

Hate Crime and its Violent Consequences: the Muslim Council of Britain's Supplementary Submission to the Home Affairs Committee

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) provided evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on 13 December 2016, and was requested to provide additional written evidence on a number of topics.
- 1.2. This supplementary submission is in response to the request by the Committee, and subsequent events, and is split into the following sections:
 - Section 2: Identifying the actions or words of Conservative Party MPs that may lead to an atmosphere of hostility against Muslims
 - Section 3: Importance of the role of the media in the spread of inaccurate information and irresponsible reporting
 - Section 4: Additional relevant points to supplement the oral evidence provided

2. Identifying the actions or words of Conservative Party MPs that may lead to an atmosphere of hostility against Muslims

- 2.1. Mr Loughton requested that we provide examples of language used by members of the Conservative Party that may lead to an atmosphere of hostility against Muslims. This section includes a number of such examples to help support the position of the Muslim Council of Britain on this issue, noting that it is not meant to be holistic. Furthermore, this section does not include actions by those of other political parties given the scope of the request by Mr Loughton.

2.2. *Example 1 – False accusations*

False accusations of “terrorist” or “extremist” are often faced by Muslims on British streets. Senior politicians in the Conservative Party have also made statements that appear to fall into this category. Such statements validate the broader spread of hate against many Muslims, as outlined in the previous submission.

For example, former Prime Minister David Cameron falsely claimed that Imam Suliman Gani was a supporter of IS [sic]. The Prime Minister’s spokesperson repeatedly stated that the Prime Minister stood by his comments. Imam Gani was subject to verbal abuse on the street and feared for his family’s safety. Only after a campaign by a number of journalists including LBC’s political reporter Theo Usherwood and the Daily Mail columnist Peter Osborne, was there a “half-apology”, stating: “The Prime Minister is clear this does not mean Mr Ghani supports the organisation Daesh and he apologises to him for any misunderstanding.”

Defence Secretary Michael Fallon also falsely accused Imam Suliman Gani of supporting IS. Only after the threat of legal action by Imam Gani, was there a retraction and apology: “He naturally apologises for this inadvertent error.”

Another example is when former Prime Minister David Cameron alleged that a school (Islamic Shakhshiyah Foundation) was linked to Islamic extremism – a view dismissed by Haringey Council who found no evidence of “inappropriate influence”.¹

¹ [Independent](#), 2009

Such accusations are seriously dangerous when they come from government officials and MPs within the Conservative Party.

2.3. Example 2 – “Dog whistle” politics

A more subtle example of false accusations of terrorism or extremism, is where Muslims, particularly those in public life, are accused of being linked to extremism. By playing on anxieties of the broader public, such statements feed this atmosphere of hostility.

The most prominent example of this is when former Mayoral Candidate for London, Zac Goldsmith, supported by the Conservative Party, consistently accused another Mayoral Candidate, Sadiq Khan of being linked to extremists. The current Prime Minister and the former Home Secretary even said that London would be unsafe under Sadiq Khan².

The Defence Secretary’s inflammatory language also plumbed a new low: that “Sadiq Khan was 'unfit to protect Londoners against terrorists' because he is a 'lackey who speaks alongside extremists’ – shocking allegations later withdrawn.³ It is worth noting that this was how the Conservative Party treated the most senior Muslim politician in the country.

Whilst some might argue this to solely be a political tactic, it was one that has contributed to creating a climate of fear and suspicion.

The most generous explanation may be that such dog-whistle politics was tolerated within the Party, because “such stuff gets said in politics”. It is a poor excuse, considering these are times requiring society to rally round shared values of mutual respect and fair play.

The former leader of the London Assembly’s Conservative group, Andrew Boff, called the campaign to link Sadiq Khan to terrorism in the Mayoral race “outrageous”. He said: “I don’t think it was dog whistle, because you can’t hear a dog whistle. Everybody could hear this,” and added: “It was effectively saying that people of conservative religious views are not to be trusted and you shouldn’t share a platform with them and that’s outrageous.” He noted on BBC Newsnight how this campaign caused “lasting damage” to the links of the Conservative party with London’s Muslim communities.⁴

2.4. Example 3 – Confirming stereotypes of Muslims as terror suspects or people who are separate from the rest of society

Government speeches provide leadership to the nation on a range of issues. Unfortunately, speeches given by the most senior members of the government about Muslims are very often talked about in negative terms or linked to extremism and terrorism, as if Muslims can only be seen through the lens of security and terrorism. Terrorism is only seen as a 'Muslim problem' and thus allows Muslims to be subject to discrimination or hatred. There is a real concern raised to us that in the absence of a sustainable counter-terrorism policy, pronouncements and strategies may be pursued to satisfy the demands of more bigoted sections of society.

