

MEND responds
to libellous and
defamatory
attacks by
Tell Mama



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This supplementary submission is presented by MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development) in response to evidence given to the committee by Mr Fiyaz Mughal on Tuesday 13 December. During the session, Mr Mughal abused parliamentary privilege to make a number of libellous allegations against MEND. We take this opportunity to set the record straight and to respond to claims made against MEND to the committee.

Mr Mughal made remarks referring to "attacks from small sections of Muslim communities" faced by his organisation, Tell MAMA, and described such "attacks" as consisting of claims of "being too Jew-friendly"; for being the friends of Zionists, because our chair is Jewish; for being in the pay of Mossad".

He said "These are some of the daily regurgitations we come across from groups who purport to be tackling Islamophobia."

He went on to argue "those groups also have some sway in this house, and it is extremely troubling, it is extremely troubling in our society to come across mindsets that live in our country, that promote this absolute nonsense that corrode communities and who give that absolute view to extremists beyond the Muslim community that all Muslims are like that."

Mr Mughal further said: "we have to tackle that group head-on as well, and make very clear that their conspiracy, their anti-Semitism, their hatred towards other communities and that their uni-polar view of life actually will be challenged."

When asked to identify by name the "groups" he was alluding to, Mr Mughal said "Well I can give you some groups. MEND for example, I can give you other groups like CAGE for example."

Mr Mughal went on to say, with direct reference to the groups he had previously named, "These groups attack us daily because of our view we work with Jewish communities. This is something that this house needs to understand and also I say to the Home Secretary and to the Home Office there is a time where we have to stand up for core values. We talk about British values, now's the time to stand up for them."

We wish to set the record straight in response to each one of these libellous allegations:

1. MEND has never made comments against Tell MAMA pertaining to the organisation or its staff as "being too Jew-friendly"; for being the friends of Zionists, because our chair is Jewish; for being in the pay of Mossad". The accusation is categorically untrue and were it not for the protection against libel afforded by parliamentary privilege, we would hasten to sue Mr Mughal for slander.
2. There has only been a single instance where the organisation's Jewish co-chair, Mr Richard Benson, has been referenced in our communications and this instance pertains to the disastrous decision by then Home Secretary Theresa May to impose an exclusion order on Palestinian political leader, Shaykh Raed Salah, on the basis, in part, of a dossier presented to the Home Office by the Community Security Trust.¹ The Home Secretary's decision was ruled by the Upper Immigration Tribunal to be "entirely unnecessary" and resulting from her acting "under a misapprehension as to the facts" concerning Shaykh

¹ Theresa May's haste to ban Raed Salah will be repented at leisure, *The Guardian*, 9 April 2012

Raed Salah.² In our communications concerning the matter, we have clearly identified media reports about the Tribunal hearing and the dossier presented by the CST to the Home Office which came to light during these proceedings.³ These facts do not correspond to or support in any way accusations regarding criticisms levelled at others for "being too Jew-friendly"; for being the friends of Zionists, because our chair is Jewish; for being in the pay of Mossad".

3. At no time have MEND engaged in "daily regurgitations" of the sort alluded to in Mr Mughal's comments. Our communications are openly and freely accessible on our website. Nowhere on our public platforms, whether in the form of published material or community events, have comments been made referring to Tell MAMA as "being too Jew-friendly"; for being the friends of Zionists, because our chair is Jewish; for being in the pay of Mossad" been uttered.
4. Mr Mughal insinuates such attacks emanate from "groups" which "purport to be tackling Islamophobia." He later names MEND as one such "group". The assertion makes two false claims; firstly that MEND has engaged in such "attacks" against Tell MAMA, and secondly that MEND merely "purports" to tackle Islamophobia. Both these assertions are demonstrably untrue.
5. Since inception, we have been committed to tackling Islamophobia. In 2010, we supported the creation of the first ever All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia bringing together more than 20 Members from both Houses of Parliament to establish the group and set a framework for objectives to address the growing problem of rising anti-Muslim prejudice and hate crime.⁴
6. Since our founding, we have focused on media portrayals of Islam and Muslims and sought to challenge inaccuracy, distortion, and discrimination against Muslims in the British media. We successfully challenged The Sun and The Times newspapers for their inaccurate portrayal of survey data falsely claiming "1 in 5" British Muslims sympathise with "jihadists".⁵ This is but one among a number of corrections we have successfully secured through the media regulators, Press Complaints Commission and Independent Press Standards Organisation. Our media toolkit and our media literacy masterclasses have transformed the way British Muslims engage with the media and has contributed to the larger volume of complaints that now register with the media regulators concerning content that is believed to breach the different regulatory codes.⁶ We are immensely proud of our efforts to educate and empower Muslim communities to play a more active role in challenging biased media output on Islam and Muslims.
7. In 2012, with the newly created position of Police and Crime Commissioner, MEND published a manifesto proposing a set of policy pledges, primary among them being the recording of Islamophobia as a separate category of crime in order to accurately derive statistics on anti-Muslim hate crime from police recorded crime data.⁷ Between 2012 and 2015, we worked tirelessly with PCCs across England and Wales to secure the pledge on recording Islamophobia. We successfully lobbied 10 out of the 42 forces in England and Wales to adopt the measure and by October 2015, Prime Minister David Cameron

