

## Separation of Mosque and State



[Raheel Raza](#) is the President of the Council of [Muslims Facing Tomorrow](#) (MFT), a non-profit think-tank established with the purpose of bringing together the East and West. She produced a documentary titled, *Whose [Sharia](#) Is It Anyway?* about the debate over *Sharia* Law in Ontario, Canada.

Her organization stands against Islamists, including the [Muslim Brotherhood](#). She said at MFT's launch that, "We wish to expose those elements amongst us who totally disagree with Canadian values, yet insist on using them for nefarious purposes, to conquer and infiltrate."

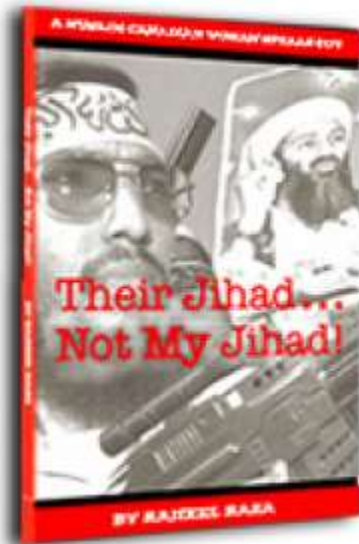
She is the first Muslim woman in Canada to lead mixed gender prayers and runs the [Forum for Learning](#) to educate youth about the dangers of terrorism and radicalization. She has spoken at the House of Commons in Canada and the United Kingdom and at prominent universities including Oxford, Columbia and Cambridge.

The following is Raheel Raza's interview with Clarion Project National Security Analyst Ryan Mauro:

1

**Ryan Mauro: What is the mission of the Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow, and what makes it different from other anti-Islamist Muslim groups?**

**Raheel Raza:** We are a forum for all Muslims who want to be an integral part of Canada's liberal democracy and to be seen as such. We believe in separation of mosque and state. We support and organize open and free intellectual discourse; offer religious, historical and practical education; and maintain dialogue with other faiths. Our goal is to empower Muslim-Canadians to celebrate Canada's cultural diversity in all of its aspects and to keep Canada safe.



MFT is not a religious organization but a movement for Muslims from all backgrounds, traditions and nationalities to face tomorrow, unlike some of my co-religionists who would rather face the 7<sup>th</sup> century. We embrace anyone from any faith or tradition who embraces our vision, and our strength lies in the fact that our advisory board consists of Muslims from various denominations and members of other faiths as well.

MFT wants to hold up the face of Islam that is fully compatible with reason, history and science. In other words, Islam at its essence is an affirmation of monotheism and is not at odds with the modern world. Muslims have forgotten or never fully understood this, except for those early philosophers in Islam who were declared heretics by men in power, such as al-Farabi or al-Kindi or ibn Rushd. Muslim rulers and religious elites turned Islam in a direction contrary to early Muslim thinkers to reflect the dominant culture of the time.

Our effort in MFT is to educate Muslims to be at peace with the modern world since there is nothing in the modern world - in terms of individual freedom, democracy, gender equality, human rights and modern science - that is incompatible with Islam.

2

**Mauro: What is MFT's position on Sharia Law?**

**Raza:** We do not say, for a single moment, that *Sharia* is compatible with democracy or human rights as practice them today. Our website says that “MFT distinguishes between Islam as a monotheistic faith tradition and *Shari'a*, as a time-bound, humanly-constructed legal-political system in the name of Islam from the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century that is mostly at odds with the modern world.

3

**Mauro: Was there a defining moment that compelled you to get involved?**

**Raza:** I have always been an activist speaking out for justice and truth, but 9/11 brought me the realization that the spiritual message of my faith has been hijacked, my voice has been hijacked, my country has been hijacked – so I *have* to speak out.

I did this informally for many years, and then decided that governments have to also get involved because we can't do this on our own. There are very few voices speaking out against the violence in the name of Islam and even fewer women's voices, so as a Muslim woman I stepped forth to defend my faith from those Muslims who have abused it and continue to abuse it.

