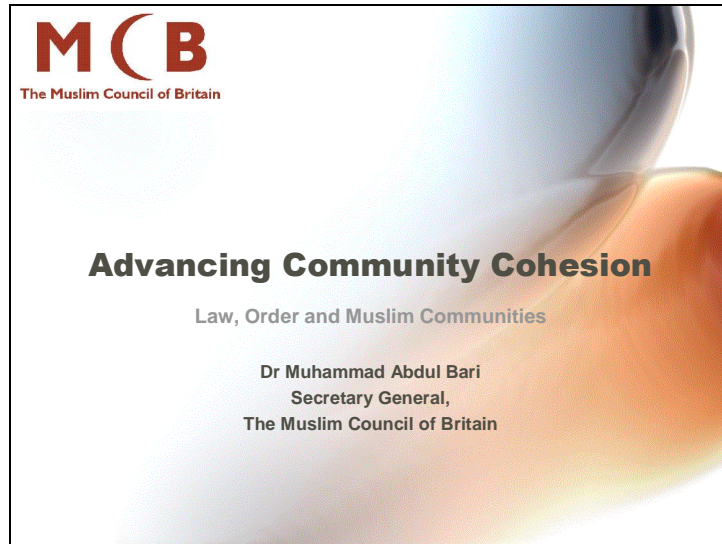


Advancing Community Cohesion Conference
Dr Muhammad Abdul Bari
Secretary General
The Muslim Council of Britain
16th November 2006, Sheffield

Slide 1



Thank you for extending this invitation to meet you this afternoon.

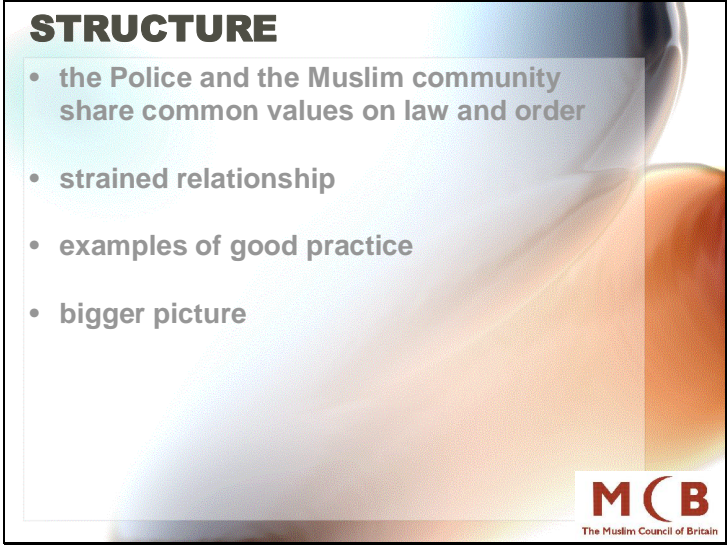
Firstly I would like to introduce the work of The **Muslim Council of Britain** which exists to play a constructive role in achieving a nation at ease with itself: accepting of diversity, yet able to appreciate shared values, acknowledge common interests and build inclusive communities through collective endeavour. To be a nation truly representative of its people we are obliged to listen to each other and to learn how to work together to fulfil our collective potential and realise the strengths of our diversity. Britain's Muslims are predominantly young, and more of them are born and raised in Britain. Their parents come from many ethnic backgrounds and cultures with a rich diversity of heritages.

A 'community of communities', British Muslims have been, and are, united through strong ties of faith identity that transcends ethnic boundaries. It is the moral and ethical principles of their faith that urges them to be concerned and responsible citizens and active participants in the life of their nation. In many respects the needs and aspirations of Britain's Muslim community are no different from those of our fellow citizens – whatever their beliefs or backgrounds. Concerns about health and education, national prosperity, strong public infrastructure and good public services are common to us all.

The values of community life, the need to build strong communities of mutual support, are basic principles that connect Muslims to their fellow citizens. From our diverse backgrounds and beliefs we can make common cause to achieve a better Britain for everyone. We seek to give voice to the whole range principles, ideas and concerns that British Muslims will contribute to the national debate, not merely for their own interests, but the common good of our shared future.

Dialogue between the police and the policed is always a good thing, as I'm sure you'd agree. But I particularly welcome this opportunity as it allows us to step back from the pressures of day to day issues and concerns and take a considered view of the relationship between Muslims and the police. Coming in the wake of recent high profile events it gives us an opportunity to take stock, evaluate some of our beliefs and practices and do things differently.

Slide 2



STRUCTURE

- the Police and the Muslim community share common values on law and order
- strained relationship
- examples of good practice
- bigger picture

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I'd like to structure my talk around four main points. Firstly, it is my belief that we've probably underestimated the extent to which the Police and the Muslim community share common values on law and order.

