



February 4, 2021

Dr. Gloria C. Duffy  
President & CEO, The Commonwealth Club  
110 The Embarcadero  
San Francisco CA 94105

Dear Dr. Duffy,

On behalf of the San Francisco Bay Area office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-SFBA), the nation's largest American Muslim civil rights organization, we write with deep concern about your planned February 11 event featuring Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Bari Weiss.

We were troubled when we learned that the Club had planned and marketed a conversation between an anti-Palestinian racist, who routinely targets Palestinians and those who advocate for their human rights, and an anti-Muslim advocate, who conflates an influx of Muslim refugees with the rise of gender-based violence in Western countries.

At a time when our organization has [documented](#) that nearly half of all Muslim students in public schools face bullying and when hundreds of American Muslims contact us annually seeking assistance with civil rights and immigration issues, the choice to host this event both deeply troubles us and detrimentally impacts our communities' safety amidst ongoing and intensified Islamophobia.

These fringe speakers are contrary to your mission to seek truth and insight about the issues we face as a society. Both speakers have a shameful track record of propagating Islamophobia, which exacerbates ongoing intolerance and hate towards Muslims, immigrants, and others.

Hirsi Ali has [called](#) for the U.S. Constitution to be altered to allow for discrimination against Muslims. She also [supports](#) violence against Muslims, as indicated through statements including 'we are at war with Islam,' and urging that Islam be 'defeated.' She has also claimed 'there is no moderate Islam,' and has referenced the faith as 'a nihilistic cult of death that 'legitimizes murder.'

Weiss has a long history of [brazenly attempting](#) to silence the free speech of those who seek to build awareness around and support for Palestinian human rights. Her earliest work, campaigning to tarnish the careers of Arab professors at Columbia University, makes it no surprise that she has consistently smeared American Muslims on the forefront of civil rights today. We see her efforts to target Keith Ellison, Rep. Ilhan Omar, Linda Sarsour, and others who dare to speak up for Palestinian human rights, as flagrant and dangerous attacks on people's fundamental rights, both here and abroad.

We must continue to hold bigots like Hirsi Ali and Weiss accountable in order to defend and uplift our communities and all who suffer various forms of hate and bias. The premise of this discussion is not a 'tough question,' but rather a reprehensible display of unfounded, Islamophobic, and xenophobic rhetoric.

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Hosting this event would be an endorsement of these bigots: advancing their hate by lending them your long-celebrated platform and through making their books available for purchase to attendees. Further, not cancelling this conversation would show an unfortunate disregard for the increase in violent hate and delegitimize the visceral and ongoing impact that Islamophobia has on our local and global communities.

As a highly influential organization that can choose who it elevates, the Club should not promote Hirsi Ali nor Weiss. Just as you would surely eschew hosting anti-Semites or anti-Black racists, we urge you to disinvite these speakers as a demonstration of your refusal to give voice to bigotry.

We invite you to instead work with the region's thriving American Muslim population and numerous organizations to promote community education around Islamophobia and xenophobia. Together, we can protect and empower the most vulnerable in our society and achieve true justice.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Aliza Kazmi  
CAIR-SFBA Advocacy Manager

Zahra Billoo, Esq.  
CAIR-SFBA Executive Director