

# THE MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN

A step towards greater consultation, cooperation and coordination on Muslim Affairs in the UK.

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## Muslim Council of Britain Weekly E-Newsletter

*21 Rabee` al-Thaane 1423 Tuesday 2 July 2002*

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### **Weekly Updates on Reports, Committees and Events: Issue 24**

#### **Reports and Committee Updates**

- Cumberland Lodge Conference, Windsor
- The Arrest of Dr Dr El-Amin Mohammad Osman
- Golden Jubilee Young People's Faith Forum, St. James's Palace
- Reception for Faith Communities, Buckingham Palace
- UN World Conference Against Racism
- Milad un-Nabi Celebration, Merton
- Milli Gorus Conference, Arnheim, Holland
- ISESCO Furthering Cultural Ties between Britain and the Islamic World
- Muslims in Britain & The Modern World, Preston
- Brainstorming Session, Markfield
- Faiths for Peace
- Faith Schools: Consensus or Conflict Conference
- Media Committee
- Community Affairs
- Social Affairs Committee

#### **Events**

- Furthering Cultural Ties between Britain and the Islamic World
- Muslim Demographics - the way ahead

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## Reports and Committee updates

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### Cumberland Lodge Conference, Windsor

This three day residential conference took place between 7th and 9th June 2002. It was held at the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Foundation of St Catherine, entitled "Being British and Feeling Muslim: Challenges to Police Understanding."

Dr Raheem M A Khan, Chair of the MCB Membership Committee and the London Task Group, also acted as one of the main organising Members of the Steering Committee for the conference. He gave a presentation on 8th June, "Oldham and Bradford Youth perspectives", which focussed on the MCB's contribution in the fact finding mission regarding the disturbances of the northern cities. His talk also covered the Angela Eagle special briefing between the Home Office and the MCB. He emphasised the need to "disseminate community knowledge and information, in order to reduce crime and promote safety, reassurance and quality of life". Additionally, Dr Khan chaired a session for youth leaders, to which Shahid Malik made significant contribution.

On 7th June, Shiban Akbar, Chair of the Social Affairs Committee, gave a talk entitled "The Problems for Muslims living in Britain". On the final day of the conference, 9th June, Dr Alastair Niven, the Principal of Cumberland Lodge, presented Dr Raheem Khan, Shiban Akbar and Cllr Afzal Khan to HM The Queen following a service given at the Royal Chapel, Windsor Great Park where they had been received by Chaplain John Ovenden. The conference and workshops were also attended by other MCB members including Cllr Afzal Khan, Imam Abduljalil Sajid, CWC Member Salah El-Hassan of Iqra Trust and NCWMP.

### The Arrest of Dr Dr El-Amin Mohammad Osman

The MCB has written to the President of Sudan, Umar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir, expressing its sorrow and concern over the arrest of the distinguished pathologist and Islamic charity worker, Dr El-Amin, in Khartoum on June 10th. During his long sojourn in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s, Dr El-Amin made an immense contribution to the cultural and educational activities of the community.

In his letter to the Head of State, Secretary General Iqbal Sacranie wrote "We in Britain hold Sudan in high esteem and have watched its achievements since the Salvation Revolution with interest and satisfaction. The unity of the Sudan is of strategic importance to the Muslim world, and in today's inter-connected world, successes in a Muslim country also make a positive impact on the standing of Muslim minorities in the West....The Sudanese government has acted in an unconscionable manner out of keeping with the civil traditions of its peoples. This can only stoke internal tensions at a time when the country needs unity. Your Excellency, you are aware that the Muslim Council of Britain holds you in high regard and we urge you to take immediate steps to establish whether there has been a breach of human rights with respect to Dr El-Amin."

### Golden Jubilee Young People's Faith Forum, St. James's Palace

On 10th June, 80 young people aged 16 to 24 from a range of faith communities, including 14 Muslim youths, took part in a special Faith Forum. The event discussed the themes of faith, service and community in 21st Century Britain. Hafiz Mohammed Naveed from Halifax gave a short speech on growing up in Britain as a young Muslim.

Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell noted that "The Jubilee is bringing together young people from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to explore what it means to be a young person of faith... We believe that the Golden Jubilee Young People's Faith Forum will be a truly representative, inclusive and ground-breaking event."

## **Reception for Faith Communities, Buckingham Palace**

On 10th June 2002 The Queen, The Duke of Edinburgh and The Prince of Wales, hosted a reception for representatives of different faiths at Buckingham Palace, inviting over 800 guest from multi-faith communities to mark the Golden Jubilee. Also in attendance were The Earl and Countess of Wessex, The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, Princess Alexandra and Prince Michael of Kent.

