

To mark International Human Rights Day

## Apostasy, Sharia Law and Human Rights Conference

### Biographies

11 December 2010

Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London

**Hamed Abdel-Samad** is a German-Egyptian political scientist and author. He studied in Egypt, Japan and Germany, worked for the UNESCO in Geneva, at the department of Islamic Studies at the University of Erfurt, Germany and at the Department of Modern History at the University of Munich. He has published *Mein Abschied vom Himmel (Farewell to Heaven)*, 2009; and *Der Untergang der Islamischen Welt (The Collapse of the Islamic World)*, 2010.

**John C Adams** is Emeritus Professor at the University of Hertfordshire. In an academic career of over 40 years John has taught, researched and examined in Economics in two UK and three overseas universities. He has authored over 150 books, articles and conference papers. John was formerly Chair (now Vice-President) of the National Governors Association, is a Founder Member, Judge and Fellow of the National Teaching awards and an executive member of the General Teaching Council. He has served on numerous government advisory boards in the UK and also advised the Education Department of the Russian Federation on the establishment of school governing bodies.

**Mina Ahadi** was active in the 1979 Iranian revolution; after the revolution's suppression and establishment of an Islamic state, Mina was expelled from medical school for opposing compulsory veiling. She continued her opposition, including in Iranian Kurdistan as a guerrilla for ten years after having fled the city of Tabriz to evade arrest. In Europe, she founded and heads of the International Committees against Stoning and Execution as well as the Council of Ex-Muslims of Germany. She is a member of the Worker-communist Party of Iran's Central Committee. She was the National Secular Society's 2007 Secularist of the Year award winner. She was also selected as one of Elle Quebec's top 45 women of the year 2007. Her biography, *I have Renounced Religion*, has been published in 2008.

**Roy Brown** is a former president of the International Humanist and Ethical Union and for the past four years has been IHEU's main representative at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva where he has written and spoken on issues as diverse as the plight of the untouchables in India, the rights of women in the developing world, and the crucial need for sex education and family planning. His primary concern within the UN Human Rights Council is to maintain the universality of human rights against pressure from the Islamic states to reduce the level of protection guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international covenants. In 2006 Roy was awarded the Free Press Prize by the Danish Free Press Society. In 2008 Roy received the award for Distinguished Services to Humanism at the World Humanist Congress in Washington DC.

**Nick Doody** is a comedian. His brand of political comedy and satire has won fans all over the country. As well as gigging regularly all over the UK, Nick has also performed in Ireland, Germany, Spain, France and Croatia. Nick is also much in demand as a writer for television and radio, writing for the likes of BBC4's Late Edition, and More4's Last Word. Nick's radio and TV credits as a

performer include contributing to shows such as BBC2's Comedy Map of Britain and ITV2's Comedy Cuts.

**Rumy Hasan** is a senior lecturer at the Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex. A political economist, he has specialised in the economies of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and, more recently, on the transition in China. But, especially since the events of 7 July 2005, his work has focused more on issues relating to multiculturalism, multifaithism, and social cohesion. Hailing from a South Asian Islamic background with parents who left India for Pakistan soon after partition, his childhood was in Scotland and the North East of England. He stresses the vital importance of secularism and humanism in bringing people from different backgrounds together and, accordingly, is highly critical of the separate identities that have arisen under policies inherent in multiculturalism and multifaithism. His ideas have recently been presented in a book *Multiculturalism: Some Inconvenient Truths*, 2010.

**Marieme Helie Lucas** is an Algerian sociologist who taught epistemology in the social sciences in Algiers University. She is the founder and former international coordinator of the international network Women Living Under Muslim Laws that provides information, support and a collective space for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam. She is also founder and present international coordinator of the network Secularism Is A Women's Issue.

**Maryam Namazie** is a rights activist, commentator and broadcaster. She is Spokesperson of Iran Solidarity, One Law for All, Equal Rights Now and the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain. She is also National Secular Society's 2005 Secularist of the Year award winner and an NSS Honorary Associate; Central Committee member of the Worker-communist Party of Iran; Vice President of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association; Distinguished Supporter of the British Humanist Association; and Emeritus member of the Secular Humanist League of Brazil. Maryam was selected one of Elle Quebec's top 45 women of the year in 2007. Her blog has been ranked one of the top 100 atheist blogs.

**Ghazi Rabihavi** is a playwright and has been writing novels, short stories and plays from the age of sixteen. His works in English include *Beloved Bell*, 2010; *My Beautiful Son* (about the situation of homosexuals in Iran), 2010; *Masculine Law* (comprising 20 short episodes, each portraying various aspects of how Iranian laws affect the lives of women), 2009; *Boys of Love*, 2008; *Stoning*, 2002, which was described by Harold Pinter as "A very strong and powerful piece of work, beautifully constructed". It is about the death penalty by stoning of a woman for adultery. *Stoning* was also short-listed for the Translations Awards at the Gate Theatre, London. *Fairy Lights*, 2002, is about the situation of young prostitutes in Iran, and there are many others. A number of his works have been banned in Iran.

