

Open letter to university students, academics, and the press

The Danish Government Exercises Opinion Tyranny and Threatens the University of Copenhagen!

On March 25, 2022, lecturer, debater, and member of Hizb ut Tahrir, Taimullah Abu Laban, was invited by the Muslim Student Association (MSA) City Campus to give a lecture at the University of Copenhagen's (KU) Faculty of Social Sciences. The event was titled: "Should Islam be modernized?".

For all who participated, it was clear that the event was a success - the debate was both factual, lively, and critical.

However, the subsequent political reaction was unmistakable. It was aggressive, as we have seen so many times before, when Muslims express themselves publicly from a non-secular perspective. Intense political pressure was put on the University of Copenhagen's Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences for allowing the event.

The former Speaker of the Danish Parliament, Pia Kjaersgaard, demanded a statement from the Minister of Integration. The spokesman for the government party made a furious comment in which he attacked the dean directly.

However, the hysterical political attack did not stop there. After the dean refused to give in to the political pressure, the government got directly involved in the debate. In an interview with BT, the Minister of Education and Research attacked the dean several times for allowing the event and accused the faculty of "condoning an old-fashioned view of equality".

The minister further accused the dean of being "infinitely naive" because he had stated that the students themselves chose their seats. If one believes that Muslims act voluntarily according to their own convictions in this country, one is apparently blatantly naive.

In the meantime, the undersigned had been invited by MSA Southern Campus to a debate with KU's own professor, Thomas Hoffmann, on 17 May, under the title "Gang Crime: Is Islam the Problem or the Solution?". On Facebook alone, nearly 700 people had stated that they would either attend or be interested in the event.

But the government had other thoughts.

The newly appointed Minister of Integration, Kaare Dybvad Bek, has a lot to live up to after his two predecessors, when it comes to hysterical outbursts against Islam and Muslims. He gave an interview to Weekendavisen and wrote a lengthy comment on Facebook, both of which were one long series of accusations, spiced with new threats against the dean, whom the minister reminded of his "fine salary". The Minister went so far as to promise legal restrictions or imposed "guidelines" for the university if the dean himself would not ban Hizb ut Tahrir from future events.

The result? A canceled debate. MSA's board were called, contrary to all procedure, for a mysterious meeting with no less than two deans and the faculty director. For "unknown reasons", the meeting can only take place long after the date of the planned debate.

In this case, I would like to highlight the following:

- The Danish government claims that Hizb ut Tahrir and others, who base their values and views on Islam, threaten cohesion, democracy, and the liberal values of freedom. But it is a globally known fact that the work of Hizb ut Tahrir is exclusively political and intellectual. If democracy and the liberal values of freedom do not stand up to debate, then what are they worth?

- Nothing undermines the principles that are claimed to be the most sacred in Danish society, more effectively than the continuously increasing coercive policy of changing governments for the past 20 years.

- The cancellation of the planned debate event on 17 May at KU comes as a direct result of political pressure and threats from the highest place directed at the faculty management. It can only be described as opinion tyranny and censorship.

- The government undermines KU's self-determination, disqualifies the many students and academics who had looked forward to attending the debate, and undermines KU's professor as a professional and suitable counter-debater.

- MSA is subject to discrimination and prevented from arranging a highly socially relevant debate, despite compliance with all legislation and all university guidelines.

- Freedom of expression, once again, proves to be a political tool that is extremely convenient when Muslims are subjected to hatred by the politicians, but completely dispensable when they want to ban "inconvenient" views from the debate. Nothing new on that front.

To university students and academics:

Your opportunities for open, critical debate are being curtailed from the highest political place these days. If the higher educational institutions are not to develop into an echo chamber of "common" opinions, dictated by the ministers' mood and temperament, a reaction is required. In this situation, it is necessary that KU's management is made to understand that its handling of this case is an expression of an unnaturally flexible backbone, and that the university's students and users, unlike the management, value principles higher than the risk of being scolded by livelihood-politicians.

To the Danish press:

In this, as in many other cases, much can be deduced from what you **do not** cover. When personal attacks were launched after MSA's previous event, there was no shortage of willing microphone holders. But except for a comment in the Weekendavisen by a clearly disappointed Thomas Hoffmann, there has been only noisy and uncritical silence regarding the political cancellation of the debate on 17 May. You clearly have no concern for open debate in universities. The conclusion seems to be that one can either hold the same opinions as the integration minister or learn to accept mockery and ridicule – so free is the choice!

I, and Hizb ut Tahrir / Denmark, will continue to be active in the debate. With or without the University of Copenhagen. With or without government approval. Unlike the Danish politicians, we actually stand by our views.

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