Among the 100 Muslim guests were scholars, ulama, journalists and youth and community leaders from all walks of life. It was an important occasion where many had the opportunity to meet the Queen and other members of the Royal Family. The evening highlighted the importance of inter-faith relationships and reflected the growth of religious and cultural diversity over the 50 years of The Queen's reign and furthered the goodwill between communities.

## **UN World Conference Against Racism**

A Steering Group Meeting was held on 12th June 2002 at the Home Office. Dr Abduljalil Sajid represented Muslim Council of Britain. The meeting was chaired by Home Office Official Mr Ian Naysmith who is currently acting head of European and International Policy Section of Home Office.

The meeting agreed the terms of references of the steering group. Regional and national consultation meetings were decided upon to promote the cooperation and partnerships of voluntary organisations such as the Runnymede and 1990 Trust. Dr Sajid raised the question of defining racism and the current government held view and whether Islamophobia and religious discrimination could be included within this definition. Following discussion, it was agreed that should these issues prove to be of concern to communities, they would be actioned and included within final documentation. The next meeting of the Steering Group will be held on 31st July 2002.

## **Milad un-Nabi Celebration, Merton**

Iqbal Sacranie Secretary General attended the Milad un Nabi Celebrations organised by the British Muslim Association of Merton on Saturday 15th June 2002. Amongst the other guests present were the Mayor of Merton and the Deputy High Commissioner of Pakistan, Mrs Mahmoud. Iqbal Sacranie's speech emphasised that for success in both this world and the hereafter we must follow the teachings of the Holy Qur'an as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him). He re-iterated that it is also our duty to interact with the larger community through Inter-faith Forums, local authorities, the police and local schools in order to bring about better understanding between Muslims and people of other faith and no faith. Such actions would serve to enhance the understanding of Islam in the wider community.

## **Milli Gorus Conference, Arnheim, Holland**

A Day of Brotherhood was held in Gelredome, Arnheim on 15th June 2002 aimed at strengthening the solidarity between Muslims throughout the world. Dr Abdul Bari, Deputy Secretary General attended the event in Holland which focused on Islam in Europe. The Islamic Community Milli Gorus represents the largest independent Islamic Community in Europe.

## **ISESCO Furthering Cultural Ties between Britain and the Islamic World**

On Thursday 20th June, The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) signed a Protocol of Understanding with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural organisation (ISESCO). ISESCO is the counterpart of UNESCO in the fifty seven nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which has its headquarters in Rabat. A two-day International Symposium entitled 'The West and

Islam in the Media' also took place (June 20-21st) at the Islamic Cultural Centre in London.

Attendees included Rt. Hon. Mike O'Brien MP, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, HE Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, Director General of ISESCO, HE Dr Khalid al-Ankary, Minister of Higher Education, Saudi Arabia and Dr Ahmed al-Dubayan, Director General of the Islamic Cultural Centre.

ISESCO Director General Dr Altwaijri said, "We hope to open a fresh new chapter in our relationship with the West, Britain in particular". The MCB Secretary General Iqbal Sacranie commented that "the Protocol extends the opportunity of furthering greater understanding and deepening cultural co-operation between Britain and the Islamic World".

## **Muslims in Britain & The Modern World, Preston**

A Conference entitled "Muslims in Britain and the Modern World" was held on 22nd June 2002 in Preston, at the University of Central Lancashire. The conference was organised by Mark Hendrick MP for Preston. Councillor Afzal Khan, member of the Central Working Committee, was one of the main speakers. The event was also attended by Lord Patel of Blackburn, Ebrahim Bassa, University of Central Lancashire, Faruk Desai, Director of Preston & Western Lancashire Racial Equality Council and Talid Shamsuddin, Secretary of Preston Muslim Forum.

The issues which were discussed included urban regeneration, equality and local and national issues.

## **Brainstorming Session, Markfield**

A residential brainstorming session was held at Markfield, Leicester on Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd June 2002. The objective of the meeting was to plan and discuss future MCB work and challenges. The meeting was attended by former and current office bearers and committee chairs. The recommendations from the meeting are to be put forward to the Central Working Committee for consideration.

## **Faiths for Peace**

The MCB hosted a multi-faith goodwill reception on Tuesday 25th June at the Commonwealth Institute, attended by representatives of the Hindu and Sikh communities, and other religious faiths. The meeting was addressed by Iqbal Sacranie for the MCB, Om Parkash Sharma MBE, President of the National Council of Hindu Temples, Mr Indarjit Singh OBE, Director of Network of Sikh Organisations (UK), and Lord Filkin, Minister at the Home Office. Guests included senior figures from other faith communities.

The event was convened to urge peace in the Indian subcontinent, harness the goodwill and co-operation that exists amongst the faith communities and present a united platform for peace. The MCB Secretary General Iqbal Sacranie noted in his speech that "here in Britain and increasingly across Europe we need to fight racism and discrimination...In the Indian sub-continent the greatest evil is poverty. We should help both in increasing aid and in promoting fair trade."

