

EUROPEAN MONITORING CENTRE ON RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA  
OBSERVATOIRE EUROPÉEN DES PHÉNOMÈNES RACISTES ET XÉNOPHOBES  
EUROPÄISCHE STELLE ZUR BEOBACHTUNG VON RASSISMUS UND FREMDENFEINDLICHKEIT



**Anti-Islamic reactions in the EU**  
**after the terrorist acts against the USA**

**A collection of country reports from RAXEN**  
**National Focal Points (NFPs)**

**12<sup>th</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2001**

**United Kingdom**

**Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)**

Following the terror attacks in the USA on 11<sup>th</sup> September the EUMC found that there was a pressing need to closely follow the possible negative repercussions on racial and xenophobic attitudes and events in civil societies in Europe. On the basis of national reports drafted by its RAXEN network of National Focal Points (NFPs), the EUMC produced a first short-term report on anti-Islamic reactions in all countries of the European Union on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2001.

In order to have a longer term and regular monitoring on attitudes/incidents towards Muslim/Islamic communities and other vulnerable groups, the EUMC decided to follow up the first report and continue to closely monitor the situation at least until the end of the year 2001.

It therefore asked the RAXEN NFPs to produce additional reports, monitoring the situation on a monthly basis until the end of the year; in addition, it asked for a final report analysing the overall developments from 11<sup>th</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2001.

According to the EUMC request, the reports have addressed in particular the following issues:

- acts of violence or aggression and changes in the attitude of the EU population towards ethnic, cultural or religious minorities (especially Muslim/Islamic communities but also other vulnerable groups or new types of victims), related to the recent terrorist attacks in the USA;
- good practices and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence;
- reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders including initiatives to reduce polarization and counteract negative national trends.

In addition to the summary report written on behalf of the EUMC by Prof. Nielsen and Mr. Allen of the University of Birmingham, the following pages contain the original reports submitted by each NFP for the whole period.

Not all reports have been made available from all countries, but the coverage is however complete. The reports are quite varying in size. It should be considered that the Member States have different systems in collecting data: some have implemented a rather elaborated and comprehensive approach, while others have done what they could to get information about the situation in the Member State.

The task of the RAXEN network is to collect reliable and comparable data (including examples of and models for “good practices”) at the European level on the phenomena of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism in order to help the EU and its Member States to take measures or formulate courses of action. For further information please visit the EUMC homepage <http://eumc.eu.int>

Vienna, 23 May 2002

## First short-term report

### Verbal and physical attacks

In the last week there have been numerous press reports attributing violent assaults and attacks on property to Islamophobia resulting from the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. However, it is impossible at this point to assess whether or to what degree these events have had an impact on recorded incidents of racist crime. Moreover, while it may ultimately be established that September 11<sup>th</sup> has been an aggravating factor in, or the stimulus for, some racist incidents, account will have to be taken of other, possibly more significant, underlying factors.

The following is a brief summary of incidents, which have been linked in the press to a 'backlash' following September 11<sup>th</sup>:

#### *Physical attacks:*

- A 28-year-old Afghan minicab driver was seriously assaulted and left paralysed from the neck down by three men who, according to police, referred to the attacks in New York.
- Another Afghan man was assaulted in Dover and has received serious injuries.
- A 19-year-old Asian woman in Swindon was beaten around the head by two men with a baseball bat prior to which one was reportedly heard to say 'here's a Muslim'.
- In the north east of England a 20-year-old Bangladeshi man suffered a broken jaw after being beaten by a gang of youths.
- "Many Muslims have been spat at and have suffered verbal abuse, particularly women wearing the Hijab" according to a London Times ('Racists seek revenge around the world' 19<sup>th</sup> September 2001).
- A Mosque was firebombed in Bolton when there were twenty people inside.

#### *Threats and attacks on property*

- In Birmingham Mosques have received abusive telephone calls and excrement through their letter boxes.
- In Oldham racist graffiti was daubed on to the walls of a Mosque.
- Bricks have been thrown at Mosques in Belfast, Manchester, London, Southend and Glasgow.
- An Islamic school in London has been forced to close after threatening telephone calls.
- Bomb threats have been made, including one to Regents Park Mosque in central London which lead to an evacuation during Friday prayers.

### Attitudes

Since press reports first began to speculate that the outrages committed in New York and Washington on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> September were the work of 'Islamic terrorists', the UK Government has been immediately conscious of the need

1. to reassure Muslim communities who feel vulnerable; and
2. to emphasise that the overwhelming majority of Muslims, both in the UK and in the wider world, do not support such attacks.

From the morning of Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> both Government ministers and the leaders of the UK's faith communities have sought to put out this consistent message.

20<sup>th</sup> September 2001

## **Report on IMPACT of September 11, 2001 ON RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN THE UK**

### **1. Acts of violence or aggression and changes in the attitude of the EU population towards ethnic, cultural, religious minorities**

We are not yet in a position to enumerate the number of attacks and other acts of aggression which have occurred in the UK as a result of the events in New York, Washington DC and Pennsylvania which transfixed the world on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 (we will refer to these events in this report as "Sep 11"). We are continuing to assemble more complete information and should be able to construct a more complete picture in the near future. In this section we have drawn on:

- Reports in the UK press of hostility towards Muslims and other religious and ethnic minority groups
- Reports collated by the Commission for Racial Equality through its network of Country/Regional Offices and local Racial Equality Councils
- Reports collated by NGOs

It should be borne in mind, however, that reported incidents can not give us a full picture of the situation - particularly the less tangible sense of threat which has been engendered in the Muslim community and other minority populations over the reporting period. The repercussions of Sep 11 continue to be felt and it will be some time before we can investigate them fully.

#### **Reports in the UK press of hostility towards Muslims and other religious and ethnic minority groups**

In the immediate wake of the events of Sep 11 reports in the UK press of violence and aggression towards people of Asian origin, and particularly those perceived to be Muslims, increased significantly.

The Guardian reported<sup>1</sup> that from Sep 11 until mid-December "there had been around 300 assaults on Muslims in Britain, and most of the victims were women. These include verbal abuse, physical assault and even rape. For example, Muslim women have been "spat at, punched, kicked, called names, hit with umbrellas at bus stops, and pelted with eggs and fruit. They have received dog excrement and fireworks through their letterboxes and bricks through their windows." Similarly, a woman attacked a 3-year-old boy, shopping with his mother, with pepper spray. His mother was wearing the hijab.

The Times stated that this is "a bad time to be Asian in Britain" and described how many Asians, particularly Muslims, are scared to go out because "when they venture out on to the street, many ... are insulted, spat at and attacked. Women have had their headscarves torn off

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<sup>1</sup> The Guardian 08/12/01 "Britain has a poor record for its treatment of Muslims"

and have been beaten up. Mosques have been set on fire, ringed with pigs' heads and daubed with racist graffiti."<sup>2</sup>

The Scottish Daily Record said "Moslems in plea for more police help as attacks by race thugs rocket". Strathclyde Police Chief Constable said "There has undoubtedly been an increase (in attacks) since Sep 11."<sup>3</sup>

In Wales the Western Mail reported that racist incidents had increased by as much as three times since Sep 11.<sup>4</sup>

## Physical Attacks

Please note that the date of the reported incident is given where available [**bold, in square brackets**], otherwise please refer to publication date

- Attacks on Muslim communities have been reported across Britain as fears grow of an angry backlash in the wake of the Sep 11 terrorist atrocities. Officials at Glasgow's central mosque have brought in private security guards to patrol the perimeter of the building after the windows of a new extension to the site were smashed during a late-night attack. Police in Livingston have stepped up patrols after the town's mosque came under attack from a gang of teenagers.<sup>5</sup>
- A Muslim-owned house in West London had its windows smashed in.<sup>6</sup>
- Ten pigs' heads were left outside a mosque in Essex<sup>7</sup>
- The windows of a new Sikh temple in Swindon were smashed in what local police described as a suspected act of vengeance after Sep 11.<sup>8</sup>
- An Afghan man was assaulted in Dover and received serious injuries.
- In the Northeast of England a 20-year-old Bangladeshi man suffered a broken jaw after being beaten by a gang of youths.
- Several mosques have reported receiving hate mail.<sup>9</sup>
- A Sikh man, mistaken for a Muslim because of his turban, was chased down the street by two men who shouted, "What have you lot been up to? We're going to have you."<sup>10</sup>
- A mosque in Belfast, Northern Ireland, had two of its windows smashed.<sup>11</sup>
- An Afghan taxi driver was assaulted and left paralysed from the neck down after an argument about the fare and about the events of Sep 11. The attackers shouted racial abuse before hitting the man over the head with a bottle and kicking him repeatedly.<sup>12</sup>
- An Asian minicab driver was assaulted "in an apparent revenge attack for the US bombings".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Times 27/09/01 "A bad time to be Asian in Britain"

<sup>3</sup> The Daily Record 23/10/01 "Protect Us From Hatred"

<sup>4</sup> Western Mail 01/11/01 "Racist attacks treble after September 11 atrocities"

<sup>5</sup> The Scotsman 17/10/01

<sup>6</sup> Financial Times 22/09/01 "Muslims sustain unwelcome attention"

<sup>7</sup> The Guardian 22/09/01 "Backlash - Racists and Islamists exploit tragedy"

<sup>8</sup> Swindon Evening Advertiser 20/09/01 "Windows smashed at Sikh temple"

<sup>9</sup> The Times 13/09/01 "Guard mounted on mosques"

<sup>10</sup> Evening Standard 14/09/01 "British Muslims hold emergency talks over threats"

<sup>11</sup> Independent of Sunday 16/09/01 "Backlash heightens racial abuse 'tenfold'"

<sup>12</sup> The Independent 18/09/01 "Three held after racist attack on Afghan taxi driver" ; The Guardian 18/09/01

"Race attack"; Daily Telegraph 18/09/01 "Islam leaders say extremists are stirring up hatred"

<sup>13</sup> The Guardian 26/09/01 "Asian minicab driver attacked"

