Executive Summary

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More than words

Approaching a definition of Islamophobia

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Defining Islamophobia

Defining the phenomenon of Islamophobia is important as it will provide much-needed clarity in legislation and policies that are intended to protect vulnerable minorities. However, it is also an act of recognition. For British Muslims, it demonstrates that the Government recognises the hardships they face and has given them a name. It officially validates their experiences and cements these experiences as undeniable facts in need of address. Furthermore, it reassures Muslim communities that these hardships can and will be tackled in a critical and dedicated manner.

MEND's Definition of Islamophobia

Short Definition:

Islamophobia is a prejudice, aversion, hostility, or hatred towards Muslims and encompasses any distinction, exclusion, restriction, discrimination, or preference against Muslims that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

Working Definition:

Islamophobia (in line with anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, sexism and other forms of hatred and discrimination) is a tool used to gain and maintain power. It is inextricably linked with socio-economic factors, and frequently reflects the underlying inequalities within society.

Islamophobia is a prejudice, aversion, hostility, or hatred towards Muslims and encompasses any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference against Muslims that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

As such, Islamophobia is demonstrated in, and articulated through, speech, writing, behaviours, structures, policies, legislation or activities that work to control, regulate or exclude Muslim participation within social, civic, economic and political life, or which embody hatred, vilification, stereotyping, abuse or violence directed at Muslims.

Taking into account the overall context, examples of Islamophobia in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere may include (but are in no way limited to):

- Causing, calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Muslims or those perceived to be Muslim due to their religious identity.
- Causing, calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of individuals due to their perceived or actual connection to or support of Muslims.
- Charging Muslims with conspiring to harm humanity and/or the Western way of life or blaming Muslims for the economic and social ills of society.
- Making mendacious, dehumanising, vilifying, demonising, or stereotypical allegations about Muslims.
- Objectifying and generalising Muslims as different, exotic or underdeveloped, or implying that they are outside of, distinct from, or incompatible with British society and identity.
- Espousing the belief that Muslims are inferior to other social or religious groups.
- Accusing Muslims as a collective of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Muslim person, group or nation, or even for acts committed by non-Muslims.
- Applying double standards by requiring of Muslims a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other social, religious or ethnic group.
- Applying ethnocentric approaches to the treatment of Muslims (judging another culture solely by the values and standards of one's own culture). For example, evaluating Muslim women's choice of dress exclusively through the speaker's expectations and without reference to the personal cultural norms and values of the women in question.

• Acts of aggression within which the targets, whether they are people or property – such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries – are selected because they are, or are perceived to be, Muslim(s) or linked to Muslims.

While criticism of Islam within legitimate realms of debate and free speech is not in itself Islamophobic, it may become Islamophobic if the arguments presented are used to justify or encourage vilification, stereotyping, dehumanisation, demonisation or exclusion of Muslims. For example, by using criticism of religion to argue that Muslims are collectively evil or violent.

Why "Islamophobia"

Despite longstanding semantical debates and proposals of alternative terms, such as "anti-Muslim hatred", MEND argues unequivocally that the term "Islamophobia" is the most appropriate terminology to use in this debate for a variety of reasons.

- It is an established terminology in academic, activist, advocacy, and victim vocabularies.
- It is a terminology with an existing broad conceptual understanding. Therefore, it is a holistic descriptor that explicitly identifies the phenomenon in all its social, economic and political forms.
- Contrary to some claims, it has not historically, nor should it presently, be seen as attempt to stifle free speech and, in particular, an effort to curtail all questioning or criticism of religion.

Understanding MEND's Definition of Islamophobia

Deconstructing MEND's Definition

MEND's working definition of Islamophobia is 480 words long, while even our short definition consists of 58 words. This may seem rather long for a definition, however, in order to encompass the full breadth of Islamophobia and its consequences, clarity is required; and such clarity requires a lengthy explanation. While we have attempted to achieve this clarity in our definition, we would like to take this opportunity to introduce the reasonings and multiple layers of understanding contained within this definition.

