

MCB

The Newsletter of the Muslim Council of Britain

PO Box 52 Wembley
Middlesex HA9 0XW

The Common Good

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Welcome to the first edition of 'The Common Good', the newsletter of the MCB

This introductory issue presents the background, objectives and activities of the MCB, the work of its affiliates and current issues of importance to Muslims in Britain.

In this issue:

- The work begins... a personal message from the Secretary General
- Brief history of the MCB
- Media and Whitehall encounters - dealing with the press and government
- Task Groups and Committees - listings of who to contact for what
- Back page news - details of our website and how you can help in seeking the common good

The newsletter is named after the MCB's commitment to the shared seeking of the common good for our society. We hope you will join in that work.

MCB Contact Points

Tel: 0181-903 9024

Fax: 0181-903 9026

Email: info@mcb.org.uk

Census 2001 - Recognising Religious Identity

The Government White Paper 'The 2001 Census of Population', published in early March proposes that the next census should include a question on religion. This is a significant achievement for a lobbying effort by the religious communities that began in 1996, in which there has been strong Muslim representation. However the battle is not yet over, because the White Paper states that such a question would require a change in legislation (to the Census Act 1920) and before deciding such a step, "the Government would want to be satisfied that the inclusion of such a question in a census commanded the necessary support of the general public". Moreover the White Paper proposes that the religion question should not be included in the Census form for Scotland. As a result of devolution, it will be for the Scottish Parliament to approve

separate legislation relating to the Census for Scotland. Much work must now be done by the Muslims and other faith communities to lobby their MPs to support the required change to the Census Act 1920. Moreover we should ask our MPs to ensure that room is made in the parliamentary timetable for this legislative change - there is a danger that a shortage of time in the Houses of Parliament, and the Scottish Parliament, could be used as an excuse for foot dragging the matter on for another decade. Dr Jamil Sherif and Chowdhury Mueen-Uddin who have been representing MCB on this issue will be preparing a fact sheet on the subject to help member organisations lobby MPs. The inclusion of a religious question in the Census is of strategic importance for Muslims.

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Religious Discrimination - An End in Sight?

Lobbying by MCB of the Home Office in regard to the Crime and Disorder Bill led to the incorporation of an amendment to cover religion. In a letter to the MCB the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, stated that as a result of his meeting with the MCB (16th June 1998), he had "decided to table an amendment to make it absolutely clear that, even where there may be a religious element to a particular crime, if the hostility is even partly racist, it will be covered by the new provisions." Whilst welcomed, the amendment obviously does not cover all religious discrimination, and could not be used by many within faith communities who could not show a "race element". MCB will



An MCB delegation meets with the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, and Home Office Minister, Mike O'Brien.

continue to press for a change in the law to make religious discrimination illegal on the mainland, as it is in Northern Ireland for instance. In view of this, MCB is continuing discussions with the Home Office and will be fully participating with research into the

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The work begins...

All praise and thanks are due to Allah, the Creator and Sustainer of all. We put our faith and trust in Him and seek His help, guidance and forgiveness, and may His peace and blessings be on our noble Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Through Allah's grace, The Muslim Council of Britain in its first year has been able to establish itself in the life of the Muslim community and in the wider society in Britain. The MCB is also known abroad as the body which brings together the widest consensus within the British Muslim community. Building on the strengths of existing organisations and the talents of individuals, the MCB - although a new name - represents unity as well as continuity.

The MCB is a body with tremendous scope and potential. Our aim is to serve the community and the country and to work together for the *common good*. The MCB has moved quickly to set up internal structures in the form of specialised committees and task groups which allow for people with specialist knowledge and interests, skills and contacts to contribute to the various sections of the community's life. Some of these have been performing well. Others need more time and resources to develop.

However, we are conscious of the fact that we have fallen short in some areas. We have, for example, not been able to have effective channels of communication on a regular basis with the community at large. The result is that many are not aware of the issues that we have had to deal with and the campaigns and developments which have been initiated by the MCB. I hope that the publication of the much awaited first newsletter will go some way towards addressing this concern. Much of the work has been done on a voluntary basis. We are grateful for all the sacrifices made and we pray that this will continue.

The MCB has at present only skeleton staff and there is a pressing need to have more staff in order to cope with the increasing demand of work. This naturally requires much more financial resources than we have been able to raise so far. I would therefore like to urge all member organisations and well wishers to contribute generously to the work of the MCB through donations, standing orders, bequests and all other means to ensure that the Council is able to provide the much needed services to the community.

The task ahead is challenging indeed which is to enable the British Muslim community to play its rightful role in the life of the country.

