

Minaret of Freedom 5th Annual Dinner Edited Transcript

Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad: Tonight's theme is the secular threat to freedom of expression. This is a very, very important issue, and one that's under-appreciated. Since the Enlightenment a mythology has been propagated that religion restricts freedom of expression. Then, it is only the overthrow of religion, or at least its confinement to a private space, that will allow the flourishing of different points of view so that people can have a free marketplace of ideas in which ideas, good and bad, will challenge one another. The good will prevail and we'll all be able to judge for ourselves what's true and what's false. Of course the Muslims in this audience know that the idea of the free marketplace of ideas is in the Qur'an, where Allah explains that the way to respond to falsehood is to hurl truth at it and truth will bash the brains out of falsehood.

What few realize is the degree to which some people have taken secularism to an extreme and caused a movement that I refer to as "Secular Fundamentalism" that is as intolerant as the medieval Church ever was, of different ideas. Tonight's guests are going to paint that picture for you and make it real. These are both people who have suffered from secular extremism. I have to explain "Secular Extremism" to an American audience, because most Americans are naive about this. We think that a government is secular if it is neutral in matters of religion; and that is an innocuous, perhaps even beneficial idea. Government should be neutral in matters of religion. This is not just for the protection of the government. We don't want the advocates of a particular religious view to impose their views on the government, but even more importantly we don't want the government to be imposing its religious views on the people. So the American concept of secularism makes a lot of sense. The trouble is that this is not what secularism means in a large part of the world, nor is it what it's becoming to be in America today. I'd like to compare the American concept of secularism with the French concept *laicism*, the idea that not only must the government be neutral, but that there must be no evidence of religion at all in the public life. Religion must be totally suppressed.

It's not just the French who feel this way, although we associate this idea with the French Revolution. It is certainly the case in Turkey. Those of you who were here a couple of years ago and heard all of this discussion of what's going on in Turkey are already somewhat familiar with that. Tonight, however, you are going to get the first-hand view from a person who is sincerely devoted to freedom of expression—not only to freedom of expression of Muslims, but to freedom of expression as a universal value, not only of Islam, but of all clear-thinking people. I will not introduce her; she will be introduced in a moment by one of our board members.

Our other speaker is going to make it clear that this threat is not just in Turkey and France, and Tunisia, and Algeria, and other parts of the world we can mention. That it is happening right here in the United States. Are second speaker is a very outspoken, and I think effective, spokesman for the Palestinian cause, and there is no doubt in my mind that all the trouble that he's been subjected to have been not because of some imagined links to terrorism, but because he's so good at speaking for the Palestinians.

The one thing that you can do to stop people is to smear them and to try to drive a wedge between the effective leadership and the people who can get inspiration from their leadership. Now, I heard Imam Johari say, "That's right." You know this has been done before in this country and the government has admitted to it. There was a project called COINTELPRO. 1960's they began to deliberately make up false stories about the black leadership of various kinds. The mere act of flinging out these accusations, although they couldn't prove any of them, was to get the black African-American masses to stop following their leaders. I believe that that's what's going on right now.

While we don't have the smoking gun, the government has now admitted that COINTELPRO is real, but they swear their not doing it anymore. [Some laughter.] They're doing it to black leaders. I don't have any inside information, but when I look at what's happening to H. Rap Brown and Jamal Abu Mumiya, questions are raised in my mind. I'll put it mildly. Questions are raised in my mind that I would like to have an answer to. One way to get an answer to those questions is to let our guest speak for himself. That's my answer to some people who have said to me when they saw who was on our program tonight. They said, "Boy, you're brave." This is what we do. We raise and answer questions. This is what we do and we're going to keep doing it as long as Allah allows it.

Unidentified audience member: Amen.

Audience: *Allahu Akbar.*

Ahmad: Now I am going to introduce one of our board members, Sharmin Ahmad, to introduce our first speaker. Sharmin has been our secretary since the beginning. She's one of our founding board members. She is a pillar of the organization. A lot of other organization might like to have a token woman on their board. Sharmin is no token. I'm sorry that our other female board member, an articulate spokeswoman for the Palestinian cause, Maysam al-Faruqi, unfortunately could not be here tonight. She had another engagement. But Sharmin is here and Sharmin will introduce our first speaker.

Sharmin Ahmad: Thank you all so much for coming. I'm honored to present our new respected guest speaker. Here we are to promote liberty and how Islam is related to the cause of human rights and the progress of humanity. Fundamentalism does not necessarily stand for religion. Fundamentalists represent a mindset that is coercive, repressive, irrational, illogical, thus are in threat to the progress of humanity. The fundamentalists may take refuge either in the religious stronghold or in the secular stronghold and perpetrate their crimes against humanity. As women, our challenges are much more complex in society. As women, we encounter challenges. And as Muslim women, our task is further challenging. And here comes the story of Merve Kavakci. By profession she's a software engineer. By passion she's an Islamist. She's the first woman parliamentarian in Turkish parliament who was elected despite wearing a *hijab*. And for that reason, she was denied her seat in the Turkish parliamentary in the year 1999. Subsequently, the party she represents, the Virtue Party, was banned in Turkey.

She along with four of her colleagues were barred from rerunning in parliamentary elections for the next five years. Merve represents the unique struggle as woman, as Muslim woman. As members of this human family we encounter on a day-to-day basis. And I'd like to welcome sister Merve Kavakci.

