

Electing to Deliver

WORKING FOR A
REPRESENTATIVE BRITAIN

2005

MCB

The Muslim Council of Britain

www.mcb.org.uk

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Introduction

ELECTING TO DELIVER addresses common concerns of British life. It is aimed at all political parties, policy makers and interested citizens to engage them in a mutual dialogue.

The **Muslim Council of Britain** exists to play a constructive role in achieving a nation at ease with itself: accepting of diversity, yet able to appreciate shared values, acknowledge common interests and build inclusive communities through collective endeavour. To be a nation truly representative of its people we are obliged to listen to each other and to learn how to work together to fulfil our collective potential and realise the strengths of our diversity.

Britain's Muslims are predominantly young, and more of them are born and raised in Britain. Their parents come from many ethnic backgrounds and cultures with a rich diversity of heritages. A 'community of communities', British Muslims have been, and are, united through strong ties of faith identity that transcends ethnic boundaries. It is the moral and ethical principles of their faith that urges them to be concerned and responsible citizens and active participants in the life of their nation.

In many respects the needs and aspirations of Britain's Muslim community are no different from those of our fellow citizens – whatever their beliefs or backgrounds. Concerns about health and education, national prosperity, strong public infrastructure and good public services are common to us all. The values of community life, the need to build strong communities of mutual support, are basic principles that connect Muslims to their fellow citizens. From our diverse backgrounds and beliefs we can make common cause to achieve a better Britain for everyone. *Electing to Deliver* is a document designed to serve this purpose.

In the forthcoming **General Election**, increased numbers of Muslims will be eligible to vote – many as first time voters. They are citizens fully engaged in the life, concerns and future course of our nation. We encourage all Muslims to take an active part in all the issues of the election campaign. We seek to give voice to the whole range principles, ideas and concerns that British Muslims will contribute to the national debate, not merely for their own interests, but the common good of our shared future.

Electing to Deliver is based on extensive consultation with Muslim community representatives. It seeks to articulate the ideals as well as the needs of Britain's 1.6 million Muslims. We draw attention to particular policy areas affecting the Muslim community that also concern the rest of British society. We highlight the issues of freedom from discrimination, greater representation, targeted policies to alleviate poverty and deprivation and initiatives in health and education. We call for the recognition of faith identity and seek fairness and justice in international relations.

The Muslim Council of Britain hopes to work constructively with the next Government – of whatever party. Our main concern as an organisation is the welfare of British Muslims; we believe this must be sought by serving and sharing in the common good of Britain as a whole.

Summary of

01 OUR NATIONAL LIFE

- All political parties should take practical steps to ensure Muslims are engaged in the mainstream of public life: in political parties as well as in public bodies. In doing so, there must be adequate involvement of Muslim women and young people
- Community cohesion can only really be achieved by addressing the structural barriers to integration, which include the lack of opportunities, discrimination and disadvantage
- With legislation in place to tackle religious discrimination, Government should focus on enforcement. It needs to ensure that equalities bodies such as the CRE and the proposed Commission on Equality and Human Rights have sufficient powers and resources
- Legislation to outlaw incitement to religious hatred is urgently required
- As a natural consequence of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the law prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religion, monitoring of faith identity should be made compulsory in all public services

02 EDUCATION

- Government should commit itself to eliminating the gap in educational attainment levels between different faith groups and the national average within the next 10 years
- Targeted initiatives aimed at improving parental involvement in education are required. The MCB is prepared to help promote such initiatives
- There needs to be an equality of treatment for Muslims in the provision of State funding for Muslim schools
- There needs to be much greater emphasis on promoting life-long learning to Muslim adults in order to tackle poor skills levels, enhance integration and improve employability

03 EMPLOYMENT

- Tackling the high rates of unemployment amongst Muslims should be made a priority by government. The scope of the Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force needs to be broadened to ensure it has a sufficient impact on faith communities
- A well established legal tool of positive action for facilitating equal opportunities and equal treatment must be put to use to address inequality and disadvantage suffered by Muslims
- Faith, as well as ethnicity, should be monitored to ensure workforces are representative of the communities they serve
- A well established legal tool of positive action for facilitating equal opportunities and equal treatment must be put to use to address inequality and disadvantage suffered by Muslims
- Government should act now to reduce levels of labour market segregation amongst some sections of the Muslim community

04 ANTI-TERRORISM & JUSTICE

- Muslims need to be part of the solution in combating terrorism. More dialogue and engagement between Muslim communities and the police and security services will help break down barriers and improve counter-terrorism efforts
- High-profile raids, stop and search activities and sensationalist media coverage has increased anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain. All parties must work to ensure that communities are not criminalised through allegations and innuendo by those in authority
- Stop-and-Search procedures have proven to be counter-productive. A new approach which is both operationally effective and sensitive to community feelings needs to be developed
- Our toolkit of anti-terror legislation violates human rights and alienates the British Muslim community. Control Orders must be scrapped, and the discriminatory and unjust Extradition Laws favouring the United States should be re-examined

KEYPOINTS

05 YOUNG PEOPLE

- Government should ensure that young people are not held back by the lack of resources, opportunities or discrimination

06 POVERTY & LOW INCOME

- Government should demonstrate commitment to eradicating disadvantage amongst the Muslim community by setting Public Service Agreements that aim to tackle disadvantage amongst Muslims across all major public service areas
- We should not assume existing policies aimed at ethnic minority groups work effectively for faith groups. They need to be audited to examine whether this is the case or not
- Initiatives that are successful amongst ethnic minority communities should be adapted for faith communities and widely rolled-out
- Progress on tackling faith disadvantage should be tracked through *Opportunity for All* the government's annual poverty report
- Muslims are but one of the groups affected by poverty. To comprehensively tackle this problem all communities who disproportionately suffer disadvantage need to be helped in tandem

07 HOUSING & REGENERATION

- We should encourage more flexible forms of home ownership addressing the needs of those on low incomes
- Initiatives such as the Communities Plan should be further developed with resources targeted toward deprived Muslim and other communities
- In order to reverse the spiral of disintegrating social cohesion and to enable Muslim communities to access opportunities, the Government must support community development and projects to give hope, aspirations and opportunities to communities in deprived urban areas

08 HEALTH

- Only a sustained programme at the national and local level will help tackle the issue of health inequalities. This requires greater Muslim involvement in policy formulation
- All human life is sacred. Religious and moral contributions to discussions on issues such as abortion and euthanasia should be fully taken on-board

09 MEDIA & CULTURE

- Government and the arts establishment should support arts initiatives from faith groups, whose cultures are often stigmatised on account of their faith
- Faith communities, as well as individuals, should be given greater access, representation and powers of redress against powerful media outlets

10 INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

- Our foreign policy needs to reflect principles of morality and justice that are shared by much of British society. Our international institutions must be strengthened to avoid the current unipolar world
- Palestine and its people should be offered no less than a resolution to their grievances. Israeli conduct towards Palestinians demonstrates the need for a peace process based on forging consensus rather than forging compliance
- There should be an immediate timetable set for the exit of occupation troops from Iraq

OUR NATIONAL LIFE

The MCB is dedicated to working for the common good. We look forward to a more inclusive society whose shared values are shaped through the participation of people of all faith communities as well as those of no faith. Our vision is of a society that accepts and appreciates the contributions of the diverse cultures of all its citizens. We work for a compassionate and caring society, one where no groups are left behind through disadvantage and discrimination. We want a society that is vibrant and successful. Muslims are eager to play their part in bringing about this vision.