I would like to thank all those who have worked for and supported our values and concerns: those who have served on committees and task groups, those who have travelled long distances at their own expense to



Iqbal Sacranie addresses the Inaugural Convention



Teamwork: members of the Central Working Committee stand behind the four Office Bearers, (left to right) Yusuf Islam, Dr Basil Mustafa, Iqbal Sacranie and Dr Abdul Bari

join hands with others; those in a wide variety of institutions and in government, MPs, MEPs, editors and journalists in community and national media, and others who have shown an understanding of our concerns. We have only taken a few steps. We have a long way to go. We need your prayers and your active support, in the years ahead - *insh'Allah*.

Iqbal AKM Sacranie

A BRIEF HISTORY

• **30 April 1994 - Birmingham**
National meeting of Muslim organisations and institutions adopts a working paper entitled "Towards an Islamic Consensus on National Affairs" and forms the independent "National Interim Committee on Muslim Affairs" (NICMU) to carry out country wide consultation.

NICMU meets three times in 1994 (May - Markfield, June - Birmingham, November - Leicester). Sub-group set up, consultation papers drafted, approved, translated into a variety of community languages and analyses begins.

• **November 1994 - May 1995**
Sub-group meets regularly to review responses, arrange for reminders and make direct contact with a variety of bodies. Direct meetings held with heads of Muslim organisations and institutions from wide cross-section of community and Muslim media.

• **15 July 1995 - Leicestershire**
NICMU meet again to review Preliminary Survey Report. Intensive discussions of the survey findings and possible options. The sub-group is asked

to submit specific proposals for the formation of a national representative body.

Sub-group examine a wide variety of options in consideration of community responses. A draft document: "Basic elements of a working constitution for the proposed Muslim consultative body" is produced.

• **13 January 1996 - Birmingham**
NICMU meet for fifth time and final report on the survey is presented. The draft of working constitution is presented. Organisational structure is agreed and sub-committee is mandated to prepare final draft of constitution.

• **25 May 1996 - Bradford**
Final meeting of NICMU. The name Muslim Council of Britain chosen from several proposals. Preparatory Committee formed to publicise and invite affiliations to the MCB and to prepare for Inaugural Meeting of the MCB. Sher Azam appointed Convenor of Preparatory Committee.

Meetings of the Preparatory Committee
• **15 June 1996 - London**
Formation of three sub-committees:

membership, finance and public information.

• **7 Sept 1996 - Manchester**
Contents of information pack agreed. Finance committee given mandate to raise funds. Constitution and Standing Orders reviewed by legal dept of National Council for Voluntary Organisations.

• **3 Nov 1996 - London**
Information pack despatched to Muslim organisations across the country.

• **11 January 1997 - London**
Public Information Committee reconstituted as Steering Committee to create increased momentum.

• **15 March 1997 - Blackburn**
Finance Committee empowered to rent or lease office for MCB. Advertisements in Muslim Press inviting participation from Muslim organisations.

• **24 May 1997 - Leicester**
Membership drive emphasised, targets set.

• **26 July 1997 - London**
Dates & venue for Inaugural Meeting agreed.

• **Aug 1997**
Approx. 800 letters sent out to affiliates and non-affiliates on Inaugural Meeting.

• **20 Sept 1997 - London**
Draft Programme of Inaugural Convention approved. Recommendation agreed on composition of committee to manage MCB between 23 Nov and 1 March 1998.

• **1 Nov 1997 - London**
Convention programme approved. Fundraising emphasised. Last meeting of full Preparatory Committee; decision making delegated to Steering Committee until Inaugural Convention.

• **23 November 1997 - London**
Inaugural Convention held. Contributions from Heads of Delegations. Constitution signed by affiliates.

• **1 March 1998**
First General Assembly meeting held. Central Working Committee (CWC) and office bearers elected.

Next Annual General Meeting planned for 15th May 1999 insha Allah.

MCB hosts luncheon meeting with Jack Straw

Representatives from affiliated organisations were among the guests at a luncheon meeting on 2nd December 1998 with the Home Secretary, Jack Straw. Other guests included members from both Houses of Parliament, heads and members of diplomatic missions, media organisations, distinguished guests from other faith communities, Muslim professionals and business men.



Guests and Muslim ambassadors at the luncheon

Iqbal Sacranie, the Secretary General, gave the opening address and thanked the Home Secretary for his readiness to address issues which affect the Muslim community. He urged Mr Straw to tackle even more fully the issues of religious discrimination, making special mention of the Crime and Disorder Act and the 2001 Census. Jack Straw gave a positive speech which included his support

for the inclusion of a religious question in the next census and a commitment to tackling the issues that affect faith communities in Britain. Lord Nazir Ahmed and Baroness Pola Uddin congratulated the MCB for organising this event. H.E. Dr Mahmoud Hammoud, Dean of the Muslim Diplomatic Corps, also gave a brief address and appreciated the work of the MCB. Sarah Joseph presented a vivid account of her experiences as a British Muslim in a society where religious discrimination is not a recognised offence. The treasurer of the MCB, Yusuf Islam, gave the closing address.

