

# Regulator opens inquiry into charity which has promoted extremism

Posted: Mon, 18th May 2020

The National Secular Society has welcomed a charity regulator's decision to open a statutory inquiry into a charity which has promoted Islamist extremism by funding a TV channel.

The Charity Commission for England and Wales announced that it had opened an inquiry into Islamic Research Foundation International (IRFI) in a [press release](#) on Friday.

IRFI, whose charitable purposes include the advancement of the Islamic faith, is being investigated over its funding of the channel Peace TV.

The broadcasting regulator Ofcom [revoked](#) the licence of Peace TV Urdu's broadcaster, Club TV, last year after it found the channel had "repeatedly rebroadcast" material that incited murder.

Earlier this month Ofcom also [fined](#) Peace TV's former broadcasters £300,000 for breaches of its broadcasting code.

## NSS involvement

In 2018 the NSS raised [concerns](#) with the commission that Peace TV and one of its speakers – Dr Zakir Naik (*pictured*), who was also a trustee of IRFI – had promoted extremist views.

Last year an NSS freedom of information request [revealed](#) that this was one of five complaints about IRFI that had been submitted to the commission since 2010.

## NSS reaction

**NSS campaigns officer Megan Manson said the decision to open the inquiry was "very welcome".**

**"IRFI's funding of Peace TV has helped to enable Islamist extremists to push deeply intolerant messages to substantial audiences. There's a clear case that this charity isn't serving a public benefit and so doesn't deserve the tax breaks and official recognition which charitable status brings.**

**"The fact IRFI has been able to operate as a charity for so long is also a sign that charity law is too deferential to religion. Removing 'the advancement of religion' as a charitable purpose would make it harder for organisations such as IRFI to register and help to restore public confidence in the charitable sector."**

In March 2019 the NSS's report [For the public benefit?](#) called for reform of charity law so 'the advancement of religion' was no longer a charitable purpose. The report highlighted concerns about IRFI (*see pages 32-33*).

## Peace TV's record

- Ofcom reprimanded Peace TV in 2012 after 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 [used](#) deeply derogatory terms to describe Jews.
- Other speakers who have broadcast on Peace TV include Bilal Philips, who the US has named as a co-conspirator in the 9/11 attacks.
- In 2018 Ofcom said it was pursuing six investigations against Peace TV, relating to shows with titles including *Media and Islam — War or Peace?* and *Valley of the Homosexuals*.

## Zakir Naik

- Naik has previously praised Osama bin Laden and said all Muslims "should be terrorists".
- In December the Charity Commission [revealed](#) that it had attempted to disqualify Naik, who is barred from entering the UK, as a trustee of IRFI.

## UPDATE (8 June 2020):

The NSS has again urged the government to remove 'the advancement of religion' as a charitable purpose after a minister responded to an MP who raised the issue, and IRFI's status specifically.

The NSS has written to the parliamentary under-secretary for civil society, Diana Barran, after she said there was "no presumption that a particular charitable purpose is for the public benefit" in a letter to Conservative MP Laurence Robertson.

In response the NSS highlighted the findings of its 2019 report.

The society wrote: "Our recent findings suggest that there is an underlying assumption that advancing religion is for the public benefit, and as a result, too many charities that do not serve a public benefit are registered under the charitable purpose of 'the advancement of religion'."

Image: Dr Zakir Naik, via Wikimedia Commons, © [Maapu](#) [CC BY-2.0] (cropped)

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