² Raed Salah Mahajna -v- The Secretary of State for the Home Department, Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) Appeal Number: IA/21631/2011, 10 April 2012

³ Tribunal rules Raed Salah detention "entirely unnecessary", *MEND website*, 10 April 2012; available at: Tribunal rules Raed Salah detention "entirely unnecessary"

⁴ All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia, MEND website, 24 November 2010; available at: <http://mend.org.uk/all-party-parliamentary-group-on-islamophobia/>

⁵ The Sun correction, MEND website, 26 March 2016; available at: <http://mend.org.uk/the-sun-correction/>

⁶ IPSO upholds complaint that Sun article was significantly misleading, Press release, Independent Press Standards Organisation, 26 March 2016

⁷ MEND Police and Crime Commissioner election manifesto, 2012

announced the measure was to be adopted as national policy. We take immense pride for having set in motion a policy pledge which was later adopted nationwide and which will contribute to bringing forth much needed clarity and accuracy on the scale of Islamophobic hate crime occurring in the UK. In 2016, with the second elections for Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales, we published our second manifesto again devoting considerable attention to the problem of anti-Muslim hate crime and evaluating local crime and policing plans and hate crime strategies to this end.⁸ Our PCC manifesto 2016 continues to empower local Muslim communities to engage more effectively with their local PCC and constabulary on issues related to tackling anti-Muslim hate crime.⁹

8. For the past 5 years, MEND has made annual submissions to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights' Hate Crime Report. The information is a vital component of the Hate Crime Report and consists of data presented by non-governmental organisations working with a range of victim groups to tackle hate crimes, and supplements data provided to the OSCE by Member State countries. MEND's submissions have been lauded by the OSCE for their rigour, detail and scope and we are pleased, through our annual submission, to support pan-European initiatives to tackle Islamophobia.¹⁰
9. MEND have produced and made available at no cost an Islamophobia awareness raising exhibition to dispel myths about British Muslims, celebrate their contributions to the UK, and highlight the media's role in perpetuating anti-Muslim prejudice. The exhibition has toured the country for the past four years with a revamped edition released in November 2016. The exhibition has been viewed by thousands of visitors including 2000 visitors at Manchester Museum and 1500 visitors at Liverpool Museum. In the last four years, the exhibition has been displayed in council buildings, local libraries, British Transport Police and London Transport venues, schools, universities, community centres and in Parliament.
10. MEND is a founding member of the Islamophobia Awareness Month (IAM) initiative. IAM is held in November of each year and brings together thousands of people throughout the country through a myriad of initiatives all dedicated to raising awareness about Islamophobia and its impact on British Muslims.
11. MEND have regularly hosted fringe events at annual party conferences highlighting Islamophobia, among other policy issues affecting Muslim communities. In 2016, our fringe events presented the results from our first ever national survey of British Muslims and experiences of workplace discrimination and Islamophobia.¹¹
12. The above examples are only some of the ways in which MEND is addressing the growing problem of anti-Muslim prejudice and hate crime. The suggestion MEND is a "group" which "purports to tackle Islamophobia" is patently slanderous and carries the danger not just of undermining our work with grassroots communities but also of diminishing the voluntary efforts of the thousands of British citizens, Muslim and non-Muslim, who volunteer in our local working groups or support our work in local communities.
13. Oral evidence presented to the committee by Mr Mughal contained openly libellous accusations. Given that MEND was later named as one of the "groups" in question in relation to the preceding section, the following claims are to be read as accusations against

