

WE TOO ARE AMERICANS AND OUR FIGHT SHOULD NOT BE A FUTILE FIGHT. THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO GENUINELY CARE WHAT WE HAVE TO SAY AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A VULNERABLE MINORITY.

**MARIATU OKONOFUA**  
HIJAB DAY ORGANIZER

**1** DIEGO PINEDA | Photo Editor  
**Mariatu Okonofua and Kristina Mayer pose in hijabs together as an act of solidarity.**

**2** DIEGO PINEDA | Photo Editor  
**Surya Shahi hugs Suad Ibrahim during the Global Solidarity March on campus.**

**3** ANTON L. DELGADO | Contributor  
**Lauren Fisher and Suad Ibrahim hold signs during the Global Solidarity March Feb. 6.**



**MUSLIM LIFE**  
from cover

after 18 months of a divisive election season, the two have bonded to proclaim Elon's campus — and the rest of the world — that unity outlasts hate.

Their project, Hijab Day, will unfold Feb. 16. While Okonofua is Muslim, Meyer has actually taken charge of planning the event, which is designed to give women only a taste of the realities of being judged for practicing their faith — particularly the misunderstood religion of Islam.

Other people may find it odd. Some may say things under their breath. But Meyer said this is simply the right thing to do.

"I think that God wants us to love our neighbors — all of our neighbors — and this hate stemming from this political rhetoric is not love," Meyer said. "I want to show the love that I find from my faith and my religion and I want to share that with everyone. This is the most effective way that I can do that and it's just a bonus that I can do that with someone I find so amusing and that I love so much.

"I don't think of Mariatu as a Muslim — I think of Mariatu as Mariatu."

**United through fear**

President Donald Trump's 13th executive order, which bans travel from seven majority countries, was one of Okonofua's last straws.

She feels he has personally attacked her for an entire year.

His refrain of "radical Islamic extremists" troubled her as a Muslim. His remarks on inner city communities astounded her as a black person. His Hollywood Access Video infuriated her as a woman. When Meyer approached her with co-organizing Hijab Day, she couldn't refuse.

It's her chance to make a statement.

"To hear him making so many derogatory comments about all of these aspects of my life, it kind of overwhelmed me and I knew I had to do something in somehow, some way," Okonofua said. "By me advocating for this and putting my name behind it, I am standing up to the man who wants to be my oppressor.

"At the end of the day, I am an American citizen, I was born here and it is my right to tell you that you are wrong about me and people who look like me or worship the same God that I do."

Meyer reacted similarly to Okonofua, though she technically was not affected the same degree. She's in the majority demographic, but she sobbed after the election without knowing why. She's participated in Hijab Day for five years, while many of her peers neglected its significance. Now, based on current events, she believes it's blatantly obvious why others should participate.

"One of the things that is so important in my faith is loving other people and I have a very big

**HIJAB DAY**

**When:** Feb. 16

**Where:** Elon's campus

**What:** A day designed to give women a taste of the realities of being judged for practicing their faith — particularly the misunderstood religion of Islam

heart for people on the periphery," Meyer said. "Seeing them so hurt and being so scared, it tore me apart ...

"I think there are a lot of things that happened that make people more willing and understanding of why it's important to rally together and show support. Last year was kind of like, 'I don't know if I should be doing this.' But this year, the community understands, and I think it's a lot more obvious."

University Chaplain for Religious and Spiritual Life Jan Fuller shares Meyer's concern for Muslims as a Christian. Growing up in Lebanon, a country rich with Islamic traditions, she's been bred to show compassion for all creeds. Last year's political sphere has disheartened her, but she's perused every avenue to advocate for the afflicted.

Posted on her office door is a sign saying, "This is a safe haven," a gateway for many who have confided in her on her couch. She's also called politicians such as Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC) to voice her concerns.

With a slew of events planned in solidarity for the Elon Muslim population, she hopes the Elon community will notice.

"What I hope is going to happen is that our community — and I can hope this only for our community, I don't know if it's happening anywhere else — but I can hope that our community realizes, or begins to realize, that we don't know enough about our Muslim students or their lives," Fuller said.

Imam Shane Atkinson, Muslim Life coordinator at Elon, agreed. He estimated there are only 30 faculty members and students at Elon who are practicing Muslims. He also said some may be scared to profess their faith, and he couldn't blame them. But while their numbers are small, their cause is universal. Atkinson said their voice can be loudly heard for if others to stake claim in the fight — that's the only way progress can be made.

"Regardless of what group we're all from, I've seen a lot of people stand in solidarity saying, 'I got your back,'" Atkinson said. "Humanizing each other and getting to know each other breaks down a lot of these barriers. We all have to be vigilant because that same hate and that same dehumanizing against Muslims, that's the same methodology used against African-Americans that labels them as thugs and rapists. This threatens all of us, and it's not in harmony with our values as Americans."

**Taking action as the voice of the students**

Elon's SGA attempted to do just that — make sense of the crazy situation affecting its constituents. The organization switched its Feb. 2 town hall meeting theme from sexual assault to the immigration ban instead to spark conversation. While the logistics of the ban were a focal point of the discussion, many of the officers