

ANNUAL REPORT

2003 – 2004



Presented at the MCB Annual General Meeting

22nd May 2004

Brent Town Hall
Forty Lane, Wembley, HA9 9HD

مجتبى خير أمة أخرجت للناس تأمرون بالمعروف
وتنهون عن المنكر وتؤمنون بالله

سورة آل عمران آية رقم ١١٠

“You are the best community raised up for mankind – you enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in Allah.”

The Qur'an, 3: 110

THE MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN

ANNUAL REPORT

2003 – 2004

Table of Contents

Secretary General’s Report.....	5 - 13
Treasurer’s Report	14 - 16
MCB Working Report	17 - 37
<u>Serving the Community</u>	17
§ <u>Representing Muslims</u>	21
§ <u>Dealing With Crises</u>	28
§ <u>Consultative Process</u>	30
§ <u>Community Bridge Building - Interfaith Matters</u>	34
§ <u>Reaching Out Beyond the Shores</u>	37
§	
Appendices.....	38 - 53
1. <u>Further Committee Work</u>	38
§	
<u>Education Committee</u>	38
§ <u>Europe & International Affairs Committee</u>	38

§ <u>Health & Medical Committee</u>	38
§ <u>Legal Affairs Committee</u>	40
§ <u>London Affairs Committee</u>	40
§ <u>Masjid (Mosque & Community Affairs Committee)</u>	41
§ <u>Media Committee</u>	41
§ <u>Research & Documentation Committee</u>	42
§ <u>Social Affairs Committee</u>	43
§ <u>Women & Family Affairs Committee</u>	45
§	
<u>2. Media Committee Letters</u>	46
§	
<u>3. Press Releases</u>	47
§	
<u>4. Office Bearers, Advisors, Chairs, National & Zonal Representatives</u>	50
§	

Secretary General's Report

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)



IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, MOST GRACIOUS, MOST MERCIFUL

Mr Chairman, Respected Scholars, Distinguished Guests, Delegates of MCB Affiliate Organisations, Members of the Central Working Committee, Sisters and Brothers.

As-salaamu alaykum wa rahmatullah.

Alhamdulillah – all praise and gratitude is due to Allah – we have been blessed with the opportunity to serve the interests of the Muslim community in Britain and the society of which we are a part for another year – the sixth year of the MCB's existence.

Alhamdulillah we have been blessed by Islam, with the eternal message of the Qur'an and the beautiful example of our guide Prophet Muhammad, a model of grace and mercy for all creation. As followers of the noble Prophet, may God bless and grant him peace, we have a tremendous responsibility to human beings, other creatures and the environment.

The past year, in some ways, has been a defining period for Muslims in Britain. Despite the difficult times in which we live, we as believers in God have to remain optimistic. It is this optimism in the help of God and in our belief in the essential dignity of all human beings that gives us the strength to meet the challenges that we constantly face. This was also the dominant message that came out of our Imams and scholars' meeting in Markfield last month.

It is in this spirit of optimism that the MCB has managed to make some substantial achievements for the benefit of the Muslim community and society.

Initiatives and Achievements

Permit me at the outset to focus briefly on a few initiatives, achievements and indeed 'successes' of the MCB in the last year.

We have seen the launch of MCBDirect, an initiative of the Research and Development Committee (Redoc). This is a groundbreaking Islamic web portal that deals with the vast amount of requests we get for information. The imaginative Books4Schools initiative to equip schools with the materials – books, artifacts, multimedia resources and support notes – that teachers need in order to present to our children with a correct understanding of Islam and Muslims. These are both excellent examples of the development of a concept, the raising of substantial funding from community events to fund it, and training the personnel to run it.

