

Women in Focus:

Nazlin Umar: Spreading the jam on as much of the bread as possible

Before you read this article I need to change your mindset the way Nazlin Umar changed mine as I was interviewing her. This is not another gender story. It is the story of a presidential candidate who says, "I am not just a female aspirant; I am a presidential candidate who happens to be a woman"



Political iron lady with a heart for the communities

When I think of Presidential aspirant, Nazlin Umar, I see the photo most used in the newspapers. That of her standing next to 8 men and I understand why they call her "Iron Lady"

Famous for contribution in the Orange campaigns she is the founder of the National Muslim Council of Kenya (NMCK), national chairperson of Oasis of Hope, a gender crisis centre providing free Islamic legal aid, litigation and mediation to redress all forms of violence against women and children. Her popular "Behind the Veil" project, which you may have heard of, aims at reducing and eventually eliminating stigma towards Muslims living with HIV/Aids. Other notable achievements include; Nominated global woman of the year 2006, Founder, ICRA Radio and her involvement in the Gold Education Trust Fund

The tale of her paternal ancestry goes back many generations to the Rajput's family in Pakistan. Her paternal great grandfather who came to Kenya with the British Army settled in Kitui and married Nzisa, the daughter of a Kamba chief while her maternal great grandfather was an Indian who married a local woman from Nandi. She often notes that due to her mixed ancestry she cannot be pinned down to a particular tribe which makes her a true Kenyan."

Her candidature

When we visited Nazlin at her secretariat in Ridgeways, Nairobi we were amazed to see her large stack of files which she presented to us as proof of her endorsements and popularity on the ground; Letters and endorsements from all

parts of the country, even places that I had never heard of. Talk about grassroots support!

She boasts avid support in the 52 districts with a voting block of over 4 million with endorsements from dignitaries to the folks in the grassroots from all over the country pledging their support.

I feel I have to share with my readers a letter which almost brought me to tears. This letter written on a tattered piece of paper, which Nazlin so proudly pulled from her “important letters collection”, was from a woman living in Garissa who had named her daughter after Nazlin. This woman wrote asking the meaning of her name as in their culture meanings of names are very important.

“I may not be on the headlines but on the ground,” Nazlin said we perused the files with her, “the proof of popularity is on the endorsements and as you can see I have in abundance.”

What motivated her?

To the jovial and vibrant Nazlin, we asked about her motivation to join the race for the top seat. She responded “When you look at the array of presidential candidates, they are all men. Aren’t there women who can take up the presidency and handle the handle the national agenda?”

“I have committed myself to working for others in need.” She continued, “I am overwhelmed by the support I have so far. God has been building me to this great time. I had not planned it. Things are happening on the ground even in places I have not held rallies and I urge you not only to look at my vision but see what I am doing and have been doing with the communities”

Party affiliations

When we asked Nazlin about her party affiliation, she said, “I am an ODM life member No. 001 and “The forum” which is a coalition of 36 member parties, have filled me as their presidential candidate.” In their letter to her, they stated that she was the most suitable candidate as they view her as the most credible with wide grassroots support and not tainted with corruption.

Constituency

When we asked her what constituency she is standing she said that due to her national outlook she was still deliberating. She indicated she would announce her constituency in the next few weeks.

One last word

“In the next few days once I finish putting my campaign strategy together, I will be doing great things. The media will have no choice but feature me on the headlines”

So to my readers I say watch this space. This is the last profile we are doing on Nazlin. We shall follow her as she takes on the grassroots bringing you the stories as they unfold.

Profile by Irene Githua