[Applause]

Merve Kavakci: I thank my sister for this beautiful introduction. I'm not sure if I deserve that, and I thank you. I'm just doing whatever is necessary to be done today for the cause of liberation of Eastern women. In my speeches I used to say that freedom of expression in the United States is an example of true democracy and that secularism as practiced here is similarly an example of true secularism. But, [during dinner], I had a chance to talk to Mrs. Al-Arian to listen to her story about her brother [Mazen An-Najjar]. Today, I see tonight's speakers, myself as well as Dr. Al-Arian and as well as Mrs. Arian's brother, who is in solitary confinement, as victims of secular restrictions on Islam. The persecution of Dr. Al-Arian gives the lie to claims of respect to individual rights, to its most fundamental form of which is expressed in the Bill of Rights. Handcuffing them and putting them in solitary confinement is not embracing "all yearning to breathe free".

Many of us thought after 200 years of slavery, the Civil War, the struggles of 20th century, in particular the civil rights struggle of America 1960's America has reached the conscious decision to live up to the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Declaration, and the Bill of Rights. The recent events, more than any other time suppose the view held by many that all of these manifestations, declarations, and proclamations were merely expressions of political correctness of the times they were made, and not necessarily the generally held collective held moral consciousness. Morality, respect for human rights, equality, justice for all are all inclusive indivisible concepts. When they are divided or applied selectively, they disappear. In using the United States as an example of these lofty concepts, we were hoping to effect a change in the behavior of the tormentors of the Muslims in Turkey and Israel. Recent developments unfortunately show that instead of Israel and Turkey learning a thing or two from the United States, it is United States taking lessons from Israel and Turkey. [Some laughter.]

A professor from Harvard University, who is regarded by many as a champion of individual rights, a liberal, a defender of due process before the state, suggested that torture would be employed as a tool of interrogation. Nobody in the so-called liberal media or human rights advocacy community except for Muslims, the intended victims practice, objected. Not only that, there is strong evidence that government has used and is still using the methods suggested by Dr. Alan Dershowitz as an interrogation tool in it's witch-hunt. Would you have believed in a thousand years that Ariel Sharon would be declared a man of peace by the President of United States? And Turkey described as the ideal Islamic country, offered as a prototype to be emulated by the other Muslim countries?

Before going into the issues as to the freedom of expression and secularism, I would like to take a few minutes in describing the circumstances in which we find ourselves, so that the concepts can be better related to the issues and the experiences of the Muslims in their work community. More often than not, we Muslims living in the West, and in particularly in America find ourselves on the defensive on issues raging from tolerance of others to violence, and so forth. All the while that Muslims are subjected to barbarities such as massacres, we are sitting in the defendant's chair in the court set up by the mainstream media—especially in the superpower United States. Unfortunately, Muslims fall in the trap willingly or unwillingly. Since September 11th, especially during the immediate aftermath, the answer to such accusations had been one of the dissociation of Islam and Muslims or the particular groups being reported from those who permitted these violent acts. Very few even mention the dirty works' root causes.

I do not know how the American public at large viewed the condemnation of terrorism and the message of Islam is a peaceful religion, but the media does not seem to be affected by it. Even today, when Muslims are buried alive in India in a place of worship, a mosque, by non-Muslims and even when their houses are bulldozed or run over by the tanks in Palestine, we find ourselves as Muslims in an apologetic mode. Do not think that those who poison the public minds with accusations believe what they say. As a matter of fact, I think that they know what they are saying is false. They do know who did what. They know well that that the Inquisition was not committed by Muslims. In fact, the survivors of the Inquisition were given shelter and comfort by the Muslim Ottoman Empire. They did not experience the Holocaust in the hands of Muslims. During an aftermath of the Holocaust though, it was again Muslims who gave homes to the survivors who escaped from Europe. Some pay back I would say. When Muslims were defeated in Iberian Peninsula, then called Andalusia, all Muslims were killed, uprooted, or forced to convert to Christianity, but around the same time, Christians were prospering in Muslim controlled lands—no inquisition or retaliation was carried out. There is nothing in Islamic history, not in modern times or in medieval times, that comes close to the genocide and rape that took place at the end of the second millennium perpetrated against Muslims. Nor is there an equivalent of the killing of one million Algerians by the colonist French in the effort to deny them self-determination. Yes, the destruction of Buddha statues by Taliban was deplorable, but it more deplorable than burning mosques, sometimes with the people in them, and building in their places Hindu temples—or houses for the settlers, for that matter today in Palestine?

My intention is not to disparage other religions or to cast aspersions on their followers. It is merely to make the point that the characterizations directed at Islam and Muslims stick, not because of factuality, but because those with an animosity towards Muslims or those who have other interests to promote, control the sources of information. The same double standard, hypocrisy, moral inconsistency are applicable to the issues pertaining to secularism. Interestingly, this secularization of Islam and suggestions on how it should be carried out are coming from now non-Muslims. If Islam needs reinterpretation, should not Muslims raise this? Why is it that we find the well known enemies of Islam behind every effort to secularize or modernize Muslim countries? Do

we see Muslims behind a movement to reinterpret the New Testament or the Old Testament?

Can there truly be a basis for reinterpretation/secularization of a religion? Isn't secularization of Islam an oxymoron? A religion cannot be separated from itself. These are obviously rhetorical questions, the answers to which are very clear. It is no surprise that the enemies of Islam offer Turkey as the model of a moderate Islamic country to be emulated by others, especially as far as the liberation of Afghani women are concerned. The people in Turkey are Muslims, but the state is staunchly anti-Islamist and anti-secular, I would say. A couple of years ago a chief justice of court of appeals in Turkey, Mr. Sami Sancu [sp.?] provided an excellent treatise on the climate of the Turkish State and its people. In the treatise he likened the word "reaction", as in reactionary, which is the favorite term the Turkish secularists use to describe observant Muslims like myself and the word such as "Kamelism", "Republic", "Modernity", and "empty containers" in his article. Empty containers in the sense that they have no fixed content, that anything can be put in them without changing the label of the container. They not only they call us reactionary, they punish us for being "reactionary" or "anti-secular" or "backward". When we asked them, what it exactly being reactionary, they do not give a definition, but only say they do know whatever we are doing, is reactionary and anti-social.

