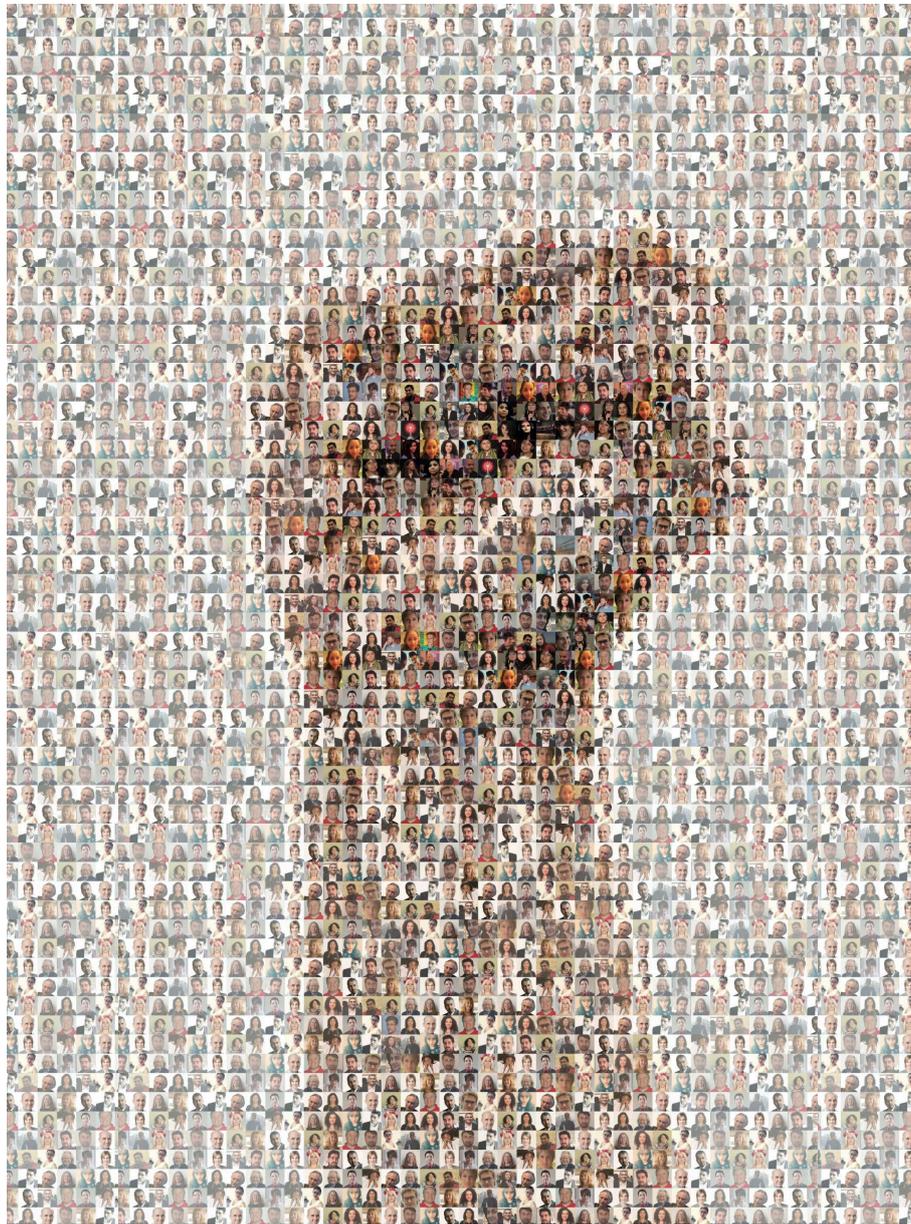


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Freedom of Conscience and Expression include
Freedom to Reject and Criticise Religion



International Conference on Freedom of
Conscience and Expression in the 21st Century
22-24 July 2017, London

www.secularconference.com



Secular
Conference

Schedule

Day 1

Saturday, 22 July 2017

8:00

Registration with Refreshments

9:00

Welcome by MCs

Fariborz Pooya, Bread and Roses TV Host, and **Iram Ramzan**, Journalist

9:10

Opening Remarks by **Maryam Namazie**, CEMB and One Law for All Spokesperson:
"Celebrating Apostasy and Blasphemy"

9:20

Bonya Ahmed, Activist, Writer and Blogger at Mukto-Mona:
"We Stand on the Right Side of History"

9:40

"Islam's Non-Believers" Film Screening

10:30

PLENARY PANEL

ISLAM'S NON-BELIEVERS

CHAIR: **Gita Sahgal**, Director of Centre for Secular Space

Deeyah Khan, Filmmaker

Fauzia Ilyas, Founder of Atheist & Agnostic Alliance Pakistan

Ismail Mohamed, Egyptian Atheist and Founder of The Black Ducks Talk Show

Sadia Hameed, Spokesperson of Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain

Waleed Al Hussein, Palestinian Writer and Founder of Council of Ex-Muslims of France

Zehra Pala, President of Atheism Association of Turkey



11:30

Break with Refreshments

12:00

PLENARY PANEL

**BLASPHEMY, ISLAMOPHOBIA,
FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION**



CHAIR: **Victoria Gugenheim**, Award-winning Body Artist

A C Grayling, Philosopher

Benjamin David, Conatus News Editor-in-Chief

Jodie Ginsberg, CEO of Index on Censorship

Mazen Abou Hamdan, Co-Founder of Freethought Lebanon

Richard Dawkins, Author and Scientist

Sarah Haider, Co-Founder of Ex-Muslims of North America

13:30

Lunch

14:30

PLENARY PANEL

RELIGION IN THE LAW AND STATE



CHAIR: **Jane Donnelly**, Atheist Ireland's Human Rights Officer

Elham Manea, Yemeni-born Author and Human Rights Campaigner

Gina Khan, One Law for All Spokesperson

Imad Iddine Habib, Founder of Council of Ex-Muslims of Morocco

Nina Sankari, Polish Atheist Activist

Pragna Patel, Director of Southall Black Sisters

Savin Bapir Tardy, Lecturer in Psychology at UWL and Counselling Psychologist for The Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation

16:00

Dave Silverman, American Atheists President:

"Firebrand Atheism vs Islam in America"

16:15

Break with Refreshments

16:45

PLENARY PANEL

SECULARISM AS A HUMAN RIGHT

CHAIR: **Tasneem Khalil**, Journalist and Editor of Independent World Report

Annie Laurie Gaylor, Co-President of the Freedom From Religion Foundation

Chris Moos, National Secular Society Council Member

Houzan Mahmoud, Culture Project Co-Founder

Karima Bennoune, UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights

Michael Nugent, Atheist Ireland's Chairperson

Teresa Gimenez Barbat, MEP, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and Euromind



18:15

Djemila Benhabib, Author and Activist:

"Algeria, France, Canada - Why Islamists are Gaining Ground"

18:30

PUBLIC ART PROTEST

IN SOLIDARITY WITH PERSECUTED ATHEISTS AND FREETHINKERS

19:00

MUSIC WITH SHELLEY SEGAL

19:15

EXHIBITION & COCKTAILS

BLACK DAYS, RED NIGHTS

Exhibition by: Aryan Arian



Day 2

Sunday, 23 July 2017

9:00

Registration with Refreshments

10:00

Welcome by MCs

Fariborz Pooya, Bread and Roses TV Host and **Iram Ramzan**, Journalist

10:10

Inna Shevchenko, FEMEN Leader:

"Gods vs Girls: Is Religion Compatible with Feminism?"