And in the process of abusing Islam, these Muslims threaten others by intimidating the overwhelming majority of Muslims and violently silencing those Muslims who disagree with them, especially since 9/11.

**Mauro: How do groups like the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) affect the Muslim-American community?**

**Raza:** MFT stands opposed to all these Muslim and Islamic organizations as they represent Islam, more or less, as a political ideology and not a personal faith of individuals. As a political ideology, Islam has been turned into an instrument for power in places like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran. It is used to justify the authority of people like Khomeini and his followers who, in the name of Islam, are at war with the modern world of science, democracy, pluralism, human rights, etc.

These organizations act as if they are the only true representatives of Muslims, that they have the sole monopoly over interpreting Islam. In other words, they think they have the monopoly over God Himself as revealed in the [Quran](#), and it is the result of such arrogance that, throughout history, Muslims who disagree with them are repressed with violence, and Muslims are turned against non-Muslims and by calling them infidels.

We in MFT believe that the darkness prevalent across the Muslim world is directly related to the manner in which Islam has been used and abused for political purposes, and it has been done in opposition to the words of the Quran, which says there can be no compulsion in religion. We believe that, within the limits of our resources, our mission is to rescue Muslims from the rigidity of pre-modern thinking that denies individuals their freedom to think, to reason, to be skeptical of politics and power and to find their own path to spiritual growth.

It is only in a free society that an individual can truly practice Islam as a personal faith in which men and women, out of their own free will, reach out to God as the ever-merciful and the ever-benevolent creator of the universe. This is the face of Islam at peace with the world and at peace with God that we in MFT want to share with everyone, and we can only do this in Canada and other democracies in the West.

Our goal, as we have written in our Mission Statement and Objectives, is to present to Muslims everywhere, especially across the Arab world, this face of Islam that is consistent with one of the sayings of the Prophet of Islam that “God is beautiful and He loves beauty.”

Islam is only genuinely a religion of peace when Muslims re-discover the meaning of beauty in all of creation as God’s gift to be celebrated, to be respected and to be shared, without any discrimination and without any claim of a monopoly on truth.

For this purpose, we wish to reclaim art, music, poetry, architecture and all that is beautiful.



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<http://www.clarionproject.org/print/analysis/muslims-against-islamists-raheel-raza>

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February 1, 2016

## **Separation of mosque and state:**

In covering anti-Shariah bill, media muddy issues

By Jim Davis

<http://www.getreligion.org/getreligion/2016/2/1/separation-of-mosque-and-state-in-covering-anti-shariah-bill-media-muddy-issues>

Those intolerant South Carolinians have gotten a lot of people upset – in a lot of lands – starting with their home state press. A bill in the state house would ban use of the Islamic legal code known as Shariah, an issue that has been thrashed out in at least 16 other states. In this edition, though, most media have produced biased, fragmentary coverage. They’ve also given the most space to the protesters.

The apparent start was a story in the [Columbia Post and Courier](#) on Friday:

COLUMBIA — A national group that lobbies for Muslim civil liberties asked the S.C. Legislature on Friday to drop a bill that would ban Sharia law from being used as a defense in state courts, saying it is unconstitutional.

Council on American-Islamic Relations attorney William Burgess said the bill violated the Constitution’s Establishment Clause on religion because it is designed to attack Muslim religious principles.

Sharia law is the legal framework where the public and some private aspects of life are regulated under legal systems based on Islam.

“This legislation is very similar to the Oklahoma anti-Sharia constitutional amendment that was struck down as a violation of the Establishment Clause in a federal court challenge brought by CAIR,” Burgess wrote.

At least they took a stab at defining Shariah. But it doesn't clarify why anyone would find Shariah objectionable.

