

MUSLIMS FOR PROGRESSIVE VALUES 2023 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Meet the Speakers



Afsheen Shamsi

Afsheen Shamsi has over a decade of experience in communications in the non-profit sector and has served as Director of Communications and Marketing at the Graduate School of Education (GSE) at Rutgers University for the last five years. Under Afsheen's leadership, Rutgers GSE has become nationally recognized for its excellence in

communications and has won several awards for many projects that she has led. She has been instrumental in developing and articulating the communications strategy for various non-profits and achieved greater visibility on the national and international stage for her non-profit clients and employers. Afsheen has worked with non-profits focused on health care, civil rights, education, hunger and homelessness.

She has a long record of public service and was elected to the Board of Education for Princeton Public Schools where she was an advocate for equity and worked to address bullying issues in the district. She was also appointed to the Princeton Human Services Commission and later to the Princeton Civil Rights Commission (CRC) where she worked to empower community members and to create a more inclusive Princeton. She also recently served on an ad hoc committee of the Princeton Civil Rights Commission to develop a Racial Equity Impact Assessment Toolkit to address institutional and structural racism at the municipal level in Princeton. She is presently serving on a Princeton CRC committee on reparations. Afsheen currently serves on the board of the ACLU-NJ and during the Trump era, she drafted a resolution with help from the ACLU-NJ and Make the Road NJ calling on our elected officials at every level to reunify immigrant families and to build a more compassionate and humane immigration system - the resolution was passed by several NJ towns and cities. She is presently chairing the ACLU-NJ's Strategic Planning Committee where they are adopting an equity lens to the strategic planning process.

Afsheen is a former Not In Our Town Princeton board member. She holds an M.S. in Strategic Communications from Columbia University and a B.A. in International Studies from Fairleigh Dickinson University.



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Ani Zonneveld

Ani Zonneveld is a writer, singer/songwriter, founder and President of Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV), an international human rights organization that advocates for social justice and equality for all, a strong supporter of freedom of expression and of conscience, women's rights and as an ally, LGBTQ rights. Ani promotes these values at the

United Nations, challenging human rights abuses in the name of Islam, and by offering an inclusive understanding based on universal human rights and justice. Since its inception, Ani has presided over MPV's expansion to include chapters in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington D.C., New York, and Boston, and the founder of Alliance Of Inclusive Muslims, the first Muslim human rights umbrella organization made of members spanning six continents.

Ani is on the U.N. Inter-agency's Faith Advisory Council, and recently commissioned by the U.N. Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect to create an anti-hate speech curriculum for Muslim communities. Recently, Ani co-authored and co-designed an "Inclusive Islam Curriculum Rooted in Human Rights" for children ages 4-7. She is the co-editor of MPV's first book, an anthology titled "Progressive Muslim Identities – Personal Stories from the U.S. and Canada"; executive producer of a video series "LGBT+ Rights in Islam"; and is a contributor for HuffingtonPost, OpenDemocracy and al-Jazeera. She has a TEDx talk titled – Islam: As American As Apple Pie, and is the subject of a documentary title "al-imam" featuring Ani's activism works.

As a Grammy certified award winning songwriter, she utilizes the power of music and the arts in countering radicalism as she speaks-sings her message of social justice and peace from a progressive Muslim woman's perspective. She has organized numerous interfaith arts and music festivals, and is the first woman to release an English Islamic pop album in the U.S. in 2004. She continues to create spiritual worship songs for the purpose of creating a new culture for Western born Muslims. Born in Malaysia, Ani, a Muslim since birth, spent a good portion of her formative years raised in Germany, Egypt and India as an Ambassador's daughter. Her exposure to different politics, religions and cultures has shaped her inclusive worldview.



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El Farouk Khaki

El-Farouk Khaki is a refugee and immigration lawyer. His practice primarily involves representing women fleeing gender violence, LGBTQI People fleeing persecution because of their sexual orientation and or gender identity, as well as people fleeing persecution because of their HIV status.

A human rights and social justice advocate, his leadership has been recognized by the awards he has received including: 2006 “Excellence in Spirituality” Award – Pride Toronto; 2007 Hero Award, Canadian Bar Association The Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Conference; 2007 Steinert & Ferreiro Award from the Lesbian & Gay Community Appeal.

In 2009, in addition to being the Grand Marshall for the 2009 Toronto Pride Parade, he was also the recipient of the “Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop”, Pride Toronto Theme Award. In 2008, he ran for Canadian Federal Parliament in two elections for the New Democratic Party of Canada.

El-Farouk is the founder of Salaam: Queer Muslim community, an organization he originally started in 1991. In May 2009, he co-founded the el-Tawhid Juma Circle with his partner Troy Jackson and dear friend, Dr. Laury Silvers. He is also co-founder of Canadian Muslim Union of which he is Secretary General, as well as co-Founder of the Muslim AIDS Project. El-Farouk has set on many boards and is a public speaker on Islam, the Immigration and Refugee system, human rights, racism, politics and HIV/AIDS.



