

# 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 E-Newsletter

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## Reports and Events

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### MCB Welcomes the Return of British Detainees from Guantanamo

The Muslim Council of Britain welcomed the announcement by the Foreign Secretary Jack Straw on Tuesday the 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2005 about the return to the UK within weeks of the four remaining British detainees from Guantanamo Bay.

"These four individuals have been through an appallingly lengthy and unjust ordeal in which they have been deliberately held by the US authorities in a legal black hole without recourse to the most basic and humane standards of due process. It is against our most cherished notions of justice to hold people without charge for so long. Their return has been long overdue. We now hope that the several hundred detainees from other countries still being held by the United States at Guantanamo Bay will also be allowed to return home," said Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain.

The MCB continues to call upon the UK government also to abide by the decision of the Law Lords who in December 2004 ruled that the indefinite detention of foreign terrorism suspects without trial in Belmarsh prison violates human rights laws.

"If these men have done or were planning something as serious as we have been led to believe then they should be charged and brought to trial. If not, they should be released without delay and given medical attention. Some of them have already been detained for almost three years now without trial and we are deeply concerned about their health and mental state. We should put an end to our own mini-Guantanamo Bay detention centre," added Iqbal Sacranie.

### Hajj 2005

Dr Shuja Shafi, chair of the MCB's Health & Medical Committee, is leading a study on influenza during Hajj. The MCB also wishes to draw reader's attention to the British Hajj Delegation 2005, headed by Lord Patel of Blackburn. The initiative provides help and assistance to British Hajjis and includes Muslim staff from the Foreign and Commonwealth office (FCO). In cases of emergency the delegation can be contacted in Makkah at the Joharat al-Mahzeer Hotel, Al-Hijlak on (02) 545 7000. Please note the delegation cannot help with travel bookings, lost baggage claims etc but will advise on UK passport and visa matters and emergencies such as accidents.

### Mayor Responds to 'Dossier' on al-Qaradawi

Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, released a dossier on Tuesday the 11 January 2005, which comprehensively answered claims that he should not have met the Muslim scholar Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi in July last year. The dossier demonstrates that the allegations made against Dr al-Qaradawi are almost entirely inaccurate.

'As Mayor of London, I have a responsibility to support the rights of all of London's diverse communities and to maintain a dialogue with their political and religious leaders, irrespective of the fact that there will always be different views on many issues.'

The dossier launched today demonstrates that Dr al-Qaradawi is, as the moderate main umbrella group of Muslim organisations, the Muslim Council of Britain has argued, 'the most authoritative Muslim scholars in the world today'.

The document comprehensively rebuts the charges against Dr al-Qaradawi made in a dossier circulated to London Assembly members in November last year. The authors called for the Assembly to conduct an inquiry into Dr

al-Qaradawi's visit to London.

The document launched today shows that Dr al-Qaradawi has fiercely condemned the terrorist outrages of Al-Qaida and similar groups. He has repeatedly condemned hostage taking in Iraq. He has, as a consequence, been openly criticised by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who has been responsible for the murder of numerous foreign hostages in Iraq.

The document shows that Dr al-Qaradawi has shared platforms with, or met, such prominent figures as former-US President Bill Clinton, the French Foreign Minister, the Italian Foreign Minister and the Spanish royal family to promote understanding between Islam and the West.

The document shows that Qaradawi has been one of the foremost Muslim scholars in combating socially regressive interpretations of Islam on issues like women's rights and relations with other religions.

## **MCB Advisor in New Year Honours List**

Mr. Iqbal Asaria, special advisor to the MCB's Secretary-General on Business & Economics Affairs has been awarded a CBE (Companion of the British Empire), for services to International Development. Other Muslims in the New Year Honours List received OBEs (Order of the British Empire), they included Dr Syed Abdul-Aziz Pasha, founder of the Union of Muslim Organisations (UMO), Mr Nazir Afzal of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Mr Muhammad Akram, policy advisor at the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and Mrs Maroof Rishi, foster carer in Birmingham

## **Muslims Welcome Law Lords Decision on Foreign Detainees**

The Muslim Council of Britain is delighted by the decision of the House of Lords Law Lords who ruled on the 16<sup>th</sup> December that the indefinite detention of foreign terrorism suspects without trial in the UK breaks human rights laws.

“We accept that our government has an obligation to protect the lives of its citizens, but it also has an obligation to respect their liberties and freedoms. The cornerstone of our justice system is that it should be open and transparent. Neither these men nor their lawyers were even informed about the actual allegations against them. The fact that some of this evidence may have been obtained through torture at Guantanamo Bay beggars belief. If these men have done or were planning something as serious as we have been led to believe then they should be charged and brought to trial. If not, they should be released without delay and given medical attention. Some of them have already been detained for almost three years now without trial and we are deeply concerned about their health and mental state,” said Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain.

Indeed, if there really is a public emergency threatening the life of our nation then it is strange that the current law only applies to foreign nationals and not to British nationals. It is clearly unfair and discriminatory as the Special Immigration and Appeals Commission and now the House of Lords have found.

No signatory of the Council of Europe – apart from the United Kingdom - has thought it necessary to derogate from Article 5 of the European Convention of Human Rights.

## **Commission for Equality and Human Rights Seminar**

The Queen Mary Public Policy Seminar on the Commission for Equality & Human Rights (CEHR), entitled ‘Delivering Fairness For All’ took place on Monday the 6<sup>th</sup> of December in London. Sadiq Khan Chair of the Legal Affairs Committee represented the MCB’s Secretary-General. “The CEHR will lead to religion getting the

same protection that rightfully race, gender and disability currently get, this is one further step in the direction of reducing the hierarchy of rights that currently exist in the UK,” said Mr Khan. Other speakers included Francesca Klugg from the LEC, Shami Chakrabati from Liberty and Julie Mellor from the Equal Opportunities Commission.

## **Grand Mufti of Albania Visits UK**

On the invitation of the Muslim Council of Britain a four man delegation from the Albanian Muslim community visited London for a week beginning on Saturday the 11<sup>th</sup> of December. Tanseem Wasti of the London Affairs Task Group of the MCB hosted a dinner for the group on Sunday. The visitors from Albania were Saleem Mucah the Grand Mufti and Chairman of the Muslim Community of Albania (MCA), Mr Dervisa the Secretary-General of the MCA, Mr Uisi advisor to the MCA and Mr Borar the Secretary and interpreter of the MCA. The situation of Albanian Muslims and priorities to help and strengthen ties with British Muslims was discussed.

On Monday the delegation addressed the Hajj committee meeting at the House of Lords hosted by Lord Nazir Ahmed. Later that day Tanseem Wasti introduced them to Muslim Aid staff where a detailed discussion took place on a ten year strategy for projects in Albania. Mr Wasti a trustee of Muslim Aid presented the delegation with a gift on behalf of the organisation. Later that day accompanied by Iqbal Sacranie Secretary-General of the MCB and Tanseem Wasti at the East London Mosque after Magrib prayers the Grand Mufti addressed thousands of worshippers. He thanked them for their support and explained the political, economic and social situation facing Albanian society. He said after 9/11 the situation had become difficult for Muslims who had to struggle for meagre resources in order to develop the community. Albania’s Muslims comprise 75% of the population, Greek Orthodox Christians 15% and about 5% are Catholics; yet unfortunately Muslims are heavily under represented in government institutions.

The Grand Mufti is responsible for all the Islamic education in Albania a very difficult task given the lack of resources. Tuesday saw the delegation visit the Islamic Cultural Centre to meet Pakistani businessmen. The rest of the visit will include a visit to Islamic Relief in London and the Islamic Foundation in Leicester. The delegation will attend the Interpal tenth anniversary celebrations on Thursday in London and meet members of Impact International before leaving for Albania on Friday the 17<sup>th</sup> of December.

