



Secular Conference

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“Secular conference created a sense of imminent and momentous change – and women will be the driving force”

– Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society

The two-day International Conference on the Religious Right, Secularism and Civil Rights held in London during 11-12 October 2014 was a rousing success, promoting a much-needed global secular alternative in the ISIS era and conquering fear with hope.

Conference videos and photos are now available online.

250 secularists, including believers, free-thinkers, agnostics and atheists from the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and the Diaspora assembled at the unprecedented and historic gathering to discuss resistance against the repression and violence of various manifestations of the religious-Right.

They highlighted the voices of the many persecuted and exiled and the strength of the demand for secularism

despite grave risks.

The delegates made an unequivocal stand with the brave women and men of Kobane, adopted a Manifesto for Secularism and set the stage for the development of a broad international front for secularism to challenge the religious-Right.

The conference, which was convened by Algerian sociologist Marieme Helie Lucas and Iranian-born Campaigner Maryam Namazie, called on people everywhere to sign the Manifesto for Secularism and join in this historical task.

The conference was not an end but a beginning of great things to come.

Join in one of the most important fights of our century.

Secularism. Today. Now.

NOTES:

1. See extensive press coverage of the conference.
2. Speakers at the conference were philosopher AC Grayling; Aliyah Saleem who spent 6 years in an Islamic school in Britain; Tunisian University of Manouba Professor Amel Grami; social and political analyst and commentator Bahram Soroush; French writer Caroline Fourest; secular student activist Chris Moos; Senior Researcher at the International Center for Ethnic Studies in Sri Lanka Chulani Kodikara; Indian labour historian Dilip Simeon; Yemeni writer and activist Elham Manea; Co-Founder of Muslim Women Research and Action Front from Sri Lanka Faizun Zackariya; founder of the Iranian Secular Society Fariborz Pooya; Senegalese International

Director of Women Living Under Muslim Laws Fatou Sow; Director of Centre for Secular Space Gita Sahgal; Leader of the Worker-Communist Party of Iran Hamid Taqvaee; One Secular School System in Ontario Campaigner Homa Arjomand; Director of the Afghanistan Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium Horia Mosadiq; FEMEN leader Inna Shevchenko; co-founder of Justice for Women Julie Bindel; author Karima Bennoune; writer Kenan Malik; Pakistani-born human rights activist Kiran Opal; Iranian writer-journalist and documentary filmmaker Lila Ghobady; Ex-Muslim Maha Kamal; Libyan president of Hakki Magdulien Abaida; Tunisian filmmaker Nadia El Fani; Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain Spokesperson Nahla Mahmoud; Vice President of the Atheist Coalition in Poland Nina Sankari; Founder member of Women Against Fundamentalism Nira Davis-Yuval; Pakistani nuclear physicist and social activist Pervez Hoodbhoy; Human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell; Southall Black Sisters Director Pragna Patel; founder of the Ex-Muslims of Scotland Ramin Forghani; author Rumy Hassan; Turkish MP Safak Pavey; journalist Salil Tripathi; Iranian/German writer Siba Shakib; Founder of Association pour la mixité, l'égalité et la laïcité Soad Baba Aïssa; co-founder of Survivors Voice Europe Sue Cox; Executive Director of Ain o Salish Kendra in Bangladesh Sultana Kamal; Director of Muslim Educational Centre of Oxford Taj Hargey; Bangladeshi-born writer Taslima Nasrin; President of the National Secular Society Terry Sanderson and women's rights campaigner Yasmin Rehman. Acclaimed pianist and composer Anne Lovett; comedians Daphna Baram, AKA MissD, Kate Smurthwaite and Sameena Zehra as well as LCP dance company and singer/songwriter Shelley Segal provided entertainment.

3. Indonesian band SIMPONI was announced as the

winner of One Law for All's Sounds of Freedom award with their entry "Sister in Danger", a tribute to Indonesian victims of sexual violence.