Kandeel Javid

Kandeel Javid is an Pakistani American from New York. By profession, He is an Engineer and an adjunct professor. He is a certified marriage Imaam/ officiate and a community organizer for Muslims for Progressive Values. Some of his work includes gender equality, inclusion, and justice for religious minorities in Muslim communities. He stands behind

MPV’s vision and strongly believes that we can not bring peace until we challenge outdated religious practices on institutional and judicial levels.



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Maggie Garrett

Maggie Garrett is the Vice President for Public Policy for Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Maggie has been working on church-state separation issues for more than 20 years. Although she started her civil liberties work as a litigator, she now works in the public policy arena. She represents Americans United before Congress

and the Biden Administration, and she oversees the state legislative program. Much of Maggie's work focuses on ensuring that public funds are used for public schools. For the last eight years, she has served as the co-chair of the National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE), a coalition of more than 50 national organizations that opposes private school vouchers. She is also the chair of the Coalition Against Religious Discrimination (CARD), which is the national coalition that fights against policies that allow religiously affiliated social service organizations to use taxpayer funds to discriminate. And Maggie leads Americans United's work to protect the Johnson Amendment, which is the provision in the tax code that ensures tax-exempt nonprofits, including houses of worship, do not endorse or oppose political candidates.

Before Maggie joined AU's Public Policy Department, she served as the Legislative Director/Staff Attorney at the ACLU of Georgia, where she litigated high-profile cases on issues including the separation of church and state, free speech, reproductive rights and voting rights. She also lobbied the Georgia General Assembly on issues such as private school vouchers, reproductive rights, free speech and religious freedom. She was also a Fellow at the ACLU of Alabama, where she participated in litigation to remove Judge Roy Moore's Ten Commandments display from the Alabama Supreme Court building, and she was the first Madison Fellow at Americans United in 1999.

Maggie graduated from Hamilton College, cum laude, and graduated with honors from The George Washington Law School, where she was the Production Editor of The George Washington Law Review. In 2016, she was awarded the Allen Thornell Political Advancement Award from Georgia Equality for being "the most responsive attorney in reviewing legislative language" they've ever worked with and for her diligence and dedication to the First Amendment.



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Muaz Chaudhry

Muaz Chaudhry, currently the only Obama Scholar from Pakistan collaborating with the Obama Foundation, is tirelessly dedicated to advancing equal rights for gender and sexual minorities. As a passionate activist and researcher, he actively engages with nonprofits and the public sector to promote equality in education, healthcare, and legal rights.

Muaz Chaudhry stands as the visionary founder of Gender Rights Watch, Pakistan's pioneering organization championing the rights of all gender minorities. His work is multi-faceted and visionary, encompassing the eradication of misinformation, education on the significance of the Transgender Persons Act, provision of legal aid to hate crime victims, the orchestration of awareness campaigns against hate narratives, and vigorous lobbying for legislative protection for gender minorities.

Furthermore, Muaz has an extensive background in humanitarian efforts. He has worked with numerous organizations in Pakistan and worldwide, particularly in Syrian refugee camps in Egypt to provide education and support. In Pakistan, he served as the coordinator for 257 schools dedicated to underprivileged children. Currently, he is pursuing a dual degree in public policy as well as social sector leadership and nonprofit management at The University of Chicago, further enhancing his capacity to drive positive change.



Nadia Khan

Nadia Khan has been putting her inner visions on paper for as long as she can remember. Nadia's work draws from diverse sources including atmospheric physics, Persian and Indian miniatures, lyrical abstraction, and religious iconography. She is inspired by the patterns that shape our world and her search for a reality that transcends time and space. Nadia

studied drawing and printmaking at the Massachusetts College of Arts, Persian and Indian miniature painting at the Prince's School of Traditional Arts in London, and Islamic Geometry at Deen Arts Foundation. In addition to her work as an artist, Nadia also serves as a co-organizer for Muslims for Progressive Values Boston Chapter, alongside Kandeel Javid.



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Nat Amazan

Nathalie E. Amazan is a Haitian American poet and law student from New York. Nathalie's poetry strives to move people to recognize the power within our souls to create peaceful and loving ways of being. When Nathalie was 17, she was a Grand Champion of the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association Poetry Contest. Since then, she has performed in several venues such as the Nuyorican Poets Café where she was a Wednesday Night Slam winner. Her first poetry collection was published by Finishing Line Press in 2023 and she is a full-time first year law student at St. John's University School of Law. You can connect with her @natamazan on all online platforms.