**Hassan Radwan** was born in England in 1959 of an Egyptian father and English mother. He completed a degree in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1984. He became active in the Muslim community in North London, sharing the Amirship of Finchley Da'wa Society, editing their magazine, *The Clarion*, and helping to set up a Muslim Housing Co-op as well as writing 4 books for children of Muslim parents. He was also a teacher at Islamia School

for 15 years. However events in his life caused him to start having doubts about Islam. Eventually in 2006 he resigned his post at Islamia School and a year later openly rejected his belief in Islam. Since then Hassan has been active in the growing ex-Muslim community, and campaigns for the freedom to leave Islam without abuse or intimidation and against the interference of religion in public and political life. He is a member of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain's Management Committee.

**Gita Sahgal** is an Indian-born writer and journalist on issues of feminism, fundamentalism, and racism, a director of prize-winning documentary films, and a women's rights and human rights activist. She has been a co-founder and active member of Southall Black Sisters and Women against Fundamentalism. She has also been head of Amnesty International's Gender Unit, and has opposed the oppression of women in particular by religious fundamentalists. In February 2010 she was suspended by Amnesty as head of its Gender Unit after she was quoted by The Sunday Times in an article about Amnesty, criticizing Amnesty for its high-profile associations with Moazzam Begg, the director of a campaign group called Cageprisoners, whom she referred to as "Britain's most famous supporter of the Taliban."

**Terry Sanderson** is the President of the National Secular Society. He is also a journalist and writer and has been an activist for gay human rights since 1979. As well as working for many years in the field of mental health, he has also been an agony uncle on Woman's Own magazine, where he worked under the tutelage of Claire Rayner. He is the author of nine books and has written extensively for the national press in Britain. He speaks extensively on secularism and has acted as media officer for the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association for many years. His popular column in Gay Times has been appearing continuously for 25 years – the longest-running column ever in the gay press.

**Muriel Seltman** taught Mathematics and History of Mathematics at various levels before retirement. She is a veteran political activist who is currently an active member of the One Law for All campaign. She has just published her political memoir: *What's Left? What's Right? A Political Journey via North Korea and the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 2010.

**Alom Shaha** is a science teacher, writer, and film-maker. He has worked with a number of high profile scientists including Brian Cox and Marcus du Sautoy, and written, produced and directed films ranging in subject matter from particle physics to mathematics. Alom's creative approach to science communication was recognised with a fellowship from the National Endowment for Science, Technology and The Arts. Alom was born in Bangladesh but raised in Elephant and Castle. In 1998, he was elected a local councillor for the neighbourhood he grew up in, and served on Southwark Council for four years before deciding to take a break from politics. Alom continues to be involved through various voluntary activities, including chairing the Management Committee of Anando Pat, a Saturday School that offers free Bangla lessons to local children. Alom has recently started writing and talking about his atheism in public.

**Joan Smith** is a novelist, columnist and human rights activist. Her columns appear in the Independent, Independent on Sunday and Evening Standard, and she also writes for the Times, Guardian and Sunday Times. She chaired the English PEN Writers in Prison Committee for four years and has advised the Foreign Office on promoting freedom of expression. She is the author of a

dozen books, including *Misogynies* and six novels; the latest, *What Will Survive*, is set in London and Lebanon. She is an Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society.

**Bahram Soroush** is a founding member of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain. He is a social and political analyst and commentator that has been interviewed in a variety of British and international news media, including the BBC, ITN and New Channel TV. He is currently the Public Relations Officer of the WPI's International Labour Solidarity Committee.

**Peter Tatchell** has been campaigning for human rights for over 40 years. He began his human rights campaigning in 1967, against the death penalty and for Aboriginal rights in his homeland of Australia. From 1971, he was a leading activist in the Gay Liberation Front in London. Peter was the defeated Labour candidate in the 1983 Bermondsey by-election, the dirtiest, most violent and homophobic election in Britain in the twentieth century. In 1990, he co-founded the queer rights group OutRage! In 1998, he interrupted the Easter Sermon of the Archbishop of Canterbury in protest at Dr Carey's support for laws that discriminate against queers. In 1999, in London, he ambushed the motorcade of the Zimbabwean President, Robert Mugabe; attempting a citizen's arrest on charges of torture. A repeat attempt in Brussels in 2001 resulted in his being beaten unconscious by Mugabe's bodyguards, which left him with permanent minor brain injuries. Two years later, he ambushed and halted Tony Blair's motorcade in protest at the Iraq war. He was bashed by neo-Nazis and arrested at the Moscow Gay Pride parade in 2007. He was voted the sixth greatest "Hero of our Time" by readers of the *New Statesman* in 2006, and in the same year *The Independent* listed him as one of top 50 "Good" people in Britain. In 2009, he won Campaigner of the Year at the Observer Ethical Awards. He is the Green Party's human rights spokesperson.

**Anne Marie Waters** is Spokesperson of the One Law for All Campaign. She is a lawyer with a keen interest in family law and human rights and the integration of the two. She is the author of *Apostasy and Asylum*, a One Law for All publication, and co-author of *Sharia Law in Britain: A Threat to One Law for All and Equal Rights*.