

**Dr Muhammad Abdul Bari, MCB Secretary General,
Speech at the Community Consultation Meeting on Prevent
& Contest 2, Birmingham Central Mosque, 21st March 2009**

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Brother Chairman, my most respected Ulama, Community leaders and fellow Muslims, Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullah.

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) is your organisation it is dedicated to serve the interest of the Muslim community and work for the common good, to the betterment of the community and country.

From the time of its inception MCB always based all its programmes and activities on the views and advice of our respected Ulama, leaders and members of the community. Today's consultation meeting is also an effort of similar nature.

The Government is about to launch a new counterterrorism strategy, Contest 2 that would lead to thousands more British Muslims being branded as extremists. The Contest strategy was first put in place in 2003 to tackle the threat of al-Qaida inspired terrorism.

In October 2005, the Government presented proposals that would have placed unprecedented controls on mosques – the so-called requirement orders. Alhamdulillah the community was able to send a strong signal that these proposals would be counter-productive. The time has come again for us to send a

signal to Government that what we have heard from the media about CONTEST2 is also going to be unproductive and they should go back and rework their policies.

What are the grounds of our concern? Apart from the media reports, the home secretary, Jacqui Smith, said in a speech in December last year that the government's counterterrorism strategy had to include challenging nonviolent extremist groups that "skirt the fringes of the law ... to promote hate-filled ideologies".

This new strategy which stems from such thinking would mean that the government would now class views held by most Muslims in Britain as extremist.

Contest 2 would widen the definition of extremists to those who hold views that clash with what the government defines as shared British values. We don't have a problem with shared values if they mean good citizenship, good neighbourliness, industriousness and personal integrity. We have a problem with shared values if they infringe on our religious beliefs and inherent sense of justice.

Moreover shared values cannot be prescribed. In a plural, democratic society they should emerge through dialogue and consensus.

When the Contest 2 proposals were leaked out in the media, the MCB immediately wrote to the Home Secretary seeking clarification. We asked the Government for clarity and whether it expected Muslims to take an oath of loyalty not expected from others? The response was

a bit long-winded, which in itself is a good thing because it means there is still an opportunity to see good sense prevail.

This is why we had to give you the trouble today to formulate a well thought out response from the Muslim Community.

I take this opportunity to remind all that the MCB fully believes in constructive engagement with all including the government, but only on our own terms. It is not an organisation of 'Yes, *Minister*'. Our community is facing trying conditions, but nevertheless we will speak truth to power insha Allah.

Unfortunately there are elements in Britain today who look at Muslims with suspicion and contempt. The officer who assaulted Babar Ahmad is an example. Yet Britain also has checks and balances, and eventually compensation was obtained, and regret expressed from the very top of the Met. Similarly we have an expectation that when a community genuinely feels that loose and subjective definitions of extremism will be counter-productive, then this voice will be heard. There are still good MPs in the house, and more new ones to join them at the next General Election.

The MCB will work with all communities in our country for the common good of our society; it has a distinguished record of vocal and uncompromising opposition of all threats to the security of our nation. We have done it spontaneously without any prompting from any quarter, and we will continue to do so without any fear or favour. But we will not submit to any dictates. That is not our way.