10:25

PLENARY PANEL

WOMEN'S RESISTANCE, THE VEIL AND RELIGIOUS MORALITY

CHAIR: **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, Co-President of the Freedom From Religion Foundation

Ani Zonneveld, Founder and President of Muslims for Progressive Values

Djemila Benhabib, Author and Activist

Halima Begum, Ex-Muslim Activist and Blogger

Rahila Gupta, Journalist and Activist

Sadia Sadia, Installation Artist

Yasmin Rehman, Women's Rights Campaigner



11:55

Break with Refreshments

12:30

PLENARY PANEL

IDENTITY POLITICS, COMMUNALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

CHAIR: **Hassan Radwan**, Agnostic Muslim Khutbahs blog

Gita Sahgal, Director of Centre for Secular Space

Gona Saed, Co-Founder of Kurdistan Secular Centre

Kenan Malik, Author and Broadcaster

Peter Tatchell, Human Rights Campaigner

Salil Tripathi, Writer and Journalist

Zineb El Rhazoui, Moroccan-born Writer



14:00

Lunch

15:00

PLENARY PANEL

OUT, LOUD AND PROUD

CHAIR: **Dan Barker**, Co-President of the Freedom From Religion Foundation

Armin Navabi, Founder of Atheist Republic

Asher Fainman, President of Goldsmiths University Atheist Society

Cemal Knudsen Yucel, Co-Founder and Chair of Ex-Muslims of Norway

Jimmy Bangash, LGBT Ex-Muslim Activist

Mohammad AlKhadra, Founder of Jordanian Atheists Group

Noura Embabi, Muslim-ish President



16:30

Break with Refreshments

15:00

PLENARY PANEL

ART AS RESISTANCE

CHAIR: **Sarah Peace**, Nigerian Artist and Director of Fireproof Library

Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, Award-winning Playwright

Kate Smurthwaite, Comedian

Nadia El Fani, Tunisian Filmmaker

Shabana Rehman, Performance Artist and Human and Animal Rights Advocate

Shelley Segal, Singer/Songwriter

Victoria Gugenheim, Award-winning Body Artist



18:30

Zineb El Rhazoui, Moroccan-born Writer: "Destroying Islamic Fascism"

18:50

Closing of Conference: Freethinkers' Declaration

19:00

Cocktails

20:15 - 23:30

DINNER & ENTERTAINMENT

With Performance Artist **Shabana Rehman**

Singer/Songwriter **Shelley Segal**

London Humanist Choir and

Magicians **Damon Conlan** and **Neil Edwards**

20:15-21:20 Magic with Damon Conlan and Neil Edwards

21:20-21:30 Messages of Solidarity

21:30-21:40 London Humanist Choir

21:40-22:00 Awards Ceremony

22:00-22:15 Music with Shelley Segal

22:15-23:00 Performance Artist Shabana Rehman

23:00-23:25 Music with Shelley Segal

23:30 Close

Day 3

Monday, 24 July 2017

10:00

EX-MUSLIM STRATEGY MEETING

Ex-Muslim activists will meet to discuss strategy across organisations and borders.

14:00

BODYPAINTING ACTIVITY

BODYPAINTING BY VICTORIA GUGENHEIM

The award-winning bodypainter **Victoria Gugenheim** will do a bodypainting of the Council of Ex-Muslims logo in an historic public display.



CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS WHO WANT TO MAKE A STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF EX-MUSLIMS:

We need you for a mass bodypainting by award-winning bodypainter **Victoria Gugenheim** on 24 July from 14:00-20:00 in London. The action is free and open to the public.

Participants will be painted as the logo of Council of Ex-Muslims and photographed from above. The public are welcome to join in.

FAQs:

Do I have to be nude?

No. Flesh coloured underwear can be worn; plain, beige coloured, brown or black bras can also be painted over.

Will I get cold?

The weather should be good, but bring a warm dressing gown!

Will the paint stain?

Although we recommend not wearing anything crisp new and white, no. The paint comes off in the shower with shower gel, and off of clothes with normal biological washing powder or capsules.

How long will it take?

From 14:00-20:00 hours, and painting groups of people will be done in stages, with multiple groups. If you're later, you'll be in group 2 or 3 for example, and not group 1.

Speakers

A C GRAYLING

PHILOSOPHER AND AUTHOR

is a Philosopher, Master of the New College of the Humanities, and a Supernumerary Fellow of St Anne's College, Oxford. He has written and edited over thirty books on philosophy and other subjects. For several years he wrote the "Last Word" column for the Guardian newspaper and a column for the Times. He is a frequent contributor to the Literary Review, Observer, Independent on Sunday, Times Literary Supplement, Index on Censorship and New Statesman, and is an equally frequent broadcaster on BBC Radios 4, 3 and the World Service. He sits on the editorial boards of several academic journals. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. In 2003 he was a Man Booker Prize judge, in 2010 was a judge of the Art Fund prize, and in 2011 the Wellcome Book Prize. He was the chairman of the 2014 Man Booker Prize. He is an Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society. His latest books are "The God Argument" (March 2013), "Friendship" (September 2013) and "The Challenge of Things" (March 2015). Anthony Grayling's new book "The Age of Genius" was published in March 2016.



ANI ZONNEVELD

FOUNDER OF MUSLIMS FOR PROGRESSIVE VALUES

is founder and President of Muslims for Progressive Values with chapters and affiliates in 12 countries and 19 cities. She has organised numerous interfaith arts and music festivals, participated in many interfaith dialogues and is a strong supporter of human rights and freedom of expression. She is the brainchild of Literary Zikr – a project that counters radical Islam on-line and co-editor of MPV's first book, an anthology titled "Progressive Muslim Identities – Personal Stories from the U.S. and Canada". She has contributed to many forewords and numerous anthologies too many to list; is a contributor for HuffingtonPost, OpenDemocracy and al-Jazeera, and recently gave her TEDx talk titled – Islam: As American As Apple Pie; and the subject of a documentary title "al-imam" featuring Ani's activism works. As an award winning singer/songwriter, she utilises the power of music and the arts in countering radicalism as she speaks-sings her message of social justice and peace from a progressive Muslim woman's perspective,. She is the first woman to release an English Islamic pop album in the U.S. in 2004. She was born and raised Muslim from Malaysia and is based in Los Angeles.



ANNIE LAURIE GAYLOR

CO-PRESIDENT OF THE FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

is Co-President of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. She was also the editor of the organisation's newspaper, Freethought Today until 2015. Gaylor is the author of several books, including "Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So", "Betrayal of Trust: Clergy Abuse of Children" and, as editor, "Women Without Superstition: No Gods – No Masters". In 2010, Gaylor received the Humanitarian Heroine award from the American Humanist Association. She has been an invited speaker at conferences including the 2012 Global Atheist Convention in Melbourne, Australia, and the regional conference of the Minnesota Atheists. She is on the speakers bureau of the Secular Student Alliance.



ARMIN NABAVI

FOUNDER OF THE ATHEIST REPUBLIC

is a former Muslim from Iran and the founder of the Atheist Republic, a non-profit organisation with over one million fans and followers worldwide that is dedicated to offering a safe community for atheists around the world to share their ideas and meet like-minded individuals. Armin was born and raised in the Islamic Republic of Iran and was indoctrinated thoroughly in the Muslim tradition. After almost losing his life in the pursuit of God's grace, the devastation of that event motivated him to seek a better understanding of the nature and concept of God and religious belief. Armin's journey led him to leave Islam and to become an atheist. Wanting to reach out to others like himself, Armin continues to examine religion as well as the notion of God and interact with others to engage in thought-provoking and educational discussion. Armin is the author of the bestselling book "Why There Is No God: Simple Responses to 20 Common Arguments for the Existence of God" which provides simple, easy-to-understand counterpoints to the most popular arguments made for the existence of God. Each chapter presents a concise explanation of the argument, followed by a response illustrating the problems and fallacies inherent in it. Whether you're an atheist, a believer or undecided, this book offers a solid foundation for building your own inquiry about the concept of God.