## **MCB Highlights the Employment Equality Regulations Impact on Muslims**

It is an unfortunate reality of life that many people – especially Muslims – experience discrimination at work based on their religion; a recent Home Office survey found that more than 50% of Muslims reported frequent unfair treatment from managers and colleagues.

The coming into force of the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 in December last year should therefore be welcomed, since these Regulations now make discrimination on the grounds of an individual’s religion or belief against the law in employment and vocational training. This covers the full spectrum of the employment relationship, from recruitment and interviews, to pay, terms and conditions of employment, training, promotion and dismissal, and the provision of references.

It is quite obvious that discriminatory conduct cannot be tackled by a simple ban alone, and this is recognised and dealt with in the Regulations. Obviously there is a provision relating to direct discrimination – where an individual is treated less favourably than another because of their religion; however our society has thankfully moved on from the days when such overt discrimination was common place, yet individuals still feel that there are various obstacles in their paths which hinder their progress.

This is where the second provision – Indirect Discrimination – comes to the fore. If an employer has a rule or policy which applies to everyone but which in practice disadvantages members of a particular religion, it will amount to indirect discrimination. A classic example is where an employer has a uniform policy that women must wear knee length skirts. The only defence available to an employer is to show that the rule is in place to meet a legitimate aim, and that no other less damaging alternative would meet that aim.

Often we find that although we may not actually be discriminated against at work, we may be the subject of jokes and teasing related to our religion from our colleagues. The Regulations therefore make provisions for

harassment based on a person's religion to also be outlawed. Significantly, this could be a one off incident or a general culture at work; what is important is that it has the effect of violating a person's dignity, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment for that individual.

The Regulations also acknowledge that outlawing certain treatment now cannot make up for years of discrimination in the past. Provisions are therefore made for Positive Action, where employers can take positive steps to redress previous inequalities in the workplace. They can advertise vacancies in the ethnic press to attract individuals from particular religions which are underrepresented within their workforce, and organise training courses so that individuals are armed with the skills required for promotion. Obviously selection for promotion etc. must still be on the basis of merit alone, but these measures – which would otherwise be discriminatory – can go some way to help those religious groups who have suffered in the past.

However the most significant change as far as Muslims are concerned, is the fact that employers are required to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate religious practices at work. Muslims can now ask for prayer facilities or for flexible working time so they can attend Jummah prayers. A request can only be refused if it would cause an undue financial or business burden on an employer. It would therefore be unlikely that a large company with many vacant meeting rooms could legitimately refuse a Muslim employee's request that they be allowed a quiet area in which to pray; on the other hand a small company operating out of two rooms would be justified in refusing, as they would not practically be able to accommodate the request. However they would then have to consider other alternatives, such as allowing the individual to attend a mosque to pray, if one is located nearby. These provisions can affect a whole range of areas, from time off for religious obligations and festivals, including Eid and Hajj, to dietary requirements at work.

It is changes like these that are likely to make the most difference in practice, as individuals will no longer be forced into making a choice between their careers and their religious obligations. It is therefore essential that everyone is aware of what the Regulations mean in practice, as merely opening a dialogue with employers is often all that is required to reach agreement on having religious needs met at work.

The MCB is currently working on a project funded by the DTI to increase awareness of the new laws. For more information please visit the website at <http://www.mcb.org.uk/>, email [dtiproject@mcb.org.uk](mailto:dtiproject@mcb.org.uk) or call 020 8305 6357.

### **President Arafat Memorial Evening**

Remembering President Arafat' was an evening to celebrate the life of President Yasser Arafat held on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> December at Friends House, London. It was organised by the Joint Committee for Palestine and held in the presence of H.E Afif Safieh, the Palestinian General Delegate to the UK. The evening was hosted by Richard Burden MP Chair of the Britain-Palestine All Party Parliamentary Group. Guest contributors included Dr Daud Abdullah on behalf of the Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain and Rt. Hon Lord David Steel, former leader of the Liberal Democrats & President of Medical Aid for Palestinians.

### **Tory Reform Group Meeting**

Iqbal AKM Sacranie, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain and Dominic Grieve MP, Shadow Attorney-General and Conservative Party Spokesman on Community Cohesion, were guest speakers at the Tory Reform Group Meeting that took place on Tuesday the 30<sup>th</sup> November at the House of Commons. The meeting highlighted issues affecting community cohesion including the role that faith plays in cohesion. Iqbal Sacranie gave examples of good practise where different faith communities had worked together: a) the campaign to get the religious affiliation question included in the Census of 2001 and b) the proposal to outlaw incitement to religious hatred. Dominic Grieve outlined how he believed the message and values of the Conservative Party had great appeal for many members of Britain's ethnic communities including Muslims.

### **First Meeting of the Ad Hoc Community Consultation Consortium on Identity Cards**

Tanseen Wasti represented the Muslim Council of Britain at the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Community Consultation Consortium on Identity Cards that took place on the 1st of December in London. The Home Office is soon to publish its summary of findings from the consultation on legislation on ID cards. The Government

intends to review the draft bill for the introduction of ID cards in light of the comments made.

Faith organisations that have agreed to work together to form a Faith Community Consultation Consortium (FCCC) include: the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Hindu Forum of Britain, Jain Samaj Europe, the Network of Sikh Organisations, the World Zoroastrian Organisation and the Muslim Council of Britain.

## **Death Certification Reform Meeting**

The Home Office consultation meeting on Coroner, Burial and Death Certification Reform took place on Monday the 6<sup>th</sup> of December in London. Ibrahim Mogra from the MCB's Mosque and Community Affairs committee attended. The meeting reflected unity amongst the Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Bahai faith communities concerns regarding burial; including the need to bury the deceased as soon as possible and to see if there are ways to avoid intrusive autopsies. In England for instance autopsies are far more frequent than in Scotland. There will be follow up meetings to explore other related issues.

The Mosque and Community Affairs Committee are intending to hold a seminar on this area in spring next year. The MCB appeals to all Muslim organisations in the UK that deal with death and burial to contact the MCB office if they are keen to get involved in this project.

## **MCB Meets With Association of European Journalists**

Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the MCB, addressed the Association of European Journalists at the Finnish Institute in London on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2004. Mr Sacranie fielded a number of questions from the assembled journalists relating to the integration of Muslims in Europe and the 'war on terror.' Mr Sacranie was accompanied to the meeting by Inayat Bunglawala, Secretary of the MCB's media committee.

## **Launch of 'Muslims in Britain'**

A reception was held at the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre, West London, on 29th November to mark the publication of 'Muslims in Britain' and celebrate Eid ul Fitr. The publication, produced jointly by the Muslim Council of Britain, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Home Office, marks the achievements of British Muslims in various walks of life. The Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, spoke at the event, as did the MCB Secretary-General Iqbal Sacranie.

In his address, Iqbal Sacranie noted that "in these post-Cold War and unilateralist times, Eid has come to evoke bittersweet sentiments for British Muslims." He acknowledged that there have been significant positive steps including notably the recent commitment in the Queen's Speech to Parliament to comprehensively outlaw discrimination on the grounds of religion. This forthcoming legislation will, insha' Allah, make a huge and positive contribution to the lives and perceptions of Muslims as well as community relations. However, it is undeniable, explained Mr Sacranie, that "it is the Washington-driven foreign policies that have become a cause of the most serious concern to Muslims in Britain and around the world."

Mr Sacranie urged the British and US governments to pursue the path of international legality and stated his belief that there was no problem that could not be solved with true international co-operation and goodwill. He ended his address with a call for the British government to be not only tough on terrorism but also tough on the causes of terrorism.

## **MCB Lends Support to the London Olympic 2012 Bid**

The Muslim Council of Britain has pledged its support for a London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games in 2012 with Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the MCB officially announced as a Bid Ambassador.

