The Muslim Council of Britain

Briefing Paper

Our stand on
Multiculturalism,
Citizenship,
Extremism,
& Expectations from the Commission on
Integration and Cohesion

Prepared by MCB's Research & Documentation Committee

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1. Multiculturalism

Some countries in Europe, like France, have a policy of assimilation in which minority cultures are absorbed into the majority culture. Hence sorry events such as the headscarf affair that began in 1989 when three Muslim girls were forbidden from donning what the authorities deemed an 'ostentatious religious symbol' in a state school.

Britain adopted a course of integration, that was described by the reforming Home Secretary Roy Jenkins in 1966 as 'equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance'.

The MCB's vision is of a multi-faith, pluralist society with a conscious policy of recognizing that people's cultural and faith identities are not merely a private matter, but ones that have public implications. This vision does not imply cultural separatism – the MCB is committed to engagement and working for the common good.

We support Professor Parekh's vision of a multicultural society as one that respects all cultures and which values cultural diversity 'as a part of its own self-understanding'[1].

Multiculturalism in Britain today is the outcome of two historical trends. On the one hand it is the logical development of a liberal society's respect for individual rights, captured in Roy Jenkins's statement. However multiculturalism was never just a gift conferred by the powers that be or civic traditions. It was the hard-earned outcome of a struggle against racism and inequality: "Multicultural Britain did not come out of the much-vaunted British traditions of fair play, equality and social justice. Rather, it was created out of decades of struggles against racism by black communities - struggles for equal pay and against discrimination on the shop floor, struggles to make the police protect communities from racial attack, struggles for children not to be streamed or bussed out of schools, struggles to include other histories in educational curricula"[2].

Anti-racism legislations such as the Race Relations Act (first enacted 1976 with subsequent amendments) were significant steps in removing the worst injustices in employment and the housing sector.

However by the 1980s one section of society remained marginalised. They were invisible in official statistics. This was the multi-ethnic Muslim community, who possessed a distinct religio-cultural identity.

The Muslim community's struggle since the 1980s has been one for parity with the other longer-established faith communities such as Catholics and Jews. It has not been a campaign for special privileges.

For example the campaign to obtain voluntary aided status for

[1] B. Parekh, Rethinking Multiculturalism: cultural diversity and political theory, 2006

[2] A. Sivanandan, ' It's anti-racism that was failed, not multiculturalism that failed', http://www.irr.org.uk/2005/october/ak000021.html

the first Islamic school began in 1989 and would only end in 1998[3].

> The truth seems to be that ministers have hidden behind a technicality to avoid the precedent of supporting an Islamic school. The long period of agonising before Lady Blatch's [Secretary of State for Education] announcement suggests that excess capacity was not the chief concern. Rather, the Government was unwilling to take the right and fair decision. Some people will applaud this disingenuous behaviour... They cite fears that girls in Muslim schools would face a poorer education, inconsistent with the sexual equality that is meant to underpin the state system. These are dangerous myths, founded in ignorance...there is no good educational reason for refusing government finance to Islamia. The decision can only confirm Muslims' feeling that they are a persecuted minority suffering discrimination. Ironically, a decision that reflects fears that Muslims will not assimilate may exacerbate their sense of isolation.
> The Independent, 20th August 1993

Multiculturalism in Britain is thus an ongoing, unfolding movement. It is a process that has evolved through the efforts of the grass roots and clear demonstrations of need.

The MCB believes that a multi-faith, pluralist society is a stronger society; it makes us all stakeholders. A Home Office survey has found that amongst its 'Black' and 'Asian' respondents, religion was among the top three bases of their self-description[4]. The public recognition of this identity supports, rather than detracts, from community cohesion.

> As a second generation becomes more distant from its roots in the rural Sylheti region of Bangladesh, the religious identity rather than the cultural identity is easier to accommodate with being British…In other words, the Muslim religious identity has been a mechanism for integration - providing a young educated second generation the way to a dual identity as British Muslim.
> Tufayl Choudhury, 2006[5]

It is a model and a practice that has made Britain unique in the world – the bid for the Olympics 2012 succeeded because Lord Coe could draw on the London's diversity and harmonious community relations. He could say this because of the efforts of the city's mayor to engage with diverse communities and draw them in as stake holders. About 45% of Britain's 2 million Muslims[6] live in London and – in the opinion of many - would not exchange it for life in any other city in the world.

[3] Islamia Primary School's campaign, see http://www.salaam.co.uk/education/index.php?file=./ips.php

[4] Home Office Research Study 274, 'Religion in England and Wales: findings from the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey, Table 3.2. The other top items were family and ethnicity/culture.

[5] Comments made during a debate with Professor Armatya Sen, reported by Madeleine Bunting, 7th December 2006 http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/madeleine_bunting/2006/12/a_challenge_to_amartya_sen.html

[6] Extrapolation based on the 2001 Census figure of 1.6 million and data on foreign migrant inflow

The East London Mosque in Whitechapel gives the call to prayer on a public address system – something unthinkable in France or Germany. Other examples of multiculturalism in practice include:
- inclusion of a question on religious affiliation in the Census
- Voluntary-aided status to seven Muslim faith schools
- Metropolitan Police's new uniform dress code
- Department of Health's support for minority faiths hospital chaplaincy
- Ministry of Defence's relaxed rules to allow Muslim servicemen to wear trimmed beards, catering for dietary needs and the appointment of an imam for chaplaincy work
- Prison Service's appointment of a full-time Muslims Advisor
- FCO's support of the British Hajj Delegation

Survey after survey have shown that Muslims see themselves both as British and Muslim, keen to become active citizens and comfortable with the multicultural model. The BBC Multiculturalism Poll (August 2005) established that 82% of Muslims believe multiculturalism makes Britain a better place to live (62% of the national population also hold this view).