Southall Mosque: Now A Public Inquiry

A seven year struggle to extend the usage of the Islamic Educational and Recreational Institute in Southall (formerly the AbuBakr Mosque) is continuing. Planning permission has been sought and denied to use the Mosque for educational and recreational activities.

July 8th saw the Council turn down the application, but an appeal was immediately filed supported by the MCB. Iqbal Sacranie, Yusuf Islam and Dr. Zakaullah Khan, all from MCB, and Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham, attended a meeting in October to discuss the issues relating to the Mosque, and were hopeful that an appeal would be successful.

In accordance with the appeals procedure, a site visit by one of its inspectors was confirmed by the Department of the Environment (DoE) for February 2nd, and a report would have had to have been submitted within 14 days. However, that appointment was cancelled by the DoE who now require a public enquiry to discuss traffic issues. Mosque representatives are not happy with this change on the part of the DoE; representation at the enquiry will incur substantial costs, the date for the enquiry is not until 5th May, and there is no time limit for the decision making processes of that enquiry.

According to Mr Shahid, Chairman of the Mosque, "there is definitely a feeling amongst the Southall Muslim Community,

and others, that permission would have been granted if the application had been from either the Sikh or Hindu religious communities and that discrimination has certainly taken place." In the time of the mosque appeal there has been local authority permission sort and granted to two Sikh temples.

Due to the nature of the discrimination MCB's view is that this is a serious issue with implications beyond the local Southall community, and will continue its efforts for a positive outcome to this issue. Mr Asif Amann, former Brent Councillor and active member of the Social Policy Committee of MCB, is helping with the co-ordination of the appeal.

Contact: Islamic Educational and Recreational Institute 0181 571 6839

MDDA meet with Frank Dobson

The Annual Dinner of the Muslim Doctors and Dentists Association (MDDA) was attended by the Health Secretary, Frank Dobson. The dinner, a popular event for health professionals from across the country, was held in Birmingham. Mr Dobson, in his key note address, paid tribute to the remarkable contribution of Muslim doctors and dentists to the Health Service. He called for a continuation of that work and made a commitment for it to be duly recognised within the government and the Health Service.

Contact: MDDA 0121 544 9757

Zero Interest Grants for Students

With the decreased funding for higher education there is much concern that students will have to pay for their courses by taking out loans which incur interest in order to fund their courses. The concern was raised by three Muslim students in the Parliamentary constituency of Batley and Spennings, where Mike Wood is the MP. He contacted the MCB, who will now attend a meeting in March with the Department of Education and Employment (DEE), alongside other organisations including the Association of Muslim Schools represented by Ibrahim Hewitt, who is also the co-convenor of the MCB's Education Committee.

Whilst no promises have been made it is hoped that the DEE will be open to amendments that will remove the interest factor from Student Grant and Loan schemes.

British Detainees in Yemen

Mahmud Al-Rashid, Chairman of the Association of Muslim Lawyers and Tanzeem Wasti, Chairman of the MCB's International Affairs Committee, and other Muslim organisations have been seeking clarification from the Foreign Office on the five (now eight) Britons detained in the Yemen. MCB organised a meeting between representatives of the families and Derek Fatchett, Minister at the Foreign Office.

The detainees, all Muslim, have been held in conditions in flagrant conflict with the Yemeni constitution: the men have been denied access to British Consular Officials, medical aid or legal representation for the first few weeks of their detention. They have finally been charged with planning to commit acts of violence against named targets in the Yemen and the trial has begun with worrying speed. On the first day, the detainees, looking tired and ragged, made accusations of torture but the authorities still refused independent medical examination.

The solicitor, AML committee member and family spokesperson, Rashad Yaqub, who had gone to Yemen to investigate the detainees' conditions, was arrested by the Yemeni authorities on the same day he was due to hold a press conference to reveal the accusation by one of the detainees of sexual abuse. After pressure from the FO that he be released, Rashad Yaqub has since made allegations that he was beaten in detention. AML and the MCB will continue their petitioning until legal procedures that cover the basic human rights of the detainees are fulfilled.

Contact: AML 01494 526 955

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA...

The media is undoubtedly a key factor in British society - to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The influence it wealds over the population is taken for granted by politicians, pressure groups and football coaches at their peril; Muslims are no different. The Runnymede "Islamophobia" report highlighted a worrying and increasing trend of the demonisation and stereotyping of Muslims. It would be very difficult to miss the "extremist", "fundamentalist", "terrorist" versus "moderate", "liberal" banners which are put on Muslims by journalists - often with very little knowledge of the inner dynamics of our communities and situation. The use of journalistic shorthand in order to "enlighten and inform" the non-Muslim population is worrying in its simplicity and caricature.