## **Faith Schools: Consensus or Conflict Conference**

Held at the Institute of Education on 27th and 28th June, this conference provided an arena for wider networking with educational bodies, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Dr Abdul Bari represented the MCB and delivered a speech on "Identity and Citizenship", giving arguments in favour of the provision of faith schools.

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## Committee Updates

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### Media Committee

#### **MCB Expresses Appreciation to Daily Telegraph for Gujarat Coverage**

The Media Committee wrote to Alex Spillius at the Daily Telegraph on 18th June 2002 to express their appreciation for an article he had written that same day regarding the recent pogroms in which over 2000 Muslims were murdered in the Indian state of Gujarat in organised violence led by the BJP and its extremist Hindu allies. The MCB pointed out that "this tragedy has not got the international coverage it warrants" in the media.

#### **MCB Questions ITN News Footage from Palestine**

The Media Committee wrote to the Head of News at ITN, Richard Tait, on 12th June 2002, to question the news footage shown on Sunday 9th June from Palestine. We will provide more details once we receive a reply, insha' Allah.

#### **Letter of Appreciation Sent to The Guardian**

The Media Committee wrote to Alan Rusbridger, the editor of The Guardian, to thank his team of reporters and photographers who worked on the excellent Muslim Britain series which was published on June 17th to 22nd, 2002. In their letter, the Media Committee said that, "It was the most extensive and sympathetic look at the British Muslim community that has yet appeared in a national newspaper in the UK. The series successfully tore down many stereotypes of British Muslims and showed a degree of understanding that was greatly encouraging."

### Community Affairs

Mr Ahmed Shaikh, Assistant Secretary General, represented the MCB at the first meeting of the Hajj Advisory Group held at the Foreign Office on 25th June. The meeting was chaired by Lord Patel and was also attended by senior members from other Muslim organisations. The meeting agenda focused on the appointment of medical advisers and the application process for advisory group members.

### Social Affairs Committee

#### **"Forced" Marriage**

Shiban Akbar, Chair of the Social Affairs Committee, attended a meeting at the FCO Offices on the subject of forced marriage with Mockbul Ali on Thursday 13th June. She explained the MCB's position on forced marriage which she confirmed was identical to the Islamic position. She identified a number of ways of taking the work forward and stressed the need for preventive action.

She also attended the "Imam's Conference on Forced Marriage" held on 27th June 2002, at the Brady Centre, Tower Hamlet. The aim of the Conference was to provide the basis for ongoing dialogue on Child Protection matters with the Faith Community. Shiban facilitated one of the four workshops held which addressed the question "How can the local authority continue to work in partnership with Tower Hamlet's Mosque?". This event was organised by the Service Manager Child Protection, the Reviewing Service along with the Chair of the Area Child Protection Committee Steering Group on Forced Marriage, London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

#### **Social Crime Reduction**

Shiban Akbar, Chair of the Social Affairs Committee, attended a meeting with Police Sergeant Paul Hembury of the Social Crime Reduction Team of Cowley Police Station, Oxford on Thursday 20th June. The meeting was used to update both parties on current activities to help gain better understanding of Muslim issues. The five day Cumberland Lodge Conference was mentioned. It is to focus on a number of themes such as community and race relations training. Shiban was invited

to present a one-hour training session in early Sept 2002.

#### **Marriage and Relationship Support Seminar (MARS)**

The Lord Chancellor's Department held a Marriage and Relationship Support Seminar (MARS) on 26th June 2002 at the London Natural History Museum. This all day seminar was attended by Shibani Akbar, Chair of the Social Affairs Committee and gave an overview of government objectives for the family and children. The discussion also covered how policy should be linked with marriage and relationships. The MARS grant programme for 2003 to 2004 was also discussed.

#### **National Council for the Welfare of Muslim Prisoners**

Shibani Akbar, Chair of the Social Affairs Committee, attended a meeting of the National Council for the Welfare of Muslim Prisoners (NCWMP) held at London ICC on Saturday 29th June, 2002.

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## **Events**

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#### **Event: Muslim Demographics - the way ahead**

Date: Thursday 26th September 2002

Contact: Chair of ReDoc, Dr Aziz Shaikh, c/o MCB office

Information: Topics for discussion include the census output on the religion question

#### **Event: Furthering Cultural Ties between Britain and the Islamic World**

Date: Monday 5th August 2002

Held By: Brent Islamic Circle

Venue: London Inter Faith Centre, 125 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6RG

Contact: G Jones, Telephone 020 7604 3053

Information: Speakers include Professor Jamal Badawi and other distinguished scholars.

