



AMERICAN ISLAMIC CONGRESS

2010

2010 Annual Report



American Islamic Congress



Dear Friends,

When the American Islamic Congress (AIC) opened its first office in 2001, I never dreamed the organization would go so far so quickly. From that one small office, AIC has grown to five offices, acclaimed national and international programming, and a dedicated staff with its sights set on fostering understanding and cooperation both at home and abroad.

I remember in 2001 that interfaith and intercultural dialogue momentarily came to a halt as communities retreated into themselves, unable to unite on the similarities that cut across all American communities. When we formed AIC, we immediately began publishing editorials, speaking to interfaith audiences, and reaching out to public officials. In our first year, we produced several handbooks to help the public – both Muslim and non-Muslim – navigate the post-9/11 climate in America.

This year our programs, both national and international, have grown exponentially. Project Nur, our on-campus, student-led initiative, has grown to dozens of chapters across the country. The Muslim Interfaith Councils, which bring together prominent Muslims and non-Muslims within communities, create understanding and cultural connections. Every day they demonstrate the power of our voices in calling for improved intra- and inter-faith relations, civil rights, and human rights.

In Egypt, AIC's Cairo Bureau builds civil society by promoting dialogue on civil rights and human rights. Our efforts have gained attention not just from students and community members—but also from Egypt's security forces, who threatened to shut down the Human Rights Film Festival. In Iraq, AIC's Ambassadors for Peace is building a movement for peace by bringing together religious and tribal leaders, teachers, and the community around a common goal. Iraq staff members actively intervene in conflicts interrupting violence before it spreads. Our success has led to requests to expand the program to Baghdad's most treacherous neighborhoods.

For AIC, the past year has truly been groundbreaking. I thank all of our supporters and donors who have made this work possible. The coming years promise to be even better.

Sincerely,
Zainab Al-Suwaij
Executive Director



Egyptian Women at the Forefront for Change

— BBC News

Campus Radicals: A New Muslim Student Group Tries to Rouse the Moderates

“We were young men and women, mostly but not entirely of Muslim background, who decided to create an inclusive space where people of all backgrounds could join together to explore Muslim identity and community.”

— Jana El Horr and Sana Saeed of Project Nur, *The Wall Street Journal*

Let American Muslims share the stage

“Just because Islamists often shout the loudest and appear in traditional clothing does not mean they should be accepted as representatives of Muslim authenticity.”

— Zainab Al-Suwaij of the American Islamic Congress, *The Boston Globe*



The Muslim Film Tour Hits Ann Arbor Today

—The Michigan Daily



Boston Muslims Celebrating Ramadan

—The Boston Globe



@Revolution: Taking a Page from Khomeini's Playbook

"Social entrepreneurs are ideally positioned now to step up, with individuals and grassroots networks able to move more nimbly than governments."

— Nasser Weddady of the American Islamic Congress, The Daily Beast

Let Democracy Resound

"For those fed up with tyranny at home, the struggle for human rights carried out by neighbors provides both inspiration and tactical lessons in nonviolent resistance."

— Sohrab Ahmari and Nasser Weddady of the American Islamic Congress, Frontline PBS



NEW ENGLAND COUNCIL

The New England Interfaith Council empowers responsible leaders as a progressive voice for the American Muslim Community.

Through cultural events and advocacy, the New England Interfaith Council unites diverse American Muslims who champion pluralism, condemn intolerance, and stand up as local leaders and ambassadors of coexistence. The Council celebrates Muslim cultural diversity, provides responsible civic leadership, and enriches civic life.

In 2010 the New England Interfaith Council hosted and co-sponsored **30 events for over 4,000 people** with partners such as the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, the American Jewish Community, and the World Affairs Council.



Boston Muslim Film Festival

The Boston Muslim Film Festival enlightens audiences on hot topics affecting Muslims in the U.S. and around the world. Each year the Festival draws greater audiences. The latest running of the Boston Muslim Film Festival billed "Controversy and Conversation," drew over 1,000 viewers to screenings across the city. "Controversy and Conversation" addressed taboo topics:

- riots over cartoons
- women sentenced to death by stoning
- leaders denying homosexuality in their countries.

