



**THE APPG ON RELIGION IN THE MEDIA'S  
INQUIRY INTO RELIGIOUS LITERACY IN  
PRINT AND BROADCAST MEDIA**

**MEND SUBMISSION**

Muslim engagement  
& development

**mend**

## The APPG on Religion in the Media's Inquiry into Religious Literacy in Print and Broadcast Media

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### A Submission from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)

April 2020

#### MEND's contribution to the consultation

This submission from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) seeks to assist the APPG on Religion in the Media to explore mechanisms for promoting nuanced representations of faith groups for the benefit of mutual understanding and social harmony.

MEND is a community-funded organisation that seeks to encourage political, civic, and social engagement within British Muslim communities through empowering British Muslims to interact with political and media institutions effectively. Our approach to achieving this involves a combination of community engagement (through education, community events, local campaigns to encourage voting etc.) and advocacy work (involving victim support, submissions to parliamentary inquiries, media analysis, election resources, briefings etc.).

In conducting research for our submission to the House of Lords Select Committee inquiry into citizenship and civic engagement,<sup>1</sup> MEND noted that one of the most significant barriers faced by Muslim communities was felt to be a toxic atmosphere of hatred that is fuelled and maintained by the effects of stereotyping, misrepresentation, and stigmatising discourse in print and online media. Indeed, studies have shown that, with 21 negative references to Muslims within the British press for every single neutral or positive reference,<sup>2</sup> the media plays an integral role in spreading prejudice, stereotypes, and xenophobic views of British Muslims. These negative representations of Muslims are incredibly detrimental to community cohesion and the subsequent ability of British Muslims to fully participate and engage as equal members of society.

Considering MEND's expertise in how Islamophobia manifests itself within print media and broadcasting, MEND hopes that its contribution to this inquiry will provide valuable insights in assisting media outlets to fairly represent the rich diversity of our society.

#### 1. What do you understand by the term 'religious literacy'?

Religious literacy is approaching the issues which affect religious minorities with nuanced understandings. This is more than acknowledging theological doctrine and practice, but rather extends to having an appreciation for the social, political, economic, historical and cultural forces that shape the experiences of religious groups. This also entails avoiding ethnocentric determinations as an 'objective' and 'universal' reality without consultation with those whom the issue directly affects (for example, applying western notions of acceptable dress to Muslim women who choose to wear hijab). As explained by Diane L. Moore, Director of the Religious Project at Harvard University, religious literacy involves "understanding

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<sup>1</sup> "MEND submission to the House of Lords Select Committee Hearing on Citizenship and Civic Engagement", MEND, September 8, 2017, accessed 20.06.2018, [https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/MEND-Submission-to-the-House-of-Lords-Select-Committee-Hearing-on-Citizenship-and-Civil-Engagement\\_v1.pdf](https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/MEND-Submission-to-the-House-of-Lords-Select-Committee-Hearing-on-Citizenship-and-Civil-Engagement_v1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See Baker, Paul, Costas Gabrielatos, and Tony McEnery. *Discourse analysis and media attitudes: the representation of Islam in the British Press*. Cambridge: University Press, 2013.

religions and religious influences *in context* and as *inextricably woven into all dimensions of human experience*.”<sup>3</sup>

## 2. What effect does a lack of religious literacy have on broadcast and/or print media?

British press and broadcasting outlets have considerable power over public narratives and perceptions surrounding essential issues. If we consider 'religious literacy' to be "an appreciation for the social, political, economic, historical and cultural forces that shape the experiences and perspectives of religious groups", a lack of religious literacy results in depictions of communities that are devoid of context and, therefore, imbued with stereotypes, misrepresentations, and essentializations.

