



The Harvard Crimson

ONLINE EDITION

News

Dutch Activist Discusses Islam

Published On 5/10/2006 4:19:21 AM

By **JAN ZILINSKY**
Contributing Writer

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a member of Dutch Parliament and human rights activist, addressed issues ranging from the culture of arranged marriages to the compatibility of Islam with open societies in Western Europe at several venues across campus yesterday.

She began her tour at the Harvard Coop, but also spoke at the Kennedy School of Government and Center for Government and International Studies.

Her visit concluded with a panel discussion where Ali addressed five questions related to immigration and Islam.

She gave an analysis of immigration to Western Europe, asserting that immigration in itself is not a problem, but that unemployment, welfare benefits, and crime are more prevalent in immigrant communities. She also associated the situation among Muslim immigrants with that of groups resistant to assimilation.

"Most Muslims complain of stigmatization as a group," Ali said. "They ask why they are required to assimilate—they want to hold on to their culture."

Ali emphasized that petty crime, dropping out of school, and engagement in criminal activity are not related to Islam. However, she questioned the religion's compatibility with an open, liberal society, such as the one that exists in the Netherlands and other Western European countries.

Ahmed Mansour, another member of the panel and a former visiting fellow at Harvard Law School, said that radical Muslims are a small minority of the Muslim community and that Islam is a religion of tolerance and peace.

"The right of the woman is there. So is the right of the non-Muslim," he said.

A third panelist, Swanee Hunt, a former U.S. Ambassador to Austria, spoke about religious radicalism and participation of women in politics around the world. She challenged the audience by asking whether the United States would go into Iraq if the vice president and half of the Senate and House of Representatives were women.

Thomas M. Scanlon, the final panelist and Alford Professor of Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy, and Civil Policy, warned against self-censorship and fear to speak up.

"The reason that someone can be offended is not a good defense of censorship... it is too easy to claim offense or to be genuinely be offended," he said.

Most of the questions and remarks from the audience were directed at Ali, including an accusation that she provokes violence.

Others, however, appreciated her presence and message.

"I loved her," Roxanne E. Bras '09 said.

The panel discussion was organized by the Dutch Cultural Society and co-sponsored by the Carr Center for Human Rights, Women and Public Policy Program, and the Graduate Student Council.

<http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=513434>