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**Risalah: A Message of Sisterhood**

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To me, gender equity means creating a world where every individual, regardless of gender, is treated with fairness, respect, and dignity. It’s about ensuring equal opportunities and empowering all voices to be heard, especially in spaces where they’ve traditionally been silenced. Gender equity is not just a principle—it’s a call to action to dismantle systemic barriers and create environments where everyone can thrive.

One of the most meaningful experiences I’ve had advocating for gender equity occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Growing up, I spent much of my childhood attending local Mosques for Quran classes. It didn’t take long to notice the glaring inequities: boys dominated the basketball courts, received the majority share of funding, and had the loudest voices in decision-making. Meanwhile, girls were often overlooked, their needs sidelined, and their presence minimized—a reflection of the male-dominated leadership in many of these spaces.

Frustrated by the message this sent to the young girls in our community, my peers and I decided it was time for change. Over Zoom calls, we brainstormed ways to empower the women and girls in our community and create a space where they felt seen, valued, and supported. From these discussions, *Risalah*—meaning "message"—was born.

Our board is made up entirely of young women determined to challenge these inequities. From the beginning, we knew that gaining the support of our community’s male leaders would be essential. We took the initiative to have conversations with our fathers and the male leaders in our Mosques, explaining the importance of *Risalah* and why it was crucial to uplift the voices of women and girls. These conversations were not always easy, but they paved the way for greater understanding and support. Their backing gave *Risalah* legitimacy and opened doors for us to expand our reach.

This year, our efforts were recognized in the most unexpected and heartwarming way. The Mosque’s board awarded us for the work we’ve been doing to empower young girls in our community. When I heard our name announced, I was overwhelmed with pride and joy. That recognition reaffirmed our belief in the importance of what we’re doing and motivated us to continue striving for even greater impact.

One of the most touching moments in this journey has been hearing from the mothers of the young women in our community. They’ve told us how proud they are of our efforts, how much they wished something like *Risalah* had existed for them when they were younger, and how we are inspiring the next generation. Their encouragement fuels our determination to grow and improve, reminding us that the work we’re doing is making a difference. Through *Risalah*, we’ve built a platform where Muslim women leaders share their journeys—not only their religious knowledge but also their personal and professional experiences. These women speak about the unique challenges of being women of color and visibly Muslim, shedding light on the judgment they face from both within and outside the community. They share stories of resilience, inspiring young girls to see themselves as capable of overcoming barriers and achieving their dreams. I also use *Risalah* to address taboo topics that are often swept under the rug in our community—issues like drug use, gang violence, the influence of toxic friendships, and the importance of valuing education. We teach young girls how to advocate for themselves in these situations, equipping them with the tools to navigate a world that often underestimates them. However, *Risalah* is more than just lectures; it’s a movement to create sisterhood. We organize monthly activities like volleyball, basketball, badminton, and painting sessions to promote physical wellness and creativity while strengthening bonds among young Muslim girls. Recognizing the challenges of being first-generation students, many of us on the board share our own journeys to help high school students navigate college applications, medical school, and other graduate programs.

Through this work, we are not only addressing inequities but also rewriting the narrative for future generations. Risalah has become a beacon of hope, a reminder that when women come together, we can create spaces where our voices are not just heard but celebrated. It is a testament to the power of community, courage, and the belief that change begins with us.