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Moroccan mourchidat, Jewish, Christian women fight extremism
Morocco's Muslim women leaders in US combat extremism



Muslim Moroccan women met with Jewish and Christian counterparts in New York to discuss tolerance

CAIRO (AlArabiya.net)

Morocco's newest Muslim women leaders met with their Jewish and Christian counterparts in New York to combat religious extremism, affirm common values of tolerance and show support for women's leadership roles in religious communities worldwide at an interfaith forum that ended Friday, the Washington Post reported Saturday.

They are the Moroccan mourchidat -- Arabic for guide -- are women religious leaders trained to take up the daily duties and responsibilities of male imams except for leading prayer.

Nezha Nassi, who headed the Moroccan mourchidat delegation to the week long forum, was among 250 women trained by Morocco's Ministry of Religious Affairs to act as a female imams, counselling prison inmates, congregants at mosques and Muslim families.

This is spiritual, moral and physical counseling

Nezha Nassi, head of mourchidat delegation

"This is spiritual, moral and physical counseling," Nassi told the Washington Post.

Nassi and her delegation, sponsored by the Moroccan American Cultural Center, met with officials from the State Department which hailed the

Morocco mourchidat program in its April report to Congress a "pioneering" program that counters terrorism and spreads tolerant Islam.

The interfaith forum appealed for religious understanding and condemned extremist interpretations of religion.

"We come from lands apart, but we couldn't be closer together," said Sarah Sayeed, program associate, Interfaith Center of New York, was quoted as saying.

"Across the world, women religious leaders of diverse faiths have made great strides and yet face many

of the same challenges. The mourchidate program in Morocco is an exciting and promising initiative that strengthens our faith communities. It should definitely be replicated in other countries."

The mourchidat program began in 2006 with the aim to train and certify women religious leaders to work along with male imams in a bid to counter suicide bombers and combat violent interpretations of Islam.

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Sarah Sayeed, Interfaith Center of New York

Women's rights

Besides fighting extremism, the Moroccan Ministry of Religious Affairs began to implement reforms in family laws and to give women more rights such as giving wives the right to approve a husband's right to more wives and their rights to initiative divorce.

The mourchidat also met with American Muslim women leaders in New York Friday to discuss the role of Muslim women leaders in combating Islamophobia and stereotypes in the U.S.

Daisy Khan, New York founder of Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity, linked the mourchidat program to a global movement geared to improve the status of Muslim women.

"There is a rising consciousness that we need to organize and institutionalize ourselves as sisters of other faiths have done before us," Khan was quoted by the Washington Post.

Rabbi Stephanie Dickstein, Spiritual Care Coordinator at the Shira Ruskay Center of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, and Rev. Elizabeth Garnsey, Associate Rector at Episcopal Church of the Heavenly Rest, were among the Jewish panelists in New York.

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