

Amnesty International parts from Gita Saghal, the whistle blower

Tuesday 13 April 2010, by [Amnesty International](#), [SAHGAL Gita](#) (Date first published: 12 April 2010).

Below follow two statements on the departure of the Head of the Gender Unit from Amnesty International following her making public her concerns regarding Amnesty International's relationship with Moazzam Begg a former Guantanamo detainee, now running an organisation called Cageprisoners which has championed the views of Anwar al Awlaki . Begg has also described the convicted terrorist recruiter Ali Al Timimi as "one of the most reasonable and middle of the path scholars that I have come across". Begg once owned a bookshop in Birmingham UK which sold a books by al Qaida mentor Abdullah Azzam. The bookshop also published 'The Army of Madinah' by Dhiren Barot, a close associate of Khalid Mohammed Sheikh, and perhaps Britain's most important connection to the al Queda leadership, who pleaded guilty to conspiracy to murder and is serving a life sentence in prison, without parole.

On April 9th 2010, Amnesty International issued the following statement:

Due to irreconcilable differences of view over policy between Gita Sahgal and Amnesty International regarding Amnesty International's relationship with Moazzam Begg and Cageprisoners, it has been agreed that Gita will leave Amnesty International on 9 April 2010. Gita has most recently held the position of Interim Head of the Gender, Sexuality and Identity Unit, and was in a period of consultation over possible redeployment following a redundancy process. Accordingly, Gita will leave receiving a payment based on Amnesty International's redundancy policy.

Below is the text of my statement on departing Amnesty International.

STATEMENT BY GITA SAHGAL ON LEAVING AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

On Friday 9th April, 2010 Amnesty International announced my departure from the organization. The agreed statement said, 'due to irreconcilable differences of view over policy between Gita Sahgal and Amnesty International regarding Amnesty International's relationship with Moazzam Begg and Cageprisoners, it has been agreed that Gita will leave Amnesty International.'

I was hired as the Head of the Gender Unit as the organization began to develop its Stop Violence Against Women campaign. I leave with great sadness as the campaign is closed. Thousands of activists of Amnesty International enthusiastically joined the campaign. Many hoped that it would induce respect for women's human rights in every aspect of the work. Today, there is little ground

for optimism.

The senior leadership of Amnesty International chose to answer the questions I posed about Amnesty International's relationship with Moazzam Begg by affirming their links with him. Now they have also confirmed that the views of Begg, his associates and his organisation Cageprisoners, do not trouble them. They have stated that the idea of jihad in self defence is not antithetical to human rights; and have explained that they meant only the specific form of violent jihad that Moazzam Begg and others in Cageprisoners assert is the individual obligation of every Muslim.

I thank the senior leadership for these admissions and for their further clarification that concerns around the legitimization of Begg were of very long standing and that there was strong opposition from Head of the Asia programme to a partnership with him. When disagreements are profound, it is best that disputes over matters of fact, are reduced.

Unfortunately, their stance has laid waste every achievement on women's equality and made a mockery of the universality of rights. In fact, the leadership has effectively rejected a belief in universality as an essential basis for partnership.

I extend my sympathies to all who have fought long and hard within Amnesty International to match the movement's principles with its actions. I know many of you have been bewildered by this dispute and others deeply shamed by what is being done in your name. You may have been told that that debate is not possible in the middle of a crisis. I agree that there is indeed a crisis and that the hardest questions are being posed by Amnesty International's close human rights allies, particularly in areas where jihad supported by Begg's associates, is being waged.

I am now free to offer my help as an external expert with an intimate knowledge of Amnesty International's processes and policies. I can explain in public debates, both with the leadership and inside the Sections, that adherence to violent jihad even if it indeed rejects the killing of some civilians, is an integral part of a political philosophy that promotes the destruction of human rights generally and contravenes Amnesty International's specific policies relating to systematic violence and discrimination, particularly against women and minorities.

During these last two months, human rights gains have been made to defend the torture standard and to shame governments who have been complicit in torture through their 'don't ask, don't tell' policies. But the spectre that arises through the continued promotion of Moazzam Begg as the perfect victim, is that Amnesty International is operating its own policies of 'don't ask, don't tell.'

So I invite you to join me as I continue to campaign for public accountability at this moment, which comes but rarely in history, when a great organisation must ask: if it lies to itself, can it demand the truth of others?

Gita Sahgal

Former Interim Head of the Gender, Sexuality and Identity Unit, Amnesty International