Indeed, studies have demonstrated that within British media discourse Muslim men and women are consistently presented as homogenous and unitary groups, with the former portrayed as misogynistic, angry, and violent extremists and the latter as passive, oppressed victims.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, a study performed by the Centre for Media Monitoring analysed stories from 31 online media platforms and five broadcasters, over the last quarter of 2018.<sup>5</sup> In analysing 10,931 articles, the study found that 59% of all articles examined associated Muslims with negative behaviours, and over one-third "misrepresented or generalised about Muslims".<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, Paul Baker, Tony McEnery, and Costas Gabrielatos have highlighted the frequency with which Muslims and Islam are associated with conflict, with "Islam" and "terror" co-occurring in more than one-third (37.9%) of the texts analysed within their study.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, a study conducted by Cardiff University found that the majority of coverage on British Muslims was focused on "Muslims as a threat (in relation to terrorism), a problem (in terms of differences in values) or both (Muslim extremism in general)". The study noted that in more than a quarter of the articles investigated, Islam was posed as being "dangerous, backward or irrational" and being in contrast to 'British Values'.<sup>8</sup>

This repetitive misrepresentation of a particular community by newspapers and broadcasters inevitably results in distorted understandings and, ultimately, the fostering of prejudices. Numerous polls have shown that the British public derives much of its information from the media and is generally quite ill-informed about Islam and Muslims. A YouGov poll conducted in 2018 by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) found that of the 1,629 Britons surveyed, 90% had not been inside a mosque in recent years.<sup>9</sup> Another poll conducted by YouGov in 2002 found that 74% knew "nothing or next to nothing about Islam" and 64% stated that what they did know was "acquired through the media".<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, in 2018, MEND's commissioned ComRes poll into Islamophobia found that the majority of Britons agreed that the mainstream media was a key source in perpetuating Islamophobia in our society.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, negative and misrepresentative depictions of minorities have a devastating impact on communities themselves, particularly regarding issues of identity and belonging. As Riz Ahmed warned during Channel 4's Annual Diversity Lecture at the House of Commons in March 2017, the lack of diverse voices and stories displayed in broadcasting can lead those from minority backgrounds to "switch off and retreat to fringe narratives, to

<sup>3</sup> "What Is Religious Literacy?," Religious Literacy Project, accessed April 9, 2020, <https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/our-approach/what-is-religious-literacy>

<sup>4</sup> See Baker, Paul, Costas Gabrielatos, and Tony McEnery. *Discourse analysis and media attitudes: the representation of Islam in the British Press*. Cambridge: University Press, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> "State of Media Reporting on Islam & Muslims", *Centre for Media Monitoring*, 2019. Accessed: 13<sup>th</sup> September 2019. <https://cfmm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/CFMM-Quarterly-Report.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See Baker, Paul, Costas Gabrielatos, and Tony McEnery. *Discourse analysis and media attitudes: the representation of Islam in the British Press*. Cambridge: University Press, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Kerry Moore, Paul Mason and Justin Lewis, "Images of Islam in the UK: The Representation of British Muslims in the National Print News Media 2000-2008", *Cardiff University*, July 7, 2008, accessed 20.06.2018, <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/53005/1/08channel4-dispatches.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> "90% of people haven't been inside a mosque - change that this weekend!" *Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)*, February 13, 2018, accessed 20.06.2018, <http://www.mcb.org.uk/90-of-people-havent-been-inside-a-mosque-change-that-this-weekend/>

<sup>10</sup> Chris Allen, "A review of the evidence relating to the representation of Muslims and Islam in the British media", *University of Birmingham*, October 24, 2012, accessed 20.06.2018, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/IASS/news-events/MEDIA-ChrisAllen-APPGEvidence-Oct2012.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> "MEND Islamophobia poll October 2018", *ComRes*, October 2018. Accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> October 2019. <https://www.comresglobal.com/polls/mend-islamophobia-poll-october-2018/>.

bubbles online and sometimes even off to Syria... If we fail to represent, we are in danger of losing people to extremism... Where is the counter-narrative? Where are we telling these kids they can be heroes in our stories, that they are valued?"<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, a lack of religious literacy serves to sow Islamophobia, xenophobia, and racism into the milieu of British society through spreading prejudice and stereotypes of minority communities, and Muslims in particular. At the same time, it creates an environment wherein religious minorities feel excluded from public debate and representation. Such a situation is highly detrimental to community cohesion and the subsequent ability of religious minorities to fully participate and engage as equal members of society.

