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Friday 27th July 2012

Dear Ms Cerfontyne,

We are writing in respect of the report published in The Observer newspaper (Sunday 15th July) alleging that officers investigating the Nottingham University PhD student, Rizwaan Sabir, fabricated a statement by another interviewee, Dr Rob Thornton, to give false justification and premise to the reasons for Sabir's arrest and detention under Operation Minerva.

The newspaper, in an interview with Dr Thornton, cites him as saying, "The police were totally unprofessional. After their mistakes they tried to cover them up. I've seen some altered police notes, I've seen evidence made up. The whole thing seems to be a complete tissue of lies, starting from the cover up of their mistakes in the first place."

The newspaper also reports the conclusions of the inquiry undertaken by the professional standards committee of West Midlands Police and their decision not to investigate officers for misconduct despite acknowledging that those involved in Operation Minerva "made up what he [Thornton] said about the al-Qaida manual".

We understand the matter has been referred to the IPCC for appeal and we are writing to express deep disquiet at the apprehension of a Muslim student on false grounds and the allegations of a subsequent cover up by police officers to preclude disciplinary action for misconduct. The decision by the standards committee of West Midlands police force is regrettable and we hope the IPCC will give full consideration to the facts in this case and take appropriate action against those involved.

Professional Standards of Behaviour that police officers are required to observe include the requisites to "not abuse their powers and authority and to "act in a manner that does not discredit or undermine public confidence in the police service".

With the arrest, detention, release without charge and allegation of fabricating evidence in Sabir's case, it is difficult to see how the police officers responsible could not be pulled up on charges of abusing their powers and authority and of bringing the service into disrepute.

There have been several cases in recent years that have demonstrated a lack of regard for the effect of poor policing on Muslim communities in Birmingham. Noteworthy among cases are those of counter-terrorism officers from West Midlands CTU visiting nursery schools in Birmingham to detect signs of radicalisation among children as young as four, and the infamous spy cameras (Operation Champion) that were installed and later removed by Birmingham City Council for their infringing the right to privacy of Muslim residents in Sparkbrook and Washwood Heath.

The construction of British Muslims as a 'suspect community' has been well documented in academic research in recent years with police powers of stop and search and racial profiling at ports and airports causing considerable unease and anger for their disproportionate use against ethnic minorities. The Equality and Human Rights Commission last year warned that stop and search was "silently eroding Muslim communities 'trust and confidence in policing.'"

Cases like Rizwaan Sabir have the potential to further erode Muslims' trust and confidence in policing and we express our hope that the IPCC in its investigation into the conduct of officers in his case will reflect on the terrible impact this episode has had on Mr Sabir, and on the wider consequences of not holding police officers accountable for the fabrication of witness evidence to justify his false arrest and detention.

Yours sincerely,

Shenaz Bunglawala