

25 May 2011

Dear Member of Parliament,

We represent the One Law for All campaign ([www.onelawforall.org.uk](http://www.onelawforall.org.uk)) and the National Secular Society ([www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk)) and are writing to ask for your support in bringing to an end a scandalous injustice. Sharia tribunals and councils are in free operation across the United Kingdom – some of which operate under the power of the Arbitration Act 1996.

**Invitation – Tuesday, 28 June 2011**

We invite you to attend an important debate, chaired by Jim Fitzpatrick MP, on whether the practice of sharia law should be permitted under the powers of the Arbitration Act. This will take place at the House of Commons on Tuesday 28 June 2011.

**Sharia Law and Family Matters**

In sharia law, a woman's word is worth half of that of a man. Child custody is awarded to fathers regardless of the circumstances of the case. A man can obtain a divorce by repudiation whereas it is extremely difficult for women to show grounds for divorce, even if abuse or violence has been proved.

It is known that family law is being practiced in accordance with sharia principles in tribunals across the UK, and we ask that the Arbitration Act 1996 be amended to bring this practice to an end.

In 2008, (the now) Attorney General Dominic Grieve was quoted in the Times as stating that sharia tribunals should not be permitted to operate a system of family law (<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article4749183.ece>). Furthermore, Britain's law lords have declared that sharia law discriminates against women and is a "flagrant breach" of the European Convention on Human Rights (*EM (Lebanon) (FC) v Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent)* [2008] UKHL 64).

Family matters are at the core of many women's lives, and women are more likely to be exposed to family law rulings than to those of any other legal field. Many women exposed to sharia law in Britain are immigrants, or do not speak English, and are unaware of their rights under British law. Many others are pressured or persuaded to attend these tribunals, and others threatened with community expulsion or violence if they refuse. Therefore, the alleged voluntary nature of sharia tribunals is a sham (please see the enclosed report 'Sharia Law in Britain: A Threat to One Law for All and Equal Rights').

We believe it to be a national scandal that the UK government tolerates, respects, or in any way accommodates a legal system which discriminates so openly against women and children, and we believe it to be a threat to community cohesion and the legal and political equality of all women. As recent legal rulings have shown, religious freedom does not – and should not – include the freedom to overrule the fundamental human rights of others.

### **An Amendment to the Arbitration Act 1996**

In 2005, the Family Statute Law Amendment Act 2005 was enacted in Canada. This Amendment made it unlawful for family law to be practiced under that country's Arbitration Act. We ask that a similar amendment be tabled for debate in the Houses of Parliament in Britain. This amendment should prohibit the practice of family law (including but not limited to divorce, child custody and contact, and domestic violence) under the power of the Arbitration Act.

### **The Rule of Law and Human Rights**

Sharia law fundamentally undermines the rule of law in this country and represents a division of rights along racial and religious lines. Muslim women and the children of Muslim parents are particularly vulnerable under this system and our society has a responsibility to protect them.

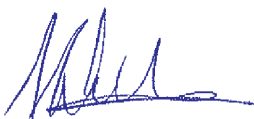
We would further point out that in a Judgment on February 13, 2003 the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg stated: "The Court concurs in the Chamber's view that sharia is incompatible with the fundamental principles of democracy, as set forth in the Convention".

We therefore ask for your support in bringing to an end sharia law and related human rights abuses in the UK; perhaps initially through an Early Day Motion to establish a list of supportive MPs. We would welcome a sponsor. After the EDM we would aim to establish with supporters the best method of banning the practice of family law under the Arbitration Act 1996, thereby enhancing gender equality, secularism and cohesion.

Enclosed is a copy of One Law for All's recently published report: 'Sharia Law in Britain: A Threat to One Law for All and Equal Rights'. Please don't hesitate to contact us at [onelawforall@gmail.com](mailto:onelawforall@gmail.com) for further information.

We look forward to seeing you at the debate.

Yours faithfully,



Anne Marie Waters  
*One Law for All*



Maryam Namazie  
*One Law for All*



Keith Porteous Wood  
*National Secular Society*