

# **Imam dismissed as No 10's islamophobia adviser after backing calls to cancel 'blasphemous' film**

An imam who endorsed a campaign for cinemas to cancel a "blasphemous" film about the Prophet Mohammed's daughter has been dismissed as the Government's anti-Islamophobia adviser.

Qari Asim was told on Saturday evening that he had been dismissed from his official roles as independent adviser on Islamophobia and deputy chairman of the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group.

The move came after Mr Asim, the head imam at the Makkah mosque in Leeds, backed those protesting against The Lady of Heaven film and asked cinemas to drop the £12 million production, which has become the centre of a free speech row in the UK.

Amid widespread protests, Mr Asim issued a statement branding The Lady of Heaven a "disparaging movie" that has "caused much pain and hurt to Muslims".

In a letter to Mr Asim published on the Government website on Saturday, the Department of Levelling Up said: "We have no option but to withdraw the appointment and end your roles with Government with immediate effect.

"Your recent support for a campaign to limit free expression – a campaign which has itself encouraged communal tensions – means it is no longer appropriate for you to continue your work with Government in roles designed to promote community harmony," it said.

The letter went on: "You will have no doubt seen reports of the scenes outside different cinema venues. These included deeply disturbing videos of sectarian chanting and anti-Shia hatred... which must be challenged at every opportunity as part of a wider effort to combat anti-Muslim hatred.

"We were disappointed to see that you failed to condemn some of the protests complicit in these behaviours."

*These are fine words from the Department of Levelling Up. But what I would like to see (amongst other things, variations on the theme) is action from the Home Office ensuring that the police give support to beleaguered cinema managers facing a baying mob. Certainly in Stratford I cannot rid myself of thinking that the police put pressure on the cinema to pull the film to avoid any sort of scene and violence which they would have been obliged to 'police'. And 100 angry Muslims are not the easy target that naive middle-class gels mourning another nice girl murdered by a policeman were last year.*