

## Secretary General's speech at MCB and FCO Eid Reception

Bismillahir Rahman-ir Rahim  
In the name of God, the Beneficent and Most Merciful

29th November, 2004

Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, Your Excellencies, Members of Parliament, distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen!

Assalamu alaikum

Let me extend to you a very warm welcome to join us this evening to celebrate the launch of the publication 'the Muslims in Britain' as well as the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr. Eid-ul-Fitr marks the end of a month-long regime of discipline and self-restraint. It is an occasion of joy and thanksgiving and no joy is complete without sharing it with your friends. So thank you once again for letting us share our joys with you. In Turkey, they call this Eid, Seker [pronounced Shakar] Bairam, the Sugary Eid, the festival of sweetness. This is important for if we share our joys we are also able to share our pains. This short preamble is necessary because in these post-Cold War and unilateralist times, Eid has come to evoke bittersweet sentiments. Sadly, the proportion of bitterness has gone on to increase ever since.

But let us have the sweet things first. Of course, there has been some good progress at the home front. The very launch of the 'Muslims in Britain', produced jointly by the Muslim Council of Britain, Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Home Office, marks the achievements of British Muslims in many walks of public life, from business and sports, to science and academia and in parliament and politics. Through show-casing such positive contributions we aim to inspire confidence and promote creativity throughout the British Muslim community.

As a result of including the faith question in the last census, the government is in a better position to fine tune the delivery of its services to the needs of the various faith communities. For far too long it has been a taboo. However, we have to congratulate ourselves that we have now taken a lead over Europe and indeed the entire western hemisphere in this respect.

By recognising the faith element in identity, Britain has helped achieve more social peace as well as harness the faith factor in the development of the nation. I am sure those in the European Nations who are grappling with a conflictual model of social integration would like to take a serious look at the British way of nation-building.

There is now also a clear recognition that Islamophobia does exist not only in the media but also in the institutions and the society at large. The Prime Minister's explicit undertaking at the last Labour Party Conference to comprehensively outlaw discrimination on the grounds of religion will go a long way towards addressing the serious and damaging effects of Islamophobia. This legal remedy will give parity to Muslims and people of other faith who until now could only be regarded as second class citizens.

The promise was duly incorporated last week in the Queen's speech to Parliament. It comes after a long and arduous effort by Muslim organisations - the MCB and others - united in a common cause. This will make a huge and positive contribution to the lives and perceptions of Muslims as well as community relations.

We keenly await the details of the Bill and very much hope it will reflect the aspirations of the community. This deserves our appreciation and support. Indeed on the domestic front progress has also been made on a number of other areas as well: increased Muslim representation in Parliament; appointment of two Muslim ambassadors; inclusion of Muslims in British delegations sent overseas; establishing health and consular services for British Hajjis; allowing state-funded Muslim schools; facilitating the development of interest-free Islamic mortgages; preserving Halal method of slaughter; explicit commitment to the right to wear hijab and so on.

There is progress too in our relationship with all major political parties which are showing greater awareness of not only our concerns but also of the overall role and contribution British Muslims can make in the life of the nation.

However, imperfect as it may be, we do celebrate the democracy at home, but it is the Washington-driven foreign policies which have become a cause of serious concern as to where we may be heading in our relationship with nations, especially with the more or less one and a half billion Muslim people in our global village. It is an empirical fact but one can also be sure that our missions abroad as well as our information agencies are keeping the Government fully informed about the great swell of public opinion against Britain. It is not because, as a Pentagon report to the Bush Administration admitted, Muslims 'hate our freedom, but rather they hate our

policies' as being driven by ulterior motives, and deliberately controlled in order to best serve American national interests at the expense of truly Muslim self-determination. What's true about the Bush Administration was equally true of our own administration.

However, imperfect as it may be, we do celebrate the democracy at home. It is the Washington-driven foreign policies which have become a cause of serious concern for all of us. We are alienating ourselves from some one and a half billion Muslims in our global village.

It is an empirical fact. We are sure that our missions abroad and our information agencies are keeping the Government fully informed about the great swell of public opinion against Britain.

The report published last week by a Pentagon Advisory Panel, the Defense Science Board, admitted that the Bush Administration – and by extension, our government too – had alienated the world's Muslim community. The report found that, and I quote:

"Muslims do not hate our freedom, but rather they hate our policies...US actions appear... to be motivated by ulterior motives, and deliberately controlled in order to best serve American national interests at the expense of truly Muslim self-determination."

End of quote. Many of us assembled here today will no doubt agree with that summary. Let us hope that the report's crucial message is heeded well both in Washington and in London.

What's true about the Bush Administration was equally true of our own administration. Of all the former colonial powers, Britain had a singular distinction for its largely civilised process of decolonisation. That is gradually being tarnished. We are fast losing both friends and our image as an independent and influential power.

Palestine had been one big blot on the fairness of our foreign policy and we have now conjoined it with Iraq to serve the interest of Zionists.

There is little controversy about democracy as long as the people themselves are left free to choose their form of democracy, but it cannot be sustained for long even if imposed by force of arms. We have to recognise that the world is no more amenable to an arrangement arrived at only between nation states. What we call globalisation has given rise to the people factor. Some people can be suppressed for some time, but as we can already see the people are rejecting any arrangement which is not fair, which is not just, which is not in accordance with international legality – and to which they, the people, are not a willing party.

The unliteralist model of world order is a sure recipe for perpetual disorder. I am sure no one, except maybe the anarchist, would want this.

I do not want to dwell too much on foreign affairs, but as foreign affairs have come to occupy most of our lives, I would only say that whether it is Palestine, Iraq, Jammu and Kashmir, Chechnya or the Malay states of Pattani ceded by us to the kingdom of Siam, now Thailand, the only way to peace and justice is to go back to international legality. There is no international issue or question today which cannot be resolved if we all submit ourselves to international legality as enshrined in UN resolutions and other international instruments.