⁸ MEND Police and Crime Commissioner election manifesto 2016

⁹ See PCC Hustings: Who Will South Wales Muslims Be Voting for on 5th May Election?, *Huffington Post*, 3 May 2016; Police and Crime Commissioner and Katesgrove local election hustings planned, *Get Reading*, 23 April 2016; 1000 extra Muslims come out to vote thanks to mosques and MEND, *Telegraph and Argus*, 6 May 2016

¹⁰ MEND submission to the OSCE Hate Crime Report 2015, available for download at:

¹¹ British Muslims 'should be allowed to bypass police' when reporting hate crime, Andy Burnham says, *The Independent*, 26 September 2016

MEND: "their conspiracy, their anti-Semitism, their hatred towards other communities and that their uni-polar view of life".

"Conspiracy"

14. MEND have never supported "conspiracy" theories nor shown any sympathy for such theories. It is not the first time such an allegation has been made about MEND to the committee and we take this opportunity to set the record straight on both counts of this repeat slander. In written evidence submitted by the Community Security Trust to the Committee's inquiry into 'Countering Extremism', a paragraph referred to Tell MAMA and to MEND alleging the following:

"MEND endorses the conspiracy theory that "Zionists" are partly responsible for encouraging anti-Muslim hatred."¹²

We can only assume the CST's claim to loosely and erroneously refer to a tour we organised titled "The Five Pillars of Islamophobia". The tour featured academic research into the "pillars of Islamophobia" which was first presented at a conference hosted by the University of Bath in June 2015.¹³

The research clearly identifies "sections of the Zionist lobby" as responsible for supporting, and in some cases driving, Islamophobia in the UK, through overlapping networks and alliances.

Research by Professor David Miller, Dr Narzanin Massoumi, Dr Tom Mills and Hilary Aked, a doctoral student at the University of Bath, outlines these "five pillars". The authors argue: "We will not turn back the tide of Islamophobia only by confronting the threat of UKIP in politics, or the EDL and other parts of the transnational 'counter-jihad movement' on the streets. We also need to focus our attention on elements of the (also transnational) neo-conservative and Zionist movements which provide information, 'research' and advocacy which can drag the state and politics to the right and sharpen Islamophobic policies..."¹⁴

In other research by Professor David Miller, Dr Tom Mills and Dr Tom Griffin, the work of three neo-conservative think tanks, the now-defunct Centre for Social Cohesion, Policy Exchange¹⁵ and the Henry Jackson Society (with Hilary Aked and Sarah Marusek)¹⁶, are examined. While both publications rigorously investigate reports published by these think tanks on topics related to British Muslims and their ideological underpinnings in cold war 'subversion' strategies, with the intended impact on Muslim communities being the cultivation of and support for a docile and apolitical British Muslim identity, the reports also illustrate the financial donors to the various groups and the affiliation of certain donors with Islamophobic enterprises or anti-Muslim views.

The empirical research supporting the identification of "sections of the Zionist lobby" as contributing to Islamophobic prejudice and policies is irrefutable and it is a slur against the

¹² Written evidence from the Community Security Trust to the Home Affairs select committee inquiry on Countering Extremism, CEX0002, published on 13 October 2015. Available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/countering-extremism/written/22384.html>

¹³ David Miller, Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills and Hilary Aked, 'The five pillars of Islamophobia'. *Open Democracy*, 8 June 2015

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ Mills, T., Griffin, T. and Miller, D. (2011) *The Cold War on British Muslims: An examination of Policy Exchange and the Centre for Social Cohesion*. Public Interest Investigations.

¹⁶ Griffin, T., Aked, H., Miller, D. and Marusek, S. (2015). *The Henry Jackson Society and the Degeneration of British Neoconservatism: Liberal interventionism, Islamophobia and the 'War on Terror'*. Public Interest Investigations.

rigour of research employed by these academics to glibly render this work a "conspiracy theory".