The Mayor of London was joined by Iqbal Sacranie and other prominent members of London's Muslim Community at an Eid reception on the 24<sup>th</sup> November, held at London's City Hall to mark the end of the Holy month of Ramadan.

Speaking at the Eid reception Iqbal Sacranie said:

"The Muslim community embraces London's Bid for a 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. We want to play



an active role in welcoming visitors and ensuring a London 2012 Games are fully reflective of our multicultural, multi-faith society. London's bid provides our communities with many benefits. Hosting the Games will act as a catalyst for regenerating an area of East London which has long been neglected and will provide opportunities for employment, affordable housing, training initiatives, community health and education. I urge all communities to join the MCB in publicly expressing their support for London's Bid."

The Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone said:

"This welcome decision by the Muslim Council of Britain will give our London Olympic bid for 2012 a huge boost. The bid relies on the goodwill and backing of London's many different communities. London's Muslim population makes a significant contribution to the economic, political and social life of the capital and strengthens our reputation as a great world city."

Lord Coe said:

"I am delighted in wishing London's Muslim Communities Eid Mubarak. London's Bid is a once in a lifetime opportunity for us all. As well as a fantastic sporting and cultural festival, the Games will lead to better community and sports facilities, more jobs and business opportunities, more visitors to the UK, and many ways of getting involved in the Games. I welcome the support of the Muslim Council of Britain which yet again demonstrates our vibrancy as a truly diverse city where every athlete and visitor can feel at home. I urge the whole UK to make Britain proud and back the bid."

## **Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain Attends Funeral of Yasir Arafat**

The MCB's Secretary-General, Iqbal Sacranie, travelled to Cairo as part of the official British delegation headed by the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, where he attended the Janaza prayer for the Palestinian leader.

Condolences from British Muslims were conveyed to the Palestinians, Iqbal Sacranie said; 'For more than four decades Yasir Arafat led with unparalleled dedication the Palestinian national movement for freedom and independence. His death has left an enormous vacuum at the helm of that movement that will not be easy to fill. It is unacceptable that the Israeli occupation authorities by virtue of their might have denied the Palestinian leader his expressed wish to be buried in al-Quds (Jerusalem), the birth-place of his mother and home of his paternal relatives,'

More than any other contemporary Palestinian leader, Yasir Arafat symbolized the struggle and determination of his people. He kept their dream alive and succeeded in keeping the Palestinian issue at the top of the international political agenda since the early 1960s. The MCB extended its deepest condolences to Fatah, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the Palestinian National Authority and the Palestinian people at home and in the diaspora. Reaffirming its absolute support for their struggle to restore their historical and national rights in their homeland. The MCB urged the British Government and its partners in the European Union to render all necessary assistance to the Palestinian people in accord with international law and relevant UN resolutions. The Secretary-General had the opportunity to meet various leaders from Muslim Countries including, leaders from the Palestinian Authority; Abu Mazen and Sa'ib Urayqat, Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah of Jordan, President Bashar al-Asad of Syria, King Mohammed of Morocco, President Mubarak of Egypt, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz of Pakistan, President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, President Umar al-Bashir of Sudan and the Foreign Minister of Iran, Kamal Kharrazi.

'To God we belong, and to Him is our return' (Qur'an 2:156)

## **Muslims attend Remembrance Day Service at Cenotaph**

The Secretary-General of the MCB represented the Muslim Community at the Annual Remembrance Day event held at the Cenotaph in London. He was accompanied by the Chair of the Public Affairs Committee Sher Khan on Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> of November.

## **MCB Meets Senior Members of the Charity Commission**

On Monday the 15<sup>th</sup> of November, members of the Charity Commission met with members of the Muslim Council of Britain at the Commission's headquarters in London. Those in attendance from the MCB were Iqbal

Sacranie, Dr. Jamil Sherif, Mohammed Abdul Bari, Unaiza Malik, and Akbar M. Ali. The Charity Commission was represented by Paul Fredericks the head of Functioning Compliance Performance with Mary Claridge the head of Customer Services. This was the first of a series of meetings scheduled to explore the following areas:

1. How the MCB can use its expertise to assist Muslim charities in the area of compliance.
2. How the Charity Commission and the MCB may work together to resolve disputes within Muslim charities.
3. How the MCB may assist in the Charity Commission's understanding of the Muslim communities needs in relation to charity.
4. Dealing with the Media so that it behaves sensitively when dealing with Muslim charitable organisations.

## **Open Society Institute Report on British Muslims Welcomed by MCB**

Greater Government recognition of the needs of British Muslims is required to ensure effective policy in tackling the disadvantage, deprivation and discrimination Muslims face as a community said a report by the Open Society Institute. The report *Muslims in the UK: policies for engaged citizens* was presented by Home Office Minister Fiona Mactaggart MP on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2004 in the Attlee Suite at Portcullis House, London. Speakers included Trevor Phillip (CRE), Iqbal Sacranie (Muslim Council of Britain) and Polly Toynbee (Guardian).

*Muslims in the UK* presents new analysis and data and makes the case that religion is a more important aspect of identity than ethnicity for British Muslims. At present both data collection and Government policy too often address minority issues only through the lens of ethnicity.

While there is a move towards greater acknowledgement of the relevance of faith identities in designing and shaping public policy, progress is still not enough to enable some of the real and rapid changes now required. If key legal and political institutions understand and accommodate their central concerns, Muslims will feel a deeper sense of belonging to British society. *Muslims in the UK* makes detailed, practical and realistic recommendations aimed at seeing that Government policy is more effective in meeting the specific needs of Muslims as a group.

Main recommendations in the report included:

- Improved data collection on the basis of faith (as well as ethnicity).
- Increased engagement by Government agencies and public bodies, in particular criminal justice agencies, with Muslim communities.
- The need for policy makers to take into account the aspirations and needs of Muslims as a group, in designing targeted policy to tackle the socio-economic disadvantage faced by Muslims and to ensure their full integration into the labour market.
- The need to incorporate knowledge and understanding of Muslims and their faith in the education curriculum.
- More research on the specific needs of British Muslims, as a group.

Iqbal Sacranie welcomed the report with the following words; "This report expertly details where we are at present. But I would like to start with where we want to be in the future. In other words, with our vision of an inclusive society. One which is multi-faith as well as no faith and multi-cultural. One where no groups are left behind through disadvantage and discrimination. One which is vibrant and successful. If that's our ultimate aim, then today's OSI report highlights just how big the challenge is in turning this vision into reality.

The OSI deserve our thanks and appreciation for their detailed research and analysis. Their latest work adds to the growing body of evidence that points to shocking levels of disadvantage and discrimination endured by sections of Britain's Muslim community. Moreover, the findings chime with the picture we are getting from the Muslim community at the grass-roots. As a representative body of British Muslims the MCB is in regular contact with Muslim communities and organisations throughout the country. Just before Ramadan I was in Leicester. There I met over a dozen organisations. They all highlighted similar worries and fears around the themes highlighted by the report. These are the people at the sharp end of the statistics highlighted today. These are the people for whom disadvantage is a daily reality.

Of course, Muslims are not the only community that is suffering. Social exclusion knows no religious or ethnic boundaries. So tackling the problem will therefore require a combined effort. But the fact is the problem appears more acute for sections of the Muslim community. Moreover, these problems have to be appreciated in the wider context. Many Muslims already feel highly aggrieved at injustices abroad: in Palestine and Iraq. Hardly a day goes by when horrifying images appear on our screens which show how the innocent Palestinians and Iraqis are suffering from the military action carried out by the occupying forces. They also feel anxious at home: at the way some police forces are using the anti-terror powers for instance. On top of all that they are a community that suffers very real hardship. It is circumstances like these that breed despair and anger. We need to replace that with hope, understanding and confidence.