Islamophobia (in line with anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, sexism and other forms of hatred and discrimination) is a tool used to gain and maintain power. It is inextricably linked with socio-economic factors, and frequently reflects the underlying inequalities within society.

Hatred and discrimination are used as tools to oppress, restrict, control, regulate, exclude and deprive those against whom they are directed. They are frequently used as mechanisms to distract society from wider so-cio-economic issues.

Often, hatred and discrimination may also be a reaction to real or imagined threats to economic, political, social and ideological interests and may stem from a fear of losing one's longstanding privilege or benefits. In response to these threats, the perceived culprit is assigned responsibility, which frequently escalates to the scapegoating of whole communities.

Part Two of this report explores how and why Islamophobia exists and is manifested. As such, we will analyse themes such as:

- Islamophobia and its relationship to xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism.
- Perceptions of collective threat and processes of securitisation.
- The counter-jihad movement and Islamophobia as a mechanism for control.
- Moral panic, the media and broadcasting.

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As this report attests, Islamophobia encompasses far more than simply hostility and hate crime. Islamophobia infiltrates every aspect of public life and creates barriers to Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslim) in overt ways, but also in ways that are subtler, and thus much harder to detect and demonstrate. For example, hatred and physical abuse on the streets is overt and impossible to ignore. However, the CV that is passed over because it boasts a Muslim sounding name; or the British-Pakistani man who is repeatedly assumed a threat at the airport on the basis of his beard; or the child who feels unable to ask questions in class because she is worried she may be swept up into the apparatus of PREVENT, these are examples that may be harder to detect, but which have dire repercussions on British Muslims' daily enjoyment of freedoms.

Part Three of this report thus explores the consequences of Islamophobia on British Muslims. Within this section, we will attempt to highlight the impacts of Islamophobia in terms of:

- Racial and religious hate crime.
- Youth and education.
- Economic exclusion.
- Security and counter-terror.
- The criminal justice system.
- Political exclusion.
- Public exclusion.

As such, Islamophobia is demonstrated in, and articulated through, speech, writing, behaviours, structures, policies, legislation or activities that work to control, regulate or exclude Muslim participation within social, civic, economic and political life, or which embody hatred, vilification, stereotyping, abuse or violence directed at Muslims.

In other words, Islamophobia can be found in and may be upheld by a variety of mediums. For example:

- **Speech**: such as political statements or individual verbal abuse.
- Writing: such as in opinion articles and online hate speech.
- **Behaviours**: such as aggressive and unreasonable acts, or attitudes towards Muslim employees.
- **Structures**: such as the underrepresentation of Muslims in upper echelons of business, politics, and teaching.
- **Policies**: such as questioning Muslim girls who wear the hijab.
- **Legislation**: such as security legislation that excludes the need for reasonable suspicion in stop and search, and thus relies on ethnic, racial and religious profiling.

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It is important to note that criticism of religion is excluded from our definition of Islamophobia. "Islamophobia" as a term, is often wrongly accused of being an attempt to stifle legitimate arguments surrounding religion. The 1997 Runnymede report "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All"¹ highlighted the need to recognise the contrast between "open views" of legitimate criticism of Islam, and the "closed" views that constitute Islamophobia.

Furthermore, within MEND's proposed definition, there is no conflict with freedom of speech that extends any further than those that already have existing legal precedents, for example, legislation that protects racial minorities from abuse, and legislation that restricts calling for the causing of harm.

Assumptions of Islamophobia

While not every instance of Islamophobia may embody all of the underlying assumptions discussed within this report, they are common themes that drive and infiltrate Islamophobic narratives surrounding Muslims and their place in society. Such assumptions include:

• Muslims are a monolithic group with static views, beliefs and practices. Such a stance ignores the huge diversity between Muslims in terms of beliefs, practices, ideologies, ethnicities, cultures, <u>languages</u> and values.