Vigorous protests by the MCB's media committee against the TV presenter Robert Kilroy-Silk's anti-Arab and anti-Muslim remarks led to the scrapping of his BBC daytime show. The media committee has continued its close monitoring of all media and has been successful in securing a number of corrections and apologies. They have also obtained assurances from the BBC not to use the demeaning terms 'Islamic terrorism' or 'Islamic terrorist'. A number of articles have been written and published in the mainstream press including The Times, Daily Telegraph, Daily Express and others and a hectic schedule of interviews on all media outlets have been maintained. This has all helped to improve the image and reporting on Islam and the Muslim community but more needs to be done to ensure that the Muslim community is not constantly projected in a negative way.

With the support from the Department of Trade & Industry, the MCB in cooperation with MDUK and the Muslim News, and with Sr Nusrat Chughtai in charge of the project, have

published material on the new Religious Discrimination legislation affecting Muslims at the workplace. In addition, several workshops have been held - in Bradford, Cardiff, London and elsewhere, for imams, community workers, solicitors and other advice providers. We are continuing with our campaign to ensure that we have protection against religious discrimination in all other areas as well.

The MCB met with the Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, to secure the release of Muslims held without charge and in the most atrocious and degrading conditions by the Americans at Guantanamo Bay. Five have been released. There are still four being held and we ask that they too should be returned to Britain immediately. <http://www.mcb.org.uk/akm.pdf>

We have secured a willing commitment from government ministers that no attempt will be made to introduce a ban on hijab in British schools. The Home Office Minister, Fiona MacTaggart at an Id al Fitr reception spoke of "valuing and celebrating diversity without controversy which allows a British woman to wear the hijab comfortably in public or in a school. "

Regular bilateral quarterly meetings have been agreed with the Secretary of States for different government departments including the Home Office, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Education & Skills, Department of Trade and Industry and Media and Culture to review issues of concern to the Muslim community.

Encouraging more Muslims to go into the teaching profession is a far-sighted initiative of the newly reconstituted Education Committee.

For the first time ever, our Public Affairs Committee organised fringe meetings at each of the major political parties' (Labour, Conservative, Liberal) annual conferences to highlight Muslim issues and concerns. Among those who took part were Mike O'Brien MP , and Fiona Mactaggart MP from the Labour Party, David Lidington MP and Dominic Grieve MP from the Conservative Party, and Dame Shirley Williams and Dr Jenny Tonge MP from the Liberal Democrats.

With the efforts of the London Affairs Committee we have worked with the Mayor's Office and the Greater London Authority to ensure that the Muslim community is able to participate fully in the political and cultural life of the capital, challenge Islamophobia and deal with security and safety concerns affecting all Londoners.

We were at the forefront to ensure that the good name of our affiliate Interpal was cleared by the Charity Commission of any wrongdoing, in spite of the sinister Zionist campaign to prevent them from carrying out their vital humanitarian work in Palestine.

The Secretary General, Committee chairs and senior members of the CWC have participated and delivered papers in several international conferences and seminars. These included the OIC Islamic Summit in Malaysia, Seminar on Corporate Social Responsibility organised by the British High Commission in Singapore, a Religious Discrimination seminar in Austria (Sabah Mokhtar), Cultural Identity in Germany (Mohibur Rahman), Pro-Life campaigns and Health issues in Malaysia and China (Abdul Majid Katme), Interfaith Meetings in several European countries and Pakistan (AbdulJalil Sajid), Democrats from the Muslim World Conference in Turkey (Iqbal Sacranie), visit to Malaysia (Iqbal Asaria) and San Francisco September 11 International Inquiry (AbdulWahid Hamid).

And looking to the future, the first MCB Leadership Development Programme over six months for professionals including men and women with a commitment to community work was organised by the MCB Treasurer, Dr Akber Mohamedali. This was part of a focussed attempt to plan for the future and develop leadership in depth.

Demands on the MCB

With its ever expanding role, with achievements and indeed 'successes' in several areas, the demands on the MCB have continued to grow. The pressures on the organisation have increased enormously, especially given the fact that all MCB office bearers and all workers, apart from our skeletal office staff, are volunteers, most of whom have their own full-time jobs.