This arbitrariness makes a mockery of the justice system in Turkey. Trust me. I know it. Since my own ordeal is a typical case in illustrating how "secularism" is practiced in Turkey today, I would like to give a summary of events that culminated in my visit here tonight. I come from an observant Muslim family where both of my parents had been persecuted for being observant Muslims as academicians. My mother was forced to leave her teaching position in German literature at Hacettepa University in 1980 solely because of her scarf. My first encounter with persecution due to my hijab occurred during my studentship in medical school of Ankara University. After two years of harassment by the university administration and professors, I was forced to terminate my education and hopes of being a medical doctor in 1988. I left Turkey soon after, and came to the United States to continue my education. I completed my education in computer science from University of Texas. A basic human right of Muslim women denied by a Muslim country was respected by a secular, predominantly non-Muslim country, the United States. Notwithstanding the current violation of the human rights of Muslim Americans nowadays, I'm grateful for this country, for the opportunity it provided me to obtain an education.

Upon my graduation I returned back to Turkey and became involved in politics in the advocacy of Muslim women's rights in the Welfare Party where I occupied several positions including the chair of international relations division. In 1999 my party nominated me for a seat in the parliament. Candidates from the party included a number of females. Of those, three women were elected. I was the only, and the first, one to be elected with hijab. Hijab, scarf, has been part of my personality, ordered, I believe, from my Creator, a right as a part of my human dignity. I could not have even thought of compromising that. I was nominated with my hijab on, and then declared eligible to run for the parliament by the state of Turkey through the supreme election commission, with

my scarf on. I campaigned and met thousands of people of Istanbul with my scarf on. And more importantly, I was elected from a part of Istanbul where some people just voted for me because I was wearing hijab, and some—who belonged to parts of Istanbul where non-Muslims were living because I was a woman—and I was a young woman. And it was a great feeling to know that after the election people from different walks of life walked up to me and said, “We need more women and more young women representation in the parliament. That’s why we voted for you.” Later, interestingly, I would be accused of pushing a political ploy as a part of my Islamic agenda by the very state that accredited me as a parliamentarian.

Hell broke loose, if you will excuse my expression, on the fateful day of my swearing in, as I walked into the chamber with my hijab. Prime Minister Ecevit used the scarf in a political lynching campaign Turkey has never witnessed before. Eventually he ordered his deputies to “put this woman in her place”. Those six words are etched in the national memory of Turkey. Nearly eighty years after the establishment of democracy, the prime minister of a democratic, so-called, European country, and the leader of the party called democratic leftist party that champions liberalism, women’s rights and establishment of western values in Turkey, ordered its members to put another member of the parliament in her place when that woman was elected by a landslide to the national assembly. His deputies acting in a thuggish fashion heeded the order. After chanting non-stop for forty-five minutes, “get out, get out”, they forced me out of the assembly without taking my oath.

I was not the only one victimized by the hatred of this staunchly secular administration, not to mention the denial of rights of my electorate. Women with hijab were harassed, abused and some were attacked by the provoked people following the parliament instant after that. Then the president of the country labeled me as an agent provocateur on national TV the very same night, which was an allegation far from truth. The series of mob-like activities against an elected MP was applauded by the generals, the military members, who hold the ultimate power in administration. They express their opinion, which in Turkey’s case, it is rather their ordered that I would not be allowed into the parliament with my hijab. “We will smash the heads of all traitors,” a general declared. I and the members of my party were the traitors, to them. A week after the incident, the state prosecutor had formal charges asking for disclosure of the party and banning elected deputies, which eventually took place in June, 2001. As my introducer has explained earlier, including myself, five members of the parliament, are barred from being elected for the next five years. The interesting thing is that, one of them is another parliamentarian, a secular women in her own lifestyle, who dared to accompany me to the national assembly that day. She is also seen as a threat to the secular system and banned from politics for the next five years. Another one is a male parliamentarian who has dared to write a book about me who is also banned from politics for the next five years.

The merciless character assassination, bullying and it is a psychological destruction campaign against an elected MP and her supporters were carried out through the media, i.e., the cartel in Turkey. Certain information about the cartel media is critical. In Turkey about 90% of the media is controlled by a handful of individuals all of whom

have very cozy relationships with the government officials, high-ranking bureaucrats, and the military leaders. These individuals' power is not only limited to journalism, but extends to economics and politics as well. They are the ones who received the sweetheart deals in government contract, including telecommunication licenses, gas pipelines and public work projects. Almost invariably, the names of one or more of the owners of these newspapers, or their columnists, surface in big embezzlement schemes, export schemes or other corrupt activities. Now the reason of giving this detail about the cartel is to apprise you of one dimension of the oppression millions of Muslims in Turkey endure every day. I happen to be only one of them. That dimension is the dimension of corruption—money to put it simply. The existing system that is based on chaos, non-functioning government institutions, and the lack of public morals and a clean government is a perfect environment for the corrupt entities which will do anything to maintain their entrenched power. These entities were then, and are now, the ones who initiate an all out war against Islam, against hijab.

