

## Imans line up to condemn Homosexuality

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Rick Morton, Social Affairs reporter, Melbourne

Gay and lesbian people should be put to death or otherwise punished under sharia, according to two imams who share leadership positions with Shady Alsuleiman, the controversial sheik invited to a Ramadan dinner at Kirribilli House by Malcolm Turnbull.

The Australian National Imams Council, of which Sheik Alsuleiman is president, has at least three executive members who believe the only punishment for homosexuality is the death penalty, according to Islamic law.

Imam Yusuf Peer, the chairman of the Council of Imams Queensland, who is a member of the national peak body, told The Weekend Australian yesterday that it was “not permissible” to be gay and Muslim.

“But we do not have a problem with the people themselves, just the act and ideology,” Imam Peer said. “But this is what the sharia law says and we have to follow that. There is no way around that. When we are talking about gays, we have to be confident (they are gay) and there must be a lot of investigating.”

When asked if sharia required death, Imam Peer said: “Yes.”

Imam Peer said because a “proper process” involving “committees” applied, it prevented the “random bashing and killing” of homosexuals: “Nobody can implement Islamic sharia on their own. There is a procedure, there is arbitration, there is a committee.”

The Prime Minister’s decision to host a holy-month iftar dinner at Kirribilli House with Sheik - Alsuleiman caused a political storm yesterday after The Australian revealed anti-gay comments made by the ANIC president.

Mr Turnbull condemned the comments and said it was a “mistake” to invite the sheik, but would not reveal whether he would be struck from future invite lists.

Responding to the media storm yesterday and Mr Turnbull’s repudiation of his comments, Sheik Alsuleiman said there was no place for homophobia in Australia and he had never called for adulterers to be stoned to death.

“I unequivocally reject the claim that I called for the stoning or any form of punishment of adulterers and/or homosexuals,” he said. “As an Australian and a Muslim, I unreservedly condemn the vilification and oppression of any group of people based on race, religion, gender, sexuality, or any other criteria for that matter. “In light of the above, there is absolutely no place for homophobia or any sort of hatred or discrimination towards a person who identifies as LGBTI. “As human beings, we need to come together to overcome and combat the hate that is fuelling so much violence in the world today.”

Sheik Alsuleiman has previously quoted Islamic law on the punishment for zina — sex outside marriage — in which he asked his followers to “remember” sharia calls for the death of those who commit adultery.

Extremist Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir's spokesman Uthman Badar said on Facebook yesterday that Mr Turnbull was condemning the "normative Islamic position on homosexuality" and criticised fellow Muslims for listening to a lecture on "how they should take liberalism instead of Islam as reference point" in their lives.

ANIC treasurer Imam Mohamed Imraan Husain said that under sharia, penalties applied to all crimes, including adultery and homosexuality. Sometimes zina applied to gay people who had sex outside marriage, attracting lashes or the death penalty.

"Males cannot see another males' private parts because that may lead to attraction," he said.

"Islamic punishments are carried out all around the world, but they do not carry out the punishment until all the prerequisites are met. But if people are raised in Islam, Islam prevents lesbianism and being gay."

Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said Imam Peer's stance on homosexuality had no "place in Queensland". "I'll always respect a person's right to freedom of religious beliefs, but under no circumstances do these views have a place in Queensland," she said. "I can't recall ever meeting with this person, and based on these comments, I wouldn't. It's an abhorrent thing to say and Queenslanders reject it."

Imam Peer conceded that while Muslims "live sharia in their everyday lives", it conflicted with Australian laws, and the only way around that was for Muslims to be "involved in the political process".

Also invited to the multi-faith dinner was Sydney Anglican Archbishop Glenn Davies, who opposes same-sex marriage and once said the church's acceptance of homosexuality was "the culmination of over 30 years of compromise with Western culture".

Amid the furore, some Muslims have demanded Sheik Alsuleiman step down as ANIC president, - arguing there was no scriptural basis for the death penalty or corporal punishment in Islam. Muslims for Progressive Values in Australia yesterday called Sheik Alsuleiman "wrong" and for him to be ousted. "Homosexuals do not spread evil in society," it said. "This is not an Islamic view, but is rather driven by blind prejudice and hate, and as such it should be rejected by other Muslim community leaders unequivocally," the group said.

Reem Sweid, the president of Muslims for Progressive Values in Australia, said other religions held homophobic views but Muslims should not be "comfortable" with having the same attitudes.

Additional reporting: Geoff Chambers