### 3. When, where, and how is religious literacy learnt?

If it is accepted that religious literacy requires not only an understanding of the basic tenants of a religion, but also an understanding of socio-cultural, political, and historical dynamics, acquiring religious literacy clearly requires learning about forces that have shaped our society. Therefore, it is essential that school curriculums reflect the diversity and shared history of British society. As but one example, 885,000 Muslim soldiers fought with the Allies in World War I,<sup>13</sup> with over 400,000 Muslim soldiers fighting on behalf of Britain – and yet only 2% of the British public are aware of the scale of their sacrifice.<sup>14</sup> It is only through the recognition of the legacy and contributions of minority communities that a shared identity can be nurtured. Furthermore, it is essential that the works and figures studied within our education system extend further than the traditional ethnocentric focus upon the achievements of primarily white western men, and expand to encompass a broad spectrum of perspectives and voices. It is only through this decolonisation of education that a true appreciation for our shared history can be developed and nurtured. MEND therefore calls upon policymakers to commit to 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.

Outside of education, an effective mechanism for encouraging religious literacy is to improve levels of diversity in positions with public visibility and influence, particularly within media and broadcasting. Having a diverse and representative workforce in the media allows for a more accurate presentation of society. However, failing to have a workforce that reflects the world it depicts can lead to important nuances being overlooked, and cause myths and stereotypes about unrepresented communities to become entrenched within the public imagination. As such, support must be given to educative and industry initiatives designed to attract Muslim and BAME individuals into the spheres of journalism and broadcasting.

### 4. What effect does religious illiteracy have on decisions journalists make when assigning, researching, and reporting news stories?

There is a lack of diversity within British journalism, which in turn creates a lack of religious literacy amongst journalists, as well as a lack of understanding of minority communities at a general level. A study conducted by the City University of London in 2016 found that 94% of journalists in Britain are white in comparison to 87% of the general UK labour force. Moreover, there is a significant underrepresentation of British Muslims in journalism, with 0.4% of journalists being Muslim, contrasted with nearly five percent of the population.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Riz Ahmed Warns Lack of Diversity on TV Will Drive Young to Isis," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, March 2, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/mar/02/riz-ahmed-warns-lack-of-diversity-on-tv-will-drive-young-to-isis>

<sup>13</sup> Hoare, James. "Britain's Muslim Soldiers of World War I find a voice in previously unreported letters." All About History. Accessed June 27, 2017. <https://www.historyanswers.co.uk/history-of-war/britains-muslim-soldiers-of-world-war-i-find-a-voice-in-previously-unreported-letters/>.

<sup>14</sup> Lockley, Mike. "Forgotten army of 400,000 Muslim soldiers who fought for Britain." Birminghammail. November 13, 2016. <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/forgotten-army-400000-muslim-soldiers-10325190>.

<sup>15</sup> Elsa Vulliamy, "British Journalism Is Now 94 per Cent White and Mostly Male," The Independent (Independent Digital News and Media, March 24, 2016), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/press/british-journalism-white-male-study-shows-a6950176.html>

Meanwhile, negative perceptions of minorities are arguably often being fed to the public in a calculated method to drive profit. This was noted by the Chair of the Ethics Council at the National Union of Journalists, Professor Chris Frost, who highlighted to the Home Affairs Select Committee during an evidence session in 2018 that “one of the best ways to sell newspapers...is to raise issues of fear...pick a group which is an ‘other’ group...at the moment a good one is Muslims... it makes for easy stories.”<sup>16</sup>