The MCB is not unaware of the wider implications of multiculturalism. An important aspect has been clarified by Professor Modood: "There seems [then] to be two distinct conceptions of equal citizenship, with each based on a different view of what is 'public' and what is private'…

- the right to assimilate to the majority/dominant culture in the public sphere; and toleration of 'difference' in the private sphere
- the right to have one's 'difference'(minority ethnicity etc) recognised and supported in the public and private spheres

…Multiculturalism requires support for both conceptions".[7]

We believe most reasonable people in Britain would accept that people should be able to be different, yet treated equally.

The MCB is aware of the need for accomodation and compromises:

> In its dialogue with immigrants, the liberal society needs to show why it deserves their moral allegiance….The latter [immigrants] could legitimately argue that when they are able to offer good reasons for their cultural beliefs and practices, these should be respected and suitably accomodated. .. Such an appeal to mutual cultural respect has several advantages. It reassures immigrants that their culture is valued by the wider society and that they need not panic and turn inwards or become intransigent. It reassures the wider society that it remains in charge of its cultural affairs, that immigrants can be trusted not to undermine it with irresponsible demands, and that the relations between the two are based on a rational dialogue conducted in a spirit of mutual commitment to a common life.
> Professor Bhikhu Parekh, 2006[8]

[7] 'Clash of Civilisations'? Muslims and the Politics of Multiculturalism in Britain' , 2001

8 'Europe, Liberalism and the 'Muslim question'', in 'Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship – A European Approach', Routledge 2006

Multiculturalism is thus not passive co-existence or grudging tolerance, but interaction offering opportunities for exploration and creativity. Man does not live by bread alone and there are deeper human needs. From a faith community's perspective, the opportunity to place moral and spiritual concerns in the public space – on the public agenda – is also important.

> In a multicultural society, community relations are not fostered by the suppression of difference but by the celebration of goodwill…..Catholocism received an injection of devotional inspiration from Islam in the Middle Ages, for which it has every reason to be eternally grateful, and it is to Muslims that Catholics can turn now for inspiration in the value of fasting.
> The Tablet, editorial, 4th March 2006

Multiculturalism and Segregation

Trevor Phillips, chair of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) - and now designated head of the Commission on Equality & Human Rights (CEHR) – has unexpectedly renounced multiculturalism. In April 2004 an interviewer asked him whether multiculturalism 'should be killed off'. Phillips responded, "Yes, let's do that. Multiculturalism suggests separateness. We are now in a different world". [9]

In September 2005, in a speech in Manchester entitled 'After 7/7: sleepwalking to segregation', Phillips observed that "In recent years we've focused far too much on the 'multi' and not enough on the common culture. We've emphasized what divides us over what unites us. We have allowed tolerance of diversity to harden into the effective isolation of communities, in which some people think special separate values ought to apply". [10] In July 2006 he also explained that "We are becoming more segregated residentially… to the formation of communities that are shut off from the outside world; that simply makes the situation worse. But that is what we are seeing emerging".[11]

The charge of isolationism has come from ministerial quarters as well, for example, the view that "Muslims are welcome but Muslim immigrants could be very isolationist and need to integrate more". [12]

The MCB challenges the notion that Muslim communities are inherently self-segregating. Moreover there is no factual basis for the claim that segregation and community isolation has markedly increased in Britain since the advent of multiculturist policies.

Professor Ceri Peach, drawing on Census data has concluded that "London Muslims, as a whole, are

[9] The Times, 3rd April 2004

[10] http://www.cre.gov.uk/Default.aspx.LocID-0hgnew07s.RefLocID-0hg00900c002.Lang-EN.htm

[11] http://www.cre.gov.uk/Default.aspx.LocID-0hgnew0hn.RefLocID-0hg00900c002.Lang-EN.htm

[12] A remark attributed to Peter Hain when Minister for Europe, The Guardian, 13th May 2002

much less segregated than Jews, Sikhs or Hindus".[13]

Also drawing on 2001 Census data the statistician Ludi Simpson states that "In all parts of Britain, the children of immigrants are moving away from so-called ghettos. After a couple of generations the mixing will be far more noticeable and the population growth of these groups will have slowed and probably stopped."[14] He notes that "new non-White majority areas are those neighbouring the previous ones and represent not retreat into one's own group, but immigration *away* from the original settlement areas".[15]

In his famous article in the Prospect magazine, David Goodhart attacked multiculturalism because it reduced trust within society. He stated, "The difference now in a developed country such as Britain is that we not only live among stranger citizens but we must share with them …Robert Putnam, the analyst of social capital, has also found a link between high ethnic mix and low trust in the US. There is some British evidence supporting this link too…. Immigrants from the same place are bound to want to congregate together, but policy should try to prevent that consolidating into segregation across all the main areas of life: residence, school, workplace, church"[16].

Goodhart's claim that diversity reduces trust between sections of society is not factual and is challenged by UK data. A Home Office survey has found that there was no simple relationship between diversity and levels of trust".[17]

The data uncovered by Simpson, Peach and others should be sufficient to disabuse those who link multiculturalism with social fractures.

