

## ***Beijing+25: Has the Mask of Gender Equality Fallen?***

### **TALK 7 – Islam: The Path to the True Empowerment of Women**

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#### **SPEECH FROM THE CENTRAL MEDIA OFFICE OF HIZB UT TAHRIR**

**Dear respected sisters**, the 18<sup>th</sup> century renown female British traveler and author, Lady Elizabeth Craven, wrote regarding the position of women within the Uthmani Khilafah, in her book, ‘A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople’: *“The Turks in their conduct towards our sex are an example to all other nations.....and I think them (Turkish women) in their manner of living, capable of being the happiest creatures breathing.”*

**Dear sisters**, this was once the unrivalled status of the Muslim woman in the Muslim lands – admired and respected by those of other nations for her rights and good treatment and viewed as the embodiment of empowerment. But this is a far cry from what we see today. So how do we return the Muslim woman to this position, and how can the countless problems that she, and women across the world, face today be solved?

For sure, it will not be achieved through the Beijing Declaration, CEDAW or any other international women’s agreement. Surely, we cannot continue down a path of recycling decades of failure by placing our hopes in further flawed gender equality laws and policies to lift the many injustices that women face. No! This will only prolong their suffering and misery. Indeed, the gender equality illusion has well and truly shattered. In truth, it has functioned as nothing but an opium in the struggle for women’s rights globally, and will never deliver a better quality of life for women. So enough of following illusions! Enough of false hopes and broken dreams! We need to reject this failed Western-inspired disastrous secular experiment in social engineering!

Real change for women will also never be realized through the adoption of a few new policies and laws within states, or greater involvement of women in decision-making, power-sharing or formulation of legislation, for the problems women face are not rooted in gender inequalities; they are ideological and systemic in their basis – caused by the Capitalist, Socialist and other man-made ideologies and systems which govern lands today. Real change for women will never materialize under such systems – for how can we seek a cure from the source of the disease?!! No! To build a brighter future for the women of the Muslim world and beyond, we need to embrace a radically alternative political, economic and social vision for our lands built upon an ideology that embodies sound principles, laws and systems to practically deliver comprehensive change for the lives of women in reality. This requires root and branch change of the political structure and systems in our Muslim lands, and comprehensive transformation of the foundation, values and laws within its societies.

Such a vision cannot be generated from the minds of human beings: male or female, for the human being by nature is limited and flawed in his or her thinking – regardless of the level of their intellect or good intentions. Rather, this vision can only originate from the Creator of the universe, Allah (swt), the All-Knowing, the All-Aware, the All-Wise, for He Alone knows best how to organize the rights, roles and responsibilities of men and women in the best and most just way to secure the needs, dignity, interests and happiness of all human beings – male and female alike – and to achieve harmony and progress within a state. Hence, it is the ideology of **Islam**, implemented by its political system: the **Khilafah** (Caliphate) based upon the method of the Prophethood, built purely on the principles and laws revealed by Allah (swt) which offer a detailed and correct vision for how to

comprehensively solve all the problems that women face, empower them in all areas of life, protect them from harm and build for them a prosperous, safe, and dignified life. But how exactly does Islam and the Khilafah lay the path to the true empowerment of women? This will be addressed in 4 key points in this talk Insha Allah.

## 1. Having the Correct Viewpoint of Life:

The first and most fundamental step in the empowerment of the woman is her embracing of the correct view of the purpose of her life – to worship her Creator, as Allah Almighty says, ﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾ **“I have not created man and jinn except as a worship unto me.”** [Adh-Dhariyat: 56] The woman who truly appreciates this point and establishes the correct relationship with her Creator, is liberated from the restrictive, ever-changing and often unrealistic and oppressive expectations of men or women – in how she looks, dresses, behaves, her lifestyle, her aspirations and her role in society, for she accepts to be judged only by the One Who gave her life, empowered with the understanding that Allah (swt) alone knows best. She is the woman who does not need to prove her self-worth by adopting the duties and roles of men, or by contributing to the economy and the GDP figures of her state, for she measures her status only through the Eyes of her Creator and her obedience to His Commands, knowing that she will be justly rewarded for fulfilling whatever role and responsibilities He has prescribed for her, as Allah (swt) says, ﴿مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾ **“Whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, while he (or she) is a true believer verily, to him will give a good life, and We shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do.”** [An-Nahl: 97]. She is the woman, therefore, who does not view her success in life based on wealth, her career, profession, or her social status but upon her Taqwa (God-Consciousness) and fulfilling the duties obligated upon her by her Rabb (swt). He (swt) says, ﴿إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ﴾ **“Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is the one who has At-Taqwa (the pious)”** [Al-Hujurat:13]. And this is the woman who embraces an enlightened vision of life based upon Islam, and is empowered to live by it and deliver it to the world, to liberate humanity from its oppression and create real change for humankind. What can be more empowering than this?

