

**Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim**

A Message  
for the Leaders of the  
Muslim Ummah attending the  
Third Extraordinary Islamic Summit

Makka al-Mukarra  
Royal Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

**The Muslim Council of Britain**

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# THE MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN

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## Respected Leaders of the Ummah

*As salaamu 'Alaikum wa rahmatullah*

On behalf of the Muslims of the United Kingdom, the Muslim Council of Britain would like to take this opportunity to offer its sincere thanks to the Secretary General of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, HE Dr Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu for inviting us on behalf of the Royal Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to attend this Third Extraordinary Islamic Summit in Makka al-Mukarra on 7-8 December 2005/5-6 Dhu al'-Qa'dah 1426.

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 .

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*".

The Muslim communities in Europe are very much part of the global Muslim Ummah. The concern for fellow Muslims where ever they may be is one of our central religious values. Muslims were the first globalised community: since time immemorial this noble city has enabled pilgrims to meet and learn more about the state of the ummah. The sense of common concern and unity is thus hard-wired into us, and the technologies that have followed – particularly the email systems, chat rooms and satellite TVs of today – have reinforced this interconnectedness more so for Muslims than anyone else. The devastated images of Balakot in Kashmir, or the flattened buildings of Faluja, prompt responses in households in London or Paris. Francis Fukuyama's famously declared that the post-cold war era was the 'End of History'; what is more accurate is that our era has seen the 'End of Geography' – i.e. geographical distance is now no longer a factor in the way public opinion is made or shared.

In this interdependent world, whatever positive or negative happens in this Ummah has a direct affect on us all – from those in positions of responsibility down to children in schools. Muslims in Britain, represented by the **Muslim Council of Britain** (MCB) are alhamdu lillah a young and vigorous component of the Ummah. I take this opportunity to provide a brief introduction to the MCB and to draw your

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attention to some developments and concerns that are appropriate to raise at this forum: (i) the increased representation of Muslims in the political life in Britain and the community's engagement with mainstream society (ii) steps taken to counter distorted media coverage of Islam and Muslims and Islamophobia (iii) campaigns to ensure justice and respect for International law.

## **Introduction to the MCB**

Muslims form about 2 million of the total British population of around 58 million - 3% of the population of Britain – not a large number, though it still makes us the second largest faith community after the Christian faith. There are more Muslims in Britain than all the Jews, Hindus, Sikhs etc put together. The Muslim community is made up of very many different ethnic, cultural and language groups who nonetheless have a strong sense of religious identity. Britain as a whole has an ageing population. Muslims are mainly in the younger age groups - in some of the larger cities, the growth of the labour force will be heavily dependent on this Muslim component. Muslims are thus an important strategic asset to Britain and this makes us an important stakeholder in the future economic and social prosperity of our country.

The Muslim Council of Britain was formed in 1997 after several years of consultation within community leaders as an umbrella body bringing together mosques, Islamic centres, Muslim voluntary sector organisations and professional associations and Muslim schools and charities. Today, alhamdu lillah it has over 400 affiliated members and has received national stature as the responsible voice of the majority of Muslims on their issues of concern.

Two key historical events of our times have been 9/11 and the London bombings of 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 (followed by the attempted bombings two weeks later). The MCB alhamdu lillah was able to provide leadership to Muslims in Britain at these times of crisis, assuring the community on the one hand while also signaling to society at large that Muslims placed clear blue water between themselves and such acts. The MCB's prompt actions were referred to by Prime Minister Tony Blair on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2005 when he said, "I welcome the statement that has been put out by the Muslim Council of Great Britain.... we also know that the vast and overwhelming majority of Muslims, here and abroad, are decent and law-abiding people who abhor this act of terrorism every bit as much as we do".

The MCB has also taken steps to point out to the media, political leaders and the authorities on the inappropriateness of the term 'Islamic terrorism'. As a result, when the Metropolitan Police of London put out its media bulletins on persons detained under the anti-terrorism laws, the following phrase is now included, "Media are advised that the use of the term 'Islamic terrorist' are very unhelpful and may contribute to inflaming community tensions. We would urge media to take this into consideration in reporting of this operation".

It was heartening to observe how the Turkish Prime Minister HE 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". This is the type of intervention that gains respect within the Ummah.

The Muslim Council of Britain is an inclusive, broad-based body in which there is representation from all the schools of thought. It has elected office-bearers and a range of committees that tap into the professional expertise and talents of Muslims in Britain. We are independent of Government funding for our core expenses and intend to remain that way.