The question in mind is, how do they perceive their mission in keeping the government corrupt through all out war against Islam? The answer is simple. Through synonyms such as Westernism, modernism and secularism. As much as it might appear from our side that as the oppression of the conservative Muslims in Turkey is that of a political ideology, because people are afraid of Islam, a more important motivation is in perpetuation of the environment for which they receive a windfall at the expense of millions of Turkish people. That is why the ones in the front lines of the all out war against Islam are the same ones whose names are associated with corruption, big embezzlement. These include government officers, high-ranking military members and high-ranking bureaucrat officials.

Now, going back to my story, eleven days after this assault in the parliament, the Prime Minister, in a special emergency session of the cabinet, issued a government decree revoking my Turkish citizenship due to my dual citizenship, in open violation of my parliamentary immunity and in open contradiction of the Turkish constitution and international conventions. But that did not matter. The decision was made. I was not going to be allowed into the parliament with my hijab, the excuse to be brought later.

Although the supreme election commission insisted that I was fully elected member of the parliament, and therefore it was the parliament itself to decide by the full membership of the parliament and to revoke my membership, the administration kept ignoring it. As a result, for the first time in the country's history, the citizenship of a deputy was terminated, and that was considered as the termination in the membership of the parliament as well. Although I regained my Turkish citizenship later through marriage and was given citizenship by the state of Turkey, I am still treated as a non-citizen by the current government. I have sued the current administration for expelling me from Turkish citizenship. After exhausting all domestic avenues, my case is in the European court of human rights today. It is definitely no exception. It is rather emblematic of ever increasing human rights abuses carried out by the entity that is afraid of its own people. There are around 400 cases before the European court of human rights today concerning only the violations related to the wearing of hijab.

Ahmad: I'm glad that Merve closed her talk alluding to the role the criticisms of corruption by Welfare deputies played in the closing of the party. I was criticized for my promotional letter in that I made it sound that as though it was only because she wore a headscarf that the Welfare Party was banned. Rather, the party was a critic of the corruption in Turkey. The headscarf is the excuse that is used in the same way that in Algeria that the accusation that the Islamists would force women to wear hijab is the excuse for suppressing that party there, when the real issue has to do with the rabid mismanagement of the Algerian economic system by the ruling elites. But that's another subject.

I would like to now introduce another member of our board, Ali Abuza`kouk is also a founding member of the board. Ali is a wonderful guy. We're talking here about speaking the truth to Pharaoh and I love Ali because he's someone who's always honest, with me at least. He's a guy you can rely on, a very sincere and committed Muslim, and I have been very grateful for his commitment to the Minaret of Freedom Institute. Right now, he's going to give us an honest introduction to our next speaker.

Ali Abuza`kouk: As-salamu `alaikum.

After the wonderful speech by our beloved sister Merve Kavakci—may Allah (swt) redeem the Turkish people and the Turkish sisters and her from the saga,—we come to another saga, a saga of an American Muslim family. There is no reason for the torment and the troubles that this family has been through except that they were originally Palestinians. Not just that, but they were able to articulate a view that their adversaries, and I always liked the word adversaries for our “friends” outside, do not like to be aired in the American society. I know Sami since he came here as a student, and I know Mazen Al-Najjar since I came here as a student. I want you to all now to make a special prayer for our beloved brother Dr. Mazen Al-Najjar who has been, by the American Federal courts, exonerated from being in any way related to terrorism, and from any crime whatsoever, and suddenly, the defender, the champion of our civil rights, Mr. Ashcroft ordered him back in jail, 23 hours a day in solitary confinement. This is the land of the free and the home of the brave, and he was supposed to be the defender of our civil rights.

Dr. Sami Al-Arian is a tenured professor in the University of South Florida. You don't get tenure without hard work and seat, and without being a well-educated person. He is well-liked by his students and his colleagues. Nevertheless our adversaries do not want his voice to be there. And now they have put him, for the second time in the history of his academic life, out of the classroom. The president of USF, Dr. Judith Genschaft, wanted to terminate his service. I'm glad we still live in a good country. The academic institutions came in defense of Sami and the case is still pending. What I can say is that the saga of the Al-Arian family and the saga of the Al-Najjar family is the saga of an American Muslim family in the land of the free and the home of the brave. When people speak the truth, sometimes others see it as a torment. We Muslims see it as a blessing, because the test in this life will determine our destiny hereafter. After this, I would love

to introduce to you my dear friend, one of the champions of our civil liberties and civil rights in America, Sami Al-Arian.

Sami Al-Arian: Thank you very much brother Ali. I want to thank also Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad for inviting me and giving me this opportunity to talk to you tonight on some very important subjects, in sha Allah.

I have to start by saying as-salamu `alaikum.

After listening to sister Merve, I think the best revenge against the government of Turkey is to elect her to the Congress of the United States. [Laughter]

Usually when I give this speech, I like to remove myself a little bit and talk about the status of civil rights in post September 11th America. This is part of my speeches that I've been giving for the past few months at different campuses around the country. Today I've been asked to focus more on my personal story. I was born in Kuwait to Palestinian Parents, moved to Egypt, stayed there for about nine years when I was eight. I came here at the age of seventeen, in 1975. I got my education here, a bachelor's degree from University of Illinois and a masters and Ph.D. from North Carolina State, and I have been teaching at the University South Florida for the past sixteen plus years.

During all that time obviously, whether it was youthful years or more mature years, we were very much in different Islamic activism. More specifically on the Palestinian cause for many years, that between 1987 and 1993 during the first intifada, we were very active holding conferences, symposiums, different activities—sometimes even newsletters, magazines and so forth, talking about what the Palestinians were going through. We knew that this was going to be basically more of a public education discourse. This was not what we were looking for in terms that would engage a more important segment of our community, in particular the academic community, because we were basically academics involved in this.