- A 19-year-old woman wearing the hijab was beaten around the head with a metal baseball bat by two white men in Swindon. Prior to the attack one of the men was reportedly heard to say "here's a Muslim"<sup>14</sup>
- A woman and her children were chased into their home in Swansea by a gang of men, who called them terrorists and threatened to bomb their house.<sup>15</sup>
- A 14-year-old boy had his face pushed into a toilet bowl by a gang, who then wrote "Osama" on his forehead and pushed a sausage into his mouth to force him to break his Ramadan fast.<sup>16</sup>
- [12/09/01] A 20-year-old woman was assaulted on a bus with a bottle, and called "Muslim bastard" - onlookers, including the bus driver, appeared to ignore the incident.<sup>17</sup>
- Two university students had their headscarves ripped off in Cambridge.<sup>18</sup>
- A Muslim girl had her headscarf ripped off by an adult outside her school.<sup>19</sup>
- An Asian woman was attacked with a hammer on a train by a man who shouted "You should die. You want killing for what you did in America".<sup>20</sup>
- [29/09/01] A gang of men armed with knives, baseball bats, CS spray and an imitation firearm were arrested in south London after police received intelligence that they were about to attack a mosque.<sup>21</sup>
- [03/10/01] A petrol bomb attack on an Edinburgh mosque and Pakistani community centre is being treated as a racist incident.<sup>22</sup>
- A Muslim woman in Gloucester was attacked by 15 white teenagers as she waited in her car at a railway crossing.<sup>23</sup>
- [19/11/01] A Muslim home and business in Hull was destroyed by an explosion in the early hours of Nov 19. The family was out at the time. The police are treating the attack as racially-motivated.<sup>24</sup>

### Verbal Attacks and Threats

- By 7.30 pm on Sep 11, The Muslim Council of Britain had received hate emails with references to 'Islamic terrorism' and 'Islamic violence'.<sup>25</sup>
- Islamia primary school in Northwest London closed temporarily after receiving threatening phone calls. The school's secretary was also verbally abused while shopping.<sup>26</sup>
- Saudi Arabian Airlines staff at Heathrow are the target of offensive graffiti in the toilets, such as "Death to Allah", "Muslim skum [sic]" and "Kill Muslims".<sup>27</sup>
- Women wearing hijab have been branded "murderers" in the street.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Times 27/09/01 "Racist wave of hate engulfs Islamic targets"; The Guardian 18/09/01 "Race attack"; Daily Telegraph 18/09/01 "Islam leaders say race extremists are stirring up hatred" The Mirror 20/09/01 "Straw Plea"

<sup>15</sup> The Times 27/09/01 "Racist wave of hate engulfs Islamic targets"

<sup>16</sup> The Independent Review 28/12/01 "Constantly exposed in the glare of the spotlights"

<sup>17</sup> The Times 27/09/01; The Guardian 08/12/01

<sup>18</sup> The Guardian 08/12/01 "Britain has a poor record for its treatment of Muslims"

<sup>19</sup> The Independent 20/09/01 "Anger at clerics extremism as race attacks rise"

<sup>20</sup> The Guardian 28/09/01 "Hammer attack on Asian woman"

<sup>21</sup> Evening Standard 02/10/01 "7 held over 'bid to attack mosque'"

<sup>22</sup> The Times 04/10/01 "Petrol bomb blamed in 'racist' attack on mosque"; The Morning Star 04/10 "Edinburgh mosque arson"

<sup>23</sup> The Times 13/10/01 "Muslim attacked"

<sup>24</sup> The Yorkshire Post 27/11/01 "Firebomb family to flee 'racist' city"

<sup>25</sup> MCB Newsletter Sep 2001

<sup>26</sup> Morning Star 15/09/01 "Islamic school shuts in fear of reprisals"

<sup>27</sup> The Observer 30/09/01 "Muslim community refuse to be victims of racism"

- In Wales, men and women of Somali origin have been verbally abused by people shouting "Go home".<sup>29</sup>
- A British Muslim who lost a daughter in the Sep 11 attacks is being targeted by racists in London. Sarah Ali is still missing but her father has been the victim of racial hatred from anti-Muslim bigots. Syed Ali said, "I have received a bad reaction in the street - gnashes of teeth, bad looks. But they don't know I lost a daughter - they just see an Asian or an Arab."<sup>30</sup>
- The Muslim Welfare House in Finsbury Park, North London, received a lot of hate mail including one letter saying "When we've finished with Afghanistan you will be next".<sup>31</sup>
- Amin Hussain, a shop owner in Glasgow, reports that he is "warned on an almost daily basis that he is going to pay for last month's terrorist attacks".<sup>32</sup>
- Mohammed Saddique, a shop owner from Oldham, is regularly called "Osama" by his suppliers.<sup>33</sup>

### **The following incidents have been reported by daily newspapers in Northern England**

**18/09/01 Manchester Evening News:** Reports that many Muslims in Manchester have received threatening phone calls at home.

**18/09/01 Manchester Evening News:** An explosive device went off outside Jamia Alvia Mosque in Bolton on 17/09/01. A number of windows shattered with minor damage to the building. 15 people were evacuated but no one was injured.

**18/09/01 Sheffield Star:** An Asian restaurant worker in Doncaster was assaulted and he and his colleagues were subjected to a torrent of abuse.

**19/09/01 Yorkshire Post:** A number of Bradford mosques have been daubed by graffiti and Muslims have had abuse hurled at them.

**21/09/01 Manchester Evening News:** At least 6 mosques and Islamic centres have been attacked in the last week.

**21/09/01 Liverpool Daily Post:** 120 Chinese and 34 Muslim gravestones were knocked down in Everton Cemetery, Liverpool.

**24/09/01 Liverpool Daily Post:** A fire damaged Al Hazar mosque in South Shields, Tyneside in what is believed to be a revenge attack. Minor damage was caused and no one was injured.

**27/09/01 Manchester Evening News:** Police are investigating a claim that an Asian girl was battered with a hammer on a tram from Manchester to Bury, in a revenge attack.

**01/10/01 Liverpool Echo:** Asylum seekers in Liverpool claim they have been suffering more physical attacks and verbal abuse since Sep 11.

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<sup>28</sup> Express on Sunday 16/09/01 "Blair fears new wave of race riots in Britain"

<sup>29</sup> Western Mail 19/09/01 "Welsh Muslims are attacked and abused"

<sup>30</sup> The Evening Standard 21/09/01 "Race hate ordeal of Muslim who lost daughter in rubble"

<sup>31</sup> Financial Times 22/09/01 "Muslims sustain unwelcome attention"

<sup>32</sup> The Glasgow Herald 23/10/01 "Glaswegians who are caught in the middle"

<sup>33</sup> The Guardian 24/10/01 "Muslims fear racist backlash in town scarred by riots"

## Reports in the Muslim News

The Muslim News is the UK's independent monthly Muslim newspaper. The paper has been established for ten years and describes itself as "non-biased, objective, non-sectarian, the most consulted paper in the UK on Muslim domestic and international issues by various media, institutions and researchers - both Muslim and non-Muslim."<sup>34</sup> It says that its offices have been inundated with reports of threats and assaults on Muslims and attacks on mosques, many of which have been reported in national and local newspapers.

[12/09/01] In Hertfordshire two women wearing hijab were walking when a car passed. The white occupants shouted "You Muslims are murderers."

[12/09/01] Dinner ladies at a primary school in Pinner were overheard by children, saying "Muslims are bad as they are killing people."

[12/09/01] In Blackpool a man was abused "You scum, you terrorist".

[12/09/01] A headteacher in Milton Keynes responded to a white student who, during assembly, said that Israelis were responsible for Sep 11, by saying that it was Muslims who were to blame.

[12/09/01] In Cardiff, Wales, the Iranian owner of a computer shop was told "Go back to your own country".

[13/09/01] In Neasden, Northwest London, an Egyptian woman wearing hijab stopped her car when a white man indicated that he needed directions. The man threw eggs at her.

[13/09/01] In Southend, Essex, a mosque was vandalised with graffiti.

[13/09/01] There was a bomb threat at the Islamic Cultural Centre in Regents Park, London. The centre has also received threatening e-mails reading "you go home", "we'll kill you", and "we'll get you."

[13/09/01] A letter was delivered to the Tooting Islamic Centre, London, which read "Shut this shop or we will kill". Later that night the windows of the centre were broken and air rifle pellets found.

[13/09/01] In Wembley, Middlesex, a young boy and his mother and sisters, who were wearing hijab, were verbally abused when a car pulled alongside theirs at traffic lights and the driver started swearing and said "we are going to bomb your centre". He then tried to ram the other car with his own.

[14/09/01] A Lebanese woman wearing hijab was punched in the face in Central London and taken to hospital with serious injuries.

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<sup>34</sup> Muslim News [www.Muslimnews.co.uk/archives/paper.php?article=508](http://www.Muslimnews.co.uk/archives/paper.php?article=508)



[14/09/01] At St Alloysius Roman Catholic school in Islington, North London, a boy was verbally abused by classmates who said, "Your family has done this, what happened in America."

[15/09/01] A brick was thrown through the window of Swansea mosque and Islamic centre.

[15/09/01] In Birmingham two Asian councillors, one a Sikh, were attacked and injured. A man ran up to them shouting "Are you Muslim? I want to kill all Muslims." The man then hit one of the councillors in the stomach and the other one in the face, knocking out some of his teeth.

[16/09/01] Kwik-save supermarket in Levenshulme was graffitied "Death to all Muslims - Allah is scum."

[16/09/01] A seven-year-old boy in Harrow and Wealdstone, Middlesex, was outside his house when two neighbours, 12 and 13 year-old girls told him "you are a terrorist, you killed those people in America."

[17/09/01] In Tower Hamlets, east London, a group of girls wearing hijab were spat on by white men.

[17/09/01] Jamia Alavia Islamic Centre, Bolton, was set alight with petrol bombs.

[17/09/01] A firebomb was put through the letterbox of The Shah Jalaal Mosque, Manchester.

[19/09/01] In Hertfordshire two Muslim women wearing hijab were shopping when a white woman said to them "You Arabs, you go back to your country, you idiots, get out of this shop. This is not your shop."

[22/09/01] The Al-Azhar mosque in South Shields was damaged by fire, followed by graffiti reading "Avenge USA - kill a Muslim now."

[22/09/01] An Egyptian journalist was interviewing people outside the American embassy in London as they queued to sign a condolences book. A man and woman almost tried to beat the journalist up, and when he called the police they asked him to leave.

[C.25/09/01] A senior member of a mosque in Surrey was threatened "I am going to blow up this mosque because you have blown up the buildings in New York. Then you can go to heaven like your suicide bombers."

