

**Iqbal Sacranie's speech at the FCO/MCB Eid reception  
on 10th December 2003 at Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre**

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In the Name of Allah the Most Kind, the Most Merciful  
Assalamu-Alaikum - Peace & Greetings to you all

The Foreign Secretary, Mr Jack Straw, your Excellencies, respected scholars, distinguished guests and friends, I am delighted that you have all joined us today for this very first joint MCB/FCO reception to mark the occasion of 'Id al-Fitr. May I at the very outset take this opportunity to thank everyone here and the director and staff at the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre for hosting us in these truly splendid surrounds. As you all know, 'Id al-Fitr marks the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan. Ramadan is a month of trial but also opportunity for the Muslim community. It is a time when Muslims throughout the world take stock of how they are performing in their duties towards God almighty and their fellow man. With the passing of each successive Ramadan the Muslim character ought to develop, mature and enhance, insha' Allah. So self-criticism is meant to be an essential part of the Muslim mind and behaviour.

The second Khalifa, Umar ibn al-Khattab urged every Muslim to judge themselves before they were judged by God. All of us, Muslim or non-Muslim can surely benefit by taking stock of where we are now. Yesterday, a delegation from the MCB met with the Home Secretary David Blunkett and the Home Office Minister, Fiona Mactaggart to convey the deep sense of unease and alarm in the British Muslim community over the recent series of arrests and the widely perceived misuse of the Anti-Terrorism legislation. As a result it is terrorising the whole law abiding community. We explained how high-handed police behaviour is threatening to damage years of constructive engagement between the government and the Muslim community. He reassured us that he would not tolerate any use that was shown to be inappropriate and was willing to look at statistics provided by MCB that there was a worrying discrepancy between the number of arrests and the numbers eventually convicted.

Similarly, no one would know it more than yourself, Jack, what a great rebuilding challenge we face in the field of international relations, not just with the Muslim and Third world but also the European Union. Knowing you as we do, as a friend of the community, let me say that we do understand your agonies during the build on to war and post war. However, it is also time for the New Labour to do a serious soul searching and not to allow this great country to become an unwitting accomplice in someone else's neo-conservative project for world domination. Even if Robin Cook could not do it then, it is time now to make our foreign policy truly fair and ethical. This is not an occasion to go into the details and arguments but we can all see how our assumptions and even our intelligence have been less than meticulous. However, whatever may or may not happen out there in Iraq or Palestine or Kashmir or Chechnya, the simple truth is that the battle for Britain is to be fought in these very great isles. The real battle that we face here today is not only about taxation, education, health services, crime and Islamophobia, but actually about the health of our own democracy.

The growing feeling of disenfranchisement and alienation by an increasing number of people. I think this is far more serious a threat to our political existence than the yet-to-be found Weapons of Mass Destruction. Let me now conclude this short Eid conversation with wishing you, Jack, again and all our honourable guests, friends and colleague, a very happy greeting not only for this Eid but also the many Eids to come. Insha Allah.

Thank you once again for joining us here this evening.

God be with you all.