

### **Candidate: Fatema Merchant**

I am currently a senior associate in the Washington D.C. office of Sheppard Mullin Richter Hampton LLP. I graduated from American University, Washington College of Law in 2008. My practice focuses on international trade counseling and investigations; I advise clients on complying with regulations that govern international business, including U.S. economic sanctions, export controls, anti-corruption laws, anti-money laundering, and customs regulations. I also assist clients with internal and government-initiated investigations.

I grew up in Dallas, Texas. My parents, who are Indian, emigrated to the United States in the late 1960s. My dad has an LLB from Karachi but never practiced law; he is in the real estate business in Dallas. I think he's proud one of his three children is a practicing lawyer who also embraces her faith. I grew up in a pious household, raised traditionally Dawoodi Bohra Shia, and my family prioritized education and community. I struggled with faith as a young person though, and I wanted to understand my heritage and religion to make an informed choice about practicing Islam, so I studied Arabic and Islamic Studies in India and Pakistan for undergrad. During that time, I had the opportunity to travel throughout the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa. After undergrad, I entered law school with an interest in international work. I was a summer associate at (what is now) Norton Rose Fulbright. I moved to Sheppard Mullin as a lateral associate in 2013.

I want to be on the CAMBA Board because I am passionate about supporting diversity and inclusion initiatives broadly, and supporting Muslim professionals in gaining visibility, attaining leadership roles, and having opportunities in the public and private sectors more narrowly. My own personal experience as a law firm associate, and that of a Muslim woman in a hijab, has highlighted for me how important it is to have a strong network of allies and supporters to succeed in the legal professional environment. As I note below, I have also served in leadership roles at my firm in diversity and women's issues. I'd like to use what I have learned from my experiences to serve CAMBA.

I bring three particular perspectives that I believe would be interesting for service on the CAMBA board. First, I have been a leader in my firm on diversity and inclusion issues and that experience will help me serve CAMBA. I serve as associate co-chair of the D.C. Diversity Committee and co-chair of the Women's Lawyer Group. I proposed that my law firm host an Iftar two years ago, and we have hosted two Iftars in which we invited clients, potential clients, and leaders from the public and private sectors. The firm got positive press in each of these events. Second, being a Muslim woman in hijab (I wear a "rida" which is a traditionally Dawoodi Bohra covering) at a law firm gives me an interesting perspective on navigating the private sector being visibly Muslim. Ultimately, I do not want my identity to be subsumed by the fact that I'm a Muslim woman in hijab – I'm a lawyer who happens to be Muslim, and happens to be a woman, and happens to wear hijab, and happens to be a mom – but given today's political climate, being visibly Muslim has definitely given me a lot of perspective on bias issues in the legal profession. Finally, I have both the experience of growing up in Texas, living and studying in the

East, and then continuing my legal education and career in Washington. Having a background in Arabic and Islamic Studies, combined with my legal education and current practice in international trade provides me with a unique perspective on melding law, foreign policy, and culture.

I have two main goals for CAMBA. First, I would like us to take on a more aggressive mentorship program. I realize that CAMBA, as an organization and as members, is a young organization. However, I think we have enough members in senior roles that could serve as valuable mentors to their younger counterparts. We hear this idea all the time on panels, in speeches, in articles – about how important mentorship is for young lawyers to succeed (especially young diverse lawyers). Whenever I would hear that – I felt like those people with great mentors just got lucky. But I realize now, it is more than luck. You have to work hard to make people want to be your mentor. I have a few great mentors at my current firm – but I put a lot of effort into those relationships. I think many CAMBA members would love to mentor younger CAMBA members, and that mentorship is likely already happening, but I am interested in making sure that younger members have all the resources available to them to succeed in the legal profession. Second, I am interested in getting more Muslim legal professionals into leadership roles in the public and private sector. I realize that many Muslim lawyers gravitate toward the public sector. I certainly never thought I would still be at a law firm this many years out of law school. But to the extent Muslim lawyers ARE in the private sector, I'd like CAMBA to be a resource for them to make partner (if that's something they are interested in) or be elected to Boards or take on leadership roles at their firms, in other bar organizations. I am also on the recruiting committee at my firm, and to the extent others are in similar positions, I think that could be a resource for law students as well. For CAMBA members in the public sector, I want CAMBA to similarly be a resource to help them attain more senior positions in government.

As for my personal background, I'm married and my husband Kusai works in the Senate. We have three children.

In addition to my educational and professional background – I'm a working mom and I'd like to bring the conversation of balancing work, life, family, religion and traditions to CAMBA. I'd love to start a CAMBA parents (informal) network if there is interest.

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**Candidate: Aisha Rahman**

This correspondence serves as my notice of intent to stand for the 2016 election of the Capital Area Muslim Bar Association (“CAMBA”) Board of Directors.