Arun Kundnani sets the context for the present-day connurbations of immigrant populations, "In Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, for example, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were recruited to work in the textile mills from the 1960s onwards. But soon afterwards, the mills began to be 'outsourced' to places where labour was cheaper. Those towns found themselves left on the scrapheap, with the only remaining jobs in the service sector, particularly the local authorities… At the same time, whites were prioritised for the new estates being built to rehouse those who had lived in the old houses around the mills. And with whites in a rush to flee the ghettoes, property prices were kept low, giving further encouragement to Asians to seek to buy their own cheap homes in

[13] C Peach, 'Islam, ethnicity and South Asian religions in the London 2001 Census', Trans Inst Br Geogr NS 31 353-370, 2006

[14] See University of Manchester note, 'Research reveals that Britain is mixing racially', 15th November 2005 http://www.manchester.ac.uk/aboutus/news/pressreleases/segregation/

[15] L Simpson & J Goodwin-White, 'Radical demography', http://www.radstats.org.uk/no091/GoodwinWhite_Simpson91.pdf

[16] Prospect, February 2004.

[17] Home Office survey No. 253, Diversity, trust and community participation in England, 2005. Interestingly this survey found that "people who follow a religion were significantly more likely to be trustful or to formally volunteer". It also found that Muslims were significantly more likely "to report generalised trust or to participate in civic activities"

these areas. Segregation in housing led to segregation in schools. And the mechanism of parental choice, introduced at the end of the 1980s, meant that, in schools with catchment areas that ought to have produced mixed intakes, white parents chose to send their children to majority-white schools a little further away[18].

Kenan Malik, another critic of multiculturalism has argued that it "has not simply entrenched the divisions created by racism, but made cross-cultural interaction more difficult by encouraging people to assert their cultural differences".[19] Again there is little hard data to back this contention.

> Recently, MORI updated a poll they have run over many years, about attitudes to race and ethnicity. Only 25 per cent of Brits say they would prefer to live in an all-white area. In some European countries it's over 40 per cent. Only 12 per cent of whites would mind if a close relative married a black or Asian person; those who would not mind were over 50 per cent. Just five years ago the figures were 33 per cent minding and just 22 per cent not minding.
> Prime Minister Blair, 8th December 2006[20]

The notion that multiculturalism is problemmatic and socially divisive is not evidence-based. The proponents of monoculturalism use emotive language such as the emergence of Muslim ghettoes with "pierced Pakistani skinhead gangs swaggering down the streets of Northern England".[21] Even Goodhart, quoted earlier, offers an imagery of 'congregating immigrants'. The xenopophobia is palpable.

What is also insidious is the suggestion that Muslims are a source of destabilisation because they are seeking to live by 'special separate values'. In fact in February 2006, Trevor Phillips went further. He pronounced that "Muslims who wish to live under a system of shariah law should leave Britain…we have one set of laws ... and that's the end of the story. If you want to have laws decided in another way, you have to live somewhere else." This was blatant scare-mongering comment based on a Sunday Telegraph poll published on 19th February 2006, that reported "four out of 10 British Muslims want sharia law introduced into parts of the country". The survey question put to respondents was ill-defined (e.g. not distinguishing between criminal and civil matters) yet it served as grist to his mill. Muslims in Britain are grateful to Lord Nazir Ahmed for his pointed response.[22]

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[18] 'Cant on Cohesion', August 2006, http://www.irr.org.uk/2006/august/ak000009.html

[19] Kenan Malik, The real value of diversity, http://www.kenanmalik.com/essays/diversity.html

[20] http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page10563.asp

[21] Mark Steyn, August 2002 http://www.jewishworldreview.com/0802/steyn1.asp

[22] As Lord Nazir put it so lucidly in Muslim Weekly: "halal and kosher meat too is part of Shariah. We allow such slaughter methods in Britain in accordance with Shariah Law. Islamic burials, including purification of the deceased through a prescribed method, is allowed in Britain in accordance with Shariah Law. Islamic banking and finance are advertised by international banks on our high street, in

As repeatedly argued in this paper, social policy should not be viewed through the prism of 7/7 and anti-terrorism measures. The CEHR is going to be society's gatekeeper on equality and discrimination issues and it is important that it avoids such conflations.

> Religious or faith identity and racial or ethnic identity do not have to clash. In a plural society, with a positive social environment, they are complementary. It is only when religion turns to fanaticism and race turns to racism that society and the world turns ugly.
>
> Dr Muhammad Abdul Bari, The Quest for Sanity, MCB 2002

Schooling and Segregation

The MCB notes that the Government set up a Community Cohesion Review Team, headed up by Professor Cantle, following the disturbances in towns in the North West in the summer of 2001. Cantle pointed a finger at 'segregated schooling' as a major cause for the unrest.
Professor Modood views in this regard should be taken on board:

"the violent disturbances …were blamed on the fact of segregated communities and segregated schools. Some of these schools, amongst the most under-resourced and under-achieving in the country, had rolls of 90% plus Muslims, while some neighbouring schools were 90% plus white. The former came to be called, including in official reports, as 'Muslim schools'. In fact, they were nothing of the sort. They were local, bottom-of-the-pack comprehensive schools which had suffered decades of under-investment and 'white flight' but were run by white teachers according to a secular national curriculum. 'Muslim schools' then came to be seen as the source of the problem of divided cities, cultural backwardness, riots, lack of Britishness and breeding ground for militant Islam. Muslim-run schools were lumped in the same category of 'Muslim schools' even though all the evidence suggested that their pupils (mainly juniors and girls) did not engage in riots and terrorism, and,despite limited resources, achieved better exam results than local authority 'secular' schools[23]."