So, where do we go from here? Fortunately the report provides some of the answers. It combines rigorous analysis with realistic policy recommendations. It identifies policy levers necessary for generating and delivering change. We strongly urge the government to give these recommendations careful consideration.

Some of the signs emerging from government are indeed promising. It has made a serious attempt at tackling poverty and social exclusion – albeit rather quietly. But more needs to be done in tackling concentrations of deprivation amongst minority faith and ethnic communities. And after determined campaigning the government has promised to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief in the same way as on the grounds of race, gender and disability. For far too long one of the biggest injustices has been the hierarchy of rights in our legal system. This has caused many groups, including Muslims, to be treated effectively as second class citizens. So we applaud the Government's commitment to the equality agenda. It's proposals will make a huge and positive contribution to the lives and perceptions of many disadvantaged communities.

Building an inclusive society requires bridge-building that can not be done by the government alone. It requires the Muslim community to pro-actively reach out and interact with the society around them. Later today I shall be at the launch of this year's Islam Awareness Week at the Globe Theatre. It is spearheaded by our affiliate, the Islamic Society of Britain. The theme this year is *Knowing your Muslim Neighbour*. Cities all over Britain will participate by opening up their mosques, their community centres, their homes and above all their hearts in order to build friendships, trust and respect. This will also serve to highlight the positive contribution many Muslims are making to British society.

Other Muslim organisations are also playing a positive role. Some of our mosques have come under much criticism lately. But the East London Mosque, which sits in the heart of one of Britain's biggest and most deprived Muslims communities, is a beacon of good practice. It has highlighted how mosques can have a positive social impact beyond the spiritual. By working with the local education authority and parents, the East London Mosque has helped significantly reduce truancy rates in Tower Hamlets. Thus improving the chances of Tower Hamlets pupils receiving a good education. Practical initiatives like these deserve recognition and support.

Muslims, like other minority faith communities, are seeking accommodation of their needs, in trying to make this country – their home – more homely. In doing so they are challenging the status quo. This is uncomfortable for some but it need not be so. Religion has a rich tradition in playing a role in public life in this country. This makes it easier for Muslims to participate, contribute and make the case for the recognition of their needs.

So, to make real and lasting progress we need to ensure that government and community organisations work together. We must ensure that we have the right mix of legislation where it is needed, money where it is required and partnership where it is effective. Only then can we really be on course of realising our vision of an inclusive and successful multi-faith and multi-ethnic society. I hope that this report brings us a step closer to that

vision. Finally, I would like once again to thank the authors for the excellent report.”

The full report *Muslims in the UK: policies for engaged citizens* is available online at [http://www.eumap.org/other areas touched by this report can also be found at: http://www.runnymedetrust.org/](http://www.eumap.org/other_areas_touched_by_this_report_can_also_be_found_at)

## **Eid ul-Fitr Gathering at the House of Commons.**

Monday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November saw the seventh Eid ul-Fitr Festival gathering at the House of Commons. To celebrate the contributions of the Muslim Community to the social and political life of the UK. Representatives of the Muslim Community gathered to be welcomed by the Prime Minister Tony Blair, Home Secretary David Blunkett, Paul Boateng MP, Dominic Grieve the Equality and Diversity spokesperson of the Conservative Party and Iqbal Sacranie Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain.

Speaking to the gathering the Prime Minister emphasised his commitment to a society where all faiths are able to make a contribution to the spiritual, cultural and economic life of the nation, and his commitment to ensure equality of opportunity was available to all the members of the community. He also restated his determination to the assurance he gave at the Labour Party Conference of giving a very high priority to resolving the Middle East conflict.

Iqbal Sacranie addressed the gathering by highlighting the following; “Honourable members of parliament, distinguished guests, as the holy month of Ramadan is above all a time for self-evaluation and assessment, I must thank Dr Pasha for so powerfully reminding us of the ongoing tragedy facing the long-suffering people of Iraq. It is now, of course, more than eighteen months after President Bush in his inimitable way declared ‘the end of major combat operations in Iraq.’

Still, it has been reassuring that our Prime Minister has for some time now recognised the urgent need for real progress to be made – if not in Iraq – then in the Israel-Palestinian conflict if we are to see an improvement in our state of relations with the Muslim world.

Israel’s ongoing thirty-seven year illegal occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza is a standing affront to international law and to all who are outraged by the unjust treatment that the Palestinian people have been subjected to. It was good to see the Prime Minister visiting Washington so soon after President Bush’s election victory to underline the need for a Middle East settlement.

On this issue so very many words have been spoken, road maps established – only to be quietly forgotten. Yet there is no great mystery about what needs to be done. The question is - and has always been – is the United States government willing to use its considerable leverage to persuade Israel to abide by international law and dismantle the ever-expanding illegal Jewish settlements, that have now swallowed up 60% of the West Bank, and allow the Palestinians to live in dignity in their own homeland? Sadly, the signs are not very hopeful. This does not augur well.

On a different issue, at home in the UK, at least, we did this year – after many years of campaigning - witness some real progress. During his speech at the Labour Party conference, the PM gave an explicit undertaking to comprehensively outlaw discrimination on the grounds of religion. We believe that the proposed law will enable and further encourage Muslims to play a full and active part towards the creation of a just, fair and cohesive society in the United Kingdom.

Earlier today, I was at the launch of a major new report by the Open Society Institute called *Muslims in the UK: policies for engaged citizens*. The report calls for the urgent accommodation of four key concerns, namely: employment, education, the criminal justice system, and equality and community cohesion.

For far too long one of the biggest injustices has been the hierarchy of rights in our legal system, which has caused many groups, including Muslims, to be treated as second class citizens. The consequence of the absence of a level playing field has led to the alienation, deprivation and marginalisation of the Muslim community. British Muslims – no doubt and people of other faiths - will now feel that their aspiration to be treated equally and fairly in the country of their choice or birth is beginning to be met.”

## **MCB meets Lord Carlisle to Assist in Anti –Terror Legislation review.**

A delegation consisting of Iqbal Sacranie , Sadiq Khan, Khalid Sofie, Abdur Rahman Jafri and Imam Sajid of the MCB met Lord Alex Carlisle on Monday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November. Lord Carlisle is the Independent Reviewer tasked with the job of reviewing part four of the Anti –Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 and the Terrorism Act of 2000. The MCB delegation conveyed their concerns with sections of both acts and also with the way they

were being implemented. Lord Carlisle has asked for a bi-annual meeting with the MCB in light of the 'valuable contribution' they made.

## **Fallujah's Citizens Pay Ultimate Price For Neo-Con Fantasy In Iraq**

The Muslim Council of Britain is utterly appalled by the United States Army's barbaric assault on the besieged and long-suffering Iraqi city of Fallujah. Reports from Iraq indicate that the US Army has damaged equipment in the main hospital in Fallujah, arrested members of its staff and has denied Iraqi doctors permission to travel to tend to the Iraqi wounded. This is in addition to the US Army having cut off supplies of water and electricity to the city.

"We have long stated that the only solution in Iraq is for all foreign armies to leave and allow the Iraqis to determine their own affairs and regain control of their own territory and resources. The war against Iraq and the continuing military occupation of Iraq by the US and British governments is illegal as was recently confirmed by the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. It is highly improbable that the US Army is going to help usher in an era of liberation and democracy in Iraq by terrorising and killing its citizens in this ghastly manner," said Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the MCB.

At the same time, the Muslim Council of Britain is disappointed that much of the British media are once again failing to truly convey the full horror of what is occurring in Iraq. The low-key coverage given by our media to the astonishing report earlier this month in the scientific journal, *The Lancet*, which estimated that more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians have died than would have been expected had the invasion of Iraq not occurred, is truly regrettable.

