

Press Release

Launch of One Law for All - Campaign against Sharia law in Britain December 1, 2008

The One Law for All campaign against Sharia law in Britain is to be launched at the House of Lords on International Human Rights Day, December 10, 2008 from 4:00 to 5:00pm.

According to campaign organiser, Maryam Namazie, 'Even in civil matters, Sharia law is discriminatory, unfair and unjust, particularly against women and children. Moreover, its voluntary nature is a sham; many women will be pressured into going to these courts and abiding by their decisions. These courts are a quick and cheap route to injustice and do nothing to promote minority rights and social cohesion. Public interest, particularly with regard to women and children, requires an end to Sharia and all other faith-based courts and tribunals.'

The campaign has already received widespread support including from AC Grayling; Ayaan Hirsi Ali; Bahram Soroush; Baroness Caroline Cox; Caspar Melville; Deeyah; Fariborz Pooya; Gina Khan; Houzan Mahmoud; Homa Arjomand; Ibn Warraq; Joan Smith; Johann Hari; Keith Porteous Wood; Mina Ahadi; Naser Khader; Nick Cohen; Richard Dawkins; Shakeb Isaar; Sonja Eggerickx; Stephen Law; Tarek Fatah; Tauriq Moosa; Taslima Nasrin and others. It has also received the support of organisations such as Children First Now; Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain; Equal Rights Now – Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran; European Humanist Federation; International Committee against Stoning; International Humanist and Ethical Union; Iranian Secular Society; Lawyers Secular Society; the National Secular Society; and the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan.

The campaign calls on the UK government to recognise that Sharia law is arbitrary and discriminatory and for an end to Sharia courts and all religious tribunals on the basis that they work against and not for equality and human rights.

The campaign also calls for the Arbitration Act 1996 to be amended so that all religious tribunals are banned from operating within and outside of the legal system.

In the words of the Campaign Declaration: 'Rights, justice, inclusion, equality and respect are for people, not beliefs. In a civil society, people must have full citizenship rights and equality under the law. Clearly, Sharia law contravenes fundamental human rights. In order to safeguard the rights and freedoms of all those living in Britain, there must be one secular law for all and no Sharia.'

Roy Brown, immediate past president of the International Humanist and Ethical Union said, "IHEU is lending its full support to this campaign.

It is intolerable that the very values on which UK society is based - human rights, equality and the rule of law - are being undermined by the quiet and insidious application of systems of law that have no basis in equality or justice."

Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society, which is also supporting the One Law for All campaign, said: "It is a grave error for the authorities in this country to give credence to Sharia in any form – whether legally or in terms of informal arbitration. When women are being subjected to violence in their marriages, it is not acceptable for religious authorities – which are, by definition, misogynistic – to arbitrate. A two-tier legal system, with women's rights being always secondary to religious demands, is unnecessary, undesirable and ultimately unjust."

To RSVP to attend the launch or for more information, please contact Maryam Namazie, email: onelawforall@gmail.com <<mailto:onelawforall@gmail.com>> , telephone: 07719166731; website: onelawforall.org.uk. The campaign's website will be available on the day of the launch.

ENDS

One Law for All - Campaign against Sharia law in Britain

Declaration

We, the undersigned individuals and organisations, call on the UK government to bring an end to the use and institutionalisation of Sharia and all religious laws and to guarantee equal citizenship rights for all.

Sharia law is discriminatory

Sharia Councils and Muslim Arbitration Tribunals are discriminatory, particularly against women and children, and in violation of universal human rights.

Sharia law is unfair and unjust in civil matters

Proponents argue that the implementation of Sharia is justified when limited to civil matters, such as child custody, divorce and inheritance. In fact, it is civil matters that are one of the main cornerstones of the subjugation of and discrimination against women and children. Under Sharia law a woman's testimony is worth half that of a man's; a woman's marriage contract is between her male guardian and her husband. A man can have four wives and divorce his wife by simple repudiation, whereas a woman must give reasons, some of which are extremely difficult to prove. Child custody reverts to the father at a preset age, even if the father is abusive; women who remarry lose custody of their children; and sons are entitled to inherit twice the share of daughters.

The voluntary nature of Sharia courts is a sham

Proponents argue that those who choose to make use of Sharia courts and tribunals do so voluntarily and that according to the Arbitration Act parties are free to agree upon how their disputes are resolved. In reality, many of those dealt with by Sharia courts are from the most marginalised segments of society with little or no knowledge of their rights under British law. Many, particularly women, are pressured into going to these courts and abiding by their decisions. More importantly, those who fail to make use of Sharia law or seek to opt out will be made to feel guilty and can be treated as apostates and outcasts.

Even if completely voluntary, which is untrue, the discriminatory nature of the courts would be sufficient reason to bring an end to their use and implementation.

Sharia law is a quick and cheap way to injustice

Proponents argue that Sharia courts are an alternative method of dispute resolution and curb legal aid costs. When it comes to people's rights, however, cuts in costs and speed can only bring about serious miscarriages of justice. Many of the laws that Sharia courts and religious tribunals aim to avoid have been fought for over centuries in order to improve the rights of those most in need of protection in society.

Sharia law doesn't promote minority rights and social cohesion

Proponents argue that the right to be governed by Sharia law is necessary to defend minority rights. Having the right to religion or atheism, however, is not the same as having the 'right' to be governed by religious laws. This is merely a prescription for discrimination, inequality and culturally relative rights. Rather than defending rights, it discriminates and sets up different and separate systems, standards and norms for 'different' people. It reinforces the fragmentation of society, and leaves large numbers of people, particularly women and children, at the mercy of elders and imams. It increases marginalisation and the further segregation of immigrant communities. It ensures that immigrants and new arrivals remain forever minorities and never equal citizens.

One law for all

Whilst arbitration tribunals are part of British law, they are subject to such safeguards as are necessary in the public interest. Clearly, public interest, and particularly the interests of women and children, requires an end to Sharia and all faith-based courts and tribunals.

Rights, justice, inclusion, equality and respect are for people, not beliefs. In a civil society, people must have full citizenship rights and equality under the law. Clearly, Sharia law contravenes fundamental human rights. In order to safeguard the rights and freedoms of all those living in Britain, there must be one secular law for all and no Sharia.

Petition

One Law for All

- * We call on the UK government to recognise that Sharia and all religious laws are arbitrary and discriminatory against women and children in particular. Citizenship and human rights are non-negotiable.
- * We demand an end to all Sharia courts and religious tribunals on the basis that they work against and not for equality and human rights.
- * We demand that the Arbitration Act 1996 be amended so that all religious tribunals are banned from operating within and outside of the legal system.