Our more serious project was the establishment of the World Islamic Studies Enterprise. Among us today is Mr. Charles Butterworth who attended several events and activities, with this particular think tank. And that's why I value so much the work of Imad-ad-Dean and the Minaret and other think tanks. Because we really, truly need Muslim think tanks. This will give you the philosophical background that is needed for the advancement of Muslims and different organizations within the society here. It's not enough to have CAIR and AMC and all the different political organizations unless you have some think tanks behind them who are able to articulate the different ideas that these organizations will carry forward within the society. With our particular organization that we established, we were trying to challenge the idea that was being advanced in the early 90's of the clash of civilizations. We thought that we don't need a clash of civilizations, what we need is dialogue of those civilizations. And we thought of ourselves to be suited to be a bridge between the Muslim East and the western world. We knew both worlds. Part of our idea was to involve a round table discussion by bringing Muslim thinkers such as Hassan At-Turabi and a whole host of others, and western

intellectuals, western academics to spend the whole day debating with them, conversing with them, discussing with them, important issues to both worlds. And at the same time to have our own journal in Arabic that could be addressed to the different intellectuals and academics overseas which are now at work. And that's how we can bring and bridge and engage in that debate.

We were pretty active between 1990 and 1995 on this enterprise and this endeavor. We produced about twenty volumes and we had several round table discussions and we brought a couple of intellectuals. Obviously a lot of people were watching us and observing us who didn't like what we were producing; and they started attacking us. I did not realize the viciousness of such attacks or the endurance of such attacks until later. They started attacking us very early on in 1993, 1994 when we started trying to bring Rashid al-Ghanouchi in to be one of those intellectuals to have dialogue with. And eventually, you know, it came to a campaign by Stephen Emerson and others, locally. And of course, part of the problem was that we had a member who was in our organization in our midst, when he left six months later, he became the head of the Islamic Jihad organization at the time. That's back in '95, almost seven years ago.

Obviously, all hell broke loose after that. My house was raided, the offices of WISE were raided and closed down. My office at the university was closed down. I was put on paid leave for two years after the sabbatical year. We were investigated by the government. They took everything that we had in these offices, and nothing came out of that—no criminal charges. In fact, several investigations took place at the university. All of them attested to the value and the benefit that WISE had to the university and the community at large.

My brother-in-law, who had finished his Ph.D. and as a stateless Palestinian couldn't go anywhere, applied for political asylum. He had a work permit. When they couldn't find anything against him, they tried somehow to get him involved, to become an informant. When that didn't happen they arrested him. They didn't arrest him on any charges at all. His political asylum was denied. They offered him political asylum for residency if he would cooperate and tell them things that they were looking for that didn't exist. When that didn't happen, they introduced "secret evidence". What is secret evidence? It's very simply this—which is antithetical to everything you would think about America and due process: the prosecutors would go behind closed door talking to the judge. They tell him whatever they want to tell him. The judge will come out and say to the defendant, "defend yourself." "What are the charges?" "Can't tell you." "Who are the accusers?" "I can't tell you." "What am I supposed to defend against?" "I can't tell you." And yet you are supposed to defend yourself. Between April of '96 and April of '98, twenty-nine individuals were faced with this prospect. One of them is sitting with us here.

Twenty-eight of the twenty-nine are Arabs or Muslims. That tells you who the real targets are. And it is so frustrating, because you can't defend yourself and at the same time you can't even use the legal system because you have to go through this whole thing until you exhaust what are called "administrative appeals." After two-in-a-half

years, Mazen was able to challenge this in federal court, and within one year he was able to defeat all these accusations, all these innuendoes. After looking at all the evidence that the government presented, both public and secret, a judge, came saying, and I quote, “There is no evidence that WISE or ICP,” which is the organization that was very active during the intifada “were fronts for Palestinian political causes.” He said, “On the contrary, there is evidence before the court that WISE was a scholarly research center and ICP was highly regarded.” And he also used the word, they were not fronts, not only just for Palestinian causes or the Palestine Islamic Jihad. And then he said that there was no fundraising, and he said he was not a threat to national security. That was appealed to a three-judge panel in Washington, DC. They refused to reverse the judge. The government then appealed to then Attorney General Janet Reno who had access to everything, including the so-called secret evidence, and she didn’t reverse the judge and he was released on December 15, 2000.

Come September 11th, now we have a new situation. Although he’s already been cleared, nevertheless he lost his appeals. He still has no place to go. He was picked up on November 24, 2001—and now not under any national security agenda—simply because he has no visa and he’s not supposed to stay in the United States. Although when he was called a national security threat, he was with the general population, he had access to telephone, every day he can call his family. He was, you know, watching TV, and because he was the longest serving prisoner he was in charge of the TV and he could tell people what to watch and not to watch. That’s prison rules by the way. “Ranking number”—the dean of prison. He had all kinds of privileges, whatever that might be. Now he is on visa violation, he’s a 23 hour lockdown, solitary confinement, no TV, no access to information, no visit to the library in prison, he has got one hour of recreation, and every time he goes out or in it is very humiliating. He has to be strip-searched naked. I think this is so humiliating, the experience. He has only fifteen minutes of phone calls a week to call his family and his children. And when they visit him it’s behind a masked partition window for once a week. That’s the type of thing that he’s been under now for almost five-in-a-half-months. And not for anything that he has done. Just simply because of who he is, what he represented and the state’s revenge against their loss.

