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## **University Launches ‘Speak Your Mind’ Campus Lecture Series**

*Fall to Focus on Middle East with Scholar Reza Aslan and War Activist Cindy Sheehan*

(NORTHRIDGE, Calif., October 10, 2006) — Cal State Northridge this fall is launching a “Speak Your Mind” lecture series exclusively for students, faculty and staff that will present provocative, thought-provoking views on some of today’s most compelling issues. The coming fall events will focus on the Middle East, while spring lectures will address immigration.

Religious scholar and media commentator Reza Aslan, who argues the current conflicts in the Middle East are the result of an internal struggle for reform within Islam, will be the kickoff speaker on Monday, Oct. 23, at 2:30 p.m. in the Plaza del Sol Performance Hall of the University Student Union. He will speak on “The Future of Islam: Toward the Islamic Reformation.”

Also scheduled for the fall is anti-war activist Cindy Sheehan, the Bay Area mother who became the face of the nation’s budding anti-war movement after her son, Army Spec. Casey Sheehan, was killed in Iraq in 2004. Sheehan will speak at 2:30 p.m. on Wednesday, December 6, also in the Plaza del Sol Performance Hall (formerly the USU Performing Arts Center).

“The purpose of the series is to bring timely, socially conscious issues to the attention of our students,” said Spero Bowman, CSUN’s associate vice president of academic resources. “Class discussions, campus awareness and media attention to these issues will help cultivate students’ informed choices about important issues that are impacting our society and the world.”

The “Speak Your Mind” series is sponsored by the university in collaboration with Associated Students and the University Student Union. Each fall lecture will be followed by a moderated question and answer session, book signing with the speaker, and small group breakout discussion sessions moderated by the university’s Center for Human Relations.

All events in the “Speak Your Mind” series are free, but require tickets from the Associated Students Ticket Office. The policy is one ticket per student, faculty and staff member with valid CSUN identification. Tickets will be available to students beginning two weeks before each event, and one week before each event for faculty and staff. The lectures are not open to the public.

The Plaza del Sol Performance Hall, where the lectures will occur, has seating for about 550 people. The adjoining Northridge Center in the University Student Union can accommodate an additional 600 people who can view the lectures by video broadcast. Tickets will be issued first for the Plaza del Sol Performance Hall, and then for the Northridge Center.

**(more)**

## **Speak Your Mind Lectures**

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Aslan, a native of Iran who fled with his family at age 7 to escape the Islamic revolution there, is one of the nation's most respected experts on Islam and the Middle East. The religious scholar and media commentator also is the author of the critically acclaimed book "No god but God: the Origins, Evolution and Future of Islam."

Praised by The New York Times as a "grippingly narrated and thoughtfully examined...literate, accessible introduction to Islam, the book has established Aslan as one of the most dynamic voices for liberal Islam in the U.S. Aslan also has made many television appearances, including on "Anderson Cooper 360," "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" and "Nightline."

Aslan argues the current conflicts in the Middle East are not the result of a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West, as one scholar has noted, but rather the consequence of an "Islamic Reformation" occurring within the Muslim world. Aslan maintains Islamic clerics and fundamentalists have misinterpreted the teachings of the Koran.

Sheehan made international headlines last year when she helped establish a "peace camp" for nearly a month outside President George Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas, to protest the U.S. involvement in Iraq. Sheehan also has authored a new book titled "Peace Mom: A Mother's Journey Through Heartache to Activism."

In the book, Sheehan chronicles her personal transformation from an "apathetic, ignorant, materialistic and TV-logged" wife into a highly publicized anti-war activist. Her son Casey was a U.S. Army Humvee mechanic who was killed in Baghdad on April 4, 2004, after having served only a short time in Iraq.

Sheehan went on to found Gold Star Families for Peace, an organization of Americans who have had loved ones killed in wars. Her organization also is planning a rally and sit-in on November 7 and 8 at the White House in Washington, D.C. to protest the Iraq War on the nation's Election Day and the day after.

Bowman acknowledged the fall lectures, and the soon-to-be-announced spring lectures on immigration, might stir strong feelings and emotions. However, he said the purpose is to challenge students' assumptions, stimulate critical thinking and promote informed views on some of the day's most important issues.

"The 'Speak Your Mind' lecture series reflects the university's mission to foster the free exchange of diverse and sometimes controversial ideas as part of the educational process," Bowman said. "By doing so, we uphold this nation's and this institution's traditions of free speech. The university's role is to serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas and intellectual debate."

For additional ticketing information, contact the A.S Ticket Office at (818) 677-2488.

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