[28/09/01] Two petrol bombs were thrown at the Bekash restaurant in Essex. Only minor fire damage was sustained and no one inside the building was hurt. The police are treating it as a racist incident but not necessarily related to Sep 11. However, one of the owners of the restaurant said that in 14 years this was the first sign of trouble.

[03/10/01] Two girls wearing hijab were spat at an underground station by a man who said "Muslims are always getting in my way, I hope they kill you and get you all."

[05/10/01] Three students wearing hijab, including one of the girls mentioned directly above, were verbally abused as they came out of an underground station. A man started swearing behind them and said "You pakis, I'll cut you", gesturing to his throat.

[18/10/01] Two girls sitting outside a café in London, wearing hijab, were harassed by a drunk, homeless man who repeatedly made comments such as "Islam is evil" and "you're evil". He left them alone after intervention on the part of an elderly woman.

[11/12/01] Arsonists set fire to a house in Southsea belonging to the president of the local mosque. Police considered the attack to be racist.

### **Muslim News Editorials & Columns**

The Muslim News has also printed a number of editorials and opinion columns that shed some light on the views of British Muslims. A sample of these is summarised below.

#### **Editorial "War on terrorism or Muslims"**

This editorial criticises the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, for implying in the immediate wake of Sep 11 that the culprits were Islamic, thereby causing offence to millions of Muslims. The article also questions the Prime Minister's logic in expressing his distinction between Islam and terrorism initially only in The Muslim News, to people who do not need to be told, rather than to the country as a whole.

#### **Merryl Wyn Davies "Now is the time for all good Muslims to stand up and be counted"**

Merryl Wyn Davies proclaims that it is time for Muslims the world over to reclaim their faith from the travesty of Islam peddled by terrorists saying, "We, the Ummah, must confront the hatred, isolationism, corruption and injustice within our society for it is contrary to the values and principles of Islam." But she warns that, while America is justified in avenging its losses, it must not repeat the mistakes of its past foreign policies. Terrorism, she warns, can only be ended through a universal convention that "constrains everyone, superpower or not, to abide by common laws." She writes that it is now incumbent upon Muslims to persuade the West to find a better way to create a peaceful world, "We have to reclaim the meaning and courage of our faith to serve justice and peace. Now is our time, the time of the vast silenced majority to work to make a better world - no excuses, no hesitation, and definitely no equivocation"

#### **Yousuf Bhailok "Muslims are living in challenging times"**

In a similar article Yousuf Bhailok argues that Muslims must prove to the world that Islam means peace, and that the process must begin with self-inspection or "putting our own house in order". He states unequivocally that those who support acts of terrorism are not to be tolerated within the community of Islam.

#### **Sarah Joseph "Burka is oppressive, says Cherie Blair"**

Sarah Joseph criticises Cherie Blair's comment that "nothing more symbolizes the oppression of (Afghan) women than the burka" as reductionist and over-simplified in the light of the vast burden of oppression suffered by both men and women in Afghanistan - starvation, homelessness and war for example. She welcomes attempts to find links between the West and the Islamic world but points out that many Muslims suspect the West of trying to impose its values onto them, and that commentators in the public eye should be wary of encouraging

this notion. Moreover, she reminds us, many Muslim women find it liberating, not oppressive, to cover themselves. The important thing is having the freedom to choose.

### **Sarah Sheriff "Blunkett's blunder?"**

According to Sarah Sheriff, the Home Secretary, David Blunkett's, remarks about integration of immigrants were ill thought out and ill-advised. Talking about such wide-ranging problems as asylum and immigration, use of the English language, loyalty tests, forced marriage and female genital mutilation, Blunkett is accused of confusing issues that have nothing to do with one another, and of defining immigrant communities in terms of aberrant practices abhorred by all but a tiny minority.

### **Activities by Racist Organisations**

The far-right BNP has launched a 'Campaign Against Islam' with inflammatory leaflets being circulated and made available on its website. The first, a recruitment leaflet, blames current troubles on the politicians who "forced a multicultural society upon us" and urges readers to join the BNP for "the chance to help reverse the undemocratic folly of the old parties and stop the fanatics who want to turn Britain into an Islamic Republic". The second, a 'schools leaflet' encourages parents to withdraw their children from religious studies classes at school as being "the only way for ordinary people like us to protect our children from multicultural brainwashing." A third 'churches' publication identifies Islam with **I**ntolerance, **S**laughter, **L**ooting, **A**rson and **M**olestation of Women and warns that Islam will be the death of Christianity. This leaflet also boasts Sikh and Hindu religious leaders as partners in this campaign, claims which have since been denied by the Sikh and Hindu communities.

### **Reports from CRE Regional Offices and Regional Equality Councils**

The Commission for Racial Equality has country and regional offices in Edinburgh, Cardiff, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and Leeds. Additionally, there is a nationwide network of local voluntary organisations, almost all of which receive some funding for staff costs from the CRE, called Regional Equality Councils. The following information was collated by regional offices and RECs at the request of the CRE Chair, Gurbux Singh.

#### *Scotland*

The Edinburgh Evening News reported that Lothian and Borders Police figures reveal a rise in race attacks in Edinburgh since Sep 11. Reported racial incidents in Edinburgh include physical and verbal abuse, vandalism and graffiti and incidences of arson. The police say that one-third of all the racial incidents (17 out of 55 reported) can be linked to the attacks on the US.

Reports from Strathclyde and Lothian & Borders Police show that racially motivated attacks have increased sharply in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the USA. The Director of West of Scotland REC is quoted in a number of reports claiming the number of complaints coming into the REC mirrors this increase.

Paisley Daily Express reported that a Muslim shopkeeper last week stated he feared for his life after a man threatened to bomb his fast food shop and subjected him to prolonged racial abuse relating to the Sep 11 attacks.

Seventeen headstones have been vandalised in a Muslim burial area in Cambusnethan Cemetery in Wishaw, North Lanarkshire.

### *English Midlands*

#### **Peterborough**

Following Sep 11 there has been an increase in verbal racial abuse and physical attacks.

On 21<sup>st</sup> September at 1.30am a white 17 year old youth was fatally stabbed by a group of up to 10 Asian youths whilst walking home through a predominantly Asian area with a friend. The police were alerted and arrived on the scene to find the young man had already died.

There were scuffles between white and Asian youths when white youths entered a predominantly Asian area. A car was damaged.

An Asian taxi driver was attacked in the city centre.

#### **Kingsheath, Birmingham**

A half-Afghan woman has experienced racial harassment. Her children are subjected to constant racial abuse, both verbal and physical from local children.

#### **Leicester**

The REC is aware of local low key incidents such as gestures and comments of a racist nature.

#### **North Staffordshire REC (Stoke on Trent)**

There is increasing concern as attacks on asylum seekers in the city and verbal abuse of Asian women are occurring. North Staffordshire REC has received anonymous threatening letters.

#### **Coventry**

There have been two incidents since Sep 11 involving scuffles and threatening behaviour towards asylum seekers.

#### **Derby**

Tensions are high in Derby following the distribution of a newsletter from a fictitious Muslim faction called the Real Khilafa which allegedly encourages Muslim youths to go out with Sikh girls to convert them to Islam. Local Sikh leaders believe the newsletters are being distributed by the Derby Muslim group called Al Muhajiroun from stalls in the city centre, however the Muslim Groups deny being involved.

Further reports have appeared in local press regarding leafleting campaigns by the National Front and Muslim extremists which have been distributed to Derby residents. Some leaflets call for people to boycott Asian shops whilst others oppose America. Hate mail has been delivered to some mosques in the area. Muslims are said to be frightened of further attacks.

## **Rugby**

The Director of Rugby REC has spoken to a number of local people, all of whom reported some degree of taunting ranging from 'horseplay' on the factory floor to physical abuse and racism which has mainly been targeted at Muslim women wearing hijab or young Asian men from different communities irrespective of their individual faiths. An Asian man had reported an increase in white gangs in the town centre seeking out Asian members of the communities.

### *North of England*

#### **Lancashire and Yorkshire**

Bury REC - A house where Afghan asylum seekers were living was targeted and a brick was thrown through a window. Two Asian restaurants were targeted and vandalised. An Asian taxi driver was threatened at knifepoint.

Rotherham REC - An Asian-owned takeaway was the target of an arson attack and has been burnt down. The REC has noted that there has been a marked increase in the number of reported racial incidents mainly ranging from racist graffiti to racial abuse.

Blackburn REC - Has reported an increase in the number of incidents relating to Muslims.

### *London & South England*

60 reported racist incidents Sep 11- Oct 11 compared with 59 for the same period in August-Sept

The following incidents have either a specific reference to the events in America/Afghanistan or could be connected:

- break in to Indian restaurant where intruders left twin towers built of drinking glasses
- Islamophobic death threat to a Saudi family
- pro-bin Laden, anti-white graffiti
- two anti-Muslim telephone calls to the town hall from same man
- telephone call to elderly Asian man demanding bin Laden be handed over
- man arrested for getting in a fight after being called racist names in an argument about the events
- children taunted in schools
- woman insulted by bus driver, not given ticket - she fell to the floor after sharp acceleration
- "mistaken identify" posters saying "Sikhs are not Muslims, Sikhs are not Terrorists"
- Turkish man to white man "English pig we will kill all English and Americans"
- Asian suspects threw eggs at victim, pushed him in the chest and shouted, "that's what you get for messing with our brother bin Laden"
- four cars smashed outside Sikh temple
- renewed harassment of family for the first time in nearly a year - perhaps connected.

#### **Tower Hamlets**

Police have reported that at least 17 incidents were directly motivated by Sep 11. Eight victims were white youths assaulted by Asian youths. The number of race crimes in the borough rose to 100 in September 2001 compared with 58 for the same month last year.

Oona King MP (Bethnal Green, Bow and Tower Hamlets) said "11 September has polarised communities and when that happens you get attacks from both sides."

Although the general police statistics have remained the same in Southwark, the balance in the type of activity has changed since Sep 11: there has been a marked increase in verbal abuse, mainly against Muslim women. Significantly, these incidents have been evenly distributed across the whole borough, which is unusual, and the perpetrators appear to be of all age-groups and do not fit the typical police profile for this type of behaviour. There is evidence that many Muslim women - as well as women from other visible communities - are staying at home as a result of this verbal abuse. The key local ethnic minority women's voluntary organisations have reported that they are seeing only a third of their normal numbers of service users. Muslim women have also requested that, during the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, they be allowed to make themselves less visible by not wearing traditional dress. Community leaders have agreed to this request.