The combination of a lack of diversity within journalism and pressure from editors in forming narratives to fit a specific agenda has a variety of consequences in terms of how news stories are assigned, researched, and reported:

- **A lack of confidence to challenge editors:** considering the demographics of newsrooms, there are very few people able to challenge biased narratives and stories pursued by editors when these stories concern minorities. This leads to the continued compliance with pre-existing agendas and a vacuum of counter-narratives that may provide balance to the ways in which stories are assigned and reported.
- **The production of stories that do not reflect what is important to society as a whole:** If editors and journalists do not have religious and cultural literacy, it is natural that they may not consider certain stories to be significant enough to report. However, stories that may not seem relevant to one social group may in fact be highly significant for another. For example, a group of male editors and journalists may overlook the importance of certain debates around women’s health that female editors and journalists know are of vital interest to their readers. Therefore, a lack of understanding of the diverse needs of readers excludes some segments of society from information that is of interest to them.
- **Inexperience leading to stereotypes:** A lack of understanding of the realities facing different social groups can lead journalists to rely on ethnocentric perspectives and produce analyses that are lacking in important nuances. In assigning stories to individuals who may be unfamiliar with the realities of minority communities, journalists must rely on their own perceptions and pre-existing biases when researching and reporting stories. Many of these preconceptions are drawn from a specific western perspective and existing media representations, thus forming a self-perpetuating cycle for stereotypes to flourish.
- **A lack of in-depth research and reliance on inadequate “gatekeepers”:** The pressure on journalists to produce stories on topics in which they may possess little expertise within limited timeframes is also a factor in producing overly simplistic analyses. This often leads journalists to rely on familiar sources or “gatekeepers” who have been used in the past, but who provide very narrow perspectives which do not accurately represent the perceptions of the community in question.

Using Muslims as an example, considering the vast diversity of British Muslims in terms of culture, ethnicity, religious practice, language, age, geography, and a host of other characteristics, it is rare to find unchallenged consensus amongst British Muslim communities on any topic. As such, any issue involving British Muslims must take into account a broad spectrum of perspectives that encompass this multiplicity of experiences, values, identities, beliefs, and practices. However, rather than engaging with a broad spectrum of Muslim organisations and voices, it is not uncommon for media and broadcasting outlets to deal exclusively with a pre-established minority who mirror the publisher’s narrative agenda. Consequently, think-tanks, NGOs, and individuals who do not possess the confidence of British Muslims have exercised

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<sup>16</sup> “Oral Evidence: Hate crime and its violent consequences”, *Home Affairs Select Committee*, February 2018. Accessed on: 19/07/2019.  
<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/hate-crime-and-its-violent-consequences/oral/78630.pdf>.

considerable influence in shaping public debate, thus resulting in narratives and public understandings that do not reflect the reality of British Muslim experiences.

An example of this can be found in the frequent use of individuals such as Fiyaz Mughal and Maajid Nawaz or Anjum Chaudhary in providing the basis for media analysis. While Mughal and Nawaz represent one far end of the spectrum of Muslim voices, Chaudhary represents the other far end. However, neither end represents the vast majority of British Muslims who sit in the centre. This produces a “good” vs “bad” Muslim dichotomy wherein all Muslims are presented as being in one camp or the other. As such, the use of unrepresentative gatekeepers serves to skew stories, further entrench stereotypes, and marginalise communities. Religious and cultural literacy overcomes this problem by helping journalists to accurately identify reliable key stakeholders that represent the broad range of views held by a community.

- **An unwillingness for minority communities to engage with journalism:** Considering the frequent negative bias of media and broadcasting outlets regarding certain groups and a perception of religious illiteracy across journalistic circles, it is not uncommon to find minority communities to be wary to engage with journalists. This is particularly so for sections of British Muslim communities who may view even genuine interest from journalists with suspicion. Once again, this reduces the opportunities to access a broad range of experience and limits the potential for nuanced reporting.