Active engagement in civil society is a basic duty in Islam. Our faith emphasises that this duty must be fulfilled through dialogue and collaborative effort founded on mutual respect and tolerance. Many British Muslims demonstrate their ethic of civic duty through their record of public service, especially in local government, as well as in the host of local organisations and charitable bodies. More can and should be done. Muslims are capable of and willing to contribute in the highest public and civic institutions of the country. They should be invited and encouraged to do so.



Participation

This election takes place in the wake of the Iraq war and the deep divisions it has created. It is the single issue that galvanised British Muslims. Those who participated in or watched the huge demonstration of 15 February 2003 found they stood side-by-side with Britons of all ages, backgrounds and persuasions. This mobilisation has been carried through to increased involvement in subsequent by-elections across the country. This presents a challenge and an opportunity to all political parties. The challenge is to address the fundamental questions of trust raised by the premises on which Britain participated in a war. The opportunity is to harness this involvement in politics and combat apathy. To demonstrate that ordinary citizens can make a real difference through democratic participation.

Towards a More Cohesive Society

Integration is a vital aspect of building a cohesive society. Muslims have been actively pursuing integration. For instance, in each of the last ten years, Islam Awareness Week has provided a focus for Muslims across Britain to open their mosques, their community centres, their homes and, above all, their hearts, in order to build friendships, trust and mutual respect with their neighbours.

Such local, regional and national endeavours are a necessary but not sufficient element in building community cohesion. Significant structural barriers remain that must be tackled by public authorities and government initiatives. What is real for too many Muslims is disadvantage, exclusion and discrimination.

Representation

The institutions of a representative democracy need to reflect the diversity of its people. We want greater representation than just the current two (Labour) Muslim Members of Parliament returned after the election. We welcome the appointment of Muslims to the reformed Upper House. But Muslims are still greatly under-represented, leading to a perception and reality of disenfranchisement. This is the case not only in Parliament but also in other areas of public life.

Public appointments have to be based on merit. They should also reflect the diverse nature of our country. We are concerned that talented, qualified British Muslims – women and younger people being among them – have proper opportunities to bring their dynamism to our public life. All political parties should set targets to ensure that all relevant public bodies contain appropriate representation of ethnic and faith minorities on their boards.

To play its part, the Muslim Council of Britain is prepared to work with all parties on practical initiatives aimed at increasing representation, identifying people to participate on public

SOUTHWARK MUSLIM WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

This family centre in southeast London offers education, youth projects and social events for Muslim Women and their families. Many women appreciate the friendly atmosphere at the Centre and the crèche facilities ensure they enjoy health and fitness classes, dress making, language lessons and much more. In March 2005, it's work was recognised with the *Muslim News Award for Excellence in Community Development*.

OUR NATIONAL LIFE

bodies, creating shadowing and mentoring programmes that develop a pool of competent people and generate better connections between the grassroots of the community and our national and public institutions.

Human Rights

Parts of the Muslim community experience some of the highest levels of discrimination and disadvantage. Key indicators – from crime and justice, to health and education – all point to an unacceptable level of exclusion of Muslims, particularly the young. There have been, for example, well-documented cases of anti-Muslim discrimination in the workplace¹.

The Muslim community welcomes the incremental steps taken to tackle discrimination. These includes the outlawing of religious discrimination in the workplace. The creation of a single equality commission needs to provide the required institutional support for all citizens, including British Muslims, to benefit from equality of opportunity and to fulfil their potential. This can only be

done by taking into full account the needs of our communities, in its leadership, priorities, effectiveness, expertise and staffing.

In the area of incitement to hatred, a loophole in the current legislation is being exploited by extremist groups to target Muslims. Prohibiting incitement to religious hatred is the only way to counter this growing scourge. We call on all political parties to realise the importance of such legislation. What is desired is not intended to be a constraint or diminution of free speech, but to protect people from abuse and hatred. Nor is it an attempt to extend current blasphemy laws to cover Islam. Legislation can and should provide the necessary safeguards to exclude these aspects. Attempting to avoid this necessary legislation by viewing Muslims as a race group is flawed. Those Muslims who are White will not be covered by the proposed amendment.

Coercion is contrary to the Muslim code of conduct, whether in public or family matters. Forced marriages are therefore un-Islamic and violate human rights. This is however a sensitive area requiring thoughtful handling and a joint approach between government and the communities themselves. To ensure successful outcomes, we

urge Government to consult thoroughly with relevant stakeholders before considering any further action, particularly legislation.

Faith identity and service provision

For many Muslims, religion – and not ethnicity – forms the basis of their primary identity. In terms of service provision across the whole range of public services, faith-based needs are often more relevant than those based on ethnicity. The latest Census statistics (2001) has demonstrated the need for a more equitable allocation of public services and provide baselines for monitoring representation and social exclusion. Ethnicity plays an important role, but the rightful place of a faith based identity needs to be recognised.

As a natural consequence of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the law prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religion, monitoring of faith identity should be made compulsory in all public services. This will not only ensure the eradication of discrimination but also help plan for a more equitable allocation of public services. Faith-based voluntary sector organisations should be given fair access to resources and not penalised due to their religious ethos.

Voluntary sector

Muslims appreciate the recognition by all parties that faith-based voluntary organisations provide a valuable contribution to society, providing practical help and advice to disadvantaged groups. In London alone, the *Muslim Directory* lists over 250 Muslim charities and social and welfare organisations, including some 30 Muslim womens' projects. Although Government is helping, Muslim voluntary organisations continue to find themselves in a double bind: unable to benefit because of religious and conscientious barriers to accepting lottery funding; and, as faith based organisations, denied government funding because of the absence of a race element in their work. It is essential that such bodies have greater access to alternative and equivalent funding. Religion should not be used as a justification to hinder good work already underway or capable of being done by denying funding applications at both local and national levels.

Immigration and asylum

We echo the CRE's plea to all political parties to be responsible and avoid using the issues of immigration and asylum for political gain during the election campaign. The issue should be debated in a responsible manner avoiding the headline grabbing sensationalism that the issue is at times wont to invite. Such tactics increase the sense of insecurity of British citizens, and makes second and third generation Muslims feel like conditional Britons. It directly contributes to long-term feelings of exclusion and to division.

NOTE 1 Radio 5 Live Investigation [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/3885213.stm>] and also The Guardian 12 July 2004

KEYPOINTS

- All political parties should take practical steps to ensure Muslims are engaged in the mainstream of public life: in political parties as well as in public bodies. In doing so, there must be adequate involvement of Muslim women and young people also
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EDUCATION

Education is rightfully a national priority. For Muslims, education is both an individual responsibility and a sacred duty laid on the community as a whole. Religion is a positive academic motivator. Muslims seek educational environments that are infused with values that promote respect for teachers, good discipline, respect and tolerance for others and care for the physical environment of schools. These are shared values and common concerns. We urge all Muslims parents to work with and for state schools where the vast majority of Muslims send their children. However, the greatest problem is the significant underachievement of Muslim students, a tragic waste of human potential.



Educational Attainment

Life chances are largely dependent upon educational attainment at an early age. Underachievement amongst large sections of Muslim and ethnic minority pupils is therefore a serious concern that has long-term implications. Recent improvements in attainment amongst some ethnic minority pupils are recognised and welcomed but the disparity still remains very significant. Studies show that 40 per cent of British Muslims do not have any GCSE grades A*-C¹. Coupled with the fact that the Muslim population is largely young in age profile, this problem needs urgent attention now to avoid an even bigger long-term problem. Government should therefore commit itself to eliminating the gap in educational attainment levels between different faith groups and the national average within the next ten years.

