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**** FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ****

MUSLIM ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT (MEND) CONDEMNS UNHELPFUL PUBLIC NARRATIVES AROUND FAR-RIGHT HATE MOBS

Rights group Muslim Engagement & Development (MEND) expresses its great concern at how a number of mainstream media outlets and politicians have spoken about the far-right fascist riots in recent days. We have seen a disturbing amount of news reports, commentators and politicians refer to the far-right hate mobs simply as “protesters.” The scenes of recent days have shown us these gangs have far exceeded the boundaries of legitimate protest. This is not legitimate protest; it is thuggery, Islamophobia and racism. At times, it even appears to have crossed the threshold of terrorism.

Further, media coverage at times has presented the fascists and those confronting them as a battle between “protestors” and “counter-protestors.” This distinction is false. Those standing against the fascists, as we saw for example outside the Mercure Hotel in Bristol, are defending vulnerable communities from attack. This is not simply a standoff between two sides to a legitimate debate. One side are violent attackers, while the other are defenders who stand against racism and Islamophobia.

Finally, it is important to understand that this violence is not simply driven by ‘racism,’ but a particular form of it: Islamophobia. We would therefore expect to see news outlets and politicians using that term a lot more. In order to defeat the disease, you first need to diagnose it, which means naming it for what it is.

Commenting on the issue, Azhar Qayum, CEO of MEND, said:

“Language matters. We have got to this situation because of long term poor public discourse around Muslims, ethnic minorities and asylum seekers. We must not compound this by pandering to far-right narratives and belittling mob violence at this time.”

Notes to editors

About Muslim Engagement and Development:

MEND is a not-for-profit company that helps to empower and encourage British Muslims within local communities to be more actively involved in British media and politics. British Muslims have remained on the margins of public and political debate about their religion and place in modern Britain for too long and the level of Muslim participation in media and politics remains woefully low. 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. Enhancing mainstream participation by communities that are under-represented and vulnerable is an important step towards deepening and strengthening our democracy.

For further information please contact press@mend.org.uk