

Regarding:

Imam Afroz Ali

*Respondent*

and

Former members of the Al-Ghazzali Centre, Sydney

*Complainants*

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## **COMMUNITY MEMORANDUM: CONCLUSION OF ARBITRATION**

*Date of memorandum: 28 December 2017 / 8th Rabi al-Akhir 1439*

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Council of Arbitration: Case Against Imam Afroz Ali:

*Shaykh Faraz Rabbani \ Imam Zaid Shakir \ Aarif Rasheed*

*Advisor: Dr Umar Abd-Allah*

### **Community Memorandum: Conclusion of Arbitration Process**

**To:** Muslim Community Scholars, Leaders  
**From:** Council of Arbitration on the case against Mr Afroz Ali of the Former Al-Ghazzali Centre, Sydney, Australia.<sup>1</sup>  
**RE:** Conclusion of Arbitration Process: General Advisory to All Concerned

#### **Executive Summary:**

1. A formal process of arbitration was established and undertaken by this Council in order to bring the numerous and increasing complaints against Imam Afroz Ali to a formal process.
2. Throughout several months of perseverance by the Council, including numerous directives and ultimatums issued to him, Imam Afroz Ali has remained non-compliant with key aspects of the letter and spirit of both the Council's Order and the process of arbitration.
3. It is necessary to issue this advisory as an unequivocal warning to all concerned against any engagement with Imam Afroz Ali until such time as he demonstrates clear, genuine self-rectification, which will entail overcoming his lengthy history of manipulative conduct.

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<sup>1</sup> The former Al-Ghazzali Centre has subsequently been renamed as the Riverwood Centre and is now in the custody of members of the Sydney Muslim Community.

## **(A) The Process & Order undertaken and the Order of the Council**

1. In May 2017, the Council took up the urgent duty of establishing a formal process for the complaints against Imam Afroz Ali (Mr Ali). The Council now **reports to the community** on this process by way of an advisory and warning. The process was established upon the formal consent of Mr Ali and the complainants to an arbitration process presided over by the Council. **Over 30 written evidential statements** were submitted to the Council by persons with complaints against Mr Ali, including a majority of the closest and longest-standing of Mr Ali's students and helpers at the "Al-Ghazzali Centre".<sup>2</sup> These statements were **detailed, well corroborated and credible**. They were provided to Mr Ali for response.
2. On 22 May 2017 **a hearing was held**<sup>3</sup> at which complainants (about 30 in number), together with their representatives whom they chose from amongst themselves, **attended**, read out statements, asked questions of Mr Ali before the presiding Council members.<sup>4</sup> This hearing enabled the complainants to **confront Mr Ali personally, in a formal and safe space**, a most important opportunity given their inability and/or unsuccessful attempts to do so previously. The hearing also **afforded Mr Ali the opportunity of response**. Statements in support of Mr Ali were also filed. Mr Ali also **responded orally throughout** the hearing.
3. The statements of the complainants were **overwhelming in their pattern of general agreement on their grievances** and also alluded to a diverse variety of other **factual evidence of misconduct**, especially in the areas of **lack of transparency, misappropriation and misuse of contributions, personal debts**, and other funds. They gave a **compelling picture** of Mr Ali's **overall behaviour**, which would **dismiss** any suggestion that the complaints against him were **arbitrary or the result of personal vendettas**. It was also clear that there had been **no malicious collusion** between complainants against Mr Ali.
4. Mr Ali **did not** during this hearing specifically admit or **accept any of the many substantive allegations**, despite the overwhelming evidence that he had by then had **full opportunity** to consider. Mr Ali did not provide any counter arguments to the main substance of the general body of complaints. Mr Ali **could not provide any credible or coherent alternative** to the complaints at all that might rebut the main thrust of their grievances. Despite his not explicitly admitting to the allegations, Mr Ali **agreed** to submit himself to the Council's **findings, rulings and directives**. These findings, rulings and directives were summarised, finalised, and presented to all present at the hearing in the form of the **Council's Order** ("the Order"). The Order was **agreed upon by all** present and immediately **signed by Mr Ali** and three representatives of all of the complainants.

<sup>2</sup> It became apparent during this process that Al-Ghazzali Centre was not registered as an organisation, but rather, merely served as an alias for Mr Ali himself. Accordingly, Mr Ali ran the finances of the organization entirely alone with no transparency or oversight.

<sup>3</sup> Held at the Figtree Conference Centre, Homebush, Sydney

<sup>4</sup> Shaykh Faraz Rabbani and Aarif Rasheed (Arbitrator) conducted this hearing in person for the Council.

5. In compliance with the most urgent stipulation in the Council's Order, Mr Ali did in fact, on 29th Sha'bān 1438, corresponding to Thursday 25th May 2017, at the former Al-Ghazzali Centre, deliver, as he was required to by the Order, "in full, a sincere expression of remorse, **expressly acknowledging the harm he had caused** to the concerned individuals." The following evening, on Friday 26th May 2017, Mr Ali concluded his **final class** at the former Al-Ghazzali Centre. **Mr Ali has not since returned to teach, speak, or otherwise engage in any activity** whatsoever at the premises of the former Al-Ghazzali Centre. Mr Ali had formally agreed to comply with the **explicit prohibitions** of the Order, namely:

1. for 2 years, **not teaching publicly or privately** any matter relating to Islam;
2. for 3 years, **not serving in any executive role** in a Muslim organisation, and for *any other* role to be specifically approved by the Council;
3. for 5 years, **not receiving or handling funds** in connection with any Islamic organisation.

6. Critically, the Order stipulated a rehabilitative clause: the completion of **400 hours community service, reduced to 200 hours when Mr Ali's spiritual and psychological rehabilitation** entailed his extended absence from Australia (in order for him to travel to be under the guidance of his spiritual guide).

**(B) Mr Ali's non-compliance with this arbitration process and the Order of the Council.**

7. Mr Ali **neither complied with all critical aspects of the Order, nor with numerous subsequent warnings, ultimatums and directions** from the Council which have attempted to retain the integrity of this process. Mr Ali's non-compliance has been with *both* the letter and spirit of the Council's Order and thus with the arbitration process as a whole.

**(C) The Council's advice to all concerned: a general advisory to our communities**

8. In light of the many **complaints of verbal and psychological abuse** against Mr Ali from his students and associates in addition to his **lack of transparency and accountability regarding funds, finances and personal debts**, and in light of Mr Ali's **failure to set right** these repeated patterns of abuse, the Council now advises that the **process** of arbitration it undertook has come to **an end**, and the Council issues an **unequivocal warning** to all concerned to **avoid future engagement** with Mr Ali unless and until he **demonstrates appropriate rehabilitation and establishes an acceptable pattern of behaviour**.

*Sincerely,*

*Council of Arbitration: Case Against Imam Afroz Ali*

**Dr Umar Abd-Allah**

**Imam Zaid Shakir**

**Shaykh Faraz Rabbani**

**Aarif Rasheed**