Initiatives that encourage greater parental involvement in education and closer and more responsive relationships between schools, parents and communities are welcomed. The MCB is prepared to help promote such initiatives. Greater flexibility and autonomy for schools is important for ensuring that schools have the ability to respond to the particular circumstances and needs of the localities and communities that they serve. Improving the representation of faith and ethnic minorities in the teaching profession will also enable schools to understand the needs of faith and ethnic minority pupils better, as well as providing pupils with role models.

The National Curriculum

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children rightfully constitutes one of the core aims of the National Curriculum but there is often insufficient attention paid to these aims. Greater focus needs to be directed at this deficiency to ensure that the balanced development of a child as a whole is not compromised.

The Department for Education and Skills funded project examining the curriculum needs of Muslim pupils demonstrated that the position relating to Muslim pupils generally was very poor in most areas of the National Curriculum². It concluded that, although teachers were very willing to incorporate Muslim perspectives, there were very few examples of curriculum development and good practice upon which to draw. The increasing rise of Islamophobia makes the development of such materials an urgent necessity for both Muslims and non-Muslim pupils.

An appreciation of diverse cultures and sensitivities in our curriculum will bode well for the future in our increasingly international labour market.

Choices in school provision

The principle and the policy of offering greater choice and diversity within educational provision is a very important one.

The recent state funding of three more Muslim faith schools is very much welcomed. In view of parental

CASE STUDY

IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PARTNERSHIP EAST LONDON MOSQUE & LONDON MUSLIM CENTRE

The East London Mosque has launched the 'Improving School Attendance Partnership' to encourage parents to send their children to school and dissuading children themselves from truancy.

Since its launch in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, attendance has gone up in all 12 schools involved so far, with improvement rates within individual families between 5 and 7 per cent. The success has contributed to the local authority being granted a Beacon Council status, which identifies excellence and innovation in local government.

preferences, the choice with respect to state funded Muslim faith based provision compared to other faiths (Christian 33 per cent, Jewish 39 per cent) remains seriously inadequate at only 0.54 per cent. We urge Government to do more to restore parity and fairness with regards to state-funded educational provision for the Muslim community.

The recent debate that faith schools hinder integration is not rooted in evidence. The issue of community cohesion and coherence is of paramount importance for the whole nation but we consider it irresponsible to suggest that the growth of Muslim faith schools poses a threat to 'our coherence as a nation'. The issue around schools not adequately fulfilling their responsibility in preparing children for 'their wider responsibility and obligations' is a generic issue affecting all poorly resourced schools.

For some parents, choice means sending their children to single sex schools. The demand for single sex school provision exceeds current provision in many localities.

KEYPOINTS

- Government should commit itself to eliminating the gap in educational attainment levels between different faith groups and the national average within the next ten years
- Targeted initiatives aimed at improving parental involvement in education are required
- A culturally inclusive National Curriculum should reflect the heritage of pupils from our diverse range of cultures, thus promoting tolerance and understanding
- There needs to be an equality of treatment for Muslims in the provision of State funding for Muslim schools
- There needs to be much greater emphasis on promoting life-long learning to Muslim adults in order to tackle poor skills levels, enhance integration and improve employability
- Initiatives, such as targeted recruitment and Shari'ah compliant student loans, can help remove barriers for students to enter a wider range of courses in higher education

More needs to be done to respond to parental preferences on this issue.

We welcome the Government's recent acceptance of the need to include healthy meals in schools. This is an opportune moment to ensure that, where there is sufficient demand, schools should be encouraged to diversify school meals to accommodate the dietary needs of Muslims.

Lifelong Learning

Almost one third of Muslims of working age have no qualifications, the highest proportion for any faith group. Not only does this reduce employment chances, it also hinders people's capacity to be active and integrated citizens. There needs to be much greater emphasis on promoting life-long learning to Muslim adults. More imaginative ways of encouraging Muslims with low qualifications to enter into adult learning must be developed. Further Education colleges need to work with local communities to identify demand and offer suitable courses. Innovative approaches such as Learn Direct's targeting of ethnic minorities need to be adapted and rolled out more widely by other providers too. The focus should be on both academic

and vocational courses.

In Higher Education, whilst there has been a slight increase in university entrance for Muslim students, these have mainly been at newer universities; emphasis should be placed on traditional universities actively recruiting from the Muslim community.

Many Muslim students come from poorer backgrounds and have no choice but to resort to our student-loans system. The system should make available products that are in conformity with Islamic rules (principally, the prohibition of interest payments on loans), since the absence of such products is a barrier to many Muslims entering higher education.

Universities should apply greater flexibility through granting Muslims access to areas in which they can pray.

Life chances are largely dependent upon educational attainment at an early age. Underachievement amongst large sections of Muslim and ethnic minority pupils is therefore a serious concern that has long-term implications.

CASE STUDY

MCB BOOKS FOR SCHOOL PROJECT

The MCB Books for Schools project was launched by the Secretary of State for Education Charles Clarke MP. The aim of this project is to provide high-quality Islamic materials for Religious Education to mainstream primary schools and Secondary schools in the UK, providing for a better understanding of Islam to children thereby helping to reverse negative stereotypes. This will facilitate harmony and tolerance between the non-Muslim and Muslim communities and aid integration of the latter and the formation of a vibrant British Muslim community.

NOTES 1 Demie, F. (2001) "Ethnic and gender differences in educational achievement and implications for school improvement strategies" Educational Research (43:1).
2 SDSA Research report on CREAM (Curriculum Reflecting Experiences of Afro-caribbean and Muslims) project. Funded by DFES, April 2004.

EMPLOYMENT

British Muslims are proud of the role they play in promoting the prosperity of the nation. In business as well as across a range of professions in the public, private and voluntary sectors, the contribution of Muslims is strong and growing. Many Muslim immigrants came to Britain to fill the critical shortage in our labour market.



Unemployment

Muslims are by far the most disadvantaged group in the UK labour market. 15 per cent of Muslims are unemployed. This is three times the rate for the population as a whole. Muslims also have the highest economic inactivity rates of all groups.

We welcome the Public Service Agreement (PSA) to reduce the employment gap between ethnic minorities and the rest of the population. The work of the Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force led by the Department for Work and Pensions has contributed to the narrowing of that gap. However, the PSA misses important variations between different ethnic minority communities (e.g. Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Black Caribbeans do worse than Indians and Chinese). It also ignores faith communities. Better focused targets and initiatives are required to ensure we do not miss the most disadvantaged of communities.

The Open Society Institute report into British Muslims and the Labour market made a number of recommendations which we endorse. In particular, it advocated that policy interventions could fall into three categories:

- Policies addressing the socio-economic disadvantage of Muslims which recognise that faith can be important for effective delivery to Muslims
- Understanding how existing and changing social and cultural norms impact on the labour market engagement of Muslims
- Tackling prejudice, stereotypes and disadvantage that arise from a lack of awareness and understanding of Muslims.

Opportunities for home working may be a solution in bringing down high levels of economic inactivity especially amongst Muslim women with childcare responsibilities. This could be especially effective alongside family friendly working practices including new maternity and paternity arrangements.

Improving the quality of work

For those already in employment we need to bring down labour market segregation. Many Muslims occupy poorly paid jobs with low prospects. For example, 2 in 5 Bangladeshis work in the catering

trade. Opportunities should be created with government programmes designed to improve skills targeted at those employers with many Muslims employees.