Post 7/7 there have been calls to stop voluntary aided Islamic schools, of which there are currently only seven. The MCB believes that this will be a litmus test of the future of a multi-ethnic, multi-faith Britain. There has to be a level playing field with respect to parental choice and faith education for all sections of British society.

accordance with Shariah Law…A few years ago I stood shoulder to shoulder with the Jewish community, especially the women, when they felt a change in British Family Law was required to recognise a Jewish religious divorce. It was unfair that Jewish women had to wait months, sometimes years, for the religious divorce to be finalized, when Christian women had the whole thing over within one procedure through the civil courts. It was unequal treatment of British citizens on grounds of faith. The Law was changed. And I didn't hear ….any [one] asking any Jewish woman to 'go back to Israel' for making such a demand" (The Muslim Weekly, 22nd September 2006).

[23] 'Clash of Civilisations'? Muslims and the Politics of Multiculturalism in Britain, 2001

2. Citizenship

A large proportion of Britain's Asian population fail to pass the cricket test. Which side do they cheer for? It's an interesting test. Are you still harking back to where you came from or where you are?
Norman Tebbit, 1990

Two surveys should set the record straight:

- the YouGov Poll conducted in July 2005 found that 79% of Muslims indicated they felt 'very loyal' or 'fairly loyal' towards Britain.
- a MORI poll for 'Eastern Eye' in November 2001 reported that 87% of Muslims surveyed felt 'loyal to Britain'.

Is the quaint Tebbit test only put to Asian Muslims? During the 2006 football world cup, it was not uncommon to find a Scotsman supporting France rather than England! And are the YouGov or MORI-type surveys ever put to Catholics of Irish descent on mainland England, or the dual Anglo-Israeli passport holders?

The MCB concurs with the views expressed by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) that "if citizens do not exercise a certain amount of responsibility in addition to exercising their rights, the communities in which they live fragment and the democratic framework on which our liberties depend weakens"[24].

The MCB has frequently spelt out the responsibilities of citizenship:

- As citizens of Britain, we have a social contract to maintain the peace and stability of this country. No one must be tempted to commit any criminal or subversive activity[25]

- As citizens of this country and an integral part of British society, we not only have rights, but also have obligations. We do not claim any special rights. All we expect is fairness and equality. Let there be no doubt in our minds that we have the obligation to participate. We have the obligation to contribute. We have the obligations of good-neighbourliness, of being concerned for others, to share their joys and feel their pains, to provide support and help wherever we can. This is what our faith requires of us. This is our unilateral responsibility. We have an obligation to encourage all that is good and discourage all that is harmful[26].

The MCB believes that it is possible to pursue both the vision of a multicultural Britain and fulfilling the responsibilities of active citizenship.

Muslims balance a sense of allegiance to the global Muslim community with responsibilities of citizenship to their nation state – the *ummah* and *qawm* respectively in Islamic terminology.

Here are three examples of basic Islamic values that contribute to such dialogue and cohesion:

[24] IPPR, Citizenship in a multicultural democracy, Ian Kearns and Rick Muir, 2006

[25] MCB Newsletter 2001 , 'Our Social Contract'

[26] MCB Annual Report, 2004

- hospitality and good neighbourliness. This is a cultural and moral value. We should not eat if our neighbour is going hungry. We thus respond immediately to the teaching in the New Testament, 'whoever does not love the brother that can be seen, does not love God who cannot be seen'. In fact our traditional definition of neighbour extends to seven houses in all directions!

- respect for the privacy of the individual. We are familiar with the incident when the Caliph Umar stood corrected after he had entered a person's home without permission to accost him for consuming alcohol. What people do in the privacy of their own homes is their business.

- family life and marriage. The marriage contract between a man and a woman is the central pillar supporting the Islamic vision of family….

MCB Annual Report, 2006

The MCB deprecates the patronising and pressurising attempts for Muslims to make declarations of loyalty.

Joseph Harker spoke for many Muslims when he declared, "Britain should make no more demands of its minority populations than it does of its own "pure-bloods". …And paying taxes involves striving to work, to pay your way, and to take part in the most basic act of a progressive society: giving part of your wealth for the general good of all. This is a true, practical mark of integration. Anyone who does this is entitled to all the benefits our society grants (having the roads swept, receiving hospital treatment, gaining access to schools). And if this is a free society, we have the right to be treated fairly, without discrimination. For the past 16 years Britain's minorities have had to endure the repeatedly cited Norman Tebbit cricket test. Now, surely, is the time to ditch it and move to a new tax-and-law pact: I'll promise to pay my taxes and to respect the law; you agree to shut up about my status"[27].

Citizenship and the place of history

There is a view, with which the MCB disagrees, that a sense of shared citizenship ought to be constructed on a single view of history – a single national story.

For example Goodhart, in the Prospect article cited earlier,noted: "British values grow, in part, out of a specific history and even geography. Too rapid a change in the make-up of a community not only changes the present, it also, potentially, changes our link with the past….we may lose a sense of responsibility for our own history – the good things as well as the shameful things in it – if too many citizens no longer identify with it… …The teaching of British history, and in particular the history of the empire and of subsequent immigration into Britain, should be a central part of the school curriculum. At the same time, immigrants should be encouraged to become part of the British 'we',

[27] Writing in The Guardian, 15th September 2006

even while bringing their own very different perspective on its formation."[28]

The history of empire is controversial and unlikely to provide the social cement which Goodhart seeks. Any attempt to create an 'official history' will be challenged by second and third generation immigrants familiar with their own family histories and lore. Mike Davis for example explains, "the European empires, together with Japan and the United States, rapaciously exploited the opportunity to wrest new colonies, expropriate communal lands, and tap novel resources of plantation and mine labour. What seemed from a metropolitan perspective the nineteenth century's final blaze of imperial glory was, from an Asian or African viewpoint, only the hideous light of a giant funeral pyre"[29].