We would also highlight two further points of interest in relation to these observations: (a) The CST in the paragraph maligning MEND as "endors[ing] the conspiracy theory that "Zionists" are partly responsible for encouraging anti-Muslim hatred" champions its work with Tell MAMA on tackling Islamophobia. We find it puzzling that the CST while speaking commendably of its particular efforts to support those engaged in tackling Islamophobia should do so in such a way as to dismiss empirical evidence identifying "sections of the Zionist lobby" as contributing to the perpetuation of anti-Muslim stereotypes and prejudices. (b) Tell MAMA's senior researcher, who was present at the evidence session on 13 December, presented a paper at the University of Bath conference in June 2015 where research on the "Five Pillars of Islamophobia" was first presented. We see little difference in our organising an educational tour to disseminate research findings on the "Five Pillars of Islamophobia" and the participation of an employee from Tell MAMA at a conference organised by the research team that produced the work. We would argue the CST and Tell MAMA's accusation of "conspiracy" are entirely without merit and maliciously cast to impugn our reputation.

"Anti-Semitism"

15. MEND has at no time, willingly or unwittingly, been guilty of "anti-Semitism". It is inconceivable that we, as an organisation committed to fostering partnerships and collaborations with other groups in society to tackle all forms of hatred, would indulge in pernicious victimisation of Jewish people. The accusation is an abominable slur and were it not for the power of absolute privilege which constrains our ability to meet this outrageous claim with firm legal action, we would engage it forthwith. It is a travesty that the Committee must address in order to ensure its evidence hearings are not brought into disrepute nor privilege abused with profligate falsehoods and fabrications uttered by individuals invited to present authoritative, well researched evidence.

"Hatred towards other communities"

16. We find the allegation of harbouring "hatred towards other communities" inexplicable and entirely without foundation. Our grassroots empowerment work with local communities consists of bridge-building exercises bringing communities together to tackle a common threat: hate crime and anti-minority sentiments. It is our firm belief and a guiding principle of our work that Islamophobia is not a 'Muslim problem' but a problem for the whole of society. Tackling Islamophobia can only be done effectively when all communities rise up and reject those who unfairly demonise minority groups and project onto them society's ills. In so doing, we recognise and embrace the fundamental need to work with others to eradicate prejudices which blight Muslims and many other communities. It is an endeavour we are proud to propagate and instil in our working ethos. It has brought us into partnerships between faith and non-faith based organisations, interfaith collaborations, and a panoply of anti-racism organisations. The suggestion that any part of our work or activities is illustrative of "hatred towards other communities" is a manifest lie.

"Uni-polar view of life"

17. We cannot fully comprehend the basis of this assertion and are not entirely sure what is meant by a "uni-polar view of life". We would, however, venture the possibility that the intended meaning is sympathetic to the term 'Islamists' and 'Islamism'.

The term 'Islamist' is often deployed in a derogatory manner to label British Muslim activists and organisations with a twofold purpose (a) to imply a

transnational dimension to their political activism and to implicate groups abroad in what are typically domestic political engagement strategies (b) to portray British Muslim political activism as a malign development in British politics rather than as the positive integration of Muslim communities through political participation and public debate. These inferences are usually supported by accusations of "entryism" against British Muslims when they participate in mainstream politics.

While the exact meaning of the phrase used here is not clear to us, we would vehemently dispute the suggestion our work raises obstacles to Muslim integration in British society. To the contrary, our initiatives and programmes are designed to promote full and active citizenship by British Muslims.

Our election manifestos, policy briefing papers, contributions to public consultations and community engagement and development activities, all are driven by our dedicated pursuit of the integration of British Muslim communities in all areas of life; social, political and economic.