- Muslims are not only different, but this difference also makes them inferior; uncivilised, irrational, violent and sexist. As such, they have no place in the civilised West unless they denounce their barbaric and illogical ways in order to progress to an enlightened Western way of life.
- Racial discrimination is normalised within political and public debate as something deemed necessary due to the perceived threat of Muslims to security. Moreover, prejudiced and racist comments about Muslims have increasingly become normalised. Rather than being considered bigoted and inappropriate, such views are frequently seen as justified and normal.
- Western commentators are justified in criticising Muslim individuals and countries for their beliefs, practices, policies and behaviours, however, the reverse is unjustified and baseless.

Islamophobia, Xenophobia, Racism, and Anti-Semitism

While animosity towards the religion is frequently used as a justification for Islamophobic sentiments, this hostility is also a product of animosity towards race, ethnicity and culture. In this way, Muslims collectively have become racialised through their religious identities. Therefore, rather than viewing Islamophobia in a vacuum, it is important to view it through the lens of racisms. As Runnymede's recent report attests, Islamophobia should be understood as an anti-Muslim racism.

In analysing Islamophobia, critical perspectives are enlightening. Indeed, there needs to be an understanding of the history and the social, political, and economic processes through which the behaviours, practices and identities Muslims have become regulated at a social, political, and legislative level. For example, understanding how institutional racisms within stop and search procedures or integration strategies are used to normalise racisms and regulate Muslim identities.

Xenophobia plays an integral role in the development of Islamophobia. British Muslims, even those whom have been born in the UK and whose parents were born in this country, may be perceived to be as foreign as someone born halfway around the world. The reason for this foreignness is found not only in distinctions of ethnicity, but also in a perceived conflict of views, values, norms, practices, beliefs, and behaviours that all culminate in a threat or an insult to the Western identity and way of life. Furthermore, there is an intimate link between Islamophobia and xenophobia that cannot be dislocated from the perceived decentering of Western power and erosions of Western and White privilege as an existential threat.

Islamophobia in the UK is not an ahistorical phenomenon, rather, it must be contextualised within the history of Britain's colonial past. Therefore, to fully understand Islamophobia in any meaningful way, there must be an acknowledgement of the relationship between Islamophobia, Orientalism, and empire.

Orientalism is a mechanism through which to gain cultural and civilising power over Muslim populations. Islamophobia thereby becomes the conduit through which Muslims are regulated into hegemonic Western conceptions of modernity. Muslims who resist such Western appropriation are deemed a threat to the stability of the state and are thus placed in the dichotomy between the good "moderate" Muslims (those who unquestioningly adhere to the sensibilities of Western identity constructs) and the bad "extremist" Muslims (those who threaten Western hegemonic notions of modernity through maintaining their religious-cultural identities or through questioning the status quo of this hegemony).

Islamophobia is often portrayed as completely distinct from anti-Semitism. However, this is a misunderstanding of hatred and racisms. Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia and other forms of hatred are all mechanisms of social regulation and control of minorities. Therefore, they need to be understood in the interconnectivity of their logics, manifestations, and consequences.

Driving Islamophobic Narratives: The Islamophobia Industry

The term "Islamophobia Industry" (also known as the "Counter-jihad movement") encompasses a largely interconnected and well-funded network of think tanks (for example, the Henry Jackson Society), media outlets (such as Breitbart and Rebel Media), public figures, politicians, and policy-makers that advance, disseminate and perpetuate negative discourses about Muslims and Islam for economic and political gains. Commonly guided by right-wing and neoconservative ideologies, the Islamophobia Industry employs the rhetoric of an array of "experts" in order to disseminate misinformation and fear about Muslims and Islam, primarily by perpetuating the myth of an Islamic invasion of the Western world. Through this kind of propaganda, the industry is able to influence and hijack political discourses, to influence voting patterns, and even

to set the basis for legislative debates and drafting.²

Grassroots organisations, such as the EDL or Football Lads Alliance, who are often guided by strong nationalistic sentiments, subscribe to the anti-Muslim discourse advanced by these experts and fuelled by the statements of media and political figures, thus giving this divisive rhetoric a voice among broader society.