Workplace monitoring of ethnicity needs to be expanded to include faith. This will help ensure that equal opportunities employers are inclusive of faith communities at all levels of their organisations.

Discrimination

We welcome the long-awaited legislation to outlaw all forms of religious discrimination in the work place. In the interest of fairness, equality and justice, we have every expectation that the new legislation on religious discrimination will cover 'harassment' and 'public functions' in the same way as currently covered for race.

The value of the legislation lies in effective enforcement. Funding needs to be in place for cases to come to court. There needs to be more guidance on religious discrimination and understanding of the more subtle ways in which religious discrimination takes place. Monitoring by religion should be promoted as good practice, alongside ethnic monitoring as well as monitoring access for funding for credible cases.

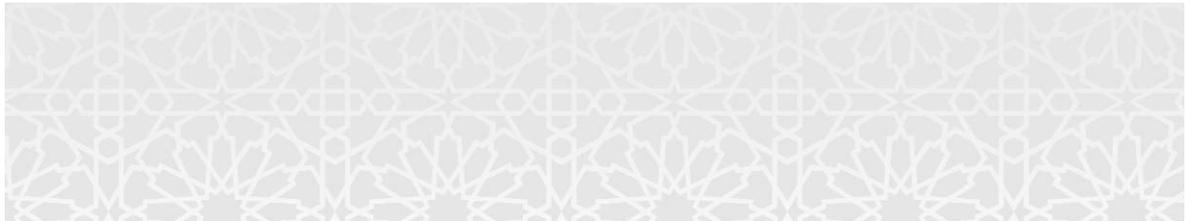
NOTES
Aspirations and Reality: British Muslims and the Labour Market. Open Society Institute, 2004

KEYPOINTS

- Tackling the high rates of unemployment amongst Muslims should be made a priority by government. The scope of the Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force needs to be broadened to ensure it has a sufficient impact on faith communities
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ANTI-TERRORISM AND JUSTICE

Justice is a cardinal value in Islam to be considered and promoted in all aspects of human life. Respect for the law, working to achieve and support safe and secure communities are basic precepts of the faith. They are also common practical concerns British Muslims share with their neighbours. However, this natural commonality of interests too often fails to come to the fore. We lose focus on the shared values that should promote better community relations. We must not permit the apparatus of addressing a legitimate concern for security to erode our community's confidence in policing and the wider criminal justice system.



Joining forces against terrorism

The most urgent issue today is the growing perception amongst Muslims that they are being unfairly targeted by the police and security services. So we must find ways to tackle terrorism by creating a climate of understanding that acknowledges British Muslims as part of the solution. At the heart of this must lie the understanding that terrorism is as much a concern for Muslims as it is for all Britons. Terror does not distinguish victims by faith, race or class. An attack on Britain is an attack on British Muslims. London is seen as a likely prime target, and of the nearly 1.6 million British Muslims, half live in the capital.

More dialogue between Muslim communities, police and security services is required. There needs to be genuine buy-in if this is to work. Dialogue needs to be respectful, patient and open. It needs to happen in Muslim communities and involve all sections of it – particularly the young. This can potentially bypass media sensationalism. It will help break down barriers which promote suspicion and hostility. It will promote accountability and give all participants an opportunity to voice fears and concerns. Hopefully it will lead to improvements in the way we combat terrorism.

Anti-terrorism legislation

A measure of a mature society should be its willingness to engage in reasoned debate and take measured response to actual or likely threats to its security. If we fail in this challenge we risk more enduring damage to the essential values of our national life and community relations than any terrorist could plot.

The measures contained in the Anti-Terror, Crime and Security Act 2001 violate human rights. It has been stated by the Government that the threat is from members of the Islamic faith. The House of Commons' Home Affairs Committee in its Terrorism and Community Relations report (6 April 2005) noted that 'Muslims perceive that they are being stigmatised by [anti-terror] legislation'. The MCB believes that it is more than a matter of 'perception'. The report also finds 'overwhelming evidence' that the media exerted 'a powerful and often negative impact' on public attitudes towards British Muslims and that 'representatives of the media appeared unaware or dismissive of this.' This is a call for more balanced and responsible journalism.

Recent years have seen the characterisation of British Muslims as a 'problem community' in much of the media and through statements made by Government and police officials. These have contributed to a growing anti-Muslim climate in the UK. The British Psychological Society found that 'Hatred and dislike of Muslims hardened after 11 September, with 43 per cent of non-Muslims admitting that they had become noticeably more anti-Islamic.'

The Report found only seventeen convictions for terrorism offences resulting from the 702 arrests under the terror laws up to December 2004. Of those only three were Muslim. A sense of perspective needs to be re-introduced into the debate.

We oppose the introduction of Control Orders that places suspects (irrespective of their nationality) under

KEYPOINTS

- Muslims need to be part of the solution in combating terrorism. More dialogue and engagement between Muslim communities and the police and security services will help break down barriers and improve counter-terrorism efforts.
- High-profile raids, stop and search activities and sensationalist media coverage has increased anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain. All parties must work to ensure that communities are not criminalised through allegations and innuendo by those in authority
- Stop-and-Search procedures have proven to be counter-productive. A new approach which is both operationally effective and sensitive to community feelings needs to be developed.
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ANTI-TERRORISM AND JUSTICE

house arrest with restrictions. The law sanctions house arrests (a feature of undemocratic regimes) and amounts to detention without trial. The Extradition Act 2003 lacks the necessary safeguards as it allows the UK to extradite its citizens without a case being established in British courts.

Stop-and-search

Anti-terrorism laws have a disproportionate effect on Muslims. There has been a 300 per cent increase in stop-and-search for Asian people, a large proportion of whom are Muslims. The majority of young Muslims who are stopped and searched have never been in trouble with police before. With a mere fraction of such stop and searches leading to any sort of conviction, the practice is operationally inefficient and damaging to community relations. We should reflect on the consequences of the 'Sus Laws' on the Black and Afro-Caribbean community in the 70's and 80's.

Policing

The Muslim community's confidence in policing has reached a low ebb, despite some efforts by police forces to engage with the community. The incidence of hate crime around UK has risen. Yet the communities affected often do not report these attacks to the police out of a growing feeling that they will not receive adequate protection. The manner of police conduct in anti-terror raids has raised serious concerns. Raids were often conducted in the full glare of the media but the subsequent release-without-charge did not attract comparable attention.

Furthermore, there are disturbing reports of the police using disproportionate force during arrests. Babar Ahmed received serious injuries though he offered no resistance. We know from the experiences of the black community that police mistreatment is a serious problem that needs tackling. This now appears to have spread to Muslims. More responsive and sensitive policing is therefore required to restore confidence.

More dialogue between Muslim communities, police and security services is required. There needs to be genuine buy-in if this is to work. Dialogue needs to be respectful, patient and open. It needs to happen in Muslim communities and involve all sections of it – particularly the young.