There is also evidence that other visible communities, especially some refugee groups, are being mistaken for Muslims and targeted. There were two incidents in Camberwell recently where two shop windows belonging to non-Muslims were smashed. In both cases, the traders identified the mistaken identity issue as the cause.

### **Wellingborough**

Wellingborough REC have reported a racist incident in a secondary school in Northants in which a pupil said that all Muslims should be bombed including those at the school.

### **Hillingdon**

The REC reports an inflammatory leaflet being distributed across the country. The leaflet, entitled "A Message to Moslem Youth" urges young people to promote Islam to "non-believers" using both "gentle persuasion" and "manipulation."

### *South Western England*

### **Bristol**

The Police reported that 84 racist incidents had been notified in the six weeks between 11 Sep and the end of October and indicated that the words used in most incidents made it clear that they were a response to recent events in America.

### **Bournemouth**

14 recorded incidents, including racist abuse, paint-filled balloons thrown at Islamic Centre, a bomb threat to a language school, a student slashed with a knife, a racist letter to the Islamic Centre, and a school student subject to racist abuse.

## **Reports compiled by Muslim NGOs**

### **The Islamic Human Rights Commission**

The Commission was set up in 1997 as an umbrella organisation for a variety of projects relating to human rights abuses against Muslims and their rights in the UK and the wider world.

In its report on the anti-Muslim backlash after Sep 11, the Commission concluded that it is "deeply concerned that there has been a significant rise in anti-Muslim attacks, hostility and discrimination in the wake of the Sep 11 attacks on the USA." It also comments that "there is a chronic shortage of victim support schemes both in mainstream and Muslim communities."<sup>35</sup>

The following is extracted from their report *UK Today: The Anti-Muslim Backlash In The Wake Of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001*

### **Verbal and written abuse**

74 incidents reported, ranging from the offensive and obscene to the threatening, including malicious phone calls, both to Muslim institutions and to individuals; threatening emails and notes through letterboxes and left on cars.

### **Discrimination**

8 incidents reported, including pressure exerted on school children by their peers and their teachers, and the boycotting of shops owned by Muslims.

### **Psychological harassment and pressure**

17 incidents reported plus general concerns as follows:

- due to fear for their physical safety some Muslim women have felt the need to remove their veils, and men to shave their beards off
- some Muslims have felt scared to leave their homes
- non-Muslim parents have prevented their children playing with their Muslim friends
- Muslims feel they are being shunned by previously friendly people.

### **Serious Crimes of Violence**

88 incidents reported and categorised as follows:

#### *1) Physical violence*

52 incidents reported ranging from pushing, shoving and spitting to serious attacks leading to hospitalisation.

- Many Muslim women reported having their head scarves pulled off. In one incident a schoolgirl had her headscarf pulled off by a female adult at the school gates.
- Three clubbings with bats were reported.
- A Muslim was deliberately run over with a car.
- Several cases of beatings and kickings and three reports of rape have been heard of, although there is not official recognition that these crimes were anti-Muslim in nature.

#### *2) Criminal Damage*

36 incidents reported, mainly in the form of attacks on mosques and Islamic centres. Also reported however were:

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<sup>35</sup> "Uk Today: The Anti-Muslim Backlash In The Wake of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001" (Oct 2001)  
[www.ihrc.org/file11.htm](http://www.ihrc.org/file11.htm)

- vandalisation of cars and homes, including graffiti, burning, egg-throwing and petrol-bombing
- vandalisation of a Muslim graveyard
- alcohol poured through letterboxes and around properties.

### **List of incidents in September compiled by Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR)**

The Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism is an independent charitable organisation which works for greater awareness of Islam in the UK as well as the eradication of discrimination against Muslims. FAIR has compiled a list of post-Sep 11 incidents from which the following list is extracted.<sup>36</sup>

#### **Threatening e-mails 11/09/01 & 12/09/01 London**

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) received a series of threatening and offensive e-mails. One stated that "I may even begin to have sympathy with the National Front." Several had "go back home" messages, and others expressed a desire that NATO/America kill/bomb Muslims/Palestinians.

#### **Verbal Abuse & Threat of Physical Assault 13/09/01 Cheswick**

A woman wearing a headscarf was subjected to religious profanity by two other women, while walking her child in his buggy in W4, London. The woman, an English convert, felt distressed and upset after the incident. One of the tormentors of the woman said, "Fucking Muslims, I wish I could shoot them all." In the woman's statement to FAIR she said: "I don't feel bitter or hold any grudges towards anyone, because I feel and understand the grief of people, but the common and everyday Muslim should not have to be fearful of reprisals or revenge attacks ... I blame the media for choosing spokesmen for the Muslim community that only represent a small extreme faction, as the reason behind such attacks."

#### **Verbal Abuse & Physical Assault 13/09/01 London – Elephant & Castle**

A woman was chased out of a newsagent in the Elephant and Castle area of London by a group of men, while they were shouting religious profanity and attempting to rip off her headscarf. The incident occurred as a direct result of Sep 11.

#### **Damage to Property 13/09/01 London SW17**

Tooting Islamic Centre received phone call death threats on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> September. Since then several windows have been smashed with air pistols. Threatening and offensive graffiti were left on the mosque walls.

#### **Assault 14/09/01 London – Tooting**

Balham Mosque reported an incident where two Muslim women were assaulted on Tooting High Street having their scarves pulled off and were spat at. They are collecting a register of incidents that have taken place in the area.

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<sup>36</sup> FAIR Islamophobic Incidences September 2001 [www.fairuk.org](http://www.fairuk.org)



### **Bomb Scare 14/09/01 Sheffield**

Sheffield Allyah Jamia Mosque received a bomb threat through the post at 10am on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> September threatening “Close the Mosque down or we will bomb it”. The police were notified.

### **Verbal Abuse 14/09/01 London - Harrow**

A Muslim woman in Harrow, London was harassed by a taxi driver who stopped his taxi in the street and shouted: “you will pay for what you’ve done”.

### **Arson Attack 14/09/01 London W12**

An arson attack left the interior walls of a maisonette in London black with soot and smoke, after a likely petrol bomb attack, through the letterbox of a Muslim family. The incident took place at around midnight, after the telephone, power and alarm cables appeared to have been deliberately cut. No one was hurt but it is believed that the attack was directed at the block of residential flats because it houses mainly Muslim families.

The resident of the maisonette later returned to see religious hate messages and slurs pasted on the blackened walls. He believes the same group is responsible for the fire and the graffiti, and linked the attacks unequivocally to Sep 11.

### **Verbal Abuse & Physical Assault 14/09/01& 11/09/01 Birmingham**

A woman had a newspaper, depicting pictures of the destruction of the WTC, brandished in her face. Two days later a skinhead, wearing a bomber jacket, sprayed beer in her face at a busy bus stop. In a statement sent to the FAIR office she said: “I was shocked and deeply saddened by the horrific events that took place in N.Y. on Tue 11 Sep, ...my prayers and thoughts go to all the victims and their families ... I am concerned by the backlash being experienced by the British Muslims, ... when the nation is grieving, when people of all faiths, colour and creed should be joined together, ... I have had to endure racial abuse, ... as a woman living and working in Britain I feel vulnerable and unsafe.

“... I believe this is due to the mass hysteria, fear and panic caused by the media and politicians, ... unless decisive steps are taken to improve the portrayal of Muslims incidents of racial abuse and violence will only increase ... We live in an integrated and multicultural society and I hope that we can continue to live together with mutual respect and regard for each others way of life.”

### **Verbal Abuse & Physical Assault 15/09/01 London E14**

An elderly man and his young daughter were chased near their home by a group of young men who were chanting religious slurs and pelting them with missiles. The incident occurred on an estate in Poplar, East London. Some of the thugs are thought to reside in the same estate.

### **Physical Assault 15/09/01 London – Limehouse**

Two girls (sisters) were attacked by three girls outside Limehouse Station at about 4pm. One girl was pulled to the ground, kicked repeatedly and punched. Several people passed by but made no effort to assist. The girl suffered a fractured nose, two black eyes and bruising. Her sister was ‘pushed around’ but was not seriously hurt. The other two girls were of South Asian descent. The Police were informed.

### **Threatening and offensive e-mails 15/09/01 (date reported to FAIR)**

The Islamic News and Information Network received several threatening, offensive and abusive e-mails. Several emanated from outside the UK, one had a German address, and another referred to the intention to hold parties in Holland if America attacks the Arab world. Several were death slogans, others anticipating military action with excitement.

### **Verbal Abuse & Physical Assault 15/09/01 Birmingham**

A group of seven men wielding bottles of beer as weapons attacked a group of young Muslim men. The attack happened in Birmingham City Centre, and was unprovoked, and believed to be linked to Sep 11. A fight broke out for about 5 minutes, after which a smaller number attempted a second attack. Police arrived 10 minutes after the incident had finished and were reported to be very unhelpful in attitude and approach. In a statement to FAIR the young Muslim man said: "I believe this is a direct result of the incident in New York and the poor portrayal of Muslims in the media. The thugs were clearly targeting men with beards. The police didn't do much and were reluctant to help and take statements, ... they were telling the people who saw the incident to go away, making no attempt to gather witnesses ... When pushed for it the police, took two statements and one of the victims had to demand to give a statement." The most severely injured was an English convert who had a beard and was wearing a turban.

### **Verbal Abuse 17/09/01 London – Wood Green**

A young Muslim man with a beard was forced to walk out of the bakery where he works in Wood Green, after continual religious and racial abuse from colleagues. Statements such as: "How's your brother – Osama bin Laden, ... we're gonna get you Islamic bastards, ... you're a bloody terrorist. I bet you've got a bomb on your body" were directed towards him.

### **Damage to Property 17/09/01 London N4**

The Muslim Welfare House in North London had a wine bottle thrown through a window into its main office. The incident happened on Sunday evening, no one was in the property and nobody was hurt.

### **Various reports: Death threats, damage to property, discrimination 17/09/01 Swansea**

The RAHMA has received a number of incidents in the Swansea area. They have received reports of two death threats to individual families, bricks through the Swansea Central Mosque windows, individuals harassed in the streets and a school girl receiving 2 weeks detention for questioning her teacher's interpretation of the incidents that happened on Sep 11.