The MCB has supported Gordon Brown's reference to moral and ethical values – a strong sense of duty and fair play – as a basis for a cohesive society[30].

The MCB believes a more secure foundation than a 'single national story' is the shared heritage of Judeo-Christian-Islamic values: hospitality and good neighbourliness; respect for the privacy of the individual; family life and marriage;a willingness to treat others in the same way we would like to be treated ourselves.

Jonathan Steele is quite correct in observing that "recognizing our true history is what the chancellor's Britishness campaign should focus on" [31].

3. EXTREMISM

The British Muslim position about terrorism or political violence has been clear and categorical….as early as March 2004 we had issued a public guideline for imams, ulama, chairs & secretaries of Mosques, Islamic Organisations and Institutions to help them play a pro-active role in discharging their Islamic duty in helping to preserve the peace of the nation as well as protecting the community against falling into any trap or provocation…. **This has always been our position: rejecting terror and extremism of any kind, Muslim or otherwise, though more unforgiving, if it came from any 'Muslim' quarter**…. This is the leadership that the community has displayed and continues to do so whenever called for. One can, therefore, rightly assert that despite all the unhappiness concerning certain unethical aspects of our foreign policy, and all the injustices that continue to play upon the emotions of the young and the angry, if Britain has been particularly calm and secure, it was no less due to the strong and unequivocal leadership provided by the Muslim community…

But like in all societies there are

[28] Prospect, February 2004

[29] Late Victorian Holocausts, Verso, 2001

[30] Speech to the British Council, July 2004 http://politics.guardian.co.uk/labour/story/0,9061,1256550,00.html

[31] 20th January 2006, The Guardian

always the useful Muslim idiots too, as well as a few sadist criminals, willing to serve as a tool for murder or mayhem, and not in the service of any noble cause. The question is how do we deal with this serious problem? Certainly not by throwing the baby out with the bath water!

Post July 2005, however, instead of dealing with the underlying factors, isolating the pathogen and treating it with the strongest medicine, it is the Muslim community itself, all of the 2 million, which seems to have become the subject of mass medication. A medication supposed to cure and cleanse it of all traces of the virus of 'extremism', 'radicalism' – in fact anything that is generally diagnosed as 'Islamic terrorism', 'Islamofascism', Islamo-Nazism' et cetera. Terminology which is deeply reprehensible equating as it does a noble faith with ignoble ideologies and criminality.

Extract from Sir Iqbal Sacranie's address to the MCB's Ninth Annual General Meeting, June 2006

The MCB has been surprised by statements that place the onus on tackling extremism on a small, largely deprived community – a third of all Muslims live in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country[32].

One example of this trend is the remark of Denis MacShane MP while an FCO minister, who told Muslims that they had to choose between the 'British way' of political dialogue and non-violence and the 'way of terrorists' and use clearer and stronger language against terrorism[33]. More recently a national paper ran a headline, "Becket asks Muslims to stand up to extremists"[34]. All this is not withstanding the repeated statements condemning 9/11 and 7/7 from mosques and Muslim representative bodies. More recently another minister is reported to have told a journalist that "it is Muslims' responsibility to deal with extremism"[35].

… opponents of multiculturalism have used the post-9/11, post-London bombings climate to push their agenda. Multiculturalism, it is argued, elevates difference and therefore enhances segregation. The Trojan horse for this argument is the debate about Britain's Muslim communities, much of which is simply Islamophobic. The rightwing press is now rampant with the argument that multiculturalism intensifies segregation. The truth is that vile anti-Muslim prejudice, using the religion of a community to attempt to sideline and blame it for many of society's ills, is the cutting edge of racism in British society

Lee Jasper, 12th October 2005, The Guardian.

Statements by politicians and the media which link acts of political violence by individuals with the Muslim community more generally, lead to a deterioration of community cohesion and fuels xenophobia. An Evening Standard poll of Londoners in September 2006 indicated that more than a third felt nervous or uncomfortable while travelling near a person of Asian or north African appearance,

32 Review of the Evidence Base on Faith Communities, DCLG, April 2006

[33] Statement made in November 2003
[34] The Guardian, 9th November 2006
[35] In October 2005, to Madeleine Bunting

and a half of these have moved seats.[36] The European Centre on Racism and Xenophobia in documenting Islamophobia cited the findings of a survey in which 43% of youth in British regional towns and cities becoming more Islamophobic – 10% of 13-14 year olds supported the BNP. [37] What is the degree of xenophobia that tipped Germany in the 1930s towards a murderous ethnic and cultural racism?

Statistics are presented to convey an impression that a very large number of Muslims in Britain support violent extremism. These can be traced back to a YouGov poll of British Muslims conducted soon after 7/7, which included the question. 'Do you think the bombing attacks in London on July 7 were justified or not?' The sample size of the poll was 526, of whom only 100 answered this particular question. Eighty eight indicated it was not justified, 6 said they did not know, while another 6 responded with a 'Yes'.[38] On this basis media reports stated that 6% of Muslims in Britain supported the terrorists. For example one broadsheet made a further extrapolation: "Six per cent may seem a small proportion but in absolute numbers it amounts to about 100,000 individuals who, if not prepared to carry out terrorist acts, are ready to support those who do".[39] The figure of 100,000 dangerous Muslims has now entered the popular imagination, based on a sample of 100 from a community of 2 million!

