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These People Are Showing That Islam Is Compatible With Women's Rights

The #ImamsForShe campaign is meant to empower women to educate themselves about their rights in Islam. These imams put forward an uplifting, inclusive and compassionate expression of Islam.

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Mar. 17, 2016, 11:03 AM EDT | **Updated** Mar. 18, 2017

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TUNIS, Tunisia -- A group of 30 imams and Islamic scholars, both men and women, recently gathered around a table to do something historic. Our goal is to find a better way forward for women and girls and to inoculate radicalism in a Muslim country that has, for hundreds of years, been a model progressive nation.

Meanwhile, in Burundi, a group of 26 imams -- in an organization called Alliance of Imams of the North Corridor for Humanitarian Development (AICNDH) -- is striving to defend the rights of women and girls in a country now consumed with civil strife. In various mosques across the northern part of the country, these imams recently delivered 12 *khutbahs*, or speeches, on women's rights in Islam. AICNDH, in partnership with Muslims for Progressive Values, will be hosting a series of conferences at universities and schools in Burundi over the coming months, also on Muslim women's rights.

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Together, these imams are the brave [#ImamsForShe](#): religious and lay leaders, Islamic scholars, men and women. They debunk the misogynistic interpretation of Islam. They fight against the violation of the rights of women and girls in the Muslim world and beyond. These are the imams we need to empower and mobilize.



For many years in our Muslim communities, we have heard from too many hate-mongering imams, whose Wahhabi theology is radical, racist and supremacist. Their interpretation of Islam is based on what "Sharia law" dictates. But Sharia law is a man-made construct. Sharia law is a mash-up of medieval, misogynistic political leaders' extrapolation of the Quran, pre-Islamic norms, cultural norms of the day and hadiths (secondary texts of what Prophet Muhammad supposedly said and did, compiled by men more than 100 years after his death).

Instead of challenging these false "truths," the American mainstream media popularizes them, like when the Islamist imam Anjem Choudary was [featured](#) on CBS in a "60 Minutes" episode; he is also a [favorite](#) of Fox News. The ex-Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali's propagation



on media outlets from the right to left, including NPR.

Less visible in the public discourse is another set of imams who have an [inclusive worldview](#). Far too often, they are shut out by Muslim communities, slandered for challenging the misogynistic interpretations of the faith and, in some instances, [killed](#) by radicals.

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[Muslims for Progressive Values](#) is a grassroots, faith-based human rights organization. For years we have been in search of these inclusive imams. We have been elated to partner with them, but we've also discovered that they recoil in fear at the thought of going public with their views.

Borrowing from the United Nations Women's [#HeForShe](#) campaign, promoted by actress Emma Watson, we designed a new campaign called [#ImamsForShe](#). We need to counter the domination of Islamist imams in our societies with [#ImamsForShe](#) and to actually improve the lives of all human beings, particularly women.

In March of last year in New York, at the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women session, we launched the campaign to a [packed room](#) of diplomats and non-governmental organizations hungry for [#ImamsForShe](#) to positively affect real lives on the ground. We reached 125,000 people on social media, were featured on [Voices of New York](#), [written up](#) in a Danish newspaper, praised and promoted by the minister for education, culture and science in The Netherlands and, most importantly, endorsed and championed by imams and human rights defenders of Muslim heritage.



On March 23, we will take this initiative to the next level with a [workshop](#) that will pair up imams from various Muslim backgrounds with secular women's rights defenders at the U.N.'s 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York.

The #ImamsForShe campaign is meant to [empower women to educate themselves](#) about their rights in Islam so that no mullah or husband can deprive them or their daughters of their right to decide whom they choose to marry. These imams put forward an uplifting, inclusive and compassionate expression of Islam. They challenge female genital mutilation, child marriages, male "guardianship" and the death sentence of daughters who supposedly dishonor the family name.

Imams in the Muslim world are, for the most part, highly regarded. It is a hierarchical system that is not going to disappear. But with that status of authority comes great responsibility. That is why working within that system is necessary if we are to positively affect people's lives. We need #ImamsForShe to counter radicalism with the same conviction as the hate-mongering imams.



compassionate expression of Islam.

A Pew Forum [report](#) last year on world religions states that by the year 2050, the world Muslim population will bump up against the Christian world population. What sort of adherents to Islam should we hope for? The Islamist ones who have destroyed historical sites, churches, mosques and have enslaved girls and pushed gays off tall buildings? Or Muslims with an inclusive worldview?

The choice is clear.

High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein [put](#) it perfectly: "We must persevere together until we bend the course of humanity's future to a destination more hopeful and enlightened, in which human decency is the only currency of human interaction."

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