## **1. Representation of Muslims in the political life in Britain and the community's engagement with mainstream society**

As you may recall, there was a General Election in Britain in May 2005. The MCB firmly believes in the engagement of Muslims in the political process. It fulfilled a key educational role in making Muslims aware of their responsibility to vote and in providing briefings on the key issues to raise with the candidates of all parties. The MCB published in large numbers a ten-point list of issues and concerns, that were used by Muslims up and down the country in making the selection of their candidate of choice. The MCB also produced a detailed policy document, for use by the policy analysts in all parties when framing their manifestos and action plans. The Muslim vote bank size was only about 500,000 but this was decisive in a number of 'marginal' seats. Political analysts classified 14 constituencies where the impact of the Muslim vote could be 'Very High', 23 where it was 'High' and 67 where it was 'Medium', based on an assessment of the 2001 winner's margin and an estimate of Muslim voters. In the next General Election, even more constituencies will be marginal. While the MCB itself is apolitical, its aim is to ensure that Muslims possess a voice on the British political scene.

The 2001 General Election also saw the number of Muslim MPs increase from 2 to 4: new MPs Sadiq Khan and Shahid Malik joining Muhammad Sarwar and Khalid Mahmood, all on the Labour benches. The House of Lords has four Muslim peers – Lord Nazir Ahmed, Lord Adam Patel, Baroness Pola Uddin and Lord Bhatia.

The Muslim Council of Britain has regular bilateral meetings with Government departments – we have a committee structure that largely shadows the important ministries such as education, health, the Home Office etc. The MCB regularly invites important decision makers to meetings to engage with Muslim audiences. This has recently included the Chief of Defence Staff, General Sir Michael Walker and his top aides. The MCB view ministerial and similar contacts as important opportunities to present the concerns of the community, without fear or favour. We also have excellent relationships with the Lord Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone and actively supported London's bid for the 2012 Olympics. In fact one of the reasons which enabled London to succeed was its reference to London's diversity and multiculturalism.

## **2. Steps taken to counter distorted media coverage of Islam and Muslims and Islamophobia**

I drew your attention earlier to our efforts to educate politicians and others to stop using the term 'Islamic terrorism'. The MCB has an active Media committee that responds to vulgar misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims. In an age of global media empires, we feel this type of work needs to be undertaken in a more coordinated and better resourced manner through the OIC and its branches.

An example of what the media tries to project, and an effective countermeasure is the 'Kilroy Silk' affair of last year. This well-known TV personality and journalist published an article 'We owe the Arabs nothing' in a popular British tabloid stating that "the Arabs" should be castigated for "murdering more than 3,000 civilians on September 11 and then dancing in the hot, dusty streets to celebrate". He also described Arabs (as a whole) as "suicide bombers, limb-amputators, womenrepressors". The MCB responded with articles in the press, letters to editors and calls on Mr Kilroy-Silk's employers, the BBC, to dismiss him. The MCB also sought, and obtained, the support of other civil society and faith organisations such as the Commission for Racial Equality, The Council for Anglo-Arab Understanding (CAABU) and the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ). The outcome was that Mr Kilroy-Silk's programme was discontinued by the BBC.

The MCB has similarly taken effective action in the case of four extremely vitriolic and inciteful articles about British Muslims that appeared in a serious national newspaper in July 2004 under the pseudonym, Will Cummins. In one article, the author had stated "All Muslims like all dogs share certain characteristics". The MCB took up the matter with Will Cummins' employer, the government-funded British Council. It was clearly an untenable position and the British Council dismissed the miscreant.

The MCB has initiated regular meetings with the editors of the main newspapers and heads of TV news programmes to work towards a code of practice that preserves critical and independent journalism without descending into gratuitous abuse and Islamophobia.

Islamophobia is a world-wide phenomenon that has a traumatising effect on Muslims. It should be defined as a crime in the same way as is anti-semitism – and have the full force of international and national sanctions that are brought to bear in cases of antisemitism.

## **3. Campaigns to ensure justice and respect for International law**

The MCB has taken forthright stands on issues of the illegal occupation of lands in Palestine, the illegal war to which our Government is party to in Iraq, and the numerous floutings of the rule of law by the US and other Governments in the so-called 'War on Terror'. The MCB has similarly taken robust steps with respect to anti-terrorism legislation that is seen to target and criminalise our community in Britain (some of our recent press releases are attached in the Appendix to this letter). You may not be aware of the following shocking disproportionalities: from 9/11 until September 30 2005 a total of 895 people have been arrested in Britain under the Terrorism Act 2000. Of these, 138 have been charged under this

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legislation and a further 156 charged with other offences, including murder and the use of explosives. Of the remaining 601 people, 496 were released without charge and 106 dealt with in other ways, including being handed over to the immigration authorities. Only 23 have so far been convicted of terrorist offences – these include persons held for their support of other causes e.g. Irish (at least 7), Kurdish etc. The number of Muslims may only be three, of whom two have appealed.

The British Government in the wake of 7<sup>th</sup> July has proposed new anti-terrorism legislation that increases the number of days a person can be held prior to charging, and also provides powers to control and close down mosques. The MCB is in the process of lobbying Parliament against draconian sanctions, that only serve as fuel for greater alienation amongst the youth. Hastily conceived populist legislation is eroding fundamental values of society such as the habeas corpus and the presumption of innocence unless proven guilty.

