

SANSAD Condemns Attacks On Itrath Syed for Defending Human Rights

South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy (SANSAD) condemns the attacks being directed against Itrath Sayed, the NDP candidate for Delta-East Richmond, for defending the human rights of all Canadians, including Gays and Lesbians, and affirming their equality with all Canadians under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The harassment faced by Ms Syed for her secular and democratic principles has come to our notice from the front-page article on her in Vancouver Sun of June 17, 2004, substantiated by further comments from members of the South Asian community. Ms. Syed has wisely refused to engage with the personal attack on her because it diverts attention from the many urgent issues that are facing us in the forthcoming elections and because it offers an opportunity for targeting her community at a time when it particularly needs to be defended against prejudice and discrimination. But as an organization dedicated to the development of the principles of secularism and democracy within the South Asian diaspora, it is our responsibility to stand with Ms Syed in defense of these principles.

SANSAD comprises people from all parts of South Asia, of diverse occupations and beliefs, who are united in championing human and democratic rights, peace, and social justice. We applaud Ms Syed's defense of the principle that all Canadians, irrespective of their race, colour, class, place of origin, religion, gender, and sexual orientation should enjoy an equality of rights and freedoms. All those who attack and attempt to intimidate Ms Syed for respecting the rights of Gays and Lesbians to be included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are bigots. By excluding a group of human beings from the rights enjoyed by others they cast doubt on the principle of human rights itself. When such an attack comes from within a minority community that is already at risk, it can only be seen as blindingly shortsighted. The rights of any minority are secure only to the extent that the rights of all minorities are secure.

We are aware that many religions, or certain practitioners within them, find it necessary to exclude various humans from the enjoyment of equality. These matters are doctrinal and are meaningfully debated only within the confines of a specific doctrine. Within a pluralistic and secular society like Canada, all religions have the right to maintain their doctrines with all their contestation, but no religion has the right to impose its doctrinal limits on the rights of others.