melting pot of Muslim cultures that nurtured my understanding of diverse perspectives and societal issues. My mother, the pillar of strength and faith in our family, even played a guiding role in my father's spiritual journey. After living in America, I settled in Bosnia, married, and raised our three children – two daughters and a son. My career path then led me to the entertainment industry, including work in Hollywood, before ultimately returning to Bosnia.

Throughout my journey, I have been fortunate to travel and experience various cultures, especially while working on the show "Ailenin Yeni Üyesi" ("A New Member of the Family") in the last five years. Witnessing different family structures and the beauty of family life in third world countries has been truly inspiring. In such societies, the essence of family unity is deeply ingrained, untouched by certain aspects of Western consumerism. Despite having very little material wealth, these families' simplicity and contentment are enchanting. They During my travels, I was particularly moved by the resilience and strength of women in places like the Philippines and Ghana. In the Philippines, I observed



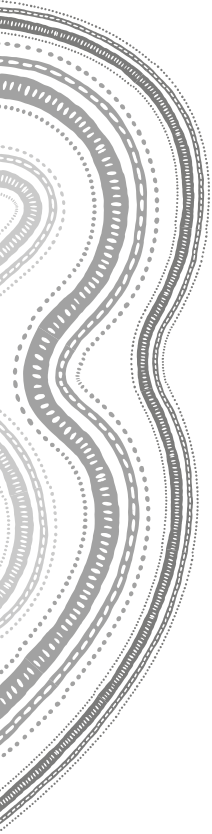
women working diligently while the men were less active, leading me to appreciate the determination of these women. In Ghana, I encountered women carrying heavy water containers for long distances daily. Their incredible strength and sense of community profoundly impacted me, and I could not help but be emotional witnessing their challenging lives. The experiences I have gained from traveling and encountering various cultures have opened my eyes to women's diverse struggles worldwide. It has ignited a deeper appreciation for the strength, resilience, and unity found in the most unexpected places.

For decades, major corporations held a tight grip on the narrative, frequently censoring sensitive topics like Palestine and Israel in the audio-visual media. However, the rise of social media has ushered in a significant transformation. Before exploring this impact, it is crucial to understand how social media operates. Like a drug that triggers a dopamine rush, it can have detrimental effects on humanity. We often find ourselves compulsively checking for updates, even moments after the last refresh. This addictive quality presents a significant danger, especially for young people who might lack the skills for responsible use.

In contrast to traditional media, just a tiny portion of the content on social media is grounded in fact. Much of what we see is an idealized, curated version of people's lives, often heavily edited and photoshopped. Social media's curated portrayals of success, luxury, and extravagant vacations can fuel desires that clash with our everyday lives. This distortion of reality, coupled with the prevalence of sexualized content, presents ongoing challenges for safeguarding our children's well-being and values. The alluring but deceptive nature of social media can have profound consequences for women, parents, and children, as it has the power to strain family bonds. Parents, who may already be diligently juggling their responsibilities, might begin to yearn for uncharted avenues in life, creating rifts within family dynamics. Unfortunately, this aligns with the Western world's preference for weakened family structures, particularly in Muslim cultures.

The portrayal of Muslim women on television is often derogatory, depicting them as uneducated or limited to menial service roles, whether in Türkiye or elsewhere. Rarely, if ever, do we see Muslim women portrayed as superheroes or leaders, as such narratives do not align with the profit-driven agenda of companies like Google, Twitter, and Facebook. These corporations prefer content that commodifies sex, which I find deeply troubling. As a parent, I grapple with these challenges, engaging in ongoing discussions with my children about their clothing choices and the pressure they encounter to conform to societal standards.





## SESSION III, HALL B: PICTURES OF WOMANHOOD

**Assoc. Prof. Ayşe Taşkent**

*Lecturer, Istanbul University*

To explore the depth of Islamic art, we must embark on a journey across the vast Mediterranean region, encompassing the Middle East, the Gulf countries, and North Africa. Throughout history, ancient civilizations like the Egyptians and Mesopotamians, along with major religions including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Byzantine Orthodoxy, have all woven their threads into the artistic landscape. Beneath the surface swirls a captivating narrative: The profound influence women exerted on artistic expression. Even as 20th-century modernist movements like cubism, surrealism, and others left their mark, the artistic spirit of women in this region continued to flourish.