THE MCB URGES MUSLIMS TO HELP GUARD AGAINST TERROR

As Muslims have made clear since 11 September 2001 international terrorism that targets innocent civilians has no warrant in Islam. On that awful day the Muslim Council of Britain immediately declared in a press release: "We utterly condemn these indiscriminate terrorist attacks against innocent lives. The perpetrators of these atrocities, regardless of their religious, ideological or political beliefs, stand outside the pale of civilised values." In April 2004, the MCB took the exceptional step of writing to the Imams and Chairmen of each and every mosque in the UK – over 1000 of them – calling upon them to observe the utmost vigilance in the face of a common terror threat that hangs over us all. But the community is also responsible through education, youth programmes and mentoring for ensuring these efforts reflect Islamic precepts of wise action and noble conduct. In the summer of that year we published a pocket guide entitled *Know Your Rights & Responsibilities*. We reminded the community of the rights it had when it was subjected to, for example police stop-and-search. We are not complacent, but neither do we accept or take as given the existence of a threat from the Muslim community

YOUNG PEOPLE

Over half of Britain's Muslims are aged 24 or under (compared with the national average of just under a third). This young and vibrant community is vital to the future prosperity of the nation. Yet, for many young Muslims, discrimination, exclusion and a lack of opportunities stifle their development. Britain cannot afford such a waste, either on the grounds of social justice or simple prudence. As a young community, policies aimed at children and young people will have a disproportionate impact on Muslim communities. It is vital therefore, that Government departments and agencies implementing and delivering policy in relation to young people lead the way in ensuring that such policies are sensitive to the particular needs of Muslims.

Encouraging Integration

The inability or difficulty that young Muslims experience in integrating into British society can lead to alienation and disillusionment. Therefore, measures ought to be taken to eradicate the barriers that inhibit this. Such barriers include the discriminatory allocation of resources at a local level, the failure to recognise the importance of the Islamic faith to young Muslims, and the persistence of negative stereotypes in the media and politics. As the debate on our national identity intensifies, young Muslims, like everyone else, need the space and encouragement to formulate their own reference to Britishness. The debate as it stands – imposed by the media and certain politicians, stifles the ability to discover one's own national identity.

Supporting faith-based youth organisations

As well as providing young people with the moral and spiritual guidance required to fulfil their role in society, faith groups are also at the forefront in providing practical help and support ranging from mentoring schemes to anti-drug initiatives. The work of such organisations – often carried out by volunteers – should be recognised and supported by the Government.

KEYPOINTS

- Government should ensure that young people are not held back by the lack of resources, opportunities or discrimination
- Muslims, like every other Briton, need the space and encouragement to formulate their own reference to Britishness
- Faith groups working with young people should not be stigmatised on account of their confessional basis
- We should encourage a youth service that is culturally sensitive, particularly when operating in areas of Muslim concentration.

A Youth Service based on values

Government and local authorities need to recognise that the ethos of youth services should not be value-free. Youth workers need to be culturally sensitive, particularly when they operate in areas of Muslim concentration. It is essential that they appreciate the contribution faith makes to personal identity, personal growth and civic responsibility.

NOTE 1 Census 2001, Office for National Statistics

Tackling Britain's labour shortage

At a time when skills shortages are driving firms to recruit from overseas, and the dynamics of an aging population is cause for concern, we believe Britain's young Muslim community can help alleviate some of these problems. This issue is given greater importance when it is noted that young Muslims are five times more likely than average to be unemployed¹. Initiatives to discourage discrimination must urgently be enacted. More investment in education and training to develop this growing resource pool can help plug this shortfall. For many, alienation and the allure of extremism is a symptom of living in deprived neighbourhoods and being unemployed. Improving skills of young people, help them in their confidence and lead to positive social integration.

CASE STUDY

YOUNG MUSLIMS HELPING THEMSELVES

The Muslim Youth Helpline (MYH) operates a free phone confidential telephone, e-mail and face-to-face counselling service for young people in need.

MYH was set up in August 2001 by a group of young people who recognised the need for a faith and culturally sensitive support service for Muslim youth. Since its launch MYH has dealt with over 5,000 enquiries from young people in need and distress.

Young people contact the Muslim Youth Helpline on a wide-range of social issues, such as mental health, substance abuse, sexual abuse, relationships, confusion over sexuality and mental health problems.

MYH has a strong working relationship with Connexions and is beginning to build working relationships with various government departments such as the Home Office, Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills.

POVERTY & LOW INCOME

We recognise that significant improvements have been made in reducing poverty and social exclusion in recent years. But as the Government's Social Exclusion Unit has shown, such improvements have not been equally shared by all disadvantaged communities¹. Together with a succession of studies from various organisations they make for sombre reading. Britain's Muslims are identified consistently as one of the most disadvantaged communities in Britain. Compared with the rest of the population, Muslims are three times more likely to be unemployed, the least likely to have a qualification² and over three times more likely to live in the ten most deprived local authorities³.



Faith is not an explanation for poverty but it is a useful tool in identifying groups – like Muslims – who are particularly affected by the multiple causes and effects of poverty.

Government must acknowledge the scale of this problem and develop proactive policies and PSA targets to reduce the inequalities faced by disadvantaged faith groups in key public service areas such as employment, education, housing and health and spur action on the ground.

Existing policies and targets need to be audited for their effectiveness in addressing faith groups. The assumption that initiatives such as the Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force and area-based initiatives in places with large Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations will by default cover Muslims, needs to be critically examined. The lack of progress of the Task Force suggests that this is far from an adequate response to the desperate need of those beset by poverty and exclusion.

Programmes like the Department for Work & Pensions Ethnic Minority Outreach initiative, which has had a positive impact in increasing ethnic minorities' awareness of employment and training opportunities⁴, should be replicated with a greater focus on faith groups and applied across all the major public service areas.

Implementing more faith-focused policies is necessary, but not sufficient. In order to ensure they have the desired effect, the government's annual poverty report *Opportunity for All* needs to measure progress. Relevant indicators need to be broken down by faith, as some currently are by ethnicity.

We recognise that Muslims are but one of the groups affected by poverty and social exclusion. Our wish is to see poverty eradication across all communities. Poverty demeans human dignity; it blights the life of individuals, families, neighbourhoods and whole

communities. Poverty deforms any society. But competition for scarce resources can create tensions between different faith and ethnic communities. The challenge for government is to work with local communities and voluntary sector organisations to unite them in a common struggle against eradicating disadvantage whilst being sensitive to different approaches tailored to different communities.

KEYPOINTS

- Government should demonstrate commitment to eradicating disadvantage amongst the Muslim community by setting Public Service Agreements that aim to tackle disadvantage amongst Muslims across all major public service areas.
- We should not assume existing policies aimed at ethnic minority groups work effectively for faith groups. They need to be audited to examine whether this is the case or not
- Progress on tackling faith disadvantage should be tracked through *Opportunity for All*, the Government's annual poverty report
- Muslims are but one of the groups affected by poverty. To comprehensively tackle this problem all communities who disproportionately suffer disadvantage need to be helped in tandem

NOTES

1 Breaking the Cycle. Social Exclusion Unit, ODPM Sep 2004

2 Census 2001, ONS

3 Index of Multiple Deprivation 2001, DETR

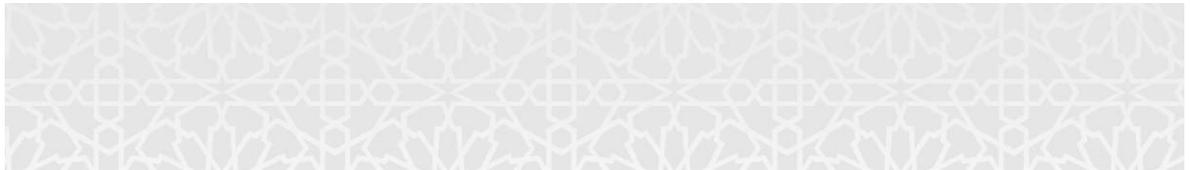
4 Ethnic Minority Outreach: An evaluation. Barnes et al. DWP 2005

HOUSING & NEIGHBOURHOODS

A strong sense of community is the bedrock of Islam. Being a good neighbour is a duty whoever your neighbours are, whatever their faith, origin or background. Community and neighbourliness are not just functions of behaviour, but also functions of the physical environment. Good community relations require good housing and the regeneration of communal spaces and facilities.

