Zulfat Suara

Mary Hatwood Futrell Human and Civil Rights Award

Zulfat Suara is helping to create a symphony of tolerance and harmony in Tennessee’s Music City.

As the first Muslim American elected to the Metropolitan Nashville City Council, Suara dominated a crowded field of candidates to prevail in a region formerly under the yoke of Jim Crow segregation.

For a woman of color and Muslim to achieve this is a history-making milestone; to Suara it’s her birthright as a citizen of the land of democracy. Running a campaign with a platform emphasizing an increase in public school funding, safer communities for women, upholding women’s rights, and community participation in the budgeting process struck a chord, and the people responded.

The Nigerian-born Suara emigrated to the States in 1993 and located in Nashville when her spouse secured a fellowship at the city’s prestigious Vanderbilt University. While working at her own accounting firm, she became a very visible and committed presence in community service, becoming the treasurer of the National Women’s Political Caucus, and chairperson of Day on the Hill, a coalition of women’s organizations speaking out on issues concerning women and families.

Inducted into the Tennessee Women’s Hall of Fame in 2015 by the Tennessee Economic Council on Women, Suara also received kudos for Outstanding Service from the state’s Human Rights Commission. That same year she created a lasting legacy for Islamic women, founding and being named the chair of the American Muslim Council of Tennessee. Suara also received an award of Outstanding Service to Human Rights from the TN Human Rights Commission and currently serves as board member of the Nashville Metro Action Commission. She has supported women, serving two terms as State President of the Business and Professional Women, a century old organization promoting equity for all women in the workplace, from 2009 – 2011.

While her work serves as an inspiration to Muslim Americans and women, Suara sees her role as a servant to all people in the state, with a focus on hearing and addressing the needs of students. Thanks to her passion for community involvement, and dedication to advocate for reforms that will uplift children of all races, Zulfat Suara has become a key player in diversifying the “composition” of Music City.