## **CRE Chair's Remarks Are Misplaced and Misleading**

The MCB is bewildered by the speech made by the Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) Trevor Phillips, at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies demanding that Muslims repeatedly denounce terror.

'British Muslims have been and remain very much part of the fight against terrorism, especially after 9/11. They have been explicit, vocal and unanimous both in their rejection as well as denunciation of terrorism - whether it emanates from individuals, groups or states. In fact, beside the security services, the British Muslim community too can take legitimate credit that despite all the provocations against them, British Muslims have helped maintain peace and order in the realm.' Said Iqbal Sacranie.

The MCB believes that the duty to fight against terrorism belongs to all Britons, not just Muslims, and it is in this respect that the CRE Chair's remarks appear rather unfortunate. He similarly depicts the problem of 'forced marriages' as Muslim-specific and lectures about 'true Islam'. British Muslims have repeatedly pointed out that forced marriages are not legal marriages under Islamic law, and secondly, few Muslims would like Trevor Phillips to lecture them about 'true Islam.'

'Trevor is an old friend, and one had hoped - in vain - that he had been misquoted by the media,' said Iqbal Sacranie.

## **MCB Welcomes the Creation of a New Commission for Equality & Human Rights**

The Muslim Council of Britain welcomed the Government's announcement on Thursday the 18<sup>th</sup> of November concerning the creation of a single Commission for Equality & Human Rights (CEHR). The new Commission will hopefully provide the required institutional support for a future Britain where all citizens, including British Muslims, can benefit from maximum equality of opportunity and are able to fulfil their full potential.

Following the powerful case made by the MCB, as acknowledged by the Government's response, the MCB welcomes the announcement on extending the current legislation against religious discrimination.

'The MCB will assess the details of the new provisions on religious discrimination and incitement to religious hatred against the clear and unequivocal commitment made by the Prime Minister at the last Labour Party Conference, where he pledged to "change the law to make religious discrimination unlawful...as with race, gender and disability."' In the interest of fairness, equality and justice, we have every expectation that the new

legislation on religious discrimination will cover ‘harassment’ and ‘public functions’ in the same way as currently covered for race,’ said Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the MCB.

The MCB hopes that, with the setting up of the CEHR, the Government will ensure that the structural failings and weaknesses of the existing commissions will be left behind, as will the inconsistencies and inequalities in the laws that these bodies are currently responsible to implement. We are hopeful that the new CEHR will be the first step in the right direction towards a fairer and more prosperous Britain.

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## Affiliate News

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### Notice to MCB Affiliates

The Muslim Council of Britain would like to remind its affiliates that they can advertise events, news and job opportunities nationally free of charge through the MCB website and MCB E-Newsletter.

- To register events go to: [http://www.mcb.org.uk/mcbdirect/event\\_add.php](http://www.mcb.org.uk/mcbdirect/event_add.php)
- To register community news go to: [http://www.mcb.org.uk/mcbdirect/news\\_add.php](http://www.mcb.org.uk/mcbdirect/news_add.php)
- To register jobs: send an email to: [mcbdirect@mcb.org.uk](mailto:mcbdirect@mcb.org.uk).

Automatic registration will soon be possible insha'Allah.

### Islam Awareness Week and the Launch of a New OSI Report on British Muslims

Islam Awareness Week (IAW) was launched at the Shakespeare Globe Theatre in London on Monday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November. The initiative was started in 1994 by The Islamic Society of Britain a national affiliate of the MCB. It invites Muslims to share Islam with the public at large, providing information regarding its message and way of life. This year's theme was ‘Your Muslim Neighbour’ it sought to highlight the valuable contributions made by British Muslims to everyday British life. The launch was marked by the exterior walls of the Globe being illuminated with Peter Sanders’ photographic images of Islamic lands, architecture and peoples. Guests at the launch included Iqbal Sacranie Secretary –General of the MCB, Patricia Hewitt the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Prince Turki al –Faisal the Saudi Arabian ambassador, Charles Hendry the deputy chair of the Conservative Party, Baroness Ludgate MEP, Patrick Spottiswoode Director of Globe Education and the International Shakespeare Education Centre.

Commenting on the support they had received from the MCB Shafeeq Sadiq of the IAW campaign said, “As co-ordinators of Islam Awareness Week, the Islamic Society of Britain is proud of its relationship with and support of the MCB in furthering our common cause.”

This year's Islam Awareness Week arrived at a time when the government was presented with a new report produced by the Open Society Institute, called *Muslims in the UK: policies for engaged citizens*. The OSI report confirms the MCB's stance and shows that religion is a more important aspect of identity for British Muslims than ethnicity and urges the government to enact effective policies designed to tackle the disadvantage, deprivation and discrimination Muslims face as a community.

“There is an urgent need to accommodate the four key concerns highlighted by this significant new report, namely: employment, education, the criminal justice system, and equality and

community cohesion. This is an imperative if we are to be successful in building a truly inclusive society. But building an inclusive society requires bridge building that cannot be done by the government alone. It also requires the Muslim community to actively reach out to the society around them. It is in this context that we whole-heartedly welcome this year's Islam Awareness Week. Spearheaded by the Islamic Society of Britain, the IAW has now become a prominent and welcome fixture in the British Muslim calendar," said Iqbal Sacranie. For more details about Islam Awareness Week visit <http://www.iaw.org.uk/>

### **Muslim Charities Raise Emergency Funds For SE Asia Earthquake Relief**

Several British Muslim charities have responded to an MCB appeal and have pledged emergency funds to help the families of the victims of Sunday's earthquake which sent huge tidal waves from Malaysia to Africa leaving a trail of terrible destruction and human grief in its wake.

"One of the MCB's affiliates, Muslim Aid, yesterday announced that they were allocating an immediate initial sum of £100,000 to help purchase food, clothing and medicines in the countries affected by this tragedy. Today we have learned that several other charities including two MCB affiliates, Islamic Relief and Human Relief Foundation have also pledged significant sums bringing the total donated so far to just over £500,000. We urge all British Muslims to donate generously to help these charities to speedily deliver much needed aid and support to the afflicted," said Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain.

The contact details for donations to the main British Muslim charities are as follows:

Muslim Aid:	0207 3774200	<a href="http://www.muslimaid.org/">http://www.muslimaid.org/</a>
Islamic Relief:	0121 6220622	<a href="http://www.islamic-relief.com/">http://www.islamic-relief.com/</a>
Human Relief Foundation:	0870 0117112	<a href="http://www.hrf.co.uk/">http://www.hrf.co.uk/</a>
Muslim Hands:	0115 9117222	<a href="http://www.muslimhands.org/">http://www.muslimhands.org/</a>
Human Appeal International:	0161 2250225	<a href="http://www.hai.org.uk/">http://www.hai.org.uk/</a>

"The MCB requests all mosques throughout the UK to make a special appeal at this week's Friday congregational prayers to raise emergency funds for these charities and to pray for the victims of this tragedy," added Mr Sacranie.

Since its conception in 1991 the Human Relief Foundation has saved lives and relieved suffering amongst hundreds of communities, through aid, education and care. Originally established as a response to the first Gulf War, HRF has become the first point of reference for donors and sister agencies who wish to help the people of Iraq. HRF have conducted projects around the world: in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe. HRF offices are now located in London, Birmingham, Rotterdam, Damascus, Peshawar, Baghdad and Basra.

E-Mail: [/external.html?link=mailto:%20donate@hrf.co.uk](mailto:/external.html?link=mailto:%20donate@hrf.co.uk) website: <http://www.hrf.co.uk>

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## **Committees Update**

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### **Media Committee (MC)**

#### **Hate against Muslims**

The MCB responds to Kenan Malik's article 'What Hate?' published in the Guardian to co-incide with a half hour documentary by the writer aired on Channel 4, which argued Islamophobia was not as great a problem as was being portrayed by sectors of the Muslim community.