The good news is that this situation is set to improve, insha Allah with the new appointment of an Executive Director for the MCB. This onerous position will generate the support needed to make the running of the MCB smooth and effective.

The Treasurer's Report which follows will provide more in depth details of our financial position. The situation has improved considerably which is largely due to the dedication of our Treasurer Dr Akber Mohamedali. May Allah accept and reward his efforts.

Our financial resources – critical to consolidating and extending our work - are meagre. We urge all affiliates to try help in all the ways they can to make the organisation financially healthy. The success that the MCB has achieved nationally and internationally has of course meant that the demands on and challenges to the organisation are constantly on the increase. This of course calls for constantly greater resources to meet these demands.

Work of Committees

The MCB committees are the engines that drive the multi-faceted work of the organisation. Many committees have performed outstandingly well. Among these have been the Finance and General Purposes Committee, Research and Documentation Committee, the Media Committee, the London Affairs Committee, the Membership Committee, Social Affairs Committee and recently the Education Committee.

A few committees, however, have not been able to constitute themselves properly or have not delivered meaningful results. Some committees have remained one-person efforts. We are now making a recommendation that each committee should now have a permanent secretary who would be responsible for administrative tasks and also the research and documentation work of the particular committee. This should be a paid appointment, and should help in efficiency and deliver results. The big need would be one of raising funding.

Affiliates

Although the number of our affiliates has increased in the past year to 395, we need to ensure that more organisations, from the rich mosaic of Muslim Britain, become affiliates of the MCB and reflect the unity and diversity of the Muslim community in Britain.

We have seen some excellent initiatives from our affiliates. At this year's Islam Awareness Week, we had the innovative idea of the Virtual Islamic Classroom, which among other things gave a sampling of the positive impact of Islam and Muslim civilization on Europe (www.isb.org.uk). The ISB Living Islam Summer Camp 2003 in Lincolnshire was a huge affair for families and youth to network, acquire skills and enjoy themselves in a halal setting.

In national affairs, we see that FOSIS, the Federation of Students' Islamic Societies in the UK & Eire has had a record delegate participation in this year's National Union of Students Conference as a result of which for the first time Muslims are represented on the NUS executive.

We see individuals graduating from community organisations to participating in national campaigns and now aspiring to represent constituencies at the European and National level. The former President of our National affiliate MAB, Anas Al-Takriti is standing for a European parliamentary seat for the Respect Party. We are also pleased to note that Muslims have been selected to fight safe seats. Our Chair of the Legal Affairs Committee Sadiq Khan has been chosen as the prospective Labour candidate for Tooting, Shahid Malik selected for Dewsbury, Yasmin Qureshi for Brent East Labour Party and Ali Miraj for the Watford Conservative Party in the upcoming General Election. We wish all of them our best wishes.

This is an appropriate point to encourage all Muslims to take an interest in and participate fully in the functioning of local democracy, in the local elections as well as in the European elections. We encourage all Muslims to vote on June 10 in the Local Government and European Elections for candidates who have firm ethical values and who are likely to be most effective in working for the well-being and improvement of our communities and societies. And remember that participation does not end with voting.

Among many other affiliate initiatives, there have been Mosques Open Days around the country such as the programmes organised by the UKIM and Harrow Mosques. The idea of an Annual National Open Mosque Day will soon be a feature of British national life.

One of the most imaginative projects is the London Muslim Centre, a new complex of buildings and services with the East London Mosque on Whitechapel Road at its centre. This is a symbol of the vision, planning and skills within the community. We may complain about our youth, this is an example where from the start, a large number of young and talented people have been engaged in this project which will be a landmark contribution to the vibrant city of London when it is opened on Friday 11 June with the Imam of the Ka'bah leading the Jumu'ah Salat. This project demonstrates that a community that is plagued by poverty and by a variety of social ills has the capacity to raise itself up and to become a beacon of hope for others.

