

Women in Muslim Societies

challenging the cultural barriers







{ Melegates at the September 2012 Expert Consultation }





{ Message By Mr. Tewodros Melesse }

Director General of the International Planned Parenthood
Federation



For me as Director General of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) a key issue that requires debate and on-going dialogue is that of Women's Health specific to Muslim populated countries. In Islam, health is regarded as a great blessing with encouragement to gain further medical knowledge and to seek out improved treatments and solutions where these improve the lives of women, men and their children. We see in many countries improvements to our healthcare systems but all too often

women and girls are prevented from access and utilisation of these health services. Barriers linked to poor education, social stigma, gender inequality and restrictions on personal freedom and decision making continue. The impact on women and their health can be devastating.

Too often misconceptions between religion, culture and traditional practices exist. Creating the opportunity and space to discuss these from differing viewpoints and perspectives can lead to positive outcomes. I had the privilege in September 2012 of bringing together Health experts, Shariah scholars, Parliamentarians and Practitioners to discuss and debate. The meeting commitment is a clear set of steps that can now be taken to progress this important topic further and ensure the necessary momentum exists for religious, political and financial decision makers to work together and seek improvement to the health and lives of women and girls.

Tewodros Melesse
*Director-General of
the International Planned Parenthood Federation*



{ Perdana Leadership Foundation }

Chairman Board of Trustees, Perdana Leadership Foundation

The Perdana Leadership Foundation was set up with the aim of preserving, developing and disseminating materials by and on Malaysia's past Prime Ministers. The Foundations broader objective is to promote global understanding by providing a channel for scholars and thinkers to undertake research and idea-sharing for lasting, peaceful resolutions.

Women and children are the most vulnerable groups in any population and are the first to suffer in the face of adversity or calamity. We have seen many examples of this through natural disasters , wars, civil and political unrest. Women and children are displaced, uprooted from their homes and separated from their families.

We were honoured to co-host the consultation of experts organised with the International Planned Parenthood Federation. Not only is the expertise useful but such an event can garner support from allies in circles of influence to bring about social justice and human rights to the silent and disadvantaged.

At PLF we are ready to work with you on this important theme which is crucial for the advancement of all countries and its people.



YBhg Tan Sri Azman Hashim
Chairman Board of Trustees
Perdana Leadership Foundation