## 5. What methods can be used by journalists to engage with faith groups sensitively?

And

## 6. What steps should be taken to better equip journalists when engaging with issues relating to faith?

There are four primary avenues to promoting religious literacy that broadcasters and publishers should aim to explore:

- **Community Engagement:** Building relationships with communities allows journalists to build trust, explore differing perspectives, and expand their own knowledge of important issues. Engagement activity such as roundtables and community forums provides opportunities for open and dynamic dialogues and for minority groups to understand how the media operates and, therefore, to be in a better position to offer support and advice in locating relevant sources of information. Third party organisations, such as MEND, specialise in facilitating such community engagement programs and in building relationships between journalists and communities.
- **Supporting initiatives designed to attract BAME and individuals from religious minorities into the spheres of journalism and broadcasting:** As discussed above, diversity is key in ensuring representative reporting. Many publishers have already launched specific schemes that target BAME communities, such as the Guardian’s *Positive Action Scheme*,<sup>17</sup> as well as the Sun and the Mirror’s paid postgraduate placements at London’s City University through the *Widening Media Diversity Scholarship*, which aims to develop “a pool of Muslim journalists who can advance diversity in the media industry, improve reporting on religion and minorities in the media, and champion under-represented communities”.<sup>18</sup> Alongside such initiatives, it is important that publishers and broadcasters collect accurate data on the protected

<sup>17</sup> “Positive Action Scheme,” The Guardian, accessed April 23, 2020, <https://workforus.theguardian.com/index.php/entry-level-opportunities/positive-action-scheme/>

<sup>18</sup> “Foundation Partners with City University, The Sun and The Mirror for New Journalism Diversity Scholarship,” COSARAF, July 12, 2019, <https://www.cosaraf.org/foundation-partners-with-city-university-the-sun-and-the-mirror-for-new-journalism-diversity-scholarship>

characteristics of their workforce in order to monitor diversity and further develop inclusion strategies.

- **Diversity and inclusion training:** Mandatory diversity and inclusion training for all staff is also an effective way to tackle religious illiteracy. These training courses can be generalised to cover all protected characteristics, or they can be bespoke, such as that provided by MEND which can be tailored to specifically focus on British Muslims as a case study. Such training is not only important to improve knowledge of different faiths, but also to introduce a culture of tolerance and inclusion and encourage heightened sensitivities to the differing needs and concerns of minorities.
- **External expert training and educational resources:** There are a variety of third party organisations, such as MEND, that provide specialised and bespoke expert training and resources designed to equip journalists to understand the issues affecting religious communities. MCB's Religion Media Centre offers a course entitled *Reporting Religion in Britain*, which is designed for both faith groups and media professions, and which aims to give "an overview of faith in Britain, including organisation, beliefs and customs, and addressed challenges in reporting religion, such as language, balance and fair representation."<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, educational materials such as factsheets, workshops, briefings, and easy-read produced by MEND can be utilised to provide detailed information on issues concerning Muslim communities.

#### 8. What steps can a) universities, b) journalists, c) publishers, d) broadcasters and e) regulators take to improve religious literacy in media?

- **Universities:** As mentioned previously, policymakers must commit to 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. It is only through such efforts that society can work to encourage a holistic understanding of the socio-cultural, political, and historical dynamics that have shaped the current landscape.

Furthermore, tackling the underrepresentation of ethnic and religious minorities within media professions requires supporting university initiatives designed to attract BAME and individuals from religious minorities into the spheres of journalism and broadcasting.

- **Journalists:** As previously mentioned, there are certain valuable methods that journalists may utilise to increase their own religious literacy, in particular community engagement, undertaking diversity and inclusion training, and participating in specialised expert training.
- **Publishers:** As discussed above, there are tangible programs that publishers can adopt in order to encourage religious literacy. Particular attention should be paid to increasing the diversity of staff, including at senior levels. This should include positive action and engaging in initiatives that are designed to attract talent from BAME and religious communities.