Local experts led post-film discussions adding depth and context to the films. The Festival earned coverage in the *Boston Globe*.

Mimouna

Moroccan Muslims and Jews historically marked the end of Passover with shared celebration – a fete known as Mimouna. AIC's New England Interfaith Council and Boston's New Center for Arts and Culture revived the centuries-old tradition for a capacity crowd of 500 people with performances by famed spoken-word poet and comedian Vanessa Hidary, Mexican-Israeli jazz guitarist Ilan Bar-Lavi, and Moroccan-Gnawa-jazz collective Club D'Elf.

Human Rights Vigil

In observance of the one-year anniversary of brutal post-election crackdowns in Iran, the Council organized supporters in Boston's Copley Square to stand in solidarity with Iranian grassroots reformers. Council members acting as ambassadors of freedom and tolerance recounted human rights abuses in their home countries. The *Boston Globe* covered the public vigil with an appeal from Council members for the support of fellow Bostonians.





Interfaith Iftar

In August 2010, over 300 guests joined AIC and the American Jewish Community for a charity interfaith iftar. The break-fast meal served more than just food as Muslim guests shared their Ramadan reflections, and likewise Jewish co-hosts explained the Yom Kippur fast. More than just educational, the event raised more than \$1,500 for victims of the devastating floods in Pakistan.

State House Ramadan

The Massachusetts State Legislature presented AIC and the Council with the second annual resolution honoring the Ramadan holiday. Council member Abdel Maliky – a native of Benin – addressed a crowd of 100 on Beacon Hill, while a delegation of students from AIC’s Project Nur campus initiative presented a donation to Boston-area homeless shelter, Pine Street Inn.

East Meets West Annual Benefit

Over 200 guests – including AIC supporter and Boston City Council President Mike Ross – gathered to honor Iranian women’s rights activist Mehrangiz Kar at the second annual Benefit. AIC saluted other local Muslim leaders including Nigerian-American filmmaker and Council member Rahman Oladigbolu (“Artist of the Year”), NCAA field hockey player and Boston University sophomore Amira Downes (“Student of the Year”) and Council member Zamzam Syed (“Community Leader of the Year”).



New
England
Interfaith >>>
Council

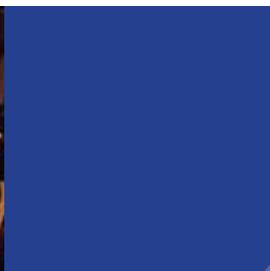
A SNAPSHOT
OF MEMBERS

Rahman Oladigbolu: Oladigbolu came to the U.S. from Nigeria with one goal in mind: make movies. His first feature *Soul Sisters* recently won Best International Film at the African Movie Academy Awards. While fulfilling his dream of directing films, he is also a Harvard graduate student of neuroscience and psychoanalysis.

Denia Hasic: Bosnian-born, Hasic and her family fled ethnic cleansing for the U.S. in the early 1990s. Now she curates the annual Muslim Film Festival and is a key organizer of local youth seeking to explore Muslim cultural identity.

Sohrab Ahmari: As an Iranian-American with the freedom to advocate openly, Ahmari publishes frequently as an activist for civil rights in Iran.

Jamal Aithammou: Aithammou is an MBA candidate, importer of rare Moroccan gemstones, and frequent speaker who often shares his story of witnessing violence by campus radicals in his native Morocco at speaking events around Boston.



council

PROJECT NUR

Since 2007, AIC has mobilized American Muslim students on campuses to claim a positive cultural identity and to become America's next generation of leaders.

Project Nur, AIC's student-led initiative, has been creating a distinct and alternative Muslim voice, one grounded in pluralism, civil rights, and peace. Dispelling the perception of a monolithic Muslim identity, Project Nur combats stereotypes on campuses and in local communities.

