Executive Summary

MEND submission to the consultation on the "Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper; Building Stronger, More United Communities"

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MEND's executive summary of its submission to the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper

In analysing the *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper*, MEND would like to highlight the below observations and conclusions.

General observations and conclusions:

o The Green Paper is littered with references and allusions reminiscent of counter-terror strategies that have previously been condemned as hugely damaging to cohesion and inclusion of minorities. This fear has been heightened with the publication of the Home Office's updated counter-terror strategy "CONTEST The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism", which explicitly mentions this Green Paper in outlining its strategy. It is imperative that strategies of community integration and of counter-terrorism do not overlap, as this can only result in the further securitisation of an already problematic tripartite relationship between government, society and minorities.

o The Green Paper strongly 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 that has guided the Government's policies on community cohesion and integration thus far.

o The overall approach of the Green Paper is highly problematic. By unilaterally shifting the responsibility and blame for a lack of social inclusion almost entirely onto minority communities, it de-contextualises barriers to inclusion and examines them in a vacuum. While there are brief mentions of hate crimes contributing to isolation, there is a concerning lack of analysis of institutionalised and systematic racism in Britain. Similarly, there is no mention of the way developments, such as the Government's "hostile environment" policy, the PREVENT strategy, and Brexit, have further contributed to creating a climate of fear, mistrust and disillusionment that prevents BAME individuals from fully and actively participating in British society. Without a stronger focus on the broader issues and mechanisms of socio-economic discrimination and exclusion, the Green Paper will be confined to be a collection of half measures that will be insufficient to bring about positive change.

o The absence of any form of introspection and self-criticism results in the very limited understanding of some of the key causes that contribute to limiting integration between communities and, in turn, between them and broader society. For example, there is no mention of the impact of the Government's policy of austerity and cuts to public service affect minorities' access to health services, nor is there mention of severely reduced police budgets at a time in which hate crime against minorities is on the rise. Furthermore, there is an absence of commentary on how elements of the British media contributes to spreading harmful narratives surrounding minorities, as well as a lack of analysis regarding the Government's recent cancellation of the second part of the Leveson inquiry. Any serious effort to address the challenges identified by the Green Paper requires a better contextualisation of the issues within the broader social, political and economic framework in which minorities are positioned.

o The Government's current policy of disengagement from non-violent Muslim organisations creates a huge strain on Muslim communities who feel they are not properly represented nor

acknowledged. As noted by Dominic Grieve in the *Citizens UK* report "The Missing Muslims", "There is a broken relationship that needs to be resolved, and both parties need to be proactive in addressing this."[1] In light of the current mistrust between the Government and the Muslim community, it is imperative that the relationship is recalibrated in an effort to extend the Government's dialogue and engagement to individuals and organisations that so far have been left out of the process.

Introduction:

o   The Green Paper's proposal to deploy "tailored local plans and interventions" to address the issue of isolated community suggests that it is merely envisioning a further extension of its powers into areas such as the family, education, the voluntary sector and even religion.[2] This could result in the further interference of the Government into the private life of British citizens, as well as a concerning attempt to assume the role of inspector of whatever it considers constitutes a segregating or "self-segregating" behaviour.

Strengthening Leadership:

o   In line with the Casey Review, it would appear that the Green Paper assumes problematic ideologies to be those perceived as being at odds with thus far ill-defined "fundamental British Values". With no explicit guidance on what explicitly constitutes British values, the terminology implies that it would be the Government's prerogative to set a threshold for multiculturalism. This raises questions surrounding how one measures and identifies ideologies relative to British values. For example, how does the right to religious dress or religious slaughter fit into this evaluation?

Supporting new migrants and resident communities:

o   The Green Paper's emphasis on "British values"[3] draws from controversial counter-terror guidance. The reliance on ill-defined "British values" puts minorities, and especially new migrants, at risk of being "Othered" and problematised purely on the basis of their ethno-cultural and religious identities. Furthermore, by relying upon and pushing these "British values" the Government is effectively framing rights and responsibilities for new migrants under the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) umbrella. It is imperative that strategies of community integration and of counter-terrorism do not overlap, as this can only result in the further securitisation of an already problematic tripartite relationship between government, society and minorities.

o   The Controlling Migration Fund risks increasing societal divide along ethnic and economic lines, shifting the blame for current economic difficulties faced by local authorities squarely onto minorities.

Education and young people:

o   In its analysis of British schools, the Green Paper is misguided in its assumption that segregation is a matter of choice and its framing of its limited understanding of segregation exclusively within ethnicity lines, thereby failing to provide meaningful analysis of other

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[1] "The Missing Muslims: Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All", Report by the Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life, accessed 04.06.2018, https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/newcitizens/pages/1261/attachments/original/1499106471/Missing_Muslims_Report_-_Electronic_copy.pdf?1499106471

[2] Martin Parson, "Casey's proposal were an attack on religious freedom. Javid was right to bin them", March 15, 2018, accessed 16.05.2018, https://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2018/03/martin-parsons-caseys-proposals-were-an-attack-on-religious-freedom-javid-was-right-to-bin-them.html

[3] "Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper", p. 25.

factors that can contribute to uneven concentrations of different ethnicities and backgrounds, such as social class or opportunities for social mobility.

