



Apr 20, 2023

Dr. Lynn Mahoney
President,
San Francisco State University
president@sfsu.edu

Dear Dr. Mahoney,

Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV) is stunned by the announcement that an investigation into Professor Maziar Behrooz is now underway by San Francisco State University's Office of Equity Programs and Compliance for a frivolous reason - an alleged "offensive" act of portraying a historical image of Prophet Muhammad.

Our mission at MPV is to advocate for human rights, social justice, and inclusion in the United States and around the world by inculcating a culture rooted in human rights through public education, advocacy, and the arts. We were founded in 2007 with chapters in five American cities and affiliates in six continents, where we work to create and expand space in Muslim communities for an Islam that differ from the predominantly misogynistic and intolerant interpretations.

Among these interpretations are those whose opinions on the appropriateness of the depiction of Prophets among Muslims, differs from the student in Professor Maziar Behrooz's history class in the Fall of 2022.

As Professor Behrooz shared with university administrators, similar images to the one he showed in his course can be found on the streets outside of the mosques in his hometown Tehran, one of the most important historical cities in Islam. As his account demonstrates, there are simply too many different discourses on the appropriateness of the depiction of the Prophets to ban outright. Even if one day, hundreds of thousands of Muslims scholars come to the conclusion that depicting the Prophet is prohibited, SFSU as a secular institution has no role in weighing in on or on following religious dogma if it wishes to remain a reputable academic institution.

If we as a society aspire to be more inclusive then we should by all means ensure that the institutions that are training and educating the future generation practices this inclusivity. Silencing the cultural traditions of a minority because it is deemed offensive to a majority simply has no place in today's societies, secular or Islamic.



We cannot allow a particular interpretation of a religion to dominate and stifle alternative interpretations and their right to be represented in our educational institutions. Nor can we, in attempting to assuage the discomfort of the majority, punish professors whose sole responsibility is to open young minds to our rich intellectual, artistic, and philosophical traditions. It is precisely through this practice of critical thinking and debate that the world's first university was founded by a Muslim woman, Fatima al-Firhi in 900 AD. This rich history is so underrepresented in academic institutions across the West but how can we expect our younger generations to have a deeper understanding of our collective history, when those who attempt to celebrate and honor it in a respectful way are punished by an institutions' complaint system.

We hope you take our message into consideration, and we urge you to decide in favor of Professor Behrooz and allow him to teach without fear of complaints, which would better be resolved by a private, educational discussion between professor and student.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Ani Zonneveld
President & Founder
Muslims for Progressive Values