In 2010, Project Nur expanded to:

- 39 Chapters
- 271 Campus Events



ON CAMPUS

Project Nur chapters bring together students, professors, leaders, artists, and community members for open discussions about often controversial issues. Student-run chapters organized hundreds of events that underscore their commitment to pluralistic values, human rights, and social justice. 2010 events included:

- The Modern World and the Necessity of Dialogue among the Abrahamic Religions
- Islam in South Asia
- Film screening of "Persepolis"
- Breaking stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims in America using stand-up comedy presented by Dean Obeidallah and Aron Kader, the stars of the popular "Arabs Gone Wild" comedy tour
- Film screening of "New Muslim Cool" and presentation about the growing number of Hispanic Muslims in the U.S.
- Women's Rights Abuses in the Arab States of the Gulf
- What IF? Speak-In – Answering questions such as "What IF people of all faiths and traditions took action together to change the world?"
- The Road to Islamic Reformation
- 30 Mosques, 30 States, 30 Days: 1 Unique Road Trip across the US – two New Yorkers, Aman Ali and Bassam Tariq, reflect on their journey across the U.S.
- Security, Stability and Peace in Afghanistan & Pakistan: Mission Impossible?
- An Evening of Poetry and Prose with poets and film makers of Nigeria, South Asia, and Azerbaijan



IN THE COMMUNITY

Project Nur is not confined to campuses. Students bring their talents and Project Nur's mission into their communities.

Muslim Film Festival

Riots over cartoons. Courts sentencing women to death by stoning. Clashes between Muslims and Christians. Leaders denying homosexuality exists in their country. These recent snapshots from the headlines are a reminder that contemporary Muslim affairs are rife with controversies. In spring 2010, the Muslim Film Festival aspired to transcend the sound-bites and stereotypes shrouding these events to foster dialogue and discussion regarding controversial topics in the Muslim world. This year's festival featured provocative short films, invigorating post-screening discussion, and dialogue with academics, artists, and experts.

Devastation in Pakistan: Awareness and Relief Efforts

Project Nur chapters around the country held events to raise awareness and collect relief supplies to aid the victims of the floods that devastated wide swaths of Pakistan. Holding Iftars, presentations, and events, chapters mobilized their campuses and communities to raise thousands of dollars for Pakistan Relief.

3 "I" factor – "Intercultural Interfaith Iftar"

Project Nur presented its third annual Boston-wide cross-campus event - "Intercultural Interfaith Iftar" (3 "I" Factor). The Iftar is a traditional meal that breaks the daily fast during the month of Ramadan. Following on a tradition started last year, students collected food donations as part of Project Nur's "Help End Hunger" drive; cost of entry to the Iftar was a donation of two bags of rice. All donations benefitted the Pine Street Inn, a Boston homeless shelter. The Iftar brought together 80 students and young professionals from more than 10 schools in Boston and more than 16 countries to break the fast while giving to those most in need.



//
As a Muslim and a minority in every education and social system that I've ever been through, I am well aware of the stereotypes... and misconceptions that many people have against Muslims. I see Project Nur as my means to not only dispel these false notions... but to also show my fellow classmates that //
Muslims believe in peace, equality and unity.

Ali Abidi, Project Nur student, Trinity University



//
When I graduate I plan on taking a stand... using the skills that I learned in Project Nur. //

Norah Almahdali, Project Nur student, University of Mary Washington

NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

In mid-October, Project Nur's National Student Conference brought together 50 Project Nur campus leaders from across the country. The conference was dedicated to developing students' leadership skills and empowering them with the necessary tools to support Project Nur's mission. The dynamic speakers informed students about critical issues while imparting skills and lessons they have learned on their career paths. Key conference speakers and sessions included:

- Dr. Sadia Afroze Chowdhury, World Bank's Lead Specialist on Reproductive Health - *Reproductive Rights: The Foundation of Women's Rights*
- Uzma Bawany, Founder and Executive Director of Thaakat Foundation - *Contributing to Sustainable Economic Development*
- Ameena Meer, Author, Creative Director, Journalist, and Muslim Activist - *Community Involvement and Media Representation*
- Hind Makki, Leadership Program Associate, Interfaith Youth Core - *Speak Out & Mobilize: Using Your Story to Inspire Others*

However, the most important part of this year's conference was the team building session to improve students' media relations skills, management styles, and outreach techniques. This year, Project Nur Alumni led three sessions imparting their lessons learned as chapter leaders and empowering student leaders to plant the seeds for a national movement.

