



# *the* OXFORD UNION

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10 December 2008

Dear Homa Arjomand,

I am writing as President of the Oxford Union to invite you to speak in a debate which I am hosting on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February. The proposed motion is:

**‘THIS HOUSE BELIEVES ISLAM IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH WESTERN LIBERALISM’**

The role of Islam in the West, and its compatibility with the norms and values of liberal democracy are two of the most contested and debated issues of our time. There has been a growing feeling amongst many in the West that the events of 9/11 and July 7<sup>th</sup> showed that what Huntington referred to as the “clash of civilisations” is becoming an ever increasing reality. On the other hand, Muslims continue to serve in all the key institutions of our democracy and have contributed to the maintenance of these institutions. The question remains however, is the liberal interpretation of Islam compatible with the liberal western values that we hold so dear in the UK? If so, can they remain consistent with the values and tenets of the Koran itself? Moreover, can Islamic teachings and Sharia Law be tolerated in a liberal society? Is the veil, for example, a symbol of female repression or female empowerment? Can the Koran be interpreted to be accepting of gay rights or at least no worse than other religions?

As you may be aware, the Oxford Union enjoys a reputation as the world’s oldest and most famous student debating society. Over the years, it has gained a reputation as the most prominent debating platform outside Westminster and contains the world’s oldest purpose-built debating chamber. Throughout our 180 year history, we have regularly hosted high-profile international figures here in Oxford to discuss contemporary and controversial issues. We are proud to be able to count amongst our past guests Mother Theresa, Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Michael Jackson and Her Majesty the Queen to name but a few. Last term alone, for example, we were lucky enough to host the US Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, along with the leader of the British opposition party, David Cameron. We would be delighted to be able to add you to the long list of pre-eminent speakers who have visited this prestigious society.

The evening usually starts with a drinks reception at 6.30pm, followed by dinner and the debate, which begins at 8.30pm. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail: [president@oxford-union.org](mailto:president@oxford-union.org), by mobile telephone: 07901 913058 or by using the details at the foot of this letter.

At any rate, I can guarantee you unstinting hospitality and the warmest reception in Oxford. The Society would, naturally, be happy to cover your domestic travel expenses, as well as hosting you at the dinner preceding the event, the drinks reception afterwards and providing accommodation if required.

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It would be an absolute pleasure to welcome you to the Union for this debate and I very much look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

**Charlie Holt**  
President  
*Oxford Union Society*