



For immediate release : MEDIA ADVISORY

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International Day Against Female Genital Mutilation WISE Calls for End to Harmful and Un-Islamic Practice

New York, NY, February 5, 2010 — In recognition of International Day Against Female Genital Mutilation, February 6, the Women’s Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE), reaffirms its commitment to advocate for the elimination of the cultural practice of female genital cutting (FGC)* and calls on all decision makers around the world to take a lead in establishing renewed efforts to eradicate FGC.

FGC is an ancient norm that was practiced long before the birth of Islam in the 7th century. In Egypt it is practiced by Christians as well as Muslims. Although FGC is often believed to be an Islamic practice, it has been overwhelmingly condemned by Islamic scholars, denounced in *fatwas* (opinions of Islamic law), and rendered illegal by governmental statutes.

Despite the fact that the Qur’an makes no reference to female genital cutting and that the Prophet said: “Take care of your daughters and don’t hurt them,” the practice continues today and has unfortunately been inaccurately recognized as a religious tradition within some parts of the Muslim world. According to UNFPA, an estimated 100 million to 140 million women and girls worldwide have undergone the practice and 3 million more girls are at risk each year. An increasing amount of medical evidence shows that FGC poses a substantial threat to women and girls’ health and increases susceptibility to HIV and maternal mortality.

As part of its ongoing *Jihad Against Violence* campaign, WISE is collaborating with the Egyptian Association for Society Development (EASD), an NGO in Giza, Egypt working to eradicate FGC by providing religious education against the practice, as well as financial incentives and replacement economic activities for those currently performing FGC. For example, in 2008 the members of the association reached out to Amin Hussein, a barber who regularly committed FGC illegally so he could financially support his wife and three children. After receiving educational training demonstrating that FGC is un-Islamic and harmful to women and broader society, Hussein agreed to stop the practice in exchange for monetary compensation and new tools for his barber shop business, which is now thriving. It has been well over a year since Hussein committed a single FGC procedure and he proudly displays in his barbershop for all to see a declaration from Al-Azhar University that FGC is un-Islamic and *haram* (forbidden). In another successful case under this pilot project, Zeinab Mohammed, a widowed midwife from an impoverished region of Giza, agreed to stop practicing FGC in exchange for an investment in her upstart grocery and fresh poultry store.

WISE, in tandem with EASD, urgently calls on all religious and community leaders to support programs and educational trainings that can effectively eliminate FGC within the context of local communities.

For more information, please go to www.wisemuslimwomen.org.

*In respect to the millions of women and girls around the world who have undergone the procedure and live with its consequences, WISE prefers to use the more sensitive term Female Genital Cutting (FGC).

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The Women’s Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE) is a program of the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA) and the Cordoba Initiative (CI). ASMA aims to elevate the discourse on Islam and foster environments in which Muslims thrive through interfaith collaboration, youth and women’s empowerment, and arts and cultural exchange. The Cordoba Initiative works to improve relations between the Muslim World and the West by offering innovative, viable, and sustainable solutions with concrete outcomes. The mission of WISE is to build a cohesive, global movement of Muslim women that will reclaim women’s rights in Islam, enabling them to make dignified choices and fully participate in creating just and flourishing societies.