//
My hope is that Project Nur at NYU will be able to lead the way in breaking down barriers and opening up new discussion which will restore New York City to a place not only rich with diversity but // that is accepting of all people and all walks of life.

Michael Huggins, Project Nur student, New York University



AMBASSADORS FOR PEACE

In 2008, AIC launched Ambassadors for Peace, a landmark initiative dedicated to fostering a culture of peace and reducing violence in conflict zones. Piloted in Basrah, Iraq this initiative creates networks of tribal leaders, faith leaders, and community members to bring about peace and create a safe environment for civil society. At their first meeting, new AIC outreach workers came together and created a mission statement to guide Ambassadors for Peace in Iraq.

“For a new Iraq, we pledge to work collectively for peace and the renunciation of violence through starting a dialogue with different groups within society, treating as fundamental the principles of confidentiality and work team safety. We will build balanced relations with individuals, community leaders and people of influence to achieve these objectives.”

In 2010, AIC **intervened in over 472 conflicts**. 141 of these conflicts likely would have resulted in violence without our efforts.

Ambassadors for Peace is a collaboration between AIC and CeaseFire, a Chicago-based organization that specializes in reducing gang violence in Chicago. AIC culturally adapted CeaseFire’s methodology and applied it within the Basrah neighborhoods of Khamza Meel and Al Jamhuriya. AIC’s personal relationships and reputation in Iraq based on local connections and successful track record provided an ideal starting point from which to build an effective network of individuals dedicated to peacebuilding.

Ambassadors for Peace works through a team of outreach workers, prominent members of the community who command the type of respect that official sources, including police, have yet to attain in Iraq.

Outreach workers are in the streets, sports events, political gatherings, and homes, where Ambassadors for Peace public education campaigns prompt citizens to solve disputes peacefully. Most critically, Ambassadors for Peace can be found in schools. In 2010, AIC brought techniques of non-violent intervention to more than 1,700 of Basrah’s youth and 300 teachers. AIC is creating a new generation of leaders oriented towards non-violence and peacebuilding.

Targeting religious and tribal leaders, in addition to community leaders such as teachers, policemen, doctors, NGOs, and journalists, AIC built a wide-ranged network of advocates and supporters to assist in violence prevention and spread the message of tolerance and peace throughout the city. In 2010, Ambassadors for Peace trained more than 4,000 people to use non-violence means to settle disputes.

Often at personal risk, our outreach workers step into on-going conflicts on the street and are called into homes or private events to defuse tensions before they boil over into violent actions—a testament to the clout and the respect outreach workers carry.





AIC has gained a reputation in Basrah for being at the forefront of response teams to violent events. Staffers mediated disputes intervening in family conflicts, tribal conflicts, and honor killings.

AIC Basrah outreach workers put themselves in danger as they formed what Iraqi media called the “green belt.” Citizens were protesting the lack of basic services such as clean water and electricity in Basrah. When instigators threatened demonstrators and tried to shut down the protest, AIC was the only NGO in the streets. Our outreach workers put themselves between the protesters and violence instigators, protecting Iraqi people’s right to demonstrate peacefully.

A husband and wife quarreled when the husband discovered unknown contacts in his wife’s cell phone. He expelled her from the house and sent her back to her family. The wife’s brother was insulted by this and fought with the husband, beating him with a stick and hospitalizing him. This fight would likely bring retaliation from the husband’s family and possibly lead to a tribal feud which often means multiple deaths among the families. AIC outreach workers were informed of the conflict by a personal contact close to the families. Our mediators explained to the brother the rashness of his attack on his brother in law. Eventually, our people were able to bring the two men together and to convince the husband to accept the brother’s sincere apology for the beating. This averted what could have grown into a tribal war that would potentially cost lives and property.