### **Abusive Messages 18/09/01 London TW3**

Abusive and threatening messages were left on the Sound Vision Islamic Shop's answering machine. The incident was reported to the Police.

### **Verbal Abuse 19/09/01 London NW6**

A mother collecting her child from Avenue (Muslim) School, in Northwest London, was approached by two men shouting abuse at her. She had to sit and wait in her car, as the men were 'cussing' from outside until they left her. It is thought that other parents are experiencing similar harassment.

### **Verbal Abuse 24/09/01 London TW3**

The Sound Vision Islamic Shop reported verbal abuse being shouted at a hijab-wearing woman by another woman on the street in Hanslow.

### **Harassment 27/09/01 London – Newham**

A woman wearing hijab, while driving on Newham Highway, was harassed by four or five Asian young men (20-30years) who were travelling in another car. They shouted abuse and spat at her car. They drove in a manner making her driving very difficult, swerving in front of her, slowing down then speeding up. They continued to follow her as she turned off the dual carriageway and only desisted when they observed her on the phone to the police for the third time.

## **2. Good practices for reducing prejudice, violence and aggression**

### **Policing and crime prevention**

The police forces in Britain responded in a number of ways - locally, regionally and nationally - to prevent attacks on Muslim targets and to reduce the sense of threat felt in the Muslim community. Concerted action was taken under the auspices of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Scotland has its own separate body, ACPOS). Taking a lead from London's Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), ACPO set up a National Community Tension Team.

A key part of this approach was to monitor the extent and location of incidents which appeared to have some link to Sep 11. The intelligence gained from this monitoring was then provided to Chief Officers in regular briefings which would allow them to assess the level of tension and the likelihood of serious disturbances or other violence. At present the British police do not specifically monitor faith-hate crimes and religion is not mentioned in the current ACPO Race and Hate Crime Manual. However, the MPS have now begun to develop criteria which will allow them to collate such incidents as a sub-set of racial incidents.

In many localities patrols were stepped up around mosques and senior police officers met with community leaders to hear their concerns and to reassure them that action was being taken. Other organisations such as municipal councils and Racial Equality Councils were often involved in these meetings and, in some cases, ad hoc working groups were set up to keep track of the situation. We do not have an exhaustive list of these activities but we have received information on initiatives in Peterborough, Coventry, Stoke-on-Trent, Wolverhampton and Suffolk.

A group was set up in Birmingham, lead by Birmingham City Council and the local Police to discuss current issues and plans to decrease tensions within the city. Its meetings were attended by all faith groups and other key players in the city. A good example of work of the London Metropolitan Police is in the borough of Southwark. Fifty-eight Muslim voluntary and community organisations were mapped by Southwark Police following Sep 11. A meeting was held between the police and the Muslim community and a special dedicated telephone line was set up to record any backlash incidents against the Muslim community or any other communities in Southwark who feel they have been targeted or otherwise affected.

In Scotland on 22<sup>nd</sup> October Lothian and Borders Police Chief Constable Sir Roy Cameron said that people 'who look ethnic are being targeted regardless of race or religion' and called for communities to pull together to root out racism. He said that police patrols have been stepped up in Edinburgh following the fire attack on a Mosque. Also on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, Strathclyde Police launched an intensive programme of community activities in a bid to calm rising racial tensions. At yesterday's seminar between the Muslim community and police in Glasgow, Muslim leaders and business owners called for increased police patrols and the creation of a special racial attack hotline.

On 26<sup>th</sup> October the Scottish Executive announced that mosques and other places of "ethnic community worship in Scotland were given £1m to improve security after the petrol bombing of a mosque in Edinburgh. The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) were asked to identify what steps might be taken to pre-empt potential attacks on Mosques, Hindu and Sikh Temples, Synagogues and other places of worship. The police were expected to carry out crime prevention surveys to determine the level of risk and to identify the measures, CCTV systems for example, required to deal with that risk.

### **The Role of Muslim NGOs**

Voluntary organisations have played central role in representing the views and interests of British Muslims. NGOs are responsible for, or have been involved in, many of the examples of good practice listed in this section of the report. The work of some of the more prominent national organisations is summarised here.

Established in 1996, the **Muslim Council of Britain** (MCB) is widely seen as the official voice of Islam in Britain. Since Sep 11 it has played a central role in seeking to reduce community tensions and represent accurately the opinions and concerns of most British Muslims.

Immediately after the events of Sep 11, MCB issued a press statement condemning the attacks, saying, "Whoever is responsible for these dreadful, wanton attacks, we condemn them utterly."<sup>37</sup> This was followed swiftly on Sep 13 by a press conference intended to give the media an accurate impression of the depth of shock and anger felt by the British Muslim community. The MCB also published in its September newsletter a short article entitled "Our social contract" in which it is stated "As citizens of Britain, we have a social contract to maintain the peace and stability of this country. No one must be tempted to commit any criminal or subversive activity."

On 14<sup>th</sup> September the MCB issued a statement to all MPs with the comment that "a historic burden of responsibility lies with our elected representatives to demonstrate the supremacy of the rule of law by seeking just means to counter the great injustice that is terrorism."<sup>38</sup>

MCB representatives have held meetings with various politicians, other faith groups and the Police.

On 17th September a delegation, including representatives of other Muslim organisations, met the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw. This was followed on the 19<sup>th</sup> by a meeting with the

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<sup>37</sup> Muslim News "Outpouring of Muslims Grief" <http://www.Muslimnews.co.uk/archives/paper.php?article=407>

<sup>38</sup> MCB Newsletter Sep 2001

Mayor of London, Ken Livingston and Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Greater London Authority; and on the 20<sup>th</sup> by a meeting with the Home Secretary, David Blunkett.

The MCB also reports examples of good practice on the part of smaller, local Muslim groups. For example, one Islamic centre in London made contact with its surrounding community by means of a letter of condolence and reassurance that the Muslim community felt as badly about Sep 11 as everyone else. The letter said "We have, like all the people of Britain and the rest of the world, been deeply shocked and stunned by these terrorist acts that have taken away thousands of innocent lives... We would like to (offer) our assistance to any neighbour who has indirectly or directly been affected by these sad events."<sup>39</sup> Also, in Exeter, the Islamic Centre of the Southwest has been in contact with the local education department, alerting the department to potential problems at school and in Nottingham the Karimia Institute has published a leaflet explaining why Islam is against terrorism

The **Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia** (CBM) was set up by the Runnymede Trust in 1996. It issued a booklet for widespread consultation and its subsequent report, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all*, was launched at the House of Commons by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw MP, in autumn 1997. The Commission was re-constituted in 1999 in order to monitor and support progress in implementing the 60 recommendations made in its 1996 report, and to provide advice to interested organisations and individuals. Its website<sup>40</sup> contains a collection of resources on Islam and Islamophobia, including some material on the situation after September 11, in particular:

- A supportive commentary on Part 5 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill
- Links to a range of articles on the issues raised by September 11
- Guidance and resources for teachers, youth workers and others who might need to discuss September 11 with young people
- Addressing Prejudice and Islamophobia, a booklet of resource, references and guidance available on the Internet

The CBM also met with the Commission for Racial Equality's regional London and South team to discuss the police response to the increase of incidents post September 11.

The **Islamic Human Rights Commission** (IHRC) was set up in 1997 as an umbrella organisation working for various projects relating to Muslims' human rights both in the UK and world-wide. In the wake of Sep 11 the IHRC issued information and campaigning packages which aim to:

- put pressure on the government and Parliament to take more action to deal with increased religious and hate crimes
- provide safety tips for the Muslim community
- encourage reporting of any incidents to the police and Muslim monitoring groups
- assist parents and teachers to address Islamophobia in schools

A spokesperson for IHRC said "We hope that the campaign would fight against complacency and increase practical ways in which our streets can again be safe for all members of society". The IHRC also organised a seminar entitled "Human Rights, Justice & Muslims in the Wake of September 11". Contributions included speeches on the targeting of Muslim women and the role of the media. More information can be found at <http://www.ihrc.org>

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<sup>39</sup> MCB Newsletter Sep 2001

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/meb/islamophobia/index.html>

### **Expressions of goodwill and support for British Muslims**

The MCB publicly acknowledged the many letters and emails of support it has received both from other faith communities and from individuals, reporting that, for every hate mail, it has received five messages of goodwill. A few examples of such letters follow, and more can be found in the MCB Newsletter Vol 1, Issue 4.

"I know you're getting a lot of hate emails. They represent a sick minority view of a sad element of the British people. I know I speak for the majority in Britain in saying that the vast majority of Moslems in the UK are good Britons who have put a lot into this country."

"I was greatly saddened yesterday to hear on Radio 4 that your organisation has been receiving hate mail in the aftermath of the attacks in the US. I don't think I am the only non-Muslim who would like to express my concern and support for the British Muslim community at this time.

In order to show its gratitude for the support it received the MCB hosted a Good Will Reception on Nov 10 for the many people who had sent positive messages. The reception also provided an opportunity to learn more about Islam and Islamic culture. More information can be found at <http://www.mcb.org.uk>

### **National Islam Awareness Week**

This took place between Nov 5th and 11th involving a host of special discussions, presentations, seminars, question and answer sessions, exhibitions and social and fundraising events in every part of the country. Organised by the **Islamic Society of Britain (ISB)**, this event has been running since 1994 but took on particular significance this year. It was successfully launched on Nov 5th in the House of Commons with contributions from a cross-political range of MPs and peers, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

The ISB describes the aim of the week as being "to invite all Muslims to work together during the week in sharing Islam with the public at large, providing information regarding its message and way of life, and removing misunderstandings in the process," and goes on to say that "The IAW aims to create an awareness of Islam in our society by involving everyone throughout Britain, irrespective of their school of thought or group affiliation. Everyone is invited to come forward and join hands in practical efforts to rid Britain of Islamophobia." Sarah Joseph, a white English convert to Islam, describes the week as involving "hundreds of ordinary Muslims giving up time and energy to tell ordinary people about their faith. This work goes on in local libraries town halls and school halls, people's homes and the High Street, and never before has this work seemed more urgent, more pressing, more important."

As part of the campaign the ISB initiated a 'Pledge to British Muslims' which can be signed on their website asking people to:

- work towards preserving and enhancing relations between Britain's faith and non-faith communities;
- work for greater understanding of each other's faiths and ways of life; condemn all attacks perpetrated against people of faith and all places of worship;

- celebrate the strength of Britain's community relations and build respect and tolerance for people of religion and no religion;
- avoid using language of an inflammatory or discriminatory nature.