The past fifty years have seen war, terrorism, and the devastation of cities inflict deep wounds on a once culturally vibrant region. These upheavals undeniably affect the artistic expressions of female artists, regardless of religion, often channeling their experiences of trauma into their work. This period also presented its unique challenges, where artists had to navigate between expressing their local identities and conforming to the filters of modernism, resulting in a somewhat schizophrenic state.

The post-1990s era of globalization, postcolonialism, and postmodernism brought a surge in prominence for female artists from the Middle East and the Far East, previously marginalized for being perceived as too ethnic or exotic. International biennials, art fairs, and galleries offered new platforms, but representation has remained uneven. A group of artists from the Middle East and neighboring regions grapples with the region's distinct challenges and rich heritage, authentically exploring themes of exile, war, and identity. This diverse selection, encompassing both Muslim and non-Muslim artists, demonstrates a deep commitment to Middle Eastern issues, particularly those concerning Syria, ISIS, and the plight of women migrants. Curating this group posed a significant challenge, as the broader international art scene often prioritizes narratives driven by neo-capitalism or perpetuates orientalist stereotypes.

One noteworthy artist is Shamsia Hassani, an Afghan woman who breaks the traditional narratives of depicting women veiled in burqas. Her art challenges and redefines these representations. Mamouna Guerresi is an Italian artist who converted to Islam after traveling to Senegal and being profoundly impacted by its metaphysical and mystical elements. Her paintings, which include female figures and symbolic Sufi elements like milk and trees, offer enlightened viewpoints. Moreover, foreign artists like Matilde Gattoni, whose beautiful and impactful artwork titled "The Swallows of Syria", portrays the struggles of refugees.

In contrast, other artist groups cater to the neo-capitalist market by utilizing trends like neo-modernism or orientalism to achieve recognition. This dynamic often leads to commercially successful but artistically shallow work, with limited engagement with local issues. Edward Said's concept of orientalism critiques how Western perceptions of women in the Islamic world are constructed. These perceptions draw on influences ranging from the Ottoman Empire to the travels of European artists in the East. Even today, echoes of orientalism persist in contemporary art. The recent trend of "post-new" or "self-orientalism" falls into three main categories.

The first category, arguably the least harmful, is “Commercial Orientalism.” Here, artists exploit familiar Eastern motifs like calligraphy, marbling, and sultans to target high-end Western art buyers. These undeniably exotic elements perpetuate orientalist tropes. More concerning is the second group: “Orientalism by Eastern Artists.” It comprises Eastern artists living in the West, potentially disconnected from their own heritage. They unintentionally reproduce orientalist notions in their portrayals, with the hijab becoming a frequent subject. The final group, “Self-Orientalist Artists in the East”, consists of artists residing in their home countries. Isolated from their cultural context, they cater to Western expectations, hindering the development of genuine Eastern artistic expression.

In all three categories, the artists’ works lack authenticity in their portrayal of the East. This reinforces cultural hegemony, as Gramsci observed. Essentially, these artists, intentionally or not, conform to the dominant Western art system. However, a critical perspective remains essential when examining these works, considering the continued influence of Western culture and the potential for orientalist tropes to resurface.

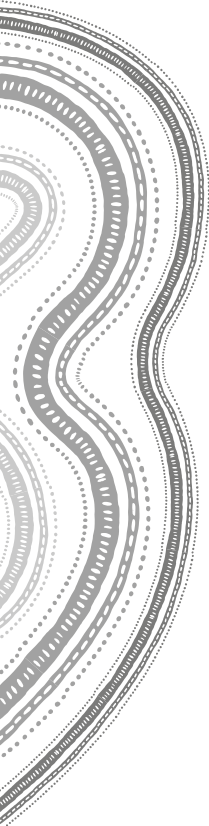
To fully understand the relationship between women and art in the Islamic world, we must consider feminist art criticism. This approach challenges the exclusion of women artists from art history and the undervaluing of their work. It exposes the historical bias that separates “craft”, often associated with women, from “fine art” dominated by men, such as painting and sculpture. Why, feminist critics ask, should a woman’s woven rug hold less value than a man’s sculpture? This academic lens critiques how art history has treated women.

Another crucial aspect involves the persistent representation of women’s bodies in painting and sculpture throughout art history. Certain feminist art criticism trends question why women’s bodies have been excessively exposed, fetishized, and idealized

from a male perspective. Feminist artists strive to develop a new language to counter the conventional representation of the female body in painting. However, there is no established canonical discourse. The feminist art world is divided on the portrayal of the female body. Some artists choose to avoid it altogether, while others depict women with physical imperfections that challenge conventional beauty standards and deliberately make the viewer uncomfortable.

