DEFINING ISLAMOPHOBIA

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As the world recovers from the recent deaths of fifty people in devastating far-right terror **attacks** on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, there are few reminders of the danger of Islamophobia that are more poignant. This problem is not new to the UK and its persistent presence in the daily lives of our Muslim communities is a stark reminder that action is needed to combat all forms of hatred which leave innocent individuals vulnerable to marginalisation, discrimination, and even violence.

Politicians such as Baroness Sayeeda Warsi have **remarked** on how Islamophobia "has passed the dinner table test" in the UK. Indeed, looking at patterns of Islamophobic comments amongst prominent members of political parties, it seems Islamophobic beliefs have been afforded an air of legitimacy even amongst our political representatives.

To protect our Muslim communities and meaningfully combat Islamophobia, it is essential that policymakers are firstly equipped with a definition with which to identify it.

MEND, therefore, urges the UK Government to:

1. **Adopt the definition of Islamophobia produced by the APPG (All-Party Parliamentary Group) on British Muslims: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."**

2. **Apply the above definition in conjunction with the explanatory guidelines put forward by the Coalition Against Islamophobia.**

As such, this paper seeks to offer a brief (but by no means exhaustive) analysis of the necessity to adopt a definition of Islamophobia that is in agreement with the aforementioned guidance and to highlight key initiatives that are essential in tackling the phenomenon.

The Need to Define Islamophobia

Defining Islamophobia is important as it will provide much needed clarity in legislation and policies that are intended to protect vulnerable minorities. 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". 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.

Defining Islamophobia is also an act of recognition. For British Muslims, it demonstrates that the Government recognises the hardships they face 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.

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.

Why the APPG Definition Needs Additional Guidelines

The definition proposed by the APPG serves an important function in locating Islamophobia within the framework of racism. If the logic of this definition follows the UN's conceptualisation of racism, it provides the scope to encompass the public exclusions and discriminations contained within Islamophobia that extent further than just hate crime and abuse.

It states in the APPG's report that "*in analysing the quantitative and, mostly, qualitative data, a thread of three key factors emerged: the process of Islamophobia, the actions that qualify as Islamophobic, and the impact of Islamophobia… any definition must include the aforementioned three factor*s".

To be clear, for a definition to comprehensive it must incorporate the following:

(i) The process of Islamophobia,

(ii) The actions that qualify as Islamophobic,

(iii) The impact of Islamophobia.

However, it appears that the APPG's definition does not satisfactorily meet this three-pronged test as it does not clearly define (i), (ii), or (iii). This is important since there may be policies which are Islamophobic, yet do not make any mention of targeting Muslims, or expressions of Muslimness.

One such example is the PREVENT strategy. The PREVENT strategy does not explicitly target Muslims, nor specifically mention any expressions of "Muslimness" or even perceived "Muslimness". Indeed, to do so would be illegal and fail its own Equality Impact Assessment. Therefore, taking the APPG definition as it is written, it would be difficult to categorise PREVENT as Islamophobic. However, the strategy has been invariably shown to be

institutionally Islamophobic in its process, application, and impact; its disproportionate application to the Muslim community being but one indicator of this.

On the other hand, if through these additional guidelines, the APPG positions Islamophobia within a framework of racism in line with both the Runnymede Trust's definition and the UN's definitions of racism and racial discrimination (*any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference… which 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*"), it is clear that PREVENT must be seen as institutionally Islamophobic.

Therefore, the progress made by the APPG in locating Islamophobia within the framework of racism necessitates a confirmation of the types of discrimination the definition encompasses. This can be done by incorporating the suggested guidelines as an addendum to the APPG definition, listing the ways in which Islamophobia is manifested in public life, the media, schools, and the workplace.

These proposed guidelines would also facilitate an understanding of the type of Islamophobia that is in question. For example, one of the clauses in the guidelines states that Islamophobia includes;

- *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.*

This would be Islamophobia by PROCESS under condition (i)

Another example is;

- *Making mendacious, dehumanising, vilifying, demonising, or stereotypical allegations about Muslims*

This would be classified as Islamophobia by ACTIONS under condition (ii).

Meanwhile, another clause includes;

- *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.*

This constitutes Islamophobia both as an action (clause (ii)) and as an IMPACT under condition (iii) through physical harm or damage to individuals or property.

Furthermore, the inclusion of guidance clarifies the limitations of the definition with regards to criticism of religion. As the guidance states;

> *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.*

To illustrate this, we may use the example of niqab. One could legitimately criticise the theological or ideological basis for wearing of niqab, however, when women who choose to wear the niqab are compared to "letterboxes" and "bank robbers", this is undoubtedly dehumanising and thus constitutes Islamophobia.

A Holistic Understanding

Islamophobia encompasses far more than simply hostility and hate crime. Islamophobia infiltrates every aspect of public life and creates barriers for 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. It is in the aim of encompassing Islamophobia in all its manifestations that the guidance laid out in this briefing are in need of application.

