

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **It's about time that disability issues be put on the Muslim community's agenda**

**TORONTO**—Today, although accessibility is gaining higher priority on the agenda of mainstream society, barriers are clearly present within various individual faith-based communities. Within the Muslim community, Muslims with disabilities remain isolated and families caring for people with severe disabilities receive no support by the religious community. Muslims with disabilities are also excluded from learning and engaging in spiritual and social activities.

Currently, Muslims who are deaf or hard of hearing have no access to learning how to read the Quran or take part in any Islamic studies classes. There are no Braille Qurans readily available for Muslims who are blind. There is no opportunity for Muslims with intellectual disabilities to be taught anything about Islam outside of their families. The majority of mosques and Islamic centres in the Greater Toronto Area are not even wheelchair accessible.

“Our vision is to create a global village that includes full access for people with disabilities,” says Rabia Khedr, a founder of CAMD (Canadian Association of Muslims with Disabilities). “We have the right to practice and experience our cultural and faith traditions. We have the right to be valued, respected and included in society and in our communities,” says Rafia Haniff-Cleofas, another founder of CAMD. CAMD is a national non-profit organization that was recently founded by a few strong disability advocates. The mission of this organization is to work towards an inclusive society by promoting principles of accessibility. The key objectives of this organization include the following:

- To ensure that people with disabilities have access to spiritual and social activities, events and programs in their places of worship.
- To resource and facilitate physical accessibility, alternative communication/Sign Language interpretation, and alternative print formats for faith based institutions.
- To research and promote information about and needs of faith, spirituality and culture through the lived experiences of people with disabilities to leaders, service providers, governments and communities
- To facilitate networking opportunities for persons with disabilities and their families.
- To lead and support the development of alternative respite and independent living opportunities that meet the requirements of faith and culture.

Time and time again, Muslims with disabilities and/or their families state that there are no supports within the Muslim community, that they do not know about their entitlements and that mainstream services do not respond adequately to their individual religious needs as Muslims. “Parents of children with disabilities are constantly looking for the opportunity for their children to learn to read the Quran, however, there are no accessible programs available to assist them,” states Omayya Rakieh, also a founder of the organization. A deaf Muslim stated that his only option to learn about Islam was to be the first one in the mosque and sit right in front of the Imam, while struggling to read his lips during the khutbah (Friday sermon). CAMD advocate, Ali Mohamed says that, “Our community is thinking about elevators to accommodate the able bodied carrying coffins for funeral services after having ignored us individuals with disabilities for years.” It is definitely clear to the founders of CAMD, that the Muslim community leadership is unaware about the population of Muslims with disabilities and are uninformed about how to fulfill individual accessibility requirements.

CAMD’s first project is already underway: *Towards an Inclusive Ummah – Muslims with disabilities speak out*. This project will conduct a broad consultation with Muslims with disabilities to determine and document what issues and barriers they face within the Muslim community, in Mosques/Islamic Centres and at Muslim events. Focus groups will be held with individuals with disabilities and their family members at Crescent Village, Masjid Toronto, Islamic Institute of Toronto and ISNA Canada Centre during the month of May. The output of this project will be a report that will be printed and disseminated to Muslim leaders, to ensure that accessibility is no longer ignored and is a priority on the community agenda.

For more information about CAMD and the current project, please contact CAMD at: 416-252-8668

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