The MCB urges you to stand by the rule of law – and also to recognise that the call for justice at the international plane has to be accompanied by justice and the rule of law on the domestic front.

We pray for wise counsel and success in your deliberations insha Allah. We pray that Allah Subhannahu wa ta'ala will guide your efforts and strengthen your resolve to work for the freedom, dignity and respect of Muslims, and to work for pleasing Him.

May the peace and blessings of Allah be on you. Ameen.

Yours sincerely

Iqbal Sacranie

Secretary General

The Muslim Council of Britain

7<sup>th</sup> December 2005

# Appendix: Documents

## Recent Press Releases

1<sup>st</sup> December 2005 - MCB Urges Immediate Release of Norman Kember in Iraq

9<sup>th</sup> November 2005 - Muslim Council of Britain Calls on MPs to Reject Anti-Terror Bill

8<sup>th</sup> October 2005 - British Muslims Send Condolences and Aid to Earthquake Victims in Kashmir, Pakistan and India

23<sup>rd</sup> July 2005 - MCB Expresses Deep Concern over Mistaken Killing in Stockwell

**01 Dec 2005**

## **MCB Urges Immediate Release of Norman Kember in Iraq**

The Muslim Council of Britain views with the gravest concern the abduction and continued detention of the British aid-worker and peace-activist, Norman Kember and his four colleagues in Iraq.

The MCB urges his captors to release Mr Kember and his colleagues immediately and allow them all to return to their families safe and unharmed.

'Norman Kember is a man who cares deeply for the people of Iraq and his kidnap and continued detention is completely unjustifiable. Our faith of Islam holds in great esteem the peaceful bridge-building work that Mr Kember was involved in,' said Sir Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the MCB.

Sir Iqbal said the MCB would continue to exert its utmost efforts and utilize all its influence to help secure the release of Mr Kember.

**9<sup>th</sup> November 2005**

## **Muslim Council of Britain Calls on MPs to Reject Anti-Terror Bill**

The Muslim Council of Britain will be jointly organising a meeting in Parliament this afternoon to lobby Members of Parliament to urge them to reject the Government's proposed new anti-terror measures.

"This bill has huge implications for the Muslim community, many of whom already suffer from unfair targeting and harassment by the police and security services. These draconian measures have the potential of alienating large sections of the Muslim community who will undoubtedly be at the receiving end of increased police powers. While we accept that necessary steps should be taken to help prevent terrorist attacks, we believe the police already have more than sufficient powers at their disposal and that the government has failed to justify the need for these drastic measures," said Sir Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain.

The Muslim community, along with other civil and human rights organisations, is alarmed at the prospect of the extension in detention without charge from 14 to 90 days; and in view of the 'glorification clause' - the circumscription of dissenting opinion through the banning of non-violent groups and the implications for expressing legitimate criticism and condemnation of oppressive regimes and those who violate international legality.

**8<sup>th</sup> October 2005**

**British Muslims Send Condolences and Aid to Earthquake Victims in Kashmir, Pakistan and India**

The Muslim Council of Britain sends its condolences to all the families of the victims of this morning's tragic earthquake whose epicentre is thought to have been near the Kashmiri city of Muzaffarabad. The regions worst affected are in Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India.

"We are sure that British Muslims will be generous in helping to send aid urgently to the affected regions, especially in this holy month of Ramadan. We know that several Muslim relief organisations which are affiliated to the MCB, including Muslim Aid, Islamic Relief, Muslim Hands, and others have already pledged initial donations amounting to several hundred thousand pounds. The MCB also urges mosques throughout the UK to help raise relief funds during congregational prayers this week", said Sir Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain.

**23 July 2005**

**MCB Expresses Deep Concern over Mistaken Killing in Stockwell**

The Muslim Council of Britain expresses its deepest condolences to the family of the innocent man who was shot dead yesterday by the police in Stockwell, South London.

"While we accept that the police are under tremendous pressure to apprehend the criminals who are attempting to cause carnage on the streets of London, it is absolutely vital that utmost care is taken to ensure that innocent people are not killed due to overzealousness," said Sir Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain.

The MCB has received numerous calls from distressed British Muslims since the killing in Stockwell. We have also received several reports of young Muslim men who were going about their everyday business being forced to the ground by plain clothes officers and who are now very fearful.

"We are all going through a difficult period. Following yesterday's release of the CCTV images, all of us – Muslim and non-Muslim - must be united in helping the police identify and bring to justice those who are plotting the mass murder of innocent Britons. At the same time, the police also have a duty of care to ensure that they do everything humanly possible to protect innocent members of the public and prevent needless deaths," added Sir Iqbal.

The MCB understands that this killing is now being investigated by the Independent Police Complaints Commission and urges everyone to await its findings.