Secondly, in recent years our relationship has become seriously strained and therefore requires immediate remedial action.

Thirdly that there are examples of good practice by the police and Muslim communities that we can build upon not merely to repair the damage, but enhance the relationship between British Muslims and the police.

And finally, that we need to be fully aware of the bigger picture here: the relationship between the police and the Muslim community is symptomatic of the relationship between Muslims and the state more generally.

AREAS IN COMMON

- supportive of strong measures aimed at enhancing the peace and security of law-abiding citizens
- empathy with victims
- justice
- respect for law
- working to achieve and support safe and secure communities are basic precepts of the faith

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Let's start however with what we have in common. The Muslim community has a particular soft spot for law and order, if I can put it that way. In other words, it's generally supportive of strong measures aimed at enhancing the peace and security of law-abiding citizens. The phrase "tough on crime" resonates well with us. This is so because for Muslims criminality is not only a crime - by definition - but it is shameful too. It brings disrepute to the family and damages the community.

Moreover, as victims of crime, especially hate crime that is racially or religiously motivated, Muslims can readily empathise with victims. So both the Muslim community and the police have common cause.

Let me give you a practical example of this. In the aftermath of the northern disturbances in 2001 the parents of young men involved in the disturbances voluntarily took their children to the local police stations. They realised that their sons were probably involved in something wrong and believed in doing the right thing. They put their faith in the justice system.

Sadly though their honesty and integrity was rewarded by a system which meted out disproportionately harsh sentences for Asians involved in the disturbances compared with whites. Young Asian Muslims are now paying the price for their parents misplaced trust in justice. But my point remains valid. It was a sense of duty and a belief in law and order that compelled parents to volunteer their children to the authorities.

Justice is a cardinal value in Islam to be considered and promoted in all aspects of human life. Respect for the law, working to achieve and support safe and secure communities are basic precepts of the faith. They are also common practical concerns British Muslims share with their neighbours. However, this natural commonality of interests too often fails to come to the fore. We lose focus on the shared values that should promote better community relations. We must not permit the apparatus of addressing a legitimate concern for security to erode our community's confidence in policing and the wider criminal justice system.

CHALLENGES

- polarisation
- diversity
- community characteristics
- insularity
- poverty
- religious dogma
- illiteracy
- poor social conditions
- in challenge lies strength

*“And among God’s wondrous signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variety of your languages and colours. In all this indeed are signs for people with sound knowledge.”
(The Qur’an, 30: 22)*

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So why is our relationship less than perfect? This leads on to my second point: that things have got significantly worse in recent years. A large part of the explanation lies with September 11th and its aftermath: particularly counter-terrorism. But there are other relevant explanations. Let me highlight a few of them.

There can be no gainsaying that there are a number of challenges faced by today’s Muslim community. One need only glance through, for example the recently launched Muslims in London Report spearheaded by the GLA and the Mayor last week - a welcome initiative which analyses, amongst other issues demography, socio-economics profiles and islamaphobia - to note how the odds are seemingly stacked up against the Muslim Community in Britain.

It would seem that we live in an era of misinformation, mistrust and a growing culture of fear. Recently the Head of MI5 Dame Elizabeth Manningham-Buller stated “It is the youth who are being actively targeted, groomed, radicalised and set on a path that frighteningly quickly could end in their involvement in mass murder of their fellow UK citizens”. She followed this with the statement that “My service is dedicated to tackling the deadly manifestations of terrorism. Tackling its roots is the work of us all. That is no easy task, particularly given the scale and speed of radicalisation and the age of some being radicalised – while still at school.” There can be no doubt that these indeed are frightening words, to think that young people are being groomed at school sends a shiver down all our spines – I am sure. But the question is, how do we overcome this phenomenon? Should we just focus our energy on, as Dame Manningham-Buller put it, tackling the manifestations or should we also be focusing on the root causes? We all know that the latter will actually provide us with the solution rather than over-emphasising the former and in so doing perpetuating levels of fear and insecurity. The MCB believes that we all need to quickly come to this same conclusion and we believe the most productive way to start this process is to hold a Public Inquiry in to the atrocities of 7 July.

There are increasingly cynical attempts made to divide us in spite of our diversity, which leads to regressive reactions and a growing refusal by many to reach out to one another giving rise to tension and sometimes erupting in violence in our communities. We are in

danger of creating a climate where we are at best ambivalent of each other, or, at worst, fearful of one another. But I hasten to reassure you, it is not all doom and gloom.