This is what we would like to see more of in the country as a whole. There is great need for more effective spending on improving the facilities in our neighbourhoods, places for people to meet and learn, play and pray, for athletics, sports, outdoor keep-fit facilities, neighbourhood meeting places for youth and community – places which are alcohol, drug and tobacco free where the scourge of anti-social behaviour, of uncontrolled vandalism and criminality which is blighting our inner-city centres and neighbourhoods across the country.

Links with affiliates and 'grass-root' communities

We are conscious of the fact that the links with our grass-root communities need to be strengthened considerably.

Office bearers and zonal representatives need to travel the country on a regular basis. Because of the excessive demands of limited staff, the weekly E-Newsletter has not been posted as regularly as it should have been. In the last few weeks, however, through the generosity of Ahmed Malik, the editor of the new national tabloid newspaper, The Muslim Weekly (www.themuslimweekly.com), we have had a full page of MCB news every week. MCB committees and affiliates need to submit instant and newsworthy reports of their initiatives and activities to enable us to inform both our community and others of the varied work of the MCB. The best source of up-to-date news and archived material for the MCB is its website (www.mcb.org.uk) which is generously maintained by Webstar. Other forms of effective communication of news and especially the analysis of issues and trends need to be considered if we are to upgrade our performance.

We appreciate and applaud the constructive and objective reporting in the mainstream Muslim media and in particular the Muslim News, the Muslim Weekly, Impact International, News International, the Nation, Asharq – al –Awsat, ARY Digital, Prime TV and Euroangla.

The MCB has been stretched. But we have a long way to go. We say alhamdu lillah, all praise and thanks be to God, for giving us this opportunity to do a duty.

Work in Progress

We need to make a determined effort to improve the financial base of the MCB on a permanent basis. We also need to be thinking of new offices and headquarters.

A new initiative spearheaded by our Constitutional Advisor Mr Khurshid Drabu called 'Friends of the MCB' is set to involve individuals in supporting the MCB in a massive way.

The Public Affairs Committee, following a period of consultation, is in the process of revising the Electing to Listen document to inform the community about the issues for the next General Elections. Next week they are holding a Question Time session with all the London Mayoral candidates. Muslims make up a sizeable section of voters in many London boroughs.

The Legal Affairs Committee is planning to organise a high profile international conference on Islam and Social Peace/Social Justice that will go a long way towards bringing about greater understanding of the teachings of Islam in these troubled times. There are also tentative plans for holding a seminar of Muslims from Europe and the Western hemisphere to look at strategic planning issues for the next decade.

Assessment

The Muslim community is now more outward-looking and growing in confidence despite a widespread climate of anxiety and the existence of barriers in certain areas -- such as the lack of protection in law against incitement to religious hatred.

In the face of perceived threats to our community and our country, we have acted to ensure that the Muslim community is protected and that it is, and is seen to be, working for the safety and security of everyone in our society. Muslims adhering to their faith can only be a source of strength and good not only for their own community but also for the rest of society.

In my address to our AGM last year, I stated that the Muslim community is not and cannot be a ghetto community. It is not, and cannot be, a community that is content with agitating from the sidelines against perceived ills and injustices. It is a community that is firmly committed to participation at every level of society for the common good of all. This has been the MCB's ethos right from its inception.

As citizens of this country and an integral part of British society, we not only have rights, but we also have obligations. We do not claim any special rights. All we expect is fairness and equality. Let there be no doubt in our minds that we have the obligation to participate. We have the obligation to contribute. We have the obligations of good-neighbourliness, of being concerned for others, to share their joys and feel their pains, to provide support and help wherever we can. This is what our faith requires of us. This is our unilateral responsibility. We have an obligation to encourage all that is good and discourage all that is harmful.

As part of interacting with the wider society, the MCB has been keen to foster good relationship with other faith communities. In the interfaith meetings that we have participated, we have emphasised the need for all communities to go beyond the principle of mere tolerance of others to one of respect for others. From respect will automatically flow tolerance and harmony in society. This is a position that is firmly rooted in Islamic teachings.

