

Mass controversy over visiting Islamic scholar



By [Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#), Editor (2010/11)
Monday 14 February 2011



Mufti Muhammad ibn Adam al-Kawthari
delivering a lecture

The invitation of Islamic Scholar Mufti Muhammad ibn Adam al-Kawthari to speak at the University on Wednesday has sparked controversy across campus.

Several campus societies, including StandforPeace, Amnesty International, Jewish Society, Freedom Society and York Conservatives, have collectively launched an official complaint, claiming that al-Kawthari “poses a threat to social cohesion at York” and that “his views are out of place in a civilised, free and equal society.”

The concern is centred on a report by the thinktank CIVITAS, profiling the Mufti, which explicitly states: “he places severe restrictions on male doctors treating female patients; he rules that women may not swim (even for medical reasons) where a male lifeguard is present, or where there are non-Muslim women; using tampons is ‘disliked’; a woman may not travel beyond 48 miles without her husband or a close relative accompanying her; a female is encouraged to remain within the confines of her house as much as possible; polygamy is permissible.”

Sam Westrop of StandforPeace, who has led the campaign against him speaking at York, has also pointed out that al Kawthari “legitimises rape” in his claim that “the narrations of the beloved of Allah clearly signify the importance of the wife obeying her husband in his request for sexual intimacy. It will be a grave sin (in normal circumstances) for the wife to refuse her husband, and even more, if this leads the husband into the unlawful.”

Speaking to *Nouse*, Westrop added: “It is a terrifying state of affairs that persons such as al-Kawthari are allowed to propagate their views on university campuses, and that the Union and University should so blithely approve such a speaker. We would all be up in arms if the far right popped up on campus stating that homosexuals have no rights and that capital punishment is suitable for adultery; so why should we hold back with people such as al-Kawthari? We urge the Islamic Society to change the speaker for this event, to someone far less disgusting.”

However, Dinah Salah, President of the York Islamic Society who organised for al Kawthari to speak at York

as part of Islam Week, has spoken out against the allegations.

She stated that the societies had been “recklessly sensationalising” his views and that they are being taken “bizarrely out of context.”

Salah continued: “It is important to note that socially conservative views should not be confused with violent extreme views. We find it deeply problematic that individuals seek to tarnish the good name and reputation of Muslim scholars under the premise of ‘extremism’ and ‘islamism’ based on misquotes of a very serious issue.

“We feel that such an approach is not cohesive to good campus relations and seeks to alienate Muslim students from engaging properly in their Students’ Union and hindering their development of a strong Islamic identity. The Islamic Society stands in favour of freedom of expression, with the only exception being when it incites hatred or violence. How can there be meaningful progression in our society, when individuals seek to restrict opinions and prevent constructive challenges of diverse views?”

The protests have also garnered interest from parties outside of the University, who also object to the religiously conservative viewpoints of al Kawthari.

Julian Sturdy, MP for York Outer, stated his concern: “I believe in the absolute importance of freedom of speech, but I am not happy that this vile speaker is using the university as a platform to create tension in the community.”

Hasan Afzal, communication officer for the Middle East Insitute, also added his voice to the fray, commenting: “With less than a week since the Prime Minister made his speech in Munich condemning violent and non-violent preachers, it’s to the lasting shame of York ISoc if they welcome this preacher of hate.”

The University has released a statement in the wake of the rising number of complaints, saying “YUSU has a protocol for visiting speakers and we have been assured that these procedures have been followed. The University has a clear and unequivocal position on issues of human rights, gender equality and religious toleration.”

They continued to state that, to ensure caution, the Pro Vice Chancellor for Students will attend the speaker’s presentation on Wednesday to “monitor its contents carefully”, adding “if we decide that the contents of the presentation are incompatible with the University’s position on these issues, or if we conclude that the speaker is preaching a message of hate, we will not hesitate to take this up with YUSU and the Islamic Society.”

YUSU would not provide a comment till they had addressed the matter with all parties involved.

Nonetheless, Salah was keen to emphasise that “the whole aim of our Islam Awareness Week is to create dialogue and understanding with all students in University in relation to Islam and promoting interfaith communication. All our events are open to all individuals from the University; not only do we extend our invitation to faith societies on campus, but also the wider community including the York Interfaith Forum.

“We invite all societies to come along to the talk on the 16th of February from 6:30 till 8:30 at PX/001 and raise these issues in an open and friendly debate.”



25 comments

Oliver Blackburn

14 Feb '11 at 5:45 pm

Whilst Sam Westrop might be onto something in criticising the speaker – I don’t know the accuracy of his

allegations – it is something else to claim they shouldn't speak.

