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**Syrian Girls Move Front and Center in the Mosque, Learning the Qur'an
From a Woman's Perspective in POV's 'The Light in Her Eyes,'
Thursday, July 19, 2012 on PBS**

For 30 years, Houda al-Habash Has Piously Taught the Qur'an to Syrian Girls—
Braving Criticism and Challenging Tradition by Charting a New Path for Muslim Women

Produced in Association with American Documentary | POV

"This wonderful documentary will be surprising for many. . ."—Kamran Pasha, *The Huffington Post*

MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET

National Dates: Julia Meltzer and Laura Nix's **The Light in Her Eyes** has its national broadcast premiere on **Thursday, July 19, 2012**, at 10 p.m. during the 25th anniversary season of the award-winning PBS series **POV (Point of View)**. (Check local listings.) The film will be available for sneak previews on PBS apps for iPhone and iPad beginning July 13 and will stream on POV's website, www.pbs.org/pov from July 20 - Aug. 19.

POV continues on Thursdays at 10 p.m. through Oct. 25 and concludes the season with fall and winter specials. American television's longest-running independent documentary series, POV is the winner of a Special Emmy for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking and two International Documentary Association Awards for Continuing Series.

The Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins on July 21 in North America.

The Film: Houda al-Habash, a conservative Muslim preacher, founded a Qur'an school for girls in Damascus, Syria, 30 years ago. Every summer, her female students immerse themselves in a rigorous study of Islam. A surprising cultural shift is underway—women are claiming space within the mosque. Shot right before the uprising in Syria erupted, **The Light in Her Eyes** offers an extraordinary portrait of a leader who challenges the women of her community to live according to Islam, without giving up their aspirations. The film is an Official Selection of the 2011 International Film Festival Amsterdam.

The Light in Her Eyes constructs Habash's portrait through sequences of her teaching classes, counseling students and giving her fellow teachers pep talks. At home, she speaks freely about her ideas, especially with her 20-year-old daughter, Enas al-Khaldi, who is studying abroad. Says Khaldi, "I can see that I can serve Islam better if I study politics or if I study economics or media." These scenes are supplemented by commentary from Habash's husband and colleagues, punctuated by public denunciations of women's education by male clerics.

Habash represents a new face of women's leadership in Islam. If and when political freedom comes to places like Syria, the local definition of freedom will likely differ dramatically from its definition in the West.

The Light in Her Eyes is a Clockshop production, produced in association with American Documentary | POV.

Embed a trailer, download press materials and learn more at www.pbs.org/pressroom.

Online: POV's website for **The Light in Her Eyes** www.pbs.org/pov/thelightinhereyes/ offers a broad range of exclusive online content to enhance the broadcast. Download a discussion guide, lesson plans and other viewing resources, view photos from the film and interact with the filmmakers.

Outreach: POV works with public television stations and national and community groups across the country to foster dialogue around the issues presented in our films. For a list of upcoming screening events go to www.pbs.org/pov/outreach. POV and nationally recognized media educator Dr. Faith Rogow have developed a discussion guide with background information to help event organizers. Cari Ladd, M.Ed., has created a lesson plan. Educators may record and show **The Light in Her Eyes** in their classrooms for one year following the premiere broadcast.

Filmmakers'
Statement:

"Most people don't associate Islam with women's rights, and that's exactly what we found interesting about the Al-Zahra Mosque Qur'an School," say filmmakers Meltzer and Nix. "Inside this community, we uncovered a lively debate about women's roles as mothers, teachers, wives, workers, sisters and daughters. Houda insists that secular education is an integral part of worship, because it gives her students the tools to make decisions about their futures.

"This was the most difficult project either of us has ever undertaken. It took several years of return trips to Damascus to convince Houda to allow us to film in her mosque. Finally, in the summer of 2008, she agreed. We worked with a very small all-women crew, and we made the film without the permission of the Syrian government. The school itself could have been shut down by state security for engaging with American filmmakers.