Many British Muslims are concentrated in urban areas, often in neighbourhoods suffering multiple sources of deprivation, where they disproportionately experience poor environments and living conditions and exclusion from life chances.

Faith-oriented organisations have made a significant impact in addressing housing, regeneration and social inclusion issues. However, Government should ensure that the Muslim community's specific needs are addressed through mainstream policies. The next Government needs to ensure that housing and regeneration policies recognise diversity and address the needs of the Muslim community.



Home Ownership

Home ownership is high amongst some sections of the Muslim community, but amongst Bangladeshis (along with Black Caribbeans), nearly half rely on local authority housing. This disproportionate dependence on social housing means many Muslim communities suffer from poor housing conditions, including overcrowding, disrepair, harassment and anti-social behaviour, all of which are problems associated with living in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of people on low incomes.

These factors impact on the ability of Muslim communities to develop economically. Poor housing and deprived neighbourhoods have a negative effect on an individual's health, educational attainment and participation in the labour market. The inability to get on the housing ladder excludes many in the Muslim community from reaping the benefits of the housing boom, which in turn leads to dependence on social housing and further financial exclusion.

We welcome the Government's initiative to provide greater access to home ownership for Muslim communities. Extending stamp duty and land tax relief for Islamic house purchase schemes is a step in the right direction.

We should encourage more flexible forms of home ownership addressing the needs of those on low incomes, e.g., shared ownership, to provide opportunities for Muslims to gain an equity stake in their homes. Such initiatives may offer new ways of meeting housing needs, especially for those on low incomes - whatever their background.

Affordable Housing

Good quality affordable housing should be made widely available to those on low incomes. The Deputy Prime Minister's Communities Plan is a welcome initiative to meet the chronic shortage of affordable homes. Government must ensure that major public investment and land allocations planned in the South-East are matched by significant investment and commitment to meet the housing need in other areas of the country, especially in many northern towns and cities with low demand. The Communities Plan should ensure that its policy is backed up with comparable investment in the physical infrastructure needed for sustainable communities to lead development, create certainty and reduce risk for developers. Whilst we welcome the Government's aim to achieve the Decent Home Standard by 2010, we should ensure that there are wider options available for those in social housing and ensure Muslim communities understand the issues to participate in the process.

Overcrowding

Overcrowding is an issue for many Muslim households, but most acute for Bangladeshi households. The funding of social housing should be at an appropriate level to enable larger dwellings to be built to alleviate

KEYPOINTS

- We should encourage more flexible forms of home ownership addressing the needs of those on low incomes
- Initiatives such as the Communities Plan should be further developed with resources targeted toward deprived Muslim and other communities
- In order to reverse the spiral of disintegrating social cohesion and to enable Muslim communities to access opportunities, the Government must support community development and projects to give hope, aspirations and opportunities to communities in deprived urban areas

HOUSING & NEIGHBOURHOODS

overcrowding and its related health and environmental problems. Urgent attention is needed to address the use of 'temporary accommodation', as this exacerbates social exclusion

Funding for social housing development should ensure that the need for larger dwellings is taken into account to make provision for extended families. This not only enables extended families to live together, promoting family stability and social cohesion, but allows for 'lifetime' design standards to meet the changing needs of all families and contributes to the objectives of the Communities Plan. Other benefits range from savings in child-care costs and care for the elderly, to less measurable but equally important benefits in fostering a more caring society and developing and utilising social capital.

Safe neighbourhoods and stronger communities

While the introduction of neighbourhood policing and stronger measures to tackle anti-social behaviour are welcomed, the Government should ensure that housing providers and the Police are equipped with the knowledge and understanding to work more effectively with Muslim communities to tackle fear of crime, harassment and intimidation.

The Government should do more to support mediation, rehabilitation and understanding between different ethnic and faith groups, ensuring that appropriate sources of funding are accessible to Muslim communities for community development, inter-faith and inter-generational work, as well as activities for the engagement and social development of young people.

Regeneration

Britain's Muslims are concentrated mainly in the large metropolitan conurbations of London, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow, and in industrial towns in the Midlands and the North. Many of these areas have suffered a widening gap in all indicators of deprivation between them and the most affluent areas due to the decline of traditional industries and manufacturing, poor access to alternative employment opportunities and re-training, resulting in communities with a concentration of need.

We are concerned that in many inner-city areas, especially northern towns, such as Bradford and Oldham, and parts of East London and Birmingham, 'ghettos' or homogeneous areas of high deprivation are developing, trapping residents in a vicious cycle of poverty and a lack of opportunity. Muslim communities are especially affected by this, as they have often co-located in order to gain mutual support and utilise their communities' own social capital. In order to reverse the spiral of disintegrating social cohesion, and to enable Muslim communities to

access opportunities, the Government must support community development and projects to give hope, build aspirations and create opportunities in these areas.

Faith-based organisations are making a major contribution to this challenge by becoming involved in the front-line of regeneration activities. While we welcome the Government's recognition of this in its National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, and the incorporation of a faith-based element in regeneration planning, we believe more needs to be done to identify successful initiatives and to support such initiatives with greater funding.

There is concern regarding proposals for the future of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. While this may seek to concentrate funds on the most deprived areas, where many Muslim communities live, it may also 'exclude' other Muslim communities in local authorities which do not fall within the category of 'most deprived' authorities. The Government should ensure that there are alternatives to Lottery Funding available for Muslim communities.

If ethnic minority voluntary sector organisations are to have a greater impact Government should not only deliver more financial support, but also improve access to existing services and resources by removing structural and institutional obstacles, e.g. ensuring best value procedures take account of added value factors to enable the voluntary sector to compete for service delivery contracts. More training, more targeted funding, and capacity building must be provided to this sector. Non-Christian faith-based organisations have faced particular difficulties. Muslim organisations have been denied funding specifically because they target a faith (rather than an ethnic) community. This is unfair and unjust, as they provide a range of services vital to communities. The criteria for granting funds must be based on need and all good work and community enterprise should be encouraged. Discrimination against faith-based organisations in accessing funding must be eliminated.

Poor housing and deprived neighbourhoods have a negative effect on an individual's health, educational attainment and participation in the labour market.

HEALTH

Muslims are committed to the concept and values of our National Health Service; members of the community have been part of the heroic generation that built this great institution that benefits all Britons. Good health concerns us all but ill health afflicts different communities differentially. The health profiles differ by region as well as by ethnicity. The Muslim community, though a heterogeneous ethnic group, still, as a faith community, score highly in all the major indicators of ill health.



Muslims and ill health

Minority community groups are not a homogeneous group. Their needs are different, solutions to their problems need tailored approaches and methods of reaching them differ. Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and other Muslim communities are over five times more likely to be diabetic than the white population and 50 per cent more likely to suffer coronary heart disease. Much of the variation in health between and within different communities is related to socio-economic and cultural aspects. Tackling health inequalities in different communities requires tackling causes of inequalities in different communities. A commitment to implementing community-specific strategies and holding accountable those who are charged to deliver is essential if improving the health of the nation is the goal.

