

Foreword

by *Dr. Ingrid Mattson,*
Founder & Director of the Hurma Project

In my life as a Muslim, I have witnessed individuals inspired by faith become profound agents of goodness, performing acts of love and sacrifice for others. I have also witnessed shocking abuses of power justified by religious texts and traditions. Wherever we are in relationship with others—in families, in congregations, in spiritual communities, in schools, and in nations—both empowerment and oppression can happen. Any Muslim who has reached the age of majority has a moral responsibility (*taklif*) to work for the proliferation of benefits, and the prevention or mitigation of harms, for themselves and for others. Our first responsibility, however, is to protect our *own body*, intellect, and spiritual self from abuse and harm, to the extent that we are capable. Sometimes, this is not possible, but we should know—no matter who wants to convince us otherwise—that it is not piety to accept the harm perpetrated against us by others; their abuse benefits neither them nor us. Our safety is our right.

As a community, we have a collective obligation (*fard kifayah*) to put in place systems of knowledge, oversight, and care to prevent harm when possible, to stop it when it is ongoing, and to provide paths for healing and support for those who have been harmed. In far too many cases, religious authorities fail in their responsibility to prevent or respond to the abuse. Beyond specific instances of abuse, the religious community is implicated when we continue to preach “obedience” to parents, husbands, or scholars rather than focus on the *responsibility* of those who have any measure of power or authority to, above all, do no harm.

These are the values and principles which underlie the Hurma Project. For years, I have tried to respond to individual cases of abuse and attempted to work with various

organizations to put procedures in place. It became clear to me that the issues underlying spiritual and familial abuse in the Muslim community were so complex, and the abuse of power so misunderstood, that a major, long-term project of research, education and advocacy was needed to address them. However, I did not want to make abuse the center of our work; instead, our approach centers the concept of *hurma*—the sacred inviolability of the person. The teaching of the Prophet Muhammad that forms the foundation of our work is that an individual’s *hurma* is equal in value to the sanctity of sacred times and sacred places. We affirm that human beings are endowed by God with this sacred right, and that nothing can be used to justify its violation.

I am excited about Project Apology because it focuses on the women themselves, giving them space and support to find the words that will enable them to move towards healing. I am grateful to Ms. Elmi for this important, creative, and potentially transformative research, and the Hurma Project is proud to support it.

About Dr. Mattson

Dr. Ingrid Mattson is the London and Windsor Community Chair in Islamic Studies at Huron University College at Western University in Canada. She had previously lectured at the Hartford Seminary and served as Director of the Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations. Dr. Mattson is the former president of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), and the author of the highly acclaimed The Story of the Qur’an. In 2018, Dr. Mattson founded the Hurma Project, which is dedicated to research, education, training, and developing protocols of professional oversight for imams, chaplains, mosque boards and other community structures.