This is obvious to our community, which is why after all the consultation that took place prior to the formation of MCB, it was embodied into the constitution that MCB should "work for a more enlightened appreciation of Islam and Muslims in the wider society". In order to fulfil this task its practical declarations in its introductory "Invitation" document includes the intent to "present and communicate the Muslim case to the media and the public at large... [As] the MCB will be well-placed to draw on experts in the community and its specialist member bodies to provide the required information."

In practical terms this is a vast and difficult task which requires a systematic and practical approach. It will take foresight, time and commitment, and results will not be immediate.

The MCB has started this work by issuing press releases, writing letters to editors and co-ordinating others in the community -

who are experts in the particular field requiring comment - to respond. This small beginning has produced results - and Muslim responses have been recorded and quoted, but things have not ended there.

MCB has begun initiatives to meet with the editors and broadcasters in chief of all the major media organisations and papers. Whilst these individuals do not control everything that is written and broadcast they set the tone and make the strategy decisions for the general thrust of the media for which they are responsible. These meetings have also enabled members of the MCB to meet and thus build bridges with journalists. The creation of mutual trust and personal contacts are the most effective means of change.

Formal meetings have taken place with the editors and key journalists of *The Express*, *The Guardian* and *The Times*, with various members of the MCB attending, these include Bashir Maan (Scotland), Dr Abdul Raheem Khan (Blackburn), Sarah Sherif and Tariq Khan, the Deputy Chair of the Media Committee, with the Secretary General, Iqbal Sacranie and Sarah Joseph, Editor of the MCB Newsletter. There are plans to meet with others including the Press Association, the BBC and other broadcasting organisations, the Press Complaints Commission, the World Service and the editors of all the other papers.

The initial ground work and the meetings so far have been positive, although it is recognised that change will not take place overnight. We have expressed our frustration over stereotyping and its negative consequences. That has led the World Service to make a commitment not to couple the terms "extremist/terrorist" etc. with "Muslims/Islam".



that all Muslims are extremists.... In our headline yesterday on the arrest of several men in London by anti-terrorist police it was not our intention to cause offence to the Muslim Community. We're sorry."

MCB appreciates remedial measures taken by the media - in this case a swift and public apology - which was the result of immediate action by the MCB's Media response unit. Such action reflects a reactive approach to complement the pro-active work that seeks to stop these type of inflammatory headlines appearing in the first place. As long as we as a community allow things to happen - they will, but if we refuse to accept such labelling, eventually we can stop it!

The above headline led the front cover of *The Express* on Sept. 24th 1998. The MCB and its affiliates made immediate protestations to the editor, Rosie Boycott, expressing the community's deep concern over such an inflammatory headline and its dangerous

implications for the peace of the community. The next day *The Express* made an exceptional editorial apology: "There is a danger that whole communities, sometimes whole races, are deemed at worst guilty, at best suspicious, because of the [alleged] actions of a few of their members. It is wrong to suggest

MCB Press Releases: Responding to the issues

- 19 Nov 1997 "Umbrella body heralds new era for British Muslims"
- 3 March 1998 "Announcing the First General Assembly"
- 2 April 1998 "Muslim Umbrella Group moves forward with new initiatives" - First CWC meeting
- 22 May 1998 "Strong support for a just law" - lobbying for amendments to the Crime & Disorder Bill
- 12 June 1998 "Crime and Disorder Bill - Support from Liberal Democrats for amendment"
- 17 June 1998 "MCB delegation meets the Home Secretary"
- 20 June 1998 "Jack Straw tables Amendment to Crime and Disorder Bill"
- 22 July 1998 "European Parliament refuses Islamophobia"
- 21 August 1998 American airstrikes against Afghanistan and Sudan
- 25 August 1998 "Fight Terrorism but not through Draconian Laws"
- 29 Sept 1998 "MCB Welcomes Apology" - The Express apologises for offence caused by "Moslem Plot to Bomb London" headline
- 8 October 1998 "In Defence of Women's Rights" - MCB criticises the imposition of a secular dress code for Turkish students and officials
- 7 Dec 1998 "MCB Hosts Luncheon Meeting with Jack Straw"
- 18 Dec 1998 "British Muslims Express Shock Over Loss of Lives in Iraq"
- 23 Dec 1998 "Muslim Outrage Conveyed to Minister" - re continued US/UK bombing of Iraq
- 12 Jan 1999 "Muslims under Siege"
- 20 Jan 1999 "Not Srebrenica again!!"

