

Your Royal Highness, your excellencies, Sisters and brothers in Islam, Ladies and gentlemen, friends,

Assalamu alaykum warahmatullahi wabarakatuhu

On behalf of the Muslim Council of Britain, I would like to welcome you all to our annual Muslim Leadership Dinner.

It is wonderful to see so many friends and new faces gathered here today.

I hope you are enjoying the evening and look forward to the delicious meal about to come.

This is the seventh year in which the dinner has taken place, and I am so glad it has become a fixture in our community's calendar.

Each year we select a feature in our community to celebrate or to aspire to.

To coincide with the general elections last year, we celebrated the theme of Muslims in politics and public life.

This year's theme is 'Together for an Eco-Friendly World'.

To help us explore the issue, I am glad that we are joined by Caroline Lucas MP, Member for Brighton & Hove and former leader of the Green Party and Afsheen Rashid Kabir, Co Founder and Chief Operating Officer of 'Repowering'.

These distinguished figures have worked hard to ensure that in this modern world, we change our ways to respect the Earth given to us by God.

In the Qur'an, we are told that God has entrusted men and women as vicegerents on earth. Paramount here is our attitude to the environment.

There are over 700 verses in the Quran that exhort believers to reflect on nature, to study the relationship between living organisms and their environment, to make the best use of reason and to maintain the balance and proportion God has built into His creation.

Qur'anic verses describing nature and natural phenomena outnumber verses dealing with commandments and sacraments.

Our blessed Prophet (SAW), is reported to have said: "If any Muslim plants any plant and a human being or an animal eats of it, he will be rewarded as if he had given that much in charity."

And yet, we as humanity have failed as God's viceregents of his earth as we witness the effects of climate change.

The effects are seen more so in the Muslim world than anywhere else.

And as our aid agencies do such an amazing job in going to those affected, it is important for all of us to be proactive in tackling climate change and be more responsible to the environment.

That is why I am glad we are marking this theme tonight.

Here in the UK, our mosques and our communities can and should do so much better to meet the challenge.

There are a handful of our mosques who try to ensure they are run alongside green principles: using solar panels, using water in an environmentally favourable way, having an active recycling policy.

More of this needs to be done. As we collectively strive to improve standards in our mosques, I hope we can include green considerations as part of a package of measures that judges excellence at mosques.

I also hope Muslims and Muslim civil society can come together to not only assist in green causes, but also use their connections to the Muslim world to help improve our environment.

Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters,

As we approach the 20th anniversary of the advent of the MCB, we reflect on how Muslims and Muslim organisations have progressed. We are hugely encouraged by their successes.

At last year's general election the number of Muslim MPs increased from to 13 - an increase of 60%. What is more encouraging is that 8 of these 13 MPs are women.

And I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to one of our previous guests and good friend of the MCB, Sadiq Khan, to whom earlier this month Londoners entrusted the responsibility of running this great city. His election as Mayor of London was an inspiration, not only to the whole country but particularly to Muslims.

Then we had Nadiya Hussain - the Great British Bake off winner who was bestowed honour of baking the Queen's 90th birthday cake.

Malia Bouattia - recently elected President of the National Union of Students (NUS).

Then there was Riyad Mahrez, named PFA's Footballer of the year.

Recently we heard of Dr Taj Hussain, elected President of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine.

We congratulate them and many more who contribute behind the scenes let us give them all a big round of applause.

Before I conclude, I would like to remind you of the work of the Muslim Council of Britain and how crucial it is that you all support our work.

The Muslim Council of Britain is a non-profit institution that is independent of government.

It was established in 1997 by the community and for the community. From all walks of life, and from the different traditions of Islam, Muslims came together to establish this common platform.

With our rich diversity, they wanted to give British Muslims one voice: to find common cause, to speak up for our shared interests.

To fight for fairness, not favours for British Muslims. And to highlight the good work of our community.

That aim is more relevant today than it has ever been before.

There is so much the MCB does, I cannot give it justice in these short remarks, but I will give you one or two highlights.

Earlier this year we initiated our second 'Visit My Mosque Day' where over 100 British mosques from around the country opened their doors to the neighbours around them.

It made a high impact to mystify Muslims and Islam. And it has connected Muslims with the communities around them.

Moreover, with terrorism overshadowing our community, and with extremists and Islamophobes dominating the airwaves, we have tried to ensure the mainstream voice gets through.

After the Paris attacks in November, the MCB brought together over 300 affiliates and other Muslims to put their name to advert we took out in the national newspapers condemning terrorism. This made a huge international impact.

And last Saturday, we continued our campaign to challenge government where it needed to be challenged by facilitating a powerful and unlikely coalition of civil rights activists, policemen and civil and faith organisations to raise concerns about the government's Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill.

Brothers and sisters, ladies and gentlemen,

From the moment it was established, the Muslim Council of Britain has worked hard

to safeguard the long-term future of British Muslims.

We celebrate our community and look for the good amongst British Muslims. We do not talk it down.

The MCB aims to give our community a broad-based, independent voice.

We rely on the low fees paid by our affiliates and the generous support of our community. But the work we carry out is numerous and the expectations placed on us are vast.

As a Muslim community, we are now the second largest faith community in Britain. We are also one of the youngest. As our community grows, so do our challenges.

We hope you will agree that the role the Muslim Council of Britain plays in the service of the community is more relevant than ever before.

Our work can only be effective by the goodwill of our community. We have a skeleton staff who are supported by many volunteers. Now is the time to professionalise our work and increase our capacity.

You can help not only by affiliating to the MCB if you already have not, but by also generously donating either to our help us with our general work, or giving money for for specific projects.

With any community, we are much more effective when we come together.

The future of British Muslims depends on our ability to sustain our institutions that are only here today because of the hard work and sacrifice of many.

Brothers and sisters, ladies and gentlemen,

It is poignant that as we meet tonight to highlight eco-living and the environment, we do so in the hope we leave a legacy for our children and a better world for them.

Let us hope too that the Muslim Council of Britain, which will celebrate its 20th year next year, also becomes an institution that safeguards the interests of the next generation.