The Post and Courier quotes the CAIR letter that cites the Oklahoma case, in which a federal judge ruled the anti-Shariah law breached the separation of church and state. Finally – at the end of the article – the newspaper allows Rep. Chip Limehouse, the bill sponsor, to give an example of what the bill might prevent: “(With this law) an attorney can’t go into state court and say that the defendant that beat up his daughter for going on a date with a non-Muslim was within his rights

according to (Sharia law)." But Limehouse doesn't get to answer Burgess' assertion that the bill is unconstitutional.

Perhaps the Post and Courier thought it could shorten the story because it [ran another piece the previous day](#). But of course, they couldn't be sure the readers saw that one. Also, that story had four paragraphs of counter-argument from an opponent in the legislature, saying the bill wouldn't help pay for roads or build education or increase jobs. So the cumulative effect of both stories is still negative.

For a better report, you have to look across the nation – to the Courthouse News Service, based in Pasadena, Calif. Their story, which moved around the same time, is [longer and more balanced](#):

(CN) - A bill in the South Carolina Legislature that would prohibit attorneys and defendants from citing Sharia law or any international regulation in court is a step closer to adoption.

After a second reading, the state House passed the provision sponsored by Charleston Rep. Chip Limehouse by a vote of 68-42.

On Friday, in the wake of the vote, the Council on American-Islamic Relations called on the S.C. General Assembly to drop what the group described as the continuation of a national campaign by state lawmakers "demonize Islam and to marginalize American Muslims."

See what I mean? It's terser, more forceful, yet fairer. It then segues into a pro/con segment:

South Carolina lawmakers readily concede they can point to not a single example of someone trying to cite Sharia law, or any international law, in a court within the state.

Nevertheless, Rep. Limehouse believes there's a real need, as the bill states, "to prevent a court or other enforcement authority from enforcing foreign law including, but not limited to, sharia law in this state from a forum outside of the United States or its territories ..."

But the CN report isn't unflawed. It says that the American Bar Association has opposed anti-Shariah laws as redundant and meant to stigmatize an entire religious community." Actually, it reports CAIR saying that; apparently, it didn't check for itself.

And talk about redundancy – here is CN's definition: "Sharia law is the legal framework for legal systems based on Islam." How do you define a word by using similar terms three times?

But the coverage worsened over the weekend, after Al-Jazeera got hold of the story. That's right, [the same Al-Jazeera that I've been praising](#) for its sensitivity and sharp eye on religion news. But not for this [alarmist version of the South Carolina story](#).

The article is terribly lopsided, starting with the lede: "A state politician's bill to bar foreign laws, including Islamic law, from South Carolina's courts is an unnecessary move that fuels anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States, rights groups say."

Eight quotes come from Robert McCaw of CAIR. He says the South Carolina bill is part of a national "environment of fear" meant to "stigmatise Muslim communities." Says U.S. courts are already bound to follow U.S. law. Warns of "a state and federal trend for support for legislation which seeks to make the religious principles of Islam illegal."

As context, Al-Jazeera cites Donald Trump's call for American Muslims to be tracked and mosques to be watched. It also brings up the recent terrorist attacks in San Bernardino and Paris, "after which several mosques and Islamic religious centres were vandalised in the US."

And the article mentions "at least six anti-foreign law bills introduced in state legislatures across the country in 2015," without specifying what that means. Were they anti-Shariah? Something else?

At least Al-Jazeera interviews Limehouse, the bill sponsor – although tainting him as a member of the "right-wing Republican Party." He says people of every religion are welcome, but they must "operate and live under our laws when they get here – and hopefully prosper."

That's nice. But then the article has McCaw come back with: "It's obvious that this is an incredibly toxic, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim environment, and that is has impacted our state and federal legislatures."

Even as its American branch [prepares to close April 30](#), Al-Jazeera's coverage retains considerable influence. You may have noticed that the above article ran on GhanaWeb. I also saw a [digest in The Manila Times](#). Both stories had the same scare-mongering headline: "US anti-Islamic bills create 'environment of fear'."