

Secretary General's Report (CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)



IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, MOST GRACIOUS, MOST MERCIFUL

Mr Chairman, Respected Scholars, Distinguished Guests, Delegates of MCB Affiliate Organisations, Members of the Central Working Committee, Sisters and Brothers.

As-salaamu alaykum wa rahmatullah.

Alhamdulillah – all praise and gratitude is due to Allah – we have been blessed with the opportunity to serve the interests of the Muslim community in Britain and the society of which we are part for another year.

Alhamdulillah we have been blessed by Islam, with the eternal message of the Qur'an and the beautiful example of our guide Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, a model and grace for all creation. "Truly the only way of life acceptable to Allah is *Islam*".

Alhamdu lillah, it is inspiring to see at this meeting today friends who have been involved in community service for many decades. They include colleagues who were part of the National Interim Committee for Muslim Unity – NICMU – a body which in July 1995 reviewed the findings of an extensive poll of the concerns of community activists, giving impetus for the formation of the Muslim Council of Britain in October 1997. The core members who worked together ten years ago continue to be supporters and well-wishers of the MCB today. This is so important for a young institution because it is only through this *nasiha* and participation of the founding individuals that we remain true to the original vision and grow with confidence.

My main purpose today is to report on our organisation's performance in the last year and assess the challenges we face, but firstly I would like to begin with a bit of history and background that reminds ourselves of our vision and its rationale, and secondly, to share with you my thoughts on the challenges of the hour.

I believe we are in a period that demands social, moral and political vigilance - both to preserve unity and in coping with the profoundly negative effect of the anti-terror laws and policies eg the creation of fear in society as well as in the muslim community itself; it undermines the self-image and self-confidence; it adversely affects social and community relations; and above all, it acts as a barrier to the natural process of inclusion and integration. This is all being done in an open ended 'war on terror'.

Our unity is under threat through use of labels such as 'moderate' and 'extremist' Muslim and the manufactured debate on the need for 'reformation' in Islam; a new racism – Islamophobia and Muslimphobia - are transforming the anti-terrorism laws into instruments to criminalise an entire community.

Muslims are 1.6 million from a population of about 58 million according to the official statistics. This is 3% of the population of Britain – not a large number, though it still makes us the second largest faith community. We are concentrated in a relatively few number of regions – there are just over 40% in London, with the rest mainly in the West Midlands and North West England. However, according to Professor Peach of Oxford University, the chances of a Muslim having a non-Muslim neighbour is significantly greater than a Hindu or Jew having a neighbour of a different religion. Our numbers and Professor Peach's research obligates that we reach outwards and engage with others as good neighbours, because otherwise we will remain the objects of, rather than the participants in, national conversations and debates.

We have a vision of Britain and 'Britishness'. We use every opportunity to convey this – when speaking to politicians, civil servants, the Police, the Security Services, multi-nationals, leading editors – you name it and we are there. It is a vision of Britain as a 'community of communities' in which the core religious identity is not 'privatised' but finds expression in the public sphere.

We believe the future of Britain rests with the success of this multicultural project. 'The Parekh Report – the future of multi-ethnic Britain' explained that, "The cultural identity of some groups ('minorities') should not have to be confined to the private sphere while the language, culture and religion of others ('the majority') enjoy a public monopoly and are treated as the norm. For a lack of public recognition is damaging to people's self-esteem and is not conducive to encouraging the full participation of everyone in the public sphere. Public respect for different cultural identities is intrinsic to democratic equality and must be two-way – the pressure to change, to compromise, to assimilate must not all be on the so-called minorities". Multiculturalism does not mean separateness, but holding out an inclusive vision of our country as a community of communities. It is unfortunate when some of our friends active in the race relations industry seek

to undermine the multicultural project. The MCB will be resolute in confronting them and reminding society that resource allocation on the base of ethnicity or race alone will perpetuate gross inequalities and social injustices.

Many pundits have had a go at defining 'Britishness' in today's context. A welcome and indeed profound contribution to this debate came from Gordon Brown, who in his speech to the British Council in July 2004 suggested that it was "a passion for liberty anchored in a sense of duty and an intrinsic commitment to tolerance and fair play". Gordon Brown's focus was on the importance of shared moral and ethical values as a basis for a cohesive society. This is close to our thinking too.