Meanwhile, after September 11th, we were very busy trying to be part of the healing process within our community, Tampa, because there’s a lot of focus on us for the past few years. If you go to the *Tampa Tribune* archives and simply plug my name there, 205 articles have come in less than five years. You go to the *St. Pete Times*, the other large paper, about 190 articles. Between them, about four hundred articles. I’m not sure if George Bush got that many. [Laughter] They work in an orchestrated, unrelenting campaign. I remember back in ’95 when they were attacking us every single day, one or two or sometimes three articles. On Thanksgiving, they have nothing to write on, so what do they write? They write inside, things you should be thankful for on the day of Thanksgiving. And number one, you should be thankful you’re not Sami Al-Arian. [Laughter]

Then, we’re trying to handle September 11th, going to churches, to the civic centers, we had our own ecumenical service, and 400 people showed up. Over half were

non-Muslims, 23 denominations. Seventy-five members at our mosque went there to donate blood. I get a call on September 26th, two weeks after September 11th from this O'Reilly Factor. I don't have Fox in my home, so though I may have watched it a couple of times, I wasn't sure where he stands on the issues and I was debating within myself, should I go or not go? I kept talking to the producer, she kept pushing, giving me the impression that they're interested in knowing what the Muslim reaction is, especially in Florida since a lot of the hijackers came from Florida, that they didn't belong to a masjid, what kind of reaction we had, how horrible it was. So against my best judgment, I decided to go and articulate how horrified we are, that this is anti-Islam. I prepared for that.

After that, she said we'd also like to talk about WISE. I said, what do you want to know about WISE? About this person? I said, I can't handle all this information in five minutes. She said, what about the mission of WISE? And I told her, to be a bridge, and she said, this is perfect; this is what we want people to know. I said, fine. And, obviously, when I went there—if you go through the transcript, I spoke about 472 words. Did you know A? A is a bad person. Did you know B? B is a bad person. Did you know C? C is a bad person, so you must be bad. You know, classic guilt by association. And, you know, if I were with the CIA, I would be following you around everywhere you go. Goodbye. Basically that was the essence. I mean, it brought statements as I said, back in 1988 at the height of the inifada, which was different from this one.

I didn't know how that would go over. I knew it was a bad interview. I didn't like it. I was very furious at the producer. I'm not sure I was trapped, but the way she pitched it to me, and the way I took it, I should have been more careful. But that evening the death threat came. I changed my phone number. The university, you would think, is where academic freedom, free speech, where you would be immune. As a professor, you will be protected. They came, and the provost pulled me, and the dean had a meeting with me off campus, telling me that this is a huge security problem now. A lot of people have called in threatening me and they said that they had to close down the department that day because somebody called and he said that he's not coming. And they don't want me to be in danger or the students around me, or my colleagues. And, therefore, they're going to put me on paid leave the second time around. So I thought is something that was going to take a few weeks and blow over. I was even saying, can I do it over the internet, can we do it through distance learning, in a studio? I've done that before. They said no. What I didn't realize is that they really wanted to get rid of me, and this was but a first step. What I learned later is that the same guy who called on September 27th the next day, called back 20 minutes later apologizing. He didn't mean it, he was angry and they never told me that. I was under the impression that there was a real death threat going on. He never said that the guy called and apologized and said that he didn't mean it. And the same police officer who took the first report was the same one who took the second report, within 20 minutes of each other. I doubt very much that they told the president about the first call and not the second.

At any rate, I was put on paid leave for the next few weeks. Obviously, there was intense media interest: not about anything was done; not about anything that was said; not

about any information that this concerns anything; but about some of the statements that were made 14 years ago. 13 years ago. 11 years ago. Primarily anti-Israeli statements at the height of the intifada. So the news media and the different news magazines (which I totally refused to talk to) are there. You have DatelineNBC: Emerson spoke first interpreting my statements that were said 12, 14 years ago. It was a very bad one. Again there was another wave of bad e-mail, another wave of death threats came, that was about the end of October. I tried to be as quiet as possible, especially to national media. When it is time to talk to the local media, I was only concentrated with Mazen's particular, because he was taken around November 24th.

I got a call after December 18th in the afternoon I get a call from the media saying that tomorrow the members of the board will hold a meeting to discuss my situation. I never thought that I could be terminated for anything. It was really a Kafkaesque type meeting. I was banned from coming to campus, by the way. I was not supposed to set foot on campus, so they met giving less than 24-hour notice, and they decided to recommend my termination with all kinds of accusations that no one was debating, because I wasn't there; my attorney wasn't there. No one was invited to present our case. And summarily you're asked to leave. That afternoon, or that evening I received my notice of termination from the university president. And that was a few days before Christmas. Everybody's left town, students left town. Obviously, most faculty left town. According to the rules, I was given ten days to respond. It was December 19th. They gave me until the 29th of the December. I'd be out before the beginning of the semester and they will be done with me—that was the plan. And so I proposed again to fight. The same way we were fighting the secret evidence before. We got the union involved; we got the faculty senate involved; we got different student groups involved; we had a lot of faculty members from all over the country writing letters—really strong letters, objecting to this disregard of basic principles which are engraved in American academia: the concept of free speech, academic freedom, and due process.

We found there is a rule that will allow me more time. Also, by that time, we got the AAUP involved. The American Association of University of Professors, an 87-year old organization that monitors how universities treated their professors. Several editorials came, several columns came from different organizations, including some private educational institutions, and the university was under tremendous pressure and heat because of their reasons for terminating my employment. Number one, that I did not make it clear when I appeared before Fox that I was not speaking on the behalf of the university. [Some laughter from audience.] Truly. I've just seen thousands of university professors talk every day, no one ever—although, I made every effort to tell the producer then to introduce me as chairman of—

[video tape cuts out].