4. The conference was endorsed by Atheist Alliance International; Atheist Union of Greece; Bread and Roses TV; Children First Now; Center for Inquiry; Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain; Equal Rights Now – Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran; Fitnah – Movement for Women's Liberation; International Committee against Stoning; International Committee against Execution; International Federation of Iranian Refugees; Iran Solidarity; National Secular Society; One Law for All; Pink Triangle Trust; Secularism is a Women's Issue; Southall Black Sisters; The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science UK; and Women Living Under Muslim Laws amongst others.

5. Special thanks to The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science UK, the National Secular Society and donors who supported the Indiegogo fundraising campaign to bring secularists from the South to the conference, including @GodlessRobin, Andy Croy, Karima Bennoune, Kim Revill, Leif Cid, Muriel Seltman, Olivier Zimmermann, Penny Jaques, Rustom Cardinal, Sue Cox and Thomas Oliver.

6. For more information, contact:
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www.secularconference.com

**Conference of a life-time on the Religious-Right,
Secularism and Civil Rights
11-12 October 2014**

**The Tower Hotel, St Katharine's Way
London E1W 1LD, UK**

BACKGROUND

The global rise of the religious-Right, including but not limited to Islamic State (or ISIS), and their efforts to gain political power and control the state apparatus and public institutions has meant that organised religions' role vis-a-vis the state as well as secularism and the complete separation of religion from the state have become critical political and civil rights matters.

At this unprecedented conference, prominent women and men on the frontlines of opposing the religious-Right and defending secularism, including those of faith and none, will come together to discuss the religious-Right, its attacks on civil rights and freedoms, and the role of secularism for 21st century humanity.

Speakers from countries or the Diaspora as diverse as Algeria, Bangladesh, Canada, Egypt, France, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Poland, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, Tunisia, UK, USA and Yemen will reflect on the struggle for secularism in both regional and thematic ways and will discuss the specific forms that attacks on secularism – and on secularists themselves – take in various parts of the world. They will also discuss how these attacks are linked to the rise of the religious-Right in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Far East and its confluence in countries of emigration such as Europe and North America.

The conference aims to highlight the voices of the many persecuted and exiled, address the challenges faced by

activists, elaborate on the links between equality, democratic politics and secularism, promote secular and rights-based alternatives to the religious-Right, establish priorities for regional and international collective action and influence policy and practice locally, nationally, and internationally.

The conference will result in the establishment of an international front of secularists against the religious-Right.

FINAL SCHEDULE

The Conference will be in English.

Saturday 11 October 2014

8:00-9:30am Registration

Arrival Tea/Coffee

**9:30-9:40 Welcome and Housekeeping with MCs
Fariborz Pooya and Nahla Mahmoud**

**9:40-9:50 Maryam Namazie: “Secularism is our
Challenge to Islamism and the Religious-Right”**

Maryam Namazie will give an overview of the conference aims, the political necessity for such a conference during the rise of the religious-Right and the need for secularism as a minimum precondition.

**9:50-10:05 Marieme Helie Lucas: “Attacks on
Secularism”**

Marieme Helie Lucas will look at the shifting meaning of ‘secularism’; the political consequences of this shift and

how it enhances and legitimises both the rise of fundamentalist theocratic ideologies and the fragmentation of people into ‘communities’ with unequal rights.

10:05-10:10 Ouechdek: 20 ans Barakat

10:10-10:20 Tribute by Karima Bennoune to those Fallen Fighting the Religious-Right

10:20-12:00 Secularism Panel

This panel will discuss the importance of secularism as a minimum precondition for a democratic society.