Furthermore, considering the deficiencies of the current regulator, IPSO (which shall be discussed further below), publishers should be encouraged to voluntarily sign up to a Leveson-compliant regulator, such as IMPRESS. This is essential to counteract the current pressure from editors to pursue sensationalist stories at the detriment of minority communities.

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<sup>19</sup> "Training", 2019. Religion Media Centre. <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/training/>.

- **Broadcasters:** Mukti Jain Campion explored the issues surrounding a lack of diversity in broadcasting, concluding that many factors underpin the lack of cultural diversity in the field, including conservative commissioners leading to "safe" conservative commissioning and a lack of BAME faces at a senior level, especially in senior creative and editorial roles. She cites challenges at recruiting and then retaining talented BAME professionals, and the problem of them leaving due to disillusionment, especially in large traditional organisations such as the BBC. The solution to the problems, she argues, lies in embedding the concept of "cultural intelligence", which is defined as a "way of valuing diverse cultural knowledge and experience in programme-making", and which includes sensitive and intelligent portrayal of marginalised groups, reflecting "authentic voices" from those groups. She states that cultural intelligence needs to be built into each stage of programme development, including commissioning, production, scheduling, and promotion. She also advocates the use of cultural intelligence masterclasses to promote such a dialogue and instil change.<sup>20</sup>

Broadcasters should also engage and consult with mainstream Muslim groups such as MCB and MEND in order to ensure broadcast media approaches religion with sensitivity and accuracy. These organisations can provide vital insights into issues relating to Islam and Muslims, thus assisting broadcasters to approach projects with sensitivity and understanding.

- **Regulators:** Regulators are arguably the best placed mechanism to recalibrate the pressure from editors to pursue stories designed to induce moral panic through scapegoating minority communities. However, the current press regulator is unfit for purpose. IPSO fails to be Leveson-compliant and routinely fails to investigate breaches, fails to demonstrate adequate professionalism in dealing with complaints, and fails to impose punishments that are proportionate to the significance of the story contested. Dr Martin Moore, Director the Media Standards Trust, giving evidence to the Lords Select Committee that held an inquiry into press regulation in 2015, highlighted that IPSO failed the majority of the recommendations put forward by the Leveson report and that "the [recommendations] IPSO failed on were really fundamental, with regard to independence, arbitration and complaints".<sup>21</sup>

The scope of this submission does not allow a full analysis of the problematic nature of IPSO, however, MEND and other organisations such as Hacked Off have written extensively on these failings, and MEND can provide any further supplementary evidence that may be required by the APPG. MEND's latest submission to the consultation on the Editors' Code of Practice can be found [here](#).

Without a regulator that is capable of holding publishers to account, there is little scope for successfully curbing the stereotyping and sensationalising stories pursued by newspaper publishers. It is, therefore, imperative that policymakers commit to the full implementation of the Royal Charter on press regulation and commit to the commencement of the second part of the Leveson Inquiry, including an investigation into the prevalence of Islamophobia within the media.

## 9. What public policy changes could improve religious literacy in the media?

The need to address a lack of religious literacy and the subsequent scapegoating of minority communities is society-wide problem. It therefore requires a combination of legislative change, Government and industry initiatives, community empowerment, and wider community engagement. As such, MEND proposes the below initiatives and policy changes

<sup>20</sup> Mukti Jain Campion, "Look who's Talking. Cultural Diversity, Public Service Broadcasting and the National Conversation", *Nuffield College Oxford*, October 2005, accessed 20.06.2018, <http://www.nuff.ox.ac.uk/guardian/lookwhostalking.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> 'Press Regulation: Where are we now', *Lord's Select Committee*, accessed 21.05.2019 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/ldcomuni/135/13506.htm#note87>



to tackle a lack of religious literacy concerning Islam and Muslims. However, these suggestions may be translated to apply to increasing the understanding of a variety of minority ethnic and religious groups.

