

Respected Sadr Sahiba and my dear sisters,

Assalamo alaikum wa Rahmatullahe wa barakatohu. The topic of my speech today is “Khilafat – Empowering Ahmadi Women.” The issue of women’s empowerment transcends time, geography, and culture. Too often, when we talk about women’s rights, the world imagines a woman in a head-to-toe veil somewhere in South Asia or the Middle East. Yet the reality is universal: women’s rights are vulnerable in every society—including here in the United States, where many long-established rights are now being questioned or restricted.

In the United States, women gained the right to vote in 1920 after decades of struggle and resistance. Yet even then, many women of color continued to face severe barriers—legal, social, and systemic—that prevented them from casting a ballot until the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The right to vote is essential because it ensures that the perspectives, experiences, and voices of half the population are represented in the laws and policies that shape our society.

Understanding why women’s empowerment matters is vital. Empowering women leads to stronger economies, improved health and educational outcomes for families, and more innovative, inclusive communities. True empowerment means eliminating gender discrimination, ensuring equal access to education and economic opportunity, and protecting women from violence, exploitation, and abuse.

So what factors aid in empowering women? First and foremost is education. When girls and women receive quality education, everything changes. The Holy Prophet (SAW) said, “Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim man and woman.” Education gives women knowledge and confidence, critical thinking skills, access to better jobs, the ability to advocate for their rights, and independence in decision-making. It’s the single

most powerful predictor of improved health, economic security, and leadership for women. There is an African proverb which states "If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation."

In the 1970s, Dr. Muhammad Yunus, a Bangladeshi economist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, established a system of giving micro-loans to village women, which helped them make money for their families, and slowly lift them out of poverty. This Microcredit model in Bangladesh has had a significant role in women's empowerment, generally showing a positive impact on individual self-worth, household decision-making, and access to resources.

Seeing women lead and be represented in professional fields transforms the expectations of a society. Empowerment is not just personal, it's also systemic. Institutions help when they create women's organizations, such as the Lajna Ima'illah - which we will talk more about later on - and provide safe forums for discussion, education, and advocacy. When a woman has supportive parents, an encouraging spouse, and community respect, this can also aid in her empowerment, which is easier when home is a place of growth rather than restriction.

Fourteen hundred years ago, the Holy Prophet (SAW) significantly improved women's status in 7th-century Arabia, granting them rights to property, inheritance, consent in marriage, and divorce, making him a revolutionary figure for women's empowerment in his time. He championed women as dignified, equal spiritual beings, granting rights unheard of then, like ensuring dowries went to wives, allowing women to own property, and challenging patriarchal norms.

However, sadly in some Muslim communities, these valuable teachings of the Holy Prophet (SAW) have been forgotten or ignored. I recently read a heart-wrenching book about the plight of some women in Afghanistan, both at the turn of the 20th century and in the present day. It pained me to read about their

lack of basic rights and how they were confined to the four walls of their homes, with little to no access to education, and receiving poor treatment from their husbands and relatives. While reading this book, I would tearfully talk to my sister about the immense privilege of being born into our lives, with all the rights we possess and perhaps often take for granted. Unfortunately, ignorance among many so-called religious scholars and their abhorrent and incorrect teachings about women's rights has caused some cultures to exhibit this poor treatment of women. This is very harmful for the long-term progress of the society and of future generations.

As Ahmadi Muslim women, we are extremely blessed to be part of a community which not only encourages the empowerment of women, but our leaders also actively support and remind us of its importance. The Promised Messiah Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (AS)'s teachings set the foundation for our community. He emphasized the spiritual and moral training of women, and urged them to seek both secular education and religious knowledge.