Chair: **Peter Tatchell**

Panellists: **Caroline Fourest** (“Secularism against Fanaticism”), **Gita Sahgal** (“Who’s Afraid of Secularism and What they Won’t tell you About it”), **Hamid Taqvaeem** (“Rise and Fall of Secularism”), **Sue Cox** (“The Isolation and Alienation Caused by Clergy and Why Secularism is Important”), **Safak Pavey** (“The Turkish Experience”) and **Sultana Kamal** (“Fate of Secularism in Bangladesh”)

12:00-13:00 Lunch

13:00-13:30 Nadia El Fani, “Neither Allah nor Master”

13:30-15:10 Religion in State, Law and Politics Panel

This panel will look at religion’s role in the state, law and politics and discuss why organised religions must be kept out the state.

Chair: **Terry Sanderson**

Panellists: **Fariborz Pooya** (“Production and Reproduction

of the Myth of Moderate Religion”), **Fatou Sow** (“Religion and Politics in Sub-Saharan Secular States”), **Homa Arjomand**, (“Children have no Religion: One Secular Education for All”), **Nina Sankari** (“In the Shadow of the Church: Failed Democracy in Poland”) and **Pragna Patel** (“Religion, Law and the State in the UK: The Human Rights Implications of Accommodating Religious Legal Codes”)

15:10-15:40 AC Grayling, Secularism and Education

15:40-16:10 Break

16:10-16:20 Comedian Kate Smurthwaite

16:20-18:00 Multi-faithism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship Panel

The panel will look at problems related to the erroneous conflation of people, religions and the religious-Right and why multiculturalism and multi-faithism undermines notions of citizenship.

Chair: **Rumy Hasan**

Panellists: **Aliyah Saleem** (“My Experience at an Islamic Boarding School in Britain”), **Chris Moos** (“The Fox, The Hen House, and The One who Let Him in: The Religious Far-Right and its Enablers in Higher Education”), **Elham Manea** (“Islamic Law in the West: The Essentialists”), **Kenan Malik** (“What’s Wrong with Multiculturalism?”), **Marieme Helie Lucas** (“Communities, Conflicting Rights and Hierarchy of Rights in Non-Secular States”) and **Taj Hargey** (“Banning the Burka: Religious Intolerance or Secular Imperative?”)

18:00-18:30 Pervez Hoodbhoy, “Has the Islamic State ever been a Historical Reality?”

18:30-19:30 Regional Sessions

19:00-19:30 Cocktails for Dinner Guests

19:30-23:00 Dinner with Entertainment

21:30 onwards with MCs Maha Kamal and Ramin Forghani

Gita Sahgal interviews Taslima Nasrin

Pianist/Composer Anne Lovett

LCP Dance Theatre

Singer/Songwriter Shelley Segal. Shelley will perform and present the winner of One Law For All's international song competition, 'Sounds of Freedom'.

Sunday 12 October 2014

8:00-9:00am Registration

Tea/Coffee

9:00-9:05 Welcome with MCs Fariborz Pooya and Nahla Mahmoud

9:05-9:35 Karima Bennoune, "Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here"

9:35-11:00 Women, Religion and Religious-Right Panel

This panel will look at the role of religion and the religious-Right in societies and its impact on women and girls.

Chair: Julie Bindel

Panellists: **Horia Mosadiq** ("Religious Fundamentalism and its Impact on Women and Girls in Afghanistan"), **Magdulen Abaida** ("Women in Islam"), **Nira Yuval-Davis** ("The Role of Religion in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and its Effects on the Position of Women"), **Siba Shakib** ("How Religion and Tradition Determine the Lives of Women and Girls and Education as a Way to Free Oneself") and **Soad Baba Aïssa** ("Double Fight: against Islamist Terrorism and Ideology")

11:00-11:30 Lila Ghobady, "Female Iranian Artists: A Portrait of Anti-Regime Women in Exile"

11:30-12:00 Amel Grami, "Female Bodies in Tunisia Post Revolution"

12:00-13:00 Lunch

13:00-13:30 Comedy with Sameena Zehra and Daphna Baram

13:30-15:00 Blasphemy and Apostasy Panel

This panel will address the issue of blasphemy and apostasy laws.