Freedom Soc under Westrop had people like Godfrey Bloom MEP to speak, known for saying things like “No self-respecting small businessman with a brain in the right place would ever employ a lady of child-bearing age.” Bloom told journalists he wanted to deal with women's issues because: “I just don't think they clean behind the fridge enough”

He was recently ejected from the European Parliament chamber for shouting a Nazi slogan at a German MEP but I respect that Freedom Soc might well be fans of his thinking. Or, shock horror, that they don't actually believe in everything their speakers say.

The point is, can Sam really complain about other societies speakers when his own aren't to everyone's tastes, and his societies mission statement is this:

“The Freedom Association is a non-partisan, libertarian pressure group dedicated to fighting for individual liberty and freedom of expression. As such, we seek to challenge the erosion of civil liberties and we campaign in support of freedom for the individual and free speech. ”

So yeah. Might not want to wade in on this one Sam.

**comment has been moderated*

[▲ Report](#)

[Farooq](#)

14 Feb '11 at 6:56 pm

As someone on the national StandforPeace committee who has been troubled by Al-Kawthari for a while now, I will state it is important to note that ALL the opinions attributed to al-Kawthari are NOT solely sourced from Civitas, but can be referenced from the speaker's Fatwa site itself. These are primary sources from text written directly by al-Kawthari.

Our condemnation is not based on conjecture; we presented statements of fact with indisputable evidence supporting them. Al-Kawthari is a man who legitimises rape, calls for thieves to have their hands chopped off, believes women should be stoned to death for adultery and that homosexuals should not be defended in court. He represents a repulsive, bastardised form of the Islamic faith that does not represent the Muslim student body.

For this Saleh to suggest sensationalism is either naive or deliberately unscrupulous. It is not 'sensational' to denounce the killing and forced servitude of women; our condemnation is rational and principled.

Furthermore, to cite Freedom of Speech is a weak argument indeed. Sam has commented on this ludicrous defence: 'This man does indeed have a legal right to speak under freedom of expression laws. It is, as we have said, a decency issue. It is indecent to invite such a speaker in the first place, and it is indecent to give him the oxygen of publicity. Nick Cohen, the Observer columnist and author of 'What's Left?' has said on this matter: “Freedom of speech includes the freedom of vile men to propagate foul views, but it does not exempt them from criticism. It is essential that students act as free men and women and correct, mock and refute reactionaries who stray on to their campuses. They should on no account allow enfeebling notions of political correctness to hold them back.”

Getting people, as Nick Cohen pointed out, to 'correct, mock and refute' these hate preachers is an imperative, and there is better chance of this, if attention is brought to the matter.'

The Union and University has thus far refused to properly comment on Al-Kawthari. At least there is more of a pressure to do so if students of all religious and political persuasions are made aware'

The CIVITAS report in question notes of al-Kawthari:

“He places severe restrictions on male doctors treating female patients; he rules that women may not

swim (even for medical reasons) where a male lifeguard is present, or where there are non-Muslim women; using tampons is 'disliked' (makruh-a classification in shari'a law); a woman may not travel beyond 48 miles without her husband or a close relative accompanying her; a female is encouraged to remain within the confines of her house as much as possible; polygamy is permissible. If anyone were to ridicule polygamy, he would become an unbeliever; it is a grave sin for a woman to refuse sex to her husband; it is forbidden to have close, intimate relations with or have love for non-Muslims; Muslims are not to sit, eat, live or mingle with them; the legal punishment for adultery is stoning." [1]

Al-Kawthari recommends that if someone engages in sexual intercourse outside of marriage, the punishment should vary from a hundred lashes to death by stoning [2]. Furthermore, Al-Kawthari legitimises rape. He has stated, "The narrations of the beloved of Allah (Allah bless him & give him peace) clearly signify the importance of the wife obeying her husband in his request for sexual intimacy. It will be a grave sin (in normal circumstances) for the wife to refuse her husband, and even more, if this leads the husband into the unlawful." [3]

The same Civitas report notes that similar places for fatwa rulings in the UK have demanded that homosexuals should be beaten. While it is impossible to know what many of these rulings state, as they are decided behind closed doors, this question from the Darul Iftaa website, cited in the Civitas report, suggests something:

"Question: The questioner is about to start a career in law. Someone has told him that most aspects of English law would be forbidden to him to practise. Could he/she defend people of crimes (irrespective of guilt), and could they advocate rights for people such as homosexuals?"