ARYAN ARIAN

PHOTOGRAPHER/FILMMAKER

is an Iranian-born independent photographer/filmmaker who lives in Montreal. He started photography and film-making at the age of 16 and received his B.A in Film Directing and M.A in Cinema Studies from the University of Art in Tehran. He moved to Canada in 2001 and after many years photography experiences in Iran and Canada, decided to expose his own uniquely-styled photography in 2012. Lonely women talking to the darkness, lonely women talking to the statues, lonely women talking to nature, lonely women looking for peace and freedom, lonely women tortured by religion (specifically Islam) are themes Arian has been attached to. He is the only Iranian photographer who is focusing in fine art nude photography and criticising religion with his unique style. The topics and the atmospheres in his artworks are about Loneliness, Women, Minimalism, Virulence, Absurdism, Death, Atheism, Tenebrism, Cultural Symbols, Nudity, Formalism, Eroticism and Criticising Religions. "Black Days, Red Nights" is his new exhibition in London (UK, 2017). It's a compilation of old and new photographs expressing his viewpoint on Islam, women, and freedom.



ASHER FAINMAN

PRESIDENT OF GOLDSMITHS ASH SOCIETY

is a student and President of Goldsmiths Atheist, Secular and Humanist Society. He is also co-founder of #Right2Debate campaign and an occasional writer.



BENJAMIN DAVID

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF CONATUS NEWS

is Editor-in-Chief of Conatus News, a contributor to The Huffington Post, a philosophy academic, and was until recently the president of Warwick University Atheists, Secularists and Humanists. He is also an activist for the university free-speech movement, #Right2Debate, a secularist and published poet.



BONYA AHMED

ACTIVIST, WRITER AND BLOGGER AT MUKTO-MONA

is a Visiting Research Scholar at UT Austin since Fall 2016, working on the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. She is also a published author and moderator at Mukto-mona blog, the first online platform for Bengali speaking freethinkers. Until recently, she worked as a Senior Director in the Finance industry in the USA. She is the widow of Avijit Roy, a well known writer, blogger, and activist who founded Mukto-mona. Roy and Ahmed were brutally attacked in the middle of the street by Islamists during a book signing trip to Dhaka, Bangladesh on February 26, 2015. Ahmed was gravely injured during the attack. She continues to work with international and local groups to help Bengali bloggers and activists and to seek justice for Avijit and others murdered. She is dedicated to drawing attention to the growing culture of impunity in Bangladesh.



CEMAL KNUDSEN YUCEL

CO-FOUNDER AND CHAIR OF EX-MUSLIMS OF NORWAY

was born and raised in Turkey. He was an Islamist and active in the youth branch of the Islamist movement, Milli Gorus, which is a part of the Muslim Brotherhood. He is now an ex-Muslim atheist activist and founder and chair of Ex-Muslims of Norway. He writes articles, participates in debates and conferences related to apostasy, blasphemy, women's status in Islam, Islamic reform, and political and social issues. He is helping to build the ex-Muslim community and promoting enlightenment work.



CHRIS MOOS

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY COUNCIL MEMBER

is a secularist activist, and campaigns against sexism, racism and fundamentalism. He is a National Secular Society Council Member. As a PhD student, he was the president of the London School of Economics SU Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society. In 2013, the LSE banned him from wearing a Jesus & Mo t-shirt, a ban he successfully challenged. He has also co-organised successful campaigns against the Universities UK gender segregation policy as well as the Law Society's Sharia Wills Practice Note. He writes for the Huffington Post and the Freethinker, and was nominated for the Irwin Prize for Secularist of the Year 2014.



DAMON CONLAN

MAGICIAN

is a magician, comedian, skeptic, and blogger from the West Midlands. His sarcastic sorcery often orbits the themes of atheism and skepticism, as well as political satire. He also likes to call himself a Jocular Prestidigitator because it has long words in it and makes him sound clever.



DAN BARKER

CO-PRESIDENT OF THE FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

is Co-President of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and co-host of Freethought Radio, a national weekly talkshow. He is a contributing editor of Freethought Today and is involved with the Foundation's state/church lawsuits. He regularly travels the country and the world giving lectures, performing concerts, and participating in debates with theists, many at college and university campuses. Prior to that, he was a preacher for 19 years. He became a teenage evangelist at age 15 and was ordained in 1975. He served as associate pastor in three California churches. He maintained an ongoing touring musical ministry, including eight years of full-time, cross-country evangelism. An accomplished pianist, record producer, arranger and songwriter, he worked with Christian music companies such as Manna Music and Word Music. Following five years of reading, Dan gradually outgrew his religious beliefs. He announced his atheism publicly in January 1984. He tells his story in the books "Losing Faith in Faith" (1992) and "Godless" (2008).



DAVE SILVERMAN

PRESIDENT OF AMERICAN ATHEISTS

is the current president of American Atheists, a non-profit organisation that supports the rights of atheists and the removal of expressions of religion in public in accordance with the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. He is the author of "Fighting God: An Atheist Manifesto for a Religious World", a firebrand manifesto from one of the most recognisable faces of atheism. In his book, Silverman - a walking, talking atheist billboard - discusses the effectiveness, ethics and impact of the in-your-face-atheist who refuses to be silent.



DEEYAH KHAN

FILMMAKER

is a critically acclaimed music producer and Emmy and Peabody award-winning documentary film director. She was born in Norway to immigrant parents of Pashtun and Punjabi ancestry. Her 2012 multi-award winning documentary "Banaz: A Love Story" chronicles the "honour killing" of a young British Kurdish woman killed in 2006 in London. Deeyah's second film the Bafta-nominated "Jihad" involved two years of interviews and filming with Islamic extremists, convicted terrorists and former jihadis. Her third film is on ex-Muslims, called "Islam's Non Believers". She has also received several awards for her work supporting freedom of expression, human rights and peace, including the Ossietzky prize by Norwegian PEN and the University of Oslo's Human Rights Award. She received the 2016 Peer Gynt Prize from the Parliament of Norway. Deeyah is also the CEO of Fuuse. One of the most recent Fuuse initiatives is "sister-hood", a digital magazine and a series of live events spotlighting the voices of women of Muslim heritage.



DJEMILA BENHABIB

AUTHOR AND ACTIVIST

was born in to a Greek Cypriot mother and an Algerian father, both scientists. She was raised in Oran, Algeria, where her parents were engaged in social and political causes. From an early age, she was aware of the poor condition of women in that country, but also of their hopes. She became an activist in the Parti de l'avant-garde socialiste. In the early 1990s, the oppressive Front islamique du salut rose to power. Djemila helped to organise demonstrations to oppose this movement. However, in 1994, death threats made by the Front islamique pour le djihad armé forced her and her family to flee to Paris. There, she organised groups that fought against the oppression of Algerian women – some of this oppression having reached as far as France itself. In 1997, she was awarded a scholarship to pursue a Master's degree at Quebec's Institut nationale de recherche scientifique. After that, she went on to pursue another Master's degree in political science and international rights. During these studies, she also served as the Canadian correspondent for the French-language Algerian newspaper El-Watan. In 2012, she received Le Prix international de la laïcité.



ELHAM MANEA

AUTHOR AND HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGNER

is an Associate Professor specialised on the Middle East, a writer, and a human rights activist. She is a Fulbright scholar who holds a PhD degree in political science from the University of Zurich, Master degree in comparative politics from the American University in Washington D.C, and a Bachelor degree in political science from Kuwait University. She has published several academic and non-fiction books, including "The Arab State and Women's Rights: The Trap of Authoritarian Governance". She works at the Political Science Institute at the University of Zurich and is a consultant for Swiss government agencies and international human rights organisations. Recently, she has been appointed by the Swiss Federal Council as a Member of the Federal Commission for Women Affairs. Her concept of humanistic Islam was first published in a series of articles in Arabic. Her most recent book is "Women And Sharia Law: The Impact Of Legal Pluralism In The UK".



FARIBORZ POOYA

BREAD AND ROSES TV PRODUCER

was born in Iran. He took part in 1978-79 revolution, but moved to UK in 1979. He studied economics and politics at Oxford Brookes and Birkbeck College, University of London. He founded the Iranian Secular Society, was one of the founding members of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain and writes and comments on politics and secularism. He also co-hosts and produces a weekly political-social TV magazine, Bread and Roses TV in Persian and English.