So our vision of the the MCB encourages us to build alliances and partnerships and to engage in the fullest sense of the term. As I may have remarked at earlier events, when we see ministers it is not to enjoy a cup of tea in an acquiescent mode. Rather it is to press our case for equity and fairness for the community, in a cordial and informed manner. This approach yields dividends. One example is the enforcement of the EU directives relating to religious discrimination in the workplace that came into law in Britain in December 2003, while other EU countries are still lagging behind. Similarly statements from senior Ministers supporting the right of Muslim women to wear the hijab should they choose to do so, at a time when this was banned in French schools, are a direct result of the engagement of the MCB and its affiliates. A further example is the far-reaching changes in financial institutions, as they gear up to provide shariah compliant products for house purchase, pensions and child trust schemes. Apparently these products are not just attractive to Muslims, and there may be a wider market. This year the MCB has also developed an important partnership with the largest network of public advice providers, Citizens Advice, in offering information on new legislation relating to religious discrimination at the work place.

We make worthwhile contributions to the wider society in which we live and, *insha Allah*, we also stand loyal to the *ummah*, the global community of believers. It seems that this has always been a particular passion of Muslims in Britain. Some dedicated individuals even formed a 'Pan-Islamic Society of London' around 1905, one hundred years ago.

In the 1920s London saw the publication of a weekly newspaper 'Islamic News', that would report on events in Muslim countries. I cannot resist sharing with you one brief extract from its issue of 7th July 1921 that says so much about the on-going plight of the Muslim world. It begins with the heading "An Appeal". Then it goes on: "It is a crisis in the history of the world. Europe has almost succeeded in asserting her military domination over other continents. It is also trying to

dominate morally and intellectually. Struggling weak nations need mutual support. Their cause must be strengthened. Propaganda against them must be counteracted...Our enemies is spending colossal sums on their propaganda and they have besides the whole of the European Press free at their disposal... “.

If you substitute the US for Europe this would read like a feature item from this month's Muslim News! But it shows Muslims have faced tough times before, but *alhamdu lillah* we have emerged from dark periods to change the world around us.

We believe Muslims have the genius and ability to be true to their responsibilities as citizens of Britain and the sense of *wafa* (affinity) to the *ummah*. This is not going to be plain sailing, but it is a territory that has been charted before by our ancestors. After all Muslims migrated to China in an early period of Islamic history, and have survived and often thrived under dispensations much harsher than we are facing in Britain. Recently the MCB invited the British Army's chief of staff and other military top-brass, as part of its regular programme of engagement with the decision-makers. Of course the issue of Muslims serving in the Armed Forces were in the fore-front of our minds. This is one of those areas where Muslims in Britain have yet to work out appropriate terms of 'accomodation', to use the term of my colleague in the MCB, Muhammad Iqbal Asaria.

I have described what the MCB stands for in its dealings with the wider society. Now consider our role within the community. Our delegates assembled here represent the main mosques and Islamic institutions in the UK – from Glasgow to Brighton, Belfast to Hull. Over 400 organisations have affiliated to the MCB so far and there is a lot more work to be done in this area. The best description I can find of what you sign up for when joining the MCB is in one of our first published documents, entitled 'Invitation': the MCB is as an independent body working for the pleasure of Allah; it has a formal system of representation and accountability; it is non-sectarian, working without interfering, or displacing or isolating any existing Muslim work; it is a body that bases its policies and decisions on consensus and the largest possible practical measure of common agreement; and finally and importantly, it seeks to draw on the talents and specialist skills of individuals, and the strengths of organised bodies, to meet the great challenges ahead.

We need to ask ourselves some searching questions about how inclusive we are as organisations. We are rightly proud of the fact that Islam gave women rights to dignity, financial independence and so on well before most other societies. We make great virtue of the fact that ours is a very young population. But how many women and young people are involved in our activities and in decision-

making? It is not enough to express our desire to get women and young people involved. We need to take practical steps to make sure they have the opportunities to do so. The MCB is itself not immune here. We have made efforts but have a long way still to go.

