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EWIC PUBLIC OUTREACH PROJECT

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EWIC Staff Concept Note: **MUSLIM WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT: MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRIES**

There are many Muslim women in leadership roles in Muslim-majority countries. Muslim-majority countries, for purposes of this concept note, are considered those countries that have 50% or higher Muslim population. Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and Kosovo are all countries that either have women in governmental positions or have done so in the recent past. Many of these women held the executive power, as prime ministers or as presidents of their countries.

The list below lays out *the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments in 2013 in Muslim-majority countries*.

Data from the World Bank website:

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS/countries/1W?display=default>

Afghanistan: 28%	Jordan: 12%	Syria: 12%
Algeria: 32%	Kazakhstan: 24%	Tajikistan: 19%
Azerbaijan: 16%	Kuwait: 6%	Tunisia: 27%
Bahrain: 10%	Lebanon: 3%	Turkey: 14%
Bangladesh: 20%	Libya: 17%	Turkmenistan: 17%
Egypt: NA-	Malaysia: 10%	United Arab Emirates: 18%
Eritrea: 22%	Morocco: 17%	United Kingdom: 23%
India: 11%	Pakistan: 21%	Uzbekistan: 22%
Indonesia: 19%	Saudi Arabia: 20%	
Iran: 2013: 3%	Sudan: 25%	

A majority of the MENA populations in Jordan, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco and Lebanon agree that women should hold leadership positions.¹ In order to be assured of gender parity both Tunisia and Libya used a “zippered list” approach in elections following the Arab Spring. Zippered lists alternate male-female candidates. In Tunisia women hold 23% of parliamentary seats and in Libya 17% of the National Assembly seats are held by women. In Egypt women are currently campaigning for proportional representation in the government.²

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union 18.6% of parliamentary seats in Indonesia are held by women.

³As of 2011, Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority country in the world, as well as Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh all have a higher proportion of female representation in their lower chambers than do the

¹ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/22180/issue-women-government-islamic-countries.aspx>

² <http://middleeastvoices.voanews.com/2013/10/insight-quotas-and-women-in-egyptian-politics-84510/>

³ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

United States. Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh both have 20% female representation in their lower chambers while the United States has 18.3%.⁴

In Saudi Arabia thirty women have been appointed to seats in the Shura Council, or collective assembly. King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz appointed university graduates, and human rights activists to fill the seats formerly held by males. The king also indicated that by 2015 women would be granted the right to vote and run in local elections.⁵

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENTAL POSITIONS:

MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRIES

In Indonesia, Megawati Sukarnoputri was Indonesia's second democratically elected president. Megawati served as president from 2001 to 2004. She also served as vice president from 1999-2001. She was the fourth woman to serve as head of the Indonesian government. In Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto was the first female Prime Minister. Benazir Bhutto was also leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Bhutto served as Prime Minister from 1988 to 1990 and then again from 1993-1996. Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in 2007.⁶ In Bangladesh, Khaleda Zia has been involved in politics for over 30 years. Khaleda Zia served as Prime Minister of Bangladesh from 1991-1995 and again from 2001-2006.⁷ Following Zia, Sheikh Hasina has been the Prime Minister of Bangladesh since 2009. She previously held the same position from 1996-2001. Women have been a consistent presence in the Turkish government since 1971. The current minister of the Family and Social Policies is a woman, Fatima Sahin, who has held the position since 2011.⁸ Atifete Jahjaga is the president of Kosovo. Kosovo is 95% Muslim. Atifete Jahjaga assumed office of Kosovo in April 2011 and is the first female head of state in the Balkans and the youngest person to assume office.⁹ Roza Isakovna Otunbayeva was elected to serve as the interim president of the Muslim-majority country of Kyrgyzstan from 2010-2011. Kyrgyzstan has set quotas for women government and is a part of the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.¹⁰ In 2012 Senegalese parliamentary elections 64 women were elected to the Assembly. Mame Madior Boye was the Prime Minister of Senegal from 2001 to 2002.¹¹ In Afghanistan 27.5% of upper-house seats in parliament are held by women while 27% of lower-house seats were also occupied by women.¹² In 2005 Habiba Sarabi was appointed to be governor of the Bamiyan Province in Afghanistan.¹³ Bahrain was the first country in the Gulf region to have women fully participate in elections. Bahrain has 15 female MPs who come from diverse religious backgrounds. Muslim, Jewish and Christian women are represented in the government.¹⁴ Muslim women hold leadership roles not only within their native countries but in the diaspora as well. For example, Mehreen Faruqi was the first Muslim to enter the Australian parliament. Mehreen Faruqi migrated from Pakistan with her family in the early 1990's. Faruqi was the first female Muslim in the Australia government.¹⁵

⁴<http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=MDG&f=seriesRowID%3a557%3bcountryID%3a360%2c784%2c826%2c840%3byear%3a2011&c=2,3,4&s=countryEnglishName:asc,year:desc&v=1>

⁵<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/02/2013219201637132278.html>

⁶<http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources>

⁷<http://www.forbes.com/lists/2005/11/JSK7.html>

⁸http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/milletvekillerimiz_sd.bilgi?p_donem=23&p_sicil=6159

⁹http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/07/atifete-jahiaga-kosovo-president_n_846356.html

¹⁰<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8608708.stm> and <http://www.wluml.org/node/6978>

¹¹<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-18719787>

¹²<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

¹³http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4610311.stm

¹⁴<http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Jewish-woman-named-to-Bahrain-Shura-Council>

¹⁵<http://www.voanews.com/content/first-muslim-woman-will-enter-australian-parliament/1647010.html>