However even one criminal act is one to many. ***The problems of violent extremism can only be tackled by a partnership including the community, government, schools, police and employers together with a recognition of the anger prompted by some of the country's foreign policies.***

One cannot isolate policies that lead to violence abroad with its repercussions within. As noted by a recent distinguished visitor to the MCB, "we are now in an era of security for all or security for none".[40]

A recent report from Demos notes "building meaningful relationships with Muslim communities will require the government to take their grievances seriously, which could open up difficult discussions and disagreements for the government, not least around foreign policy and the war in Iraq" [41].

The factors contributing to radicalisation and recourse to violent extremism are complex and inter-related, and the attempt to place the problem on one door step is unfair and counter-productive. At one stage the government – in its belief that 'mosques are at the cause of extremism' - put forward proposals that would have given

[36] Joe Murphy, Evening Standard, 5 September 2006

[37] EUMC, December 2006

[38] YouGov Poll, 'Muslims', http://www.yougov.com/archives/pdf/TEL050101030_1.pdf

[39] Daily Telegraph, 23rd July 2005

[40] Sayyid Mohamed Khatami, November 2006 http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/ntext.php?ann_id=597

[41] 'Bringing it Home', by R Briggs, C Fieschi & H Lownsbrough, Demos 2006

unprecedented powers to the police to interfere in the affairs of places of worship. Objections were raised by the MCB, some Church leaders and the Association of Chief Police Officers.[42]

A wide consultation with mosque imams undertaken by the MCB concluded that "mosques are being mis-identified and stereotyped as incubators of violent extremism, while the social reality is that they serve as centres of moderation; the bombers were indoctrinated by a sub-culture outside the mosque; the notion of influential 'back-door' mosques is a figment of the imagination". The Home Office took heed and withdrew the proposals 'for the present time'.

The recent report from the City of London Police, 'Problems and Practical Solutions to tackle Extremism and Muslim Youth and Community issues' validates the community's stand. This report notes, "the attention given to a presumed cadre of extremist and foreign imams preaching in mosques is seriously misplaced"[43].

The Muslim community itself has done much soul-searching and self-analysis. The MCB for example is in the process of collecting data on concerns and priorities in the community, particularly amongst younger Muslim men and women. This data has been collected through youth interviews (the MCB 'Muslims voices' project, on-going since August 2005), focus groups and imam's interviews (the MCB 'Voices from the minarets' project', September – November 2005[44]) and other means including the Secretary General's 'Engaging the community' tour in August 2006. This work is facing up to 'uncomfortable problems' and also identify examples of 'good practice'. The 'Voices from the Minarets' project included a consultation event in May 2006 attended by over 300 leading Islamic scholars, imams and mosque trustees from across the UK representing a wide cross section of the Muslim community and all schools of thought. There is a commitment to improving the quality of service provided through mosques and facilitating the participation of young persons and women in decision-making. The tour in summer 2006 by the MCB's office bearers of 22 towns and cities has also helped to identify good practice projects such as the youth and interfaith work carried out by its affiliate the Bristol Muslim Cultural Society.

Extremism and the anti-terrorism legislation

It is only the law enforcement and security agencies that are really privy to the scale of the threats facing society. The perception of Muslims is that they are being unfairly targetted and victimised. The Times/ITV news poll in July 2006 found that two-third of

[42] For a review see http://www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/september03_index.php?l=6#c

[43] Mehmood Naqshbandi, July 2006, http://www.defac.ac.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/monographs/MNaqshbandi_25aug06.pdf/view?searchterm=Muslim

[44] Downloadable from http://www.mcb.org.uk/uploads/vfm.pdf

Muslims believed that the anti-terror laws were not applied fairly.[45]

In recent months two senior officers in the Met have themselves voiced their concerns.

Assistant Commissioner Tarique Ghaffur in his speech to the National Black Police Officers Association in August 2006 noted: "There is a very real danger that the counter-terrorism label is also being used by other law-enforcement agencies to the effect that there is a real risk of criminalising minority communities. The impact of this will be that just at the time we need the confidence and trust of these communities, they may retreat inside themselves. We therefore need proper accountability and transparency round all policy and direction that affects communities. In the face of this global terrorist threat, the police service must also come to terms with the new reality and learn a number of important lessons. In particular, the police need to think very carefully about the emerging wider consequences, especially issues relating to minority communities.

Not only has anti-terrorism and security legislation been tightened across many European countries with the effect of indirectly discriminating against Muslims, but other equally unwanted practices have also emerged, including 'passenger profiling' as well as increased stop and search and arrest under Terrorism legislation. These practices tend to be based more on physical appearance than being intelligence-led.

The Institute of Race Relations calculated that between 11 September 2001 and 31st December 2004, 701 people were arrested for offences under the new Terrorism Act, many of whom were Muslims: only 17 people were convicted under the Act, of which only three relate to some form of Islamic terrorism. The consequence of this type of wide-scale enforcement has been to create a strong feeling of mass stereotyping within the Muslim community and in fact the wider non-Muslim South Asian communities[46]".