If you are here today as an observer, please consider signing up to this shared vision. It will bring you into a network that is expanding and maturing rapidly.

Our host, the East London Mosque and London Muslim Centre, is a beacon institution - serving not just as a place of worship, but providing employment and health advice, education and sports facilities. There are others like it, for example, the Islamic Cultural Centre in Central London, the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre in West London, Balham Mosque and Tooting Islamic Centre in South London, the Al-Muath Centre in Bordesley, Birmingham. Affiliates such as Muslim Aid, Islamic Relief, Interpal, the Palestinian Return Centre and the Islamic Foundation, to name a few, are institutions that command respect in their respective fields, not only in the UK, but internationally too. We are witnessing something significant here: a process of redefinition of the role of mosques and a new programme of service delivery in keeping with the needs of the community and life in Britain. *Alhamdu lillah* the MCB too is part of this process of maturity. It is providing the leadership to help our institutions develop and prosper, while itself it is undergoing internal change to cope with a more sophisticated and demanding environment.

The MCB, like the young community it represents, is at a take-off point. Our trajectory can be an exciting one if we remain fully alive to our duties and obligations, preserve our unity and provide the MCB with the financial and human resources it now needs. Our able Treasurer, Dr Akber Mohamedali has introduced much professionalism in equipping the MCB for the new challenges and responsibilities. The Prophet, peace be on him, inspired us to a life of vigour and dynamism when he remarked that if our today was the same as our yesterday, then we have not improved.

Let me now move on to the second of the three points I wished to make by way of introduction – the need for vigilance to preserve unity.

The media, in its quest for simplification and quick analysis, often uses the term 'moderate' to describe the MCB. This is in juxtaposition to labels such as 'Islamist', 'fundamentalist', 'extremist', 'traditionalist' and even 'jihadist'. It was so heartening to observe how the Turkish Prime Minister Tayeb Erdogan, on hearing the Prime Minister of Australia use the expression 'moderate Islam', immediately took to the floor and made the correction, "There is no need to put a

different adjective before or after the word 'Islam'. Islam means peace. It rejects all kinds of excessiveness". Whether you are in the MCB or have yet to join, let us eschew these misplaced categories.

I would also like to alert you to another trend – that of seeking for a 'reformation' in Islam like that experienced by Christianity as a result of Martin Luther in the fifteenth century. As our Muslim scholar Tim Winter has so accurately observed, those who seek such reformation understand neither Islamic history or Christian theology. Muslim scholarship has its own mechanism of reforming society (*islah*) that remains true to the fundamental sources – we do not need to be told by some think tanks what is right or wrong with Islam.

We also know from the article 'Hearts, Minds and Dollars' written by David Kaplan published in April this year¹, that *"after repeated missteps since the 9/11 attacks, the US government has embarked on a campaign of political warfare unmatched since the height of the cold war....Washington is ploughing tens of millions of dollars into a campaign to influence not only Muslim societies but Islam itself..Washington has quietly funded...think tanks, political workshops, or other programs that promote moderate Islam"*. As the dollars trickle across the Atlantic, and there is a convergence in the thinking of policy makers, we need to be alert to attempts to foster new rivalries or exploit internal differences so as to divide the British Muslim community.

Think tanks like Rand have this Francis Fukuyama-type world view that the west's current stage of intellectual and political advancement cannot now be surpassed - it is now the end of history! Western notions of human rights and justice are universal, they like to think. But their reaction post 9/11 shows how flimsy is this allegiance to universal human rights. In our own country we had the Belmarsh detainees travesty. Human rights seem to depend not on whether you are a human, but whether you are a British citizen.

Gareth Peirce, the brave civil rights lawyer has said so eloquently, ""We have lost our way in this country. We have entered a new dark age of injustice and it is frightening that we are overwhelmed by it. I know I am representing innocent people; innocent people who know that a jury they face will inevitably be predisposed to find them guilty". This state of affairs cannot be the end of history, but the point from which things can only get better.

