Amnesty International’s Islamist Problem Continues, Senior Figure Accused of Muslim Brotherhood Links

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One of Amnesty International’s most senior figures has been accused of multiple links to the Muslim Brotherhood, both through her husband, who was named in court papers as a British Islamist, and in her own right.

The allegations bring into question Amnesty’s claim to be an impartial observer, and reignite [accusations](http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303880604579405043945585218) of Islamist sympathies.

Amnesty claims to have been unaware that the husband of Yasmin Hussein, its director of faith and human rights, featured in documents pertaining to a criminal trial conducted in the UAE. The documents revealed connections between British supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and Arab Islamists accused of plotting to overthrow the Gulf state.

The Brotherhood is banned as a terrorist organisation in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, although not in Britain. In 2013, dozens of Emiratis were accused by their government of sedition and conspiracy for their involvement with the Brotherhood; 60 were jailed. Wael Musabbeh, Ms Hussein’s husband of 20 years, was named in case documents as a British Islamist along with a number of other figures, none of whom were defendants.

In the same documents, Hussein and Musabbeh were said to have been directors of a Bradford community trust which presented itself as an aid agency but was banned by Israel for its alleged funding of Hamas terrorism. The authorities have said that the trust was part of a complex financial and ideological network, using the UK and Ireland as a hub through which the Brotherhood and its branches in the UEA were linked.

Amnesty has openly admitted to knowing about the trial and associated documents – it called for fair proceedings for the accused at the time – but claims that it had no idea that Ms Hussein and Mr Musabbeh were married.

That suggests that Ms Hussein contravened Amnesty’s guidelines on disclosure of any links which may generate either a real or perceived conflict of interest with Amnesty’s claims to be impartial.

In a separate incident in 2012, Hussein was been criticised by colleagues for holding a private meeting with Adly al-Qazzaz, a Muslim Brotherhood ministerial education adviser who was blamed by a teachers’ union for instigating the “Brotherhoodisation” of Egypt’s education system. While meeting with him in Cairo on Amnesty business, Ms Hussein stayed overnight at his family home.

She claims not to have been aware of any concerns raised over the incident, and says that she was unable to secure accommodation anywhere else in the city. She also told [*The Times*](http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/article4529234.ece) that she “never had any association whatsoever with . . . the Muslim Brotherhood”.

However, the charity said that concerns were raised with her at the time, that she accepted the stay had been inappropriate, and had promised it would not happen again. A spokesman for Amnesty added that they had been informed by Ms Hussein that “any connections [with the Muslim Brotherhood] are purely circumstantial,” a claim that they appear to be satisfied with.

The charity said it did not believe that any of her alleged connections with Islamists represented a conflict of interest, adding: “Amnesty International does, however, take very seriously any allegations that would call into question our impartiality and is therefore investigating the issues raised.”

Unfortunately for Amnesty, its own work has already sowed seeds of doubt about its impartiality in abundance. In 2014 the charity lobbied against the proscription of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation by Saudi Arabia. Al-Nusra, al-Qaeda’s outfit in Syria, and ISIS were also banned by the same ruling, which carried a 20 year jail term for those found to belong to the groups.

Slamming the legislation, Said Boumedouha, Amnesty’s Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director said [at the time](http://www.timesofisrael.com/saudis-name-muslim-brotherhood-a-terrorist-group/): “The Saudi Arabian authorities are seeking legal cover to entrench their ability to crack down on peaceful dissent and silence human rights defenders.”

And in 2011, the charity [handed £533,104](http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/National/article555707.ece) to Irene Khan, its former secretary general as a golden handshake when she stepped down. A source close to Khan suggested that a significant proportion of the payment was made as “settlement for a dispute with the board.”

A year earlier, under Khan’s rule, Gita Sahgal, head of the charity’s gender unit was suspended, and then left after a very [acrimonious and public dispute](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/25/gita-sahgal-amnesty-international) with her bosses over whether Amnesty should be working with Islamists and pro-jihadist groups, considering their track record on women’s rights.

Sahgal called the leadership “ideologically bankrupt,” and spoke of an “atmosphere of terror” which cowed staff into accepting the prevailing line.

The charity ploughed on nonetheless, working with former Guantanamo detainee Moazzam Begg and his organisation Cage, which has been repeatedly linked to Islamists and jihadists. It was a senior member of Cage who described Mohammed Emwazi – better known as ISIS’s executioner Jihadi John – as “[extremely kind, extremely gentle](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11437579/Mohammed-Emwazi-is-extremely-gentle-says-British-advocacy-group-Cage-director.html), extremely soft spoken, [and] the most humble young person that I knew.”

It wasn’t until March of this year, when those comments were made, that Amnesty [finally distanced](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/amnesty-international-responds-questions-about-cage#.VdHuhflViko) itself from Cage, saying “Amnesty no longer considers it appropriate to share a public platform with Cage and will not engage in coalitions of which Cage is a member.”

Amnesty International UK’s Director Kate Allen continued: “At the time that Gita Sahgal left Amnesty International, we commissioned an independent external review into our work with Cage and Moazzam Begg which concluded that it was reasonable for Amnesty to campaign with Cage and Moazzam Begg in his capacity as a former detainee at Guantanamo Bay.

“Based on an extensive review of comments made by Cage Prisoners (as it was then known) then available to the public, we concluded that limited cooperation with Cage on the narrow issue of accountability for UK complicity in torture abroad was appropriate, given their consistent and credible messaging on this issue.”

Some years earlier Amnesty had been rather more upfront about their reasons for working with Begg. “Is “jihad in self-defense . . . antithetical to human rights?” Claudio Cordone, then Amnesty International’s interim secretary-general rhetorically asked. “Our answer is no.”