FAUZIA ILYAS

FOUNDER OF ATHEIST & AGNOSTIC ALLIANCE PAKISTAN

is a Pakistani human rights activist and ex-Muslim. She became known for founding Atheist & Agnostic Alliance Pakistan where the state religion is Islam and apostasy leads to death. Since then, she has been a subject of several death threats. In 2015, Fauzia sought asylum in the Netherlands because her family members and religious fanatics threatened her life. Instead of protecting her, the authorities threatened to arrest her for blasphemy. Fauzia won the Kazimierz Lyszczyński Foundation Atheist of the Year (2017) in Warsaw.



GINA KHAN

ONE LAW FOR ALL SPOKESPERSON

was born in Birmingham to Pakistani Muslim parents. Gina is a human rights activist and researcher. Personal experiences prompted Gina to break her silence in 2005 by speaking out in radio debates and writing to local Birmingham newspapers following a traumatic divorce and experience of living as a lone woman and parent in Birmingham. Gina focuses on two main subjects: the rise of pro-jihad ideologies within Muslim communities and the position and status of women within those communities. Gina believes these two twin phenomena to be symptomatic of deeper problems. After speaking out against Jihadism in Birmingham, Gina and her children were forced to leave her home after it was attacked. She is currently the co-Spokesperson of One Law for All.



GITA SAHGAL

DIRECTOR OF CENTRE FOR SECULAR SPACE

is a writer, journalist, film-maker and rights activist. She is currently Founder and Director of Centre for Secular Space. She was formerly Head of the Gender Unit at Amnesty International; she was suspended in 2010 after she was quoted criticising Amnesty for its high-profile associations with the Islamist Moazzam Begg, the director of a group called Cageprisoners. For many years she served on the board of Southall Black Sisters and was a founder of Women Against Fundamentalism and Awaaz: South Asia Watch. With Nira Yival Davis, she edited "Refusing Holy Orders: Women and Fundamentalism in Britain" (London, 1992). Among her articles are "Legislating Utopia? Violence Against Women, Identities and Interventions" in "The Situated Politics of Belonging". During the 1980s, she worked for a Black current affairs programme called "Bandung File" on Channel 4 TV. She made two films about the Rushdie affair, "Hullaballoo Over Satanic Verses" and "Struggle or Submission". She has also made two programmes for Dispatches Channel 4, "The Provoked Wife" on the case of Kiranjit Ahluwalia and "The War Crimes File" an investigation into allegations of war crimes committed by members of the Jamaat i Islami in Bangladesh in 1971.



GONA SAED

CO-FOUNDER OF KURDISTAN SECULAR CENTRE

is a women's rights activist from Iraqi Kurdistan. She was forced to flee Iraqi Kurdistan in 1998 due to her active involvement in campaigning for human and women's rights. Currently, she works as a Projects Manager at the Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organisation in UK and is the Overseas Director of Kurdistan Secular Centre. Gona is a writer, commentator and public figure in Iraqi Kurdistan who is well known for her stance on equality and women's rights. She is a co-founder of several civil society and NGO organisations, including the Independent Women's Organisation in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1993, Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Rights Organisation in 1999 and recently the Kurdistan Secular Centre in 2015. Gona has over 25 years of experience as a human and women's rights activist and advocate. She has campaigned to abolish polygamy law in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2008, to lift the UN economic sanctions on Iraq during 1990s and against the wars on Iraq before and after 2003. In the UK, she has been an active member of campaigning for positive changes in government policies towards "honour based violence". Gona has been a key speaker at the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day in Denmark in 2010 presenting about "Women in Conflict Zones – Iraq as an example". She has been a speaker in many local and international conferences and in public debates and media interviews, including BBC 4 Women's Hour, London Live TV and BBC World Service discussing issues facing Middle Eastern women and their struggle for freedom and equality.



GURPREET KAUR BHATTI

PLAYWRIGHT

has written extensively for stage, screen and radio. Her first play "Behsharam" (Shameless) broke box office records at Soho Theatre and the Birmingham Rep in 2001. Her play "Behzti" (Dishonour) was sensationally closed in December 2004, after playing to packed houses at the Birmingham Rep. The play, which explored sexual abuse in the British Sikh community caused controversy as it was set in a Gurdwara. Members of the local Sikh community objected to the play and demonstrations culminated in a riot which led to theatre bosses closing the show – a move which launched a national debate about artistic censorship and multiculturalism. Death threats forced Gurpreet into hiding. In 2005, "Behzti" won the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. In 2006, the play was translated into French and did sell-out tours in France and Belgium. "Behzti" was translated into Italian in 2012 and was performed in Bari, Italy. In 2010 her follow up to "Behzti" - Behud (Beyond Belief) - was co-produced by Soho Theatre and Coventry Belgrade and shortlisted for the John Whiting Award. Recent credits include "Khandan", Royal Court, "Fourteen", Watford Palace Theatre and the feature film "Everywhere and Nowhere". She is currently under commission to the Birmingham Rep, is developing two television projects for the BBC and is a member of the writing team of "The Archers".



HALIMA BEGUM

EX-MUSLIM FEMINIST RESEARCHER AND BLOGGER

is an ex-Muslim activist and blogger. After a decade-long journey from Sunni and Shia Islam over Islamism to Secular Liberalism, Halima wrote a study on "British ex-Muslims: Negotiating the Essential and the Revolutionary", which won the Best Dissertation Award at Birkbeck University in 2014. Halima is keen to promote freedom of expression and uphold rights of personal autonomy. She has written for Sedaq, sister-hood Magazine and Double-Bind. She hopes to share her journey and help others find the best way they can be true to themselves and live freely.



HASSAN RADWAN

AGNOSTIC MUSLIM KHUTBAHS BLOG

graduated with 1st class honours in Arabic from SOAS University of London in 1984, his specialist subjects being Quranic commentary and Pre-Islamic poetry. For 3 years, he served as president of SOAS Students Islamic Society. He spent 15 years as a teacher at Islamia Primary School in London and has written four books for children of Muslim parents as well as leading an Islamic circle. After going through a period of questioning & doubting his faith he first identified as an ex-Muslim but eventually came to identify as an Agnostic Muslim and campaigns for radical reform within Islam – in particular the need to recognise the Quran's human origin. He recently translated the book "My Ordeal with the Quran" from Arabic to English and founded the Agnostic Muslims and Friends Facebook group. He runs the Agnostic Muslim Khutbahs blog. Hassan is also an active member of the Inclusive Mosque Initiative in London.



HOUZAN MAHMOUD

CULTURE PROJECT CO-FOUNDER

is a women's rights campaigner, public lecturer and co-founder of Culture Project, a transnational project formed recently to raise awareness about feminism and gender in Kurdistan and diaspora. She has an MA in Gender Studies from SOAS, London University. She worked as a representative of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq for many years. She was born in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1973 and currently resides and works in London. Her articles have been published in The Independent, The Guardian, The Tribune, The New Statesman and others. Houzan has led many campaigns internationally, including campaigns against the rape and abduction of women in Iraq, and against the imposition of Islamic sharia law in Kurdistan and the Iraqi constitution. She has also led other campaigns against so called honour killings, and against violations of freedom of expression. She is the winner of 2016 Emma Humphrey's Memorial Award.



IMAD IDDINE HABIB

FOUNDER OF COUNCIL OF EX-MUSLIMS OF MOROCCO

is a Moroccan atheist threatened for his atheism. He is founder of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Morocco, the first public atheist organisation in a country with Islam as the state religion. The Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain declared May 15 "International Imad Day" in order to galvanise support for his case. His case was also highlighted in a 2013 CEMB report on the political and legal status of apostates in Islam. He is currently co-Spokesperson of Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain.



