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Women's rights mostly ignored in Muslim nations, speaker says

By B.J. Thomsen
Of the Emerald

Women are oppressed in Muslim countries not by Islamic Law but by their own willingness to have the law interpreted for them, said Aminah Assilmi, an American Muslim known internationally as a key lecturer on Islam and how it relates to women's issues.

There is no such thing as a true Muslim nation in the world at this time, Assilmi said, because the rights given to women by the Koran, the sacred book of the Muslims and the equivalent of the Bible, have been lost.

Assilmi, until recently a spokesperson for the National Islamic Center in Washington D.C., spoke Thursday night before about 100 people in a lecture sponsored in part by the Muslim Students Association.

She believes that not enough Muslims take time to study the

Koran for themselves to discover how many rights it bestowed on women when the book was written more than 1400 years ago.

When she began to study the Koran in 1976 while attending Metropolitan College in Denver, she was impressed with its guidelines on human rights and relations. She said the Koran gives "women rights they still have not attained in much of the world, such as equal pay for equal work."

Assilmi, who now wears the traditional long, flowing black and white "Hijab" reminiscent of a nun's habit, was born in Oklahoma as a Southern Baptist, and turned to Islam 10 years ago when she set out to convert some Arab students she had in a class in college.

She began to study the Koran and "came to realize that it could not have come from the mind of any man but only from God."



Aminah Assilmi

The women's movement has done a lot to help women escape from second-class citizenship, she said, but they still have a long way to go.

"The income of a working woman relative to a man has hardly changed in 50 years," Assilmi said. In 1939, a woman earned 63 cents to a man's dollar for the same job done. In 1985, that has improved to 64 cents to the man's dollar for the same job done, she said.

"Islam does not tolerate prejudice or discrimination under any grounds whether it be race, religion, color or creed or sex," Assilmi said.

More than 1400 years ago, the Koran outlined laws guaranteeing certain rights for women including the right to pursue education and knowledge, the right to freedom of expression, the right to own property, the

right to make contracts and conduct business, and the right to equal pay for equal work, "something we're still struggling for," she said.

The Koran also guarantees women the right to choose their own husbands and to divorce them, and protection for the woman and her children during and after the divorce.

The Equal Rights Amendment has freed some women, she said, but has marked others, many of them Muslim, who choose to remain in the role of mother and housewife.

Assilmi defends these women, saying that child-rearing is the most important job in the world. When mothers stay home with their children they are "shaping the future of the world," she said.

The equal rights movement has not gone far enough, she said, and in some areas it has gone too far. The women's liberation movement needs a guidebook, and "that book should and can still be the Koran," she said.

The most important thing that women must recognize is that "men and women are created as equal partners to each other. If you're going to have men and women fighting each other, there's no hope for the earth but destruction," Assilmi said. "We were not created to be adversaries."

November

Great goings on!

Oregon Repertory Theatre: "Foxfire"
Nov. 7-15, 7:30 p.m.
Sunday matinee, 2:00pm
Wednesday, 6:30pm
\$8 to \$14

Jazz Tap Ensemble
Sunday, Nov. 9, 2:30pm
\$7 to \$15

Eugene Symphony: Classical II
with Gary Hoffman, cello
Thursday, Nov. 13, 8:00pm
\$7 to \$19

Oregon Junior Miss Competition
Friday & Saturday
Nov. 14 & 15, 7:00pm
\$10.00, \$7.00

Sweet Adelines (barbershop concert)
Saturday, Nov. 1
2:00pm & 7:30pm
\$7.50

"Jackolyn and the Beanstalk"
Children's Matinee
Saturday & Sunday
Nov. 15-16, 2:00pm
\$3.50

Celebrate Excellence Seminar
Tuesday, Nov. 4, 8:45am
\$45.00

Peter Nero
Friday, Nov. 7,
8:00pm
\$11.50, \$9.50, \$7.50

The Bangles
Monday, Nov. 17, 8:00pm
\$14.75

Oregon Mozart Players
Saturday, Nov. 22, 8:30pm
\$9.50, \$7.50, \$6.00

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11/13	Mainstage Theatre Co.
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12/4	UO Children's Choir
12/11	UO Song & Dance Troupe
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