Chair: **Salil Tripathi**

Panellists: **Inna Shevchenko** ("Girls against Gods"), **Kiran Opal** ("The Human and the Kafir: How Fear of Apostasy Fuels Islamist Power"), **Maha Kamal** ("International human rights law and the clash with state-implemented Sharia law") , and **Nahla Mahmoud** ("Islamic Apostasy in the West: Reality and Challenges")

15:00-15:30 BREAK

15:30-17:20 Religious-Right Panel

This panel will focus attention on the religious-Right, far-Right political movements, using religion for the right-wing restructuring of societies.

Chair: **Yasmin Rehman**

Panellists: **Bahram Soroush** ("Confronting the Islamic State"), **Chulani Kodikara and Faizun Zackariya** ("Sinhala Buddhist Ethnonationalism: Implications for women and minorities in post war Sri Lanka"), **Dilip Simeon** ("India – Communal Faultlines and Genocidal Consensus") and **Gita Sahgal** ("Remembering Genocide, Striving for Secular Space")

17:20-17:25 Video: Mali's Songhoy Blues will not be silenced

17:25-17:45 Secularism Manifesto and Closing with Marieme Helie Lucas and Maryam Namazie: What Next?

The conference is organised by Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain and One Law for All. It is endorsed by Atheist Alliance International; Bread and Roses TV; Children First Now; Center for Inquiry; Equal Rights Now – Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran; Fitnah – Movement for Women's Liberation; International Committee against Stoning; International Committee against Execution; International Federation of Iranian Refugees; Iran Solidarity; National Secular Society; Pink Triangle Trust; Secularism is a Women's Issue; Southall Black Sisters; The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science UK; and Women Living Under Muslim Laws amongst others.

Richard Dawkins will be attending the conference.

For full details of the conference, including on registration and obtaining tickets, visit the [event's dedicated website](#) or contact Conference Organising Committee: Amal Farah, Atoosa Khatiri, Eileen McFadden, Gaby Grammeno, Huma Irfan, Marieme Helie Lucas and Maryam Namazie at maryamnamazie@gmail.com. Please also join the event's [Facebook page](#) and follow the conference on [Twitter](#) or Tweet #Secularismtodaynow.

SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF SPEAKERS AND ACTS

- **AC Grayling** is a Philosopher, Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and the Royal Society of Arts, Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society and author and commentator.
- **Aliyah Saleem** spent 6 years in an Islamic school in Britain and now campaigns for secular education.
- **Amel Grami** is Professor at the Tunisian University of Manouba; she was on the frontlines of Manouba's successful struggle to defy a Salafist siege last year and is a leading expert on Religion and Women's Studies.
- **Anne Lovett** is an acclaimed pianist and composer.
- **Bahram Soroush** is a social and political analyst and commentator.
- **Ben Baz Aziz** is a Presenter at Arab Atheist broadcasting and a blogger focusing on LGBT and atheist rights in the Middle East who was imprisoned in Kuwait for blasphemy.
- **Caroline Fourest** is a French writer, editor of the magazine ProChoix, and author of Frère Tariq, a critical look at the works of Tariq Ramadan and books on topics such as the conservative right, the

pro-life movement and the fundamentalist trends in the Abrahamic religions.