## 2. Establishing the Correct View of the Woman Within a Society:

Secondly sisters, the empowerment of women depends also upon the view that an ideology and system creates of the woman within a society. Islam views the woman and the man as being the same in their human nature, their intellect and their worth, for Allah (swt) says, ﴿وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِّنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا﴾ **“And Allah has made for you mates of your own nature...”** [An-Nahl: 72]. And the Prophet (saw) said, «إنما النساء شقائق الرجال» **“Women are the twin halves of men.”** [Abu Dawood] Indeed, when Allah (swt) addresses humankind with His rights and obligations, He addresses them as human beings, and not as males and females. For example, He says, ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ﴾ **“Oh mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, who created you from a single person...”** [An-Nisa: 1]. Therefore, in Islam, men and women have the same rights and obligations except if a distinction is made in the Shariah texts. So the woman has the same political rights as the man to elect her ruler, be a member of a political party, raise her grievances against those who rule her, express her political opinions, and be elected representatives in the Majlis Al-Ummah – a state body which accounts the Khalifah and walis. Women also have the same economic rights as men to trade, own land and property, invest their wealth, be an employer and employee – whether it be as a judge, doctor, journalist, engineer, a director of a company or any other profession, including heading various state departments or being spokeswomen for the Khilafah, as

stated in Article 98 of Hizb ut Tahrir's *Draft Constitution of Al-Khilafah*, which reads, "Any citizen of the state, male or female, Muslim or not, who is suitably competent may be appointed as head or a civil servant of any administration, directorate or department." We see for example, how Shifa bint Abdullah was appointed as the Qadi Hisba, the judge of the market place, during the Khilafah of Umar bin Al-Khattab (ra). Women also have the same legal, health care and education rights as men in Islam, such as becoming scholars in every sphere of life, like Aisha (ra), the wife of the Prophet (saw) who was not only known as 'faqihat ul Ummah' jurist of the Ummah to whom the Khalifahs would refer for questions on fiqh due to her expertise in Islamic jurisprudence, but who was also a great scholar of medicine, literature and poetry.

However, unlike secular and other man-made systems, where the rights of people can be discarded at a whim according to the prejudices of those who rule, as we see with hijab and niqab bans in Europe which marginalize Muslim women, in Islam, the God-given rights of women are set in stone, and no man, ruler or government can deprive her of them for they are ordained by Allah (swt). Rather, the leader of the state must guarantee these entitlements for them, and this was the case under the 1400 years of Islamic rule of the Khilafah as evidenced by its law books and judicial records – which is why there was no need for any women's rights movement in the history of Islam. So I ask you sisters – under which system – are the rights and privileges of women more safe?

Furthermore, Islam has an unrivalled view towards the dignity of women, ascribing it immense value, and placing its protection at the same level as safeguarding life itself, even describing the utterance of a single word which slanders her honour as a heinous crime, deserving of a severe punishment. Numerous Islamic evidences oblige men and society to view women with respect, and treat them with kindness and defend their dignity always, as well as unequivocally prohibiting any form of violence or abuse against them. Allah (swt) says, ﴿وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ﴾ **"And live with them in kindness."** [An-Nisa': 19]. And the Prophet (saw) said, «أَلَا وَاسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ خَيْرًا» **"Treat women well"** [Bukhari and Muslim], and «مَا أَكْرَمَهُنَّ إِلَّا لَنِيْمٍ» **"None but a noble man treats women in an honourable manner, and none but an ignorant treats women disgracefully."** [Narrated by Ahmad] And he (saw) also said, «لَا تَضْرِبُوا إِمَاءَ اللَّهِ» **"Do not beat the female slaves of Allah."** However, in contrast to secular states who talk of respect for women but implement laws which violate it, Islam and the Khilafah embody a multi-level approach to preserve this high view of women within the society and protect them from harm. Firstly, Islam rejects liberal personal and sexual freedoms and prohibits the sexualisation of women or society as well as any other belief or action which devalues the status of women or could harm their wellbeing. This includes the exploitation of women's bodies and beauty for profit.

