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Britain & Free-speech: Student union blocks speech by 'inflammatory' anti-sharia activist

Goldsmiths University Islamic Society tried too to prevent Myriam Namazie from speaking

Sunday 13 March 2016, by [ADAMS Richard](#), [Council of ex-Muslims UK](#), [NAMAZIE Maryam](#), [NSS \(UK\)](#) (Date first published: 26 September 2015).

Warwick University union says Maryam Namazie could incite hatred on campus if allowed to take up secularist society invitation.

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A human rights campaigner has been barred from speaking at Warwick University after organisers were told she was "highly inflammatory and could incite hatred".

Maryam Namazie, an Iranian-born campaigner against religious laws, had been invited to speak to the Warwick Atheists, Secularists and Humanists Society [1] next month. But the student union blocked the event, telling the society that Namazie's appearance could violate its external speaker policy.

In an email to the society's president, Benjamin David, a student union official said the decision had been taken "because after researching both her [Namazie] and her organisation, a number of flags have been raised".

It went on: "We have a duty of care to conduct a risk assessment for each speaker who wishes to come to campus. There a number of articles written both by the speaker and by others about the speaker that indicate that she is highly inflammatory, and could incite hatred on campus."

The student union's policy says external speakers are "not permitted to encourage, glorify or promote any acts of terrorism" or "spread hatred and intolerance in the community" and "must seek to avoid insulting other faiths or groups".

David said he felt embarrassed [2] by the student union's move and had lodged an appeal against the decision. "Maryam has always campaigned against violence and discrimination and has done so passionately for many years - something that should have been taken on board when the student union's assessment was made," he said.

Namazie said she hoped to go ahead with the event if Warwick changed its mind. "The student union seems to lack an understanding of the difference between criticising religion, an idea or a far-right political movement on the one hand and attacking and inciting hate against people on the other,"

she wrote on her blog. “Inciting hatred is what the Islamists do; I and my organisation challenge them and defend the rights of ex-Muslims, Muslims and others to dissent.”

The student union said that as a charity it was required to conduct risk assessments of any external speakers proposed by its societies. “It is crucial to note, however, that the decision-making process is currently incomplete, and a final decision on this issue will be reached by the organisation’s most senior members of staff in the coming days,” it said in a statement.

“The initial decision was made in deference to the right of Muslim students not to feel intimidated or discriminated against on their university campus ... rather than in the interests of suppressing free speech or freedom of expression.”

Namazie, who has written for the *Guardian*, is the spokesperson for One Law for Al [3], a group that campaigns against sharia and religious laws, and a member of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain and the Worker-Communist party of Iran.

In 2005 she won the National Secularist Society’s prize for secularist of the year, presented by the *Guardian* columnist Polly Toynbee.

Richard Adams Education editor

* The *Guardian*. Saturday 26 September 2015 08.00 BST:

<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/sep/26/student-union-blocks-speech-activist-maryam-namazie-warwick>

Maryam Namazie Named “Secularist of The Year”

Maryam Namazie, inveterate campaigner for the rights of women and refugees in Islamic countries was named as the winner of the inaugural Irwin Prize for Secularist of the Year last Saturday.

Maryam received her prize — a cheque for £5,000, sponsored by Dr Michael Irwin — from *Guardian* journalist Polly Toynbee at a glittering event in London.

The happy crowd who arrived at the Montcalm Hotel on Saturday were also joined by Honorary Associates Dr Evan Harris MP, Joan Smith, Martin Rowson and Jonathan Meades. The hilarious entertainment was provided by top notch comedian Stewart Lee, who is co-author of *Jerry Springer - The Opera*. His joke about what happens if you lick a lollipop with the face of the pope on it doesn’t bear repeating in a family e-letter.