All press releases are available on our website, or will be sent by post upon receipt of a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Extremists and Terrorists

The presentation of Muslims and Islam as terrorists, fundamentalists, extremists is nothing new. Whilst it has frustrated and angered the community, little has been achieved to stop the stereotyping. Those who have made efforts to present another image have often been labelled as "moderate and liberal". This divisive tactic is of little use and just sets up two camps within the community of "those we like" and "those we don't like".

The ultimate dangers of stereotyping and caricature have been seen throughout history - the Germany of the 1920s and 30s being an obvious example. Without going that far - the constant labelling of individuals and groups means that any serious analysis and comment is made difficult if not impossible. Hence this was one of the key issues that the MCB brought up in all its media meetings.

The Guardian, feeling it would like to lead the way on this issue, very bravely acknowledged its own usage of these negative terms versus its description of Christians and Christianity. The results below make for interesting and disturbing reading:

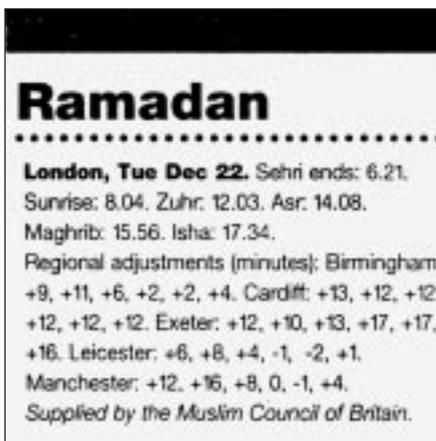
Islam		Christianity	
Islamic militants	16	Christian Democrats	13
Islamic extremism/ist	15	Christian Aid	8
Islamic group(s)	13	Christian church/es	7
Islamic republic	13	Christian name	5
Islamic fundamentalism/ist	8	Christian Right	5
Islamic state(s)	8	Christian conservatives	3
Islamic Jihad	7	Christian fellowship	3
Islamic Law	6	Christian millennium	3
Islamic Terror/ism/ist	6	Christian tradition	3
Islamic Salvation Front	5	Christian approach	2
Islamic movement(s)	3	Christian beliefs/s	2
Islamic world	3	Christian charity	2

Numbers describe the frequency of usage of these word combinations.

(Acknowledgement to *The Guardian* for this analysis).

A First for *The Guardian*

In our meeting with *The Guardian* editors and other key journalists, issues of a practical nature were discussed. As the meeting took place just prior to the start of Ramadhan this was an obvious topic of discussion. MCB asked those present whether they were going to note the beginning of Ramadhan now and in the future. With such a large Muslim population in Britain, most of whom observe the fast, the reporting of this major event seems important. Making the general population aware of why and how Muslims fast would be a positive community exercise. There was little time however prior to this Ramadhan for major articles to be produced, but *The Guardian* suggested it could print a daily timetable giving the times of prayer and the opening and closing of the fast. This was a small but sustained acknowledgement of Ramadhan that made non-Muslims aware and was of practical benefit to Muslims who were fasting. The community's response was very positive, *The MCB* would like to place on record its thanks to *The Guardian* for this gesture.



Making the Most of the Media - Media Training Weekend

'Making the Most of the Media', was a successful two day training seminar that took place between 10-11 October, 1998 at the Markfield Conference Centre, Leicester. It was attended by about 60 participants from organisations affiliated to the MCB and was organised by the MCB's Media Committee.

The keynote address: **Muslims and the media: perils and promises**, was delivered by the newly ennobled Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham.

Topics covered include:

- **"Find me a fundamentalist"**:- **Muslims and Television**
Asad Ahmad, newscaster, BBC News and Current Affairs
- **"Good news, propaganda; bad news, journalism"**: **How the press covers news**
Ehsan Masood, science writer, *Nature* magazine
- **"Watching them, watching you"**: introduction to MCB media committee
Dr AbdulRaheem Khan, member MCB Media Committee
- **"Spin doctor sahib"**: getting the media to work for you
Cllr. Qasim Afzal, Producer/Director "Multi-Media Network TV Productions"
- **"Dear Sir"**: the neglected art of writing to newspapers
Ibrahim Hewitt, Association of Muslim Schools
- **"Future.com"**: making effective use of the internet
Shahzad Sheikh, Car World
- **"Out of site, out of mind"**: the MCB website
Jamil Sherif, Webstar Plc

There were also practical workshops and a lively panel discussion.



Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham making a keynote address



Preparing the future: five youth leaders learn to deal with the media

If you see anything in the media which you think warrants action let us know

Tel: 0181 731 6057 (Tariq Khan) Fax: 0181 903 9026
 e-mail: media@mcb.org.uk

DEALING WITH GOVERNMENT...