HANDS ACROSS THE MIDDLE EAST SUPPORT ALLIANCE

AIC's Hands Across the Middle East Support Alliance (HAMSA) initiative unites people of conscience to support civil rights reformers in the Middle East. At the heart of HAMSA is the drive to turn thinkers into doers whose efforts focus on civil rights and grassroots reform.

Indeed, as Mideast youth raised a collective voice for reform, activists, bloggers, and journalists who are past HAMSA program participants were among those leading protesters on the frontlines. The dream of Mideast civil rights is now being translated into action as courageous young leaders pursue the chance for a freer future.

Dream Deferred Essay Contest

With the launch of its founding program, HAMSA called on Mideast youth to explore the pain of repression and the importance of securing individual rights in the region the UN calls the world's "least free." AIC asked the simple question posed in Langston Hughes' classic poem: "What Happens to a Dream Deferred?" Six years later, nearly 10,000 essayists have competed for thousands of dollars in prizes and the chance to be reviewed by celebrity judges.

In 2010, 700 burgeoning essayists entered the contest. Standout entries earned unprecedented attention this year for their work.

- Yemen's top Internet news outlet spotlighted finalist Rayyan Al-Shibani's essay on the impact of repression on his local community – validation for Yemen's burgeoning civil rights movement.
- Essayist Tarek Shahin, whose essay imagined the dramatic deportation of an Egyptian cartoonist, published his own comic novel detailing the events leading up to Egypt's revolution.

The C.R.I.M.E. Report

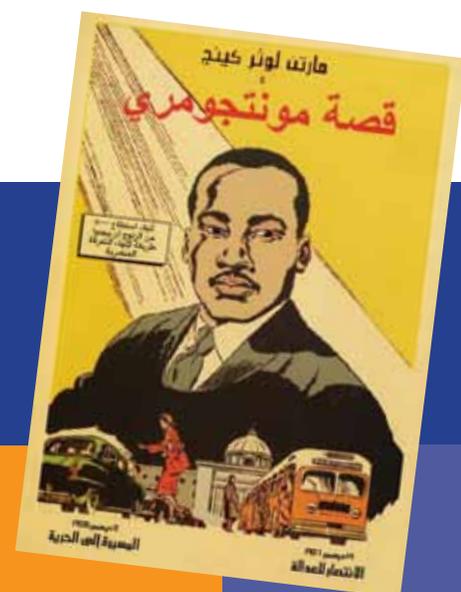
HAMSA's bi-weekly e-newsletter the C.R.I.M.E. Report documents Civil Rights In the Middle East, and the courageous individuals persecuted for promoting civil rights. C.R.I.M.E. gives young activists a portal through which to connect, author news coverage, and comment on their regional struggles for reform. In 2010, C.R.I.M.E. hit a worldwide readership of 15,000 by covering the hot-button stories that mainstream outlets do not, and landed interviews with jailed Bahraini blogger Ali Abdulemam, persecuted Saudi women's rights activist Maliha Alshehab, and leaders in struggle for Lebanese women's citizenship rights.

CAIRO

Beginning three years ago with an interfaith Iftar for Muslims and Copts, AIC's Cairo Bureau has grown into a force for Mideast human and civil rights activism.

Martin Luther King Comic Book

AIC published a groundbreaking Arabic translation of "The Montgomery Story," a 50 year-old comic book depicting the nonviolent Montgomery Bus Boycott that inspired the 1960s American civil rights movement. The MLK comic book, with thousands of copies in Arabic and Farsi distributed across the Middle East, captures AIC's key civil rights strategy: popularize lofty concepts and make them accessible for Mideast youth. When Egyptian protestors claimed Cairo's Tahrir Square, AIC's Cairo office team kept the comic, and the nonviolent message of Dr. Martin Luther King, in wide circulation.



