

# THE MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN



Rt Hon. Brandon Lewis MP  
Chairman, Conservative Party  
House of Commons,  
London, SW1A 0AA

26 June 2018

Dear Mr Lewis,

Three weeks ago we wrote to you requesting an inquiry into Islamophobia within the Conservative Party. Sadly, we have neither received an acknowledgement nor a reply.

This lack of response is deeply disappointing given that we write as the largest umbrella body of Muslim organisations in the UK with over 1000 mosques and Muslim institutions either affiliates or members of affiliates.

Moreover it has become clear since we wrote that we are not only ones voicing such concerns. Our view is also shared by many others, including but not exclusively:

- Councils of mosques across the country representing over 500 mosques and Muslim institutions<sup>i</sup>
- The largest Muslim student union, FOSIS, representing 120 Islamic societies, as well as the Union of Jewish Students (UJS)
- Two out of the four Muslim Conservative peers Baroness Warsi and Lord Sheikh
- The Muslim Women's Network and Jewish organisations such as the Jewish Council for Racial Equality
- The affiliated Muslim group, the Conservative Muslim Forum
- Editorials in The Times<sup>ii</sup> and The Observer<sup>iii</sup>
- Conservative Home

Furthermore, while we believe that the evidence provided in our initial letter is more than sufficient to warrant an inquiry, it appears that the extent of Islamophobia in the Conservative is wider and deeper than originally set out, as the following evidence has now come to light:

- Claims that Cabinet Minister Michael Gove had “extreme” views about Muslims<sup>iv</sup>
- Revelations that Party Vice Chair Ben Bradley attempted to cover up his dismissal of Islamophobia by a local Councillor<sup>v</sup>
- Your “extraordinarily dismissive response” attacking Muslim MP Afzal Khan who asked legitimate questions about Mr Bradley (as stated by BuzzFeed’s Head of News)<sup>vi</sup>
- Baroness Warsi was labelled a “P\*\*\*\*” in Conservative Party meetings<sup>vii</sup>
- Conservative Party Candidate Shazia Awan explaining her choice to leave the Party because it has “a notion that Islam is not compatible with British values” explaining a worrying incident a party event<sup>viii</sup>
- Former Tory candidate Kishan Devani quit the party due to “uncomfortable lurch to the right which caused Islamophobia scandal”<sup>ix</sup>
- A number of Conservative Councillors or representatives of the Conservative Party have been suspended or are being investigated including (noting there may be others not in the public domain):

- Stephen Ardley (former Mayor of Lowestoft) allegedly said it was “unbelievable” that a Muslim had been elected and went on to describe those who voted for him as “blind”<sup>x</sup>
- Ian Hibberd (Southampton) who asked a fellow councillor “Why are you dressed like a P\*\*\*\*”<sup>xi</sup>
- Linda Freedman (Barnet) who expressed support for the detention of Muslims<sup>xii</sup>
- Mick Murphy who shared anti-Muslim posts from Pegida and compared women wearing the niqab with dustbin bags<sup>xiii</sup>
- A number of Tory members telling about their experiences of Islamophobia in the Party e.g.
  - The local party leader had said that one member looked “too Muslim” and “wouldn’t be accepted”
  - Insinuations some members were not British
  - A reference to good Muslims only being of one sect<sup>xiv</sup>;
  - Five BME Tory members being seated on a single table at the back of a room at a Conservative association dinner
  - One Muslim member telling how a councillor had told him he was “not welcome” in the party
  - The same member later being told during a candidate’s interview that “naturally in your core belief women are not allowed to work”<sup>xv</sup>
- A party member in the West Midlands says he made a complaint to the Conservatives’ regional headquarters, after an older councillor made a racist remark during a meeting. “It was totally brushed under the carpet; they didn’t want to know,” he says. “They just said ‘don’t worry about it, he’s an old man’.”<sup>xvi</sup>
- The second largest pro-Conservative Facebook (closed) group, the Conservative Debating Forum, was full of regular Islamophobic abuse (a 42-page dossier has been collected)<sup>xvii</sup>. Comments include demands to “expel the London mayor” and “send back” immigrants, while another post states that “Islam should be banned”. 10 Conservative MPs were found to be members as well as “dozens of Tory councillors” and other senior Conservatives. Some have since distanced themselves from the group.

Since we last wrote to you, other individuals have shared with us their stories of experiencing Islamophobia. They are worried about taking their concerns to your Party because it would be “political suicide”<sup>xviii</sup> or might endanger their relationship with their local MP. This is a sad state of affairs for our democracy and we hope they can be taken up in an independent inquiry.