Manifestations of Islamophobia

Moral Panic, Media, and Broadcasting

Studies have shown that, with 21 negative references to Muslims within British media output for every single neutral or positive reference, the media plays an integral role in spreading prejudice, stereotypes, and xenophobic views of vulnerable groups. These negative representations are incredibly detrimental to community cohesion and the subsequent ability of minorities to fully participate and engage as equal members of society. The prevalence of Islamophobia within the British press has been highlighted by several studies, including that of Paul Baker, Tony McEnery, and Costas Gabrielatos, who conclude that the "most salient finding is that the British Press most frequently positions Islam and Muslims in stories or contexts that relate to conflict". Similarly, another **study** by Cardiff University found that the bulk of coverage on British Muslims was focussed 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".

Notable tabloid publications that have thus developed an infamous reputation for publishing controversial, xenophobic, and Islamophobic stories, including The Sun and The Daily Mail; both being singled out for criticism by name by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). The ECRI **accused** the Daily Mail, of playing a "prominent role in encouraging prejudice" against vulnerable groups, whilst also reporting that both the Daily Mail and the Sun "are responsible for most of the offensive, discriminatory and provocative terminology". Concluding that "hate speech in some traditional media continues to be a serious problem", the report highlighted articles such as the Sun's *Rescue boats? I'd use gunships to stop migrants*, in which the columnist, Katie Hopkins, likened migrants to cockroaches, and also highlighted The Sun's front-page headline *1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis* which was subsequently found to be wholly inaccurate and a forced retraction and correction was issued. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) also **pointed** to the disturbing journalism of the Sun and the Daily Mail, arguing that, "The two right wing tabloids in our sample, the Daily Mail and Sun, were unlike anything else in our study… what really differentiated these two titles was their aggressive editorialising around threat themes, and in particular how they presented refugee and migrants as a burden on Britain's welfare state. Both papers also featured humanitarian themes at a much lower level than any other newspapers in our study. Overall, this meant that the Sun and the Daily Mail exhibited both a hostility, and a lack of empathy with refugees and migrants that was unique."

However, the Sun and the Daily Mail are reflective of a wider problem. Indeed, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein, drew similar conclusions in 2015, when he noted that "decades of sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner

abuse, misinformation and distortion" were identified as a major problem in British press. He called on all European countries to take a firmer line on racism and xenophobia which "under the guise of freedom of expression, are being allowed to feed a vicious cycle of vilification, intolerance and politicization of migrants, as well as of marginalized European minorities".

Racial and Religious Hatred

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 an increasing levels 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 the year 2017/18, there was a **40% rise** in religious hate crime with 52% of these attacks aimed at Muslims.

In January 2019, a clip was widely circulated of a man filming himself hurling racist and Islamophobic **abuse** at school girls in East London. In the 2-minute clip, the suspect can be heard making references to Dr Mengele, an SS officer and physician, infamous for his role in the Nazi regime for conducting inhumane experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz concentration camp. Abhorrent language litters the video, including reference to the girls as "black c***s" who are going to "breed like f***ing rats" and calling for their sterilisation. He continued "This was England," and "We're going to be f***ed with this lot. I think what we might have to do is think of something like old doctor Mengele […] so the c**ts can't f***ing multiply".

Meanwhile, **Demos** have noted that, between March 2016-March 2017, 143,920 Tweets were sent from the UK that were considered to be derogatory and anti-Islamic – this amounts to almost 400 per day. Such anti-Muslim sentiments are particularly acute following incidents such as the London Bridge attack in 2017, following which the Guardian **reported** that 32 of the top 100 most shared tweets expressed negative sentiments about Muslims.

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 school girls 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

It is necessary to examine Islamophobia in terms of its ability to economically exclude Muslims from 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.

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.

As a result of the amendments to the Counter-Terror and Border Security Bill proposed by the House of Lords, the Government has conceded to an independent review of the PREVENT strategy. The review follows sustained criticism of the strategy put forward by experts from across society, including three special rapporteurs to the UN, the Joint Committee on Human Rights, the NEU (formerly known as the NUT), the NUS, the former Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Rights Watch UK, the Open Society Justice Initiative, the Joint Committee for Human Rights, and more than 140 academics, politicians and experts in one instance alone.

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, such as the Muslim Council of Britain and MEND, 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 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. 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 assumptions 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 cancelation 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.

It is imperative that Islamophobic, racist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic attitudes are tackled and that people of all backgrounds and faiths stand in solidarity against prejudice and violence. As such, MEND calls upon the UK Government to:

- **Adopt the definition of Islamophobia produced by the APPG on British Muslims: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."**

- **Apply the above definition in conjunction with the guidelines outlined in the introduction of this briefing in order to ensure a full and holistic approach to the phenomenon.**

How MEND can assist parliamentarians and policy makers:

- Providing briefings, information, analysis, and expertise on issues impacting British Muslim communities.

- Arranging opportunities for MPs to engage with their local Muslim communities.

- Conducting research within Muslim communities.

- Connecting MPs to local stakeholders.

If MEND can be of any assistance to your work, please feel free to contact
info@mend.org.uk