Despite the challenges of identifying authentic voices amidst neo- capitalist and orientalist trends, a group of artists persists in grappling with critical Middle Eastern issues. As orientalism continues to evolve in contemporary art, fostering thoughtful critiques remains essential to promote nuanced and authentic representations. Feminist art criticism tackles the underrepresentation and undervaluing of women's artistic contributions. By challenging patriarchal norms and exploring new artistic languages, these approaches aim to empower women and redefine their roles within society.





## Ayşe Akova

*Designer, Cartoonist, Podcast Publisher*

Despite progress, gender gaps persist in the arts, even in developed nations like Germany. While women graduate from fine arts, film, or music schools in high numbers, establishing themselves professionally remains a challenge. Many talented graduates, like female film school alumni, find themselves in jobs like camerawomen at weddings –roles that offer limited creative fulfillment. Art careers, statistically more attainable for men, leave many women with few options, potentially relegating their artistic endeavors to hobbies. Historical factors contribute to this imbalance. Until the 1970s, German women required husbands' permission to work, hindering their entry into the art world. Even today, women across professions, including the arts, face a gender pay gap, limiting financial rewards for their work.

Despite being held in progressive countries like France, prestigious film festivals like Cannes continue to demonstrate a gender gap in recognition. The Palme d'Or, the festival's highest directorial honor, has only been awarded to a woman once in its seventy-one-year history. Similarly, the Berlinale's Golden Bear reflects this disparity, with only six female recipients out of sixty- seven awards. This lack of representation extends beyond awards. Key decision-makers in the art world, like curators and budget allocators, are often male, potentially influencing resource allocation and perpetuating a cycle that favors male artists

and filmmakers. These imbalances underscore the urgent need for equal opportunities and recognition for women in artistic fields. Addressing these disparities will require continued efforts to promote gender equality in the arts. Encouraging more women to be proactive, assertive, and ambitious in pursuing their artistic careers can help challenge the existing norms and gradually bring about positive change in the industry. Although achieving full equality may be challenging, incremental progress over time can lead to a more equitable and diverse artistic landscape in the future.

I am pleased to introduce “Ayşe in Almanland”, or “Ayşe in Germany.” While the name “Ayşe” is entirely coincidental, this series promises a captivating exploration of a singular character. Ayşe’s story follows her quirky and occasionally tragicomic misadventures as she navigates life in Germany. The inspiration for Ayşe stems from a dear friend residing in Samsun. This friend, a woman of unwavering principles and a refreshingly direct communication style, embodies the passionate spirit of the Black Sea region. Her worldview is characterized by a clear distinction between right and wrong, leaving little room for ambiguity. This adherence to principles adds a captivating layer to Ayşe’s unique charm. Perhaps the most unexpected aspect of Ayşe’s character is the intriguing blend of seemingly contrasting attributes. A dedicated law student at the University of Cologne and a staunch advocate for feminist ideals, Ayşe also chooses to dress modestly. This juxtaposition playfully challenges conventional expectations and dismantles stereotypical assumptions.

As she shared her anecdotes with me, I could not help but envision hilarious comedy scenes. One of her stories goes like this: Picture my friend –a young girl dressed in black with a headscarf– sitting in a park in Germany. Next to her is a black man, and on the opposite bench is a German granny. The stage is set for a classic cultural misunderstanding. Suddenly, a German police officer approaches the trio, and everyone gives each other suspicious glances. The

black man thinks, "I wonder what she did; the officer must be coming for her." My friend, in turn, suspects the officer is after the man. Meanwhile, the German lady gives them both a knowing look –the kind you often see in German clichés. And here comes the twist! The police officer goes straight to the old woman and asks, "Are you the lady who escaped from the nursing home across the street?" This hilarious incident perfectly captures the intercultural comedy that exists in our society. We frequently find ourselves in such misunderstandings, prejudices, and tragicomic situations. Through my work, I wanted to shed some light on these events and share them with German society.

