

# Press regulator sides with free speech in ruling on The Sun's hijab article

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The press regulator IPSO has cleared Kelvin MacKenzie over an article in *The Sun* which asked why Channel 4 had "a presenter in a hijab fronting coverage of Muslim terror in Nice".

In July Kelvin MacKenzie [wrote](#) of Channel 4's coverage of the Nice attack: "The presenter was not one of the regulars — Krishnan Guru-Murthy, Matt Frei or Cathy Newman — but a young lady wearing a hijab.

"Her name is Fatima Manji and she has been with the station for four years. Was it appropriate for her to be on camera when there had been yet another shocking slaughter by a Muslim[?]

"Of course not."

Channel 4 News editor Ben de Pear said that the article amounted to religious discrimination and Manji complained to the Independent Press Standards Organisation.

Manji said that "the article had targeted her deliberately, causing her intimidation and distress, and whipping up hatred against her, and Muslims generally."

She also said that the article had "inaccurately" claimed that Islam was "a violent religion".

In response MacKenzie said that the article was not directed at Manji personally, and "was not about the propriety of a journalist having religious faith, but about the propriety of public figures wearing outwardly religious garments, in the context of a story with an unavoidable religious angle."

[IPSO summarised MacKenzie's response](#): "The column formed part of a public debate about presenters wearing symbolic items on screen, which had previously been seen in discussions about a Channel 4 presenter's decision not to wear a poppy, and the wearing of a crucifix by a presenter on BBC News."

*The Sun* rejected the claim that describing Islam as a "violent religion" was inaccurate or that it violated Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice.

The press regulator then considered whether the article had breached three clauses of the Editors' Code including accuracy, harassment and discrimination.

The committee which examined the complaint found that "There can be no doubt that this was deeply offensive to the complainant and caused widespread concern and distress to others" and that it "contained pejorative references to Islam."

However it found that the Editor's Code "prohibits prejudicial or pejorative references to an individual on account of, amongst other things, that individual's religion" but that it does not "prohibit prejudicial or pejorative references to a particular religion, even though such disparaging criticisms may cause distress and offence".

"Were it otherwise, the freedom of the press to engage in discussion, criticism and debate about religious ideas and practices, including the wearing of religious symbols while reading the news, would be restricted."

"The columnist's view that Islam is 'clearly a violent religion' was a statement of his opinion," IPSO said.

The regulator concluded that "While the columnist's opinions were undoubtedly offensive to the complainant, and to others, these were views he had been entitled to express."

The National Secular Society welcomed the ruling. Campaigns director Stephen Evans commented: "Whatever your opinion of the points made in his article Kelvin MacKenzie should be free to express his views. His comments clearly didn't amount to 'incitement' and we're therefore pleased to see the right to freedom of speech has won in this case."

See also: [\*Why Ipso was correct: freedom of expression means the freedom to offend.\*](#)

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