² [Video](#) by Chuka Umunna MP, May 2016

³ Daily Mail, February 2016; remarks withdrawn in May 2016

⁴ [Huffington Post](#), May 2016

For example, the former Prime Minister David Cameron has made a number of speeches in the past 6 years about Muslims and extremism⁵, including most famously last year proposing that Muslim women should learn English to help tackle extremism⁶.

The government has often conflated important issues such as FGM and forced marriages (which are undoubtedly wrong and must be tackled) and linked them to extremism, and in particular Muslims. These issues affect a number of communities from specific cultures rather than in any way linked to faith.

There is little doubt about the serious threat of extremism and terrorism in the UK and the importance of tackling this threat. However, the fact that Muslims are almost always the sole focus of discussions on terrorism, ignoring the fact that ten times more people have been killed in Northern Ireland due to terrorism than in the rest of the UK, and ignoring the rise of the far-right – is a serious concern.

Even within the government’s message in 2015 to Muslim communities on the celebration of Eid, former Prime Minister David Cameron felt compelled to refer to the attacks by Daesh on Kobane and Tunisia.⁷

2.5. Example 4 – Sidelineing representative voices within Muslim communities

We understand that the government has refused to engage with the Muslim Council of Britain. No reasons have been given, other than what we find in the right-wing press which in themselves reflect the bigotry Muslims find should they wish to organise and participate in the public space.

A consequence of not engaging with the Muslim Council of Britain is that authoritative policy makers are not hearing the full gamut of Muslim opinion, particularly from a body which is uniquely representative of the Muslim population and its community organisations.

This refusal to engage with the largest umbrella body of Muslim organisations in the country, is a position considered “extraordinary” by the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation David Anderson QC⁸.

The lack of engagement of the Conservative Party with Muslim organisations is not limited to the Muslim Council of Britain. According to VICE news, the government did not consult with any Muslim organisations about its flagship anti-radicalisation website “Educate Against Hate”⁹ – and such a position is held widely amongst Muslim communities.

⁵ Speech in Munich on radicalisation and Islamic extremism: [Full transcript of speech](#), 2011; Speech in Indonesia including how Muslims must abandon “the dead-end choice of dictatorship and extremism”, [Daily Telegraph](#), 2012; View that multiculturalism aided extremists⁵ and call on Muslim leaders to confront extremism, [Daily Mail](#), 2013; [The Times](#), 2013; Ordering an inquiry into the Muslim Brotherhood [The Guardian](#), 2014; View that Muslim silent majority must tackle Islamist extremism at launch of the counter-extremism strategy, [Daily Telegraph](#), 2015

⁶ Former Prime Minister Cameron’s proposal that more Muslim women should ‘learn English’ to help tackle extremism, [Daily Telegraph](#), 2016

⁷ Eid 2015: [David Cameron’s message](#)

⁸ [BuzzFeed](#), 2016

⁹ [Vice News](#), 2016

Furthermore, as noted in the previous submission, the “government was simply not that interested in anti-Muslim hatred” and “resists real engagement with Muslims” showing a clear lack of political leadership with Muslim communities.

By not engaging with Muslim communities unlike other communities, there is a serious perception that the Conservative party treats Muslims differently to other communities.

2.6. Example 5 – Making statements that are insensitive and unbecoming of a politician

As leaders in our society, the words used by politicians play an important role. A few examples of Conservative MPs making statements about Muslims that are unbecoming of a politician include:

- Philip Hollobone MP called the burka "the religious equivalent of going around with a paper bag over your head with two holes for the eyes"¹⁰
- David Davies MP claimed that the Islamic tradition requiring women to wear face and head coverings is “an excuse for sexual violence against women”¹¹ and was castigated for his comments blaming communities “who have imported into this country barbaric and medieval attitudes towards women”, which was widely understood that he was referring to Muslim communities (although he denied it). As the South Wales Argus notes: “The fact that he made comments that could be interpreted in this way is very naive, to say the least...While we uphold the right of free speech we expect people to use it responsibly, particularly those in public office.”