It is with deep regret that we note the continuing scathing attacks on Islam by Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury. In his Rome speech, he sought to rekindle old prejudices and bizarrely called for the need to "question and revise" the Qur'an to enable Muslim societies to overcome their "strong resistance to modernity". Such outrageous remarks are also incompatible with the spirit of interfaith dialogue and the excellent work that has been done to promote mutual recognition and respect among faiths.

Lord Carey, among many others, continue to allege that Muslim leaders have not been doing enough to condemn acts of terror. On the contrary, Muslims have clearly and forcefully condemned all forms of terrorism whether practised by individuals, groups or states. This is what is now expected from other faith communities as well. What we all need to understand is that dialogue is not about talking at, but rather speaking with each other.

On a positive note, we welcome the just stand taken by the new Archbishop Rowan Williams in his Christmas message in calling for the end of the detention without trial of Muslims in Belmarsh and in Guantanamo. His criticism of the French legislation to ban hijab in public schools as "very provocative and very destructive" still has a strong resonance as other countries seek to follow intolerant France. Rowan Williams' assertion in this context that "There is no such thing as a neutral public space in which everybody has to put aside that which makes them distinctive" must also inform the recently rehashed debate on Britishness and multiculturalism. This debate, as Professor Tariq Modood has pointed out, is largely a phoney one. There is no conflict between our commitment to Britain and the need to preserve identities within a richly varied culture. "British Muslims have consistently shown how it is possible to be British, Muslim and proud." These are the words of the Home Office Minister Fiona MacTaggart.

In practical terms, we have worked in concert with others to achieve common objectives. On the important question of preserving the shechita and halal methods of preparing animals for food, the MCB and its affiliates have worked together with the Board of Deputies of British Jews in persuading the Government to reject the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) recommendation to impose pre-stunning before slaughter.

However, we do not accept the FAWC proposed new tactic of post-cut stunning for animals. We ask the Government to reject this recommendation as well. However, as a community, we too need to look at the whole question of halal foods at all stages in the food chain – from the rearing of birds and animals to sales outlets. Evidently, there are massive malpractices in the

halal food trade and we must look seriously at introducing or strengthening institutions and procedures for creating confidence in halal and wholesome food products.

The issue of terrorism and security, which we have mentioned above, continues to dominate. One atrocity, one terrorist attack, is one too many. We all need to remain vigilant. We are however puzzled when government or security officials speak not just of 'possible' but of 'inevitable' terrorist attacks. Why 'inevitable'? we are forced to ask. People really need to exercise considerable caution in apportioning responsibility and blame for atrocities before thorough investigations are carried out.

At the same time the MCB has been calling upon the security services to be much more circumspect in their 'fishing operations' for terrorists. There have been far too many cases of wrongful arrests and miscarriages of justice. One case of wrongful arrest is one too many. We note that this is not just a British phenomenon. In France, Germany, Italy and elsewhere, Muslims have been arrested and accused of trying to carry out horrendous crimes. Often with the powerful media in tow and with its chilling power to demonize, the assumption is almost always that people arrested in a blaze of publicity are guilty. When people are freed without charge, as in the vast majority of cases, the public does not know.

We urge the police and the security forces in all their actions to preserve the cardinal principle that a person is innocent until proven guilty. Nothing must be done to undermine this principle.

It is with a great deal of disquiet, indeed alarm that we note that new anti-terror laws are being proposed in Britain. The newer and yet more draconian measures that are being proposed (such as 'lowering the burden of proof') go beyond the requirements of security and would do immense damage to basic human rights.

The 'Stop and Search' powers given to the Police have been used unfairly and devastatingly especially against Muslims. Just as an entire generation of young black people were alienated through 'Stop and Search' practice, we are deeply worried with the latest report that the same thing is occurring again, this time to young Muslim men. We cannot support anything which is unjust.