### **Work with young people**

While the events on and subsequent to Sep 11 have underlined the need to improve the understanding of Islam in the UK population as a whole, it has been particularly important to explain these events and their wider context to young people and children. *Talking and Teaching*, the resource for teachers, youth workers, carers and parents created by the CBM and published on their website<sup>41</sup> includes references to other sources to materials published by American and British organisations. The British references are to:

- Guidance from the Department for Education and Skills to help schools “provide accurate information, challenge crude stereotyping and provide a safe environment in which children and young people can explore their understanding and come to terms with their fears”.
- A leaflet on explaining the attacks to pupils produced by the National Union of Teachers, the largest teachers’ union in the UK, and distributed to its members
- An article published in the Times Educational Supplement entitled "Why Do Arabs Hate Americans, Miss?" and a related web forum on ‘Teaching Islam’

We have received reports of similar examples of good practice at local level. Coventry City Council sent a letter to all headteachers other school managers, urging them to engage pupils in promoting cultural awareness, sensitivity and tolerance. Some headteachers have written to their pupils’ parents and guardians, explaining their approach to the situation. For example, in Wellingborough, a local Primary School headteacher wrote a letter explaining that pupils had been told that, regardless of who was responsible for the attacks, their race and religion were irrelevant and it should not be assumed that all people of the same race and/or religion agree with their actions. Parents were urged to help to support and educate the children to avoid racial tensions.

### **Other meetings and events**

There have been numerous meetings between Muslim representatives and various government and other public figures (including the Prime Minister, the Leader of the official Opposition and the Prince of Wales) some of which are covered in another section of this report. Other notable events of this type include:

- A meeting of members of the Muslim community with Home Office Officials on 13<sup>th</sup> November to discuss the need for comprehensive legislation against religious discrimination and to raise concerns about the potential for misapplication of the new Anti-terrorism bill.
- a special meeting of the British Council All Party Parliamentary Group on 20<sup>th</sup> November which was attended by Iqbal Sacranie, Chair of Muslim Aid, as well as more than 50 MPs and Peers. The meeting looked at the importance of cultural dialogue between people of differing cultures, with a specific focus on the cultural relationship between the UK and the Islamic world. The British Council also organised an ‘Open Minds’ conference which

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<sup>41</sup> [http://www.runnymedetrust.org/meb/islamophobia/talking\\_teaching.html](http://www.runnymedetrust.org/meb/islamophobia/talking_teaching.html)

addressed questions of how to encourage deeper understanding and trust between the UK and other countries, particularly those with substantial Muslim populations, through public diplomacy and cultural relations.

- A conference held at the House of Commons on 28<sup>th</sup> November entitled 'The Arab and Muslim Worlds - What Next?' on Nov 28<sup>th</sup> at which Dr Hany El Banna spoke on behalf of the MCB. Dr El Banna argued that Muslims in western Europe are now in a good position to bridge the chasm of ignorance that had for so long divided the Oriental and Occidental worlds.
- Eid el-Fitr celebrations held inter alia at the House of Commons and by the Prince of Wales at St James's Palace

There were also a number of events involving representatives from different religious faiths. At a national level, the Prime Minister hosted a meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> October to discuss Sep 11 and its repercussions which was attended by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbi as well as Hindu and Muslim religious leaders.

Local inter-faith groups also sought to resolve tensions and increase mutual understanding between followers of different religions. For example, a multi-faith service for world peace in response to Sep 11 was held in the Swansgate Shopping Centre in Wellingborough on 25<sup>th</sup> September. The service involved leaders of Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Christian faiths and was attended by 300 people representing a variety of religious and community groups.

### **3. Reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders including initiatives to reduce polarization and counteract negative national trends**

#### **Statements by Political Leaders**

As soon as press reports began to speculate that the perpetrators of the Sep 11 attacks were 'Islamic extremists' the UK Government sought to reassure Muslim and other vulnerable minority communities and to emphasise that the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the UK were wholly opposed to the attacks. This effort was led by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair. The week following the attacks, in an article in the Muslim News, Mr Blair stated that "blaming Islam (for the Sep 11 attacks) is as ludicrous as blaming Christianity for loyalist attacks on Catholics, or nationalist attacks on Protestants in Northern Ireland."<sup>42</sup>

Speaking after talks with leading members of the British Muslim community on 27<sup>th</sup> September, the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, described attacks on innocent Muslims in Britain as "despicable" and stated that "there is a minority who are only too happy to use recent events as a convenient cover for racism" which has "no proper place in our country". Mr Blair characterised Islam as a "tolerant, peaceful" religion and went on to add that "there is no contradiction between being a Muslim and being British".<sup>43</sup> He reinforced these sentiments in a series of articles for publication in the Muslim press in which he assured Muslims that "the vast majority of decent people in Britain realise that neither you nor Islam is in any way

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<sup>42</sup> BBC News online [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk\\_politics/newsid\\_1567000/1567187.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk_politics/newsid_1567000/1567187.stm)

<sup>43</sup> The Sun 28/09/01 "PM slams racists for 'despicable attacks' on Muslims"; The Guardian 28/09/01 "Blair condemns racist attacks"



responsible for what happened in the US."<sup>44</sup> He held a further meeting with Muslim religious leaders as part of an inter-faith gathering on 8<sup>th</sup> October and in December it was announced that Mr Blair had appointed John Battle, a Labour MP and former minister, as his personal envoy to the UK's faith groups.

Other senior Government figures made similar statements in the wake of the attacks. The Scottish Parliament gave its support to a motion condemning racist attacks<sup>45</sup> and on 27<sup>th</sup> September, the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott appealed to people to reach out to local Muslims and to "show a bit of humanitarianism and express some solidarity and concern". Referring to plans for military strikes in Afghanistan (which began ten days later on 7<sup>th</sup> October), the Deputy Prime Minister said "this is not an action against the Muslim community but against terrorism on a world-wide scale."<sup>46</sup> On 5<sup>th</sup> October (the national day of prayer for peace) the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, visited a mosque in Sheffield and used the opportunity to underline the government's resolve not to "tolerate attacks or have people living in fear and insecurity".

Leading figures from the other main political parties have also made statements showing their support and concern for Muslims in the UK. On 1<sup>st</sup> October the Leader of the official opposition Conservative Party, Iain Duncan Smith, also met with leading members of the British Muslim community. Mr Duncan Smith emphasised the contribution made by Muslims to British life and assured the representatives that his party would do everything possible to "ensure good community relations and the protection of mosques and other places of worship."

There were, however, some voices which dissented from the consensus that the Sep 11 attacks should not be linked to Islam. Former Conservative Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher, commented in an interview with the Times newspaper published on 4<sup>th</sup> October that she "had not heard enough condemnation from Muslims priests" of the Sep 11 attacks. She went on to say "The people who brought down those towers were Muslims and Muslims must stand up and say that it is not the way of Islam...They must say that it is disgraceful".<sup>47</sup> Baroness Thatcher's comments were widely repudiated by the press and politicians on all sides, including Oliver Letwin, the Conservative spokesperson on home affairs, who described his impression that senior Muslims he had met were "pretty categorical in their condemnation of terrorism."<sup>48</sup>

Lord Tebbit, who was Conservative Party Chairman during the 1980s, also distanced himself from the former Prime Minister's remarks but then caused further controversy himself when he made remarks in an interview for a magazine, calling for British Muslims to "stand alongside the forces of civilisation against barbarians born into Islam" in order to "make it much easier for us to see them first as British and only then as Muslim." A Conservative spokesperson responded to this by saying that Lord Tebbit "is not speaking for the party"

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<sup>44</sup> Financial Times 19/09/01 "Blair attempts to stem racial attacks on Muslims" The Guardian 19/09/01 "Message of reassurance after attacks" The Times 19/09/01 "Blair tells British Muslims: We are not blaming Islam"

<sup>45</sup> Morning Star 21/09/01 "Scots Parliament slams racist attacks"

<sup>46</sup> The Times 27/09/01 "Prescott urges: Reach out to local Muslims"; The Daily Express 27/09/01

<sup>47</sup> The Times 04/10/01 "Thatcher speaks out on terror"; The Daily Mail 05/10/01 "Thatcher under fire"

<sup>48</sup> BBC News Online: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk\\_politics/newsid\\_1578000/1578377.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk_politics/newsid_1578000/1578377.stm)

### **Efforts to outlaw religious hatred**

Northern Ireland is the only jurisdiction in the UK that has legislation prohibiting discrimination on the grounds on religion and a specific criminal offence of religious hatred. Legislation on religious discrimination in Great Britain is due to be brought in shortly under the Equal Treatment Directive. However, on October 15<sup>th</sup> the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, announced that the Government would seek to extend the criminal law more swiftly by including the offence of incitement to religious hatred in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security bill.

This emergency bill contained provisions relating to a large number of areas, most of which were targeted at 'international terrorism'. While many - including the main Muslim organisations, who were uneasy about other aspects of the Bill - welcomed this proposal, concern was expressed by politicians and other commentators about its implications for free speech. The House of Lords refused to accept the provision and on 14<sup>th</sup> December the Government was forced to amend this part of the bill which as passed into law shortly afterwards.

Although its central provision was dropped, Part 5 of the anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act (2001) does make religion, like race, a possible aggravating factor for a number of criminal offences, and extends the maximum penalty for existing incitement to hatred offences from two to seven years imprisonment. A Religious Offences Bill has since been introduced in the House of Lords which would create an offence of religious hatred but it is unclear if this will be given Government support. The Muslim Council of Britain has urged the home Secretary to introduce comprehensive legislation "as soon as possible".

There has also been an effort to introduce religious hatred offences in Scotland, spear-headed by Donald Gorrie, a Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP). Initially, Mr Gorrie had focused on the particular experience of sectarianism in Scotland. However, in the wake of Sept 11, he broadened his approach to cover religious hatred more generally. His proposals also include a suggestion that key public bodies be required to draw up a Code of Conduct to tackle sectarianism.

The Scottish Executive had made a commitment to offer similar protection to faith communities in Scotland to that originally outlined by Home Secretary David Blunkett for inclusion in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act. While those provisions fell at Westminster, the Executive has said that it will continue to look at the issues in a Scottish context and will be establishing a working group to consider the most appropriate approach. Both Donald Gorrie MSP and the Commission for Racial Equality in Scotland have been asked to sit on this group.

