APPG on British Muslims
MEND submission in response to call for evidence on definition of Islamophobia

Muslim Engagement & Development

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All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims

Submission from MEND: Muslim Engagement and Development

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1.0 Introduction and consultation process

1.1 MEND is a community funded organisation that seeks to empower and encourage British Muslims within local communities to be more actively involved in British media and politics. For too long, British Muslims have remained on the margins of public and political debate about their religion and place in modern Britain and the level of Muslim participation in media and politics remains woefully low. As such, MEND seeks to enable British Muslims to engage more effectively with political and media institutions and play a greater role in British politics and society by instilling confidence, competence, and awareness within them.

1.2 An important step within the movements to fight anti-Semitism, sexism, racism, and homophobia was the development of terminologies to identify these biases. The stigmatisation and discriminations faced by Jews, women, ethnic minorities and the LGBTQ community existed long before the words existed to describe them. However, the formulation of these terms — anti-Semitism, racism, sexism, and homophobia — and their usage by prominent figures was a critical step in communicating to the public the serious prejudice and discrimination these groups faced.[1]

1.3 To this end, MEND is offering our definition of Islamophobia which has been devised in consultation with our several hundred Muslim volunteers across the country and in the context of collaborative discussions with other Muslim organisations. As a result of this consultation process, we propose the working definition outlined in section 2.1-2.2.

2.0 Have you adopted a definition of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hatred in your line of work and if so, what is it?

2.1 MEND's short definition of Islamophobia:

> 2.2.1 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.

2.2 MEND's working definition of Islamophobia and explanatory notes:

> 2.2.1 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.

> 2.2.2 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.

2.2.3 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.

2.2.4 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):

2.2.4.1 Causing, calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Muslims or those perceived to be Muslim due to their religious identity.

2.2.4.2 Causing, calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of individuals due to their perceived or actual connection to or support of Muslims.

2.2.4.3 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.

2.2.4.4 Making mendacious, dehumanising, vilifying, demonising, or stereotypical allegations about Muslims.

2.2.4.5 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.

2.2.4.6 Espousing the belief that Muslims are inferior to other social or religious groups.

2.2.4.7 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.

2.2.4.8 Applying double standards by requiring of Muslims a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other social, religious or ethnic group.

2.2.4.9 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.

2.2.4.10 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.

2.2.5 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, dehumanization, demonization or exclusion of Muslims. For example, by using criticism of religion to argue that Muslims are collectively evil or violent.

3.0 What are the consequences of not adopting a definition of Islamophobia or of anti-Muslim hatred, if any? Do we need a definition of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hatred?

3.1 As duly observed by Gottschalk and Greenberg, "movements against discrimination do not begin until a commonly understood label evolves that brings together under one banner

all forms of that particular prejudice".[2] Once established, terms such as sexism, homophobia, racism and anti-Semitism became important tools to oppose and tackle the various discriminations and prejudices these labels embody; prejudices and discriminations which at one time were considered normal and thus remained unchallenged. It is now time to afford official recognition to a definition of Islamophobia so that the same progress will be afforded to the efforts to tackle the prejudices, hostilities, discriminations and barriers faced by Muslims on account of their ethno-religious identities. Such recognition is important for the following reasons:

> 3.1.1 For British Muslims, it demonstrates that the Government recognises and validates the hardships they face. It gives a name to 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.

> 3.1.2 While being an act of recognition for victims of Islamophobia, it also forms a basis for countering the vocal minority in our society who deny Islamophobia's very existence, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

> 3.1.3 It is a critical tool for awareness raising in communicating to the public the serious prejudice and discrimination faced by Muslims.

> 3.1.4 It is an asset in formulating effective and meaningful legal protections.

> 3.1.5 It encourages a full and holistic exploration of the phenomenon, which in turn presents effective methods for approaching and challenging it.

4.0 What actions or behaviours are captured by the definition or criteria that you employ?

4.1 For examples of the actions and behaviours captured by our definition, see the (non-exhaustive) examples provided in our working definition and explanatory notes (see points 2.2.4.1-2.2.4.10).

5.0 What are the strengths and weaknesses of the definition or criteria that you employ? How do the strengths or weaknesses compare to other definitions of group-based hatred or hostility eg. racism and anti-Semitism?

5.1 Our proposed definition is very broad which makes it robust and allows a holistic understanding of the problem to be formed.

5.2 Secondly, our definition draws from well-established understandings and definitions of inequalities (racial discrimination, racism, xenophobia, racial discrimination, anti-Semitism), thereby building upon the principles established in these well-recognised definitions.

5.3. Our definition also draws upon and incorporates other well established and respected definitions of Islamophobia itself, such as that by the US organisation Center for Amercian Progress in its report 'Fear Inc.2.0', and that utilised by the French organisation CCIF (Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie en France).