The far reaching consultative work that was the foundation for MCB showed that the Community was very concerned that there should be a Muslim voice speaking to central and local government to present their case and lobby on issues of concern. As a result the MCB declared as one of its aims "to establish a position for the Muslim community within British society that is fair and based on due rights." The MCB has been interacting with various Government departments on a whole range of issues, drawing in other organisations and individuals who are specialist in the relevant fields.

THE HOME OFFICE

Muslim Advisor to the Prisons

In support of the excellent work done by the London Islamic Cultural Centre and the Iqra Trust, the MCB made representation to the Home Office for a fully paid full time Muslim advisor to the prison service. Muslim prisoners require support and facilities like other inmates. MCB is now fully involved in recommending the set up of a nominating authority for Imams in prisons and establishment of a Muslim Advisors Forum. MCB has taken the lead in insisting that funding comes from central government and greatly appreciates the measures taken by Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham, which resulted in the government agreeing to fund the post of Muslim Advisor.

Age of Consent

The move by the Government to lower the age of consent for homosexuals from 18 to 16 has been rigorously contested by the MCB. Joining with Church groups, members from the Jewish community and various members of the Lords, MCB has been lobbying for the lowering of the age not to take place - citing that the moral and physical well-being of minors to be at risk. Baroness Young took the lead and cited her contact with and support from the MCB in her Lord's address (22 July 1998).

This campaign led the Lords to vote down in July the Commons motion of the previous month which had supported the lower age. At present the House of Commons has again voted to lower the age of consent to 16, but the MCB is continuing its lobbying of the Lords for them to again vote this motion down.

Post Mortems & Burials

The Community Affairs Committee of the MCB, led by Dr. Manazir Ahsan and Abdur Rashid Siddiqui along with Dr. Hasan Irfan of the Health & Medical Committee, had meetings with the Coroner's Office with a view to producing guidelines on Muslim sensitivities to post mortems for coroners across the country. MCB has expressed a desire for Muslims to have the body released immediately after death and for autopsy to be carried out only if absolutely essential i.e. in suspicion of criminal circumstances.

Other issues which Community Affairs has been dealing with include the registration of deaths with the Registrar of Births and Deaths after office hours and on weekends and public holidays. Once a death certificate has been issued by a doctor this has to be taken to a Registrar who will issue a Disposal Certificate. In many parts of the country it not known that a Registrar is available after working hours for issue of the Disposal Certificate. The MCB will make this information available.

Burial space for Muslims is still not provided by a number of local authorities. MCB has been in talks with the Association of Local Authorities regarding this as it is a legal duty for them to provide burial space to faith communities.

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry

MCB joined with the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Churches Commission for Racial Justice in the issuing of a press release on the Macpherson Report - the inquiry ordered by the Home Office into the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

The joint statement spoke out against the "pernicious and insidious evil which racism represents in our society", and made the point that "as the three faith communities which share a common Abrahamic heritage, we have a duty at this time to offer moral leadership." The statement called upon all faith communities to give a lead in absorbing the lessons the report offers.

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Stunning and Halal Slaughter

Imam Abduljalil Sajid, Chairman of MCB's Social Policy, Welfare and Regeneration Committee, alongside representatives of 11 other affiliated and non-affiliated Muslim organisations, met with the Minister for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in a series of meetings to discuss issues relating to Halal meat. As well as discussing food standards, the meetings have led to the exemption of stunning in the slaughter of animals for food consumption, where the grounds are religious, being retained.

THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Muslims in the Armed Services

MCB has been involved in talks with the Ministry of Defence regarding the recruitment of Muslims into the Armed Services and the needs of Muslim service personnel. Khurshid Drabu has attended meetings with the Chiefs of Staffs of the Services and talks with the Ministry have proved beneficial and informative to all sides, breaking down some difficult misconceptions. MCB discussions with the Ministry have led to Muslim male service personnel being allowed to wear trimmed beards and Service regulations have been amended accordingly. Other issues of religious observance are currently being discussed and there are hopes for greater understanding in other areas.

THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Hospital Chaplaincy

MCB is now part of a Multi-Faith National Consultation on Hospital Chaplaincy, and is represented by Chowdhury Mueen-Uddin. A delegation from the group met with the Health Minister Helen Hayman, and raised the issue of the appointment of Imams in hospitals and to provide a special budget for their training. MCB has been fully involved in the preparation of the guidelines: "Chaplaincy - Spiritual Care in the National Health Service". These guidelines recommend that hospitals which have 40 Muslim patients require a paid imam. Once approval of the guidelines is achieved the community should be prepared to find people qualified to fill the posts.

Circumcision on the NHS

The circumcision of boys is a requirement for Muslims and other faith communities, but access to medical staff qualified and capable of carrying out this procedure can be difficult. As a result MCB has been in talks with the Department of Health to carry out this procedure free of charge in NHS hospitals. Dr Jafer Qureshi, Chairman of the Health and Medical Committee of the MCB and Dr Hasan Irfan, Chairman of the Muslim Doctors and Dentists Association (MDDA) are pursuing the matter with the Department of Health.