Reaching the community

There is evidence that health services do not always reach people from minority communities or meet their particular needs. Government must do more to promote awareness of measures to tackle ill health within all communities. Evidence shows that whilst national health promotion campaigns achieve results within the majority of the population, invariably they

fail to touch those communities which most need the help. A targeted long-term health promotion strategy based on sound evidence is what will benefit the Muslim and other socially excluded communities most effectively.

We suggest that a Muslim Liaison Working Group be established. The Group should be charged with drawing up and implementing policies to promote and implement issues pertinent to the health of the Muslim community.

Cultural aspects

Promoting healthy living by reducing smoking, obesity and improving diet, increasing exercise, improving sexual health must be addressed in a culturally appropriate manner. An appreciation that tobacco use within the Muslim community includes chewing tobacco products and smoking tobacco products other than cigarettes, means evolving community-specific health promotion strategies.

A disturbingly high proportion of Muslim patients are represented in Mental Health. Specific measures are urgently needed to identify causes and solutions to this trend. Muslims oppose the Mental Capacity Bill as this will pave the way for the introduction of Euthanasia as an acceptable remedy.

Religious aspects in Healthcare

Healthcare planning should take into account other needs and sensitivities of Muslims. It is not only Muslim women or women from ethnic backgrounds who wish to be assured of the option of consulting a female doctor and being treated in a same sex healthcare environment. We note the government's commitment to single sex wards, but its delivery is long overdue.

Muslim practices and healthcare are inextricably linked. We welcome moves, for example in the area of chaplaincy-support, to include the Muslim component. We welcome the requirement for Trusts to provide Muslim Spiritual Care Services and appoint 'Muslim Chaplains'. Currently provision of these services is patchy and more needs to be done to obtain uniformity. The initiative to supply halal food and prayer facilities in hospitals should continue.

Plans should also supply doctors, nurses and all non-Muslim health professionals with training on sensitivities and the hospital needs of Muslim patients. Healthcare planning should also tackle Islamophobia; religious discrimination towards Muslim patients and staff.

KEYPOINTS

- Only a sustained programme at the national and local level will help tackle the issue of health inequalities. This requires greater Muslim involvement in policy formulation
- All human life is sacred. Religious and moral contributions to discussions on issues such as abortion and euthanasia should be fully taken on-board

Muslims are required to bury their deceased as soon as possible. The process for releasing bodies should be accelerated, unless exceptional circumstances demand otherwise. Government should implement the procedures and processes recommended in the document 'Review of Coroner Services' and issue guidelines to relevant health agencies regarding Muslim death rites. Post-mortems are viewed as potentially violating the dignity of the deceased and should be avoided; 'non-invasive autopsies' should be applied when necessary.

Patient Public Involvement

Communities most vulnerable to health inequalities are the least likely to participate in such patient public processes; this is especially true of refugee and asylum groups who are predominantly Muslims. If this is not addressed appropriately these communities will face further a widening in inequalities.

Accessing these groups through places of worship and introducing screening services in Mosques and community centres is an effective means of identifying individuals with communicable diseases, heart disease, diabetes etc. These should be put in place as positive health improvement measures such that the communities do not feel threatened.

Ethics and Public Health

Human life is sacred. All parties should ensure that religious and moral contributions to discussions on issues such as abortion and euthanasia are fully appreciated. Many in Britain are concerned that over 180,000 abortions take place in the UK every year. Advances in technology have revealed that fetuses suffer terrible pain when subjected to this cruelty. The use of abortion on demand should be restricted only to the most extreme cases.

Tackling health inequalities in different communities requires tackling causes of inequalities in different communities. A commitment to implementing community-specific strategies and holding accountable those who are charged to deliver is essential if improving the health of the nation is the goal.

MEDIA & CULTURE

The media is a powerful agent in shaping attitudes and beliefs. The media is a gatekeeper with enormous power to affect the way in which national debates are borne and driven. It can either enable us to talk to each other and come to know each other better, or promote division that will work to the detriment of us all. We seek to work with the media, not through a culture of complaint and antagonism, but through a pro-active and constructive relationship.



Culture

For many British Muslims, cultural life does not simply emanate from the national media. Faith and traditions of Islam have historically enriched British cultural life. In addition, many young British Muslims are formulating new cultural parameters that fuse their faith traditions with the realities of British life today.

Government and the arts establishment have a history of mainstreaming ethnic cultures, allowing other Britons to enjoy the diversity of Britain. The same support should be afforded to faith groups whose cultures are often stigmatised due to ignorance.

Standards in the media

Muslims are not alone in their concern about standards and the prevalence of negative values, violence and amorality in the media. We appreciate this is a sensitive area, and we believe it is a proper function of Government and political parties to encourage public debate on these matters.

Religious values and members of a religious group are too often portrayed negatively and frequently in stereotypical fashion. Mutual respect and understanding is a basic human right. Complaints procedures have their place in redressing grievances, but the media has a moral obligation to implement anti-racist, religious and cultural awareness initiatives.

Since 11 September, the negative stereotypes of Muslims living in the West have been reinforced through substandard dramas, careless news reporting, and half-hearted attempts to address root causes. Exposure of British Muslims in the media does not necessitate disproportionate emphasis on terrorism. Government should also adhere to the due process of laws without seeking to pollute the public discourse by suggesting guilt before a trial takes place. This

inevitably permeates in the media and poisons the atmosphere.

Faith communities, as well as individuals, should be given greater access, representation and powers of redress against powerful media outlets. At the same time, the remit and effectiveness of bodies such as the Press Complaints Commission, the Advertising Standards Agency and Ofcom, needs to be reviewed. As media outlets often fail to consult Muslims on the accuracy of their output, regulators just as frequently defer to those stereotypes and misrepresentations of Muslims, preferring to construe "ambiguity" in favour of the broadcasters. If these bodies are to demonstrate relevance to today's problems facing British Muslims then they must prove capable of addressing grievances of communities and not just individuals.

Commitment to Public Service Broadcasting

The commercialisation of the media should not dilute the principles of public service broadcasting. In particular, the erosion of religious broadcasting damages all faith communities. The traditions of public service broadcasting are a precious resource, a distinctive feature of Britishness we should all value, that still has the potential to serve the needs of an increasingly diverse nation.

KEYPOINTS

- Government and the arts establishment should support arts initiatives from faith groups, whose cultures are often stigmatised on account of their faith
- Faith communities, as well as individuals, should be given greater access, representation and powers of redress against powerful media outlets

We seek to work with the media, not through a culture of complaint and antagonism, but through a pro-active and constructive relationship.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The British Muslim community is a microcosm of the world. Its members have connections with people, cultures and languages which are now spread all over the world. The Muslim community can help Britain build bridges with crucial regions to serve our national interests. This input has never been more needed since Britain's has now been undermined in the international arena through its involvement in the Iraq War, on the basis of dubious intelligence.

The response to the attacks of 11 September 2001 marks the beginning of a new era in British foreign policy, the backwash of which profoundly affects community relations at home. We urgently need to reflect on the policies we have been pursuing and re-define our course to reflect consistent principles of morality and justice in international relations. We should work for the democratisation of the institutions and agencies of the international system, beginning with reform of the UN Security Council, and the equally unrepresentative voting rights of the IMF and the World Bank. These institutions should be given the necessary capability to ensure that we do not live in a unipolar world.