Cairo Human Rights Film Festival

One of AIC Cairo's key innovations is the Cairo Human Rights Film Festival, the first of its kind in the region. In 2010 the Festival screened 24 films over 5 nights, garnering submissions from young filmmakers across the Mideast. Films touched on hot button issues: HIV/AIDS in the Congo, the plight of Sudanese refugees, and child labor. Films also inspired audiences by relating the success of Poland's solidarity movement or showcasing two Cameroonian women prosecuting cases of spousal abuse in defiance of community pressure. The festival drew 1,000 viewers often playing to standing room only crowds and garnering media attention including live radio coverage for honoring activist Negad Elborai at its opening ceremony.

Yalla Shebab

In 2010, the Arab Initiative for e-Media, or 'Yalla Shebab' joined the AIC Cairo family. Originally a group of students passionate about social media and non-violent advocacy, Yalla Shebab has grown into a network of more than 1,000 university students on campuses across Egypt. Known for their citizen journalism, mainstream Egyptian media tapped Yalla Shebab for their coverage of revolution protests, amplifying across the world the video footage, sound bytes and interviews captured by Yalla Shebab members on the ground.

//

When, at first, we went to print the comic book, a security officer blocked publication. So we called him and demanded a meeting. He agreed, and we read through the comic book over coffee to address his concerns. At the end, he granted permission to print and then asked: // Could I have a few extra copies for my kids?"

Dalia Ziada, AIC Cairo Bureau, *The Boston Globe*

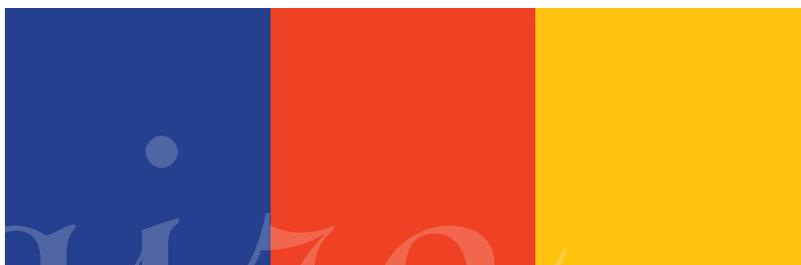


AB Human Rights

Human rights education begins at the bottom. AIC's Cairo Bureau developed a curriculum for elementary-age youth that uses a puppet show, cartoon, and comic book to relay the 30 Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in terms that children can understand. In 2010, AIC piloted AB Human Rights at a government school in Cairo.

Cairo Open Debate Series

AIC's Cairo Bureau closed 2010 by piloting a debate series on civil rights. Over 20 young Egyptians from across the country learned to disagree civilly, and then put their skills to use in live debates broadcast on Egyptian TV and radio. Given the political transition underway, these are critical skills that Egyptians – stunted for decades by censorship – urgently need to help civil society flourish.



A MODERN NARRATIVE FOR MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

AIC launched *A Modern Narrative for Muslim Women in the Middle East*, a project to give voice to the progressive, reform minded women's movement in the Middle East. This project focuses on five target countries—Egypt, Morocco, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan—and around five spheres of study, encompassing the economic, legal, political, religious, and social conditions that affect women in these nations.

Over two years AIC conducted extensive research, interviews, and held two conferences in Cairo bringing together women who are charting a new path in the Middle East and North Africa.

In January 2010, AIC's research team, alongside prominent women including business leaders, academics, government officials, and grassroots activists met again in Cairo, Egypt. The conference began with updates on the current status of women in the target countries but then graduated to discuss the most imperative changes to be made at the grassroots and policy-making levels. These imperative changes include the need for legislation addressing sexual harassment and domestic violence across the target countries, along with clear enforcement mechanisms, and for online mobilization resources at both the domestic and regional levels.

The culmination of the project came in September 2010 when AIC published the report featuring the testimony and analysis of activists representing the five target countries.

A Modern Narrative for Muslim Women in the Middle East is available in English and Arabic.