More recently Andy Hayman, the Metropolitan Police's assistant commissioner responsible for anti-terror probes: few arrests or charges arose from such searches. "It is very unlikely that a terrorist is going to be carrying bomb-making equipment around... in the street," he told a London police authority hearing. "So, I am not sure what purpose it serves, especially as it upsets so many people, with some sections of our community feeling unfairly targeted."It seems a big price to pay."[47]

These remarks from the heart of the Police establishment must not go unnoticed.

The Demos report cited above notes, "the government's tendency to hold the whole of the Muslim community accountable for the

[45] The Times, 4th July 2006

[46] Speech delivered on 7th August 2006 http://www.nbpa.co.uk/images/AGM2006/nbpa_ghaffur_060807.doc.doc

[47] BBC report, 12th December, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6171775.stm

actions of the few – within an already tense climate of Islamophobia and alienation – has had the effect of driving a wedge between the Muslim community and the rest of British society, rather than between the extremists and everyone else. A lazy parlance in which the words 'extremist' and 'radical' have become interchangeable has meant that any Muslim expressing anything other than unremitting support for the government is under suspicion."

4. COMMISSION ON INTEGRATION AND COHESION

The Commission, as announced by Secretary of State Ruth Kelly, will be:
- Examining the issues that raise tensions between different groups in different areas, and that lead to segregation and conflict
- Suggesting how local community and political leadership can push further against perceived barriers to cohesion and integration
- Looking at how local communities themselves can be empowered to tackle extremist ideologies
- Developing approaches that build local areas' own capacity to prevent problems, and ensure they have the structures in place to recover from periods of tension

Fourteen commissioners have been appointed[48]. While the MCB welcomes the inclusion of a commissioner representing the Hindu Forum of Britain, it is puzzled by the absence of a representative from the Muslim community's largest umbrella body.

In the absence of any further details on the Commission's advisers, the MCB also notes the absence amongst the list of commissioners of established academics and other experts, particularly those prominent in the Runnymede Trust's 'Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain'.

The MCB considers it inappropriate that a study on community cohesion should overlap with issues of extremism: **cohesion cannot be a vehicle for an anti-terrorism policy. It should not be about "standing up to extremism" - there is only a distant relationship between integration and extremism**, as Madeleine Bunting has clarified:

> "It is crucial to delink terrorism from the integration and diversity agenda. They have nothing to do with each other, so nail the myth - perpetrated by politicians and commentators - that integration is an anti-terrorism strategy….
>
> So go back to basics and reiterate that integration is about equality of opportunity, breaking down intergenerational cycles of poverty, and harmonious social relations. These goals may - or may not, depending on international affairs -

[48] Darra Singh (Chair, Local Government); Ramesh Kallidai (Hindu Forum of Britain); Nargis Khan councillor, Labour); Dr Ebrahim Adia (councillor, Labour); Hamza Vayani (youth worker); Dr Harriet Crabtree (Interfaith); Steve Douglas and Decima Francis (community cohesion); Frank Hunt (Unions), Ch Supt Steve Jordan (Police); Professor Michael Keith (sociologist, Goldsmith College); Leonie McCarthy (Asylum), Ed Cox (local government); Samantha Tedcastle (regeneration in Burnley).

reduce the appeal of terrorism in the long run, but any serious government should be interested in them in their own right, not simply as a means to the end of defeating terrorism".
Madeleine Bunting, The Guardian, 4th December 2006

A further conceptual confusion is the linkage of community cohesion with participation in the National Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) The MCB has merely called, from the outset, for the event to be inclusive.[49] It is simplistic to connect this principled stand with 'the fight against extremism'[50].

49 In a communication to the Home Office in December 1999, the MCB stated "The Muslim Council of Britain is fully supportive of the concept of a Remembrance Day…The Holocaust was indeed a universal catastrophe for humanity when genocide and persecution were directed against mainly the Jewish people in Nazi Germany. The Muslim Council of Britain suggests that following the Holocaust a number of similar tragedies have befallen humanity…without in any way wishing to minimise the enormity of the Holocaust or create parity with what happened in Germany during the Nazi rule, the Muslim Council of Britain strongly feels that it would be inappropriate not to remember and highlight these crimes against humanity at the same time….".

50 Ruth Kelly MP's speech, 11th October 2006: " There are also some people who don't feel it right to join in the commemorations of Holocaust Memorial Day even though it has helped raise awareness not just of the Jewish holocaust, but also more contemporary atrocities like the Rwanda genocide. That's also their right. But I can't help wondering why those in leadership positions who say they want to achieve religious tolerance and a cohesive society would choose to boycott an event which

The MCB stands by its record of verbal condemnation of those who engage in criminal activity and also its practical actions through publications and the mosque network.

The lack of consultation in the establishment of the Commission and its conceptual confusions, have raised questions in the minds of MCB's affiliates.

To the MCB, the approach of marginalising key community institutions is as ill-advised.

Many sections of society, the MCB included, would much rather have seen a judicial inquiry on the events of July 2005 rather than a Commission on Integration and Cohesion.

The MCB however has been assured by the Prime Minister's recent comments on the need to celebrate multiculturalism. As former President Clinton once remarked in the context of affirmative action and civil rights: mend it, don't end it.