Challenges faced include that of:

- Polarisation – secular, national and Islamic political groupings
- Diversity – by their very nature Muslims comprise an array of subgroups within a community, a mosaic with varying languages, dialects, lineages, etc
- Community characteristics- passivity, apathy, docile, submissiveness
- Insularity
- Poverty
- Religious dogma
- Illiteracy
- Poor social conditions

But in surmounting these challenges the community in turn grows in strength .

Collectively we need to show the strength of will and courage to overcome hurdles of difference and get to know one another. We believe in unity in our diversity, for diversity in humanity is the message of Islam. Contrary to assertions that religions have been used to foster hatred and sow destruction, the essential message in the Quran is the unity of humankind and its potential as a positive force for harmony and cooperation. Rather than regarding diversity as a source of inevitable tensions, the Qur'an states that human variety is indispensable when defining common beliefs, values and traditions in community life:

“O human kind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, so that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most God-fearing of you. God is All-knowing, All-aware.” (Quran 49:14)

Imagine a multi-coloured flower garden and compare it to a monochromatic flower garden, which will people prefer? I believe that many among us, including members of the Muslim community value the essential unity of the human race in its diversity. By diversity however we certainly do not mean isolation, segregation or insularity for that surely defeats the whole purpose of diversity.

CHALLENGES

- **generational change**
 - levels of deference lower
 - questioning attitude
 - more sensitive to instances of unfair treatment by the police - perceived or actual
- **Macpherson Report - racism and discrimination amongst the police is a serious problem**
- **loss of confidence in the police**
- **a measure of a mature society should be its willingness to engage in reasoned debate and take measured response to actual or likely threats to its security**

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There's been a generational change and with it attitudes have changed too. The first generation of Muslims, particularly Asians, had a largely over-deferential attitude towards authority - the police included. Moreover, they tended to keep their heads down and get on with it, so to speak.

Contrast that with the second and third generation of Muslims. Their levels of deference are much lower and their questioning attitude is much more on a par with the population as a whole. More alert to their rights as citizens they're also much more sensitive to instances of unfair treatment by the police - perceived or actual. They are, on the whole, a tougher customer to please.

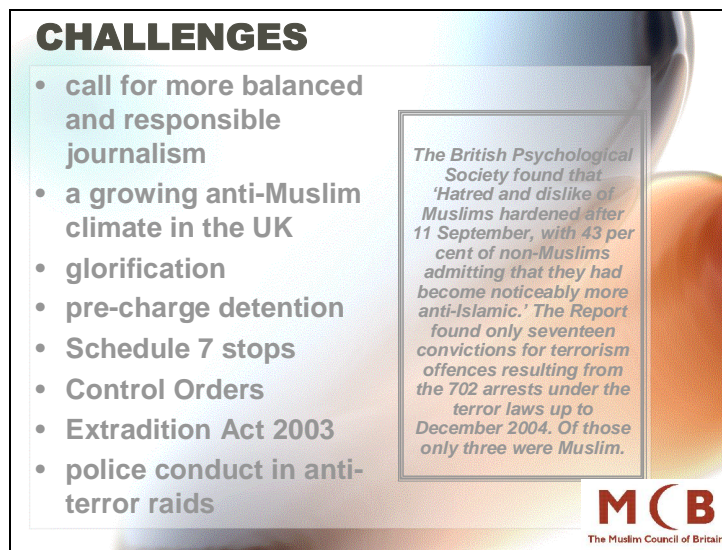
Additionally, the Macpherson report has firmly established that racism and discrimination amongst the police is a serious problem. But even before Macpherson, sections of the Muslim community were increasingly concerned about what they saw as insensitive policing.

Indeed, it was an alleged incident of police maltreatment that sparked off the first Bradford disturbances in 1995. It's not that police discrimination is a new phenomena, it's just that people are now more aware of it.

What all this amounts to is a serious loss of confidence in the police. All of this has of course been exacerbated by September 11th and in particular the way the police have used the new powers under the terrorism legislation.

A measure of a mature society should be its willingness to engage in reasoned debate and take measured response to actual or likely threats to its security. If we fail in this challenge we risk more enduring damage to the essential values of our national life and community relations than any terrorist could plot. The measures contained in the Anti-Terror, Crime and Security Act 2001 violate human rights.

It has been stated by the Government that the threat is from members of the Islamic faith. The House of Commons' Home Affairs Committee in its Terrorism and Community Relations report (6 April 2005) noted that 'Muslims perceive that they are being stigmatised by [anti-terror] legislation'. The MCB believes that it is more than a matter of 'perception'. The report also finds 'overwhelming evidence' that the media exerted 'a powerful and often negative impact' on public attitudes towards British Muslims and that 'representatives of the media appeared unaware or dismissive of this.'