Moral Panic, Media, and Broadcasting

Considering the overly negative representation of minorities and British Muslims within the British press, the media's monopoly on public understanding has detrimental impacts which are acutely felt by minority social, ethnic and religious communities, and Muslims in particular. This leads to potentially dangerous repercussions in terms of hate crime, discrimination, and marginalisation.

Furthermore, the level of bias, misinformation and distortion within reporting on British Muslims has fostered a sense of distrust in the media institutions amongst parts of the Muslim community, and for many individuals, has led to a disengagement from traditional media. Meanwhile, this Muslim disengagement is often accompanied by a sense of frustration and insecurity with regards to their perceived place and value in society.

It is, therefore, essential that effective regulation is examined and implemented to hold publishers accountable.

Within broadcasting, the lack of diversity and inclusive images stemming from a lack of minority representation results in a vision which neglects segments of society and thus alienates and marginalises minority communities. Therefore, industry initiatives that promote diversity are of upmost importance in fostering a shared sense of national identity and in order to tackle stereotypes that result from the lack of normalised images of minority groups.

Racial and Religious Hate Crime

Hate crime is in many ways the most overt, visible, and undeniable symptom of the Islamophobia prevalent across certain segments of society. Over recent years, British Muslims have suffered from increasing levels of hate crime in conjunction with seemingly obsessive demonisation in the media and an increasing presence of online hate speech on social media platforms. Major socio-political events, such as terror attacks and the EU referendum, often mobilise acts of hostility towards Muslims and the impacts of these crimes are long-lasting, with many victims left feeling anxious and fearful for their safety.

In tackling anti-Muslim hate crimes, it is important to address the disparity in protections afforded by the Racial and Religious Hate Crime Act 2006 on grounds of race versus the protections afforded to religious groups. At the same time, effective strategies and primary legislation needs to be enacted to tackle online hate speech whilst protecting freedom of speech.

Youth and Education

Islamophobia in the education system is a serious problem which impacts Muslim children and their development in a wide variety of ways. From being bullied explicitly in reference to their faith, to being stigmatised and reported to the PREVENT strategy for views they may hold, and to being interminably questioned on their apparent divergence from (thus far ill-defined) "British Values", Muslim children are struggling to navigate this complex maze. Meanwhile, controversies such as the apparent "Trojan Horse" affair and Amanda Spielman's recent proposals to question schoolgirls who wear the hijab highlight the obsessive scrutiny and problematisation of Muslims within the sphere of education. The impacts of these experiences can be long-term, damaging their ability to achieve success in the employment sphere and inhibiting their participation in wider civic society and the political arena.

Economic Exclusion: Islamophobia and the Labour Market

It is necessary to examine Islamophobia in terms of its ability to economically exclude Muslims for the labour market, thereby furthering socio-economic divides. Indeed, numerous studies in recent years have researched the failure of Muslims to progress and reach levels of success in the workplace which their non-Muslim counterparts enjoy. These studies have pointed to a combination of Islamophobia, racism and discrimination as reasons for Muslims to be paid less than their non-Muslim counterparts, less likely to be in work, less likely

to be in skilled and professional occupations, and less likely to break through the glass ceiling to access top level executive positions.

Securitising Muslim Identities: Security and Counter-Terror

The lens through which Muslims are repeatedly and forcefully portrayed as security threats is a narrative desperately in need of recalibration. Meanwhile, the damaging consequences that result from misguided policies predicated upon Islamophobic assumptions and discourses is an area that is in need of immediate address.

Processes of securitising Muslim identities have intersected with vague definitions of "extremism", "radicalisation", and "Fundamental British Values" to result in damaging policies such as the PREVENT strategy, which are based on flawed evidence and serve to stigmatise Muslims and marginalise their voices within democratic debates.