Answer: One should not help defend someone who is guilty of a crime. One must not help others gain a right prohibited by sharia or disapproved of by it. 'When practicing law, one must do so within the limits of Shariah. As such, one is not allowed to advocate rights that are incompatible with Islam, such as recovering interest money and fighting for the rights of homosexual and/or lesbians.' [4]"

Furthermore, Al-Kawthari recommends that the legal punishment for theft is amputation, "The penalty for the one who steals (when the above conditions are met) is that his/her right arm is amputated. If a person steals a second time, his left foot is amputated; if a third time, then he will be imprisoned until he repents, but no further amputation will take place." [5]

- 1 - <http://www.civitas.org.uk/press/prcs87.php>
- 2 - http://www.daruliftaa.com/question.asp?txt_QuestionID=q-16484743
- 3 - http://www.daruliftaa.com/question.asp?txt_QuestionID=q-07335282
- 4 - <http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/ShariaLawOrOneLawForAll.pdf>
- 5 - http://www.daruliftaa.com/question.asp?txt_QuestionID=q-18254323

 Report

jeez

14 Feb '11 at 7:36 pm

"Furthermore, to cite Freedom of Speech is a weak argument indeed. Sam has commented on this ludicrous defence"

Are you serious? You try to wave this off as a 'weak argument', saying that this is a decency issue, while **at the same time calling for the event to be cancelled** ? Did you manage to keep a straight face while writing that?

If this was just a decency issue, then surely you could just conclude that the event is not to your liking and you would not attend!

When you call for an event to be cancelled, then **automatically it is a freedom of speech issue!** And it is particularly ironic to see supposed libertarians trying to restrict this freedom. Even more so when you

consider what kind of people you have defended in the name of freedom of speech.

Clearly you people are under the impression that everyone should be allowed the freedom to express your view!

[▲ Report](#)

Charleson

14 Feb '11 at 7:51 pm

Let this bozo come and speak his nonsense. Students are supposed to be intelligent, open minded people. As such, they're best placed to ridicule him. Anyway, people should make their own minds up- maybe he's right!

[▲ Report](#)

Sarah

15 Feb '11 at 12:04 am

I went to there Blind Eyes event today, and it was such a cool lec, the guy was too funny. I don't understand what all this controversy is about, the Al kawthari guy is not inciting hate on anyone, and let the guy at least say a word out of his mouth before shooting him down. this is definetly a freedom of speech issue when people are trying to stop this event going ahead, when the society says the very issues such as womens rights and shariah law will be discussed at the misconceptions lec to clarify these issues, then why don't people want to hear the clarifications. i look forward to attending the lec, and hope it turns out to be a peaceful affair.

[▲ Report](#)

anonymous

15 Feb '11 at 12:13 am

I came across the ISOC reply on their website, which am abit confused by:

Recently, a few societies have raised their concerns regarding the York Islamic Society (ISOC) choice of speaker: Mufti Muhammed Ibn Adam Al Kawthari, who will be speaking in York ISOC Islam Awareness Week event.

The complaints have been fuelled by a single press release by rightwing think-tank CIVITAS, which fails to reference the original source of the claims, instead recklessly sensationalizing and listing views which have been taken completely out of context. These complaints have used a number of sentences that were taken out of context and due to space limitations we will only discuss one accusation and as for the rest of the accusations we invite all societies to come along to the talk on the 16th of February from 6:30 till 8:30 at PX / 001 and raise these issues in an open and friendly debate.

One of the issues raised is the statement: "It is a grave sin for a woman to refuse sex to her husband".

The complaining societies presented the following sentence "Furthermore, Al-Kawthari legitimises rape. He has stated, "The narrations of the beloved of Allah (Allah bless him & give him peace) clearly signify the importance of the wife obeying her husband in his request for sexual intimacy. It will be a grave sin (in normal circumstances) for the wife to refuse her husband, and even more, if this leads the husband into the unlawful." However, the above extract omits a later extract that he notes in the same article which directly delegitimizes rape. He adds that "However, the above does not in any way mean that the husband may force himself over her for sexual gratification. The Hadith mentions "the husband spends the night in anger or being displeased" which clearly shows that he must restrain himself from forcing himself over her. Muhammed Ibn Adam Al Kawthari goes on to say "Similarly, it should be remembered here that, the wife must obey her husband in his request for sexual intimacy unless she has a valid reason. She must obey him as long as she does not have to forego her own rights. As such, if the wife is ill, fears physical harm or she is emotionally drained, etc; she will not be obliged to comply with her husband's request for sexual intimacy. Rather, the husband would be required to show her

consideration.” Also he adds “If the wife is not in a state to engage in sexual activities and has a genuine and valid reason, and the husband forces her, then he will be sinful.”