Tuesday January 11, 2005

Kenan Malik (What Hate? G2, January 7) makes the not uncommon mistake of equating Islam with race. They are not the same. A recent Open Society Institute report found that "Muslims in the UK are more likely to face discrimination based on religion rather than race". The BNP has in recent years switched its strategy for fear of being prosecuted under our incitement to race hate laws from targeting racial groupings to explicitly targeting British Muslims as a faith group. Malik omitted any mention of the riots of 2001 and the key role the BNP's Muslim-baiting played in them, and his C4 documentary criticises the government's proposals to close this loophole in our legislation and prohibit incitement to religious hatred.

Islamophobia is not confined to the far right. Last summer, the BBC conducted a survey in which fictitious applications were made for jobs using applicants with the same qualifications and work experience, but different names. A quarter of the applications by the candidates with traditionally English sounding names were successful in securing an interview, but only 9% of applicants with Muslim names. The mainstream media have also played a key role in fomenting this prejudice against Muslims. Islamophobia is a myth only if you choose to look the other way.

**Inayat Bunglawala**

Muslim Council of Britain

**MCB Letter to the Daily Mail Challenges Melanie Phillips**



Dear Sir,

Your columnist, Melanie Phillips, misrepresents the government's proposals to prohibit Incitement to Religious Hatred, by claiming that they will restrict freedom of speech and that:

"This proposed law will almost certainly put Christians, among others, in the dock for expressing legitimate opinions - as we can see from what has happened in Australia, where a similar law recently resulted in the criminal conviction of two Christian pastors for merely criticising Islam." (Daily Mail, Monday January 10th, 2005)

In fact, the Australian judicial tribunal found Pastor Scot and Paster Danny Nalliah guilty - not of criticising Islam - but of inciting fear and hatred of Muslims by claiming that Muslims were liars and demons.

Our own government's proposals do not seek to outlaw criticising someone's beliefs but rather inciting hatred against entire religious groups. This is a much-needed and common sense measure and cannot be sensibly described as a restriction on our freedoms any more than the existing incitement to racial hatred laws can be described as restricting our discussions about race.

The far right British National Party has clearly been trying in recent years to exploit the existing loophole in our laws to incite hatred against faith groups - and in particular British Muslims - with a view to creating social strife in our country. In the summer of 2001 we witnessed riots in several northern towns where the BNP had deliberately set out to foment trouble. Does Melanie Phillips think that the BNP should continue to be allowed to do so?

Yours faithfully,

Mr Inayat Bunglawala,  
Secretary,  
Media Committee,  
The Muslim Council of Britain

### **Discussion on Religion and the Tsunami**

Inayat Bunglawala, Secretary of the MCB Media Committee, took part in two discussions on the recent Tsunami in South-East Asia and the impact it could have on people of faith. The discussions were held on BBC Radio 5 Live (Sunday 2nd January 2005) and BBC2's Newsnight (Tuesday 4th January 2005). Also taking part in the discussions were Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor and the vocal atheists Professor Richard Dawkins and Professor Peter Atkins. Recordings of both discussions can be downloaded from the MCB website at [www.mcb.org.uk](http://www.mcb.org.uk).

### **SO .. IS THERE A GOD?**

The following extract appeared in the January 3rd, 2005 Edition of the Daily Mirror. Distinguished believers and non-believers were asked how they reconciled their faith with the horrors of recent days...

Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary General, The Muslim Council of Britain:

"GOD says in the Koran: "Every soul shall have a taste of death and We test you by evil and by good, by way of trial. To Us must you return."

Natural disasters are perhaps inevitable due to the very nature of our planet and it is inspiring to see different faith communities coming together to help each other.

For believers, that faith will offer the hope of reuniting with their lost ones in the afterlife.

With many of their material possessions destroyed, that hope will be all that they have left to hold on

to.”

## **MCB Letter of Complaint to Royal Bank of Scotland**

5<sup>th</sup> January

Robert Macdonald,  
Customer Relations Manager,  
Royal Bank of Scotland

Dear Mr Macdonald,

We have been contacted by an affiliate of the Muslim Council of Britain, 'the Friends of al-Aqsa', who say that your bank has arbitrarily decided - without any explanation - to close their bank account held at your Leicester Belgrave Gate branch. Your bank has also apparently decided to close the personal and business accounts of the Chairman of 'the Friends of al-Aqsa', Mr Ismail Patel, again, without offering any explanation.

In the current anti-Muslim climate, this appears to us to be an extremely worrying development and we must ask that you review your decision immediately. The Friends of al-Aqsa are a highly respected body in the British Muslim community dedicated to educational and charitable activities in aid of the people of Palestine.

Failure to rescind your inexplicable and wholly unjustifiable decision will mean that many British Muslims will come to regard the Royal Bank of Scotland with real concern about their discriminatory anti-Muslim actions.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr Iqbal Sacranie,  
Secretary-General,  
The Muslim Council of Britain

## **Letter from MCB re: Charles Moore piece**

19<sup>th</sup> December 2004

Dear Sir,

For the second week running, Charles Moore (Daily Telegraph, Dec 18th) continues to misrepresent why I – together with most British Muslims and leading faith organisations from other communities - support the government's proposals to outlaw incitement to religious hatred.

He says that I "see attacks on the Prophet as attacks on all Muslims – therefore...they should be banned." While it is true that Muslims regard vilification of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as reprehensible and the provocative charge of 'paedophilia' especially so, this is an entirely separate debate.

I made it explicit to Mr Moore in our encounter together last Tuesday on Channel Four News that the MCB does not believe that this type of vilification would contravene the proposed incitement laws – which are about protecting believers against incitement to hatred, not belief systems.

The proposed incitement provision is needed to combat the hatred that threatens the cohesion of our

communities. The proposed law is a logical extension to an existing law on incitement to racial hatred that protects believers from the Jewish and Sikh communities - because they are regarded as mono-ethnic communities. Is it not only proper, fair and just that the laws should protect believers of all faith communities and not just some? In evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on Religious Offences, many organisations, including the Association of Chief Police Officers, gave examples of problems where they faced difficulties responding under the existing Incitement to Racial Hatred legislation alone and where the extension of this incitement provision to religious hatred would help them combat extremism.

The critical question Mr Moore avoided in both of his comment pieces on this issue was this: should the likes of the far right and the British National Party continue to be allowed to exploit the existing loophole in our current legislation to incite hatred against British Muslims?

Yours faithfully,  
Iqbal Sacranie,  
Secretary-General,  
The Muslim Council of Britain

### **Muslims are Constantly Attacked in Britain**

*The following letter from the MCB's media secretary, Inayat Bunglawala, was published in the Daily Telegraph on Dec 11<sup>th</sup> 2004.*

Sir – The Muslim Council of Britain is campaigning against incitement, not the right to criticise beliefs. The Attorney-General has taken a very strict view of what constitutes incitement with our existing race hate laws. Only four out of more than 80 cases brought to him have been approved for prosecution in the past three years. There is no reason to suppose he would be any less strict with the proposed incitement to religious hatred law.

Michael Burleigh (Opinion, Dec 9) is entitled to his opinion when he described the Dutch member of parliament Ayaan Hirsi Ali as "extraordinarily brave" and extolled the murdered Theo van Gogh as a "liberal film-maker". Of course, the gruesome violence and threats they received are wholly reprehensible. Yet it would be honest to mention that both made deliberately provocative remarks, with Hirsi Ali describing Mohammed as a "lecherous tyrant" and a "pervert" while Van Gogh referred to Muslims as "goat-f-----".