So it is not that we need to dispense with multicultural Britain. On the contrary we should continue celebrating it. But we need - in the face of the challenge to our values - to re-assert also the duty to integrate, to stress what we hold in common and to say: these are the shared boundaries within which we

marks, above all, our common humanity and respect for each other. When society's core values are transgressed, it can, as a minimum, lead to resentment. But at worst if we fail to assert and act to implement our shared values this *makes us weaker in the fight against extremism and allows it to flourish.[emphasis added]*

all are obliged to live, precisely in order to preserve our right to our own different faiths, races and creeds". Prime Minister Blair, 8th December 2006 http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page10563.asp

This clears the air and presumably the Secretary of State will now distance herself from her own earlier ambivalance[51].

The MCB hopes the Commission will be open-minded and not start from the assumption that religious belief and faith are problems. On the contrary, these are factors for the betterment of society.

There are significant ways in which young people affiliated with the Islamic tradition enjoy higher levels of spiritual health in comparison with young people who belong to no religious tradition…in the environmental domain young Islamic affiliates display greater concern for world development issues…in the personal domain [they] express a greater sense of purpose in life …these findings demonstrate the significant contribution to urban hope which can be generated by the good spiritual health nurtured within the Islamic community.
Professor Leslie Francis & Mandy Robbins, 'Spiritual Health and Urban Hope'. Epsworth Press, 2005

The Muslim community would avail opportunities offered by the Commission to provide factual evidence for the success of multiculturalism in engaging marginalised communities in making them stakeholders in society.

The MCB would strike a note of warning that if policies on community cohesion and integration are interconnected with the Government's policies on 'extremism' and 'terrorism' then this would only create tensions and alienation.

Finally, the MCB's policy has always been, and remains one of constructive engagement.

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[51] At the launch of the Commission she observed, "…we have moved from a period of uniform consensus on the value of multiculturalism, to one where we can encourage that debate by questioning whether it is encouraging separateness…In our attempt to avoid imposing a single British identity and culture, have we ended up with some communities living in isolation of each other, with no common bonds between them? I think we face the clear possibility that we are experiencing diversity no longer as a country, but as a set of local communities".

Aims and Objectives of the MCB

- ✓ To promote cooperation, 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 the 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

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The Muslim Council of Britain is an inclusive umbrella body that represents the interests of Muslims in Britain. It is made up of over 400 national, regional and local organizations, mosques, specialist institutions and professional bodies. Write in or email for an affiliation pack.

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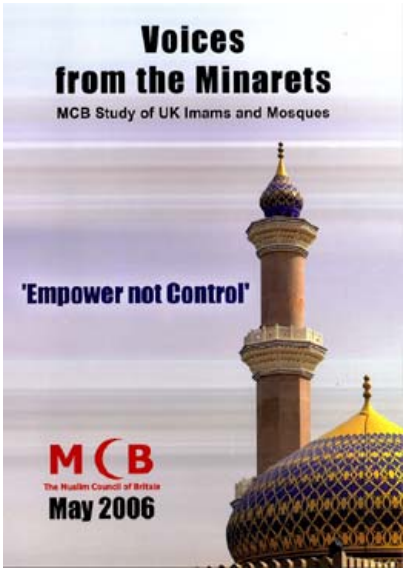

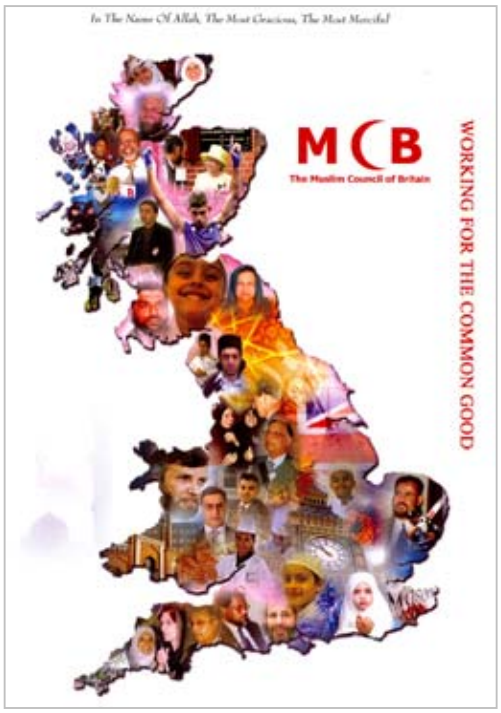

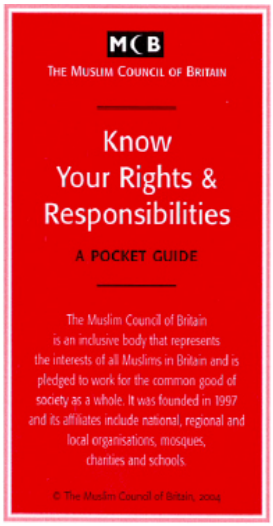

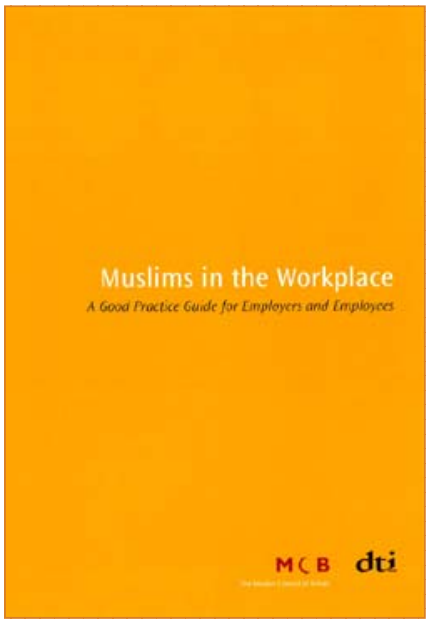

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