### **Statements by Other Public Figures**

Outside of party politics other key public figures in the UK have been keen to foster understanding and reduce tension. For example, the Prince of Wales has a long-standing commitment to developing understanding between the different religions practised in the UK. On 28<sup>th</sup> October the Prince made a call for peace and tolerance while visiting a mosque in East London, saying "I wanted to show how much I minded about and cared about the Islamic community in this country and also particularly at a time when it is so difficult for

everybody. I also want to show above all my support for all those people of whatever faith who utterly reject violence."<sup>49</sup> On December 19<sup>th</sup> at an Eid reception for young Muslims in his official residence, St James's Palace, Prince Charles argued that all religions ultimately sought to arrive at the same truth and that they simply traversed different routes to get there.

Following the interfaith meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> October (see below), the Archbishop of Canterbury (who heads the clergy of the Church of England), Dr George Carey asked people to remain calm, saying, "current divisions must not be used... as a pretext or an excuse for hostility and aggression towards any individual on the basis of religious adherence". He added, "at a time when anxieties and fears abound, it's vital that we continue to build bridges not walls, to make friends, not scapegoats."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the Bishop of London, Rt Rev Richard Chartres, asked for tolerance, saying, "Any language which demonises the whole Islamic world and drives a wedge between Muslims and their neighbours makes a tragic and dangerous situation infinitely worse."<sup>51</sup>

### **Newspaper Editorials & Columns**

Following Sep 11, many of the large national and regional newspapers in the UK expressly used their "leader" editorial column to defend Islam and British Muslims. For example, on 13<sup>th</sup> Sep, The Sun printed an editorial headed "Islam is not evil religion" which went on to say that "If the terrorists were Islamic fanatics then the world must not make the mistake of condemning all Muslims."<sup>52</sup> In subsequent articles The Sun urged people to "Reach out to Muslims as friends" and to "imagine the power you have to affect (Muslims' fear) by simply saying hello in the street."<sup>53</sup> On 30<sup>th</sup> September the Sunday Express began its leader column "Don't blame Islam for the madness of terrorists", going on to emphasise that the Qu'ran is not in any way war-like. The editorial pointed out that "just as Christians believe that it is nobler to turn the other cheek, the Qu'ran teaches: "Even if you stretch out your hand against me to kill me, I shall not stretch out my hand against you to kill you." It went on to condemn the bigotry and ignorance that leads to the idea that Muslims are violent terrorists.<sup>55</sup> The Welsh newspaper The Western Mail proposed "A united stand against the racist bigots" and stated that "racism has no part in a civilised society."<sup>56</sup>

As the situation developed domestically and internationally, the newspapers published numerous opinion and editorial columns discussing a range of topics relating to Islam and Muslims. In many cases these columns were sympathetic and had a public education element for the benefit of non-Muslims.

**John Casey in The Daily Telegraph 19/12/01 "No offence, but Muslims love Jesus as much as Christians do"** emphasises the great links between the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In particular he investigates Islamic perceptions of Jesus and finds, to his surprise, that the Messiah of Christianity is the Messiah in the Qu'ran as well.

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<sup>49</sup> The Daily Mail 29/09/01 "The Prince preaches a message of peace"

<sup>50</sup> BBC News Online 08/10/01

<sup>51</sup> The Times 15/09/01 "Bishop's plea for tolerance towards Muslims"

<sup>52</sup> The Sun 13/09/01 "Islam Is Not Evil Religion"

<sup>53</sup> The Sun 24/09/01 "Good and Evil"

<sup>54</sup> The Sun 17/09/01 "Reach out to Muslims as friends"

<sup>55</sup> The Sunday Express 30/09/01 "Don't blame Islam for the madness of terrorists"

<sup>56</sup> The Western Mail 19/09/01 "A united stand against the bigots"

Jesus, while not divine in Islam, is highly honoured and loved as a prophet, miracle-worker, ascetic and lover of the poor. Casey writes "It is good to be reminded, especially now, of the intimate connections there have been between Islam and Christianity, and how close in spirit Muslim and Christian piety can come to each other."

**Andrew Gimson** in **The Evening Standard 19/09/01 "We must not fail this test of our tolerance"** asserts the right of all Muslims to criticise American foreign policy without becoming an object of suspicion. He then goes on to describe how diversity, including diversity of opinion, is a great strength and one that makes London a great city.

**Yusuf Islam** (formerly musician Cat Stevens) in **The Mirror 14/09/01 "Don't Blame the Muslims"** describes how he embraced Islam in his mid-thirties because of its blend of reason and spirituality, as well as an emphasis on equality and acceptance of other beliefs that is utterly divorced from the kind of ideology that justifies terrorism.

**Dr Zaki Badawi** in **The Daily Telegraph 22/12/01 "September 11 will bring us all closer together"** argues that in the long run the lives of British Muslims will improve as the process of integration will now accelerate. Dr Badawi, the principle of the Muslim College, believes that Muslims must embrace British culture if they are to be successful here - "You cannot take citizenship à la carte," he says.

**Sophie Gilliat-Ray** in **The Daily Telegraph "Muslims in Britain: putting down roots"** discusses the history of Muslims settling in Britain which began in the sixteenth century, or even earlier. The Muslim population in Britain began to grow quickly after the second world war, when British industrial cities in Scotland, the midlands, and the north of England were in desperate need of more workers. It is estimated that there are 1.5 million Muslims in Britain now, (some estimates are nearer to 2 million) and Islam is rapidly catching up Protestantism as the most-practised religion in the country.

Several journalists, Muslim and non-Muslim, have written about the growing popularity of wearing hijab in Britain, particularly amongst young second and third generation British women, in articles that challenge common preconceptions. For example **Raekha Prasad** in **The Guardian 05/11/01** cites the case of Sumaya Shakur who began wearing hijab at the age of 28, after a secular Muslim upbringing. Her decision was purely personal: her husband would prefer that she did not wear it.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, **Cheryl Holden** in the **Daily Telegraph 30/11/01 "Women who want to be 'under wraps'"** talks to 38-year-old Safina who also very recently started wearing hijab because she "understood it was a direct order from the creator." Safina has found that, far from making her feel repressed, wearing a veil has "freed up a lot of time that I used to spend on my hair and making sure I looked perfect. I feel very comfortable about going out in this dress."

A number of columnists were more critical of certain elements of Islamic thought and practice or questioned the consensus that 'Sep 11 had nothing to do with Islam'.

**Hugo Young** in **The Guardian 09/10/01 "It may not be PC to say but Islam is at the heart of this"** contradicts the common consensus that the 'war on terrorism' is nothing to do with Islam. He states rather that "we need to face squarely the fact that traits embodied by

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<sup>57</sup> The Guardian 05/11/01 "Cover story"

America and Islam are what has brought the world to its gravest crisis since Moscow put missiles into Cuba. Otherwise the bleak future will become bleaker still."

**David Aaronovitch** in **The Independent 30/10/01** asks "**How much more can we tolerate?**" referring to what he sees as the great lengths people in Britain are going to accommodate and protect the feelings of Muslims, and the apparent determination, as he sees it, of Muslims not to notice these efforts and to wilfully remain in the role of victim. He writes "We have all (save for the most right wing of us) done elaborate pirouettes and jetés to show that we respect Muslim sensibilities".

**The Spectator 03/11/01** **The Leader** speaks out against the now commonly-accepted sentiment that Islam and terrorism are in no way related, claiming that the Qu'ran can be interpreted in such a way as to justify violent activity, "The truth is that there are elements of the Qu'ran which do legitimate hostility towards us infidels. The Qu'ran does give scriptural cover for judicial brutality and the ill treatment of women. In the headiness of its poetry and rhetoric, it is easy to see how the Qu'ran can help induce a divine rage and suicidal madness". The problem the West faces is that it can never admit this, for to do so is to "invite all Muslims to feel defensive of their religion and culture" and to play into Bin Laden's hands by creating a polarised world of infidels against Muslims.

**William Oddie** in **The Daily Telegraph 08/11/01** "**British hypocrisy could prove the salvation of society**" picks up The Spectator's comments and suggests that Tony Blair's insistence on separating 'Islam' and 'terrorism' in the minds of the British public is a desperate and unconvincing attempt to "prevent, or at least to obfuscate, some people's perception of the British Muslim community as an 'alien wedge'" Oddie, the editor of The Catholic Herald, agrees with The Spectator that this separation is "nonsense", and moreover goes on to denounce the idea that "the overwhelming majority of Muslims world wide were as horrified by Sep 11 as we were" as a "pious fiction or necessary myth (that) most of us know in our hearts is not true." He contends that British people have a tendency towards "benevolent hypocrisy" which masks their true fears. He concludes that this hypocrisy will be vital in the years to come as Islam grows and continues to be a problem for community relations.

**Ann Leslie** in **The Daily Mail 03/11/01** "**Saturday Dispatch**" accuses Islam of paranoia and self-deception. "Nothing", she says, "that the indefatigable and well-meaning Tony Blair could say during his constant shuttling round the Middle East will convince the regimes and the men and women in the Arab street that 'this is not a war on Islam'". She goes on to challenge the "oft-repeated mantra that Islam is peaceful and tolerant", pointing out "intolerance towards Jews and Christians seems to be on the increase and in the past 50 years no religion has produced so many wars among its own members," and wonders why the Islamic world rarely admits to practising the double-standards it so despises in the West.

As more and more news coverage was given to stories of 'Islamic extremists' living in Britain and of young British Muslims fighting in Afghanistan on the side of the Taleban regime, many columnists, including Muslims, became less circumspect about criticising Muslims in the UK and further afield.

**Manzoor Mogal**, Chair of the Federation of Muslim Organisations in Leicester, in **The Daily Mail 17/09/01** stated that "**Those who rant against the West deserve nothing but contempt**". Mr Mogal believes that Muslims in the UK should recognise the many benefits of living in "probably the most tolerant nation in the world" and declare their support for the

country that they have made their home. He writes "If we fail in that duty, then we are abusing the very tolerance which has allowed us to practise our religion without any fear of prejudice."

**Ziauddin Sardar** in **The Observer 23/09/01 "My fatwa on the fanatics"** asks why fanaticism has been allowed to flourish and obscure the truth of Islam and blames the unwillingness of Muslims the world over to look critically at their religion.

