

## **Leeds community groups come together to save atheist doctor**

LEEDS, UNITED KINGDOM – Community groups across Leeds have come together to unite behind a campaign to save an openly atheist doctor from being deported to Pakistan where he faces persecution for his beliefs. The campaign is designed to raise awareness via the media as well as social networking sites and an online petition.

Dr. Shaukat Aman Ulla became heavily involved with local atheist and humanist groups while studying for his doctorate at the University of Leeds. Dr. Ulla was in the UK on a student visa and applied for asylum on the completion of his Ph.D. His application was rejected in March; he is currently appealing the ruling.

Chris Worfolk, trustee of the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist & Secular Student Societies said, “This is exactly what our asylum laws were set up for. Here is an individual who faces genuine persecution for his beliefs in his own country. If we truly value freedom of expression and the right to your own beliefs we must grant asylum.”

Sophie Stringfellow, president of Leeds Atheist Society said, “Being part of the Atheist Society has really opened my eyes as to how some people view non-believers, even in modern society. If we encounter this attitude in a secular country such as the UK, I fear what attitudes may be encountered in Parkistan.”

Parkistan has no separation of church and state where 95% of the population are Muslim<sup>2</sup>. Apostasy (leaving Islam) is punishable by death, as is speaking out against Islam (as this is considered blasphemy)<sup>1</sup>.

Since the decision a coalition of Leeds community groups, led by Leeds Atheist Society have come together in order to raise awareness of Dr. Shaukat’s case. Dr. Richard Parker of the Leeds-based Humanist Action Group said, “It’s amazing to see how many people have volunteered to help spread the word. I would strongly urge everyone to sign the petition and show their support.”

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Contact Chris Worfolk on 0752 158 1082.

### **ABOUT LEEDS ATHEIST SOCIETY**

Leeds Atheist Society is a Leeds University Union affiliated student society based at the University of Leeds. Founded in 2006 is it the most active student atheist society in the UK, currently led by president Sophie Stringfellow.

The society is also the most active group on campus promoting interfaith activities organising debates, socials, discussion panels and running the nationally renowned Perspective course in which a representative from a different faith is invited down each week and given an open platform to talk about their faith before answering any questions the audience wish to ask.

### **RESOURCES**

Online petition

<http://www.petition.fm/petitions/savearslan/>

Campaign Facebook group

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?v=wall&ref=ts&gid=302406086662>

#### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>Frederic P. Miller, Agnes F. Vandome, John McBrewster, “Blasphemy Law in Pakistan: Apostasy in Islam, Blasphemy, Freedom of religion in Pakistan, Sharia, Pakistan”

<sup>2</sup>Apostacy from Islam in Parkistan,

<http://www.faithfreedom.org/oped/StephenGill51020>