Secondly, the Khilafah will place the protection of women's dignity and security as a key pillar of state policy. Article 112 of Hizb ut Tahrir's *Draft Constitution of Al-Khilafah* states: "She (the woman) is an honour (ird) that must be protected". The state will achieve this through many means. It will nurture the vital concept of Taqwa as well as the correct view of women within the society through its education system and media policy which both strengthen the sublime values of Islam within the state. Indeed, Taqwa is the frontline defence against the abuse of women, for it creates a mentality of accountability to the Creator in the way men and society treat women, protecting them from harassment and violence. In addition, through its educational and judicial system, the Khilafah would strive to eradicate all traditional attitudes that devalue women or rob them of their Islamic rights, as well as eliminate oppressive traditional practices such as forced marriages and honour killings. This is alongside implementing Islam's severe punishments for any form of violence against women, including the death-penalty for murder or rape. M. De M. D'Ohsson, an

Armenian man who worked for many years in the Swedish Embassy in Turkey in the 18th century, wrote regarding the Uthmani Khilafah, *“Anyone who behaves badly towards a woman, regardless of his position or religion, cannot escape punishment, because religion generally commands women to be respected. For this reason, both the police and judges deal very severely with anyone who ill-treats women.”*

Alongside all this, the Khilafah would comprehensively apply all the principles and laws of the Islamic social system, which places the protection of the dignity of women at the very heart of all its rules and regulations. For example, laws, such as the segregation of the sexes except for a need defined by the Shariah, the prescription of a specific dress code for the woman which conceals her beauty, the prohibition of a non-Mahram man and woman to be alone (Khulwa) with one another, and the obligation to preserve chastity, all help to preserve a pure relationship between the genders that ensures their interaction is not cheapened or hindered through sexual distractions through ensuring that all sexual relationships are restricted to marriage alone. This establishes a productive, healthy cooperation between men and women in all fields of life, empowering the woman to engage actively in society, for example in study or work, but within a dignified and safe environment, while also protecting the integrity of marriage and the family unit.

### **3. Assigning the Woman the Correct Role in Family Life and Society:**

Thirdly sisters, Islam empowers the woman by assigning her a role in life and society which is in harmony with her distinct and indispensable nature as the child-bearer of humanity, which is essential for the continuity of the human race. It truly celebrates and values this unique nature when organizing the roles and responsibilities of the genders in family life and society, rather than ignoring and sidelining it as Capitalist states and feminist agendas have. Dale O’Leary, a freelance US journalist, lecturer and author of the book, *The Gender Agenda* stated, *“The search for authentic womanhood begins with the truth about the human person.....that men and women are different by design and that these designs are a blessing.”* Any ideology or system that ignores the undeniable truth of gender differences when organizing a state, or fails to appreciate the unique biological nature of women as the child-bearers of humanity, or accommodate for the central role that a mother has in a child’s life, will always fail in its search for authentic womanhood and the empowerment of women. Indeed, expecting women to adopt the same duties as men and compete with them on the same level, while pregnancy, childbirth and nursing affects the genders differently, and it is the path to oppression, not empowerment. Islam, therefore, ascribes a prestigious status for motherhood, and views it as a great and honourable duty that emulates the actions of the Mujahideen in its worth, and which is promised the best of rewards in the Akhira, rather than as unpaid and unimportant work that is a waste of women’s talents as espoused by feminist movements. جاء رجل إلى رسول الله صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، فَقَالَ: مَنْ أَحَقُّ النَّاسِ بِحُسْنِ صَحَابَتِي؟ قَالَ: «أُمُّكَ»، «تُمَّ أُمُّكَ» (رواه البخاري ومسلم) A man once came to the Prophet (saw) and said, ‘O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship?’ The Prophet (saw) said: **“Your mother.”** The man said, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: **“Then your mother.”** The man further asked, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: **“Then your mother.”** The man asked again, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: **“Then your father.”** [Bukhari and Muslim].