**Mary Ann Sieghart** in **The Times 31/10** asked **"If they despise the West, why have extremist Muslims chosen to live in this country?"** and expressed concern that some Muslims feel their loyalties lie with the international Islamic community rather than with their country. "Why do they side automatically with Afghanistan just because it is a Muslim country? In Kosovo we were fighting Christians and defending Muslims. None of us Christians saw it as a holy war in which we felt compelled to side with our own faith.

**Salman Rushdie** in **The Independent 03/11 "Rushdie claims 'paranoid Islam' needs to be beaten"** contradicted the government by saying that the war in Afghanistan is "about Islam". He claimed that many Muslims the world over were now re-examining their faith and questioning "whether the Islamic world, not America and the West, was responsible for its own problems." He also stated that "if terrorism is to be defeated, the world of Islam must take on board the secularist-humanist principles on which the modern is based."

**Melanie Phillips** in **The Sunday Times 04/11 "Britain is in denial about the angry Muslims within"** expressed her horror at the presence of a "fifth column in our midst", referring to reports that many young British Muslims are supporters of Osama Bin Laden. "Thousands of alienated young Muslims, most of them born and bred here but who regard themselves as an army within, are waiting for an opportunity to help to destroy the society that sustains them. We now stare into the abyss, aghast."

**Christopher Andrew** in **The Times 30/10/01 "Muslims must confront those who preach race hatred in the name of Islam"** hopes that Muslims will make great efforts to confront and reject the small but dangerous minority who seek to use Islam as a cover for race hatred. Andrew argues that while it may be unfair to expect ordinary Muslims to disown loudly ideas or groups with which they have no connection, it is in their interests to do so.

### **Press Coverage of British Muslim Opinion On The War in Afghanistan**

Reports of Muslim reactions to the bombing of Afghanistan have been widely published in the mainstream press. Opinion, both hard-line and moderate, appears to have been overwhelmingly against military action.

#### **Mainstream Muslim Groups**

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and the Muslim Parliament, the two largest groups representing British Muslims, have been the biggest contributors to public perception of Muslim opinion. These organisations were widely reported condemning the Sep 11 attacks and warning of an increase in racist attacks against Muslims. Representatives of both groups have met the Prime Minister for talks. They have tended to urge for restraint in the use of

military force in Afghanistan, and later to oppose it.<sup>58</sup> Seen as representatives of moderate or mainstream Islam, MCB and the Muslim Parliament have publicly dismissed the inflammatory rhetoric of hard-line groups. The MCB has complained that these groups have received much more coverage than their support warrants.<sup>59</sup> Despite this, the mainstream Muslim groups have sometimes received less media coverage than the hard-line groups.

### Journalists

Muslim journalists have in general been trying to foster an understanding of the opinions within the Muslim community in Britain and internationally.<sup>60</sup>

### Individuals

Many individual Muslims have been asked for their responses to the Sep 11 attacks, their fear of racist and Islamophobic attack, their opinions on the war and whether they support the hard-line Islamic groups.

- A poll for the BBC's Today programme suggested that 80% of UK Muslims were opposed to military action in Afghanistan.<sup>61</sup>
- The Sunday Times news paper survey found that 4 out of ten British Muslims believed that Osama Bin Laden was justified in mounting his war against the US.<sup>62</sup>
- The Asian radio station Sunrise conducted an opinion poll reporting that 98% of London Muslims under 45 said they would not fight for Britain while 48% said they would take up arms for Bin Laden.<sup>63</sup>

It should be kept in mind when understanding these results that there is a widespread feeling amongst young Muslim men, that they have no stake in British society.<sup>64</sup>

### Coverage Hard-line Islamic Opinion In The UK Press

Small hard-line Islamic groups, previously unheard of by the vast majority of the population, have gained a lot of coverage in the wake of Sep 11. Also the revelation that some young British Muslims are prepared to risk their lives fighting British troops has provoked much discussion. Whilst the press has in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> stated that Islam is not a violent religion, in the last part of 2001 their focus shifted on to these groups and their supporters, giving them a disproportionate amount of coverage compared with mainstream Muslim groups.

The most reported hard-line Islamic groups were the Al Muhajiroun, and the Supporters of Sharia groups. These are both quite small with the larger of the two Al Muhajiroun reported to have no more than 2000 members in the UK. These groups believe in theocratic Islamic rule and the opposition of Western Governments to Islam. They have come to prominence since September 11<sup>th</sup> and wish to be seen to be the voice of all UK Muslims.

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<sup>58</sup> The Sunday Times 2/12/01 'Muslim anger at British leaflets', The Financial Times 11/10/01 'Blair 'Has failed to win over Arab and Islamic opinion in the UK', The Express 28/9/01 'Blair's Moslem warning'

<sup>59</sup> Daily Telegraph 20/9/01 'UK Muslims disown 'lunatic fringe'

<sup>60</sup> The Observer 23/9/01 'My fatwa on the fanatics', The Independent Review 28/12/01 'Constantly exposed in the glare of spotlights'

<sup>61</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) UK news 14/11/2001 'UK Muslim leaders divided over Afghan War'

<sup>62</sup> Sunday Times 4/11/2001 'Britain is in Denial About the Angry Muslims Within'

<sup>63</sup> Sunday Times 4/11/2001 'Britain is in Denial About the Angry Muslims Within'

<sup>64</sup> Cabinet Office 6/00 'Minority Ethnic Issues in Social Exclusion and Neighbourhood Renewal'

Supporters of these groups have been reported as approving of the September 11th attacks<sup>65</sup> while the groups' spokesmen have commonly blamed American foreign policy for the attacks, or denied they were carried out by Muslims.<sup>66</sup> Both groups have sought to portray the war in Afghanistan as a war against Islam. Their leaders have given many interviews and regularly being asked for comment. The leader of Al Muhajiroun Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammad has become the recognisable face of hard-line Islam in Britain. He has suggested that Britain will suffer an internal intifada "Christians have to learn that they cannot do this to Islam. We will not allow our brothers to be colonised. If they try Britain will turn into Bosnia"<sup>67</sup> Abu Hamza leader of the Supporters of Sharia group is reported to have praised the attacks of 11th September as a "justified" attack on "a crazy superpower".<sup>68</sup>

Actions of the Al-Muhajiroun group since Sep 11:

- A spokesman said that the group will "strive until we see flag of Islam flying over Downing Street".<sup>69</sup>
- Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammad is reported to have issued fatwas calling for the assassinations of Tony Blair and President Musharraf of Pakistan.<sup>70</sup>
- A spokesman for the group claimed that "thousands" of British Muslims had gone to fight in Afghanistan.<sup>71</sup>

There have been many articles reporting that British Muslims have volunteered to fight in Afghanistan against America and Britain. There has been little evidence to support that this is happening in anything but a few cases. Such stories have led to the loyalties of young British Muslim men coming under media scrutiny. Many articles on the subject included quotes from young Muslim men; "I'm British born and British bred, but I'm willing to kill British soldiers".<sup>72</sup> These reports may result from young Muslims not feeling part of British society.

The press coverage of these extremist groups and the volunteers has been extensive. During late 2001 and early 2002, mainstream Muslim groups have been eclipsed, often only being in the media to respond to hard-line Islamic groups. Press coverage of these groups has often been characterised by the uncertainty and fear of most commentators, on what the attitudes of British Muslims are to the war. Some articles have warned of the threat to our society that these hard-line Muslims pose. Referring to them as 'the enemy within' and 'a fifth column' some journalists have argued that the opinions of these young Muslim men expose the failure of Britain's current approach to multiculturalism.<sup>73</sup>

The idea that Muslims should be grateful to Britain for their presence here is often alluded to and occasionally stated.<sup>74</sup> These opinions rarely differentiate between those born in Britain and more recent immigrants. This view of British Muslims is further shown by reactions to

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<sup>65</sup> The Sun 30/10/01 'Abdul from Dagenham'

<sup>66</sup> Independent On Sunday 30/9/01 'An audience with the Tottenham Ayatollah', The Independent 4/10/01 Interview with Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad, The Sun 14/9/01 'Messages of hate from Brit minority'

<sup>67</sup> The Observer 4/11/01 'The British recruits'

<sup>68</sup> The Independent 20/9/01 Anger at clerics extremism as race attacks rise'

<sup>69</sup> The Independent 23/10/01 'Islamic leaders Argue on Britons Joining Taliban'

<sup>70</sup> The Independent on Sunday 30/9/01 'An audience with the Tottenham ayatollah'

<sup>71</sup> Daily Telegraph 30/10/01 'Britons who join Taleban to face trial'

<sup>72</sup> David Mellor Sunday People 4/11/01 'Price of selling our nation short'

<sup>73</sup> R Littlejohn The Sun 30/10/01 'Let's crack down on guerillas in our midst', Melanie Philips Sunday Times 4/11/01 'Britain is in denial about the angry Muslims within'

<sup>74</sup> Mary Ann Sieghart The Times 31/10/01 'If they despise the West, why have extremist Muslims chosen to live in this country?' (see above)



those that volunteered to fight for the Taleban. Some newspapers have called for those involved to be expelled from Britain “Anyone who shoots at our armed forces gives up their right to be British”.<sup>75</sup> The ultimate sanction under UK law for a British citizen guilty of treason is a prison sentence.<sup>76</sup> Calls for the expulsion of these people were particularly common in the letters pages.<sup>77</sup>

The phrases ‘moderate Muslims’ and occasionally ‘modern Muslims’, have been used by the press to refer to those that have Western views or are opposed to the extremist groups. Also used, but less frequently, have been terms such as ‘mainstream’ and ‘average’ that imply a majority opinion. Other terms such as ‘hard-line’, ‘fanatical’, ‘fundamentalist’, and ‘extremist’, have been used to denote Muslims with the opposite opinions. The BBC has been criticised for calling Osama Bin Laden an ‘Islamic fundamentalist’ and ‘Islamic terrorist’. The MCB has written a formal protest stating that these terms are inaccurate (as his actions are un-Islamic) and bring Islam into disrepute. The BBC resolved to continue its use of these terms.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Daily Star 30/10/01 ‘Stay out or else’

<sup>76</sup> The Express 27/10/01 ‘Treason: British Muslims may be charged’

<sup>77</sup> The Sun 26/10/01 ‘Traitor Muslims must not be let back into Britain’

<sup>78</sup> The Times 19/9/01 ‘BBC’s term for terrorist “provokes racism”