

25 Red Lion Square

London WC1R 4RL

TEL: 020 7404 3126

FAX: 0870 762 8971

EMAIL: enquiries@secularism.org.uk

WEB: www.secularism.org.uk

Intervention by Keith Porteous Wood

High level meeting with philosophical and non-confessional representatives European Commission, 5 November 2013

‘Putting the citizen at the heart of the European project in times of change’

“The proportion of EU citizens who are non-Christian, religiously unconcerned or non-religious is growing exponentially. Secularism protects their beliefs too, their right to hold and express such beliefs, and guarantees equal treatment for all, regardless of religion or belief.

“Such equality should ensure a better mutual understanding. If we are to be guided by the European people, and in this increasing multicultural diversity, particularly if we educate our children together, free of proselytising, so they can better understand each other’s cultures and beliefs.

“Such education must maintain and pursue Europe’s proud heritage of enlightenment, promoting enquiry, freedom of thought and rigorous examination of views.

“We must also cherish and preserve free expression; no view can be immune from critique; no person from being offended. We must therefore vigorously oppose any efforts of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation, whose office in Brussels was opened this year, to silence critics of religion within Europe.

“Their agenda can be seen in their relentless drafting over the last decade of resolutions on “combating defamation of religions” at the United Nations. It will I think shock you to learn that it is even forbidden to utter the word “Sharia” at the UN Human Rights Council, unless the speaker is a “sharia expert”. I also refer to the OIC's efforts to eliminate “Islamophobia” which term, coined by the Muslim Brotherhood, they define in a dangerously wide way.

“We sit here as representatives of the ‘non-confessional’, but our personal beliefs - be they religious or not - should not bring either privileges or disadvantages whether at the legislative table, or as citizens. This is the heart of the secular ideal, and this, I recommend, should be at the heart of the European project also.”