

Regulator opens inquiry into charity which has promoted extremism

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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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