

## SANSAD position on “No to Political Islam”

South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy (SANSAD) supports the secular, democratic, and reformist aspirations and program embodied in the web-based petition “No to Political Islam” and the explanatory note on the same site, “Why No to Political Islam.”

We wholeheartedly support the statement in the petition: “We seek a future in which all people, men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims, enjoy the benefits of equality, justice, democracy and human rights, and freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought, and freedom of expression.” These are the goals of our organization as well.

We understand the explanation offered in the document, “Why No to Political Islam,” as correctly pointing out that certain groups of people are using the authority of Islam for “limiting educational opportunity, denying the right of women to participate fully as adults in the life of the community, denying equality to non-Muslims, and imposing [their] own brutal and outmoded interpretation of Sharia law on every aspect of public life.” We endorse the program of self-criticism and religious-social-political reform implicit in the statement as guided by a democratic aspiration.

However, we cannot sign the petition because we have reservations about the concept of “political Islam” by which the petition names the phenomena it opposes. The term “political Islam” has been constructed by the West’s discourse on Islam in order to demonize Islam and is currently deployed in the U S agenda of global hegemony. To use the term is at once to give a totalizing substance to a variety of beliefs and practices in different circumstances and to fall into the U S imperialist perspective. Unfortunately, giving any special meaning to the term cannot be effective against the dominant deployment of the term by the Western media.

Though we cannot accept your concept of what you oppose, we stand in solidarity with you in your noble program for a world that is secular and democratic and in which religion guides people spiritually but does not disable them from realizing their humanity equally with others.