They can't have all three. And this is the crux of the problem. They can't be Jewish and democratic and hold onto the territories. They must choose two out of three. If they become Jewish and democratic, then that means they have to look on the territories as part of a two-state solution. If to be democratic and hold onto all of the

territories, that's the one state solution, and that's where, you know, every man is a citizen—one man, one vote, in the same tradition as South Africa. Or they can be Jewish and hold the territories, and that's apartheid. If this country would like to be part of supporting an apartheid regime, let's make it known. The fact of the matter is, now everything is flipped upside-down, where people don't know the real terrorists from the real victims. Now we the victims are being victimized further and being presented to the people as being the terrorists. If you just go to my computer and read the hundreds of emails that I've got, and what kind of descriptions, you know, these people are getting. A lot of them by the way are very, very honest people. They're just getting a picture from the media, from the likes of Steven Emerson. We have a long way to go in trying to counter-attack this viciousness.

Inshallah, we will be able to fight this. I have no doubt in my mind that we're going to win. It's just a matter of time. It's just a matter of involving all of our community members in this fight. No ethnic community, no ethnic minority in this country got empowered politically before they won the civil rights battle. Whether we like it or not, this is our civil rights battle. What happened to the people at the International Institute of Islamic Thought, at the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences, at the Fiqh Council, is something of great concern and should be of great importance to us all. You know, Fiqh Council of America is akin to the highest Muslim religious body in the land. It's like the Egyptian authorities raiding the Coptic popes in Egypt, or the Chinese raiding the head of the Catholic Church in China. We can't allow that. And this is going as if nothing has happened. When you have an Islamic school that produces nine out of thirteen military Muslim chaplains being raided without anybody raising an objection to it, this is outrageous. But no one is going to hear about it, unless we move and unless we make a difference.

[Applause]

Ahmad: We have a very short period of time to get questions for both speakers, so we're going to try to get as many questions in as we can. It will help if you make your questions very, very, *very* concise.

Before we do start, I want to mention one thing. I have seen this civil suit against Sami. In it, the complainant makes a number of allegations about that he says he gotten from the FBI and such sources. This is a new and particularly insidious method of smearing, because the government could not, in a criminal case, come out and makes such claims against anybody. This man can make it into a civil case and there is no way to test it. There's no way to check it. There's no way to see if he's telling the truth, or that he's even basing it on anything. It becomes very clear that the purpose of this case is to smear.

Mita Chattopadya: Could you do a counter suit? Number one. Number two, what can, just individuals do to further the Palestinian cause as well as this terrible assault on civil liberties that's going on.

Al-Arian: Yes, I can counter-sue. I think this is what they want me to do. They want me to be involved in litigation and depositions and things like that. I have to weigh this very carefully, with the background that is taking place. Especially with the government trying to get me. I have limited resources, I cannot extend myself very thin. What can we do about Palestine? I think what we need to do about Palestine is to be at the forefront. Yesterday there was a massive show of support. It was marvelous. I've been here twenty seven years; I've never seen anything like that, over 100,000 people, over half of them are not Muslims. This was tremendous. And we need to go one step further. We need to start talking to the editorial boards, sending letters to the editors, being in the forefront of responding, of monitoring, talking to our elected representatives, the senators, the congress people, telling them how we feel about it, talk to our neighbors. We have to be at the forefront of the defending Palestinian rights. This is a different time, because many Americans are asking questions, like they did after September 11th. Many questions about Islam, questioning their own limited knowledge of what they know. A lot of them are saying now, what we've been fed throughout these years are lies. Even some reporters on TV are questioning their knowledge. So I think we need to be active. You can be active in your own way, because you know the circumstances of your community and say, well, where can I fit? And of course you can always donate.

Mozaffar Partowmah: As-salamu `Alaikum. Question 1 for Sami: Could you consider bringing libel charges against Steven Emerson, because he has smeared you and he has smeared the whole campaign for Palestine?

Al-Arian: The problem with the American legal system is that to sue someone for libel, first you have to go through a process. First, to determine whether you are a public person or not. It would be very easy for them to prove that, and then it is extremely difficult to win your case, but before you even get to that, you go through all kinds of processes that would probably cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. It doesn't mean it can't be done. It could be done, but the cost is prohibitive. Right now Steven Emerson is suing a reporter who wrote many articles about Emerson. Emerson said that in one article he made a mistake, which he didn't. So far, his magazine has spent \$150,000 on legal fees just to defend. Now if you are going to bring a suit, it would probably be even much more. So it is not easy to do.

Partowmah: It is known that Kurdish women are observant of Islam, generally speaking, more than the other populations in Turkey. And I want to know from the experience of sister Merve, can she tell us from inside, what are the Kurdish women suffering from? Because the Kurdish men and their villages are being attacked just like the Palestinians and the Palestinian villages are being bulldozed, and three thousand villages of Kurdistan of Turkey have been demolished by the systematic attacks of the so-called "Laik" government of Turkey. And we want to know what is the case of these women who are doubly in jeopardy?

Kavakci: The plight of the of the Kurdish women is the plight of the conservative Muslim women in Turkey. In the staunchly secular Turkish state there are two victims to the system. One of them is the Kurdish problem for them; the other one is the Islamist

problem. The conservative Kurdish Muslims and the Islamists have been always in coalition supporting each other. It's interesting that whenever Kurdish parties were banned in Turkey, the Islamists parties, which I worked for—Welfare and Virtue—got the votes of the Kurdish people. Interestingly, in 1998 or 1999, new information was released that it was not the PKK, the Kurdish organization that is considered as a terrorist organization by the Turkish state that carried out the atrocities in the Kurdish villages, but the military itself. So I see the Kurdish woman are in double jeopardy more than ourselves.

