

No inquiry opened into charity promoting Islamist extremism

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A regulator has not opened a statutory inquiry into a charity behind a TV station which has promoted Islamist extremism despite receiving five complaints about it, the National Secular Society can reveal.

The Charity Commission for England and Wales has not opened any statutory inquiries into Islamic Research Foundation International (IRFI), which finances the channel Peace TV, since at least 2010.

Last month Peace TV was taken off air after the broadcasting regulator Ofcom [ruled](#) that one of its programmes had incited murder of those who practise "magic".

In response to an NSS freedom of information request, the commission has now said it has received five complaints about IRFI in the last nine years – but has not opened any statutory inquiries into it.

The NSS submitted one of the complaints about IRFI in November 2018. The complaint raised [concerns](#) that Peace TV and one of its speakers – Dr Zakir Naik, who was also a trustee of IRFI – had promoted extremist views, including by praising Osama bin Laden.

It asked the commission to review IRFI's charitable status and Naik's eligibility for trustee status.

In a comment to the trade magazine [Third Sector](#) in response to the NSS's latest findings, the commission has revealed that it disqualified Naik in April. Naik is appealing against the decision.

Concerns about IRFI and Peace TV

- In its January 2019 [annual report](#) IRFI said its "principal activity" was to secure "donations for the continuation of Peace TV".
- Speakers who have broadcast on Peace TV [include](#) Bilal Philips, who the US has named as a co-conspirator in the 9/11 attacks.
- Peace TV is banned in India and Bangladesh over concerns that it promotes terrorism.
- Last year Ofcom [said](#) it was pursuing six separate investigations into Peace TV over potential breaches of the broadcasting code.
- Ofcom has previously reprimanded Peace TV for breaching standards on two occasions, for promoting the execution of those who leave Islam and anti-semitism.
- Peace TV has also hosted speakers who have [encouraged](#) fathers to "push" their daughters into getting married and [described](#) gay people as "worse than animals".
- Peace TV has claimed to have 200m viewers around the world. Its English and Urdu channels were available via Sky in the UK.

Concerns about Dr Zakir Naik

- Naik launched IRFI in 2006. He is an IRFI trustee and is [listed](#) on Peace TV's website as its leading speaker.

- He was banned from entering Britain in 2010 for behaviour which included praising Osama bin Laden and saying all Muslims "should be terrorists".
- In 2012 he stated on Peace TV that he "tended to agree" that Muslims should be executed if they leave Islam and tried to proselytise a different religion "against Islam".
- He has [condoned](#) domestic violence and reportedly [expressed](#) agreement with the death penalty for homosexuals.

In response to the latest revelations, NSS spokesperson Megan Manson said:

"It's concerning that the Charity Commission has not opened an inquiry into Islamic Research Foundation International, given its appalling track record. There appears to be a compelling case that IRFI doesn't serve a public benefit and is therefore not deserving of charitable status.

"The government should also review charity law to consider religion's place within it. Ending the idea that 'the advancement of religion' is inherently beneficial would make it harder for harmful religious charities to register and easier for the Charity Commission to uphold standards consistently."

Ms Manson added that the NSS welcomed the Charity Commission's attempt to disqualify Zakir Naik from trusteeship, but still questioned why there had been no statutory inquiry into IRFI itself.

A Charity Commission spokeswoman told *Third Sector*: "While it is correct that the commission has not opened a statutory inquiry, as confirmed in our FOI response, we have looked into complaints that have been raised with us.

"As this is ongoing, we will not comment further on this at this time."

Charity law and relevant guidelines for charities

- Organisations are obliged to serve a public benefit to qualify for charitable status. Charity trustees are required to pass a "fit and proper person" test.
- Charity Commission [guidance](#) says "a charity's name, premises or money must not be used to promote extremist or other activities that are inappropriate under charity law, for example because they are in breach of equalities legislation".
- Earlier this year the NSS [called](#) for the removal of 'the advancement of religion' as a charitable purpose in a major report.
- According to its most recent [annual report](#), IRFI's "main objective" is "to raise funds for the proper presentation, understanding and appreciation of Islam, as well as removing misconception about Islam".

Further note

- The NSS's freedom of information request asked how many times the commission had received complaints about IRFI and investigated it since 2010. Charity Commission records at the [National Archives](#), dating back to 2005, make no mention of any investigations into IRFI. IRFI was registered as a charity in 2007.

Update, 15 May 2020: The Charity Commission has today [announced](#) that it has opened a statutory inquiry into Islamic Research Foundation International.

Image: Charity Commission logo, via [Twitter](#).

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