CHALLENGES

- call for more balanced and responsible journalism
- a growing anti-Muslim climate in the UK
- glorification
- pre-charge detention
- Schedule 7 stops
- Control Orders
- Extradition Act 2003
- police conduct in anti-terror raids

The British Psychological Society found that 'Hatred and dislike of Muslims hardened after 11 September, with 43 per cent of non-Muslims admitting that they had become noticeably more anti-Islamic.' The Report found only seventeen convictions for terrorism offences resulting from the 702 arrests under the terror laws up to December 2004. Of those only three were Muslim.

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There is a call for more balanced and responsible journalism. Recent years have seen the characterisation of British Muslims as a 'problem community' in much of the media and through statements made by Government and police officials. These have contributed to a growing anti-Muslim climate in the UK. The British Psychological Society found that 'Hatred and dislike of Muslims hardened after 11 September, with 43 per cent of non-Muslims admitting that they had become noticeably more anti-Islamic.' The Report found only seventeen convictions for terrorism offences resulting from the 702 arrests under the terror laws up to December 2004. Of those only three were Muslim. A sense of perspective needs to be re-introduced into the debate.

The 2006 Anti Terror legislation and particularly Sections 1 to 4 are of great concern and confusion. Feedback from meetings with Police via the Muslim Safety Forum have demonstrated that even the Police themselves are not clear as to what is being legislated here and in turn are unclear on how to police related matters. I understand the police have yet to give any definitive answers for the MSF to disseminate to the community.

With so many arrests taking place under the Anti Terrorism Act, many of them unplanned, alongside the large number of releases that take place (without much public awareness) there are two key issues whose impact needs addressing. Firstly is the adverse impact on those being incarcerated by the police for extended periods and ensuing lack of support after their release. Secondly the impression left on the wider society by so many arrests leads to doubt and "questionable" intelligence. These issues have a criminalising impact which is proving to be very counter productive.

Furthermore, schedule 7 stops are currently not recorded and this must be reviewed immediately. The number of Muslims being stopped, removed and delayed in their everyday travel at ports and airports is unacceptable, particularly when there are no mechanisms to draw objective analysis of this and its impact.

We oppose the introduction of Control Orders that places suspects (irrespective of their nationality) under house arrest with restrictions. The law sanctions house arrests (a feature of undemocratic regimes) and amounts to detention without trial.

The Extradition Act 2003 lacks the necessary safeguards as it allows the UK to extradite its citizens without a case being established in British courts.

The manner of police conduct in anti-terror raids has raised serious concerns. Raids were often conducted in the full glare of the media but the subsequent release-without-charge did not attract comparable attention. Furthermore, there are disturbing reports of the police using disproportionate force during arrests. Babar Ahmed received serious injuries though he offered no resistance.



CHALLENGES

- **stop and search legislation**
 - incidents of stop and search for Asians have increased by a staggering 300%
 - More responsive and sensitive policing is therefore required to restore confidence
 - More dialogue
 - incidence of hate crime risen yet affected communities often do not report these attacks to the police out of a growing feeling that they will not receive adequate protection

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Attention has focused around stop and search legislation. As figures released by the Home Office have shown, incidents of stop and search for Asians have increased by a staggering 300% in the space of one year. Stop-and-search Anti-terrorism laws have a disproportionate effect on Muslims. The majority of young Muslims who are stopped and searched have never been in trouble with police before.

We know from the experiences of the black community that police mistreatment is a serious problem that needs tackling. This now appears to have spread to Muslims. More responsive and sensitive policing is therefore required to restore confidence. More dialogue between Muslim communities, police and security services is required. There needs to be genuine buy-in if this is to work. Dialogue needs to be respectful, patient and open. It needs to happen in Muslim communities and involve all sections of it – particularly the young.

With a mere fraction of such stop and searches leading to any sort of conviction, the practice is operationally inefficient and damaging to community relations. We should reflect on the consequences of the 'Sus Laws' on the Black and Afro- Caribbean community in the 70's and 80's. The Muslim community's confidence in policing has reached a low ebb, despite some efforts by police forces to engage with the community. The incidence of hate crime around UK has risen. Yet the communities affected often do not report these attacks to the police out of a growing feeling that they will not receive adequate protection.

CHALLENGES

- investigations and arrests
 - must be able to assess the objectivity of the source before it assesses the intelligence
 - processed with community input
 - allegations have been made against the police they have mistreated detainees

“The raids are very much unplanned, not called for, unprofessional. If Scotland Yard is going to undertake missions that ‘terrorize’ innocent families and individuals despite all the protest and unlawfulness of it all and continue to carry out such operations, they firstly have to get all their facts correct, enough evidence and not do it on hypothesis and speculations that there might be some terrorist activities. What needs to be questioned and looked into is the competency and how reliable the ‘Intelligence’ sources are.”

