

<http://www.power2010.org.uk/blog/entry/why-democracy-matters-to-pluralism/>

Why democracy matters to pluralism

by Muhammad Abdul Bari

12.02.2010 //

This is the second in a series of articles looking at why democracy matters to different groups in our society. Here, Dr Muhammad Abdul Bari MBE, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, discusses why democracy matters to Muslims and other faith communities.

Back in 1994, Philippe C. Schmitter argued in an essay that the "expectations of millions of ordinary citizens" and their "long subordinated ideals of equality, participation, accountability, responsiveness and self realisation" makes the need to examine mechanisms for delivery of accountability critical.

That argument is all the more important now in the aftermath of the expenses scandal.

It is symbolic of more deep-seated problems in the democratic health of our nation, such as the nature and exercise of power over increasingly scarce resources and its impact on poverty and disparities on wealth, opportunity and resources.

It is for this reason that the Muslim Council of Britain wholeheartedly welcomes POWER2010's aims.

A fully effective democracy is one that affects our human security at a national level.

Improving our governance system is not just a matter of rubber stamping our Parliament's representatives every four years. It is a matter of improving the day to day lives which affect all of us.

It was Charles Tilly who referred to 'democracy as a lake' - he taught us of the importance of judging and measuring our democracy by its deepness and wideness.

A key strength of POWER2010 will be to fully engage with both the wide and the deep in our society - ways in which we can all be served across the political and policy spectrum.

The empowerment of all Britons across the nation is an urgent task - including that of Muslims.

We are all concerned with impoverished citizens, with rising unemployment and ASBOs, the improper payment of MPs, the education system, as well as the nation's prosperity and not least a strong public infrastructure and good public services - all held in our common trust, or as is known in the Islamic term, *Amanah*.

It is thus high time that we face up to and mitigate the 'Lockean fear that public and political religions inherently threaten political unity and stability', as Veit Bader once noted.

An enfranchised population is one which contributes to its own nation's advancement.

It is with this in mind that we both whole-heartedly endorse the grass-roots nature of campaigns such as Power2010 as well as its outcome of enfranchising and bringing to the fore decision-making, and the solutions borne out of closer encounters between our elected representatives, our systems and ourselves.

We sincerely hope that this acts as an overdue catalyst for reform which is needed; a responsive and responsible governance system which cares for the weakest in its purview, not solely that which protects and varnishes the strongest.

The MCB promises to throw its weight behind the promise of Power 2010 - not just in encouraging British Muslims to vote and participate, but by actively campaigning for all British citizens to step up and learn for themselves what is at stake - be that with the rising threat of xenophobia, our ability to play a full part in society, our international or European alliances, domestic policies and our capability to accommodate pluralism.

We believe our mutual interests can serve as the motivation to improve our children's futures.

Innovative solutions are needed today to confront the myriad of problems we as taxpayers face - from the way our funds are spent in Parliament to the effective governance and participatory systems in schools, hospitals and councils. Funding decisions aimed at Muslims affect all Britons - our mutual interest is best served by consensual politics.

Many British Muslims discovered this the hard way in the Government's funding of the recent Preventing Violent Extremism programme.

It demonstrated the contentious interface between taxpayers' money and the ways it is spent: highlighting the need for enfranchisement to be a necessary and urgent part of the

process. We can no longer be subject to the government and yet not play an active and positive role in the shaping of our common destinies.

POWER2010's vision statement speaks of outstanding solutions to challenges of shallowness in the political system - from fixed term governments to greater accountability and participatory processes.

The MCB commits to POWER2010's aspiration of innovative governance solutions. Britain can be served better by a greater ownership of the political process by all walks and shades of life.

There are many ways to encourage dialogue, openness and finding equitable and fair solutions to a myriad of challenges which face us in this new decade.

Harnessing technology and social media can only ever improve transparency. We will all benefit from this in the new decade - our ideas will become clearer and we move closer towards understanding common goals as this develops.

The MCB looks towards this year of electioneering with optimism and hopes that it serves as benchmark for future years to come.

Send a strong message to politicians about the changes you would like to see to our democracy by voting for reforms for the POWER2010 Pledge.

<http://www.power2010.org.uk/vote>