- **Chris Moos** is a secular student activist who has led a successful campaign for the right to wear ‘Jesus and Mo’ t-shirts after being harassed and threatened with removal at his university. He was a nominee for the NSS’ Secularist of the Year 2014 award.
- **Chulani Kodikara** is a Senior Researcher at the International Center for Ethnic Studies in Sri Lanka and author of ‘Muslim Family Law in Sri Lanka: Theory, Practice and Issues of Concern to Women’ .
- **Daphna Baram**, AKA MissD, the Israel-born human rights lawyer gone journalist started performing as a comedian in 2009.
- **Dilip Simeon** is a labour historian and public intellectual in India. He is Board of Trustees Member of the Aman Trust.
- **Elham Manea** is a Yemeni associate professor specialized in the Middle East, a writer, and a human rights activist. Her concept of humanistic Islam was first published in a series of articles in Arabic.
- **Faizun Zackariya** is Co-Founder of Muslim Women Research and Action Front from Sri Lanka.
- **Fariborz Pooya** is the founder of the Iranian Secular Society, was one of the founding members of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain and is a co-host of Bread and Roses TV.
- **Fatou Sow** is a Senegalese Sociologist, and a member of a number of African and international associations as well as the International Director of Women Living Under Muslim Laws.
- **Gita Sahgal** is an Indian-born writer, journalist, film-maker and rights activist, Director of Centre for Secular Space who was suspended by Amnesty

International as head of its Gender Unit in 2010 for criticising the organisation's relations with an Islamist group.

- **Hamid Taqvae** is Leader of the Worker-Communist Party of Iran's Central Committee and a leading Marxist opposition figure to the Islamic regime of Iran.
- **Homa Arjomand** is an Iranian-born political activist in Canada running the International Campaign against Sharia Court in Canada and for One Secular School System in Ontario.
- **Houzan Mahmoud** is a Kurdish women's rights campaigner and the Spokesperson of the Organisations of Women's Freedom in Iraq. She has written and campaigned extensively on women's rights issues.
- **Horia Mosadiq** has been Director of the Afghanistan Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium and an advisor to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, as well as a journalist in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- **Imad Iddine Habib** is a Moroccan atheist threatened for his atheism, founder of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Morocco, the first public atheist organisation in a country with Islam as the state religion.
- **Inna Shevchenko** is leader of FEMEN topless activists who was kidnapped and threatened by the Belarus KGB in 2011 for her activism. She was granted political asylum in France.
- **Julie Bindel** is an English writer, feminist and co-founder of the group Justice for Women. She was listed in the Independent's "Pink List" as one of the top 101 most influential gay and lesbian people in the UK.

- **Kacem El Ghazzali** is a Moroccan secularist writer, blogger, activist and atheist. He was the head of the Moroccan Center for Human Rights' Youth Chapter and is a member of the Executive Board of the Moroccan Bloggers Association.
- **Karima Bennoune** is a law professor at the University of California Davis School of Law, and author of "Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the Fight Against Muslim Fundamentalism".
- **Kate Smurthwaite** is a stand-up comedian and political activist. She has appeared on more than 500 TV and radio shows including This Morning, The Big Questions, Woman's Hour and The Moral Maze.
- **Kenan Malik** is a writer, lecturer and broadcaster, a presenter of BBC Radio 4's Analysis and a panellist on The Moral Maze. His book From Fatwa to Jihad was shortlisted for the Orwell Prize.
- **Kiran Opal** is a Pakistani-born human rights activist, writer, and editor living in Canada. She is co-founder of Ex-Muslims of North America and Editor of ExMuslimBlogs.
- **LCP** is a multimedia and multiethnic dance company which emphasises human rights issues mainly human trafficking.
- **Lila Ghobady** is an Iranian writer-journalist and documentary filmmaker. Her first independent release, Forbidden Sun Dance, was banned by the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- **Maha Kamal** is an ex-Muslim who was disowned by her parents for leaving Islam, President of the Colorado Prison Law Project, and Commissioner at the Colorado Supreme Court Chief Justice's Commission on Inclusiveness.