Stephen Kinzer, New York Times, 8/26/04

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However, stop and search represents only one aspect of this problem. We’re also worried about the at times over-zealous manner in which the police are carrying out their investigations and arrests.

The Police and security services must be able to assess the objectivity of the source before it assesses the intelligence. It is not unusual for faulty intelligence to be fed for the purpose of misleading security services. We need to ensure that intelligence is processed with community input and oversight. It must take on board seriously the criminalising affect that anti terror raids have upon the wider Muslim community.

“The raids are very much unplanned, not called for, unprofessional. If Scotland Yard is going to undertake missions that ‘terrorize’ innocent families and individuals despite all the protest and unlawfulness of it all and continue to carry out such operations, they firstly have to get all their facts correct, enough evidence and not do it on hypothesis and speculations that there might be some terrorist activities. What needs to be questioned and looked into is the competency and how reliable the ‘Intelligence’ sources are.”
Stephen Kinzer, New York Times, 8/26/04

As we are well aware, a number of serious allegations have been made against the police they have mistreated detainees. These allegations are quite rightly being investigated and we await their conclusion. But in the meantime we remain concerned.

Anti-terror raids are allegedly marked by a systematic brutality, from Babar Ahmed to the Forest Gate raids, the officers conducting anti-terror raids use excessive force and behave in a punitive manner. In addition there is a perception that lack of preventative or disciplinary measures by the authorities encourages such abuse. Information of systematic brutality and lack of meaningful oversight has a long lasting effect on the community, and encourages the perception that “anti-terror” is a form of malice against the Islamic religion. There is no justification for over proportionate force to be used, and given that anti-terror raids are more likely to be conducted on innocent people then in any other form of policing there needs to be extra caution.

A Muslim youth organisation had this to say: “From the latest raids and police approach it seems the police have no insight to a life of a Muslim. The tactics to enter the premises by smashing windows, heavy handlings of the victims of the Forest Gate raid, just shows police force are not professionals they are brutal, have no sincerity or any knowledge of the Muslim community. The impression is that there is a high ‘Islamaphobia’ within the Police force.”



WAY FORWARD

- Police Force more responsive to the needs of minority religious and ethnic groups
- more Muslim police officers involved in counter-terror policing
- Hijab as part of uniform
- Community Support Officer initiative
Visible policing e.g. police guards outside mosques
- Muslim Safety Forum
- Muslim Contact Unit
- MCB Guide to Rights & Responsibilities

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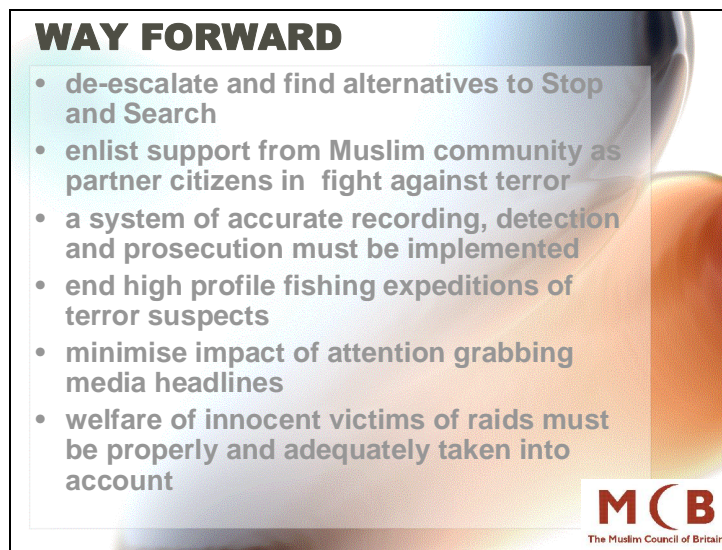
What all this amounts to then is probably the most serious set of challenges to the relationship between the police and the Muslim community in this country. So where do we go from here? Certainly the Muslim community appreciates progress that has been made to make the Police Force more responsive to the needs of minority religious and ethnic groups, Muslims included.

Many of our affiliates agree that it would also provide some balance if more Muslim police officers were actually involved in Counter-terror policing rather than public relations. People like Assistant Commissioner Tariq Ghaffur the most senior Muslim police officer in the country, will I hope act as role models for Muslims who would like to make a career out of the police force and attain seniority within it.

We appreciate the arrangements made by the Met to allow Muslim women police officers to wear the hijab as part of the uniform. And we certainly think that the Community Support Officer initiative has attracted a lot more interest from minority groups, Muslims no doubt being among them.

We appreciate the fast and sensitive response the Force mounted in the immediate aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks to help protect the Muslim community against acts of reprisals. Police guards outside Mosques were one visible sign of this. Some of the positive legacies of that period remain. The Muslim Safety Forum, not without it's fair share of challenges, remains an important medium of communication and dialogue.