Hence, Islam empowers women as mothers, and supports them in fulfilling the vital role of raising righteous and successful generations, which is one of the most valuable assets of any society and fundamental for achieving progress within any nation. The Khilafah does this by defining the primary role of women as a mother and wife, and lifting from her the burden of providing for herself and her family, by obliging that she and her children always be

financially maintained by her husband, father, brother or other male relatives, so that she has quality time to care for her children. Allah (swt) says, *الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى* ﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى﴾ **“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means.”** [An-Nisa: 34] This is a privilege for the woman, and a source of ease, and not a state of subordination to the man. If the woman has no male relatives to provide for her, then it is the state’s responsibility to do so, for the Prophet (saw) as leader of Madinah said, *«مَنْ تَرَكَ مَالًا فَلِأَهْلِهِ وَمَنْ تَرَكَ دَيْنًا أَوْ ضَيَاعًا فَلِيَّ وَعَلَيَّ»* **“If somebody dies (among the Muslims) leaving some property, the property will go to his heirs; and if he leaves a debt or dependents, we will take care of them.”** [Muslim]. Article 156 of Hizb ut Tahrir’s *Draft Constitution for the Khilafah* states: *“The State is to guarantee the living expenses of the one who has no money, no work and no relatives responsible for his financial maintenance.”*

The Khilafah would empower motherhood through many means. It would promote its importance within society through its education system and media, such that even workplaces would accommodate for women’s responsibilities to their children. It would support any woman whose husband fails to provide for her, forcing him to fulfil this obligation according to his capacity or face punishment. Writings from the law books of Islamic scholars during the Abbassid Khilafah, for example, describe how women would file complaints to judges against husbands who did not provide them sufficient maintenance and how the judge would enforce payment. The Khilafah would also support every man to fulfil his obligation of providing for his family by ensuring him employment, as mentioned in Article 153, of Hizb ut Tahrir’s *Draft Constitution for the Khilafah*: *“The State should guarantee work for all subjects holding citizenship of the State.”* This would include providing interest-free funds from its treasury, or donating its cultivated land, or organising training, or whatever else is required to aid men provide for their families.

This primarily role of women as mothers does not take away their right to education or work if they wish. Islam does not hold the narrow feminist and Capitalist view of either roles. Rather it simply ensures that women are not coerced into employment such that they neglect their duties to their children. Indeed sisters, what can be more empowering than embracing the role of raising generations who are the future heroes, scholars and thinkers of this Ummah; those who seek to lead humanity with the light and mercy of Islam and open the world to truth and justice?!! Or is our worth as women only measured in dollar signs, and according to our contribution to the revenue of states???

#### **4. The Need for a Sound and Just System Which Genuinely Serves Humanity:**

And finally sisters, the empowerment of women can only ever happen under a just system which genuinely serves humanity and truly cares for its wellbeing, as well as embodying sound solutions to the political, economic, educational, health care, social and all other problems that women face. The Islamic system, the Khilafah, is the physical manifestation of these qualities.

It is a system whose politics is sincerely based upon taking care of the needs of those it rules, and whose leadership is shaped upon guardianship of the people according to the command of the Prophet (saw), *«وَالْإِمَامُ رَاعٍ وَمَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ»* **“The Imam (Khalifah) is a guardian and he is responsible for his subjects.”** Therefore, it is not a state which seeks to secure the self-serving political ambitions of political parties or rulers, but rather to ensure justice is upheld, oppression lifted and the rights of its people guaranteed through the correct and comprehensive implementation of all the Laws of Allah (swt) and ensuring accountability

in governance. Therefore, it will encourage and facilitate women to be politically active within the state and account those who rule them, such that their political voice will have real weight within the society, rather than being appointed in token political positions which have no real influence in the affairs of the state, as under both authoritarian and democratic regimes today. The Khilafah will also enable women to take complaints against rulers to the Makhkaamat ul-Madhalim (Court of Unjust Acts), a special court that investigates negligence or injustice in ruling, allowing women to openly account their rulers without fear. Mamoon Ar-Rashid, one of the Abbassid Khalifahs, for example, would set aside Sundays to hear the complaints from his citizens – male and female. One day a poor old woman complained to him that the Khalifah's son had usurped her property. After examining the case, the Khalifah gave a judgement in the favour of the woman over his own son. Subhaanallah!

The Khilafah is also a system whose judiciary truly stands for justice according to the Command of Allah (swt), **﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ إِن** **﴿O you who believe, be staunch in standing firm in justice as witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents or relatives; whether (the case be of) a rich man or poor man, for Allah is nearer unto both (than you are).”** [An-Nisa 4:135] Hence, under Islamic rule, judges were the strict guards over the Islamic rights of women. In fact, according to the Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History - such was the level of justice that women received through the Khilafah's judicial system, that even non-Muslim women in the Ottoman state frequently preferred to use the Qadi courts to seek recourse for their grievances rather than their own religious proceedings.