Maryam Namazie received a standing ovation when the time came to reveal her as the winner. Introducing Maryam, Keith Porteous Wood, NSS executive director said: “Maryam is an inveterate commentator and broadcaster on rights, cultural relativism, secularism, religion, political Islam and many other related topics. The present revival of Islam has heightened interest in Maryam’s work, and at last her writings are gaining a mainstream audience. She has spoken at numerous conferences and written extensively on women’s rights issues, particularly violence against women.”

In her acceptance speech, Maryam acknowledged Mansoor Hekmat’s role in inspiring an entire generation of secularists and spoke of the rise of the political Islamic movement and its attempts to

dupe and silence opposition using rights language. She went on to say: "We need an uncompromising and shamelessly aggressive demand for secularism but again this is only a minimum if we are to ensure that human values are safeguarded and that the human being is put first and foremost. Today, more than ever, we are in need of the complete de-religionisation of society as well."

Maryam is a well known campaigner for secularism and refugee and women's rights and against political Islam. She is host of TV International, a Central Council member of the Organisation of Women's Liberation, and director of the International Relations Committee of the Worker-communist Party of Iran amongst others.

Seven others had been nominated, including the Somali-born Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who has highlighted violence against Muslim women and Nicholas Hytner, director of Britain's National Theatre, who came under fire for staging the musical Jerry Springer - The Opera, which many Christians regard as blasphemous.

A lifetime achievement award for services to secularism was also made to veteran NSS campaigner Bill McIlroy. In over half a century of dedicated service to the NSS, Bill has been the full time employee and also editor of the Freethinker on several occasions. He is still on the NSS council, although he is retiring from his duties at the end of the present term in November. Bill was completely unaware that this prize would be presented and received a rapturous reception as he came up to receive his award.

Billy McIlroy writes: "Superb" is a term to be used sparingly when describing a social function. But it is difficult to encapsulate in a word an adequate description of the luncheon and award ceremony organised by the National Secular Society at the Montcalm Hotel on October 8.

"The Award in question — the Irwin Prize 2005 — was donated by Dr Michael Irwin, an outspoken defender of the right to die. Dr. Irwin was recently struck off the medical register by the General Medical Council. But the reception accorded him on Saturday was an indication of the esteem he enjoys beyond the imposing portals of the GMC.

"Maryam Namazie was an ideal winner, being recognised here for her opposition to obscurantism engendered by church and mosque. Maryam Namazie fights on two fronts: against outright religious terrorists, like the murderers of Theo van Gogh, and soggy fence sitters who espouse political correctness.

"Journalist Polly Toynbee praised NSS campaigns against religious privilege and censorship. She referred to the untiring work of its Executive Director, Keith Porteous Wood.

Much credit is due to NSS vice president and Newline editor Terry Sanderson. His involvement behind the scenes contributed greatly to the success of an impressive and enjoyable occasion."

It is hoped that a DVD of the event will be made available soon.

National Secular Society

* Published Wed, 12 Oct 2005:

<http://www.secularism.org.uk/maryamnamazienamedsecularistofth.html>

Goldsmiths ISOC fails to intimidate and silence dissenters

I spoke on 30 November 2015 at Goldsmiths University at the invitation of the Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society (ASH).

The night before my talk, the ASH president received an email from the president of Goldsmiths Islamic Society (ISOC) saying the following:

"As an Islamic society, we feel extremely uncomfortable by the fact that you have invited Maryam Namazie. As you very well probably know, she is renowned for being Islamophobic, and very controversial.

Just a few examples of her Islamophobic statements, she labelled the niqab- a religious symbol for Muslim women, "a flag for far-right Islamism". Also, she went onto tweet, they are "body bags" for women. That is just 2 examples of how mindless she is, and presents her lack of understanding and knowledge about Islam. I could go on for a while if you would like further examples.

We feel having her present, will be a violation to our safe space, a policy which Goldsmiths SU adheres to strictly, and my society feels that all she will do is incite hatred and bigotry, at a very sensitive time for Muslims in the light of a huge rise in Islamophobic attacks.