THE FOREIGN OFFICE

Briefings

Informal briefing for representatives of the MCB and the Muslim community given by Foreign Office Minister, Derek Fatchett, have been taking place almost every three months, as part of a regular series of consultative meetings held on an unattributable basis. The government says it wants to hear what Muslims have to say on issues of foreign policy relating to a wide range of issues; these have included Iraq, Kosova, Kashmir and Palestine. In the December meeting the MCB stated the need for an ethical foreign policy to be implemented.

Within its constitution, MCB holds as mandatory the work of three Specialist Committees: Finance and General Purpose, Media Committee, Research and Documentation.

The MCB's declared aim is to work for the common good without interfering in, displacing or isolating any existing Muslim work in the community. At its first meeting in March 1998 the Central Working Committee (CWC), the main decision making body of MCB policy, inaugurated nine Task Groups.

The CWC defined the role of a Task Group to:

- Identify which Muslim organisations are actively working for the benefit of the community in their field
- Identify whether there are any issues that have not been addressed by these Muslim organisations
- Promote greater awareness of these un-addressed issues amongst organisations e.g. acting as a facilitator in co-ordinating and reaching agreement on issues and work of other organisations.
- Where effective organisational work does not exist, to recommend to MCB whether it should take any formal steps in the short, medium and long-term and prepare terms of references for a sub-committee where appropriate.

Task Groups' roles are to research and explore their given area of work and present findings to the CWC, which meets every three months.

A lot of work has been completed by the committees and task groups alike. Lack of space in this newsletter prevents us from detailing that work. Full reports on all the committees and task groups which detail aims, objectives and achievements are available either from the contacts or from the office. Future newsletters will aim to cover their work more fully, *insh'Allah*.

The Committees and Task Groups are always interested in and open to support, assistance and volunteers from the community. Contact names and numbers are provided below:

Specialist Committees

Finance & General Purpose:
Chairman: Yusuf Islam, Deputy Chairman: Dr AbdulRaheem Khan
Contact: MCB Office 0181 903 9024

Media Committee
Chairman: Iqbal Sacranie, Deputy Chairman: Tariq Khan
Contact: Tariq Khan 0181 731 6057

Research and Documentation
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Contact: Dr Jamil Sherif Tel: 0181 861 2012, Fax 0181 861 3113 e-mail: JSherif@webstar.co.uk or ahamid@webstar.co.uk

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Irfan. Secretary - Dr Khalid Anees
Contact: Dr Khalid Anees 0958 298 149 / 0171 915 1192
e-mail: k.anis@eastman.ucl.ac.uk

International Affairs
Chairman: Tanzeem Wasti
Contact: Tanzeem Wasti
Tel/Fax: 0181 942 5038

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Convenor: Asif Amann
Contact: Imam Abdullail Sajid
Tel: 01273 722 438 Fax: 01273 279 438

Task Groups

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Convenors: Mufti Muhammad Aslam, Maulana Bostan Qadri
Contact: Maulana Bostan Qadri
Tel: 0121 327 4204 / 0121 328 0837

Education, Training and Employment
Convenors: Mohammed Akram Khan-Cheema, Ibrahim Hewitt
Contact: Mohammed Akram Khan Cheema
Tel: 01274 569 387 Fax: 01274 510401
E-mail: Akram@makcc.force9.co.uk

Legal Affairs
Convenors: Suleman Osman, Mahmud Al-Rashid (Chair Khurshid Drabu)
Contact: Suleman Osman
Tel: 0181 735 9898 Fax: 0181 735 9998

Public Affairs
Convenor: Mohibur Rahman
Contact: Mohibur Rahman Tel: 0976 70 70 49
E-mail: mohibur.rahman@npi.org.uk

Youth
Convenor: Basma El-Shayyal
Contact: Basma El-Shayyal 0956 168 110

AFFILIATES NEWS - continued from page 3

East London Mosque: Permission Granted

The Tower Hamlet Council's Development sub-committee finally ended the long struggle to extend the East London Mosque by agreeing to divide the land adjacent to the Mosque into two. After representation to the council by Dr Abdul Bari, the Assistant Secretary General of the MCB and by other organisations, the Council agreed to a compromise measure whereby half the land will be given to the Mosque on lease purchase. The other half of the land will be given over to a Housing Association to build affordable housing and the mosque will have to contribute £1/2million to that.

The task for the Mosque is now to raise the financial capital necessary to realise the

extension project which will include a community centre.