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EGYPT



> **Amina Ouchelh**
Vice President for the
Rabat City Council
MOROCCO





To launch this publication, AIC brought together lawmakers, academics, activists, and students at three events—on Capitol Hill, at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University—to discuss the challenges to and successes of the women’s movement in the target countries.

These panel discussions moderated by AIC Executive Director, Zainab Al-Suwaij, featured two pioneering women: Fawziah Al-Hani, Manager of Gherass Center for Social Education in Saudi Arabia and Rana Hussein, Narrative contributor, human rights activist, and journalist in Jordan.

// The whole world focuses on the driving issue. I don’t want to drive unless I’m treated as a human, and equal, independent, and respected. //

Fawziah Al-Hani, Manager, Gherass Center for Social Education, Saudi Arabia

Fawziah Al-Hani described the contemporary status of women in Saudi Arabia, explaining that she is perceived as a second-class citizen. Women’s issues are rarely discussed in Saudi political and social spheres. Women have no place in official government and the business sector. If they are allowed to be active outside the home, they are restricted to educational and health activities. Only recently did women receive identification cards, though

women must still be identified by a male guardian and/or male family members. Al-Hani maintains hope, however, as small changes take place within the society and government through new initiatives and movements.

Rana Hussein, who has spent nearly 20 years as a human rights activist in Jordan focusing on honor crimes and other issues, declared that Jordan has made substantial progress in the realm of women’s rights as a result of intense media and civil society activism. Reform is still necessary in many spheres, but women are now participating in government and significant reforms have been made to the judicial system. Though the effectiveness of quotas for women in government may be debated, Hussein noted that quotas facilitate a beginning for women’s participation in elections and government service. With constant pressure on the government and society, reforms will continue and Hussein said she is optimistic about women’s future in Jordan.

While women face different conditions in each country, the Narrative reveals a common theme. The conservative narrative written for women by extremists is coming into conflict with a new, progressive narrative forged by women and reform-oriented leaders. Defying the demands of radicals ousting women from public life, we find women starting businesses, earning seats as parliamentarians, achieving the rank of military general, or working as doctors throughout the region. *A Modern Narrative for Muslim Women in the Middle East* casts aside this negative perception of women and emphasizes the positive steps they have taken to improve their lives.

// Education in our part of the world is not that great. We’re trained to memorize, not to think critically. We need to work on the teachers. //

Rana Hussein, journalist and human rights activist, Jordan



AIC thanks our generous donors and friends who have made our work possible.

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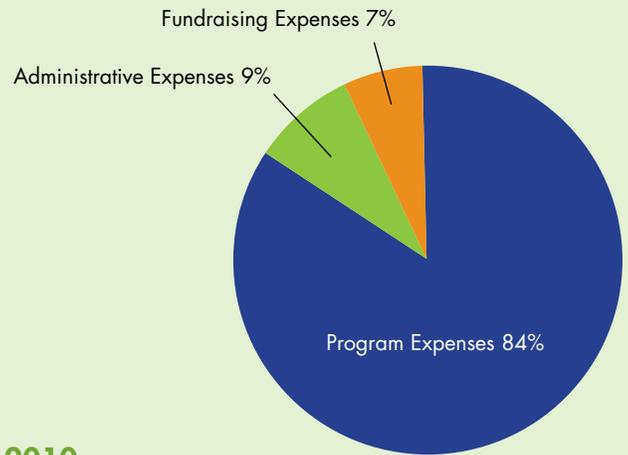
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Financial Statement



At a Glance

Revenues and other support

2010

Government grants	\$450,588
Contributions and other grants	\$981,117
Miscellaneous Income	\$3,125
Total revenue and other support	\$1,434,830

Expenses

Program Expenses	\$1,397,244
General and administrative	\$149,468
Fundraising Expenses	\$109,158
Total expenses	\$1,655,870

Changes in net assets

(\$221,040)

Net assets – beginning of year

\$842,849

Net assets – end of year

\$621,809

To obtain a copy of AIC's audited financial statements please contact the Washington, DC office (202) 595-3160.

American Islamic Congress

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