For this reason, we advise you to reconsider your event tomorrow. We will otherwise, take this to the Students Union, and present our case there. I however, out of courtesy, felt it would be better to speak to you first."

On the day of my talk, the "ISOC Brothers'" Facebook Page [\[4\]](#) (the ISOC Sisters' have a separate closed page) posted the following, which has since been deleted:

[See original article]

Despite claims of "safe spaces" and concerns about "bigotry", the Goldsmith ISOC never made any formal complaint to the Student Union, which had already approved my talk, showing that it was an attempt at intimidating ASH organisers.

After my talk began, ISOC "brothers" started coming into the room, repeatedly banging the door, falling on the floor, heckling me, playing on their phones, shouting out, and creating a climate of intimidation in order to try and prevent me from speaking.

I continued speaking as loudly as I could. They repeatedly walked back and forth in front of me. In the midst of my talk, one of the ISOC Islamists switched off my PowerPoint and left. The University security had to intervene and remain in the room as I continued my talk.

Eventually the thug who had switched off my PowerPoint returned and continued his harassments. At this point, I stood my ground, screamed loudly and continued insisting that he be removed even when the security said he should stay because he was a student. When he was finally escorted out of the meeting, discussions on many issues from apostasy, the veil to Islamism and Sharia laws continued, including with some of the ISOC "sisters" who remained behind.

In the Q&A, a women's rights campaigner who had been kidnapped by Islamists in Libya and held for three days said that the attempts at intimidation reminded her of those dreaded days.

Another CEMB activist said one of the ISOC thugs disrupting the meeting threatened him by pointing a finger to his head.

The behaviour of the ISOC "brothers" was so appalling that a number of Muslim women felt the need to apologise, to which I explained that no apology was needed from those who were not to blame.

Absurdly, this very group which speaks of "safe spaces" has in the past invited Hamza Tzortzis of IERA which says beheading of apostates is painless and Moazem Begg of Cage Prisoners that advocates "defensive jihad."

The ISOC's use of rights language are clearly a cover to silence any critic and opponent of Islam and Islamism and to normalise the far-Right Islamist narrative under the guise of Islamophobia and offence.

Despite the many attempts of the ISOC "brothers," the meeting ended successfully and raised critical issues, including that criticism of Islam and Islamism are not bigotry against Muslims who are often the first victims of Islamism and on the frontlines of resistance. The meeting also helped expose the Islamists for what they are - thugs who cannot tolerate dissent.

Nonetheless, the Islamists at ISOC will need to learn that apostates, and particularly women, have a right to speak and that we will not be intimidated or back down.

Freedom of expression and the right to criticise and leave Islam without fear and intimidation is a basic human right. We have a responsibility to fight for these universal values at British universities and also across the globe.

A video of the talk can be seen here:

<http://freethoughtblogs.com/maryamnamazie/2015/12/01/goldsmith-isoc/>

NUS: #DefendFreeExpression

Maryam Namazie

NUS: Revise Safe Space and No Platform Policies to Facilitate not Restrict Free Expression and Thought

We are deeply concerned by the increasing attempts by the National Union of Students (NUS) and its affiliated Student Unions to silence dissenters - including feminists, apostates, LGBTI rights campaigners, anti-racists, anti-fascists and anti-Islamists - through its use of No-Platform and Safe Space policies.

We stand against all prejudice and discrimination. We agree that free speech does not mean giving bigots a free pass. A defence of free speech includes the right and moral imperative to challenge,

oppose and protest bigoted views.

Educational institutions must be a place for the exchange and criticism of all ideas - even those deemed unpalatable by some - providing they don't incite violence against peoples or communities. Bigoted ideas are most effectively defeated by open debate, backed up by ethics, reason and evidence.

The student body is not homogeneous; there will be differences of opinion among students. The NUS's restrictive policies infringe upon the right of students to hear and challenge dissenting and opposing views.