Contact: East London Mosque 0171 247 1357

A Centre for the Future

Ali Omar Ermes, an active member of MCB and Chairman of the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre (MCHC) has just announced that the main building works for the new centre in North Kensington have just been completed. The Centre is now awaiting interior fittings, glaze cover of the courtyard and furniture and equipment before it opens its doors to the public.

When completed, the Centre will have a beautiful Mosque, a reference library, an exhibition Gallery, a fully equipped

information technology laboratory, a crèche, a state of the art conference hall, facilities for hosting a luncheon club for the elderly and rooms for education, counselling, career advice and health advice.

The Centre is designed to serve as a multi-purpose facility for the Muslim community in the area and will provide a variety of services including - spiritual and well-being related services, social and welfare services, education, training and career development services, culture and heritage services and a promotion of better community relations.

The MCHC is a truly innovative project and will become a flagship project for Muslim communities all over Britain to emulate, *insh'Allah*.

Contact: Dr Abdelkarim Khalil 0181 964 1496

An Appeal for Funds

"Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change that which is within themselves."

As treasurer of the MCB, I am seeking your assistance in raising funds for the work of our organisation. The Muslim community is fast approaching 2 million in this country and the MCB can play a major role in bringing about the necessary changes for us to improve our condition and be given our due rights. However effective work needs funding - to produce newsletters such as this one, to run an office, to conduct campaigns and undertake projects. I have set in place a '£1 a week scheme' where we are asking individuals to contribute £1 per week, £4 per month or £40 a year by standing order. Of course a donation of any other amount would be welcome, as would your suggestions for fundraising. Please send your donation directly to the MCB account (details below) or write to the MCB office for a standing order form.

Yusuf Islam

Bank Details:

Midland Bank PLC, Wembley Park Branch, 122 Wembley Park Drive, Wembley HA9 8HT

Account Name: Muslim Council of Britain

Account Number: 11227408 Branch Sort Code: 40-46-10

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(wishing to remain anonymous)

MCB on the Net

<http://www.mcb.org.uk>

Affiliating to the MCB

The MCB is a representative body of established national and regional organisations as well as local mosques, Islamic centres and specialist institutions. It has over 250 affiliates, plus individuals committed to helping the work of MCB. These organisations and individuals come from diverse and varied specialities and interests: mosques, charities, the medical, educational, social and legal fields, business - the list could go on. They are united in their commitment to seeking the common good. **If you would like to join in this work and this commitment then please contact the MCB for further information and an affiliation form.**

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Census 2001 - continued from page 1

The Muslim community is not alone in seeking this change. The main lobbying effort for the inclusion of the religion question in the next Census has been carried out by the Religious Affiliation Sub-Group, originally convened by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). It is chaired by the Revd. Professor Leslie J Francis of the Centre for Theology and Education, Trinity College, Carmarthen. Members of the group include the Church of England, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Muslim Council of Britain (and prior to October 1997 the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs), Jain Samaj Europe, National Council of Hindu Temples, Network of Sikh Organisations, Inner Cities Religious Council, and the Inter Faith Network for the UK.

Australia, New Zealand and Canada all have a religion question in their Census (as does Northern Ireland). The MCB's case is that the allocation of resources and the monitoring of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity alone is inadequate. Publicly-funded services and projects in areas such as health, housing, education, training and other community services can be better targeted if religion is taken into account. If it is not, large sections of the Muslim population will continue to be marginalised and disadvantaged in British society. Many Muslims do not make use of community services because these are not sensitive to their religious factor. Moreover, British Muslims, particularly British-born Muslims, identify themselves on the basis of faith rather than ethnicity or national origin. The inclusion of a religious affiliation question will also send a signal to the British Muslim community that their

presence and contribution is recognised. Muslims resent being treated as the 'invisible' element of British society, whose needs and strengths stand unrecognised by public and civic services.

Religious Discrimination- continued from page 1

matter. MCB has also sought, and gained, support from members of the opposition - meeting with the then Conservative Shadow Home Secretary, Sir Brian Mahwinney, and James Clappison, and the Liberal Democrat's Home Affairs Spokesmen, Alan Beith and Richard Allen, - which shows the broad based support for change.

With its brief to monitor the issues of race and religious discrimination that affect the Muslim community, MCB's Legal Affairs Task Group has responded to the Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) Third Review of the Race Relations Act 1976. It made it known to the Government and to the CRE that it felt the Act itself and the institutions which surround the Act, are less applicable to the Muslim Community in the UK. As a result, MCB feels the changes are marginal, especially as there are no specific proposals for change within the Act to address the outstanding problem of discrimination faced by faith Communities. On the contrary the Third Review seems to have backed down from the CRE's position in the Second Review relating to the inclusion of religious discrimination.

The MCB is pressing upon the Government the urgent need for reforms within anti-discrimination legislation and other laws to take into account faith communities in the UK. It will continue to do so until change is implemented.