INNA SHEVCHENKO

FEMEN LEADER

is leader of FEMEN, topless activists against various manifestations of patriarchy, including dictatorship, religion, and the sex industry. She has published "Anatomie de l'oppression" with Pauline Hillier. She was kidnapped and threatened by the Belarus KGB in 2011 and was given political asylum in France. In July 2013, Shevchenko was the main inspiration for a new French stamp depicting Marianne. In December 2012, the French magazine Madame Figaro included Shevchenko in its list of the world's top 20 iconic women of the year. Shevchenko is a speaker at conferences and a columnist for the international press. She was a speaker at a debate on freedom of speech in Copenhagen on 14 February 2015 with cartoonist Lars Vilks. She was speaking about an illusion that in Western Europe people can fully enjoy freedom of speech when a terrorist opened fire in the lobby of the cultural centre, where the debate took place. Surviving the attack, Shevchenko later said, "Liberal voices should be louder than Kalashnikovs".



IRAM RAMZAN

JOURNALIST AND FOUNDER OF SEDAA

is a reporter and freelance journalist based in Greater Manchester. She founded Sedaa (Our Voices), a platform for progressive/secular voices of Muslim heritage, challenging the narratives surrounding Islam and extremism.



ISMAIL MOHAMED

EGYPTIAN ATHEIST AND FOUNDER OF BLACK DUCKS TALK SHOW

is the first Egyptian to publicly announce his atheism on national television. He started The Black Ducks, an inspiring Talk Show on Youtube that interviews atheists and non-religious individuals from the Arab world. It aims to achieve a secular society in the Middle East and North Africa and offer solace and courage to those who are atheists in secret so they may know they are not alone in the world. Many share their stories of struggle on The Black Ducks. The channel is the number one platform for Arab atheists and apostates throughout the region. Mohamed launched his project in 2013, after the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood from power, a time when many Egyptians feared for their freedom.



JANE DONNELLY

ATHEIST IRELAND'S HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER

is Atheist Ireland's Human Rights Officer. Atheist Ireland is an Irish advocacy group that promotes atheism and reason over superstition and supernaturalism, and an ethical, secular society where the State does not support or finance or give special treatment to any religion. Atheist Ireland has also worked against blasphemy laws, and is part of a Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment. Jane also runs the website teachdontpreach.ie, which records religious discrimination in Irish schools and advises parents on how to tackle it.



JIMMY BANGASH

INTEGRATIVE COACH / EX-MUSLIM

is a gay British ex-Muslim Pakistani living in the UK. He grew up in a traditional Pashtun family in London where he struggled with both the homophobia and ardent misogyny within his community. He has written poems and prose about these experiences; many of which have been published on Sedaa. As an LGBT ex-Muslim activist, he is committed to unbridling the reins of patriarchy on gays and women of Muslim heritage. As a coach, he seeks to empower those individuals liberated from problematic ideologies to live a life of authenticity, self-assurance and self-expression.



JODIE GINSBERG

CEO OF INDEX ON CENSORSHIP

is CEO of Index on Censorship, a campaigning, publishing organisation for freedom of expression, which produces a quarterly magazine of the same name from London. Jodie joined Index from the think-tank, Demos. A former London Bureau Chief for Reuters, she worked for more than a decade as a foreign correspondent and business journalist. She was previously Head of Communications for Camfed, a non-profit organisation working in girls' education.



KARIMA BENNOUNE

UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR IN THE FIELD OF CULTURAL RIGHTS

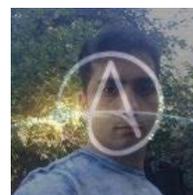
is currently UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights. She is also a law professor at the UC Davis School of Law, and author of "Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the Fight Against Muslim Fundamentalism". In 2007, Bennoune became the first Arab-American to win the Derrick Bell Award from the Association of American Law Schools Section on Minority Groups. She sits on the Board of the Network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws.



KARRAR AL ASFOOR

CO-FOUNDER OF ATHEIST ALLIANCE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

is an atheist and from Najaf, Iraq and Co-founder of Atheist Alliance Middle East and North Africa. He is also active with Arab Atheists and the Forum for Humanitarian Dialogue, a Facebook discussion group of 44,000 members that promote the right to freedom of belief and expression offering unlimited space for free speech in the Middle East and North Africa region. He is also an activist on movement.org, a platform that aims to crowd source human rights.



VISA DENIED & UNFORTUNATELY CAN'T ATTEND.

KATE SMURTHWAITE

COMEDIAN

is a stand-up comedian, writer and campaigner. She has toured her political comedy shows, including "My Professional Opinion", "Leftie Cock Womble", "The Wrong Sort Of Feminist" and her latest critically acclaimed "Smurthwaite On Masculinity" around the UK and overseas. In 2013 she was awarded a Three Week's Editor's Choice award declaring her one of the ten best things about the Edinburgh Fringe. She is a writer for Have I Got News For You and BBC3's BAFTA-winning The Revolution Will Be Televised and has written columns for The Guardian, The Independent, New Internationalist, New Statesman, Cosmopolitan and Stylist. She has appeared as a panellist on Question Time, The Moral Maze, The Big Questions and many other TV and radio shows as well as the This Morning sofa discussing women's rights and refugee rights. In 2014, she was controversially banned from appearing at Goldsmith's College amid claims that her opinions were a threat to the Student Union's "safe space" policy.



KENAN MALIK

AUTHOR AND BROADCASTER

is a writer, lecturer and broadcaster. His book *From Fatwa to Jihad* was shortlisted for the Orwell Prize. As a scientific author, his focus is on the philosophy of biology, and contemporary theories of multiculturalism, pluralism and race. These topics are discussed in "The Meaning of Race" (1996), "Man, Beast and Zombie" (2000) and "Strange Fruit: Why both sides are wrong in the race debate" (2008). He has presented *Analysis*, on BBC Radio 4, *Nightwaves*, BBC Radio 3 and was a panellist on *The Moral Maze*, Radio 4. He has written and presented a number of radio and TV documentaries including "Disunited Kingdom, Are Muslims Hated?", "Islam, Mullahs and the Media", "Skullduggery and Man", "Beast and Politics". His latest book is "The Quest for a Moral Compass: A Global History of Ethics", published by Atlantic.



LONDON HUMANIST CHOIR

is the UK's foremost community atheist, humanist, secular choir. We formed in May 2009 with the support of the British Humanist Association. Since then our 40+ singers have performed at numerous events including the Faiths In Tune - Interfaith Festivals, Sangerstevne Choral Festival, Edinburgh Free Fringe, London Month Of The Dead, Sara Pascoe's Christmas Assembly and Stand Up For Darwin. We host our own annual variety show - One Life - which celebrates World Humanist Day on 21 June. Our repertoire is wide ranging, including classical pieces, the oldest known folk song, humanist ceremony music, Tim Minchin and the Flaming Lips to name but a few.



MARYAM NAMAZIE

SPOKESPERSON OF COUNCIL OF EX-MUSLIMS OF BRITAIN AND ONE LAW FOR ALL



is Co-Spokesperson for One Law for All, the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain and Fitnah. She hosts a weekly television programme called Bread and Roses. She is on the International Advisory Board of the Raif Badawi Foundation for Freedom; National Secular Society Honorary Associate; a Patron of London Black Atheists and Pink Triangle Trust; International Advisory Board Member of Feminist Dissent and a columnist for The Freethinker. The Islamic regime of Iran's media outlets has called Namazie immoral and corrupt and did an 'exposé' on her entitled "Meet this anti-religion woman." Maryam was a character in DV8 Physical Theatre's Can We Talk About This?, which deals with freedom of speech, censorship and Islam. She was awarded the 2016 International Secularism (Laicite) Prize from the Comité Laicité République and was honoured by the National Secular Society for her campaigning work defending free speech at universities (2016) despite attempts at barring her by Student Unions or Islamic Society efforts to intimidate and cancel her talks. She was also awarded Atheist of the Year by Kazimierz Lyszczynski (2014); Journalist of the Year at the Dods Women in Public Life Awards (2013); selected one of the top 45 women of the year by Elle magazine Quebec (2007); one of 2006's most intriguing people by DNA, awarded the National Secular Society's Secularist of the Year Award (2005), amongst others.