2.7. Example 6 – Other areas

In 2015, the Conservative Party conference cancelled a Muslim charities event without contacting the Muslim Charities Forum or the charity Human Appeal. As the Daily Mail columnist Peter Osborne raised the query as to whether this would have been done were the organisations not Muslim-linked and noted: “Most worrying of all, Lord Feldman’s panicky response to a single newspaper article confirms the dark fears felt by many that the prime minister’s counter-terrorism strategy is about alienating and not engaging with British Muslims.”¹²

In 2016, Tell MAMA – an organisation which monitors anti-Muslim hatred and bigotry – were denied access to their own fringe event with G4S staff placed around their staff and team despite having registered and booked in advance.

These examples, alongside others, have led some journalists to query: “What’s the Conservative Party’s problem with Muslims?”¹³.

¹⁰ [Guardian](#), 2010

¹¹ [South Wales Argus](#), 2016

¹² [“The Conservatives were wrong to cancel Muslim charities event at conference”](#), Peter Osborne, 2015

¹³ [Middle East Eye](#), 2016

3. Media role

- 3.1. As outlined in the original submission, the role of sections of mainstream media in the spread of inaccurate information and irresponsible reporting is a vital component in the atmosphere of hostility created against Muslims.
- 3.2. Solely in the months of December 2016 and the first few weeks of January 2017, there was on average 2 corrections a week on stories related to Muslims in national newspapers including the Times, the Sunday Times, the Express, the Sun and the Mail (and Mail Online).
- 3.3. The Press Gazette reports on British journalism and aims to help the UK journalism industry do its crucial work more effectively. Its editor, Dominic Ponsford, wrote an article entitled: “Newspaper stories misrepresenting Islam would not be tolerated if they were about Judaism, regulator IPSO needs to step in”¹⁴.
- 3.4. The Assistant Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain is closely monitoring media reporting of Muslims, and has elicited over 20 corrections by national mainstream news organisations. His work has been profiled in the BBC¹⁵ and he has written extensively on this topic in the Guardian¹⁶ and Independent¹⁷. This campaign to highlight media inconsistency and bigotry has been mischaracterised as an attempt to stifle free speech. We reject this charge. What we ask for is fairness in the standards that are applied.
- 3.5. The media’s reporting of Muslims leads to increasing hostility against Muslims, as shown by academics from the University of Cambridge¹⁸ and the University of Leicester¹⁹. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance even called for the UK media to “avoid perpetuating prejudice”, and that “fuelling prejudice against Muslims” was “reckless” given the dangerous consequences, in line with the United Nations human rights chief Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, who urged the UK to “tackle tabloid hate speech”.
- 3.6. As a result, we hope that the media’s role in creating the atmosphere of hostility against Muslims will be included within the Home Affairs Select Committee’s final report on hate crime.

4. Additional points

- 4.1. In the evidence session, Fiyaz Mughal of Tell MAMA made a series of serious accusations against other organisations, such as MEND. We are strongly of the view that whenever accusations are made about others, especially when they are so serious, evidence is brought and both parties are provided the opportunity to share their viewpoint before any judgement is made. We therefore hope that the Committee will study the evidence provided in detail from both parties before reaching a conclusion about any specific group.
- 4.2. MP Nus Ghani asked in the evidence session about the Muslim Council of Britain’s view about the presence of a gay Muslim in the BBC documentary “Muslims like us”. An additional point not raised, was that Harun Khan, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, was one of the lead consultants for the documentary. He was aware and raised

¹⁴ [Press Gazette](#), 2017

¹⁵ [“The man correcting stories about Muslims”](#), BBC, 2017

¹⁶ [The UK media too often misrepresents Muslims – with dangerous results](#), Guardian, 2017

¹⁷ [Why the British media is responsible for the rise in Islamophobia in Britain](#) (headline wording not chosen by Miqdaad Versi), Independent, 2016

¹⁸ [“Media fuelling rising hostility towards Muslims in Britain”](#), University of Cambridge/ESRC Roundtable held at the House of Lords

¹⁹ [“Politicians and media fuel hate crime in Britain,” say University of Leicester experts](#), University of Leicester, 2016

no objections to the presence of the individual mentioned. Instead, Mr Khan praised the documentary for demonstrating the diversity of Muslims in the UK. We hope this will allay fears held by Ms Ghani on this issue.