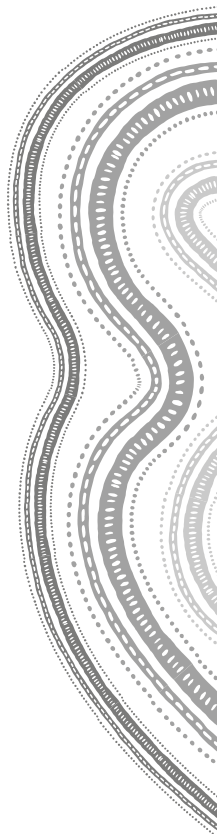
Germans are known for their appreciation of humor, and it can be a powerful tool for critique. While Europeans may be less receptive to direct criticism in professional settings, humor can bridge the gap and foster open dialogue. By addressing hijab-related issues through lighthearted humor, we can prompt Germans to consider our experiences and challenges with a more positive lens. This approach not only raises awareness and promotes understanding of cultural differences, but also adds an enjoyable element that can spark constructive conversations with German audiences.

## Samah Safi Bayazid

*Film Director & Producer, Co-Founder & Producer, Light Art VR*

During the presidency of Donald Trump, we observed a significant rise in Islamophobic incidents in American society. Muslim women, especially those wearing hijabs, became targets of attacks due to their visible Muslim identity. Through the "Islamophobin" project, we aimed to use humor to combat Islamophobia. We acknowledge the unfortunate reality of Islamophobia in the Western world. However, we believe that humor can be a powerful tool to address these challenges. It is important to recognize that alongside this approach, a dedicated and serious commitment from the Muslim community is also crucial.

Over time, we have observed progress in increased representation of minorities in the media and a growing sense of understanding and acceptance. Muslim women in the US are actively engaged in various professional domains, including politics, healthcare, and filmmaking. As a Muslim filmmaker and producer, I take pride in being part of this transformation. Initially, being recognized as one of the few female Muslim filmmakers filled me with pride. But when I am asked about being the only one, I express a fervent hope that this will not be the case for long. True strength lies in a collective voice. A multitude of Muslim women filmmakers raising their voices, sharing our stories, and narrating our experiences –that is what will empower our community.



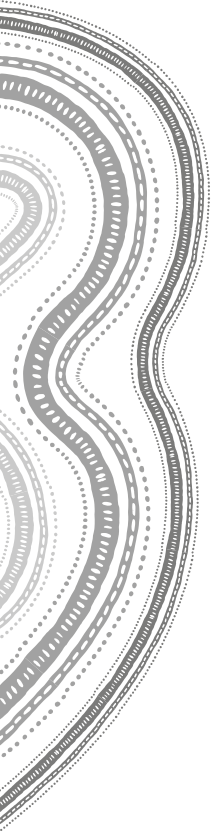
Historically, Hollywood producers have shaped our narratives on their terms. As Muslim women producers, we hold the power to enact meaningful change by directing resources towards projects that authentically portray our lives. Amidst our efforts to positively portray ourselves to the world, we must also remember the importance of connecting with our communities.

Platforms like these, where Turkish women can interact with other women from around the world, and Muslim women can address their particular concerns, are something I greatly admire. Over the past four years, my perspective has evolved. It is not that I have stopped caring about Islamophobia -it still profoundly affects me, especially now that I am a mother of a daughter. I approach wearing my hijab with caution, conscious of her safety. However, I have realized that we sometimes overlook our Muslim audience in our endeavor to prove ourselves to the West and others.

In recent years, a concerning trend has emerged within the Muslim community in the West, particularly in the US and Canada. Young people, increasingly influenced by negative media portrayals, have begun to disconnect from their cultural heritage and Islamic identity. To address this challenge, we initiated Light Art V.R. This innovative project aims to reengage young Muslims with their rich heritage by offering an immersive experience into the story of Islam, including the life of Prophet Muhammad. We leverage cutting-edge technology, V.R. Media, to deliver these narratives in an engaging and immersive way. Through motion platforms, wind, and sand effects, audiences are transported into the heart of historical events that shaped Islam, including the struggle for gender equality and the fight against slavery.

This project fills me with immense pride. Our work resonates with Muslim audiences and has attracted the attention of US companies interested in our V.R. technology and software. By reconnecting with our roots through immersive storytelling, we empower ourselves and our community to excel professionally and represent our faith with proudly. We hope that such initiatives can contribute to diminishing Islamophobia and inspire more confident Muslims to embrace their identities, speak their truths, and challenge misconceptions about Islam.