On the more sensitive issues to do with counter-terrorism, the MCB is in frequent contact with the authorities. We note the work done by Bob Lambert and his team in the Muslim Contact Unit. 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.



WAY FORWARD

- de-escalate and find alternatives to Stop and Search
- enlist support from Muslim community as partner citizens in fight against terror
- a system of accurate recording, detection and prosecution must be implemented
- end high profile fishing expeditions of terror suspects
- minimise impact of attention grabbing media headlines
- welfare of innocent victims of raids must be properly and adequately taken into account

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But a lot more needs to be done. Firstly we need to put an end to the escalation in stop and search of Muslims. We seriously need to ask ourselves this question: is the considerable harm created by stop and search really helping in the fight against terror? Are there not more effective means of achieving the same ends.

Secondly, 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 that the police acknowledge that barring a few exceptions the vast majority of the Muslim community in Britain have nothing whatever to do with terrorism. A system of accurate recording, detection and prosecution must be implemented.

This needs to be followed up by action: an end to high profile fishing expeditions of terror suspects, the majority of whom are released without charge or only on non-terrorism charges after the damage has been done.

The impact of attention grabbing media headlines needs to be minimised. Of course the police cannot control what the media publish, this is not desirable. But there is a perception at the moment that the police and authorities contrive in breaching the law and feed tabloids with sensationalist stories.

When ten Manchester Muslims were arrested in dawn raids in April 2004 by over 400 officers the Sun stated 'Intelligence chiefs believe al-Qaeda fanatics planned to blow themselves up amid 67,000 unsuspecting supporters. A source said: "The target was Old Trafford."' The same paper also stated 'A police source said: "The plot involved several individual bombers in separate parts of the stadium. If successful, any such attack would have caused absolute carnage. Thousands of people could have been killed.'" The newspaper also had access to detailed information regarding the evidence collected by the police that day – specific football tickets, which turned out to be mementos of a fan from past matches. It is beyond doubt that members of the Police force improperly disclosed confidential information contrary to existing police disciplinary code. It was also felt that the police source would have known the very serious and damning consequences of the leak

and the fact that it's only possible purpose could have been to feed far right hysteria and Islamophobia.

If such media sensationalism is set right at source, it can help to create a more level playing field.

Furthermore, it is paramount that the welfare of innocent victims of raids must be properly and adequately taken into account. While many of those wrongfully targeted under the act are released or acquitted, they can never recover from the stigma attached to them and their community. High profile, extravagant and untruthful media attention on arrests under the Act coupled with relative silence on acquittals and releases have left a devastating impression of the Muslim UK community being a fifth column.

We need to significantly reduce the negative impact of counter-terror policing. As identified in the CBMI report the current wave of Islamophobia gains oxygen from the domestic and international counter terror measures taken by the Government and the way these are reported in the media. The police must be commended for the careful use of language they have adopted when speaking about anti-terror. This has played a significant part in maintaining community trust with the police to date.

However there must be a greater appreciation within the police that their actions do have a significant effect on the public domain. Use of careful language makes little difference to the wider public who are fed a consistent stream of images of Muslims being dragged from their beds and arrested as suspected terrorists coupled with officialdom warning against Islamic terror. We draw attention to Peter Hillyard's study (Suspect community- people's experience of the prevention of Terrorism Acts in Britain) which noted that one of the results of the perception that the police were treating the Irish as a suspect community is that the public are encouraged to do the same.

WAY FORWARD

- address misperceptions regarding independence of the police
- more sensitive policing
- Islam awareness
- enhance community relations and engage through communication

"I do not think simple vocabulary such as 'Sorry' can justify or resolve the torment and adversity faced by the family of the Forest Gate or the Muslim community as a whole. More importantly we hear apology for high profile raids and attacks on a Muslim but what about those cases that the media or the press do not get hold of, who takes responsibility for those?"

'Suspect Community - People's Experience of the Prevention of Terrorism Acts in Britain', Paddy Hillyard, Pluto Press (1993).

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Many have questioned the independence of the police with some claiming that the 'police is a tool of the Government and its misplaced war on terror'. These sentiments permeate deeply within the young and old alike and there needs to be recognition of this and a clear strategy to bring the perception back of the independence of the police.

Regardless of what could be done to change such perception it would be a good starting point to at least recognise the negative effects of counter-terror policing. One member of the public summed up what many felt:

"I do not think simple vocabulary such as 'Sorry' can justify or resolve the torment and adversity faced by the family of the Forest Gate or the Muslim community as a whole. More importantly we hear apology for high profile raids and attacks on a Muslim but what about those cases that the media or the press do not get hold of, who takes responsibility for those?" 'Suspect Community - People's Experience of the Prevention of Terrorism Acts in Britain', Paddy Hillyard, Pluto Press (1993).