Europe and the USA

Britain's political identity must be independent. We should not shun our special relationship, but utilise it to uphold justice. As a member of the European Union, Britain should not overlook the well-being of Europe's minorities. There is great concern at the rising levels of racism in general and of Islamophobia in particular in other EU states. Britain's record on race and community relations contrasts positively with those in other EU states. This is something of which we can be proud. Britain is therefore well placed to lead the way in promoting good race and community relations' policies throughout the EU. The future European Union Constitution should ensure the space and rights for all of Europe's minorities. Support for Turkish entry into the European Union is also promising, and this should continue during negotiations.

New challenges are emerging for Britain to take leadership. Potential Turkish entry into the European Union and our growing reliance on energy imports from Muslim countries, mean that we need a policy of constructive engagement with Muslims.

The Middle East

Our conduct in this region has been emotive to all. Palestine and its peoples should be offered no less than a resolution to their grievances. Israeli conduct towards Palestinians demonstrates the need for a peace process based on forging consensus rather than forging compliance. Any lasting settlement must be overseen by a truly independent arbiter, such as the UN.

We also call for the implementation of all relevant UN Security Council resolutions. The implementation of UN resolutions should not be expected from selected countries, but from all without exception.

We call for respect for the fundamental freedoms and

human rights of the Palestinian people. These include the status of Jerusalem and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland. The recent wavering of our Prime Minister on the issue of Israel's illegal settlements in the West Bank is a cause of grave concern. The opportunity of a viable Palestinian state cannot be actualised if Israel is allowed to persist with its relentless ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

Muslims, like many ordinary Britons, view the Iraq war to be an ill-judged enterprise. While the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein may have been dismantled, it has been done illegally, without the agreement of the international community, and at the expense of thousands of Iraqi deaths and with greater instability in the region and the country. British troops must withdraw from Iraq as soon as possible, and every genuine attempt should be made to allow the Iraqi people, and the rest of the Middle East, to govern themselves. Harold Macmillan may have captured the mood of the moment when 'winds of change' decolonized and democratized Africa in the 1960s. Yet dictatorship and puppetry followed in what became a playground for the world powers. The current optimism for democracy in the Middle East has every possibility of turning into this scenario.

KEYPOINTS

FOREIGN POLICY

- Our foreign policy needs to reflect principles of morality and justice that are shared by many Britons. Our international institutions must be strengthened to avoid the current unipolar world
- Britain must be independent and make positive use of our special relationship with the United States

EUROPE

- The future European Union Constitution should ensure the space and rights for all of Europe's minorities

MIDDLE EAST

- Palestine and its people should be offered no less than a resolution to their grievances. Israeli conduct towards Palestinians demonstrates the need for a peace process based on consensus rather than compliance
- British troops must withdraw from Iraq as soon as possible and every genuine attempt should be made to allow the Iraqi people to govern for themselves

Balkans and the Former Soviet Union

The people of Bosnia & Herzegovina should once again be allowed to govern in a multi-ethnic democracy. We must have a credible and timed exit strategy for the EU appointed foreign governor as soon as possible.

Our policy towards the Russian Federation also tarnishes our claims to be just on the world stage. President Putin continues to cast an iron grip in the region and in his own country. Instead of dealing with the nation of Chechnya on the basis of mutual respect, the Russian government opted for the old Stalinist policy of forcible subjugation and humiliation. It is notable that for all their talk of a 'war on terror', Western leaders have turned a blind eye to Russia's savage behaviour in Chechnya where over 100,000 men, women and children have been killed since 1994.

South Asia

Britain's colonial past means it has a special responsibility towards the people of Jammu and Kashmir. We urge our Government to use its best

endeavours to ensure a peaceful and just resolution of the dispute in accordance with the freely expressed wishes of the people of Kashmir as requested by the UN Resolutions. Britain needs to play an enhanced, proactive role in this regard.

Africa

The West, and Britain in particular, bears a special responsibility to assist in the re-building of this resource rich continent. We should rightly confront the Sudanese Government over its conduct in Darfur, but also insist that it be resolved through African neighbours and African institutions such as NEPAD.

We welcome the Government's initiative to bring meaningful change on the continent through the Commission on Africa. We note that tackling corruption requires that we be tough on people, organisations and corporations that facilitate the handling of ill gotten gains. In this regard, our record on facilitating investigations of illicit funds deposited within our institutions is very poor. We seek greater transparency in this regard to deter illegal capital flight from poor countries.

Dialogue

We welcome the consultation meetings the Foreign Office has initiated and maintained with the Muslim community. They are a valuable exercise in feedback and dialogue. We hope these discussions will enable Muslim concerns to be borne in mind at the policy formulation stage.

International Aid and Development

The Government's decision to increase overseas aid and, along with other G8 nations, to cancel foreign debt is welcome. Aid should continue to be directed to overcome poverty and promote self-sufficiency. Programmes that promote good governance, transparency and anti-corruption measures should be promoted in partnership with the relevant countries. Britain should commit itself to work within the European Union to insure that we and all other nations achieve the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of GDP in aid. We must also work to remove barriers to the entry of third world goods into first world markets.

British Muslim aid agencies, with the welcome support and recognition of the Government, have become a dynamic new feature of the nongovernmental aid community. This is an important signal of their future potential, as displayed in the recent Tsunami appeal. This is an important indication of the role British Muslims can play and should be encouraged and strengthened.

In 2005, our country holds the presidencies of both the G8 and the European Union. We should do our utmost to launch the initiatives outlined here and restore Britain's reputation in the world. We must work to create a world of genuine democratic participation – free from the narrow constraints imposed by superpower rivalries, which worked to the detriment of democracy around the world.

KEYPOINTS

CHECHNYA

- As with Zimbabwe, our posture towards the Russian Federation should be more robust for the brutality it has unleashed on the Chechen people

SOUTH ASIA

- The Kashmiri people must be allowed to determine their own future

AFRICA

- We must insist on an African solution for the current tragedy in Darfur
- The Commission for Africa's proposals should be accepted and promoted by all British political parties

INTERNATIONAL AID

- We must ensure that we and all other nations achieve the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of GDP in aid

We should do our utmost to launch the initiatives outlined here and restore Britain's reputation in the world.



The Muslim Council of Britain

The Muslim Council of Britain is the UK's representative Muslim umbrella body with over 400 affiliated national, regional and local organisations, mosques, charities and schools. It aims:

- *To promote co-operation, consensus and unity on Muslim affairs in the UK*
- *To encourage and strengthen all existing efforts being made for the benefit of the Muslim community*
- *To work for a more enlightened appreciation of Islam and Muslims in wider society*
- *To establish a position for the Muslim community within British society that is fair and based on due rights*
- *To work for the eradication of disadvantages and forms of discrimination faced by Muslims*
- *To foster better community relations and work for the good of society as a whole*
- *To foster better community relations and work for the good of society as a whole*

www.mcb.org.uk

ELECTING TO DELIVER addresses common concerns of British life. It is aimed at all political parties, policy makers and interested citizens to engage them in a mutual dialogue. It is based on extensive consultation with Muslim community representatives. It seeks to give voice to the whole range principles, ideas and concerns that British Muslims will contribute to the national debate, not merely for their own interests, but the common good of our shared future.

Electing to Deliver draws attention to particular policy areas affecting the Muslim community that also concern the rest of British society. We highlight the issues of freedom from discrimination, greater representation, targeted policies to alleviate poverty and deprivation and initiatives in health and education. We call for the recognition of faith identity and seek fairness and justice in international relations.

The **Muslim Council of Britain** is an inclusive body that represents the interests of all Muslims in Britain and is pledged to work for the common good of society as a whole. It was founded in 1997 and its affiliates include national, regional and local organisations, mosques, charities and schools.

THE MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN

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