

QUMSA's Membership Open to All Queen's Students

Concerns regarding the legality and integrity of the membership policies of Queen's Muslim Students' Association (QUMSA) have surfaced since the first meeting of the AMS Assembly. Seemingly convincing criticisms of the organization have subsequently emerged, yet the arguments put forth are nonetheless mistaken in their most basic premises.

Firstly, QUMSA's membership clause must be clarified, as it has been widely misunderstood. Everyone is welcome as a member of QUMSA, to partake in all of its events and utilize all of its services, regardless of their religious orientation or lack thereof. The club in fact has never been segregationist in terms of participation in its activities.

Following the Islamic faith is only requisite to voting in QUMSA's elections, and running for positions on the club's executive committee.

While Stacey Duong, in Tuesday's Journal editorial, argues that QUMSA's exclusivity in this regard is not compatible with the group's own goals, she highlights only select objectives of the organization, removing them from the context of the full mandate in its entirety.

QUMSA encourages friendly relations and dialogue with non-Muslims, holding such values with the highest regard. Nevertheless, QUMSA's primary focus is serving the Muslim community on campus, and representing Muslims at Queen's. A quick glance at its website confirms this point, as the objectives Duong underscored are merely few among many revealing QUMSA's priority to assist Muslims with their religious and spiritual needs.

Given this mandate, it's only logical that executive positions within QUMSA be taken up by Muslims. The best person to understand the needs of Muslim students, to have the necessary knowledge base and comprehension of Islam, and to represent Muslims at Queen's would naturally be a Muslim student.

As Duong explains, section 18 of the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC) allows special interest groups to give priority of membership to those it is engaged in serving. Organizations with a religious mandate may require that members in an executive position be "similarly identified", as the charter puts it. Thus it's unclear exactly how QUMSA's membership clause violates the OHRC. If the minimal restriction of eligibility in executive elections is not within the OHRC, then what is the purpose of section 18 and how else could the exemption possibly apply to any group?

In fact QUMSA's restriction of executive positions to Muslims alone falls well within the boundaries of the OHRC. This exclusion ensures that the club's goals of serving Muslims on campus are realized, while its secondary goals of fostering good relations with non-Muslims and increasing Islamic awareness are in no way hindered. Conversely, allowing

for non-Muslims on QUMSA's executive essentially jeopardizes the interests of those whom QUMSA aims above all to serve.

Attempting to attribute this clause to some fear of an anti-Muslim coup is absurd, as this matter has nothing to do with keeping non-Muslims out and everything to do with securing the club's primary goals.

Nonetheless, hefty allegations of QUMSA's "wholesale exclusion of non-believers" are categorically unfounded. All of QUMSA's events and services are open to everyone. The reality is that many non-Muslims do partake in a variety of QUMSA's activities, from educational events to social gatherings and even worship rituals.

Indeed it's quite presumptuous to claim that non-Muslims joining in the club's activities would "feel the effects of QUMSA's [supposed] segregationist practices". I can't help but wonder how those with such strong testimonials feel qualified to offer these judgments, and whether they themselves have ever attended one of QUMSA's events or even discussed it with someone who has. Perhaps if they had, they'd find that longtime members of QUMSA, who are non-Muslim themselves, attest to the fact that they've never felt treated or viewed as different.

Further, in comparing QUMSA to employers who are barred from questioning applicants regarding their creed, the same line of logic must be applied to an alternative perspective: as employers require certain qualifications and education, should QUMSA not also ascertain a candidate's aptitude to fulfill the constitutional responsibilities of the exec?

Regarding the definition of a Muslim, QUMSA has no place (and in fact categorically rejects) judging one Muslim from another, and has never purported to do so; whosoever considers himself a Muslim can participate in executive elections.

Moreover, it's appalling that one need fight to defend a right he is already entitled to and has already been granted; the OHRC, the AMS constitution, and the Queen's Human Rights Office have allowed QUMSA this exemption, in accordance with the law.

Those skeptical or intrigued by QUMSA are invited to our upcoming Fast-a-thon on October 17th. We look forward to Muslims and non-Muslims partaking in the fast together, and gathering for dinner courtesy of QUMSA. Coming together to fundraise for a greater cause and foster a deeper mutual understanding is but the best of resolutions I see.