This past year has been filled with crises. Every crisis has been a challenge, which has propelled us further and higher. The MCB has been conscious of the need to develop and go beyond a situation of perpetual crisis management in the way in which its affairs are run. We need to go beyond this to a situation of crisis anticipation and, better still, of crisis avoidance wherever possible. We need to protect innocent lives.

This is why the MCB in consultation with imams and scholars sent out a letter to the community throughout the country condemning terrorism unequivocally and calling for vigilance in the community. We are pleased to say that the response to the letter from the Muslim community and from the public at large has been very positive and supportive. I'd like to quote just one of many messages of support. Mr Dan Hoban wrote to the MCB via our website:

'You are doing something wonderful in your stand against violence. I often listen to news radio after work as I am picking up my children. The other day my eight year old son asked, "Why do Muslims want to kill everyone? Are they evil?" I said, "No son but the good Muslims seem afraid to stand up and say this is wrong."
I hope your efforts will convince more Imams to stand up against these unislamic actions....".

I ask: Who is responsible for putting such fear in the mind of this tender child? Who is responsible for this demonisation of Islam and Muslims? While asking this crucial question, we get some insights and relief from the recent remarks of the Bishop of Oxford when he spoke on Radio 4 about the negative perception of Islam and the stereotyping of the Muslim community. He commented that while everybody knows it's wrong, yet this negative stereotyping continues at a very high level.

In dealing with these challenges, I want to emphasize that the MCB is not here to encourage a culture of complaint or the politics of protest in the Muslim community.

For those who stand on the sidelines and accuse the MCB of compromising the interests of the community (being 'sell-outs' to the government) they need to know whenever we meet a Government Minister or a responsible person in the Services, we say to them: These are our governmental departments and agencies. What they do have a direct bearing on the lives of all citizens – from the cradle to the grave, from pre-natal care to facilities for burial. It is only proper that we should understand at first hand what they are doing and it is only proper that they should be aware of our needs and our concerns. And they should be accountable. We have the duty to support them in all that is reasonable and just. We have the duty to offer nasihah or sincere advice when we believe the interests of the country as a whole or our community in particular are being jeopardized or compromised. We have the right to demand of them that they are scrupulously fair and just in their dealings.

When Muslims are harassed, when Muslim homes are stormed in the middle of the night, we have the duty and the right to be vigilant and ask searching questions. When our Business & Economics Committee meets the Chancellor or the Governor of the Bank of England, we go there as representatives of people who need to buy houses and who need to have financial products that meet with the requirements of their faith – requirements that others also can benefit from; we go there to talk about the burden of debt and borrowing that increasingly oppresses consumers and even the government itself; we go there to put the case of the poor nations of the world who are seized in the debt trap and unable to even 'service' their loans. When we go to the Education Secretary, we highlight the plight of the educational underachievement of large sections of our communities and work together to establish a plan of action which will remedy the present imbalance.

When we meet Ministers and responsible personnel in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office we go there to press for an ethical foreign policy in a dismal world. For there is indeed much that is dismal, unjust, disturbing and heart-rending in what we see abroad. Our government's policies in the Middle East, as warned and predicted by us, have been disastrous for Britain and for the peoples of the region, especially for the long-suffering people of Palestine and Iraq. Afghanistan now is all but forgotten.

This is not just a Muslim view. The unprecedented letter from former British ambassadors called on the PM to reassess Britain's role and stop backing the 'doomed' US policies. The uncritical British support for the United States must end. Without justice for the Palestinian people and the right to return to their homeland, there will be no peace in the region. Britain bears a primary burden of rectifying its historic wrongs to the Palestinian people. Just as it bears a historic burden of responsibility to the people of Jammu and Kashmir to let them exercise their right of self determination through a UN supervised plebiscite. We hope and pray that the Iraqi people would soon be free from the unmitigated disaster of foreign occupation.