o The Green Paper places the onus and responsibility for segregation squarely on minority communities with no insight into the parallel responsibilities and required interactions from majority communities. For example, many majority white single–sex public schools also do not afford opportunities for their pupils to "mix with people with different backgrounds".

o An area in need of address is the Green Paper's omission of exploration of the impacts of racist and religiously motivated bullying on the social mixing of pupils from different social, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

Boosting English language skills:

o Both the Casey Review and the Green Paper are fundamentally flawed in their conclusions that language barriers are the ultimate hindrance to employment and ultimately to full socio-economic and civic participation. However, while we disagree that language barriers are the primary concern with regards to accessing the labour market, we firmly agree that economic empowerment is an essential component in ensuring that Muslims and minority communities have all the opportunities necessary for them be fully engaged within social, economic, political and civic life. As such, MEND argues that 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.

o If the Government is serious about its intention to promote English language learning as a mechanism for promoting socio-economic inclusion, the appropriate funding needs to be made available and individuals need to be supported in accessing the support that they require. Defunding programs such as ESOL is in direct opposition to what is required.

Places and Community:

o By excluding an exploration of Islamophobia, hatred, and similar mechanisms of socio-economic and civic exclusion, the Green Paper does not provide any assessment as to what drives minorities to live in "segregated" areas. Therefore, while many of its proposals are welcome, such as "shared activities through culture and sport" or "shared community spaces", there is a clear lack of a holistic understanding of the conditions surrounding the issues that motivate and drive segregation. As such, efforts to ensure that communities have opportunities to come together with people from different backgrounds, while noble, will always be marred by wider processes and products of prejudice and social-exclusion. Therefore, such aims cannot be achieved without challenging anti-Muslim and anti-minority narratives that are prolific throughout public, political and media discourses. Without tackling problems such as racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia, it is difficult to see how initiatives to persuade minority communities to consider living in a wider range of communities can be successful.

Increasing Economic Opportunity:

o MEND welcomes the Government's emphasis on the role that economic opportunities play in strengthening integration and inclusion, as well as its efforts in supporting people who are not currently active in the labour market.

o However, this chapter of the Green Paper is somewhat narrow in scope and does not provide an in-depth analysis of the causes of the phenomenon. MEND maintains that, in order to encourage economic integration, it is critical to tackle religious discrimination in the workplace and to address the low level of economic activity among Muslims through targeted

interventions at stages of recruitment, retention and promotion, while simultaneously improving access to employment for British Muslim women.

Rights and Freedoms:

o Parts of the Green Paper are concerning for is its overly aggressive focus on Islamic beliefs and practices, seemingly identifying them as belonging to "cultures and practices that are harmful to individuals or restrict their rights and hold them back from making the most of the opportunities of living in modern Britain."[4] This is a reason for great concern, as it opens a number of related issues that distort the nature of the problem while generating alarmism about Islam, stigmatising the Muslim community, and overlooking other crucial problems that limit British Muslims' socio-economic and civic inclusion within society.

o Muslim women are frequently considered to be victims of their religious and/or cultural heritage without having actually been consulted on the matter.[5] This paints a generalised and incomplete picture, whilst simultaneously presenting solutions and approaches that do not resonate with the women that they are intended to help.

o While British Muslim women's lives are framed within their ethno-cultural and religious circumstances, the challenges they face cannot and should not be completely dislocated from structural disadvantages that all British women face more generally. Moreover, political and media discourses that serve only to perpetuate stereotypes of Muslim women can only ever be counterproductive for all women by misrepresenting the nature - or worse, completely distracting from - the issues that they actually face. Therefore, while cultural practices should be examined, women's issues do not exist in a vacuum and need to be confronted with appropriate honesty and nuance.

o While strengthening protections and rights afforded to women to ensure their equality is a fundamental calling, it is imperative that any changes in this area remain non-discriminatory in focus. Furthermore, with regards to nikah, any proposals must be consulted upon with Muslim communities and a broad spectrum of Muslim women specifically, in order to ensure that their interests are being maintained and in order to avoid any unforeseen consequences and hardships.

o It is important that the issue of Shariah councils is addressed honestly and openly in full consultation with Muslim women. The Green Paper's approach ignores the protections that women are able to access through Sharia councils which they may not feel able to access without them. In November 2106, The Muslim Women's Network told the Home Affairs Select Committee that if Sharia Councils were to be banned, Muslim women would be left without protections against "abusive relationships", because they would not feel that they could leave the marriage in a way that is compliant with their Islamic values.[6]

o The call for a "clearer interpretation of Islam for life in the UK" is extremely worrying for the Muslim community and needs to be clarified. The concern is that a certain liberal interpretation of 'acceptable Islam' will be championed by consultation with Government selected 'Muslim clerics', whilst mainstream conservative views will be marginalised as 'extremist'. This is unacceptable and the Muslim community as a whole should be empowered to consider such matters. We are also concerned that Islam has been singled out in this manner, without references to any other faith groups. We would thus infer that the

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[4] Ibid.

[5] See Moosavi, "Orientalism at home."

[6] "Sharia Councils", Home Affairs Committee, November 1, 2016, accessed 04.06.2018, https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/76b3f1e0-29be-498f-9325-62d15033c20f

Government is perfectly happy with orthodox Christian or Jewish practice, and if this is the case, the basis of this position should be explicitly stated.