

challenging religious privilege

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national
secular
society

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Dear General Manager

Cancellation of 'The Message' screening

Dear General Manager

We are writing in response to news reports suggesting that a planned screening of "The Message" by the Islamic Society of Britain has been cancelled by Grosvenor cinema after a very small petition of Muslims from the UK, Saudi Arabia and Nigeria deemed the film "unacceptable".

We are surprised and extremely disappointed to see a cinema capitulate to reactionaries who wish to deny freedom of expression, and we are keen to learn the rationale behind your decision.

By refusing to show the film you will be contributing to a climate of censorship brought on by the unreasonable and reactionary views of some religious extremists. Rather than defending free expression, one of the most precious pillars of our liberal democratic society, you have chosen instead to listen to extremists and patronise British Muslims by assuming that they will take offence. This is particularly sad considering that the screening was arranged by British Muslims.

We believe that freedom to communicate is vital in a democracy - in debate, reportage, creative media and any other public arena. We hope you will not allow the weapon of offense to be used to restrict your freedom as a cinema to screen films and the freedom of British audiences to watch them. If you do so, you are opening yourself up to a whole manner of unreasonable complaints about the content of films you show.

We therefore join the Islamic Society of Britain in urging you to reconsider your decision to cancel this screening.

Yours sincerely,

Keith Porteous Wood
Executive Director
National Secular Society