Thirdly, we need more sensitive policing. Those involved in cultivating, collecting and interpreting intelligence must be aware of context. One female youth organisation said:

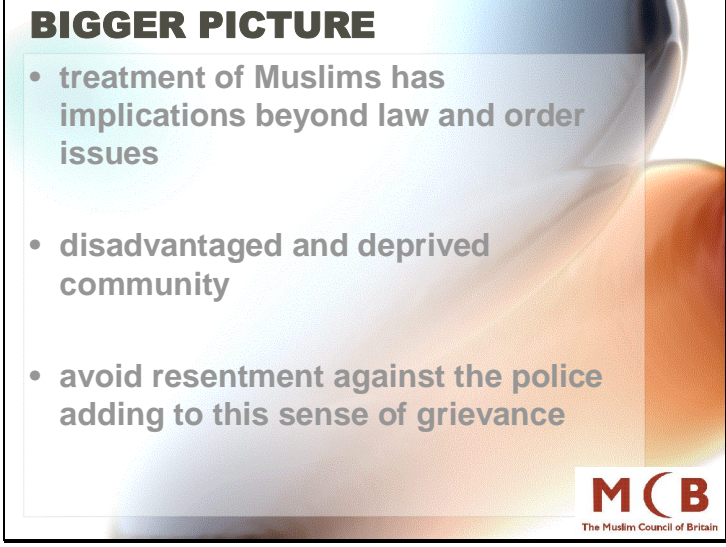
"I think there is a lack of understanding of Islam, due to these small things like growing a beard and attending mosque regularly, the police may interpret it as extremist behaviour. If there was better understanding of Islam then these misunderstandings will be avoided and reduce innocent behaviour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

It is advised that the members of the Police and security forces receive community cultural training by members of the community gaining Islam awareness.

There is a clear and present need for the enhancement of Community Relations through clear and consistent levels of communication. One MSF member said: "Police communication with the public is very poor. How can Sir Ian Blair make statement such as 'it is the community who fight terrorism' when the police Force do not share information

with the community. It is acceptable that Intelligence information cannot be broadcasted but justification and avoidance of not just one mistake but to an index of continuing mistakes to reoccur.” The community needs to be engaged and are vital in fighting the terror threat. Listen to their views and suggestions; they know what goes on in their community. Calls to moderate Islam need to be dispatched and replaced with determined efforts to root out criminal elements from society. We need to root out and identify the causes that propel them to such criminality.

Pressures on Muslim youth, particularly within university settings, need to be alleviated and not pushed underground in order that their voices, ideas and concerns are heard and incorporated into mainstream dialogue.



BIGGER PICTURE

- treatment of Muslims has implications beyond law and order issues
- disadvantaged and deprived community
- avoid resentment against the police adding to this sense of grievance

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Finally, it's worth dwelling briefly on the bigger picture. We need to recognise that the way in which Muslims are treated by the police have implications beyond law and order issues. Resentment and anger at the police will ultimately hinder efforts to further integration. The police are seen as an integral apparatus of government. Suspicion or maltreatment by the police is therefore interpreted as suspicion and maltreatment by society generally.

We know that the Muslim community in Britain is one of the most disadvantaged. The majority of Muslims live in the most deprived local authority areas in the country. The unemployment rate for Muslims is more than three times that of the population as a whole. This is an enormous problem in its own right. What we need to avoid is resentment against the police adding to this sense of grievance.



BIGGER PICTURE

- part of the solution
- dialogue and engagement
- counteract increased anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain
- work to ensure that communities are not criminalised through allegations and innuendo
- implement new approach to Stop and Search
- increase respectful, patient and open dialogue involving community, police and security services.

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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. At the heart of this must lie the understanding that terrorism is as much a concern for Muslims as it is for all Britons. Terror does not distinguish victims by faith, race or class. An attack on Britain is an attack on British Muslims. London became a prime target on 7/7, and of the nearly 1.6 million British Muslims, half live in the capital. I cannot emphasise enough that Muslims need to be part of the solution in combating terrorism.

More dialogue and engagement between Muslim communities and the police and security services will help break down barriers and improve counter-terrorism efforts. High-profile raids, stop and search activities and sensationalist media coverage have increased anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain. All parties must work to ensure that communities are not criminalised through allegations and innuendo by those in authority. Stop-and-Search procedures have proven to be counterproductive. A new approach which is both operationally effective and sensitive to community feelings needs to be developed. Our toolkit of anti-terror legislation violates human rights and alienates the British Muslim community. Control Orders must be scrapped, and the discriminatory and unjust Extradition Laws favouring the United States should be re-examined.