Early on in my legal career I had a few, remarkable mentors that took the time to train me as a litigator. These mentors remain some of the best attorneys I know – they were terribly savvy in the courtroom, extremely ethical, and gave of themselves fully to train me. While they remain some of my best friends and mentors till this day, they were not Muslim nor were they of color. Because of this, they had limitations on how they could

relate to me. One of my mentors, for example, told me to wear skirt suits while practicing before a particular judge because that was his “soft spot.” Another mentor, when seeing my hair covered in my driver’s license photo, advised me to change my photo to one that represents who I am now because I would be treated differently in a court of law and in legal circles. These experiences were truly enlightening for me, and have helped me to realize the importance of having a professional, membership organization that understand the various intersections of my identity as an American Muslim woman and lawyer. As a member of the Board of Directors, I would like to see CAMBA as an organization that serves as just that. I have been proud to be a member of CAMBA for the past couple of years, and as a member of the board, it is my hope to continue to foster opportunities for lawyers of diverging career paths and different backgrounds come together and learn from one another. One of my goals as a member of the board would be to create more opportunities for informal or formal mentoring between lawyers.

Currently, I am the executive director of KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights (“KARAMAH”). I have held this position for nearly five (5) years and through my role, I have been involved in many local, national, and international legal activities. Prior to my tenure at KARAMAH, I was a family law attorney at Legal Aid of East Tennessee, representing indigent survivors of domestic violence. I carried that experience to DC by providing direct legal services to those who are unable to afford private legal services in my personal time. To that end, I have been recognized on the “Pro Bono Honor Roll” in DC from 2013-2015. I remained committed to this vision, and at KARAMAH we began providing culturally and religiously sensitive legal services to indigent, Muslim survivors of DV in 2014. My role at KARAMAH has not only centered around family law issues. As the nation’s oldest civil rights organization that focuses on the rights of American Muslim women, I have remained committed to the intersection of the civil rights of American Muslims, particularly women, and have provided advocacy on various issues including CVE, bullying, gender based violence, and language access at the Department of Justice, the White House, and other governmental agencies. Finally, many of our educational events at KARAMAH have been done in conjunction with CAMBA, including our latest workshop on the Islamic marriage contract. KARAMAH’s commitment to Islamic law and its relationship with American law is a unique niche, and I believe that CAMBA would benefit from having a member of the board that understands this nexus.

I received my legal education at the University of Tennessee college of law, where I served as a staff editor of the Journal of Law and Policy. I received by Bachelor of Arts from Emory University. I am currently licensed to practice law in the state of Tennessee. I believe that my organizational, management, and programs logistics skills would be incredibly beneficial to CAMBA. In my role at KARAMAH I have managed staff, handled budgets and fundraising, and have organized local, national and international programs in and for the Muslim community. I hope to lend my skills to CAMBA. Please consider my candidacy for the CAMBA Board of Directors.

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**Candidate: Yahya Thabit**

I earned my Bachelor of Arts degree from York University (2008) in Toronto, Canada and my J.D. from the University of the District of Columbia (2012). Following law school, I completed two clerkships with judges on the circuit court bench in Maryland. I am currently an attorney at a general practice law firm based in Silver Spring, Maryland.

I would like to serve on the CAMBA board so that I can assist in adding to the great work that has been accomplished by the Board. I also would like to contribute to the Board to help ensure that CAMBA continues to make concerted efforts in becoming a more inclusive organization, which will help the organization's growth.

I am a hardworking attorney who is a team-player and is willing to serve others to help foster a collegial environment. During law school I helped found the Muslim Law Student Association and have experience planning and organizing events.

I would like to help CAMBA continue to grow its membership base through organizing regular meet-ups, workshops catered towards professional development, and by developing a mentorship program where seasoned practitioners are paired with junior attorneys, recent graduates, and law students. I would also like to continue CAMBA's efforts in serving marginalized communities in the greater metro area through pro bono programs and other volunteer events. If elected to serve on CAMBA's Board, I will earnestly seek to carry out CAMBA's mission and achieve the collective goals set by our organization.

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**Candidate: Ambereen Shaffie**

I am an environmental attorney based in Washington, DC. I am currently consulting on a range of domestic and international environmental law issues. At the moment my focus has been on climate change and energy efficiency, and specifically, the Montreal Protocol Amendment and the Paris Agreement. Prior to that, I practiced federal environmental law, general civil litigation, and served as a clerk at the DC Superior Court.

My pro bono work includes representing victims of domestic violence and abuse, particularly in the Muslim community. In addition, I am also serving as the co-founder and co-leader of the DC Chapter of the Sisterhood of Salaam-Shalom, a Muslim-Jewish women's organization dedicated to eradicating anti-religious hate and violence. Finally, I serve as a Board Member of the DMV Exchange, which fosters greater collaboration among all DMV-area Muslim organization and leaders. These volunteer endeavors have been the most rewarding aspects of my professional and personal life in DC.

When I moved to DC, CAMBA was my first point of contact with the legal community in DC, and it had an immediate, positive influence on my career. In addition to providing legal training and education, I developed warm relationships that continue to this day. The fact that we continue to work together is an example of the quality of relationships and collaboration that such professional associations can foster. Finally, I have seen the

effect of CAMBA's influence upon the wider DC Muslim community, beyond its lawyers, and would be honored to be a part of its legacy.