Hazrat Musleh Maud (RA) established schools and colleges in Qadian and Rabwah so that girls who could not travel to bigger cities to study, could still be provided a proper education and attain high standards of secular knowledge and religious teachings. He formed the Lajna Ima'illah in 1922 and said "A community cannot progress unless its women also progress." Lajna Ima'illah was created with the primary objectives of educating Ahmadi women, preparing them to serve their fellow beings, and to encourage them to instruct, guide, and train their children in Islamic practices. Lajna Ima'illah is active in over 100 countries, empowering hundreds of thousands of women through education, spiritual development, leadership training, and humanitarian service. We organize interfaith panels, women's conferences, community service, peace symposiums, and presentations on Islam and women's rights. Today, Ahmadi Muslim women serve as educators, physicians, academics, engineers, leaders, and humanitarian workers across continents. We celebrated the centenary of Lajna Ima'illah a couple of years

ago, and it is truly a visionary organization. Many of my non-Ahmadi friends have been impressed by how organized and active our Lajna is, compared to their own churches and mosques. Every year during Jalsa, I can't help but marvel at all that goes into ensuring everything runs smoothly, with volunteers working day and night. On the Lajna side, our hard work, organization, and incredible attention to detail play a huge part in making the whole event a success.

We are blessed that each of our Khalifa-e-Waqt have been an advocate for women's rights. Hazrat Khalifatul Masih III, Hazrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad (RA) set up many international educational and training programs for women outside of South Asia. Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (RA) encouraged women to pursue science, medicine, research, and public speaking. Our current Huzoor, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (ABA) has delivered dozens of speeches directed exclusively to Lajna members on women's independence and dignity, on education, and leadership and service.

In his address to Lajna during the Germany Jalsa in 2016, Huzoor advised that we should not only speak of the rights which are limited to one's individual self. Instead, we "should raise the slogan of women's rights which should originate in the minds of boys from their early childhood upbringing; that they should promote from the outset. They should understand they have to establish the rights of their wives, daughters and mothers and grant them the highest status in society, a status that Islam has granted them." What a profound statement and I love that he reminds us that our sons should also be aware of women's rights so that they grow to be supportive men who are advocates of women.

At the national Waqfe-e-Nau Girls Ijtema in 2017, Huzoor (may Allah be his Helper) said that women should pursue secular and religious education and use their knowledge to defend Islam and for the sake of the moral training of their future generations.

Children spend their most formative years with their mothers, who provide their earliest education, guidance, and moral foundation. When children see their mother as educated, confident, and empowered, those qualities naturally influence their own development. This impact extends far beyond a single generation—the empowerment of one woman can elevate families and communities for years to come.

There is a beautiful quote by the American writer and professor Audre Lorde, where she says “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.” We must work together as Lajna members and follow the teachings of Khilafat in order to break the shackles of ignorance.

At the end of that book I recently read about the Afghani women, the main character is actually able to escape her abusive family and save herself because she knew how to read and had an education. She was able to read street signs and store fronts and got support from a local women’s organization. It was a beautiful ending to an otherwise painful story, which only reminded me that women’s empowerment can be achieved through education, spiritual guidance, and institutional support, and our Jamaat fosters a model of empowerment that blends faith, service, and leadership from Khilafat.

For more than a century, our Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has cultivated a holistic framework for women’s empowerment grounded in theology, leadership, organization, and education. Through the visionary establishment of Lajna Ima’illah, continual guidance from the Khalifa, and a global culture that values women’s intellect, dignity, and service, Ahmadi Muslim women have emerged as leaders in education, humanitarian work, family development, and spiritual life. Our Jamaat represents a distinctive model where faith and empowerment reinforce one another, shaping generations of confident, educated, and service-oriented women across the world.

Empowering young women is more than just an admirable goal — it's an essential step towards a more equitable and prosperous society. May Allah enable us to follow the teachings of Islam with Khilafat as our guide to establish a beautiful future full of confident, educated, and empowered women. Ameen.

I end with some beautiful and emotional couplets from Hazrat Nawab Mubarika Begum Sahiba:

*Rakh Pesh Nazar Wo Waqt Behen, Jab Zinda Gari Jati Thi
Ghar Ki Diwaren Roti Thi Jab Dunya Mein tu ati thi
Wo Rehmat -e Alam ata he - tera Hami ho jata he
tu bhi insaan kehlati he - sab haq tere dilwata he*

*Hearken back to those times, sisters, when (newborn) girls would be buried alive;
The walls of your dwellings would weep, when you entered the world;
Then appeared the Rahmatul-Aalameen -- the one who became your benefactor;
You became a human -- with all human rights!*

Wa akheruddawana anil hamdolillahe rabbil alameen.