More dialogue between Muslim communities, police and security services is required. There needs to be genuine buy-in if this is to work. Dialogue needs to be respectful, patient and open. It needs to happen in Muslim communities and involve all sections of it – particularly the young. This can potentially bypass media sensationalism. It will help break down barriers which promote suspicion and hostility. It will promote accountability and give all participants an opportunity to voice fears and concerns. Hopefully it will lead to improvements in the way we combat terrorism and other criminality.



IN CONCLUSION

- common set of values that hold law and order in very high regard
- relationship between Muslims and the police continues to undergo some serious strains which require immediate action
- public inquiry into the events of 7/7
- we acknowledge and appreciate steps by the police to improve the situation
- we need to be aware of the bigger picture: of the relationship between how Muslims are treated by the police and how they might perceive that are treated by society generally
- social contract

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The Muslim Council of Britain

Let me conclude then by reiterating my main points. Firstly, that the Muslim community and the police share a common set of values that hold law and order in very high regard. Secondly that the relationship between Muslims and the police continues to undergo some serious strains which require immediate action. To prevent the increasing feeling of marginalisation and alienation, we continue with our call for a public inquiry into the events of July 7th. Thirdly that we acknowledge and appreciate steps by the police to improve the situation. And finally that we need to be aware of the bigger picture: of the relationship between how Muslims are treated by the police and how they might perceive that are treated by society generally.

This can only be successfully borne out in an environment that fosters proactive engagement through partnership. For this we require a high level of transparency and openness and the assurances that rising levels of Islamophobia are tackled head on in order that the politics of fear and terror are thereby diminished. Engagement such as this, at senior level must filter through to produce knock on changes on the ground.

In essence, I feel we must focus on giving young people space and time to formulate their own identities. To provide plenty of avenues that help formulate a positive British identity. This cannot only be a top-down approach: whether that be from Government, mosques, churches, synagogues or the community leadership. All have a role, but if we pander to the headlines that pressurises our young, we can expect a backlash and unsatisfactory results

It is young people, more than people like me, who will determine what British identity looks and feels like. Their awareness of, but with some detachment from, the cultural heritage of their parents, will allow them to draw more widely from the varying cultural heritages from different parts of the globe bring. They will pick and mix. They will also be able to advance in areas which we've only just began to explore. For instance – what is the Muslim contribution to the arts, to literature to British culture? Interesting times lie ahead. But the goal must be an identity into which the entire community – with all its diversity – can be accommodated and one that sits comfortably within the context of a multi-faith and multi-ethnic Britain.

Naturally, as Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, I support the notion that religion can bring about a solution rather than a problem. Strife is not a uniquely religious concern. The historian Niall Ferguson has recently charted how the last century was one of the bloodiest. Very few of the conflicts of the 20th century were about religion. People fought over ethnicity and ideology. The Carnegie Commission argued “religious diversity does not spawn violence independently of predisposing social, economic and political condition as well as the subject roles of belligerent leaders.” I firmly believe that our dear religion, properly understood and projected, can only serve as a source of immense good not only for the Muslim community but for the society as a whole. For example, it is incumbent on Muslims to care for our neighbours, irrespective of faith. Yet how many of us actually uphold this value? Much can be said, however for initiatives such as Islam Awareness Week, whose theme this year is “One World” and is now in its thirteenth year, have contributed significantly to breaking down these barriers to diversity.

As citizens of Britain, the Muslim community have a social contract to maintain the peace and stability of this country. No one must be tempted to commit any criminal or subversive activity. As citizens of this country and an integral part of British society, we not only have rights, but also have obligations. We do not claim any special rights. All we expect is fairness and equality. Let there be no doubt in our minds that we have the obligation to participate. We have the obligation to contribute. 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. This is what our faith requires of us. This is our unilateral responsibility. We have an obligation to encourage all that is good and discourage all that is harmful.

As a Muslim, I feel the message of compassion and social justice needs to be flagged up. Now more than in any previous era, the world needs a spiritual message that enables societies to heal human suffering and protect religion from the perversion of cruel fanaticism. Faith communities have a duty to foster a culture of peace and build a partnership aiming to promote equality of opportunity for all in society. We strive towards a Britain where all are at peace and ease with one another, where our differences are respected and we all have an equal opportunity to excel and contribute to the common good of our nation.

I've raised some of our most serious concerns and suggested some ways forward. I re-state our readiness to work with you. We have no desire to be mere spectators. That would not benefit you or the Muslim community. By resolving these issues you will have a community that can feel justified in trusting the police and a police force freed to do the real job of securing our nation from security threats. We would be happy and willing to work with the Police on any initiatives that result in a safer country for all ensuring that justice is served equally and is also seen to be done.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you.

Peace Be Upon You.