

MRU cancels speech by ex-Muslim-turned-atheist in light of New Zealand terror attack

Armin Navabi says Calgary school is over-reacting and calls its decision disappointing

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<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/mount-royal-university-armin-navabi-new-zealand-ex-muslim-atheist-speech-1.5065319>



Armin Navabi speaks to members of the Secular Party of Australia. (Armin Navabi)

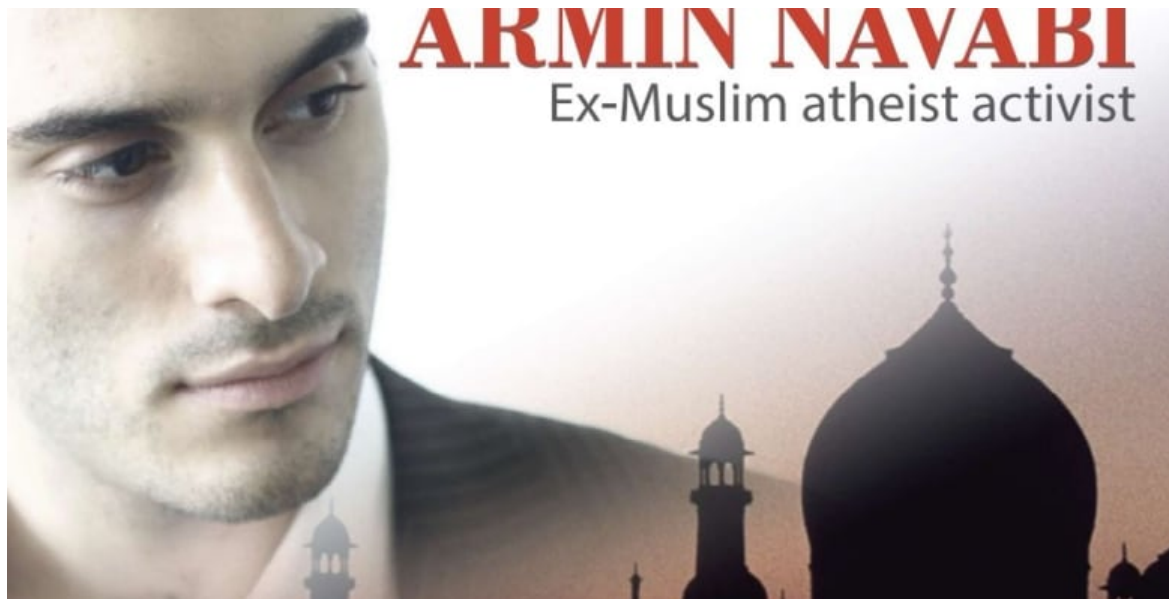
An ex-Muslim who is now an atheist and secular activist says Mount Royal University is overreacting by canceling his talk that was planned on campus for Thursday.

Armin Navabi, who lives in British Columbia, was being brought in by the Atheist Society of Calgary to share his journey and discuss the reasons he doesn't believe the Islamic faith can be reformed.

But now he says he's disappointed he won't get a chance to engage in some passionate discussions with staff and students, including those who still practice Islam, because of MRU's last-minute decision.

"What do they want? Do you want to have less conversation? Isn't less conversation exactly what leads to people having extreme radical positions," said Navabi,

"I mean the less words exchanged between us, the more fists and bullets are going to exchange between people. Having more conversations is exactly what you need in the face of some tragedy like this."



A poster promotes a now-cancelled talk at MRU by Armin Navabi, an ex-Muslim who has become an atheist and secular activist. (Armin Navabi)

The Atheist Society of Calgary says it was hoping to provide a safe space for open communication and a chance for people to learn more about atheists, from Navabi's perspective.

The group says it was also an opportunity to let some people know they are not alone.

"There are people that really resent the ex-Muslims, the ones who have been Muslim and left, they are in a really tough position, and we just wanted to give them, and

students that might be in the same position, in the closet, an opportunity to communicate and to explain to people where they are coming from and why," said Lois Edwards, who is a board member of the Atheists Society of Calgary, and an atheist contact with the Interfaith chaplaincy at MRU.

Navabi says he always struggled with his Islamic faith growing up, even attempting suicide at age 12, as a way to try to escape his fears.

Eventually he left Islam, became an atheist, and began sharing his journey with others through his [podcast](#), a book, and talks across the globe.

He says his goal is not to convert people, but to show them that people can disagree and still get along.

"If I don't really don't like Islam that means I hate Muslims, that's what people think. But we show them, no we are very much against Islam but we get along with Muslims the same way they very much dislike atheism but they can get along with us. And by showing them that they say, like, 'Hey look, disagreements are just that disagreements,'" said Navabi.

In an email to the Atheists Society of Calgary, MRU says it cancelled Navabi's talk because of concerns by some staff and students.

A statement to CBC News reads: "Universities are diverse and inclusive places where people should always feel respected and where there is free exchange of ideas. The tragic event that occurred in Christchurch less than a week ago has had a large impact on many members in our community. We made this decision in light of that impact and we would absolutely have the speaker come to our campus at another time."

Navabi is still scheduled to speak at C-Space King Edward, an arts centre at 1721 29th Ave. S.W., at 7:30 p.m. Thursday.