This war of cultural domination to create a unipolar world in the master's image is only one side of the coin. It may be the softer side but we must be aware there

¹ <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/050425/25roots.htm>

is another, more iron-fisted side as well. I am referring to the criminalisation of Muslims in the name of fighting the 'war on terror'.

This is not an assertion made lightly. It goes without saying that British Muslims are equally concerned about preserving the peace and security of our nation. However, what concerns us is the indiscriminate manner in which draconian anti-terror laws have been applied. The MCB has repeatedly drawn attention to the disproportionality between arrests made under the anti-terrorism laws and the convictions in court. As of 6th April 2005, more than 700 have been arrested since 9/11 using the powers conferred to Police through anti-terrorist legislation; of these 120 have been charged, leading to 17 convictions. The 17 convictions under anti-terrorism legislation include 7 Irish, and also 2 Sikhs and members of other groups; the number of Muslims is 3 - of whom some have been given leave of appeal. However it is believed that for some, arrests have been made solely on suspected membership of, or association with, bodies proscribed as 'international terrorist organisations' by the Home Office. Our concern for this disproportionality does not mean we condone the guilty: there is no sympathy for Sajid Badat of Gloucester for venturing into a conspiracy to blow up an airline, or with Kamal Bourgass for stabbing DC Stephen Oake in Manchester in January 2003.

At the same time, we are appalled at the tactics adopted by the Police and security services, which in some instances is likely to be due to political pressure. Simon Jenkins, writing in *The Times* on 1st January 2003, observed, *"Each weekend Downing Street and its 'terrorism unit' summons the press for the Sunday scare story. We have now had the Nine-Eleven anniversary scare, the sarin-on-the-Tube scare, the smallpox scare, the 'threat to public transport' scare, the Christmas shopping scare and last Sunday's 'London quarantine' scare. (Note, these stories always appear on a Sunday.) They offer no useable public advice. They are pure heebie- jeebie."*

One of the most notorious of these 'heebie-jeebies' was the Ricin Scare. We all remember the media fanfare, but at the subsequent trial it was demonstrated that the chemical lists found in North London "were an exact copy of pages on an internet site in Palo Alto, California, the recipes being the invention of survivalist Kurt Saxon" – here I am referring to the report by the security expert Duncan Campbell in *The Guardian*.

Of particular concern however is the disclosure in the *Financial Times* in January this year: "Counter-terrorism officials see the prevention of attacks and the use of robust means to make it known to radicals they are being watched as more important than the preservation of harmonious relations with the Muslim community".

This is a chilling revelation – the ‘robust means’ presumably refers to a host of stratagems from arrests under the anti-terrorism laws to use of the media for scare-mongering. It must also include the strong-arm tactics during arrest – take the case of Babar Ahmad who received serious injuries though he offered no resistance.

Muslims in Britain are bearing the cost of such a blinkered policy – demonisation in the media and life in a climate of suspicion. As we suggested in our General Election Voter Card, the course for the future must now be to reestablish the due proper and transparent process of law. Racial prejudice has yet to be rooted out from many institutions in Britain; there is now another racism to root out – Islamophobia and Muslimphobia.

We are all too aware of the shocking levels of poverty and social exclusion that affects our community. A number of authoritative reports have charted our levels of unemployment being five times higher than the population as a whole, qualifications lowest of all faith communities and Muslims occupying some of the worst housing conditions in the country. We will re-double our efforts to lobby the government for action on all these areas. But we ourselves must take responsibility. What can we do, in practical terms to help? It's time we talked about ideas. We've seen many examples of Muslim and non-Muslim community and voluntary organisations doing great work in this area. Let's learn from what they're doing. Let's spread good practice so otherwise isolated pockets of good work can be spread across the country and make a real impact on people's everyday lives. And upon the life chances of future generations.

So in summary we find ourselves presented with both opportunities and major challenges. It is an exciting and fast-changing era. As I stated last year, despite the difficulties we as believers in God have to remain optimistic. We need to continue to think wisely and act systematically.

I would now like to focus on a few initiatives, achievements and indeed ‘successes’ of the MCB in the last year. Eleven major items are noted below; our detailed activities have been reported in the MCB e-newsletter (extracts presented in the appendix).

