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A JIHAD AGAINST VIOLENCE: MUSLIM WOMEN STRUGGLE FOR PEACE ON INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

New York, NY, December 10, 2009. As the world comes together today to celebrate the 61st anniversary of International Human Rights Day, we, the women of WISE (Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality) demand that violence against Muslim women come to an end.

Violence against women not only affects women and their families, but also the communities and societies we live in. Violence impedes women's development, access to education and health, and equal rights in the family which in turn hinders the progress and development of communities and societies. As the World Economic Forum's 2009 Global Gender Gap Index points out, 18 of the 25 lowest-ranking countries are Muslim-majority countries. It is time to end the violence against Muslim women and allow our communities to flourish in peace.

Today, WISE women leaders around the world are reclaiming the rich legacy that Muslim women have had in the history of Islam in order to end violence against women. Using their Islamic faith to justify and inspire Muslim women's empowerment, WISE women aim 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. A universal declaration for Muslim women and the cornerstone of the WISE movement, the WISE Compact highlights the basic rights of Muslim women. In particular, it focuses on the need to end violence against women and as its signatories, members of the WISE community commit themselves to the realization of this endeavor, *'We are dedicated to protecting and promoting life by promoting the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health of Muslim women and by eliminating violence against Muslim women.'* Similarly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states the importance of life and security for all individuals in Article 3; *'Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.'*

WISE is working in several areas to end violence against women. WISE's Shura Council, a global council of Muslim women scholars, activists and specialists, recently launched their campaign *Jihad against Violence*, which uses religiously-grounded arguments against violence. In addition, WISE is collaborating with a number of women's organizations around the world, including in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Egypt to improve women's rights and end violence against women. WISE women from the Noor Educational Centre in Afghanistan are creating the first holistic gender-sensitive Imam training program in Kabul and surrounding areas. In Pakistan, WISE women from the organization Bedari are organizing advocacy efforts including outreach material and street theater performances in an effort to raise awareness about domestic violence against women. WISE women from the organization Egyptian Association for Society Development have developed an economic incentive and religious education project to end Female Genital Cutting (FGC) practices in surrounding neighborhoods of Cairo.

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

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.