We have read your article on the Conservative Home website with interest. Specifically we welcome your pledge for a zero-tolerance approach and the adoption of our third recommendation of education and training on discrimination. And while you have not yet responded to our letter, we welcome at least your willingness to talk about Islamophobia rather than resort to shooting the messenger, as was done soon after we raised the matter.

Furthermore, we are heartened by the Prime Minister’s public comments. She demonstrated positivity and leadership in her comments at the Eid celebration in Downing Street and in her Eid message. She visited the Al-Manaar mosque in Kensington to commemorate the year after the Grenfell tragedy. Her spokesperson reiterated that she “considers Islamophobia unacceptable in all its forms” in response to a question on Islamophobia. At Prime Minister’s Questions, the Prime Minister also recalled the attack in Finsbury Park and paid tribute to Imam Mohammed Mahmoud. And she heard the victims of the attack in Finsbury Park at Downing Street.

These are positive steps by yourself and the Prime Minister, which we welcome, but they do not deal with the issue at hand.

Our concerns require leadership from the Conservative Party. It is unclear how these statements and warm words align with the apparent tolerance for Islamophobia detailed here. We cannot have an approach where you are “hoping that the issue would ‘magically go away’ so that it could avoid a bruising inquiry into anti-Muslim prejudice”<sup>xix</sup>.

Finally, please note that we chose to write to you after the local elections. As an independent, non-partisan organisation we have no interest in scoring political points out of this. As we stated previously, our first priority is to ensure a robust political culture that does not scapegoat minorities and nobody turns a blind eye to legitimate concerns about bigotry.

We therefore look forward to your response to our initial letter, as well as the additional evidence outlined here. A wide-ranging inquiry into Islamophobia within the Party is the absolute minimum - nothing less will do.

Yours,



Harun Khan,  
Secretary General

<sup>1</sup> Federation of Muslim Organisations (Leicester), Bradford Council of Mosques, Manchester Council of Mosques, Muslim Council of Scotland, Muslim Council of Wales, Bolton Council of Mosques, Rochdale Council of Mosques, Federation of Redbridge Muslim Organisations, Waltham Forest Council of Mosques, Council of European Jamaats, Joint Mosque Council of Peterborough, Luton Council of Mosques, Luton Sunni Council of Mosques, Belfast Islamic Centre. More than 350 mosques urge Conservatives to launch internal inquiry into Islamophobia claims, 4 June 2018, Independent (note new councils have joined since this article)

<sup>2</sup> Isolating Islamophobia. The Conservative Party needs to tackle a perception that it is hostile to Muslims, 1 June 2018, The Times

<sup>3</sup> The Observer view on Islamophobia in the Conservative party. The Tories must launch an independent inquiry into anti-Muslim prejudice in the party, 3 June 2018, The Observer

<sup>4</sup> The Islamophobia scandal in the Conservative party goes 'right up to the top', 11 June 2018, Business Insider

<sup>5</sup> A Tory Party Vice-Chair Defended A Councillor's Anti-Muslim Facebook Posts, 16 June 2018, BuzzFeed News

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Miller, 16 June 2018, Twitter

<sup>7</sup> Good Morning Britain via Twitter, 31 May 2018

<sup>8</sup> As a Muslim member of the Tory party, I saw Islamophobia firsthand, 1 June 2018, New Statesman

<sup>9</sup> Former Tory candidate quit party due to 'uncomfortable lurch to the right which caused Islamophobia scandal', 10 June 2018, Independent

<sup>10</sup> Tory councillor suspended after 'posting Islamophobic comments about Sadiq Khan on Facebook', 10 June 2018, Independent

<sup>11</sup> Two Conservative councillors suspended following allegations of Islamophobic comments on social media, 4 June 2018, Independent

<sup>12</sup> Jewish Tory councillor suspended for backing 'detention of Muslims', 4 June 2018, Jewish News

<sup>13</sup> BBC Nottingham via Twitter, 8 June 2018, BBC

<sup>14</sup> 'He inferred I wasn't British': Tory members tell of Islamophobia, 31 May 2018, Guardian

<sup>15</sup> Conservatives hoping Islamophobia issue 'will magically go away', warns senior party activist, 5 June 2018, Independent

<sup>16</sup> 'He inferred I wasn't British': Tory members tell of Islamophobia, 31 May 2018, Guardian

<sup>17</sup> Pro-Tory Facebook group filled with Islamophobic abuse, 10 June 2018, Guardian

<sup>18</sup> 'He inferred I wasn't British': Tory members tell of Islamophobia, 31 May 2018, Guardian