Crime, Policing and the Criminal Justice System

Institutional Islamophobia relating to discriminatory practices ingrained within the Criminal Justice System is particularly significant because of both its disruption to the lives of many Muslims and for its long-term consequences to their future social engagement as equal members of society.

While noteworthy and commendable steps have been made to improve equalities in the Criminal Justice System since the publication of the Macpherson report in 1999, Muslims and ethnic minorities remain over-represented and demonstrate low levels of trust in the system. Furthermore, homogeneity within the Criminal Justice system needs to be examined as conduit for potential biases and as a hindrance to understanding the experiences of Muslim offenders, thereby obstructing meaningful strategies to approach Muslim socio-economic mobility and the driving forces behind criminality. As such, Islamophobia must be examined as a mechanism potentially maintaining inequalities at all levels of the Criminal Justice System.

Political Representation and Exclusion

Islamophobia should be understood as a mechanism which marginalises and excludes Muslims from being able to fully participate in social, political and civic life. While barriers have been broken by individuals such as Mohammad Sarwar, Sayeeda Warsi, Naz Shah, Yasmin Qureshi, Shabana Mahmood and Rushanara Ali, to name but a few, Muslim representation of 2% of the House of Commons still lags far behind what is proportional considering the population of British Muslims, which stands at 4.4% according to the 2011 census.

Furthermore, divisive security strategies such as PREVENT have been utilised by certain groups (such as the Henry Jackson Society and its project Student Rights) to shut down Muslim voices, particularly on university campuses which are intended to be the epicentres of critical debate and engagement of ideas. The result is that young Muslims in particular are actively discouraged from being politically active and engaging with the debates that are integral to a democratic society.

Moreover, it is essential that the Government's policy of disengagement with credible mainstream Muslim organisations and be urgently reversed so that the relationship between Government and Muslim communities may be recalibrated.

Public Exclusion, Integration and Minority Rights

Britain has always claimed to embody a proud history of supporting multiculturalist principles advocating respect and celebration of the multitude of diverse ethnic and religious identities that have led themselves to a British identity built upon pluralism and collaboration. However, recent years have seen simmering resentments and debates surrounding national identity and a perceived "ghettoisation" of minorities.

In line with the development and consequences of moral panic, these fears have culminated in calls for the UK to reassess its policies towards multiculturalist principles. The result is an increasingly restrictive integration strategy, within which examples of Islamophobic assumptions and institutional racism can be readily witnessed regarding the treatment of Muslim communities.

The Government's current approach towards integration heavily relies on the highly criticised 2016 Casey Review. As a consequence, its analysis and suggested strategies are inherently tainted by the same flawed evidence and lack of understanding. This has resulted in the infiltration of Islamophobic narratives and as-

sumptions which have directed the development of this strategy, and therefore, limit its potential to make a positive difference.

Of particular concern are its overlap with counter-terror strategies, its prescribed views of "acceptable Islam", the de-contextualisation of challenges facing minorities, and an absence of introspection concerning Government strategies such as "hostile environment" policies, austerity, cuts to healthcare and policing, or the cancellation of Leveson part II.

Furthermore, despite the protections afforded by the ICCPR, the ECHR and the Human Rights Act 1998, recent years have witnessed numerous controversies, scandals, and vicious public debates that have challenged Muslim religious practice and observance in the UK context. Particular public controversy has surrounded the right to halal meat, the building of mosques, and the right to religious dress, amongst other topics of public interest. Such debates demonstrate how religious practices, whilst protected by national and international legislation, can still be contested and the discourse around them used as a proxy argument to marginalise minority communities and Muslims specifically.

The model to tackle Islamophobia

To solve a society-wide problem, a combination of legislative change, Government and industry initiatives, Muslim community empowerment, and wider community engagement is required. As such, MEND humbly proposes the following initiatives and policy changes to tackle the causes, driving forces, and impacts of Islamophobia,

Legislative changes

Press regulation: We call on policy makers to ensure the commencement of the second part of the Leveson inquiry. Furthermore, Leveson II should place explicit emphasis on including an investigation of Islamophobia in the press as a mandatory requirement.