5.4 Meanwhile, the terminologies and phraseologies employed by our definition are further shared by UN definitions for inequalities, such as that of racial discrimination, as well as by the UK governmental definition of anti-Semitism. While we accept that this definition may create discomfort in the sense that its broad scope may challenge several government policies

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[2] Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, *Islamophobia Making Muslims the Enemy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), p11.

and positions, considering its commonalities with UN definitions of inequalities, it only serves to reinforce existing government responsibilities

5.5 Moreover, our definition explicitly identifies the phenomenon in all its social, economic and political forms. Therefore, it is a useful tool in extrapolating specific areas in need of address and effective methods to tackle these inequalities.

5.6 Finally, it is more useful than definitions of anti-Muslim hatred in that it incorporates anti-Muslim hatred, whereas anti-Muslim hatred arguably does not incorporate all aspects of Islamophobia. This is an issue that will be discussed further below in points 6.5-6.6.

6.0 How useful is the definition or criteria you employ to identifying, quantifying and tackling Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hatred?

6.1 A distinction needs to be made between the usefulness of "Islamophobia" as a label for the experiences and structures that create barriers for Muslims, and the usefulness of "anti-Muslim hatred". MEND is unequivocal in its position that "Islamophobia" is a far more effective, suitable and recognised term for a variety of reasons.

6.2 While Islamophobia is a term around which linguistic debates may centre, there is a great deal of conceptual clarity and understanding. In other words, while there may be a definitional problem, no such problem exists conceptually. As such, what is needed is a label to be attached to this concept.

6.3 Islamophobia is a term that already holds currency within public discourse and is well established within public and popular understanding. Consequently, it has an existing legitimacy and emotional power. Many individuals affected by Islamophobia may not have the technical vocabulary nor the theoretical framework to fully articulate the roots, causes or the precise definition of their experiences. However, the long-standing existence and usage of "Islamophobia" as a descriptive tool for approaching and explaining these experiences means that the term has accepted credibility amongst those whom it affects. Meanwhile, due to this wide and established legitimacy, it has a galvanising and mobilising force within the realms of activism.

6.4 Therefore, it is not a term that will be easily replaced within political, activist or victim vocabularies. As such, there is merit in the efficiency of using the most widely recognised and used linguistic tools to challenge urgent socio-political issues.

6.5 While others have suggested "anti-Muslim hatred" as a replacement, this would be counter-productive as it would involve forcing a new terminology into the place of a well-established concept. Consequently, at this point, it is far more prudent to devise a strong and comprehensive definition for the word "Islamophobia", than to attempt to force a new terminology into the language of advocacy and activism.

6.6 Differences between terms such as Islamophobia and "anti-Muslim hatred" reflect differences in focus and understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, they produce different approaches and priorities in tackling it. "Anti-Muslim hatred" does not have the same conceptual understanding attached to Islamophobia. Therefore, while "anti-Muslim hatred" may be used to describe hate crime, verbal abuse and harassment, it obfuscates the damaging effects of political and media discourses and the dangers of discrimination and socio-political exclusion.

6.7 Consequently, understanding the hatred, discrimination and exclusions facing Muslim communities as Islamophobia provides a holistic understanding that explicitly identifies the phenomenon in all its social, economic and political forms. Furthermore, because this definition makes it possible to identify Islamophobia in all its forms, it is a useful tool in extrapolating specific areas for address, approaches and priorities in tackling it.

6.8 It is worthy to note that the term "anti-Muslim racism" is a term that could also potentially encompass this full and holistic understanding. However, due to the previously mentioned arguments surrounding Islamophobia as an established and credible linguistic tool, we do not feel that "anti-Muslim racism" can be easily co-opted as an activist concept into the public understanding with the same efficiency as Islamophobia. While viewing Islamophobia as a form of racism is a useful way to understand the phenomenon, in a definitional capacity, the explicit reference to racism also risks precipitating further semantic and legal arguments that Muslims are not a race.

7.0 What conditions should a working definition satisfy to be functional across sectors?

7.1 Any definition of Islamophobia must incorporate a holistic appreciation of the phenomenon. Therefore, it must not only focus on hatred and abuse, but must also recognise both causal and resulting discrimination and all forms of socio-political exclusion. As mentioned above (see points 6.6-6.7), our definition is more useful than definitions of anti-Muslim hatred in that it incorporates anti-Muslim hatred, whereas anti-Muslim hatred arguably does not incorporate all aspects of Islamophobia, rather focussing on hate and abuse whilst potentially neglecting discrimination and forms of socio-political exclusion.

7.2 Meanwhile, any definition must be able to explicitly identify the phenomenon across all sectors and in all its social, economic and political forms, and must also be act as a tool for extrapolating specific areas for address and methods to tackle the impacts of Islamophobia.