MAZEN ABOU HAMDAN

CO-FOUNDER OF FREETHOUGHT LEBANON



is a Lebanese civil rights activist and one of the co-founders of Freethought Lebanon, an initiative that aims to empower freethinkers in Lebanon in order to promote humanism, encourage critical thinking, and disseminate secular values as a solution for intolerance and sectarian violence. Mazen has been highly involved in the struggle to legalise civil marriage in Lebanon and has worked extensively on projects related to human rights education, conflict resolution, and non-sectarianism in Lebanon and the MENA region.

MICHAEL NUGENT

CHAIRPERSON OF ATHEIST IRELAND AND WRITER

is a Writer and Chairperson of the advocacy group Atheist Ireland, which promotes atheism, reason and ethical secularism in Ireland and around the world. He campaigns for the right to assisted dying for terminally or seriously ill people and has campaigned against terrorism in Northern Ireland, including founding and chairing the peace group New Consensus. His writing ranges from satire to serious; his comedy book "Dear John – The John Mackay Letters" was a number one bestseller; his comedy musical play "I, Keano" was also a hit.



MOHAMMED ALKHADRA

FOUNDER OF JORDANIAN ATHEISTS GROUP

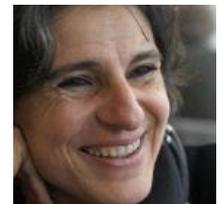
was born in 1992. A Jordanian civil engineer and a human rights activist, Alkhadra founded the Jordanian Atheists Group in 2013. He later began to organise help for endangered ex-Muslims to leave the country. He shows his face on camera to challenge the illegality of apostasy in the country.



NADIA EL FANI

FILMMAKER

a Tunisian film-maker living in France, risks arrest and up to five years in prison if she returns to Tunisia after Islamists filed a complaint against her for her film "Neither Allah nor Master". The film is an account of Tunisian life immediately before and after the fall of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. Others films include "Ouled Lenine" and "Our breasts, our weapons!"



NEIL EDWARDS

MAGICIAN

is a Magician.



NINA SANKARI

VICE PRESIDENT OF THE ATHEIST KAZIMIERZ LYSZCZYNSKI FOUNDATION
IN POLAND

is a Polish secular, atheist and feminist activist. She is the Vice President of the atheist Kazimierz Lyszczyński Foundation in Poland, co-founder of the International Association of Free Thought and its Spokesperson. She writes and translates articles for the Polish and French freethinkers and feminist centres (Fakty i Mity, 50/50, Journal ReSPUBLICA, La Raison, Charlie Hebdo). She has participated in many international conferences related to secularism, rationalism, atheism, women's rights, and on political and social issues. She is the initiator and co-organiser of the Atheist Days – a big yearly event in Warsaw.



NOURA EMBABI

MUSLIM-ISH PRESIDENT

is an Egyptian-American ex-Muslim based in New York City. She is currently serving as President of Muslim-ish, a nonprofit organisation dedicated to creating a safe environment for the exchange of ideas among current and former Muslims, fostering pluralism that respects the rights of all individuals to live according to their conscience, and striving to abolish blasphemy and apostasy laws across the globe. A member of Muslimish for over three years, Noura identifies with the nuanced stance of the organisation - giving voice to those leaving Islam in order to humanise and bring visibility to ex-Muslims, while cultivating conversations with others in order to move towards a pluralistic society.



PETER TATCHELL

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGNER

has been campaigning for human rights and global justice since 1967. New Statesman readers voted him sixth on their list of "Heroes of our Time" 2006. He won Campaigner of the Year at The Observer Ethical Awards 2009, as well as Secularist of the Year 2012. He writes and broadcasts on many human rights and social justice issues. In protest against the Archbishop of Canterbury's support for legal discrimination against LGBT people, he interrupted Dr Carey's Easter Sunday Sermon in 1998. He attempted a citizen's arrest of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe in 1999 and again in 2001, and was beaten unconscious the second time. He was also arrested and beaten when he went to support Moscow LGBT Pride in 2007. Both attacks left him with brain and eye damage. He is currently the Director of the human rights organisation, the Peter Tatchell Foundation.



PRAGNA PATEL

DIRECTOR OF SOUTHALL BLACK SISTERS

is Founder and Director of the Southall Black Sisters. SBS is, a multi-award-winning women's organisation founded in 1979 to address the needs of black and minority women experiencing gender violence. It successfully campaigned for the release of Kiranjit Ahluwalia, a landmark case in which an Asian woman was convicted of the murder of her violent husband. The case reformed homicide law, creating greater awareness within and outside minority communities. Pragna is also a co-founder of Women Against Fundamentalism. She has also written extensively on race, gender and religion, including "Citizenship: Whose Rights?", "Faith in the State? Asian Women's Struggles for Human Rights in the UK", and "Shrinking Secular Spaces: Asian Women at the Intersect of Race, Religion and Gender". She was listed in The Guardian's Top 100 women: activists and campaigners.



RAHILA GUPTA

WRITER AND JOURNALIST

is a freelance journalist and writer. Her work has appeared in The Guardian and New Humanist among other papers and magazines. Her books include, "Enslaved: The New British Slavery"; "From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers: Southall Black Sisters"; "Provoked"; and "Don't Wake Me: The Ballad of Nihal Armstrong" (Playdead Press, 2013). She is co-authoring a book with Beatrix Campbell with the title "Why Doesn't Patriarchy Die?"



RANA AHMAD

WRITER & HEAD OF THE RDF ARAB ATHEIST COMMUNITY

is Syrian/Saudi-Arabian Activist, Women's Rights Campaigner, Ex-Muslim Activist, Head of the RDF department Arab Atheist Community in Germany, Pop science blogger and editor, a member of Giordano-Bruno-Stiftung, and a member of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Germany. She hope to help all girls to be free. After she discarded her religion, she had to escape because she was threatened with death by her family and the government in Saudi Arabia.

**VISA DENIED & UNFORTUNATELY CAN'T ATTEND.**

RICHARD DAWKINS

ENGLISH ETHOLOGIST, EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGIST AND AUTHOR

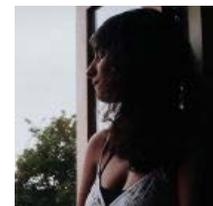
is an English ethologist, evolutionary biologist and author. He is an emeritus fellow of New College, Oxford, and was the University of Oxford's Professor for Public Understanding of Science from 1995 until 2008. Dawkins first came to prominence with his 1976 book "The Selfish Gene", which popularised the gene-centred view of evolution and introduced the term meme. With his book "The Extended Phenotype", published in 1982, he introduced into evolutionary biology the influential concept that the phenotypic effects of a gene are not necessarily limited to an organism's body, but can stretch far into the environment. In 2006, he founded the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. Dawkins is an atheist, and is well known for his criticism of creationism and intelligent design. In his most popular book, "The God Delusion", published in 2006, Dawkins contends that a supernatural creator almost certainly does not exist and that religious faith is a delusion. He has been awarded many prestigious academic and writing awards and he makes regular television, radio and Internet appearances, predominantly discussing his books, his atheism and his ideas and opinions as a public intellectual.



SADIA HAMEED

SPOKESPERSON OF THE COUNCIL OF EX-MUSLIMS OF BRITAIN

is a Spokesperson of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain and has been featured in a 2016 film, "Islam's Non Believers", by award-winning filmmaker Deeyah Khan. She is also a human rights activist and Honour Based Violence, Forced Marriage and FGM Consultant, based in Gloucestershire, working in the sexual violence field, with a focus on Black Minority Ethnic women. Sadia organised a hugely successful event titled 'Let's Talk Honour' in October 2016, which was held at Gloucester University. She also launched Critical Sisters. She is Winner of IKWRO Special Recognition: Activist of the Year 2017.