The Khilafah is also a system that does not define economic success according to the flawed capitalist perspective of increased production or GDP figures. No! Economic success under Islam is when wealth has been effectively distributed amongst its citizens such that poverty is eradicated, where not a single person goes hungry and without their basic needs met, including health care and education, where every able man has the ability to provide for his family, and where prosperity is created which benefits all rather than an elite few, enabling the masses to better their standard of living. It achieves this through its unrivalled Islamic economic system which rejects interest and the hoarding of wealth which concentrates wealth in the hands of a few, implements a low tax-system when necessary which encourages investment, businesses growth and employment, prohibits the privatization of natural resources which is a source of poverty creation and implements a sound agriculture policy which encourages the cultivation of land to produce ample food for the nation, including the reallocation of unused agricultural land to ensure its cultivation. Hence, the Khilafah truly embodies the principles to make poverty history for women and men alike and generate prosperity, such that the Islamic economic rights afforded to women have real meaning within the state. Indeed, it was the Khilafah which created a state historically which overflowed with wealth such that citizens in various provinces were in no need of the Zakat, as under the rule of Khalifah Umar bin Abdul Aziz, in the 8 CE, where even after his official in Iraq had used state funds to pay the people their dues, pay off their debts, give funds to those who needed it for marriage, there was still huge excess wealth remaining in the treasury. So the Caliph ordered that anyone who owed the kharaj (the land tax) be lent whatever was needed to help them cultivate their land, and that excess funds also be used to buy seeds for the birds, so that even they would not go hungry in Muslim lands! Subhaanallah!

And finally, the Khilafah, as a system which truly cares for humanity, views the provision of good-quality health care and education to every citizen – male and female - as a basic right that should be free of any charge, and not a luxury enjoyed by those who can afford it. This was exemplified by the constitution of the al-Mansuri Hospital in Egypt that was

completed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century under Islamic rule, which read, *“The hospital shall keep all patients, men and women, until they are completely recovered. All costs are to be borne by the hospital whether the people come from afar or near, whether they are residents or foreigners, strong or weak, low or high, rich or poor, employed or unemployed...The entire service is through the magnificence of Allah, the Generous One.”* The Khilafah is, therefore, obliged by Islam to provide sufficient well-equipped hospitals and clinics, as well as medicines, doctors and nurses to serve all those it governs. It is also obliged to provide for the specific health needs of women, such as ensuring sufficient access to female-only wards, hospitals and maternity units as well as well-trained female physicians, surgeons, gynaecologists, obstetricians, nurses and other medical staff. Indeed, the Khilafah will not accept any second-rate education or health care system for women. It will only accept the best – first class models - all funded by the exemplary Islamic economic system. This is why the Khilafah in its history was the centre of the world in academic excellence and female scholarship, creating thousands of female experts in all disciplines – including Islamic jurisprudence, sciences, mathematics, and medicine. And it is why Will Durant, an American philosopher, historian and writer, stated: *“Islam lead the whole world in creating good hospitals and supplying them with their needs.”*

Surely all this is the true empowerment in rights and wellbeing that all women are searching for! All achieved without a single gender equality law or policy! Rather, solely through the blessing and mercy that is delivered for humankind through the System of Allah (swt)!

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion sisters, it is Islam and the Khilafah which provide a comprehensive blueprint for the empowerment of women in all sectors of life while also achieving true progress and development within a state. Empowering women from the Shariah perspective comes within the context of empowering the Muslim Ummah, as it is not possible to achieve the revival of women without achieving the revival of her Ummah. And this can only materialize through resuming Islam as a complete way of life in our Muslim lands through the establishment of the System of Allah (swt). So, as the women of Hizb ut Tahrir, we call our dear Muslim sisters across the world to work with us to establish this magnificent righteous state which will herald a new dawn for women in the Muslim lands and stand as a model globally once again for the rights and good treatment that all women deserve. We call you to gain the great rewards and status in Jannah Insha Allah promised to those who work to establish the Khilafah upon the method of the Prophethood that will spread the light of Islam to a world that has been immersed in darkness for too long; for surely, true empowerment is not empowerment against men but the empowerment of nations! Allah (swt) says, **﴿وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تِبْيَانًا لِّكُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ﴾** **“And We have sent down to you the Book explaining everything, and a guidance and a mercy and good tidings for those who have surrendered (to Allah).”** [An-Nahl: 89]