### *Legislative Changes:*

**Press regulation:** We call on policymakers to commit to the full implementation of the Royal Charter on press regulation and the commencement of the second part of the Leveson Inquiry, including an investigation into the prevalence of Islamophobia within the media.

**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.

Last year, the UK Government committed to the reviewing and updating of domestic legislature governing cyberspace to make the UK “the safest place in the world to go online”.<sup>22</sup> This resulted in the Online Harms White Paper.<sup>23</sup> However, the remit of the white paper is limited to User Generated Content (UGC). Therefore, this appears to exclude newspaper websites from oversight as they are not UGCs, but rather project harms without the influence of users. Crucially, concerning the devastating attack on mosques in New Zealand in 2019, the white paper notes that there was a “co-ordinate cross-platform effort to generate maximum reach of footage of the attack”.<sup>24</sup> However, there is no acknowledgement of platforms such as MailOnline, the Sun, and the Mirror which shared footage of the attacks and the attacker’s manifesto on their websites.<sup>25</sup> The initial consultation response by the Home Office and Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, failed to clarify the issue but did reveal that press freedom organisations and media actors “expressed the view that journalistic content should not be in scope”.<sup>26</sup> Considering the reach of newspaper websites, it is vital that they are held to the same standards of reducing harm as other platforms.

### *Government and Industry Initiatives:*

**Media and broadcasting:** There needs to be an 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.

**Political accountability:** Public figures must show greater maturity and responsibility when discussing issues involving minority communities and take care not to cause hysteria for the sake of political popularity and agendas. Accusations of Islamophobia have been directed at both major political parties in recent times. In particular, reports such as MEND’s analysis of Islamophobia within the Conservative Party<sup>27</sup> and the recently leaked internal Labour Party report<sup>28</sup> demonstrate the need to address Islamophobia within their ranks. If political leaders do not take meaningful steps towards eliminating hate within their own parties, they cannot

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<sup>22</sup> “Online Harms White Paper”, Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and the Home Office, April 2019. Accessed: March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper>.

<sup>23</sup> “Online Harms White Paper”, Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and the Home Office, April 2019. Accessed: March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Jim Waterson, “Facebook removed 1.5m videos of New Zealand terror attack in first 24 hours”, *The Guardian*, March 2019. Accessed: March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/17/facebook-removed-15m-videos-new-zealand-terror-attack>.

<sup>26</sup> “Online Harms White Paper”, Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and the Home Office, April 2019. Accessed: March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper>.

<sup>27</sup> “From ‘Letterboxes’ to ‘Ragheads’: Over 100 Examples of Islamophobia in the Conservative Party” (London: MEND, 2019) <https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Islamophobia-in-the-Conservative-Party-MEND.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> “Leaked Labour Party Report Reveals Islamophobia and Inaction Within the Party,” Muslim Engagement and Development, April 22, 2020, <https://www.mend.org.uk/leaked-labour-party-report-reveals-islamophobia-and-inaction-within-the-party/>

hope to inspire tolerance and understanding across society. MEND hopes that all political parties will take a renewed stance on tackling prejudice in all its forms.

### *Muslim Community Empowerment:*

There are a number of ways in which British Muslim communities may be empowered to engage with political and media spaces. Strategies to achieve this include:

- Supporting educative and industry initiatives designed to attract Muslims and BAME individuals into the spheres of politics, civil service, media, and broadcasting.
- Placing greater emphasis on educational programs aimed at empowering minority communities to be actively engaged within politics and media.

### *Wider Community Engagement:*

There are certain areas than MEND feels should be addressed in order to promote a wider understanding of religious and other minorities in the UK:

- Promoting greater inter-community engagement and awareness of Islam and other religions. MEND has a variety of materials (including our exhibition, factsheets, and easy read guides) and runs numerous programs (training courses, campaigns, and events) that are examples of methods that may be used within such efforts.
- 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.