<sup>19</sup> Tory Muslim chief accuses party of failing to tackle Islamophobia, The Times, 6 June 2018

## Selected list of media coverage

### Press

**The Mirror**, *Mikey Smith*, Tory councillor suspended over tweets apparently backing imprisonment of Muslims, (4/06/2018)

**The Independent**, *Shehab Khan*, Two Conservative councillors suspended following allegations of Islamophobic comments on social media, (4/06/2018)

**The Independent**, *Shehab Khan*, Conservatives hoping Islamophobia issue 'will magically go away', warns senior party activist, (06/06/2018)

**The Times**, *Ducan Geddes*, Tory Muslim chief accuses party of failing to tackle Islamophobia, (06/06/2018)

**The Independent**, *Shehab Khan*, Two Jewish groups back calls for inquiry into Tory Islamophobia allegations, (06/06/2018)

**Middle East Eye**, *Peter Osborne*, Tories' Islamophobia is pushing Muslim voters into Corbyn's arms, (07/06/2018)

**Anadolu Agency**, *Muhammad Musa*, Union in UK backs call for probe into Tory Islamophobia, (08/06/2018)

**The Observer**, *Michael Savage*, Pro-Tory Facebook group filled with Islamophobic abuse, (09/06/2018)

**The Independent**, *Shehab Khan*, Former Tory candidate quit party due to 'uncomfortable lurch to the right which caused Islamophobia scandal' (10/06/2018)

**Evolve Politics**, *Tom D. Rogers*, 10 Tory MPs and 25 Tory Councillors exposed as members of racist Islamophobic anti-Muslim Facebook group, (10/06/2018)

**The Mirror**, *Dan Bloom* Conservative Party deliberately uses 'dangerous' hatred of Muslims to win elections says top Tory Baroness Warsi, (11/06/2018)

**iNews**, *Richard Vaughan*, Baroness Warsi: Conservative Party 'poisoned by Islamophobia at every level' (11/06/2018)

**The Independent**, *Benjamin Ketish*, Islamophobia 'very widespread' in Conservative Party, says Baroness Warsi (11/06/2018)

### Broadcast

#### BBC

Radio 4 Today (May 31, 06:38 AM): Norman Smith (Assistant Political Editor)

BBC 2 Victoria Derbyshire (May 31, 09:51 AM): Miqdaad Versi (Assistant Secretary General, MCB)

BBC News at One (May 31, 13:22 PM) Norman Smith (Assistant Political Editor), Sayeeda Warsi (Conservative Party)

BBC Breakfast (May 31, 08:10 AM) Eleanor Garnier (Political Correspondent)

BBC News Afternoon Live (May 31, 14:40 PM) Johnathan Blake (Political Correspondent)

Radio 5 Live Drive (May 31, 17:32 PM) Miqdaad Versi (Assistant Secretary General, MCB)

BBC Asian Network, Reports (May 31, 17:41 PM), Miqdaad Versi (Assistant Secretary General, MCB)

BBC Breakfast, (June 06) Ben Wright

BBC Radio 4 News Briefing, (June 06) Neil Sleet

BBC Asian Network, Asian Network Report, (June 06) Haroon Rashid

BBC Radio Nottingham, (June 08) Andy Whittaker and Sarah Julian,

BBC Sunday Politics Leeds, (June 10) Kevin Larkin  
BBC Radio 4 Sunday,(June 10) Edward Stourtan  
BBC Radio London, (June 10) Inspirit with Jumoke Fashola

### **Sky News**

Sunrise (May 31, 06:11AM), Beth Rigby (Senior Political Correspondent)

All Out Politics (May 31, 10:12 AM) Adam Boulton interviewing Miqdaad Versi (Assistant Secretary General, MCB)

Live Desk with Colin Brazier (May 31, 11:41 AM) Colin Brazier interviewing Sayeeda Warsi (Conservative Party) \_

### **ITV**

Good Morning Britain (May 31, 06:20 AM) Paper Review with Ayesha Hazarika (Labour Party) & Tom Newton Dunn (The Sun, Political Correspondent)

Good Morning Britain (May 31, 07:25 AM) Interview with Sayeeda Warsi (Conservative Party)

Good Morning Britain (May 31, 08:06 AM) Johnathan Swain (Correspondent)

ITV Lunchtime News (May 31, 13:41 PM) Angus Walker (Correspondent), Sayeeda Warsi (Conservative Party)

### **LBC**

Iain Dale (May 31, 16:05 PM) interview with Sayeeda Warsi (Conservative Party)

Ian Collins (May 31, 10:21 PM) Phone in