We, therefore, call on the NUS to revise its No-Platform and Safe Space policies to facilitate freedom of expression and thought, rather than restrict it.

* <https://www.thunderclap.it/projects/38257-nus-defendfreeexpression?locale=en>

17 MARCH RALLY FOR FREE EXPRESSION ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

We are writing to you to ask for your support in favour of free expression and one secular law for all.

As you know, Islamists are often free to speak at universities whilst those of us providing a progressive counter-narrative are repeatedly denied or restricted from speaking. We are wrongly accused of Islamophobia and "incitement to hatred" when we are in fact challenging the Islamists' hatred of apostates, women, Muslim dissenters and others. Warwick University Student Union, for example, initially barred our spokesperson, Maryam Namazie, from speaking to the Atheist Society using these very accusations: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/13/islamism>.

You might also have heard about what happened at Goldsmiths University where the Islamic Society tried but failed to intimidate and cancel Maryam's talk by misusing the concept of safe spaces.

Clearly, the National Union of Students' no platforming and safe space policies are being used to restrict the free expression of an increasing number of feminists and rights campaigners, including Julie Bindel, Peter Tatchell and Kate Smurthwaite.

On 17 March, Right2Debate and CEMB are organising a protest rally at the NUS in London to call for the reform of policies that restrict free expression. Please join us if you can from 5-6pm at Macadam House, 275 Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1X 8QB.

We have been informed that a counter-demonstration is being planned.

Please also:

* Tweet "I call on @nusuk to revise safe space and no platform policies to facilitate not restrict free expression and thought" or on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/nationalunionofstudents/> or other social media

* Take part in the thunderclap campaign:

<https://www.thunderclap.it/projects/38257-nus-defendfreeexpression?locale=en>

* Email the NUS office nus.org.uk to register your protest

Please also email us (exmuslimcouncil@gmail.com) with your name and a description as well as any organisational affiliation if you would like to sign on to the statement calling for reform:

<http://ex-muslim.org.uk/2016/02/nus-revise-safe-space-and-no-platform-policies-to-facilitate-not-restrict-free-expression-and-thought/>. The statement will be sent to the NUS after the protest.

We look forward to your solidarity and support in this important fight.

GET YOUR TICKETS NOW FOR 30 APRIL DAY CONFERENCE ON SHARIA LAW, LEGAL PLURALISM AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE

On 30 April, 11:30am-5:30pm, in Central London, near Kings Cross Station, One Law for All will be organising a day-conference on Sharia Law, Legal Pluralism and Access to Justice.

At the conference, author Elham Manea will present the findings of her new book "Women And Sharia Law: The Impact Of Legal Pluralism In The UK."

Women's rights groups that led successful campaigns preventing public authorities such as the governing body of UK Universities and the Law Society from incorporating aspects of Sharia laws into their public policies will further present their case against Sharia courts and the Beth Din, legal aid cuts, and the denial of access to equality and human rights.

Other confirmed Speakers include: Diana Nammi, Director of Iranian Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation; Gita Sahgal, Director of Centre for Secular Space; Pragna Patel, Director of Southall Black Sisters; Maryam Namazie, Spokesperson of One Law for All and Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain; Nareen Rehman, Co-Founder and Chair of British Muslims for Secular Democracy and Yasmin Rehman, Women's Rights Campaigner.

For more information and to purchase tickets to the conference, visit:

<http://www.onelawforall.org.uk/30-april-day-conference-on-sharia-law-legal-pluralism-and-access-to-justice/>.

For more information on the protest on 17 March, contact: Benjamin David,
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Thanks again and warm wishes

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Footnotes

[1] <https://www.facebook.com/warwickASH?fref=nf>

[2] See on ESSF (article 37406), [Britain & free-speech principles: Maryam Namazie – secularist, human-rights campaigner – barred from speaking at The University of Warwick.](#)

[3] <http://www.onelawforall.org.uk/about/>

[4] <https://www.facebook.com/goldsmiths.brothers.isoc/>