8.0 How useful would a scale of intensity or Islamophobia/anti-Muslim hatred index be for measuring the strength of anti-Muslim feeling/anti-Muslim prejudice?

8.1 A scale of intensity or Islamophobia index for measuring the strength of anti-Muslim feeling/anti-Muslim prejudice would not be particularly beneficial. Firstly, there would be complications in whether one approached the scale from a psychological perspective, from an anthropological perspective or a sociological perspective. Each perspective would generate different understandings of Islamophobia that may provide interesting points for analysis, but which cumulatively may be very difficult to amalgamate onto a singular scale or index.

8.2 Secondly, the idea of a scale or index is, in itself, somewhat problematic. The mere idea of a scale implies different levels of acceptability. As such, there is potential danger that it could make certain acts, behaviours or attitudes seem more acceptable.

8.3 Furthermore, the impact on victims and those who experience Islamophobia is subjective and cannot be positioned in a scale. If such an attempt were to be made, it could have the consequence of effectively nullifying some experiences.

9.0 How can we reconcile a working definition of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hatred with freedom of speech, within a rights-based framework?

9.1 Islamophobia, as a term, is often wrongly accused of being an attempt to stifle free speech and, in particular, an effort to curtail all questioning or criticism of religion. However, it has never historically, nor should it presently, be seen in this light.

9.2 The historical usage of Islamophobia can be found in colonial communications as far back as the turn of the 20th Century. One of the earliest examples can be found in the writing of French colonialist Maurice Delafosse in his discussion of "*Islamophobie*"[3] in 1910. Delafosse discusses Islamophobia as "a principle of indigenous administration."[4] As such, Islamophobia was a reference to how Muslims living under colonial rule were perceived and treated by the

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[3] Over time, the French "Islamophobie" became translated into English as "Islamophobia". This follows the same pattern set by the term "Judeophobie" and "xenophobie", which later became anti-Semitism and xenophobia.
[4] Abdoolkarim Vakil, "Is the Islam in Islamophobia the same as the Islam in Anti-Islam; Or When is it Islamophobia Time?" in S. Sayyid and Abdoolkarim Vakil, eds., *Thinking Through Islamophobia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 38.

French colonizers. In this instance, Islamophobia is about people, about Muslims, not about religion.

9.3 Islamophobia truly entered mainstream political discourse with the publication of the 1997 Runnymede report "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All".[5] Within this report, Runnymede exerted considerable effort in highlighting the need to mitigate the dangers of Muslim belief and practice becoming beyond the realm of critical inquiry. As such, they stressed the need to recognise the contrast between "open views" of legitimate criticism of Islam and the "closed" views that constitute Islamophobia. As such, the term Islamophobia has been widely used in public discourse for over 20 years and has not hitherto stifled debate or free speech.

9.4 Islamophobia should not be understood as a protection against questioning or criticising religion. Nor should it be seen as an attempt to enforce restrictions on freedom of speech beyond what is necessary for civil society to protect individuals from abuse and violence – protections for which there already exists a vast array of legal precedents.

9.5 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, dehumanization, demonization or exclusion of Muslims. For example, using criticism of religion to argue that Muslims are collectively evil or violent would be Islamophobic in our definition, whereas criticising or ridiculing the tenets of Islam would not be per se.

9.6 Whilst cherishing the right to freedom of speech in an open democratic society, one must not allow people to hide behind the argument of free speech to perpetuate anti-Muslim and racist agendas. From legislative point of view, there is currently no absolute right to free speech that harms others, and we would support that position. Within MEND's proposed definition, there is no conflict with freedom of speech that extends any further than what already exists. Indeed, the only limitations within our definition already have existing legal precedents, for example restricting calling for causing harm.

10.0 Recommendations

10.1 In light of present challenges, MEND has proposed the following definition of Islamophobia:

> *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.*

10.2 A full working definition with accompanying explanatory notes can be seen in points 2.2.1-2.2.5

10.3 We would further advise the APPG to:

10.3.1 Officially adopt the term "Islamophobia" over the term "anti-Muslim hatred". While "anti-Muslim hatred" may be used to describe hate crime, verbal abuse, and harassment, it obfuscates the damaging effects of political and media discourses and the dangers of discrimination and socio-political exclusion.

10.3.2 Ensure that any definition of Islamophobia incorporates all aspects of the phenomenon, extending beyond mere hatred and abuse, but rather incorporating both causal and resulting discrimination and exclusions in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. Any definition must, therefore, be able to explicitly

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identify the phenomenon across all sectors and in all its social, economic and political forms.

10.3.3 Recognise Islamophobia not as a protection against questioning or criticising religion, but rather as a phenomenon that may prove to require restricting freedoms of speech only as far as necessary for civil society to protect individuals from abuse, discrimination, and violence – protections for which there already exists a vast array of legal precedents.