{ Message from our Patron: Tun Dr Mahathir }

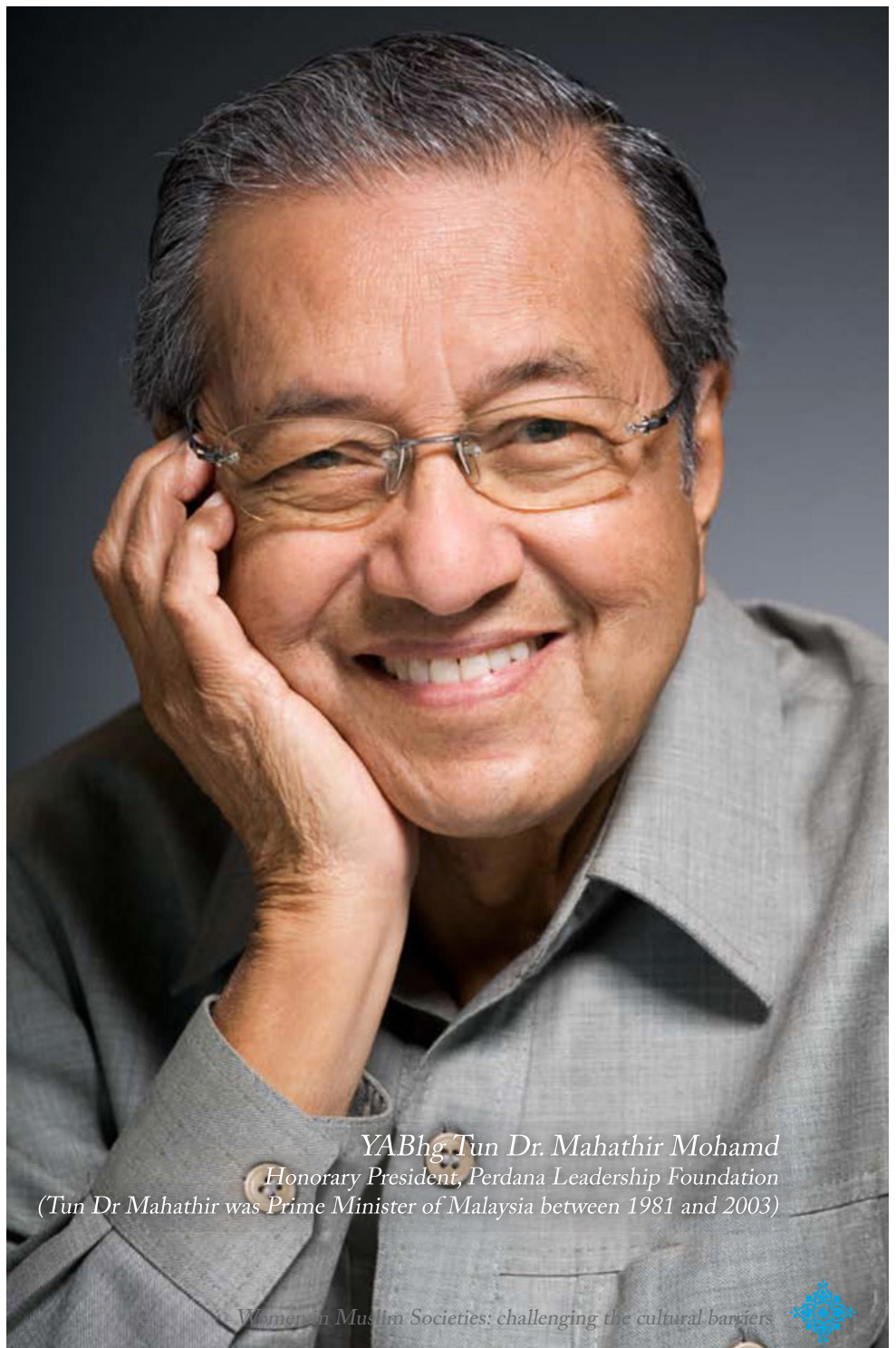
Honorary President of Perdana Leadership Foundation

Women have a special place in Islam – even the holy Quran dedicates an entire sura (chapter), the Sura an Nisa, to women. However, interpretations of the Quran are commonly compounded by cultural norms, rituals and traditions, which affect women's access to health and their health-seeking behaviour. The Foundation was pleased to help bring together health experts, renowned Shariah scholars, parliamentarians and practitioners as they sought lasting sustainable resolutions to close the gender gap in access to health in Muslim societies.

It was a pleasure to both be part of this event in September 2012 but also to welcome delegates to Kuala Lumpur, a thriving business city that houses a host of diverse Asian cultures with a progressive Islamic foundation at the heart.

YABhg Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad
Honorary President
Perdana Leadership Foundation





*YABhg Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad
Honorary President, Perdana Leadership Foundation
(Tun Dr Mahathir was Prime Minister of Malaysia between 1981 and 2003)*





{ Women's Health in Muslim Countries: High Level Expert Consultation }

High level experts from more than 30 countries gathered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia between 22-24 September 2012. The meeting outcome included a commitment to:

- End violence against women and girls including domestic violence, honour killings and abuse, neglect and degrading treatment by family or society members.
- Accelerate reduction of maternal mortality and morbidity through expanding universal access to comprehensives, affordable, quality sexual and reproductive health services. To advocate against child brides and marriage given the serious complications and high risk to health associated with this.
- Provide and promote family planning and birth spacing in particular for higher risk groups including adolescents, those of advanced maternal age and those who have had multiple births.
- Reject female genital mutilation as a violation of women's rights.
- Address HIV and the vulnerabilities that increase the risk of HIV transmission especially for women and young girls, this includes integrated HIV and sexual and

reproductive health services, access to anti-retroviral treatment care and support and fighting stigma and discrimination towards those living with HIV.

