

## **A Hijabi Featuring in Playboy is No Victory for Muslim Women**

### **News:**

On September 24th 2016, it was reported that aspiring American journalist Noor Tagouri was to be featured in the 'Renegades' issue of the Playboy Magazine, proudly wearing her hijab. Tagouri tweeted that it was an 'honour' to be featured in the October 2016 edition – eliciting reaction from Muslims across the world.

Some are in strong support of Tagouri's decision to feature in the magazine and believe it to be empowering, whilst others remain highly critical and focus on the nature of the magazine itself. Founded by Hugh Hefner in 1953, the magazine is known primarily for its publication of nude and semi nude models, which although recently abandoned in its print edition, it continues to publicise such material online.

Tagouri and her supporters have justified her decision by the rationale that through such a feature she is breaking stereotypes about Muslim women and giving dawah to Playboy's audience. They hope to achieve the normalisation of the hijab in order to reduce Islamophobia directed at and about Muslim women.

### **Comment:**

As Muslims we should not be surprised that some individuals feel that such a feature is acceptable and praiseworthy. The Muslim community has by and large, ignored for many years, the rise of our sisters blogging and vlogging on fashion and makeup, not realising it was reducing them to the value of their appearance, and diluting the meaning of hijab. The rise of Muslim fashion shows was also ignored, not addressing the fact that the Islamic dress code is meant to free us from the enslavement to these industries, not provide a niche market for businesses. We ignored the rise of prominent Muslim figures promoting Muslim's participation in music videos and dance performances. This was all ignored, if not justified, under the rationale that this is what it means to be a Muslimah in modern society, that this is a way of carrying dawah about Islam and clarifying misconceptions about Muslim women's oppression.

Yet all that has happened is that we have fallen victim to the same kind of oppression, just a different brand, made especially for the Muslim woman.

It is important to note that this discussion is no way about bashing an individual Muslim woman who has taken a decision for whatever reasons, she deems best. Nevertheless, when it comes to Muslim women in the limelight, the action of one soon sadly becomes a discussion point by others, about all and therefore this issue needs to be addressed from the Islamic perspective.

Firstly, regardless of the magazine now being 'nudity-free', surely featuring in a published interview is an endorsement of their brand's history and sixty-year business venture of demeaning and objectifying of women which continues to this day. It is a

brand founded by men, run by men and the end consumer has always been men as a means to fulfil their desires.

Secondly, where is the 'honour' and achievement with a Muslim woman appearing in Playboy? Was this really a barrier that needed breaking? Without doubt, women in the Muslim community and public sphere are under-represented and marginalised. This is a very real challenge and obstacle that needs to be dealt with. However, surely the real honour and achievement would be for the one who tries to emulate Aisha (ra) who narrated over 2200 hadiths who was in fact a scholar and taught men the religion of Islam, or Fatima Al-Fihri, who as a Muslim woman founded the World's first ever University?

Lastly it is unacceptable from Islam to justify engaging in activities that are against Islam or go into environments that are forbidden to us, for the sake of "dawah". Just as going into an atmosphere of alcohol to convey the message of Islam is contradictory, so is contributing to platforms which exploit and use individuals for their own gain.

For minority Muslim communities today in the current Islamophobic climate, the pressure to conform and compromise on our Islamic values is a great challenge. Our mainstream views on modesty and Islamic social relations regularly come under fire because they are alien to the predominant norm. But it is through Islam's rules and values that it creates communities that are upright, moral, dedicated to family and value women. Ultimately the solution for Muslim women lies in resolutely standing and explaining the Islamic Sharia rules without hesitation and not feeling to compromise our values in the hope of social acceptance.

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