The complete statement of Mufti Mohamed could be found at this link http://www.daruliftaa.com/question.asp?txt_QuestionID=q-07335282.

What seems to be happening is that speakers are being quoted bizarrely out of context, or have social values or political ideals conflated with actual violent extremism, when there is no link between the two. Speakers which are popular amongst Muslim students, that provide valuable discourse, that condemn terrorism and provide no security risk whatsoever, are now being associated with the scourge of extremism; and consequently the good name of your every day positive Islamic Society and popular Muslim figure is being attacked.

It is important to note that socially conservative views should not be confused with violent extreme views – whilst one is completely abhorrent the other should be confronted and discussed openly through rational debate. We find it deeply problematic that individuals seek to tarnish the good name and reputation of Muslim scholars under the premise of “extremism” and “islamism” based on misquotes and reckless sensationalism of a very serious issue. We feel that such an approach is not cohesive to good campus relations and seeks to alienate Muslim students from engaging properly in their Students’ Union and hindering their development of a strong Islamic identity.

The Islamic Society stands in favour of freedom of expression, with the only exception being when it incites hatred or violence. This view is supported by the University’s long-established policy on freedom of speech, particularly with its public declaration that members of a University have a particular obligation not to seek to prevent the expression of opinion but to counter argument with argument and thought with thought. How can there be meaningful progression in our society, when individuals seek to restrict opinions and prevent constructive challenges of diverse views? The StandforPeace organisation state “we encourage the very persons-who might usually disrupt such events-to get involved and to come listen and debate with speakers, topics, literature and ideas from a number of differing viewpoints” yet it is this very society who are urging our society to either cancel or change the speaker.

Finally we in the Islamic society wish for a dialogue with all students in the university and they are all welcome to attend our talks and gatherings. We are promoted to the welfare of students and we have not shown through our actions hostility to any group. The claims made by StandforPeace made against us amount to an attack on our principles by tarnishing our reputation in the university. The whole aim of our Islam Awareness Week is to create dialogue and understanding with all students in University in relation to Islam and promoting interfaith communication. All our events are open to all individuals from the University, not only do we extend our invitation to faith societies on campus but also the wider community including the York Interfaith Forum. Ironically, the talk scheduled to be delivered by Muhammed Ibn Adam Al Kawthari is actually Misconceptions About Islam aimed to clarify common misconceptions related to the very issues such as women’s rights and Shariah law which the societies have brought attention to.

 Report

anonymous

15 Feb '11 at 12:28 am

just let the dude come, and say his bit. surely, we are intelligent enough to make up our own minds. but restricting freedom of speech is not the way to go.

 Report

York Duck

15 Feb '11 at 12:38 am

I agree with Charleson.

 Report

MRB

15 Feb '11 at 1:15 am

Is there a special academy where homophobes, misogynists and racists learn these unconvincing excuses to justify their bigotry?!

The reason I ask is because every time they are confronted and asked to explain why they propagate such hateful and divisive views they say "its taken out of context". Sorry... In what context are homophobia or misogyny ok?!! What's worse than the frequency these ridiculous excuses are used, is the way they always manage to deflect criticism and hoodwink everyone!

I noticed how Dinah Salah, did not deny Al-Kawthari had said these vile things, she just tried to explain them away by saying that his views were merely conservative views, as though this explains it!

She said:

"It is important to note that socially conservative views should not be confused with violent extreme views." I think it is Miss Salah who is confused, so I will clarify- Justifying rape and fomenting hate against homosexuals is not a conservative view- it is an incitement to hatred and violence.

"the whole aim of our Islam Awareness Week is to create dialogue and understanding with all students in University"- yep ALL STUDENTS unless you are gay, female or anyone else who Al Kawthari thinks should be lashed for who they are.

Disgusting.

[Report](#)

Christopher Fraser

15 Feb '11 at 2:39 am

Totally agree with "Charleson" above - it's a well-publicised event in a university, not an agitational event for would-be Islamic extremists. The worst that could happen is that he expounds what appears to be his usual bile, and he (rightly) gets called out for it.

A quick note, as well: I've since left after serving on the committee for a year, but the Amnesty International society should not be campaigning to have him banned from campus - however awful his words are, this isn't a human rights issue. I'm hoping that it's just certain StandForPeace members being overzealous and trying to make it seem like they have widespread support, but having familiarised myself with the ins and outs of Amnesty International's policies, they'd be quick to distance themselves from this campaign, and with good reason.

