



**FSU**  
FREE SPEECH UNION

THE FREE SPEECH UNION  
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[FREESPEECHUNION.ORG](https://www.freespeechunion.org)

Mr Moshe Greidinger  
Chief Executive Officer  
Cineworld Group PLC  
Vantage West  
Great West Road  
Brentford  
TW8 9AG

9<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Dear Mr Greidinger,

I am writing to you in my capacity as General Secretary of the Free Speech Union (FSU). The FSU is a non-partisan, mass-membership public interest body that stands up for the speech rights of its members and campaigns for free speech more widely.

This letter concerns the recent decision made by Cineworld to cancel showings of the film *Lady of Heaven* across the country in response to aggressive protests by some Muslims who regarded the film as offensive.

#### Background

On 3 June 2022 *Lady of Heaven*, an independent film about the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed, was released in cinemas across the UK, including at venues owned by Cineworld, Showcase and Vue.

As you will be aware, Cineworld cinemas in Bolton, Birmingham and Sheffield were all targeted by Muslim demonstrators whose purpose was to prevent the film being shown on the grounds that they believed it to be, in the words of Bolton Council of Mosques, “blasphemous”. This is because it breaches the taboo of visually depicting Islamic religious figures.

#### Cancellation of screenings

In response, Cineworld took the decision to cancel screenings of *Lady of Heaven* nationwide.

Cineworld’s statement explaining this decision makes clear that these demonstrations were threatening, and that the decision was taken on the basis that showing the film could put staff and customers in physical danger, rather than because Cineworld agreed with the protestors’ objections:

Due to recent incidents related to screenings of *The Lady of Heaven*, we have made the decision to cancel upcoming screenings of the film nationwide to ensure the safety of our staff and customers.<sup>1</sup>

In light of your concerns, would it not have been better to ask the local police to protect your staff, as well as any customers wanting to see the film, rather than simply withdrawing it from all your cinemas?

Instead, Cineworld has bowed to the demands of a small group of religious extremists, depriving your customers of their right to see this film for themselves and make up their own minds about its contents.

Your decision also created a regrettable precedent. Shortly after Cineworld cancelled all showings of the film, Showcase followed suit. The producer of the film, Malik Shlibak, has also received death threats in the wake of the cancellations.<sup>2</sup>

Only Vue is continuing to show *Lady of Heaven*. We hope that Vue will have the courage to persevere with this and we will be writing separately to police chief constables in Bolton, Birmingham and Sheffield asking for their assurance that cinemas that wish to show the film will be supported in doing so, with their staff and customers properly protected.

One protest leader in Bradford said, "We have a right not to be insulted."<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, no such right exists in English law. As Lord Justice Sedley said in *Redmond-Bate v Director of Public Prosecutions*:

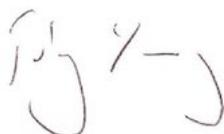
Free speech includes not only the inoffensive but the irritating, the contentious, the eccentric, the heretical, the unwelcome and the provocative... Freedom only to speak inoffensively is not worth having...<sup>4</sup>

Nor does England have a law prohibiting blasphemy. But Cineworld's actions have handed a small group of hardliners the power to determine what cinemagoers can see. It will not surprise you, I am sure, if others try to exercise the power of veto over what films Cineworld screens now that you have granted a small group of Islamic fundamentalists this opportunity. If you believe this veto will only be exercised by Muslims and not white supremacist groups objecting to films they find offensive I fear you will be mistaken.

If the right to free speech is not vigorously defended by all of us it will simply wither away and die. Cineworld's decision to capitulate to the will of these protestors will encourage more extremist groups to make unreasonable demands, backed up with menacing protests, and the sectarian views of tiny, unrepresentative, hard-line groups will be imposed ever more widely on the rest of us.

Can I kindly ask you to reconsider your decision?

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'J. Y.' or similar, written in a cursive style.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-61729392>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/cineworld-prophet-muhammad-fatima-lady-of-heaven-b2096633.html>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E\\_eKCHULE7w&t=92s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_eKCHULE7w&t=92s)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/miller-v-college-of-police-judgment.pdf>

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Cc: The Rt Hon Priti Patel, Home Secretary  
The Rt Hon Kit Malthouse, Minister for Crime and Policing