Burleigh derides the evidence for Islamophobia as "anecdotal and slight". In September, an Iraqi Muslim was viciously assaulted in Cardiff and later died of his injuries in what police describe as a race-hate killing. Not a single issue of the Muslim News goes by without similar stories of British Muslims - surgeons, mini-cab drivers, young children - being attacked and abused in the street, their homes pelted with stones, their places of worship subjected to arson and even their cemeteries vandalised. Perhaps if the mainstream media paid a bit more attention to these crimes, Burleigh would not remain so unaware of the reality of Islamophobia here.

There has been a clear and undeniable upsurge in anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Muslim hate crimes in Europe over the past few years. This should be portrayed in a fair manner.

**Inayat Bunglawala**, Muslim Council of Britain, London E15

## **We Need Protection From the Pedlars of Religious Hatred**

By Iqbal Sacranie, 14 December 2004

In his column last Saturday, Charles Moore began with an almost unbelievably provocative question. "Was the prophet Mohammed a paedophile?" he asked.

The charge of paedophilia refers to Mohammed's marriage with Aisha. Yet a paedophile is one who is primarily aroused by children. For most of his married life, the Prophet (peace be upon him) had one wife, who was a widow with children of her own. After her death, he married others, most of whom were former widows themselves. Why would the Prophet have waited three years after his betrothal to Aisha – his only virgin bride – if not because he was waiting for her to attain puberty?

So the charge of paedophilia is nonsense; and, to be fair, the former editor of *The Daily Telegraph* acknowledged as much in his next paragraph. "People are perfectly entitled - rude and mistaken though they may be - to say that Mohammed was a paedophile," he wrote. Even so, the conjunction of the Prophet's name and this particular crime will have shocked Muslim readers.

As it happens, poetry in the Muslim world - and, in particular, that of the Urdu poet Allama Iqbal – abounds in complaints and reproaches made to God Almighty. Few poets, however, would dare to cast aspersions upon the name and memory of the blessed Prophet Mohammed. Witness the Persian couplet: *Ba khuda deewana basho, Ba Muhammad hoshiyar* (Take liberty with God if you wish, but be careful with Mohammed).

European writers, though, have a history of taking liberties with the Prophet. As Minou Reeves, a former Iranian diplomat, observes in her book *Mohammed in Europe: A Thousand Years of Western Myth-Making*: "Over the course of no fewer than 13 centuries, a stubbornly biased and consistently negative outlook had persisted, permeating deep levels of European consciousness. In the works of an overwhelming majority of European writers, Mohammed was portrayed as a man of deep moral faults. Churchmen, historians, orientalist, biographers, philosophers, dramatists, poets and politicians alike had sought to attribute to Islam, and especially to Mohammed, fanatical and disreputable, even demonic characteristics."

It is no easy task to convey to a secular audience the immense love and esteem in which Muslims hold the Prophet. To us, he was the restorer of the worship of the One True God; teacher of an elegant and pristine monotheism; the friend of the orphans and the poor; a wise statesman, brave warrior, loving father, considerate husband; he was also the final of God's Prophets sent to mankind to remind us of the awesome Day of Judgment, when all will be called to account for the deeds we have committed during our lifetimes.

Anyway, back to Mr Moore. We seem to be revisiting the arguments that came to the fore during the Satanic Verses affair. Is freedom of expression without bounds? Muslims are not alone in saying "No" and calling for safeguards against vilification of dearly cherished beliefs. Earlier this year, the BBC accepted complaints from Catholics and withdrew its cartoon series

Popetown. Why does society not show the same courtesy and sensitivity towards Muslims?

As you may have gathered, Mr Moore disapproves of the Government's proposal to outlaw incitement to religious hatred, seeing it as an "attempt to advance the legal privilege that Muslims claim for Islam". Quite what "privilege" Islam currently enjoys in Britain over and above other faiths, he does not say.

Yet the proposed legislation does not create a new offence as such. Such an offence already exists in relation to the Jewish and Sikh communities, by dint of their being regarded as mono-ethnic communities. It also exists in relation to all faith and belief communities in Northern Ireland. The Home Office proposal simply extends the current provisions to all faith communities in mainland Britain. If the present provisions in relation to Jews, Sikhs and Northern Ireland raise no concerns - and there is no real campaign to remove these provisions - why should they raise concerns if extended to other religions in Britain?

So, the incitement to religious hatred proposal is not a matter of advancing privileges for British Muslims. It's about establishing equality under the law.

The current loophole in our legislation has resulted in far Right groups such as the BNP modifying their racist rhetoric of yesteryear - no doubt out of fear of prosecution - into a more explicitly and aggressively anti-Muslim invective, this time without fear of breaking the law.

Stirring up hatred against people simply because of their religious beliefs or lack of them ought to be regarded as a social evil. The BNP's ongoing Islamophobia can and has led to criminal acts, abuse, discrimination, fear and disorder. At the moment, there are laws against those who are stirred into committing these offences, but not against those that do the stirring. In opposing the incitement to religious hatred provision, Charles Moore, Rowan Atkinson and the National Secular Society are unwittingly strengthening the hand of those, such as the BNP, who peddle religious hatred.

Quite a few red herrings have been floated this past week about free speech and the dangers of censorship. To be sure, proscribing legitimate free speech is not in the interest of any religion. The death of discussion, debate and robust criticism about a religion is the surest way of routing that religion itself. However, we can make a critical distinction between the substance and form of free speech. The law need not infringe on the substance but can assist to moderate the form, so that all people in this country, whatever their religion, may live in dignity, free from hatred and hostility.

As Martin Luther King observed: "The law might not change the hearts, but it can restrain the heartless." Modern Britain, like the rest of Europe, is now home to millions of Muslims. Some may have sought political refuge in our more democratic societies, some migrating for economic reasons.

Whatever their motives, they are now a part of the social fabric that constitutes these societies. Muslims in Britain do not seek to create an enclave or a parallel culture. They want to be respected as British. That is what they are. And the government that sees and treats them as such, by criminalising offences directed specifically at them, is a government that understands its obligations.

Iqbal Sacranie is secretary-general of the Muslim Council of Britain

## **MCB Responds to Charles Moore Provocation**

Following the MCB's article 'We need protection from the pedlars of religious hatred' published on the 14<sup>th</sup> December in the Daily Telegraph in response to Charles Moore's notorious article, (in which he used the word paedophile in conjunction with the name of the blessed prophet Muhammad peace be upon him, in supposed opposition to proposed legislation to ban incitement to religious hatred). Mr Moore further reacted with a piece on the 18<sup>th</sup> December, the MCB's Secretary-General, Iqbal Sacranie replied with the following letter:

### **MCB Responds to Calculated Insult**

The Government's commitment to introduce legislation for the prohibition of the stirring up of hatred against people because of their beliefs is supported by the MCB, because it would give Muslims the same protection afforded to other religious communities such as Jews and Sikhs - and also place extremists in the British National Party (BNP) on notice. However the proposed legislation has been decried in some quarters, most recently by Charles Moore in the Daily Telegraph (11th December). Regrettably Mr Moore's article included a conjunction of the Prophet's name with the nonsensical charge of paedophilia. The MCB Secretary-General, Iqbal Sacranie responded with an article published in the Daily Telegraph on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Media Secretary Addresses Educationalists**

Inayat Bunglawala, Secretary of the MCB's media committee, delivered an hour-long PowerPoint presentation on 'Towards Understanding Islamic Culture and Heritage' to an audience of over 50 teacher and head teachers at the Credon Centre, Plaistow, London, on Monday 22nd November 2004. Inayat talked about the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the development of Islamic civilisation. He also discussed the historical interaction between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds

## **Social & Family Affairs Committee (SAFA)**

### **Muslim Families in the Capital Seminar**

The MCB's Family & Social Affairs Committee (FSAC) organised a conference entitled 'Muslim Families in the Capital - Challenges and Opportunities' on Saturday the 11<sup>th</sup> of December at the City Hall, London. The event was held in co-operation with the Mayor's Office. The seminar provided an opportunity for Muslims living in the Capital to hear and debate their views on 'Marriage and Islam', 'Conflict in Families' and 'Adoption and Fostering'. The event was well attended by a cross section of Muslims.