[Report](#)

Farooq

15 Feb '11 at 9:56 am

I repeat: It is not a freedom of speech issue. The delightfully named 'Jeez' seems to insist that it is. We are not calling for the Islamic Society to change the speaker because what they are doing should be illegal, and proscribed. He is more than welcome to stand on a box and shout hatred there.

Instead, the Islamic Society has a choice. It is a decency issue.

We don't see many BNP speakers invited to campuses not because we're breaking freedom of speech laws, but because we believe it is indecent to invite hateful fascists.

The double standards solely lie with you.

[Report](#)

rabbit in a hat

TABBUL III a HIAL

15 Feb '11 at 12:04 pm

westrop enjoying a friendly drink with farage...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Did00i3kxow>

 Report

Champagne Conservative

15 Feb '11 at 4:04 pm

Would be intrigued to see how the people defending this berk would respond to a debating society inviting a member of the BNP to speak.

“NO PLATFORM. THIS IS DIFFERENT, LIKE.”

 Report

Henry

15 Feb '11 at 4:21 pm

Let him come here, let him speak. Preventing people from speaking is surely never the answer. There's a very fine line, I'll admit, between protecting freedom of speech and protecting someone's right to espouse hatred but what is offence? What does taking offence actually mean?

Such a tricky issue but unwanted views (legitimisation of rape/homophobia/racism - whatever the issue might be/whoever the speaker might be) will not go away if we choose to not provide them a platform!

Get the issue out in the open, discuss it, debate it and treat people equally. Then people can make up their own minds.

On another point - what great advertising for the Islamic Society, there'll be no seats left on the night in question now!

 Report

Moderator

15 Feb '11 at 7:39 pm

All comments on the website have been temporarily suspended

 Report

Enrique

15 Feb '11 at 11:58 pm

Why have comments been suspended? Nouse should have the decency to give the students they represent the credibility to express their own views on the debate, no matter how controversial.

 Report

Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy

16 Feb '11 at 2:30 am

It's silly to call for him to be cancelled, but i for one look forward to laughing while he tries to defend his awful views, (though i assume/hope that's not part of his lecture) even within Koranic scholarship. He's clearly a vile person. Arranging him to be the speaker for 'misconceptions about islam' is obviously a misstep by ISOC.

 Report

Moderator

16 Feb '11 at 2:47 pm

YUSU have shut down all comments on the Nouse website. Please direct all comments and complaints to YUSU President Tim Ngwena at t.ngwena@yusu.

We apologise for any inconvenience and are working to rectify this as soon as possible.

[▲ Report](#)

Andrew Marvell

16 Feb '11 at 10:59 pm

“Though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously, by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?”

-John Milton

[▲ Report](#)

Cheryl Cole

17 Feb '11 at 11:05 am

‘Mass controversy over visiting Islamic scholar’

Well, what was he doing at a Catholic Church in the first place? I'll get my coat.

[▲ Report](#)

blah

20 Feb '11 at 4:42 pm

Too bad the supposedly “freedom loving” Sam Westrop had nothing to say when his “Freedom society” invited an Israeli extremist who said the murdering of innocent Palestinians in Israel was justified. How dare Sam call himself a libertarian? Outrageous.

[▲ Report](#)

Natural Diet Pills

22 Feb '11 at 6:15 pm

Let the him have his talk and let the students decide for themselves if his views are acceptable in the modern society that we live in today.

Others want it cancelled because he has differing views or shall I say his religion professes differing views. Some will call it fanatical but we have to respect others and debate to convince them otherwise. Not allowing them to speak would isolate him and his followers and that is not desirable.

[▲ Report](#)

Johnson

25 Feb '11 at 2:24 pm

@blah - Don't suppose you have a name for that speaker, or a date/event?

[▲ Report](#)

History Student

26 Feb '11 at 7:43 pm

“We don't see many BNP speakers invited to campuses not because we're breaking freedom of speech laws, but because we believe it is indecent to invite hateful fascists.”

That and the fact that if we did the NUS would threaten riots and ‘people hurt’ as they did in Durham.

[Report](#)

Mohammed Umar

1 Mar '13 at 12:08 pm

one thing i would like to bring it to your notice.

“It will be a grave sin (in normal circumstances) for the wife to refuse her husband, and even more, if this leads the husband into the unlawful.”

-this dosen't mean that it is lawful to rape.

-rape is rape, Adultery is adultery. he is just focusing on the wife's part, however the for the “unlawful” he(husband) will be punished.

kindly, when you hear something on Religious Matters don't come to a conclusion without knowing the entire situation.

He is Mufti, Alhamdulillah he knows the remaining part. question him about that you will definitely get the same answer as above(“punishment for the 'Unlawful' act”)

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