My prior opportunities to serve as an active board member has given me the skills required to be a successful member of this team. Those skills include leadership, relationship building, consistency, and institution building. Consistency and relationship building is key for this position, which requires identifying and cultivating relationships with members, board candidates, and potential partners. It also requires a significant time commitment, which I have a demonstrated track record of achieving as a board member (in addition, I will be transitioning out of my position with several significant volunteer activities whose time limit has run, which will allow me the time and focus to achieve results for CAMBA). Finally, I have co-created the DC Chapter of the Sisterhood and have real-world experience in building institutions, a critical skill for an organization that is still young and developing.

My goals for CAMBA are as follows, and all are subject to the input of the final board and its consensus. First, I would like to grow the membership base to include a more diverse sector of the Muslim legal community, representing more identities and viewpoints, by engaging in regular outreach and targeted events. Second, I would continue to strengthen CAMBA's governance by implementing the elements of the existing, already strong, strategic plan – and where necessary, adding to that foundation. Third, I would like to see CAMBA have more consistent communication and tailored programming for the members, by instituting systems to facilitate ease of regular member communication.

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**Candidate: Johny Chaklader**

I graduated from Howard University with a JD-MBA in 2010. I worked at the Capitol Hill office of Senator Pete Domenici (as an Intern) and at the law firms of Arnold & Porter LLP (as a Paralegal), Keller & Heckman LLP (as a Paralegal, Summer Associate and Associate), and Akin Gump Strauss Hauer and Feld LLP (as an Associate and currently as Counsel). I also served as a seconded Assistant General Counsel in the Department of Legal Affairs at a military and cybersecurity focused federal agency in the United Arab Emirates for 15 months.

Growing up, I did not have the benefit of knowing any Muslim lawyers who could serve as a role model for me. Organizations like CAMBA simply did not exist. Today, perhaps more so than at any other time in recent history, it is crucial to have institutions in the Muslim community that young people can look up to. By connecting talented lawyers whose lives and practices have been informed by their experiences of the Islamic faith to one another, CAMBA also serves as a vehicle to inspire and empower future generations of Muslim lawyers and law students. Having derived a great deal of value from CAMBA over the years through its consistently superb caliber of programming and the wonderful community of lawyers it brings together, I hope to join the CAMBA board in order to do my part to give back – both to this fantastic organization and to my

community.

I am a detail oriented, responsible and thorough person who loves to work with people and see projects through to completion. My strongest skill is my ability to set others at ease and help people see the best in themselves. I have worked with and advised dozens of non-profit organizations on matters relating to strategy, finance, corporate governance and policy over the past several years. I look forward to bringing those experiences to CAMBA if I am elected to its Board.

I intend to help CAMBA create an exciting array of educational and networking, professional development, and pro bono focused events and activities. I would love to help CAMBA partner with other Muslim and non-Muslim focused institutions in the community to bring about these events. I will also focus on helping CAMBA enhance its board and governance, committee, membership, engagement, and data management capabilities. To accomplish these goals, I will pay close attention to the priorities and objectives identified in CAMBA's 2015-2017 Strategic Plan. Most importantly, I want to leverage CAMBA to enhance the informal mentorship opportunities available for young Muslim lawyers and law students in the greater DC area.

My practice focuses on International Trade law. I help companies investigate compliance issues involving the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control and EU sanctions laws, U.S. State Department's International Traffic in Arms Regulations; U.S. Commerce Department's Export Administration Regulations, as well as the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and the UK Bribery Act. During my secondment in the UAE, I participated in negotiations for 200+ defense deals and government contracts, which required me to travel to Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Qatar, Oman and all seven of the Emirates. If elected to the Board, I will seek out opportunities to highlight the international dimensions of the practice of law.

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**Candidate: Khalil Gharbieh**

My name is Khalil Gharbieh, and I intend to run for the CAMBA board. I earned a JD from the University of California, Berkeley, in 2010, and have practiced in Washington since then, in litigation and public international law at Arnold & Porter until 2014, and as an international trade attorney at the Department of Commerce from 2014 to the present. During law school, I spent time in Washington as a summer associate and as a legal intern at the Departments of Treasury and Justice.

I am stepping forward in the hope that I can give back to an organization from which I have benefited for the past several years. I think CAMBA is hugely important for our community's professional and social networking, mentorship of new lawyers, dialogue concerning legal issues, and engagement with the broader community. These goals have long held a strong resonance with me. I served as the editor-in-chief of the Berkeley Journal of Middle Eastern & Islamic Law, and as the president of Indiana University's Muslim student group, in both instances working extensively on event planning and

community engagement and leading a large organization that shares objectives in common with CAMBA. These experiences, as well as my familiarity with the law firm and government legal spheres in Washington, have prepared me to contribute to CAMBA's mission.

I have been extremely pleased to see CAMBA develop into a vibrant community, and I hope to help sustain its trajectory and deepen its impact.