

Muslim Canadian Congress



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Press Release

AN INQUISITION DISGUISED AS A DEBATE FOOLS NO ONE MCC urges Islamists to abandon medieval authoritarianism

TORONTO - The Muslim Canadian Congress (MCC) regrets the attempt by NAMF, the North American Muslim Foundation to turn a debate on Islam into a public inquisition of its founder Tarek Fatah. The 'debate' was to have taken place today between Mr. Fatah and NAMF imam Sheharyar Sheikh inside the NAMF mosque in Scarborough, and was to be moderated by Karen Mock, the Liberal Party candidate in Thornhill.

On arrival at the venue Mr. Fatah was told that NAMF had unilaterally appointed a new moderator after Karen Mock declined to attend, citing 'family matters.' In the typical authoritarian style that governs most Islamist organizations, NAMF did not consult with Mr. Fatah on the appointment of the new moderator, nor did they consider the ~~three names~~ suggested by him (Imam Shabbir Ally, Imam Yahya Fadlallah and CBC broadcaster and Islamic scholar Nazim Baksh)

Leading up to the debate, from the appointment of Dr. Mock as moderator to the format of the debate, all decisions were made unilaterally by NAMF, without any consultation with either Mr. Fatah or the MCC. Mr. Fatah did express his reservations about the arbitrary and authoritarian process, but in the interest of free speech and free public debate, reluctantly agreed to participate in the debate as long as it was moderated by Karen Mock.

Mr. Fatah had placed just one condition as a pre-requisite to the debate: a moderator acceptable to both sides. In appointing an unknown moderator without consultation, NAMF acted in bad faith with the intention of creating an uneven level playing field that could prove to be not conducive to a fair debate.

To make matters worse, NAMF issued a statement that no video cameras would be allowed inside the hall. Furthermore, the MCC discovered that the off-duty policemen NAMF had hired for security, had been withdrawn.

In the absence of an agreed-upon moderator, the restrictions on the media, and the withdrawal of police, the MCC has come to the conclusion that what was being promoted as a debate on Islam, was nothing more than an inquisition where Tarek Fatah was to be ambushed. As a result, the MCC has urged Mr. Fatah not to participate in his own inquisition where his own safety would be in jeopardy.

Toronto Police also advised Mr. Fatah not to attend the debate as they could not provide the police protection he had sought after being falsely accused by yet another Imam of "viciously attacked the Quran and Prophet Muhammad." This allegation essentially labels Mr. Fatah of committing blasphemy and as a result, makes him a possible target of attack by radical Muslims.

Speaking about the MCC decision not to participate in the debate, the president of the MCC Sohail Raza said: "We came to the NAMF Mosque in good faith and to hear a healthy debate, but on arrival discovered a hostile environment, with no moderator, restrictions on media and the absence of any security. As a result, we have decided not to enter the premises and become potential targets of violence." Raza asked Islamists to be more forthcoming in the future as an inquisition disguised as a debate fools no one. "On behalf of the MCC I urge Islamic organizations to abandon medieval authoritarianism and embrace democracy," he added.