

## Muslim couple spearhead drive to clear post 9/11 haze

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### **By Sarmad Qazi**

THE lack of response from the Islamic world to the concerns of Americans post 9/11, was deafening and forced Muslims there to take the lead to clear any misconceptions, American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA) executive director, Daisy Khan said here yesterday.

Her husband, Feisal Abdul Rauf, has served as imam of Masjid al Farah in New York for 25 years. Khan is visiting Qatar for the first time.

“They (Americans) simply wanted to know why Muslims hate their country, or whether it’s the values or cultures that they are up against,” she said.

According to her, 9/11 changed every thing for some 25mn Muslims who live in the West and started debates within the pluralistic Islamic community.

“A lot of people, organisations and governments approached me after the horrible incident, and even though we have always advocated and organised interfaith dialogues, the need for these is now more than ever,” said Imam Rauf, who is also the author of What’s Right With Islam and two other books and has spoken at the UN forum for Islamiophobia and anti-Semitism.

This led the imam and his wife to start initiatives and come up with a “master plan”, since “a massive undertaking such as ours had to involve governments, NGOs, think tanks and businesses”.

He founded the Cordoba Initiative that provides the US and Muslim policy makers and the international press with informed research and critical thinking regarding ways to improve the relationship between America and the Islamic world. The effort is aimed at issue-specific research, as well as policy white papers, editorials, magazine articles and books.

The issue and policy research aspect of Cordoba Initiative currently includes The Shariah Project, that will index the Islamic jurisprudence, while the Dialogues include organisation of The Jerusalem Dialogues, The Spirit 21 Dialogues and the Civil Society Dialogues.

“We also emphasis on cultural and educational programmes, with our lectures, symposia and conferences,” he said.

ASMA, which works under the umbrella of the Cordoba Initiative, oversees the Women’s Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity (WISE) and Muslim Leaders of Tommorrow (MLT).

“We realised that Muslim women lag behind their male counterparts in health, school enrolment, income, and political engagement. This state of affairs is the result of a complex interaction of religion, culture, economics, and politics though. These factors underscore a need for religiously grounded arguments in women’s advocacy efforts,” said Daisy Khan, who reconsidered her career path of 25 years as a corporate executive for design and construction project management, to dedicate herself to community development. “WISE is basically defining human rights in an Islamic legal framework, by fostering collaboration among fragmented groups of women and committing them to dismantle theological oppression through education,” she said.

The next annual conference of WISE will be held in June in Malaysia, where the Women’s Shura Council (consultative) will be discussing ‘distorted scriptural interpretations’.

The MLT also convenes an annual assembly of emerging young leaders and is premised on two ideas.

“First, Muslims are part of the solution and not the problem. Second, to tackle current crises, Muslim partnerships need to be formed along new lines,” said Imam Rauf, who’s also won multiple awards for his efforts of inter-faith harmony.

“MLT is poised to become a global movement for positive Muslim-West interaction in near future,” he added.



[Imam Rauf ..... advocating inter-faith harmony and Daisy Khan .... amplifying the voice of women and youth](#)

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