

Saudi secularist blogger flogged for “insulting Islam” released

Posted: Mon, 14th Mar 2022

The National Secular Society has welcomed the release of Saudi secularist blogger Raif Badawi, who was jailed and flogged for "insulting Islam".

Badawi was [sentenced](#) to 10 years in prison as well as 50 lashes a week for 20 weeks in 2014, after advocating an end to religious influence on public life in Saudi Arabia.

His wife Ensaf Haidar, who lives in Canada and led a worldwide campaign for his freedom, announced he was free on Friday.

Badawi's work and persecution

Saudi authorities have long [harassed](#) Badawi for debating religious issues. In 2008 he established the Liberal Saudi Network, a forum that sought to encourage debate on religious and political matters in Saudi Arabia.

That year he was formally charged with "setting up an electronic site that insults Islam" but the charges were dropped. In 2009, the authorities barred Badawi from travelling abroad and froze his business interests.

In 2012, Islamic cleric Abdulrahman al-Barrak issued a religious ruling declaring Badawi an "apostate who must be tried and sentenced". Al-Barrak claimed Badawi had said " Muslims, Jews, Christians, and atheists are all equal," and that this statement "is not allowed unless accompanied by a repudiation".

Badawi was arrested in 2012 and charged with "insulting Islam through electronic channels" and "going beyond the realm of obedience".

Later that year, a judge [recommended](#) that he also be tried for apostasy. Saudi Arabia is one of 12 countries where apostasy or blasphemy are [punishable by death](#). This charge was dropped after Badawi told the court he is Muslim.

In 2013 he was sentenced to seven years in prison and 600 lashes. This was increased to 10 years imprisonment and 1,000 lashes by an appeals court in 2014.

Badawi's first round of 50 lashes in 2015 sparked a global outcry and he was not subjected to any further flogging.

The court also fined him the equivalent of £217,000 and banned him from any media work or foreign travel for 10 years after his release.

Reporters Without Borders said it would work to ensure he can join his family in Canada despite his travel ban. Quebec has placed him on a priority list of possible immigrants for humanitarian reasons.

Badawi won the 2014 Reporters Without Borders prize in the net-citizen category and the European parliament's Sakharov prize for freedom in 2015. In 2015 and 2016 he was among the nominees for the Nobel Peace Prize.

NSS comment

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said Badawi's release was "fantastic news".

He said: "Badawi should never have been charged, let alone imprisoned and subjected to such barbaric punishment. Blasphemy shouldn't be a crime anywhere.

"We hope Badawi is given safe passage to Canada to be with his family.

"And we call on the UK government and other nations that enjoy liberal democracy to apply greater pressure on Saudi Arabia to ditch its draconian blasphemy laws and make drastic improvements to its human rights."

Image: [Human Rights Watch](#) and is reproduced under its [Creative Commons Licence](#)

[Discuss on Facebook](#)

Freedom of Expression

Democracy cannot exist without the right to free speech. Join our campaign to protect freedom of expression from religious incursions.

- [Find out more](#)
- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [Free speech](#)

Related Campaigns

-

[Protect freedom of expression](#)

We promote free speech as a positive value.

[Read More](#)

Related Articles

We must empower secular schools to assert their ethos

When Islamists tried to bully Michaela Community School, the school refused to back down. Other schools have not been so successful in challenging religious intimidation. Megan Manson explores what made Michaela different. [Read More »](#)

NSS announces major conference on protecting liberal values

Kenan Malik, Joan Smith and more speaking at NSS Secularism 2024 conference in London. [Read More »](#)

NSS hosts talk with author of Annie Besant book

Renowned author Michael Meyer discusses 'A Dirty, Filthy Book' in online event. [Read More »](#)

Three years on, the lessons of Batley are yet to be learned

The Batley affair exposed the Islamist threat to UK schools. We're still yet to come to terms with its implications, says Jack Rivington. [Read More »](#)

Response unit needed to tackle blasphemy flashpoints, report says

Recommendations echo NSS calls for more support for schools facing religious intimidation and threats. [Read More »](#)