18. Mr Mughal made claims MEND was a group which attacked him daily for his work with Jewish communities. We would openly challenge Mr Mughal to present the committee with such evidence as he possesses to corroborate his claims. We are confident there is no such evidence available because we have never attacked an organisation for working with Jewish communities nor for any similar purpose. We have proudly met with a representative from the Board of Deputies of British Jews to discuss projects bringing Muslim and Jewish people together in local communities; our fringe event at Conservative party conference in 2014 included on our panel of speakers Professor Francis Davis, now a trustee of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, and we have engaged in dialogue with a number of prominent Jewish activists with the purpose of facilitating Muslim-Jewish dialogue and joint social action projects on Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism. Our record is a factual testimony of our approach to working with Jewish communities and it wholly undermines these false allegations that we have attacked others on a "daily" basis for their work with Jewish communities.

19. Mr Mughal went on to lament the approach of the Home Office claiming it was pusillanimous for failing to support his "projects" to "untangle the narrative of such groups". He also said: "I say to the Home Secretary and to the Home Office there is a time where we have to stand up for core values. We talk about British values, now's the time to stand up for them."

The underlying premise of these words are that the Home Office needs to support organisations that "untangle the narrative" of MEND and be more assertive in support of "British values" purportedly because MEND undermines them.

20. As to the first allusion, we express surprise and consternation at the suggestion the Home Office needs to be more heavy-handed in its approach to British Muslim organisations. The fact of the matter is there is no "narrative" to "untangle" but there is much work to be done to cultivate a more open and transparent dialogue between Government and British Muslim organisations.

21. In its monitoring report on the UK, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance called on the British Government to establish "a real dialogue with Muslims in order to combat Islamophobia and consult them on all policies which could affect Muslims."¹⁷

¹⁷ ECRI report on the United Kingdom (fifth monitoring cycle). Council of Europe, 4 October 2016. p 10

22. Moreover, in a radio interview, the Independent Reviewer on Terrorism Legislation, David Anderson QC, criticised the Government's failure to engage with the Muslim Council of Britain calling its exclusion of the national umbrella organisation from forums for dialogue between the Government and Muslim communities "extraordinary".¹⁸
23. The Conservative peer, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, has spoken eloquently of the "trust deficit" between Government and British Muslim communities fuelled, in part, by the near exclusion of mainstream British Muslim organisations from Government-supported dialogue platforms.¹⁹
24. We find it disturbing that a time when the Council of Europe's human rights monitoring agency and the Government's Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation are calling on the Government to open channels of communication with British Muslim organisations, Mr Mughal is arguing in favour of Home Office support to further exclude and marginalise British Muslims.
25. As to the second point, the suggestion that the Home Office needs to do more to speak up for core British values, we would like to highlight an inconsistency in evidence presented to the Committee.

In written evidence submitted to the Committee during its inquiry into 'Countering Extremism', Mr Mughal's organisation, Faith Matters, stated the following:

"The Home Secretary...has a disproportionate power to analyse and define extremism around the notion of 'British values'. While liberal democracy, tolerance, and free speech are certainly values we must share in British society, this should (in our opinion) be a product of a healthy public sphere rather than values imposed by a government policy."²⁰

The written evidence diverges from the more recent evidence session where in oral testimony Mr Mughal appeared to make an argument contradicting his earlier position, moving away from values emerging from a "healthy public sphere" and instead moving towards "values imposed by a government policy".

The discrepancy is, in our view, wholly consistent with the confused and, at times openly slanderous, evidence presented to the Committee on 13 December.

26. Select committees play a fundamental role in our democratic process and their work scrutinising Government policy is a vital mechanism to maintain checks and balances in a democracy and hold power to account. An invitation to present oral evidence to a select committee is an honour and a privilege. It is deeply lamentable that Mr Mughal abused the Committee's evidence hearing session and parliamentary privilege to make multiple slanderous allegations against British Muslim organisations under the pretext of tackling "anti-Muslim hatred" in society. We would urge the Committee to reconsider the evidence given by Mr Mughal and take the necessary steps to remedy the libellous claims we have highlighted here.

¹⁸ Prevent anti-extremism strategy 'fuelling distrust among Muslim communities', *Daily Mail*, 6 October 2016

¹⁹ Sayeeda Warsi, 'Muslims will speak up for British values only when they know they will be heard'. *The Observer*, 24 January 2015

²⁰ Written evidence from Faith Matters to the Home Affairs select committee inquiry on Countering Extremism, CEX0055, published on 08 March 2016. Available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/countering-extremism/written/30254.html>