"The act of women teaching each other about Islam is a key element of the religious revival taking place in the Middle East, and understanding that is crucial to understanding how the region is changing, especially through the Arab Spring."

Filmmaker Bios: [Julia Meltzer \(Director, Producer\)](#)

Julia Meltzer is an artist and filmmaker living in Los Angeles. She founded and directs Clockshop, a nonprofit arts organization that produces public projects and documentaries. Her film and video work with David Thorne has been awarded prizes at the European Media Art Festival and the Rio de Janeiro Short Film Festival and has been exhibited at the Whitney Biennial, the Sharjah Biennial, the Toronto International Film Festival and the International Film Festival Rotterdam.

Meltzer is a recipient of grants from Art Matters, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, the Rockefeller Media Arts Fellowship, the John Simon Memorial Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, and she was a senior Fulbright fellow in Damascus, Syria from 2005 to 2006. She received her bachelor's degree from Brown University and her master of fine arts degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Meltzer is a fluent Spanish speaker and is proficient in the Levantine Arabic dialect.

Laura Nix (Director, Producer)

Laura Nix recently co-wrote *California State of Mind: The Legacy of Pat Brown*. Her nonfiction work has been shown on HBO and the History Channel, in addition to being distributed internationally on DVD. She is the writer/director of the narrative feature *The Politics of Fur*, which played in more than 70 film festivals internationally and won numerous awards, including the Grand Jury Award at Outfest. She produced the festival hit *The Yes Men Fix the World*, about the gonzo political activist duo of the title, and is currently producing their next film, *The Yes Men Are Revolting*.

Related Stories: "Where Are the Middle East's Revolutions Heading?" *Spiegel Online*, July 4, 2012.

<http://tinyurl.com/7xj35ws>

"Syria Crisis: Christians Fear For Safety In Conflict Between Islamic Groups" by Bassem Mroue, *The Huffington Post*, June 20, 2012. <http://tinyurl.com/ckh83r7>

"Inside a Syrian Quran School for Women: The Spiritual Roots of a Revolution" by Kamran Pasha, *The Huffington Post*, Dec. 2, 2011.
www.huffingtonpost.com/kamran-pasha/syrian-quran-school-for-women_b_1119535.html

"Syria's Solidarity With Islamists Ends at Home" by Kareem Fahim, *The New York Times*, Sept. 3, 2010. www.nytimes.com/2010/09/04/world/middleeast/04syria.html?_r=1

"No place for the Niqab" by Obaida Hmad, *Syria Today*, August 2010.
www.syria-today.com/index.php/politics/11359-no-place-for-the-niqab

"Syrian Islamic revival has woman's touch" by Lina Sinjab, *BBC News*, Nov. 28, 2009.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7710822.stm>

"Islamic Revival in Syria Is Led by Women" by Katherine Zoepf, *The New York Times*, Aug. 29, 2006. www.nytimes.com/2006/08/29/world/middleeast/29syria.html?pagewanted=all

Credits:

Co-directors:	Julia Meltzer, Laura Nix
Co-producers:	Julia Meltzer, Laura Nix
Cinematographers:	Anne Etheridge, Julia Meltzer
Editors:	Monique Zavistovski, Nathaniel Fregoso

Running Time: 56:46

POV Series Credits:

Executive Producer:	Simon Kilmurry
Co-Executive Producer:	Cynthia López
Vice President, Production/Programming:	Chris White
Series Producer:	Yance Ford
Coordinating Producer:	Andrew Catauro

Festivals: World Premiere, International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam, 2011
Official Selection, Dubai International Film Festival, 2011

Pressroom: Visit POV's pressroom, www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom, for press releases, downloadable art, filmmaker biographies, transcripts and special features.

POV: Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and celebrating its 25th season on PBS in 2012, the award-winning POV is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers. POV has brought more than 325 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *POV's Borders*. Since 1988, POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. Visit www.pbs.org/pov.

Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the desJardins/Blachman Fund and public television viewers. Funding for POV's *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Special support provided by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KQED San Francisco, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