1. Political Engagement and Participation

This year saw unprecedented interest in the 'Muslim vote' in the General Elections. The MCB is encouraged that the British Muslim community have in huge numbers reaffirmed their commitment to a fuller participation in the civic and political life of the country to work for the common good.

In the run-up to the elections, we launched our strategy and programme for the 2005 General Election. With our policy document, “Electing to Deliver”, and the Voter Card in which we highlighted the ten key questions that Muslims had to ask of all prospective parliamentary candidates, we urged British Muslims to come out to vote and to participate more actively in mainstream politics. The MCB’s advertisements were broadcast on Islam Channel, ARY Digital and al-Mustakillah. In addition, both Muslim News and the Muslim Weekly carried extensive coverage of the MCB’s call for greater engagement and participation in both the political and civic spheres.

The election results show that no single party can any longer take the Muslim community’s votes for granted. The Muslim Council of Britain welcomes our two new talented and dynamic MPs Sadiq Khan and Shahid Malik and the re-election of Muhammad Sarwar and Khalid Mahmood. We call upon them to be exemplary role models in the conduct of their affairs. We look forward to working with all the Muslim parliamentarians and politicians in the coming years, insha’ Allah.

The General Election witnessed the important role played by national affiliates the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) and Islamic Forum Europe (IFE) in mobilizing the Muslim vote. A number of talented Muslim individuals narrowly missed victory – for example Salma Yacoob (Respect) and Ali Miraj (Conservative) and Yasmin Qureshi (Labour) – and we call on them to persevere and try again.

Another milestone for the MCB was the fringe meetings that we held with all three of the major political parties at their Party Conferences. All meetings were well-attended, including by party leaders and were very successful. The MCB were delighted by the pledge given by the Prime Minister Tony Blair to extend religious discrimination legislation beyond employment.

2. International affairs

As we note in ‘Electing to Deliver’, the British Muslim community is a microcosm of the world. Its members have connections with people, cultures and languages which are now spread all over the world. The Muslim community can help Britain build bridges with crucial regions to serve our national interests.

This input has never been more needed since the Iraq misadventure. As expected, the illegal invasion unleashed a wave of killings of thousands of innocent civilians. Caught in the cross fire of this nightmare scenario were foreigners who became pawns in a dirty war. When Ken Bigley, was taken hostage we immediately called for his release and condemned the hostage takers. We sent a very able delegation comprising the MCB Assistant Secretary General Dr Daud Abdullah and the Director of MCB affiliate the Karima Institute, Dr Musharraf Hussain to Baghdad to try to assist in securing his release. Unfortunately the worst scenario unfolded, though the MCB’s humanitarian effort was greatly appreciated.

The MCB also remains clear on the way forward in the Middle-East. We call for the implementation of all relevant UN Security Council resolutions concerning Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian lands. The implementation of UN resolutions should not be expected from selected countries, but from all without exception. We call for the fundamental freedoms and human rights of the Palestinian people, including the return of occupied Jerusalem and the right of the Palestinian people to return to their homeland.

Our unequivocal stand on other international issues is also on record and can be established from our publications and web site – for example on Chechnya and Jammu and Kashmir.

We continue to urge our government to take an active role in helping implementing the relevant UN resolutions which will we believe help restore peace in those regions.

The MCB continues to build on its relationships with like Muslim representative bodies outside Britain. We are frequently requested by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office to host Muslim dignitaries visiting the UK. The MCB's work is known within the Organisation of Islamic Conferences (OIC) and we attend its meetings – a further example of our real contribution to bridge-building between our country and the Muslim world.

3. Human Rights

Under the guise of the war on terror, hundreds of men and women continue to be detained by the United States and kept in Guantanamo Bay. The MCB has continuously pressed the Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith and senior government Ministers to seek the release of all British detainees who were deliberately held in a legal black hole by the US authorities. The last four British detainees were released in January this year.

We however note that over 600 men and boys (all of whom are Muslim) from other nations continue to be held at Guantanamo Bay without any prospect of receiving a fair trial. This includes two British residents [TO BE CHECKED] for whom we continue to campaign.