The stability and prosperity and the reputation of Britain matters to Muslims. We are contributors to this stability and stakeholders in its prosperity. We are not parasites and opportunists. This is our home and we have a duty to see that it is clean and healthy and free from danger. For when danger threatens, it threatens all alike.

Thanks

I would like to place on record my gratitude and deep appreciation for the support and cooperation I received throughout the year from my fellow Office Bearers, Chairs of the Committees, Office Staff, advisers and individuals who have given their invaluable advice and much of their time to the work of the MCB.

I also wish to thank all those individuals and organisations that have provided financial contributions and support for specific projects and those who make regular contributions through bankers standing orders. We hope that the number and size of such contributions will increase substantially so that the MCB can be placed on a firmer financial footing, insha Allah. I would like to thank institutions such as the Justice Foundation, the Islamic Cultural Centre and London Central Mosque the Muslim World League, London, Muslim Cultural Heritage, London and the Islamic Foundation in Markfield for hosting us and allowing us to use their facilities without charge on several occasions. I am particularly appreciative of the Imams and Mosque Committees throughout the country for their positive response and the critical role they have played and continue to play in mutual consultation in safeguarding the interests of the community.

I would also like to thank all those numerous persons in institutions, government departments and agencies, in the media, in academia, in the business community and elsewhere who have listened to us, reached out to us, advised us, supported us and who have contributed to the sum total of what we have achieved for the benefit of our community and our society.

This AGM would not have been possible without the sterling efforts of the AGM Planning Committee comprising Dr Jamil Sherif, Dr Daud Abdullah, AbdulWahid Hamid, Shiban Akbar and Dr Abdul Raheem Khan and our Constitutional Advisor and Election Officer Khurshid Drabu who have worked tirelessly over the last few weeks in preparing the documentation and reports for this important event. May Almighty Allah reward them abundantly for their commitment and efforts.

Conclusion

As I conclude, I would like to say that in spite of all the challenges that we are facing, it is heartening to note that people still find time to carry on with some of their normal activities. Courtesy of MCBDirect, for example, some have been enjoying the Visual Poems of the artist Mustafa (Mark) Evans while hundreds took part in the Islamic Relief's Evening of Inspiration at the Royal Albert Hall which raised thousands of pounds for charity. Through the MCB and the keepers of the Greenwich Observatory and Museum, groups have spent 'An Evening with the Stars' while getting a peep at Muslims' contribution to astronomy. Others have had the opportunity to attend the Shakespeare and Islam season at the Globe Theatre – all indications that Britain and Islam and Muslims go back a long way.

'There is a time for this, and a time for that,' said our noble Prophet, peace be on him.

However, as we go back to our homes and our communities, we need to realise that this is the time for Muslims to come out and work. "*Work! And God will see your work, and so will ...the believers.*" (*The Qur'an, Surah at-Tawbah, 9: 105*). There is no room for apathy or standing with arms folded on the sidelines. We need to go forward and take the fullest possible part in society. It should not be business as usual. We all have a job to do – to help rekindle the spark of morality in public affairs and a return to the basic values of truth and justice and compassion.

Today we sadly miss the presence of our dear brother Dr Ayub Thakur, President of President of the World Kashmir Freedom Movement who passed away this year. Dr Thakur was a universally loved figure among British Muslims, may Almighty Allah grant him Jannah.

Muslims who are true to their faith have proved how much they value humanity, law and order, family and community ethos, enterprise and social harmony. Islam teaches us to stand up for truth and justice and against wickedness and oppression, in a lawful and civilised manner. This is part of our religious obligation. We should reject any victim mentality and positively engage with others to create social harmony and stability.

We pray to Allah Subhaanahu wa Ta'ala to guide us and bless us with all that is good, that He makes this land safe and secure for all who live in it, and that He brings peace, justice and prosperity to all the oppressed people of the world. May Allah Subhaanahu wa Ta'ala forgive our shortcomings and accept all our efforts.

Ameen.

Iqbal AKM Sacranie
Secretary General
22 May 2004

