

MEDIA STATEMENT

8th August 2018

BORIS JOHNSON – His ‘Veil Comments’ are irresponsible and Incite Hatred

Boris Johnson’s comments are irresponsible and will incite hatred and put Muslim women who veil in danger. Instead of challenging similar far right rhetoric, Boris Johnson is pandering to their agenda by deliberately adopting xenophobic discourses. He knows the face veil has become an emotive issue in Europe and is using this issue to get media attention and publicity.

It is worrying that some politicians continue to give Muslim women’s dress disproportionate attention given that of the 1.4 million Muslim women and girls in the UK, only a tiny minority of Muslim women (potentially from a few hundred to even a few thousand) wear the face veil. It is also interesting to note that in this widespread campaign against the face veil across Europe, the leading voices are those of men. They are using women’s dress as a political tool to promote fear and hatred.

MWNUK Chair Shaista Gohir said: *“The right to freedom of speech and therefore criticise the veil can be done in a respectful way with intellectual arguments without comparing women who veil with letterboxes and bank robbers. Although he does not support a veil ban, by using language that dehumanises Muslim women and compares them to criminals puts them in danger of physical and verbal abuse. We must support women, including those who choose to cover their face, to make independent choices about how they dress whatever that may be.”*

We welcome Prime Minister Theresa May’s and Brandon Lewis’s statements on the issue and call on Boris Johnson to apologise. If he does not then he should face disciplinary action because as one Muslim Women’s Network member, who called today, said: *‘Such comments have real consequences for real women in the real world.’* If he is not reprimanded then it legitimises incitement of hatred against Muslim women. This is yet another example of Islamophobic language emerging from senior members of the Conservative Party.

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Muslim Women’s Network UK (www.mwnuk.co.uk) is the national leading Muslim women’s charity working to improve the social justice and equality for Muslim women and girls.