

Britain has “turned a blind eye” to abuse of women by sharia ‘courts’

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Powerful testimony from Muslim women has been published by MPs on the Home Affairs Committee as part of their investigation into sharia, while activists have warned that its approach so far has favoured those who support sharia councils.

[Submissions received from Muslim women](#) on their experiences of sharia 'law' have now been published by the Committee. The evidence was gathered by One Law For All, who sent the personal testimonies to the committee for their investigation into sharia 'law' in the UK.

One woman whose evidence was included for the Select Committee's consideration is Habiba Jan who was trapped in an abusive Islamic 'marriage' and was unable to escape without a sharia 'divorce'. Jan ended up being referred to Anjem Choudary for a 'divorce', without knowing who he was.

Jan asked the committee, "Now as a women's right activist, I am alarmed that I had been sitting with a Jihadi extremist who wants Sharia law to take over this country, a misogynist. He is a dangerous man; how many more like him are running these mosques or sharia courts that women who are escaping forced marriages and domestic violence from, have to use?"

She warned that "many" imams who pose as "moderate clerics" allow polygamous marriages, "leaving Muslim women with no rights."

"The state has ignored the abuse that goes on in our communities," she wrote, adding that the state was "turning a blind eye".

Meanwhile activists and groups including the National Secular Society have criticised the approach taken by the Select Committee.

During a recent hearing of the Home Affairs Select Committee to gather evidence for their inquiry, committee member Naz Shah MP said: "the people I have been talking to in the last 24 hours have told me that there is an air of Islamophobia and racism about this whole debate" about sharia.

Ms Shah also accused witness Maryam Namazie, a secularist campaigner who was recently awarded the International Secularism Prize by the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, and who was named Secularist of the Year in 2005, of wanting to discriminate against all religious believers.

During the hearing Shah claimed of Namazie: "If we were to look at implementing your view of the world, the majority of discrimination would be faced by the 33 million Christians of this country because you would have away with Christianity and any religious institutions".

Keith Porteous Wood, executive director of the National Secular Society, [wrote](#) to the chair of the Home Affairs Committee Yvette Cooper MP that Shah's comments were "a bizarre and totally unjustified portrayal of Ms Namazie's secularist worldview.

"Secularism seeks to ensure and protect freedom of religious belief and practice for all citizens. It

does not seek to challenge the tenets of any particular religion or belief, neither does it seek to impose atheism on anyone.

"We regard Ms Shah's questioning as being emblematic of a view that treats anyone with concerns about sharia with suspicion. It is wrong to insist that only Muslims can talk about sharia, and that only Muslims can fix it. Wider society, non-Muslims and ex-Muslims all have legitimate concerns and the right to articulate them."

While Muslim women can be "powerful advocates on the need to challenge sharia codes," Mr Wood wrote, "There are serious problems in limiting the conversation around sharia to Muslim women alone."

Several other campaign groups [complained about](#) the nature of the Select Committee's hearing. Southall Black Sisters, the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation, the Centre for Secular Space, One Law for All, British Muslims for Secular Democracy and the Culture Project wrote that the evidence session was "highly unbalanced and weighted in favour of those who support Sharia Councils".

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