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MEDIA STATEMENT

Divisive Politics is Endangering Muslim Communities in Britain

Muslim Women's Network UK is deeply concerned that the current government appears to lack a strong commitment to addressing Islamophobia, leaving many feeling that the government is potentially even contributing to the growing acceptance of negative attitudes towards Muslims. Divisive politics must not be allowed to endanger Muslim communities.

Political leaders and institutions play a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes and policies. And yet despite Lee Anderson MP losing his Conservative whip due to Islamophobic and anti-Muslim comments directed at London Mayor Sadiq Khan, Cabinet Ministers and the Prime Minister are refusing to categorise his remarks as Islamophobic. Additionally, Suella Braverman MP, who also made Islamophobic comments, has similarly not faced condemnation and retains her Conservative whip. Paul Scully MP is now making unfounded claims that certain areas of London and Birmingham, where Muslims reside, are deemed as 'no-go areas'.

Baroness Shaista Gohir OBE, CEO of MWN UK said: *"The escalating levels of anti-Muslim prejudice is creating an atmosphere of fear and anxiety within the Muslim community. In particular, many Muslim women feel less safe in their daily lives whether in public spaces, on public transport, at university or online. And negative attitudes towards them are sometimes extending into their workplace or when accessing services. Despite Muslim women, particularly those who wear the headscarf, being possibly the most targeted group and consequently facing heightened risks, we feel the government is not sufficiently engaging with Muslim women's groups in a proactive manner."*

Concerns regarding Islamophobia within the Conservative Party are not new. The perceived lack of engagement with diverse Muslim organisations sends a strong message that some forms of hatred are acceptable. For example, in November 2023, amid rising community tensions, Muslim Women's Network UK requested a meeting with the Home Secretary. The response from the Minister for Victims and Safeguarding, Laura Farris MP, indicated that both the Home Secretary and she 'have a packed schedule of pre-existing diary commitments' and suggested getting in touch 'to see if we can arrange something in the coming months.' We feel the delay in meeting the only national charity representing the voices of Muslim women strongly implies a lack of urgency or seriousness in addressing the issue. The government must be careful not to establish a hierarchy that implies that the safety of some groups is less important.

Baroness Shaista Gohir OBE, CEO of MWNUK added: *“At present, a comprehensive dataset on anti-Muslim hate crimes in the UK is unavailable. This lack of information prevents us, and others from understanding the real scale of the problem and from advocating for more proactive measures. While the government is presently highlighting their support of Tell Mama as an indicator of their efforts to address Islamophobia, who provide some statistical information, this is not sufficient. Recent Freedom of Information (FOI) requests regarding Muslim hate crimes sent to 45 police forces by us produced varying responses – some did not reply, others sought fees for information, and the quality of provided data varied. However, a noticeable pattern emerged from the data: in certain regions, both Muslim men and women encountered equal levels of targeting, whereas in other areas, Muslim women experienced less targeting—accounting for one-third of the victims compared to two-thirds for men. The data suggests a potential underreporting of incidents by Muslim women in certain areas. Additionally, a consistent trend observed was that the majority of perpetrators were identified as white males”.*

Muslim Women’s Network UK also extend a message to a potential incoming Labour government, urging a comprehensive review of the strategies employed to tackle Islamophobia. This should include a consultation with groups nationwide, an examination of how funds are allocated, and proposals for improving reporting mechanisms through a system that must be informed by key stakeholders including Muslim women. It will be necessary to also take action against discriminatory attitudes among politicians, by establishing a cross-party working group and mandating training for political figures. This government, as well as any potential future administration must pledge a zero tolerance approach to all forms of discrimination, irrespective of the targeted group.

Additional Information

- Media enquiries can be directed to: contact@mwnuk.co.uk or 0121 2369000
- Muslim Women’s Network UK is a national charity and more information can be found on the website: www.mwnuk.co.uk
- MWN Helpline (national specialist faith and culturally sensitive helpline) can be contacted on: Tel: 0800 999 5786 / Email: info@mwnhelpline.co.uk / Text: 07415 206 936 and further information can be found at: www.mwnhelpline.co.uk