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MEDIA STATEMENT

Conservative Party Discrimination Inquiry - Concrete steps needed to tackle anti-Muslim attitudes now

Previously Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) has raised concerns about the narrative used by some Conservative politicians when talking about Muslims - describing Muslim women as 'letterboxes' for instance - and have also supported calls for an independent inquiry into Islamophobia within the Conservative Party. Now that the findings of the inquiry into how the Conservative Party handles discrimination complaints shows that most of these relate to anti-Muslim prejudice, it confirms what we already suspected – that the party does have an Islamophobia problem.

If the Conservative Party is serious about addressing this issue, it will act swiftly to implement the recommendations of Professor Swaran Singh who oversaw the inquiry, including introducing a new code of conduct for party members and publishing an action plan within six weeks. Although we welcome the suggestion that at least one party association member should receive equality training, this alone is unlikely to change attitudes and behaviours. Efforts should also include tackling assumptions about Muslims and other racialised groups, increasing an understanding of different communities and of the negative impact of prejudice and discrimination.

Although the current spotlight regarding Islamophobia is on the Conservative Party, it is also important to acknowledge that similar allegations have been made against members of the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats. Therefore, all the main political parties should be open to investigation on the extent of the problem within their ranks, take concrete steps to address concerns and send a message that they do not tolerate any form of discrimination against Muslims.

Anti-Muslim rhetoric also has consequences. An analysis of religious hate crime offences already indicates that Muslims are the most commonly targeted group. Muslim women often bear the brunt of abuse but do not always report hate crimes. Muslim women should not have to get so used to Islamophobic abuse that they consider it normal part of life in Britain today.

Muslim Women's Network UK

www.mwnuk.co.uk