

Statement of Support for Khurshid Begum Awan from the Montreal Unity Mosque and the El-Tawhid Juma Circle

Rooted in our commitment to creating communities that are open and welcoming to all people - of every gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, religion, or sect - the Montreal Unity Mosque and the El-Tawhid Juma Circle stand in solidarity with all people who have faced violence, intimidation, displacement, and other forms of injustice.

For this reason, we are expressing our support for Mrs. Khurshid Begum Awan, a Pakistani woman who arrived in Canada in 2011 with her husband, and claimed refugee status based on the threats of violence that they faced from an extremist anti-Shia group in Pakistan.

After the refugee claim was rejected and Mrs. Awan's husband, Mohammad Khalil Awan, was deported in April 2013, Mrs. Awan faced a number of health complications, including a heart attack. In August 2013, facing imminent deportation despite her health problems, Mrs. Awan sought sanctuary in an Anglican church in Montreal, where she has remained ever since. The situation has taken an immense physical and emotional toll not only on Mrs. Awan herself but also on her daughter Tahira Malik - who came to Canada to escape her abusive husband - and her grandson Ali Own. Mrs. Awan's husband is currently in hiding in Pakistan, and only rarely able to be in contact with his family in Canada.

This family has faced unimaginable violence, the effects of which are exacerbated by the precarity of the current situation. We therefore call on the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to immediately grant Mrs. Khurshid Begum Awan permanent residency in Canada on humanitarian grounds. Moreover, we ask that Mr. Mohammad Khalil Awan be permitted to return to Canada and also be given permanent residency status, and that the entire family be reunited and finally allowed to live together in peace and safety.

The El-Tawhid Juma Circle (<http://jumacircle.com>), a network of mosques whose local chapter is the Montreal Unity Mosque, is a non-sectarian, gender-equal, and queer-positive prayer space that functions through a structure of shared religious authority. As a faith-based community, we honour the role that religious communities of all denominations have had throughout history in providing sanctuary for those who seek it, as well as Mrs. Awan's decision to seek safety and protection from the persecution that she has faced in Pakistan.