SADIA SADIA

BRITISH ARTIST/EX-MUSLIM

is a Canadian-born British installation artist. She was one of the first women in the world to be signed to a major label as a record producer, and became the first female member of the British Record Producer's Guild (now the MPG Music Producer's Guild), under the chairmanship of Sir George Martin. Her work has been sequenced to film and television by companies such as Polygram/ Miramax, Interscope and Universal Pictures. Sadia was the music producer of the inaugural TUC 'Respect: Unite Against Racism' campaign, featuring dozens of international musicians. As an artist and film maker, Sadia's work has been screened around the world in venues including the Melbourne International Film Festival, the Tricycle Theatre, the National Science and Media Museum and the Cinematheque Francaise. Her work forms part of the permanent collection of ACMI (the Australian Centre for the Moving Image). Sadia has a master's degree in design from Central St Martin's as well as a master's degree in political science and economics with a specialisation in gender from Birkbeck University. She was born to a Pakistani Muslim father and is an atheist and ex-Muslim.



SALIL TRIPATHI

WRITER AND JOURNALIST

is an award-winning writer and journalist, who chairs the Writers in Prison Committee of PEN International. He was born in India and has been a foreign correspondent in Singapore and Hong Kong and now lives in London. He is the author of "Offence: The Hindu Case" (Seagull, 2009), "The Colonel Who Would Not Repent: The Bangladesh War and its Unquiet Legacy" (Aleph, 2014 and Yale University Press, 2016), and "Detours: Songs of the Open Road" (Tranquebar, 2015). He is currently working on a book about Gujaratis, which Aleph will publish in 2018. Salil is contributing editor at Mint and Caravan in India. His articles have appeared in major international newspapers and magazines around the world. His awards include the Citibank Pan Asia Economic Journalism Award in 1994, Bastiat Prize (third prize) in 2011, and Red Ink Award for Human Rights Journalism in 2015.



SARAH HAIDER

CO-FOUNDER OF EX-MUSLIMS OF NORTH AMERICA

is an American activist, writer and speaker. Born in Pakistan and raised in Texas, Sarah spent her early youth as a practicing Muslim. In her late-teens, she began to read the Quran critically and left religion soon after. In 2013, she co-founded Ex-Muslims of North America, where she advocates for the acceptance of religious dissent and works to create local support communities for those who have left Islam. In addition to atheism, Sarah is particularly passionate about civil liberties and women's rights.



SARAH PEACE

NIGERIAN ARTIST AND DIRECTOR OF FIREPROOF LIBRARY

is a Nigerian writer, artist and director of Fireproof Library, which campaigns for freedom of expression through publication of secular and humanist literature. Fireproof Library provides a platform for people from marginalised communities to challenge dogma and superstition and advocate for human rights through its Secular Voices campaign.



SAVIN BAPIR-TARDYUWL LECTURER IN PSYCHOLOGY AND IKWRO COUNSELLING
PSYCHOLOGIST

is a Counselling Psychologist at the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) and a Lecturer in Psychology at the University of West London. Bapir-Tardy conducted her doctoral research at City University into how traumatic events are experienced. She has worked with adolescents, adults and older adults in a variety of mental health settings. For the last 7-years at IKWRO, Bapir-Tardy has provided psychological therapy to women who have experienced "honour" based violence, forced marriage, domestic violence and female genital mutilation. Bapir-Tardy also provides training to professionals in mainstream mental health services on "honour" based violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.



SHABANA REHMAN

PERFORMANCE ARTIST AND HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE

is a performance artist and human and animal rights advocate. She is Norwegian with Pakistani descent. Shabana entered the stage in Oslo, Norway in 2000. In the following years, she quickly built a reputation for groundbreaking and iconoclastic comedy. Her controversial and popular comedy style along with public political stunts like Mullah-Lifting, and bodypainted with Norwegian flag as a performance artist, have given her a unique position in her native Norway. Among substantial international press cover, she has been featured both by The New York Times and by Times Magazine. In addition to her prolific comedy career, Shabana is a highly respected columnist, satirist, and public speaker in Scandinavia and the Scandinavian community in USA. She regularly writes for major newspaper and magazines in the region. A frequent participant and contributor in talk shows and public debates, she is among the most respected celebrities in Norway. Shabana has received several awards for her writing and fearless comedy. She had played her shows in several countries, among them Canada, USA, Denmark, Iceland, Faroe Islands and Germany. She recently founded the Secular Feminist Front.



SHELLEY SEGAL

SINGER/SONGWRITER

is a singer-songwriter involved in secular activism. Her first record, "An Atheist Album" is a passionate response to dogmatic belief, inequality, religious oppression and the idea that only the devout can be grateful and good. The record gives a voice to the often underrepresented views of non-religious people, the fastest growing minority in many countries. It also creates opportunities to discuss issues of secularism with the mainstream media. Her voice has taken her around the world including England, Australia and ten tours of the United States. She has released seven recording projects of her own and runs independent record label True Music where she works with other artists. An award winning songwriter, powerful performer and explicit story-teller, Shelley uses her music not only to express the way she sees the world but to create the world she wants to see.



TASNEEM KHALIL

JOURNALIST AND EDITOR OF INDEPENDENT WORLD REPORT

is a Swedish-Bangladeshi journalist and editor of Independent World Report, a journal of human rights and global politics. He is also the author of the book "Jallad: Death Squads and State Terror in South Asia" (Pluto Press, 2016). He was declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International in 2007, following his detention by the Bangladeshi military intelligence agency. In 2008, Swedish PEN conferred him with an honorary membership for his journalism.



TERESA GIMÉNEZ BARBAT

MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

is a Member of the European Parliament for the ALDE Group (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe). She is an anthropologist and writer and an advocate of secular humanism, rationalist universalism and scepticism. Giménez Barbat has created Euromind, a forum for scientists and humanists. It is a platform to boost dialogue between science and politics.



VICTORIA GUGENHEIM

AWARD-WINNING BODY ARTIST

is an award-winning body artist. She is passionate about the necessity of and is merging, art with science. Art and science share a common ancestor with the human imagination, and without imagination there can be no hypothesis. It was the first visual, material, tangible "What if?" that humanity had, and it started 300,000 years ago deep in the caves near the twin Zambini Rivers. Victoria's art has been a lifelong quest of "de-othering" people through art, public speaking and personal aesthetic choice. Her art ranges from bodypainting, makeup, photography, sculpture, performances, installations, digital art, clothing design, drawing and painting with science and technology. She uses bodypainting as a way of empowering the human spirit, giving the person painted a new found confidence that can be life changing.



WALEED AL HUSSEINI

WRITER AND FOUNDER OF COUNCIL OF EX-MUSLIMS OF FRANCE

is a Palestinian essayist, writer and blogger. In October 2010, the Palestinian Authority arrested him for allegedly blaspheming against Islam on Facebook and in blog posts. His arrest garnered international attention. He founded the Council of Ex-Muslims of France in 2013. His "I'm Proud to be an Atheist" Facebook page has over 150000 'likes'. His book "Blasphémateur!: les prisons d'Allah", 2015 has been widely received.



YASMIN REHMAN

WOMEN'S RIGHTS CAMPAIGNER

is a freelance consultant and doctoral candidate at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Her area of research is polygamy and the law. She has worked for more than 20 years predominantly on violence against women, race, faith and gender, and human rights. Yasmin has worked for Local Government, the Metropolitan Police Service as Director of Partnerships and Diversity (2004-08) during which time she also held the Deputy national lead for forced marriage and honour based violence. Yasmin has most recently been commissioned as founding CEO of a race equality charity in East London, followed by Transforming Rehabilitation bid and now reviewing police responses to domestic abuse for national charities. Yasmin is currently member of the Board of EVAW (End Violence Against Women Coalition), an Independent Adviser for City of London Police and a member of the Centre for Secular Space.



ZEHRA PALA

PRESIDENT OF ATHEISM ASSOCIATION OF TURKEY

is an Activist of the Atheism Association of Turkey, the first legally recognised Atheist Organisation of the Balkans, Middle East and Muslim-majority countries. Its focus is to advocate for human rights, especially the right to irreligion – a right that is viewed as an act of terrorism in many Middle Eastern countries. Ateizm Dernegi aims to protect the irreligious as well as free-thinking persons' rights in Turkey. The right to be atheist or irreligious coincides with one's legal human rights. The founders of Ateizm Dernegi are striving for the day when atheists no longer face any discrimination or prejudice in the workplace, at home or on the street. The founding members of the organisation have coined the slogan, "No atheists will be alone anymore, in the courts or in the streets!"