Counter-Terror legislation: It is imperative that the Government commits to an independent review of PRE-VENT and all counter-terrorism legislation enacted since 2000 with a view to curbing the encroachment of counter-terrorism policies on civil liberties.

Incitement to Religious Hatred legislation: Considering the disparities between the protections afforded for racial and religious hatred, it is essential to review the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act with a view to strengthening legal protection afforded to religion and equalise it with those granted to race.

Primary legislation to deal with social media offences and online hate speech: The Government should consider primary legislation to deal with social media offences and work with social media companies to protect free speech while developing an efficient strategy to tackle online hate speech online.

Government and industry initiatives

Racial and religious equality: In the context of current Brexit negotiations, attention needs to be given to supporting the principles of the EU Equal Treatment Directive to advance protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion to education, healthcare, housing, access to goods and services and social protection, within UK law post-Brexit.

Employment: The barriers to Muslim economic empowerment is an area that needs to be tackled by both governmental and industry initiatives designed to address religious, racial and gendered discrimination in the workplace through targeted interventions at all stages of recruitment, retention and promotion, including through the use of name-blind applications.

Media and broadcasting: There needs to be emphasis on promoting positive and normalised images of Muslims within media and broadcasting. It is also essential that support is given to educative and industry initiatives designed to attract Muslim and BAME individuals into the spheres of journalism and broadcasting.

Public exclusion: It is imperative that public figures show greater maturity and responsibility when discussing integration debates and take care not to cause hysteria for the sake of political popularity and agendas. Meanwhile, especially considering the unclear status of human rights commitments within Brexit negotiations, we must ensure that the tenants of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act are preserved within UK law post-Brexit. Crime and policing: Areas in need of government support include:

- Tackling the high number of Muslim prisoners through schemes to facilitate rehabilitation, cut re-offending and develop pathways for social inclusion.
- Launching research into the underlying reasons for the disproportionately high numbers of Muslim prisoners, including issues of socio-economic deprivation and structural issues within the judicial system.
- Supporting educative and industry initiatives to attract BAME individuals into the police force.

Muslim community empowerment

The Government's current disengagement policy is a clear barrier to British Muslims' participation in social and political life. It is essential that the Government mends its broken relationship with Muslim communities by committing to engage with and listen to a wider spectrum of representative Muslim grassroot organisations, such as MEND and MCB.

Muslims themselves have a responsibility to ensure that they are engaging with processes of democracy to overcome the challenges they face. As such, there are a number of ways in which British Muslim communities may be empowered to play their full role as civic actors. Strategies to achieve this include:

- Supporting educative and industry initiatives designed to attract Muslims and BAME individuals into the spheres of politics, the civil service, media, and broadcasting.
- Placing greater emphasis on educational programs aimed at empowering minority communities to be actively engaged within politics and media.
- Encouraging grassroot and community led movements to overcome barriers to reporting hate crime and encourage maximum reporting of Islamophobic incidents to the police.

Wider community engagement

Islamophobia, like all forms of hatred, is an issue of social justice, and therefore, it is inherent upon every member of society to contribute towards ending it. As such, there are certain areas than MEND feels should be addressed:

- Promoting a greater awareness of Islam.
- Promoting greater inter-community engagement.
- Prioritising PSHE and PSRE in the national curriculum to prepare young people for life in a diverse and pluralistic society.
- Developing training programmes and resources for teachers focussed on tackling bullying based on race, religion, disability or sexuality.
- Developing teaching materials to educate young people on the dangers of Islamophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and other forms of hatred.
- Supporting community and school-led programmes that encourage cultural exchange between pupils of different racial, religious, ethnic and other backgrounds.
- Supporting academic freedoms and initiatives to decolonise education, whilst giving greater emphasis within the national curriculum to shared histories and the contributions of minority communities in building our society.

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Authors and Contributions

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