- Amplify women's health responses in disaster, conflict and other humanitarian settings with a holistic approach to ensuring basic health care is provided, refugees and migrants are considered and risks in relation to violence and exploitation are minimised.
- Address other emerging concerns including cervical cancer cases and infertility.

The experts attending came from a wide range of backgrounds and organisations across more than thirty countries including:

Afghan Family Guidance Association, Family Planning Association of Albania, Centre of Study & Analysis on Population and Development – Algeria, Bangladesh lawyer and Member of Parliament, Centre on Reproductive Health – Uzbekistan, Chariaa University – Egypt, Child and Youth Learning and Development Association – Thailand, China

Family Planning Association, Department of Family and Community Health – Oman, Federation of Reproductive Health Associations of Malaysia, Global Health Strategies, Higher Council for Motherhood & Childhood – Yemen, Indonesia Planned Parenthood Association, Indonesian Institute of Sciences, International Federation of Gynaecologists & Obstetricians, Islamic Council – Thailand, Islamic Interfaith Research Institute, Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre – Pakistan, Lahore Bar Council, University of Jordan, Kabul University – Afghanistan, Mohammedian League of Scholars – Morocco, Muslim Family Counselling Services – Ghana, National Economic & Social Council – Algeria, Reproductive Health Research Centre – Iran, Palestine Legislative Council Member, Family Planning Association of the Philippines, Rabat University – Sudan, Rahnuma – Family Planning Association of Pakistan, Royal Health Awareness Society – Jordan, Shehu Idris College of Health Sciences & Technology – Nigeria, SIS-In-Islam – Malaysia, State Women's Centre – Tajikistan, Strategic Management University- Iran, Syrian Family Planning Association, Tunis University, UNAIDS, UNFPA, Women's Development Research Centre – Malaysia, World Organization for Resource Development & Education.

Those who supported the event included the Perdana Leadership Foundation, Bayer, Malaysian AIDS Council, and the Malaysian Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Health and Home Affairs. IPPF is deeply appreciative of this together with the personal support of Dr Mohamed Kamel, Regional Director of the Arab World and Datuk Dr Raj Abdul Karim, advisor to the Director General, for realising the vision of this event.

Future Plan

IPPF working with other committed partners aims to:

- Mobilise greater involvement and social accountability of Islamic scholars and religious leaders in addressing the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls.
- Provide opportunities for Islamic scholars and health care professionals to understand existing fatwas and promote a unified understanding of Islamic practices in relation to sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Encourage men within Muslim populations to be equal partners within relationships and to support the raising of their children.
- Build a network of civil society, professional associations, international organisations across related fields of health, sexual and reproductive health, HIV, religious organisations and humanitarian aid organisations to provide a common platform in support of women's health, role and rights.
- Document and communicate good practice in order to facilitate sharing of experiences.
- More widely identify opportunities to enhance the role and status of women within Muslim societies.

To assist in monitoring progress on the meeting commitments and to help accelerate support and resources a further consultation is planned for 2013 /2014.





{ International Planned Parenthood Federation }



1952 – 2012

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is a global service provider and leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. We are a worldwide movement of national organizations working with and for communities and individuals.

IPPF work towards a world where women, men and young people everywhere have control over their own bodies, and therefore their destinies. A world where they are free to choose parenthood or not; free to decide how many children they will have and when, free to pursue healthy sexual lives without fear of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. A world where gender or sexuality are no longer a source of inequality or stigma. We will not retreat from doing everything we can to safeguard these important choices and rights for current and future generations.

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UK Registered Charity No. 229476



Printed on 75% recycled, chlorine-free paper,
a NAPM approved recycled product
Design and production: Malaysian AIDS Council

Published in November 2012 by the International Planned Parenthood Federation







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