4. Legislation on Incitement to Religious Hatred

The MCB's Public Affairs and Legal Affairs Committees conducted an extensive awareness and lobbying campaign on this issue. The MCB, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Justice, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the British Humanist Association and other bodies worked together to win support for new legislation and allay fears that this would lead to a curtailment on freedom of speech. Following the dissolution of Parliament, the MCB lobbied to ensure the item was included as a Manifesto pledge by the Labour Party. The MCB will

continue to work to ensure that this pledge is enacted and is placed on our statute books. We greatly regret that the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives refused to support this vital piece of equality legislation which would have meant the end to the current unjust hierarchy of rights.

5. Pocket Guide

In view of the increasing provocative environment that Muslims were facing, our Media Committee initiated and oversaw one of our most significant and timely projects this year with the production of the Pocket Guide for British Muslims entitled 'Know Your Rights & Responsibilities'. It contains information about what to do if one is arrested, detained at ports or has their houses searched by the police. It also contains general advice on how to engage in civil society.

6. Media Seminar

At a time when British Muslims are facing unprecedented media pressure, our Media Committee organised a special one-day seminar on 'A Guide to the British Media' in September 2004 which was attended by over 120 delegates. The seminar served to develop the skills needed to ensure a better and more accurate representation of their faith and values in the print and broadcast media and proved informative and beneficial for all attendees who wanted to know more about how the UK media operates and how to combat Islamophobia.

The appendices to this report provide further details of the Press Releases and other articles prepared by the Media Committee.

7. 'Books for Schools' and Education

In keeping with our public outreach initiative the MCB's Research and Documentation committee launched the Books 4 Schools campaign which has captured the attention, enthusiasm and goodwill of many professionals as well as community members. The aim is to get high-quality Islamic educational materials into state schools so as to create a greater awareness of Islam and Muslims.

At the launch of this MCB initiative in October 2004, the then Education Secretary, Charles Clarke noted: "It is only through understanding that this country can move forward as a true multi-faith and multicultural society. We must ensure children grow up with a better understanding of their friends and neighbours. Books for Schools brings us much closer towards that goal I am delighted to have the opportunity to lend my support to this project."

The response to this project has been tremendous from both the Muslim community and the local authorities and once again it proves that a clear vision and hard work will bring about positive results. While the launch phase has been successful, we need to take this campaign to all corners of the country.

8. Religious Discrimination at the Work Place

In December 2003 the [Employment Equality \(Religion or Belief\) Regulations 2003](#) came into force, prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in employment and vocational training. Following on from earlier work in disseminating information on this important development within the community, the MCB's Legal Affairs Committee successfully bid the Department of Trade & Industry for another grant for work in 2004/2005. A four person project team was recruited that has been responsible for a programme of seminars, preparation of information materials and the establishment of advice surgeries in a number of MCB affiliates. The project's legal officers have delivered 30 training seminars between November 2004 – March 2005 at institutions such as Citizens Advice, HM Prison Service, the Law Centres Federation and at a number of MCB affiliates. 75,000 copies of an explanatory leaflet which included text in Arabic, Urdu and Bengali was prepared and distributed. An important MCB contribution has been the preparation of a 26-page 'Muslims in the Workplace – A Good Practice Guide for Employers and Employees' that is now in wide demand from trade unions, employers and Muslim employees. The MCB also convened a meeting of Islamic scholars to discuss the 'Genuine Occupational Requirements' exemptions as it applied to places of worship and Muslim organizations with a religious ethos.

9. East Midlands Office

An initiative of the local Muslim community has enabled the MCB to open its first regional office in Leicester on Sunday 10th October 2004. The MCB's East Midland Office will serve as a local hub for information dissemination and service delivery in Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland, an area with a Muslim population of 70,000.

The opening was attended by mosque imams, community activists and other representatives of Muslim communities in the region. Guests first visited the office premises, located on Charles Street in Leicester city centre. Shaykh Muhammad Gora, a senior imam in Leicester, led the gathering in du'a.

