

Dear Home Secretary,

We would like to draw your attention to the intended entry to the UK next week of Robert Spencer and Pamela Geller, two American nationals, and Anders Gravens Pederson, a Danish national, all associated with extreme anti-Muslim views and the promotion of violent Islamophobic groups. We, and other civil rights organisations, believe there are compelling reasons to refuse them entry to the UK.

These individuals, who are notorious for their anti-Muslim rhetoric, have been invited to address a public gathering of the far-right English Defence League (EDL) on Armed Forces Day, Saturday 29th June. The gathering is due to place in Woolwich, near where Drummer Lee Rigby was murdered a month ago. A petition calling upon you to deny them entry to the UK, on the grounds of their likelihood to promote hatred and potentially provoke serious criminal activity, has recently been organised by anti-extremism campaigners HOPE not hate. As an organisation with a similar history of opposing religiously-motivated hate crime and tackling extremist movements, we at Faith Matters would also like to express our alarm at the planned visit by these speakers, and urge you to take seriously the threat they pose to equality, peace, and inter-religious coexistence in the UK.

HOPE not hate's letter calls upon you to bar Geller and Spencer from entering the UK, and lists some of the pair's recent anti-Muslim activism as evidence of why their presence is likely to encourage violent hatred and racist/anti-Muslim prejudice in the UK. Pamela Geller has led strident opposition to an Islamic centre in New York City; has referred to Palestinians/Muslims as 'savages'; has denied the Srebrenica genocide; has called Islam "an extreme ideology"; claims Barack Obama is a "muhammadan... who wants jihad to win"; and says that the EDL are "courageous English patriots".

Spencer's meanwhile has been labeled as "The principal leader... in the new academic field of Islam-bashing" by a former aide to Richard Nixon and was, along with Geller, quoted significantly by Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik in his 'manifesto'. Having examined and come into contact with Geller and Spencer's work in the past, we would suggest that the pair are some of the main figures involved in stirring up organised anti-Muslim prejudice in the Western world today. Just as we ban religious hate preachers who stir up sectarian and other tensions, so too should we prevent those such as Geller and Spencer whose words have led to so much division and damage to community cohesion.

HOPE not hate and Faith Matters are not the only organisations that have expressed serious concerns about the impact of the rhetoric and activities of Spencer, Gravens, Geller, and their close network of organisations (including the American Freedom Defense Initiative, Stop the Islamisation of America, and Stop the Islamisation of Nations). The highly-respected Community Security Trust (an organisation working against antisemitic hate crime) has described SIOE (Stop The Islamization of Europe), an organisation run by Anders Gravens and that is closely associated with Geller and Spencer, as filled with '*anti-Muslim bigotry*' and as a '*recruiting sergeant for ... the far right [that] provides the fuel for terrorism*'. US organisations have similarly condemned the pair and the movement they represent – the Southern Poverty Law Centre has described SIOA as a '*hate group*' that '*mingles comfortably with*

European racists and fascists’, while the Anti-Defamation League has described it as promulgating ‘*virulent anti-Muslim bigotry and conspiracy theories*’, actions that it calls ‘*abhorrent and morally repugnant*’. The ADL cites in particular the militant nature of her rhetoric – she suggests that, if her supposed Muslim enemies sought to prevent her from speaking, she and her followers ‘*have no other recourse but to resort to violence*’. In addition, Media Matters for America, a media watchdog group, has noted her ‘*history of outrageous, inflammatory, and false claims*’ citing her tendency to engage in anti-Muslim, racist, anti-Semitic and transphobic rhetoric when given a public platform. In short, Geller, Spencer, Gravers and their organisations are widely recognised to be closely linked to a range of violent anti-minority activities, and have a history of using their platforms to spur violent prejudice against minorities and their opponents.

The Home Secretary is capable, under the unacceptable behavior policy, of denying entry permits to hate promoters and supporters of ‘violent extremism’. These include those who, through public speaking or the distribution of printed or online material, seek to ‘foster hatred which might lead to inter-community violence in the UK’, foment or ‘seek to provoke others to serious criminal activity’ (see attachment 4). Indeed, a precedent for denying entry on these grounds has previously been set by former Home Secretary Jacqui Smith in 2009, when the UK refused to admit the controversial American ‘shock jock’ **Michael Savage** (whose UK travel ban was upheld by the Coalition Government in July 2010), the white supremacist **Stephen Donald Black** (founder of ‘Stormfront’, a major white separatist/Neo-Nazi website), **Fred Waldron Phelps** (a Christian hate preacher who intended to picket the funerals of British soldiers), and **Abdul Alim Musa** (an anti-Semitic hate preacher). As far as we are aware, this policy is still in place, and we would suggest that given Geller’s/Spencer’s/Gravers’ history of promoting anti-Muslim prejudice and hatred (as well as hatred against other minority groups), they would certainly fall into this category.

Following the tragic murder of Lee Rigby, police and monitoring agencies across the country have seen a dramatic rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes and incidents, with many – like the recent arson of the Al Rahma Islamic Centre in London – seeming to suggest clear ties to the EDL. Given existing tensions in the UK surrounding this issue, we would strongly suggest that the presence of Geller and Spencer as speakers would do only inflame sentiments on all sides, encourage violence, and serve as a rallying point both for violent anti-Muslim groups (such as the EDL) and proscribed extreme groups such as al-Muhajiroun and Muslims Against the Crusades. Given their long-term reporting on Muslim issues, Spencer and Geller are most likely aware of this potential for ‘tit-for-tat radicalisation’.

For all these reasons, we strongly urge you to exercise your powers as Home Secretary and block Geller, Spencer and Gravers from entering the country and from being allowed to address the EDL gathering on Saturday 29th June.

Yours sincerely,

Fiyaz Mughal OBE
Director
Faith Matters