

## Challenging Religious Extremism and Radicalism in the 21st Century

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November 9, 2016



On Wednesday October 26, [Imam Shamsi Ali](#) (pictured) was invited to be a guest speaker at the UTS Extension Center in New York City at 4W43. His topic was “Challenging Religious Extremism and Radicalism in the 21st Century.” Imam Shamsi Ali, an Indonesian from [Sulawesi](#), had an articulate approach, gentle but firm, deeply committed to his religious thought and practice, thoughtful, open to other ideas, and concerned for the future.

He took a stand against “extremism of any type”. He made it clear that his commitment to anti-extremism is firmly based on the principled teachings of the [Prophet](#) who [warned his followers](#) to be “wary of extremism.”

The Imam’s 5 key reasons why extremism happens:

1. Ignorance itself, based on prejudices. Our relations must not be defined by conflicts (such as the Palestinian/Israeli conflict) but what we have in common; by our faith in the common God that we believe
2. Political and religious leaders misusing religion. A recent middle eastern president denied the Holocaust in order to incite domestic Muslims
3. Media failing to properly educate the public but instead focusing on conflict and strife to incite more conflict and misunderstanding.
4. Misunderstanding of religious texts.
5. When there is mistreatment and a lack of social and economic injustice, it impossible in many Muslim states to be against the government, so the alienated people (especially young people) turn their emotion and frustration on the perceived enemies i.e. USA and the West



He offered three practical ways to counter extremism:

1. Enhance spirituality for all religions, especially by encouraging all to worship our common God and not our religions and their practices
2. Challenge ourselves within our own faith tradition
3. Build partnerships with members of other faiths. Accept that we are living in one globalized world. Barriers are coming down.

#### **A New Initiative:**



The Guest Speaker Series is an initiative of Dr. Drissa Kone who joined UTS as the UTS Director of Student Life in August, 2016.

To connect with the students Dr. Kone conducted a survey in September 2016 to identify areas of student interest. Twenty-seven current students at UTS's New York City campus responded to the survey.

Of the 27 students, 19 were male and 8 female. 16 identify as Christian, 9 as Unificationist, and 2 another faith.

Through the survey the following programs were identified in order of interest:

- DISCUSSION ON RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL ISSUES
- INTERFAITH GATHERING
- VISITING HOUSES OF WORSHIP
- GUEST SPEAKERS
- WORSHIP SERVICE

#### **Student Life Mission Statement:**

To provide an opportunity for all UTS students to feel connected and embraced in an intercultural and interreligious environment through student life activities.

To meet students' needs the following activities have been recommended.

1. Invite a guest speaker to UTS each month to discuss religious and social issues.
2. Organize an interfaith gathering once a month.
3. Visit a house of worship this semester (A temple, mosque, church or synagogue)

Which will meet the following goals in line with the student life mission statement.

1. To increase students' intercultural and interreligious experience through student activities
2. To increase the student learning experience through student life activities
3. To create a safe environment for student exchange and interaction