

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS LIST

B E T W E E N : -

FARAH KOUTTEINEH

Claimant

and

ASSOCIATED NEWSPAPERS LTD

Defendant

STATEMENT IN OPEN COURT

Counsel for the Claimant

1. My Lord, in this claim for defamation, I appear for the Claimant, Ms Farah Koutteineh and Peter Gray appears for Associated Newspapers Ltd, the publisher of the Daily Mail.
2. Ms Koutteineh is an international relations undergraduate student at the University of Westminster. She is also the President of the University of Westminster Palestinian Society.
3. In 2018 the University installed CCTV cameras in student prayer rooms. The measures were part of the University's implementation of the Government's Prevent policy to counter extremism on University Campuses, and elsewhere. Some students at the University of Westminster complained that they regarded these moves by the University as, discriminatory, and erosive of their civil liberties.
4. Some students identified the University's Interfaith Advisor as the key figure in the implementation of these measures.
5. In response to these events, students at the University joined the NUS's "Students Not Suspects" campaign in April 2018 in collaboration with students at other universities. A large number of societies joined this campaign, including the Palestinian Society at University of Westminster. The campaign took the part of a three-day event, which comprised a Crisis Meeting at SOAS on the first day, a protest workshop where banners and placards were produced on the second day and a protest at the University of Westminster on the third day. Ms Koutteineh was one of several organisers of the Students Not Suspects campaign. She took part in the workshops and the protest.

6. There were seven campaign demands presented to the University and which formed the basis of the protest on campus. They included calls to dismiss the Interfaith Advisor, rewrite the risk assessment guidance for society events and involve student representatives in risk assessment decisions for transparency.
7. On 19 and 20 April 2018 The Daily Mail published an article which reported on the Students Not Suspects campaign at University of Westminster ('the Article'). The Article prominently referred to Ms Koutteineh who was pictured, with others, in two of the main photographs illustrating the Article. This gave the impression that Ms Koutteineh was the principal organiser or orchestrator of the campaign at the University of Westminster.
8. This impression was strengthened in the Article by a pull-out box which featured Ms Koutteineh as one of the student leaders which it was alleged were 'Poor Little Rich Kids who spout hatred.' The text about Ms Koutteineh went on to allege that she was a 'middle class cheerleader for terrorist groups' and that as the President of Westminster Students for Palestine Society she had held events which celebrated a female terrorist hijacker and leader of a terrorist group called the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Leila Khaled. The Article also portrayed the University of Westminster as having had a 'dark side to its campus culture... where *'The ideological climate feels conducive for radicalisation ... a place where extremism can fester'* (based upon two former students who graduated a decade ago joining Islamic State).
9. Against this background, the Article made a number of false statements and allegations about Ms Koutteineh, which it is the purpose of this statement in open court to correct, Associated Newspapers having accepted that they are untrue. Firstly, the suggestion that Ms Koutteineh is was an active supporter of one or more terrorist organisations is a was a serious defamatory allegation. It was also completely untrue, Ms Koutteineh abhors and condemns all terrorism and has never supported any terrorist organisation.
10. She did not organise an event at the University which 'celebrated' Palestinian hijacker and terrorist group leader Leila Khaled. Ms Koutteineh chaired an International Women's Day event by the University of Westminster Palestinian Society in 2018 in which she introduced speakers. Leila Khaled was not discussed at the event at all, and neither did Ms Koutteineh even know who she was.
11. Ms Koutteineh was not provided with an adequate opportunity to respond to these allegations before the Article was published and was very frightened and distressed when the Article was published, deciding to stay at home for her own safety.
12. I am here today to announce that in response to Ms Koutteineh's complaint of defamation to Associated Newspapers Ltd, the newspaper publisher and editor have agreed to withdraw these statements about Ms Koutteineh and print a correction of the Article and an apology to Farah Koutteineh in the newspaper

and online. In particular, Associated Newspapers Ltd accepts that Ms Koutteineh does not support any terrorist or terrorist group.

13. Associated Newspapers Ltd accepts that the Article should not have been published in the form that it was and has offered an apology to Ms Koutteineh. Associated Newspapers has had agreed to undertake not to repeat the publication of the allegations in the Article which Ms Koutteineh has complained of. It has also agreed to pay a sum in damages to Ms Koutteineh and the legal costs incurred in bringing the complaint.

Counsel for the Defendant

14. My Lord, on behalf of Associated Newspapers Ltd, I confirm that the company agrees with the account which the Court has just heard and is here today through me to offer a sincere apology to Ms Koutteineh for the distress and embarrassment which the publication of the Article has caused her, and to correct the record.