MUSLIMS FOR PROGRESSIVE VALUES

Position Statement on
Polygamy

Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV) hereby,

Asserts that monogamy is the ideal model of marriage between two consenting adults, and in fact is prescribed by Islamic tradition. Moreover, MPV asserts that the practice of polygamy, in which a man is permitted to marry more than one spouse, is a reflection of the social and cultural realities existent in the 7th century A.D. Arabian Peninsula. Polygamy is regarded to have been an ad-hoc, emergency practice during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and is historically recounted as a mechanism utilized to financially support women who were widowed and/or orphaned after warfare.

Denounces and wholly condemns misogyny and violence against women and girls with emphasis on acts endorsed or authorized by means of radicalized or extremist traditions of faith and/or culture, including patriarchal _theo-political_ state and non-state agendas. Furthermore, MPV recognizes and asserts that such violence against women and girls - be it physical, mental, or structural - can be manifested through child, forced and/or polygamous marriages.

Maintains that polygamous marriages may contravene women's right to equality with men, and could undermine the harmony of marital relations prescribed in the Qu'ran. Additionally, contemporary polygamous marriages, especially those that are forced or carried out without the full consent/knowledge of the other wives, may inflict serious emotional strains and financial issues upon wives and children; such strains are often related to child neglect, child custody, inheritance, and distribution of property.

Affirms that the utilization of faith and/or culture as drivers for the propagation of and justifications for violence against women and girls is absolutely inconsistent not only

with existing international human rights conventions, but with traditional Islamic values. MPV asserts that faith and culture can and should be utilized, with respect and recognition given to nonviolent and egalitarian traditions of faith and culture, as vehicles for sustainable development in accordance with international human rights law.

Strives for the promotion and protection of nonviolent egalitarian, inclusive, and secular societies, by way of unbiased and gender-sensitized primary and secondary academic curricula, elimination of dogmatic religious narratives in academic spaces, as well as freedom to publicly engage and disseminate critical analyses of theological scripture without fear of physical or mental harm.

Offers a foundation for the critical analysis of Qur'anic Scripture rooted in sound and reliable academia to counter extremist narratives and ideologies that propagate and enable atmospheres of misogyny and violence against women and girls. MPV is also poised to counter such narratives that seek to undermine or threaten the promotion and protection of nonviolent, egalitarian, inclusive, and secular societies.

Furthermore, we the undersigned affirm that:

⇨ Marriage as prescribed in the Qur'an is between two *consenting adults*, officially formalized in the *nikah* contract. Within the contract, it is the woman who dictates the terms of the marriage, including the *mehr* (dowry). *Nikah* contracts additionally require the signature of two witnesses to authenticate the marriage.

⇨ To further emphasize how Islamic tradition reveres monogamy as the ideal and prescribed unit of marriage: "And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with her, and He has put love and mercy between you: verily in that are Signs for those who reflect" (30:21). This verse is clear to indicate that 'dwelling in tranquillity' is to be enjoyed with one other person (*ilaiha*) in a state of love (*muwaddah*) and mercy (*rahmah*), metaphorically alluding to the ideal and harmonious quality of Islamic marriages.

⇨ Historically, polygamy was not an inextricable right men could observe as they please; rather it had been regarded as an *exceptional* act of responsibility to ensure just care is given to orphans and widows, who have suffered from devastating wars or large-scale disasters. Furthermore, the Qur'an explicitly stresses that all wives must be treated and cared for justly: "And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of

[other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice]" (4:3).

⇨ In a pragmatic sense, the Qur'an also recognizes that it is near to impossible to provide adequate care for all wives in a just manner: "And you will never be able to be equal [in feeling] between wives, even if you should strive [to do so]. So do not incline completely [toward one] and leave another in a state of suspense. And if you amend [your affairs] and fear Allah - then indeed, Allah is ever forgiving and merciful" (4:129).

⇨ Sharia law stipulating the denial of fundamental and civil human rights for women and girls is not founded in Qur'anic scripture, but rather is drawn from man-made legislation throughout the centuries that reflect patriarchal values rather than Islamic values.

Lastly, MPV implores governments and policy makers to:

⇨ **Ratify** in *full* the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), without reservations.

⇨ **Introduce and reinforce** legislation to abolish, criminalize, and prohibit all forms of child, early and forced marriages - polygamous or otherwise - and establish the minimum age of consent for marriage as eighteen years old, in accordance with CEDAW.

⇨ **Repeal** *immediately* discriminatory laws, policies, practices, and *fatwas* that institutionalize the denial of fundamental human rights for women and girls, including those that enable child, early, and forced marriages - polygamous or otherwise.

⇨ **Hold accountable** legal institutions, religious authorities and state authorities to ensure they uphold and enforce the rule of law without selective bias and to pursue gender-sensitization initiatives for state-actors and religious leaders.

⇨ **Devise and implement** social protection measures to ensure that women and girls are protected from child, early, and forced marriages - polygamous or otherwise - and that they are granted fair, safe, and equal access to full economic participation and benefit, decent employment, adequate healthcare,

and secular education without fear or threat of physical or mental harm from family members, society and state actors.

⇨ **Disaggregate** statistical data on the basis of gender, especially as it pertains to economic participation, all forms and incidences of violence against women and girls, including child, early, and forced marriages - polygamous or otherwise - and the enjoyment of the aforementioned public services.

⇨ **Support and purposefully engage** in civil society campaigns that publicly advocate for and disseminate international human rights education and egalitarian, inclusive, nonviolent, and critical interpretations and analyses of theological literature and scripture.

In conclusion,

We at MPV understand the sensitivity and complexity of these matters. Sensitive and complex as they are, we believe these matters must be approached critically and analytically as imperatives to spiritual, human, and societal development. A country can only rightfully call itself "*Islamic*" when the rights of women and girls are realized on the ground, through legislation, and when they live in dignity, in safety, without fear, and with freedom of conscience as the Qur'an demands. The realization of these rights is integral to the Qur'anic view of humanity. We welcome and encourage all who are interested in engaging us in this discussion, and insist upon the facilitation of interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Let us reclaim our faiths and our cultures and utilize them to strive for the realization of humanitarian values that benefit all.