

Press Release**India's Budget Cuts Add to the Disadvantage of Muslim Women**

At the end of February 2023, India's Minority Affairs Minister Smriti Irani significantly slashed the budget to support the social and political inclusion of underrepresented groups in India. This has left many Muslim women vulnerable to losing out on scholarships and assistance in allowing them to make progress in education and career goals. Last year's budget was \$304 million dollars and has now been reduced to \$204 million dollars. The resulting million-dollar shortfall has resulted in the allocation for skills development and livelihoods being cut by 99 per cent. At the same time, incentives for free coaching and other allied schemes were reduced by around 60 per cent.

The new measures have amplified last year's discriminatory policies faced by the Muslim women in Karnataka who faced bans on the Islamic dress code. Muslim teachers had to remove their veils before entering schools, and Muslim students who refused to do so were sent home; the only woman allowed to express a religious ideology was a teacher imposing "discipline". She wore a sari and a bindi, considered an acceptable image of an "Indian" woman.

The legacy of violence, both physical and language-based, is the consistent historical content of India's treatment of Muslim women. Visibly expressed Muslim women live in a state of constant fear and insecurity, and these new laws evidence the fact that this is not set to change anytime soon. Prime Minister Modi's public relations campaign to present himself as the saviour of women from oppression and life limitations is invalid and a superficial attempt to play the role of hero when he is an oppressor of the worst kind. The suffering of Muslim women in physical terms and their psychological stress of facing abuse is directly related to systemic initiatives backed by the BJP and their racist / Islamophobic policies. When the funding of Muslim women's rights is in the hands of those that have hatred for Islam, we can expect these harmful measures that persecute Muslims and place them in a position of weakness.

With this open and blatant limitation on the progress of Muslim women, we see no response or action from international organisations or leaders to change the worn-out narrative that women are oppressed by Muslim men or are extremists that stoke the flames of religious tension. Muslim women are abandoned by the international community when they cannot benefit from the so-called freedoms of the world's largest democracy. Liberal values serve no purpose for them. Diversity and inclusion policies placed them squarely on the margins of society as outcasts and rejected personas.

True empowerment of women can only come from the Khilafah (Caliphate) based upon the method of the Prophethood that serves the needs of all citizens in a manner that is fair and has no political bias. Allah (swt) sent down the Quran and Sunnah to humankind to provide balance and solutions that are in the interests of humanity regardless of nationality, race, gender, color or faith.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ إِن يَكُنْ عَنِيًّا أَوْ فَخِيرًا فَأَلَّهِ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىٰ أَن تَعْدِلُوا وَإِن تَلَوُوا أَوْ تَعْرَضُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا﴾

“Stand up firmly for justice, as a witness to God, even as against yourselves or your parents or your kin, and whether it be against rich or poor.” [An-Nisa: 135]

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