ZINEB EL RHAZOU

AUTHOR AND JOURNALIST

is a Moroccan-born French journalist. "Rien n'est pardonné" (Nothing is forgiven) by Vincent Coen and Guillaume Vandenberghe describes the fate of Zineb El Rhazoui, activist and journalist, absent from the offices of Charlie Hebdo on the day of the murderous attack who became the most protected woman in France. She is a former columnist for the Paris-based satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. She did not attend the editorial meeting of 7 January 2015 when terrorists burst in and murdered her colleagues, as she was in Morocco at the time. She is the author of several books: "13" and "Detruire Le Fascisme Islamique" (Destroy Islamic Fascism). She is a passionate critic of Islam and a prominent secularist and human rights campaigner, speaking publicly around the world about free speech.



Celebrating apostasy and blasphemy in London in July

The Freethinker interviews Maryam Namazie and Marieme Helie Lucas ahead of the International Conference on Freedom of Conscience and Expression in the 21 Century scheduled to take place in London between July 22 and 24, 2017.

Why organise an international conference on free conscience and expression?

Maryam Namazie: Atheists and freethinkers are targeted by Islamists and religious-Right movements across the globe. Despite the brutal attacks, blasphemy and apostasy laws are often legitimised.

Even where no such laws exist, there is a chorus of voices insisting that freedom of expression and conscience have limits, particularly when it comes to Islam. "Hurt" sensibilities are almost always deemed more important than threats, intimidation, censorship, violence and even murder. And victims are blamed time and time again whilst perpetrators pose as victims.

On the tenth anniversary of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, the conference aims to bring together the largest international gathering of ex-Muslims and freethinkers as a show of strength to reaffirm the right to think and live outside the confines imposed by religion and the religious-Right.

Many of the speakers are on the frontlines of the tsunami of atheism and freethought that has taken hold of societies under Islamist influence with social media doing to Islam what the printing press has done to Christianity. When dissenters continue to be threatened, silenced, no platformed, intimidated and even killed for rejecting and criticising Islam, a celebration of apostasy, blasphemy and the free word are historical tasks.

Key issues such as women's resistance, the veil, religious morality, religion in the law and state, identity politics, communalism and multiculturalism, Islamophobia and secularism as a human right will be discussed.

The conference will highlight and honour dissenters such as the Bangladeshi bloggers; Raif Badawi sentenced to 10 years in prison for blogging and Ahmad Al-Shamri sentenced to death for atheism in Saudi Arabia; ex-Muslim atheist H Farook hacked to death in India; 21 year old Sina Dehghan sentenced to death for "insulting the prophet" in Iran; Ayaz Nizami and Rana Noman arrested on blasphemy charges and 23 year old Mashal Khan lynched by a mob at his university in Pakistan ...

The gathering – labelled the "Glastonbury of Freethinkers" – will stand out, loud and proud to remind the world that the freedom of conscience and expression are also for those who reject and criticise religion and the religious-Right. And that the demand for these freedoms are universal.

The conference focus is on freedom from religion; why is that so important and relevant in the right to freedom of conscience? What is link between freedom of expression and right to criticise and leave religion?

Marieme Helie Lucas: Freedom of expression is a consequence, a corollary of the fundamental right of freedom of conscience. Freedom of conscience includes the right to believe and the right not to believe – two sides of the same right that cannot be delinked from one another. Freedom of conscience is absolute. No religion or state can put limits on it.

But while, today, the right to believe is rarely questioned – and when it is, human rights organisations run to the rescue of endangered believers, this is unfortunately not exactly the case with the right not to believe, despite the fact that non-believers in many places are threatened by the rising religious-Right, especially but not exclusively by the Muslim far-Right best represented today by Daesh and the likes.

It is interesting to note that freethinkers are not threatening anyone because of their beliefs; still they are the ones asked to 'respect' religions and their followers. Their right to freedom of expression is challenged.

Meanwhile, the religious-Right is indeed curtailing the rights of non-believers and/or followers of other religions, and in many places assassinating them, but no one asks them to 'respect' different religious beliefs or the absence of religious beliefs.

This inequality of treatment should be of concern to all as it is a clear threat to democracy and to equality between all citizens.

Maryam Namazie: It's also important to note that the right to conscience and expression are in particular rights for those who think differently. As Rosa Luxemburg said: 'Freedom is always the freedom of dissenters'. In a world where religion is deemed sacred and the religious-Right have power to legally persecute and execute freethinkers and atheists, and whip up mobs to kill at will, defending the freedom to criticise and reject religion is a matter of life and death for the innumerable.

Criticism of Islam is often labelled Islamophobic as are ex-Muslim events and conferences. Your point of view?

Marieme Helie Lucas: Who, today, would label "Christianophobic" any meeting of people who were born into a "Christian country" and/or a "Christian family" and are now freethinkers?

So the real question becomes: why is Islam singled out among all religions and for what reason(s); why are freethinkers who are born into Muslim contexts (still abusively labelled "Muslims") discriminated against when it comes to exercising their fundamental right of freedom of conscience? Whose vested interests is this discrimination serving? Why are the Left and the Far-Left buying into this illogical reasoning when it comes to Islam and Muslims, while they would not if it were Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, etc ... What hidden racism lies behind this singling out of Islam and Muslims?

Maryam Namazie: Clearly, criticism of religion and the religious-Right is not the same as bigotry against believers. Islamophobia is a political term that aims to scaremonger people into silence and stop criticism of Islam/Islamism by using rights and anti-racist language. In Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan... freethinkers are accused of blasphemy and apostasy and imprisoned/killed. Here in Europe, accusations of Islamophobia are used to impose de facto blasphemy laws and silence much needed criticism.

Historically, criticism of religion has been key for human progress and it remains so today. Those buying into accusations of Islamophobia effectively side with the Islamist narrative at the expense of dissenters.

With the rise of far-Right populism and racism against migrants and Muslims, should such a conference be held?

Marieme Helie Lucas: Insofar as we define Muslim fundamentalism as a far-Right political movement using religion to cover up their political goals, we are simply facing two far-Rights: the "traditional" one, populist, xenophobic, racist; and the new one which is taking the form of the virulent religious-Right. I do not see any reason why we should challenge one of them without challenging the other too.

Let's note in passing that the question itself testifies to the confusion of concepts that prevails among progressive people today: it is labelling "Muslims" – without ever inquiring about their religious beliefs – all sorts of people of migrant descent. Just ask Christians from the Middle East if they do not face here the same racism as their Muslim colleagues; just ask Indians if they are not confronted with similar rejection than their Pakistani fellows ...

It seems very obvious that we should, all together, combat simultaneously the "traditional" far-Right and the new "religious-Right". They reinforce each other and feed on each other; they need each other in order to mobilise their troops.

Is there any hope given the rise of the religious-Right everywhere and freethinkers being killed and imprisoned by Islamist states & mob violence?

Marieme Helie Lucas: We are undoubtedly living in a very difficult period of time and we are likely heading towards an even more difficult one. Political clarity is badly needed. The first step would be to fully understand and expose the political nature of the religious-Right, of its programme and its undemocratic theocratic goals.

This conference will give a voice to those who are slaughtered by the religious-Right. Their voice is never heard. All we can do is speak up for their rights ... and try and defend ours, here and now.

Maryam Namazie: If anyone feels there is no hope, it is only because they are not familiar with the resistance. Everyone knows Khamenei, Bin Laden, al-Baghdadi but why are Raif Badawi, Avijit Roy, Nadia El Fani, Fauzia Ilyas, Waleed Al Hussein or Zineb el Rhazoui not household names? This conference is the conference of the resistance and resistance to totalitarianism always brings hope.

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