

**Terror World: Understanding the Threat Conference
National Hall, Olympia**

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While we go on with our quiet and normal work of self-empowerment, we find our energies being substantially diverted by being continuously called upon to respond to unforeseen events such as the appalling events of 7/7. We immediately stated the Muslim community's stand on this. It is important that people take time to educate themselves and make a clear distinction between people who commit such unlawful acts and the communities they come from.

The 'militant tendency' and lunatic fringe are found everywhere and the presence of an extremist fringe in the Muslim community is totally unacceptable. The problem is however caused when sections of the media try to magnify this fringe.

The MCB has all along made it clear that "extremists" and "criminals" are in no way sanctioned by the Muslim community. Muslims are accused of denial and in the same

way some say that the Government is trying to shift blame to the Muslim community and its leaders. In fact, we should go beyond the blame game and examine the range of factors to tackle the problems. We are enthusiastic about introspection. But it is now accepted that the invasion on Iraq has made the world more unsafe. It is now clear that our government's foreign policies and also its domestic policies towards Muslims have heightened levels of mistrust, fear and frustration.

We reiterate our call to the government to initiate an independent public inquiry into the events of 7/7 to reveal the exact reasons behind the atrocities, and indeed how the atrocities themselves came to pass. This is important for the benefit of our whole society.

Muslims are tremendously diverse. It is a 'community of communities', a young evolving people in this land. Naturally, we have seen successes and faced difficulties, but overall, Muslim communities have been contributing towards building Britain, its economy and other success stories. The successful bid for the Olympics 2012 was

possible because of London's diversity and the Muslim community's strong support for the bid.

This and similar success stories do not get the press. Instead, we see a continuous barrage of Muslim bashing from left, right and centre. The government must find a proper balance between security and human rights. Regressive legislation – and particularly its implementation – has cemented a sense of unease that has pervaded all sections of the Muslim community, particularly the young. The recent reports by Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and Demos clearly underline that current policies towards Muslims are not working. It has become an open season for sections of media and politicians to undermine confidence among Muslims. These have contributed to a growing anti-Muslim climate in the UK, especially in the last few months.

Our message is clear - as citizens of Britain, the Muslim community has a social contract to maintain peace and stability of this country. We not only have rights, but also have obligations. We do not claim any special rights. All we expect is fairness and equality. From an Islamic point of

view Muslims have an unilateral obligation to interact and engage with all around us, irrespective of their background. We have the obligations of good-neighbourliness, of being concerned for others, to share their joys and feel their pains, to provide support and help wherever we can. No one must be tempted to commit any criminal or subversive activity. Anyone committing any criminal act should go through the due process of law. Since its inception in 1997 the MCB is working for the common good of society, this is our motto enshrined in our constitution.

On issues like counter-terrorism, the MCB is in frequent contact with the authorities. We note the work done by the Muslim Contact Unit and Muslim Safety Forum. The MCB is also in touch with the security services and the Home Office on these issues and the MCB Guide to Rights and Responsibilities underlines our contribution to this landscape along with our letter to Mosques of 2004 to report criminality in whichever form it takes.

We need a better approach to combating terrorism. Our aim must be to enlist the Muslim community in the fight against

terror, rather than victimise it. We need a clear and consistent message of goodwill from the police and the Govt for the Muslim community. This needs to be followed up by action: an end to high profile arrests giving ammunition to far right people. Credible intelligence, surgical operation and sensitive handling of the community are important. One female youth organisation recently said:

“I think there is a lack of understanding of Islam, due to these small things like growing a beard and attending mosque regularly, the police may interpret it as extremist behaviour. If there was better understanding of Islam then these misunderstandings will be avoided and reduce innocent behaviour being seen as extremist.”

Members of the Police and security forces need more community cultural training by members of the community. Muslim youth, particularly within university settings, need space and should not be negatively portrayed as was done recently by the DfES guidance. Their radical views, ideas

and concerns need to be heard and incorporated into mainstream dialogue.

The most urgent issue today is the growing perception amongst Muslims that they are being unfairly targeted by the police and security services. So we must find ways to tackle terrorism and crime by creating a climate of understanding that acknowledges British Muslims as part of the solution. We also genuinely need identify the causes that propel young people to criminality.

I've raised some of our most serious concerns and suggested some ways forward. We have shown our readiness to work in partnership with any one who cares to work for the benefit of the whole society. We would be happy and willing to work on any initiatives that result in a safer country for all ensuring that justice is served equally and is also seen to be done.