Dr. Sandra Montes

Dr. Sandra Montes is the Dean of Chapel at Union Theological Seminary. Montes had been serving as Interim Dean since August 2019, and is credited with the successful and seamless move of chapel online due to COVID. A bilingual educator, musician, liturgist and writer who previously worked with The Episcopal Church, Montes' experience in leading worship and her ability to successfully build relationships helped her gain the respect and appreciation of students and faculty alike. Montes, an indigenous Latina (born in Peru and raised in Guatemala), holds an Ed.D. from the University of Houston and her book, *Becoming REAL and Thriving in Ministry*, was published in May 2020.



Shifa Rahman

Shifa Rahman is currently a Master of Divinity Student at Union Theological Seminary concentrating in Islam & Interreligious Engagement. Their course work involves Queer Theology, Interreligious Engagement, and African American Political Thought. They obtained a BA in Religion at Rice University and identify as an openly Queer Muslim. They work with a variety of organizations including the #DownWithWilly movement, the Convict Leasing and Labor Project in Sugar Land, and Rest for Resistance in New York.



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Sunita Viswanath

Sunita Viswanath is the Executive Director of Hindus for Human Rights. She has worked for over 30 years in women's rights and human rights organizations. Sunita co-founded Hindus for Human Rights in June 2019, and serves as a board member. In 2001, Sunita co-founded the international women's rights organization, Women for Afghan Women and served as Board Chair of WAW until January 2022. She has been an advisory board member to Unfreeze Afghanistan since its inception in 2021, and cofounded Abaad: Afghan Women Forward in August 2022. Sunita has edited "Women for Afghan Women: Shattering Myths and Claiming the Future" (Palgrave MacMillan, 2003). For her work with WAW, Sunita was awarded the Feminist Majority Foundation's Global Women's Rights Award in 2011. Sunita co-founded Sadhana in 2011 to mobilize Hindu Americans to connect their faith to social justice and human rights, and serves on Sadhana's Executive Board. She was honored by President Obama at the White House in 2015 as a "Champion of Change" for her work with Sadhana. In 2021, Sunita was recognized by Center for American Progress as one of 21 "faith leaders to watch." Sunita is an advisory board member of Population Media Center and a board member of Dalit Solidarity Forum.



Wazina Zondon

An Afghan raised in New York City Wazina is a multi-modal storyteller centering collective memories, tradition and rites of passages in the Afghan diaspora. An "undisciplined" performer and creator, she is the co-presenter of Coming Out Muslim: Radical Acts of Love, a storytelling performance capturing the experience of being queer and Muslim alongside her creative counterpart, Terna Tilley-Gyado. She is included in Reebok's 2020 #AllTypesofLove Pride Campaign, Esquire Singapore, Advocate Magazine's 2019 Champions of Pride, HBO's OutList, HuffPost, VICE/Broadly, them., Season 2 of The Secret Life of Muslims and The Muslims of Brooklyn Oral History Project. Currently, she makes and sells third culture adornments through Bibi Adorns; when writer's block is not in the way, she is working on (re)tracing her family's love story and inherited love print. Learn more about her works at wazina.com



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Zainab Tanvir

Dr. Zainab Tanvir is the imaging director of the SAS-HGINJ microscopy core and assistant professor at Rutgers University. She earned her PhD in Biology from Rutgers University-Newark in 2023. Dr. Tanvir's work primarily centered around the evolution of nervous systems. Beyond her academic pursuits, Dr. Tanvir is the co-director of

Muslims for Progressive Values New York. This labor of love is one example of her dedication to social justice, particularly in terms of racial equity and LGBTQ+ rights.



Zaki Barzinji

Zaki Barzinji is a Senior Director for Aspen Digital, where he oversees a range of projects at the intersection of tech, policy, equity, and justice for underrepresented communities. Zaki is a public affairs leader with a decade of experience in political campaigns, public service, and policy change at the state and federal level. He served in the White

House as Senior Associate Director of Public Engagement and President Obama's liaison to Arab-Americans, Muslims, Sikhs, and other minority faiths, where he worked to amplify voices and narratives seldom represented at the highest levels of government. Before joining the White House, Zaki served as tech policy advisor and Deputy Director of Intergovernmental Affairs for Governor Terry McAuliffe, where he helped direct the launch of Virginia's first open data portal and managed Governor McAuliffe's national cybersecurity initiative for the National Governors Association.

Just prior to joining The Aspen Institute, Zaki worked as the head of state & local government affairs for Hewlett Packard Enterprise, where he partnered with Governors and Mayors across the country to close the digital divide, modernize tech policy, and leverage emerging technology to rebuild a more resilient and equitable digital infrastructure for all communities in a post-pandemic world. Zaki's writing and commentary have appeared in Politico, The Atlantic, BuzzFeed, The Washington Post, CNN, and a variety of other platforms. He is a Virginia native, Hokie, aspiring Jedi, husband to Michelle, and father to Zoon & Amedeo, the world's only two Kashmlraqtalian kids.