- **Magdulen Abaida** is a Libyan Activist and president of Hakki (My Right) Organization for Women Rights. She was kidnapped by Islamists in Benghazi in August 2012 and fled after her release three days later.
- **Marieme Helie Lucas** is an Algerian sociologist, founder and former International Coordinator of the Women Living Under Muslim Laws. She is also the founder of Secularism Is A Women's Issue.
- **Maryam Namazie** is Spokesperson for Fitnah, One Law for All and Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain; editor of Fitnah's Unveiled; and producer and co-host of Bread and Roses.
- **Nadia El Fani** is a Tunisian filmmaker who risks arrest and up to five years in prison if she returns to Tunisia after Islamists filed a complaint against her film "Neither Allah nor Master".
- **Nahla Mahmoud** is an environmentalist and human right activist originally from Sudan. She leads the Sudanese Humanists Group and is Spokesperson for the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain.
- **Nina Sankari** is Vice President of the Atheist Coalition in Poland.
- **Nira Davis-Yuval** is a founder member of Women Against Fundamentalism and the International Research Network on Women in Militarized Conflict Zones.
- **Pervez Hoodbhoy** is a Pakistani nuclear physicist and recipient of a number of awards. He is also a prominent environmentalist and social activist.
- **Peter Tatchell** has been campaigning for rights and global justice since 1967. New Statesman readers voted him sixth on their list of "Heroes of our time". He was Campaigner of the Year in The Observer

Ethical Awards.

- **Pragna Patel** is a founding member of the Southall Black Sisters and Women Against Fundamentalism. She was listed in The Guardian's Top 100 women: activists and campaigners.
- **Ramin Forghani** is founder of the Ex-Muslims of Scotland and Vice-Chair of the Scottish Secular Society.
- **Randa Kassis** is President and founder of the Movement for a Pluralistic Society. She was a member of the Syrian National Council until she was excluded for her warnings against Muslim fundamentalists in 2012.
- **Rumy Hassan** is Senior Lecturer at University of Sussex and author of "Dangerous Liaisons: The Clash between Islamism and Zionism" and "Multiculturalism: Some Inconvenient Truths"
- **Safak Pavey** is a Turkish MP representing Istanbul for the main opposition social democrat party. She also serves as an United Nations independent human rights expert.
- **Salil Tripathi** is an award-winning journalist, a contributing editor at Mint and at Caravan in India. He was board member of English PEN from 2009 to 2013, and co-chaired PEN's Writers-at-Risk Committee.
- **Sameena Zehra** is a comedian and blues singer. She's been called 'a master storyteller'.
- **Sanal Edamaruku** is an author and founder-president of Rationalist International and the Indian Rationalist Association. In 2012, he was charged with hurting religious sentiments for his role in examining a claimed miracle at a local Catholic Church.
- **Shelley Segal** is a Melbourne based singer-songwriter involved

in secular activism. '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.

- **Siba Shakib** is an Iranian/German film-maker, writer and political activist. She was born and raised in Tehran, Iran. Her international best-seller Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep has been translated into 27 languages and won a P.E.N. prize.
- **Soad Baba Aïssa** is Founder of Association pour la mixité, l'égalité et la laïcité.
- **Sue Cox** is the co-founder of Survivors Voice Europe, an international organisation that has at its heart the support and empowerment of catholic clergy abuse survivors of which she is one.
- **Sultana Kamal** is a lawyer, human rights activist and Executive Director of Ain o Salish Kendra in Bangladesh.
- **Taj Hargey** is the Director of Muslim Educational Centre of Oxford and Imam of the Oxford Islamic Congregation.
- **Taslima Nasrin** is a Bangladeshi-born award-winning writer, physician, and activist, known for her powerful writings on women oppression and unflinching criticism of religion, despite forced exile and multiple fatwas calling for her death.
- **Terry Sanderson** is a writer and journalist and current President of the National Secular Society, which campaigns for the separation of church and state.
- **Waleed Husseini** is a Palestinian blogger arrested in 2010 by the Palestinian Authority for blaspheming against Islam on Facebook and in his blog. He founded the Council of Ex-Muslims of France in 2013.

- **Yasmin Rehman** has worked for more than two decades on violence against women and girls. She was Director of Partnerships and Diversity with the Metropolitan Police Service, and Deputy Association of Chief Police Officer lead for Honour based Violence from 2004-07.



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