The East Midlands office's activities are being supervised by a steering committee chaired by community leader and local businessman Sulaiman Chachia. The steering committee members include Syed Faiyazuddin Ahmad, Abdul Karim Gheewala, Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra and MCB Assistant Secretary General Ibrahim Hewitt. There are a number of other volunteers who will assist in its work, including Adam Sabat. The office premises have been provided to the MCB by Faruk Alimohamed, founder of Fara Estates, and we express our deepest appreciation to Faruk and all other members in Leicester who are helping with this initiative.

10. Leadership Programme

Following its first successful 10-day Leadership Development Programme (October 2003 - April 2004) comprising two three-day residential modules and four single days, The Muslim Council of Britain has conducted two parallel programmes of 20 participants each in 2004/5, one for those aged between 19-25, and the second for those aged 26-40. The courses are run at purpose-built training centres such as the Sunridge Business Park, Bromley In addition to skills training, the emphasis is on self-development, systems thinking and imbibing a spirit of social enterprise. The feedback from the participants has been very positive and a number are now coming forward and volunteering to carry forward MCB projects. The MCB has also launched a mentor's training programme so that the experienced men and women within the ranks can pass forward their skills and experience to the next generation of community activists, *insha' Allah*.

Thanks

I would like to place on record my gratitude and deep appreciation for the support and cooperation I have received throughout the year from my fellow office bearers, chairs of the committees, office staff, advisers and individuals who have given their invaluable advice and much of their time to the work of the MCB.

I also wish to thank all those individuals and organizations that have provided financial contributions and support for specific projects and those who make regular contributions through bankers standing orders. We hope that the number and size of such contributions will increase substantially so that the MCB can be placed on a firmer financial footing, *insha' Allah*. I would like to thank institutions such as the Justice Foundation, the Islamic Cultural Centre, Muslim World League, the London Muslim Centre, Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre and the Islamic Foundation, for hosting us and allowing us to use their facilities without charge on several occasions. I am particularly appreciative of the imams and mosque committees throughout the country for their positive response and the critical role they have played and continue to play in mutual consultation in safeguarding the interests of the community.

I would also like to thank all those numerous persons in institutions, government departments and agencies, the media, in academia, in the business community and elsewhere who have listened to us, reached out to us, and advised and supported us, and who have contributed to the sum total of what we have achieved for the benefit of our community and our society.

Conclusion

My respected colleagues – you, the delegates of the MCB's affiliates - are the backbone of the MCB. When you return to your organizations it will be your duty to inform members, mosque congregations and the broader community of the work of the MCB. You will be receiving our press releases, e-newsletter and other mail shots. Those of you who lead the Jumu'ah prayers, please use this material where appropriate to keep your congregations informed and increase public awareness of the MCB's work.

If you know of organizations that have not affiliated, convey to them the text I read out to you earlier –the 'Invitation' - and invite them to share in the MCB's vision.

Alhamdu lillah the excellent work of our Public Affairs and Media committees – and of our leading national affiliates MAB and IFE – during the General Election has energized the community and new sense of maturity. We must now work on the ways and means of retaining this energy and enthusiasm.

We also look forward to working closely with our newly elected MPs and supporting them in their new role.

While our vision is ambitious and the demands are many, our resources - financial and human- are limited. The coming year must see the MCB raise substantial amounts of money for an HQ and proper support infrastructure. We need your practical help here – if you are involved in mosque affairs please allocate at least one Jumu'ah for collecting donations for the MCB.

This has been a year of challenges, even greater than those of previous years, but thank God, we have been able to meet them wisely and responsibly. No doubt there remain problems and injustices and while we continue to seek a fair solution I must say nothing should affect or compromise our fundamental and unilateral commitment for the good of our immediate as well as national neighbourhood. Islam is *nasiha* - which is wise advice to oneself and to everyone in the community.

We pray to Allah Subhaanahu wa Ta'ala to guide us and bless us with all that is good, that He makes this land safe and secure for all who live in it, and that He brings peace, justice and prosperity to all the oppressed people of the world. May Allah Subhaanahu wa Ta'ala forgive our shortcomings and accept all our efforts.

Ameen.

Iqbal AKM Sacranie, Secretary General

14th May 2005

