



**Q** Please provide a brief introduction of your background (professional & religious).

I was raised a Southern Baptist. I was very devout and won many awards as a child and young adult for my knowledge of the Bible. I was a Sunday school teacher and youth minister. Before I studied Islam, I obtained a few degrees and ran a very successful business. After embracing Islam, I obtained degrees in broadcasting and communications. I won several awards for radio and television production, including an Emmy, but was forced out of the profession by my determination to wear hijab.

I took Shahadah on May 21, 1977. At the time, I, also, declared that I would never wear hijab. Part of the reason was due to the way it was explained to me. It was only after reading in the Qur'an and understanding that the purpose of hijab was to identify myself as a Muslim, that I developed an appreciation of hijab. There was no one pushing me to cover. In fact, I was the first woman in my community to cover, and many Muslims tried to talk me out of it. It is my pride in being a Muslim that gives me the courage to stand against opposition and make myself easily identified.

At present I am the director of the International Union of Muslim Women. I am completely dedicated to Islamic work. I travel all over the world teaching people about Islam. I, also, work to correct misin-

formation that Muslims have about what it means to be a Muslim. There are too many cultural practices mixed into the Islam that many follow. It will only be through increased knowledge, particularly in women, that many of the errors can be corrected.

**Q** When and how did you start wearing hijab and what (if any) was the reaction among your own circle?

I started wearing hijab in 1978. The immediate reaction was loss of employment and problems in my Women's Studies classes. Most of my friends accepted it, as long as I did not try to put it on them. My mother just asked me not to wear it at home. It was the Muslims that objected the most, especially the women. They did not understand what the Qur'an said. They found the old 'woman is like a pearl' adage to be demeaning and so did I. Everything they had been taught made them see hijab as a burden, rather than a special right granted the woman. Allah chose to make the woman most easily identified as Muslim, so that they can be the first teachers of non-Muslims.

**Q** What is your response to France's recent hijab ban?

I am horrified! To ask me to go out without my hijab would be like asking a nun to go topless. It amazes me, and I cannot help but wonder if they would have ordered Mary the Mother of Jesus to uncover her hair. For women of her time it was the mark of a religious person. During the persecution of the

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early Christians, it was one of the ways they identified the Christian women. They stood fast, even under the threat of death. What is the next step? Will priests have to give up their collars? Will the cross be banned? When a nation begins to persecute one group, it is not long before other groups will face the same persecution. We are all created by the same God. We all pray to the same God. How can they face the Creator and justify persecuting Muslim women who only want people to know that they love God. Shame on them!

**Q** What are your personal observations of the media's portrayal of hijab in the West?

The media in this country has been careful, thanks to the advocacy groups. But I wonder how long it will last. Too many political figures are speaking out of ignorance and prejudice. Yes, it is true that most of them are Republicans, which is why I am now a Democrat.

**Q** Can you help in explaining the intense controversy and reaction that takes place among Muslims and non-Muslims concerning the issue of hijab? How do you think a better understanding can be reached?

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