Raymond Busch: I want to ask about Florida. I also wanted to just comment briefly about John Loftus is who is suing Sami in court. When I was visiting Congressman Frank Wolf's office here in Northern Virginia, I asked the Treasury representative and the Customs representative who were there at Frank Wolf's behest, this question about John Loftus and his leaking things to the media before the raids took place, why he had inside information and why he was doing this to frustrate a supposedly secret operation, which seemed to me an obstruction of justice? They advised me that there was an internal investigation which we have not heard anything more about, but I'll be approaching Frank Wolf on that. It's very interesting, the man would be hand in hand after he's left. He's supposed to be a former prosecutor, he's supposed to be former Nazi hunter, he's supposed to be many things as well as the president of the Holocaust Museum in St Petersburg.

I have come to learn that Sami has been the most effective lobbyist that we have ever had up here, especially in the matter of this secret evidence. And we almost had secret evidence repealed up till nine-eleven came along. Now we have the horrible patriot act, which has thrown us back into the cave era.

And one more thing: Florida. If you will look for a book which is not readily available, but is available if you order it, it's called *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*. And it is written by Greg Palast who is an investigative reporter who actually came out of Los Angeles, but he writes I believe, for one of the major newspapers in London. In that book he talks about how the election was rigged there. You mentioned when I was in Florida about how they changed Governor Bush's office, they changed the board of regions in the way that things were organized. Otherwise, you as a tenured professor could not have been treated like this. And it also went away from the academic freedom in the way that most boards are structured. If you could explain how that happened. It wasn't done for you particularly, but at the same time it works a great injustice. How are things different in Florida?

Al-Arian: Most of the public institutions in the nation are governed by one body. Governor Bush dismantled that completely. Now every institution is governed by its own body that is basically political. Out of twelve people that voted for my ouster, eleven of them are Republicans—most of them are business people. One Democrat, an African-American who was not even from Florida, the president of Howard University, is the only one who voted for me. Everyone else was a political appointee.

Imam Johari: Before we sing the praises of my university, probably by May, the ban will be lifted from Johari being able to be listed in any publication from Howard. We'll see, because there is a ban on me now. Someone leaked it to me that the director of communications has put a ban on me.

Al-Arian: I'm not praising the university, I'm just stating a fact.

Unidentified Female: I have a real concern with this whole idea of Turkey being held up as an ideal for the Muslim world to aspire to. How can we combat the ideas?

Kavakci: I think one way that, as Americans, we can combat that idea is to raise a consciousness in the federal... public offices as well as the local governments, because America is the new land and lobbying really works. We can see that through lobbying if unjust causes can prevail, then a just cause like our cause can prevail if we do whatever is necessary. And I think in aftermath of September 11th there is a great chance for us as Muslim women to express ourselves when the questions: why hijab? what are the rights of Muslim women in the society? are raised in the American public. The American government is very interested in this. I'm working voluntarily with the federal government and with the White House and the state department. An International Women Issues Department has been established after September 11th, with the first aim to try to help the Afghani women's liberation. We have to take this opportunity to push the American public as well, as the federal government with to put everything in perspective. Not to "liberalize" to the extent where some women will be oppressed by other women, like in the case of Turkey, but liberalizing women as much as they want, within the mandates of their own culture and religion. They should be honored.

Unidentified Female: Sami, what can we do across the United States to get Mazen out of jail.

Al-Arian: What can we do for Mazen Al-Najjar? First, there is du'a (prayer of supplication). Second, we need to contact your representatives. Talk to them and write them. Thirdly, give me your email and I will send you his address. Write. It makes a difference when people write to lift his spirit. And finally, contribute, because it does cost a lot of money. Our next battle will start in May 14th. On May 14, he will have been held six months. After six months we can challenge the government because according to the Supreme Court you can't stay more than 180 days if they can't find a place to deport him. That costs a lot of money. I mean, his defense is readying excess of \$70,000 and already in the hole for \$30,000.

Habib Ghanim: I have a question for Imad-ad-Dean about Lyndon LaRouche. I think he is the only leader that I know of who openly supports Muslims. And for me there's no difference between the Democrat and the Republican. I voted for Ralph Nader because I didn't see any difference. But how can we get Lyndon LaRouche since he is open to come and help us?

Ahmad: Lyndon LaRouche wants to get the Muslim vote because he's smart enough to realize that they're worth going after, but he does not share our core values. Although he's getting more sophisticated, all you have to do is go look at how he, in the early days, sought to get our vote and you can see the fascist ideology he's really coming from. He said, why are the Muslims looking for a leader, when they had the great leader in history. You know who he was talking about? Not Muhammad (as) but Hassan ibn As-Sabbah, the head of the assassins. That's his idea of a great leader! It tells you what kind of a mind he has. I don't think it's appropriate for us to be working with him.

Al-Arian: Yeah, I wanted to talk about the last election, because I think I personally played a big role in electing Bush, because we gave him the votes in Florida. And there's a reason for that. We approach both campaigns, the Gore campaign and the Bush campaign. Our core issue was evident, Gore ignored us. Bush did not ignore us. In fact, everything we asked him for he did, including raising secret evidence in a public form—not just a press conference or a speech—but in a Presidential debate, before 60 million people. He did what he said he would do. The leaders of the Muslim community say that secret evidence was the highest priority, and to get that bill past congress when you have a major party Presidential candidate endorsing that position, played very very well. And you know, he kept his promise. He said he's not going to use secret evidence, so now he's using no evidence. [Laughter from audience.]