## Hümeyra Şahin

*Historian-Author, Advisor to the President of Türkiye,  
Member of the Culture and Art Policy Committee*

The relationship between women and art is multifaceted, encompassing their roles as creators, subjects, and patrons. In the West, women were historically marginalized as artists. This marginalization led to the 1970s outcry questioning the absence of prominent female figures in the art world. Artistic contributions by women were often dismissed or attributed to male influence, perpetuating the notion that artistic achievement was inherently masculine.

The situation in the Islamic world regarding women in art is more nuanced. While prominent female calligraphers or miniaturists may not be as readily identifiable as figures like Hafız Osman, Ahmed Karahisari, or Mitrakçı Nasuh, it would be inaccurate to say women were entirely absent. In many cases, their contributions may have been overlooked. Historical records often fail to acknowledge women's artistic involvement. However, delving deeper reveals remarkable stories, such as Queen Bilqis of Yemen (Sheba) and Zubaidah, wife of Harun al-Rashid, who commissioned aqueducts. These examples highlight the need to re-examine historical narratives to give credit where credit is due.

The Ottoman Empire offers a particularly noteworthy example of women's patronage of art. Mihrimah Sultan and Nurbanu Sultan, among others, have left a lasting impact on Islamic art through their patronage. Analyzing the relationship between Nurbanu Sultan and Mimar Sinan

in constructing the Atik Valide Complex goes beyond the typical patron-architect dynamic. It raises questions about the extent of Nurbanu Sultan's involvement and contribution to the project. Notably, Nurbanu Sultan's name is mentioned in the complex's inscriptions, highlighting her distinct role. While the representation of women in art throughout history may fall short of being ideal, examining these stories and exploring historical accounts allows us to uncover women's rich contributions and experiences in art, shedding light on their undeniable presence and impact.

After this historical analysis, I would like to focus on our Weaving Atlas Project, which emphasizes the importance of craftsmanship, where women have made significant contributions to art. After the Renaissance, art and craft were separated, with art being associated with individual expression and craft with practicality. However, in the 1850s, England witnessed the Arts and Crafts movement, reuniting art and craft and leading to new artistic and architectural developments. The craft industry, deeply intertwined with art, has significantly shaped weaving culture, particularly through the often-underexplored contributions of women. We are now recognizing the wealth of stories woven into creations like carpets, rugs, and fabrics – stories molded by women's experiences and emotions. Each piece becomes a unique narrative, reflecting their joys, sorrows, desires, and life journeys. This artistic expression, a language of communication in its own right, showcases women's creativity and inspiration.

Over the past two years, we have been diligently working on the Weaving Atlas Project with the generous support of the First Lady of Türkiye. Under the Directorate General for Lifelong Learning of the Ministry of National Education, this pioneering project seeks to create a comprehensive catalog of weavings from all corners of Türkiye, including their unique names and constituent materials. This inventory stands as a narrative of cultural history, demonstrating the pivotal role of women in shaping traditional art. The Weaving Atlas Project strives to harness Türkiye's vibrant



cultural potential in contemporary contexts. It addresses the rejuvenation and safeguarding of endangered weaving traditions while offering a distinct chance to compare weaving cultures across regions and nations. For instance, we are thrilled to embark on a new project comparing weaving traditions between Mexico and Türkiye. This venture explores how women from these diverse regions have approached this artistic practice throughout history. The project fosters collaboration between artisans and artists, recognizing craft as a boundless realm for artistic exploration and innovation that extends far beyond its conventional function.

The Weaving Atlas Project transcends its exploration of textile traditions. It actively dismantles orientalist clichés and prejudices that persist around Turkish culture and Islamic art. By presenting new narratives, the initiative fosters a more nuanced appreciation of our rich heritage. This rediscovery extends to the contributions of women obscured by dominant orientalist discourses. Figures like Bezmalem Valide Sultan, whose vast collection of over 500 volumes speaks volumes about her own cultural engagement, are brought back into focus.

In conclusion, the Weaving Atlas Project goes beyond simply celebrating women's artistic contributions. It empowers them to reimagine our cultural heritage for a contemporary audience. Disrupting the established networks and power structures that often confine the art world, this project amplifies the voices of previously unheard and underrepresented artists. Through this inclusive approach, the Weaving Atlas Project offers a valuable platform to showcase Türkiye's diverse textile traditions on the global stage.



5<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL  
**WOMEN & JUSTICE SUMMIT**

5<sup>th</sup> International  
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**KADEM**  
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