

NSS questions charity links to Islamic TV channel under investigation

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The National Secular Society has questioned why an Islamic preacher who has praised Osama Bin Laden and [said](#) all Muslims "should be terrorists" is a trustee of a registered charity.

Dr Zakir Naik is a trustee of the Islamic Research Foundation International (IRFI), a charity [registered](#) in England which finances the Islamic TV channel Peace TV.

This week it was reported that the UK's communications regulator Ofcom is [pursuing](#) six separate investigations into Peace TV over concerns that it has breached the broadcasting code.

Naik, who launched IRFI in 2006 and was banned from entering Britain in 2010, is [listed](#) on Peace TV's website as its leading speaker.

Ofcom said it is [pursuing](#) six separate investigations into Peace TV for potential breaches of broadcasting rules designed to protect audiences from "hate speech, offence and the incitement of crime".

The investigations relate to shows with titles including *Media and Islam — War or Peace?* and *Valley of the Homosexuals*.

Peace TV claims to have 200m viewers around the world. Its English and Urdu channels can be viewed via Sky in the UK, despite being officially banned in India and Bangladesh.

The NSS is now planning to write to the Charity Commission over IRFI's status.

NSS campaigns officer Megan Manson said: "If IRFI is promoting extremism through its funding of Peace TV, the Charity Commission must hold it to account. We'll be writing to the commission urging it to do so.

"We must also ask why Zakir Naik is allowed to act as a trustee for IRFI. He has been banned from entering the UK over security concerns. How can he be considered a suitable trustee for a UK charity?"

Ofcom has a statutory duty to ensure any person holding a broadcast licence is "fit and proper".

The regulator has previously reprimanded Peace TV twice for breaching its standards. In 2012 Naik said he "tended to agree" that Muslims should be executed if they leave Islam and tried to proselytise a different religion "against Islam".

In 2016 the channel was fined £65,000 after another speaker, Dr Israr Ahmad, [used terms](#) such as "like a cancer", "evil genius", "their poison" and "cursed people" to describe Jews.

Other speakers who broadcast on Peace TV include Bilal Philips, who the US has named as a co-conspirator in the 9/11 attacks. Hussain Ye, a cleric who claimed a "group of Jews" were "having a party" to celebrate 9/11, has also spoken on the channel.

A [report](#) by the Henry Jackson Society on Islamic broadcasting highlighted that while Ofcom had revoked the licences of other channels, including the Iranian-controlled Press TV in 2012, it had not similarly taken Peace TV off the air.

The report's author, research fellow Emma Webb, said not revoking Peace TV's licence was a "material failure by Ofcom to exercise its statutory authority."

She added: "It is obvious that an individual who is banned from entering the country is unfit to hold a broadcasting licence."

Ofcom is also [investigating](#) another Islamic TV channel, Islam Channel, over concerns that it has promoted conspiracy theories and anti-LGBT propaganda.

Last week the channel broadcast a film saying the British government's "Islamophobia . . . treats all Muslims as criminal" and claiming a student's home was "raided over a word googled for a worksheet". The film's producers, the Islamic lobby group Muslim Engagement and Development, later [admitted](#) there was no basis for the claim.

In February the channel aired a debate on [relationships and sex education \(RSE\)](#) in which the cleric Suliman Gani, said such lessons were "about the agenda of including lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people in the education system" to "indoctrinate" children from Muslim backgrounds to "question their own sexuality". All four presenters agreed that RSE in schools is undesirable.

The channel was previously investigated by Ofcom in 2010 after it showed presenters encouraging violence against women and condoning rape.

In one programme the presenter [said](#) "it shouldn't be such a big problem where the man feels he has to force himself upon the woman".

In another the presenter advocated hitting a woman with "a stick" to "make her feel that you are not happy with her".

The regulator found the channel in breach of its code but did not impose a fine.

Islam Channel's presenters have also included preacher Haitham al-Haddad, who has expressed [support](#) for child marriage, female genital mutilation and stoning people to death for adultery.

An investigation by the *Sunday Times* [revealed](#) that the channel is funded by the overseas arm of Al-Shiddi Group, a company linked to the Saudi royal family. Islam Channel [responded](#) with a statement on its Facebook page calling the investigation "fake news".

Government research in 2008 found that Islam Channel reaches 59% of British Muslims. The station claims it has one million viewers daily.

Megan Manson commented: "Any channel that continually breaches broadcasting codes, despite repeated warnings and penalties, should lose its licence."

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