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Dear Sir,

Andrew Gilligan accuses ENGAGE of being “Islamist sympathisers” who have “repeatedly defended extremists,” (*‘MPs walk out in battle over Islamist group’*, Sunday Telegraph, 30 Jan 2011).

Gilligan cites our letter to the Home Secretary arguing against an entry ban on the Indian Muslim scholar Dr Zakir Naik without disclosing that our argument rests on the issue of freedom of speech and the futility of such a ban in an age of satellite TV and streamed coverage via the internet. To further underline our point we learned this week that the Oxford Union Debating Society have invited Dr Naik to speak to them via a satellite link. Would Mr Gilligan dare to criticize the OU Society as “Islamist sympathisers” too? Or does the charge apply only to Muslims who decry this absurdity?

Mr Gilligan besmirches the reputation of a member of our staff slyly suggesting that she may pose a security threat for holding a parliamentary pass as the administrator for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia, carefully entering a caveat no doubt to deflect libel claims.

Would Mr Gilligan dare to suggest that a member of another race or faith group holding such a pass poses a security threat to the nation? Is it Mr Gilligan’s contention that all Muslims are guilty until proven innocent? And is it not ironic that he intersperses such insinuations while seemingly writing on the subject of a parliamentary group specifically established to tackle anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination?

We also take this opportunity to correct Mr Gilligan’s erroneous claim that “no Muslim MPs have joined the all-party group.” Perhaps Mr Gilligan is unaware that the register of parliamentary groups accommodates only 20 members on the registration form and were more names permitted, we would happily have entered those of Anas Sarwar MP and Sadiq Khan MP, as well as Lord Nazir Ahmed, all of whom are supporters of the Group.

Furthermore, Mr Gilligan in his blog also claims that available evidence does not support the view of a “rising tide of Islamophobia.” We would refer Mr Gilligan to reports produced by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Open Society Institute. Our website (www.iengage.org.uk) and Islamophobia Watch, both of which highlight for public record anti-Muslim hate crimes, have recorded 11 serious incidents in the last eight weeks alone.

Gilligan abuses his position with the Telegraph Group to unremittingly exercise “the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages”, as Stanley Baldwin put it, of “power without responsibility.”

Yours sincerely,

Mohammed Asif
CEO