Speakers included Dr Daud Abdullah the Assistant Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain, Nicky Gavron the Deputy Mayor of London,

Dr Basil Mustafa the Deputy Director of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Merryl Wyn Davies from BBC religious programmes, Najma Ebrahim of the Muslim Women's Help Line, Dr Suhaib Hasan the Secretary of the Islamic Shari'a Council, Helen Oliver Marketing Co-ordinator, Ealing Fostering & Adoption, Leila Abdulabi Social worker, Ealing Fostering & Adoption and Anni Marjoram the Mayor's Policy Adviser on Women and Women's Issues.

This joint MCB/GLA seminar also explored agencies work and funding. The reality for many Muslim families is far from ideal. There was almost unanimous agreement about what needs to be done, it was a positive platform to

discuss with and gauge the opinions of participants - whose feedback was positive. Dr Basil Mustafa of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies commenting on the seminar said:

“The event focussed on a range of social issues that the Muslim community is facing today, we as a community can no longer ignore these pressing problems. As a lively community we need to take responsibility for finding solutions and helping those suffering from ills such as forced marriages, domestic violence, divorce and the break up of families. We need also to give adequate attention to the whole area of raising our children. The answers should be found within the faith itself - a resource that has not been exhausted, instead of the intrusion by feminism on family life. We can rely on the values of Islam to find adequate solutions - we need simply to look deeper into our faith.”

Ms Shibani Akbar of the Central Working Committee of the MCB added:

“It’s the first step in raising awareness, also an important event particularly with regard to making resources available to begin tackling some of the problems. It was also positive in gaining co-operation from the Muslim community. We hope in future to use the mosque network to reach out to the grassroots Muslim community to encourage positive action in areas such as fostering - where a huge gap between Muslim youngsters who need this service and those who come forward from the Muslim community to foster exists. We hope that the GLA will join us again next year to host a follow on event to further develop this important work.”

## **Legal Affairs Committee**

### **Letter to the Asian Voice.**

The MCB wrote the following letter to the Asian Voice in response to a vicious article published in the Asian Voice by Barry Gardiner MP accusing the MCB of alleging ties between the Hindu Temple in Neasden and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Mr C.B. Patel,

Editor,

Asian Voice,

12 Hoxton Market,

London, N1 6HW

January 7, 2005

Dear Mr Patel,

It would seem that Barry Gardiner MP (‘Support for Neasden Mandir’, Asian Voice, Dec 4-10 2004) either has a problem understanding basic English or he is cynically trying to create a controversy where none exists in order to raise his profile in Brent North ahead of the upcoming General Elections.

He accuses me of having ‘absolutely’ asserted that the terrorist organisation Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) – a body responsible for stirring up hatred of Muslims in India and inciting violence against them – operates from the Neasden Hindu Temple. In fact, in my evidence before the Home Affairs Select Committee on Nov 16 2004, in response to a question from

the panel Mr Jagdeep Singh (Sikh Community Action Network) made a statement after which I had concurred with the accusation that the VHP had still not been proscribed in the UK as a terrorist organisation – I made no mention of the Neasden Temple whatsoever.

One of the senior trustees of the Neasden Temple Mr Jitu Patel contacted the MCB seeking clarification on our statement. We wrote to the trustees of the Neasden Temple on Dec 13 2004 (a copy of which we enclose). I made it clear that my statement did not in any way infer linkage of Neasden Temple with the VHP. However we were very pleased to note that the Neasden Temple has categorically denied any connection with the VHP. No place of worship should give refuge to terrorists and people of evil intent. In fact our letter expresses our appreciation of the work carried out by the Neasden Temple by stating:

“We are pleased to note the excellent work carried out by the Neasden Temple in promoting understanding and community relations in the country.”

Hindus and Muslims have for many years had excellent relations between each other in London and the UK generally. It is extremely disappointing that at a time when all of us should be coming together to work in joint causes such as fighting terrorism and helping to deal with the crisis caused by the tsunami, that Barry Gardiner is seeking to find divisions and animosity where none exists.

I trust this clarifies the confusion created by Mr Gardiner’s article. It would have been proper for him to seek clarification of our statement before coming to the wrong conclusion.

Yours

faithfully,

Sadiq Khan,

Chair Legal Affairs Committee.  
The Muslim Council of Britain

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## **New on the MCB Website**

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### **Media/Press Releases -**

- 12 Jan 2005      [Return of British Detainees from Guantanamo Welcomed](#)
- 31 Dec 2004      [Muslim Charities Raise Emergency Funds For SE Asia Earthquake Relief](#)
- 16 Dec 2004      [Muslims Welcome Law Lords Decision on Foreign Detainees](#)
- 19 Nov 2004      [MCB Welcomes The Creation Of A New Commission for Equality & Human Rights](#)
- 18 Nov 2004      [CRE Chair’s Remarks Are Misplaced and Misleading](#)
- 16 Nov 2004      [MCB Calls for Dialogue and Reconciliation in Holland](#)



- 11 Nov 2004     [MCB Saddened by Death of Palestinian Leader](#)
- 10 Nov 2004     [Fallujah's Citizens Pay Ultimate Price For Neo-Con Fantasy In Iraq](#)

**Media/Letters to the Editor -**

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|-------------------|---------------------|--|
| 11 January 2005   | Daily Mail          | <a href="#"><u>MCB rebuts Melanie Phillips</u></a>                                 |
| 9th January 2005  | The Guardian        | <a href="#"><u>Kenan Malik, 'What Hate?' - response from Inayat Bunglawala</u></a> |
| 20 December 2004  | Daily Telegraph     | <a href="#"><u>Charles Moore continues misrepresentation</u></a>                   |
| 9 December 2004   | The Daily Telegraph | <a href="#"><u>Incitement to religious hatred</u></a>                              |
| 2nd December 2004 | The Guardian        | <a href="#"><u>Muslim support for single equality body</u></a>                     |
| 24 November 2004  |                     | <a href="#"><u>Anthony Browne's article (20 Nov 04)</u></a>                        |

**Library/Articles & Essays -**

- 14th December 2004     [Daily Telegraph, We need protection from the pedlars of religious hatred By Iqbal Sacranie](#)

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**New on the MCBDirect Website**

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MCB*Direct* is the Muslim Council of Britain's community information service. The Internet plays a central role in the provision of the service - visit the project's redesigned website at [www.mcb.org.uk/mcbdirect](http://www.mcb.org.uk/mcbdirect). MCB*Direct*'s objectives are to widen the sharing of information and expertise within the community, increase awareness of best practice initiatives and services, and promote a more informed understanding of Muslims and Islam throughout our society. The project is an initiative of the MCB's Research & Documentation Committee.

**MCBDirect Helpline**

MCBDirect's helpline number is 0845 1 23 23 63.

MCBDirect has posted many exciting features on the website. These include reviews of books, events, individuals etc.

To advertise community news and events please  
contact [mcbdirect@mcb.org.uk](mailto:mcbdirect@mcb.org.uk)

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## Events

To advertise events please contact [mcbdirect@mcb.org.uk](mailto:mcbdirect@mcb.org.uk)

**INTERPAL is a non-political, non-profit making British charity that focuses solely on the provision of relief and development aid to the poor and needy of Palestine the world over, primarily in Palestine and the refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon.**

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