



# Muslim Women's Network UK

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Rt Hon Dominic Grieve QC MP  
Attorney General  
Attorney General's Office  
20 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0NF

20<sup>th</sup> March 2014

Dear Dominic Grieve MP,

**Re: Lenient Sentence Given to Quran Teacher Guilty of Child Sexual Abuse**

Muslim Women's Network UK (MWN UK) is the only national Muslim women's organisation in Britain with more than 500 members with a reach of over 50000 women. We are contacted by women and girls who are suffering from a range of issues including; domestic violence, sexual violence, child abuse, discrimination, forced marriages, mental health, marriage / polygamy / divorce problems.

We are writing to raise our concerns about the recent sentencing of Mr. Suleman Maknojioa, the Quran teacher from Blackburn, at Preston Crown Court. He was only given a 40-week suspended sentence despite being found guilty of child sexual abuse. We believe this is an unduly lenient sentence and request that it is reviewed.

According to media reports, in mitigation the offender's barrister stated that Mr. Maknojioa did not pose a risk because he had kidney problems and that his children and his wife depended on him because she does not speak English. When Mr. Maknojioa was abusing his victim, he had no regard for consequences for his wife and children. Therefore using them as an excuse to save him from going to prison should not have been a consideration. Although it is unclear how much weight was put on these circumstances, if they have contributed towards his lighter sentence, this sets a worrying precedent. Other pedophiles, if caught and found guilty, will also resort to such excuses to 'get away with their crimes.'

Also in passing sentence Judge Michael Byrne stated that he was bearing in mind that social services had conducted their own assessment and found that Mr. Maknoijoa did not pose a risk. It appears that the victim has been forgotten when deciding upon the most appropriate punishment. Instead of focusing on the impact on the victim, more attention has been given to the personal circumstances of the offender who knew exactly what he was doing. Pedophilia is one of the most abhorrent crimes no matter what end of the spectrum the offences fall. Sexual offences that are considered as being at the lower end of the sexual scale also have devastating lifetime consequences on victims. Hence, no circumstances or factors can or should justify lesser sentences when punishing anyone committing sexual abuse crimes against children. When pedophiles are found guilty, they should be given the strictest sentences that are available to the judge. Regardless of whether Mr. Maknoijoa poses a risk or not, he needs to be punished for his crime.

If justice is not seen not to be served, then other victims or parents of victims will not have the confidence in the judicial system to come forward, thus leaving predators to continue abusing children. At present, Muslim communities are reluctant to hold religious teachers and institutions to account. Such individuals and organisations are held in such high esteem that it is almost impossible for those who do want to speak out to come forward. We regularly hear of situations when abuse has come to light and parents simply remove their child or the teacher has been allowed to move on. Victims are expected to suffer in silence because of dishonor, shame, and stigma. We therefore commend the victim and her family for being courageous in coming forward. However, despite her bravery and despite the fact the offender was found guilty, her abuser is walking around freely and not being adequately punished.

We request that this unduly lenient sentence is referred to the court of appeal to be reconsidered. The 40-week sentence is not severe enough because if Mr. Maknoijoa was to serve this in prison, the likelihood is that he would only serve half of this. We are also appalled by the fact that this lenient sentence has been suspended which means that he will not be going to prison. The current sentence has damaged public confidence.

I look forward to your personal consideration of this matter.

Yours sincerely,

**Shaista Gohir MBE**  
**Chair**  
**(On Behalf of the MWNUK Board)**

cc.

Minister of Justice, Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP  
Director of Public Prosecutions, Alison Saunders  
Shadow Lord Chancellor Rt Hon Sadiq Khan MP  
The Law Commission