

Evidence to All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims

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Islamophobia is anti-Muslim racism

I am very happy to be speaking here today and thank the APPG and its co-chairs for this opportunity, and the ongoing work of the group in improving outcomes for Muslims in Britain.

I am speaking as the Director of the Runnymede Trust. You may know that we recently (last November) published a report *Islamophobia: Still A Challenge for Us All*.

Twenty years before, in November 1997, the Runnymede Trust - the country's leading race equality think-tank published its landmark report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* which is said to have popularised the term.

Our follow on report, highlights the worsening situation for Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim, and the need for coordinated action across government and society.

We recognise there has been some, often brave leadership on this issue, from within and outside government, and by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

However we think Britain as a society needs to do much more to respond to Islamophobia. Our definition of Islamophobia as anti-Muslim accords with existing academic literature and international conventions, but it is also informed by how best we should respond to racisms.

Before summarising our work, we recognise that Islamophobia is not the only or even main issue facing Muslims in Britain, and we also recognise how most of the time people interact well across ethnic and faith groups up and down the country.

At the same time we feel that policy thinking and policymaking is too narrow in its response to Islamophobia, in large measure because how it is conceived. Our report is in three sections, with the first offering our definition and vision, including 10 recommendations, the second including nine chapters on mapping Islamophobia in areas including the labour market, health, hate crime, and gender, written by academic experts, and concluding with five chapters on different conceptions of Islamophobia. In my remarks today, I simply highlight 5 of our recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 1 – Redefining Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism

We disagree with the current and dominant view of Islamophobia as anti-Muslim hate or bigotry. Developing policies to tackle Islamophobia based upon this narrow interpretation fails to recognise the much broader and structurally negative outcomes for Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim. We fully recognise the importance of attending to hate crime, especially for victims and their families. But a too narrow focus on hate sustains the false impression that Islamophobia only relates to (often violent) street-level encounters rather than also attending to direct and indirect forms of discrimination within the labour market, housing, education and health provisions. British Muslims fully understand that Islamophobia is experienced (and often more consequential for their lives) in applying for a job and at middle class dinner tables as much as by bigots hurling abuse on the street.

Defining Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism properly locates the issue as one in which groups of people are ascribed negative cultural and racial attributes which can lead to a

wide range of experiences, either as an unconscious bias, prejudice, direct or indirect discrimination, structural inequality or hate incidents. As you know, there is also an important legal and policy principle that we should attend more to what people do, and their consequences, as opposed to what they think or feel.

Second, tackling this issue as a form of racism means drawing together the wider range of campaigns for racial equality and alliance building. It produces a more collective network of people able to transcend their specific experiences of racism and support each other in building the positive society that we all are all hoping to achieve.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – Public services but also private and charity sector employers should collect more data on Muslims and other faith/non-faith groups.

Given evidence of a specific ‘Muslim penalty’ across different sectors, and the diversity of the Muslim population, using existing census group ethnicity categories cannot capture the experience of Muslims in the public and private sectors. This should be part of wider efforts of public services and employers to improve their data collection, including response rates, on ethnic monitoring. Historically, Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic group categories were used as proxies for Muslim; these groups currently account for just over half (55%) of British Muslims. Collecting more data will help to better develop and advance our understanding of and solutions for the situation facing Muslims and other groups within the private and public sectors. We ask whether for government to lead on this, rolling out the collection of faith (and non-faith) data across your administration. We believe this would be best done by modifying the two Northern Ireland questions rather than the one, voluntary England and Wales Census question.

RECOMMENDATION 5 – Employers and employment support organizations should address barriers to equal labour market participation.

Policies addressing racial discrimination within the labour market will also improve outcomes for minority faith groups. This includes: publishing pay gaps, name-blind CVs, ensuring long- and shortlists reflect the local working-age population, measuring managers' ability to progress minorities as a key performance indicator, and accountability for outcomes not just by human resources or senior leadership but at every level of management.

Furthermore, it's not working class people who are currently denying Muslims and other BME groups interviews. It's the white middle class managers, who went to Oxbridge and the Russell Group, where Muslims and black people in particular are far less likely to attend, or to get a first when they do attend. When Baroness Warsi noted that Islamophobia had passed the dinner table test, she captured an important point about middle class thinking, which we might not call hateful, but that underpins not just attitudes but behaviours and outcomes in the workplace, with clear consequences for people's ability to get a job, to progress at work, to put food on their table (note that 59% of Bangladeshi children today live in poverty), and to be treated with equal respect as their fellow citizens.

RECOMMENDATION 6 – Race equality, Muslim and other faith-led civil society groups and organization should work more closely together to build a common platform to challenge all forms of racism.

It is not enough for people or organizations to challenge only the form of discrimination that affects them; anti-discrimination and equality are universal principles that must be defended even when doing so doesn't have a direct effect on us personally. It is important to understand that different forms of racisms have different attributes, whether anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim or anti-black, and that it is therefore reasonable and justifiable to understand and respond to specific forms of racism. But challenging racism requires challenging racism in all its forms, and understanding anti-racism as a wider human

rights and equality position entails defending other groups – and not just our own – that experience discrimination too.

RECOMMENDATION 7 – Local mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners should ensure appropriate resources are allocated to tackling hate crime effectively at a local level.

In addition to criminal justice sanctions for the most serious hate crime offenders, the government should utilize community-based, restorative and rehabilitative interventions to tackle hate crime.

The Home Office's 2016 Hate Crime Action Plan commits to preventing hate crime by challenging the beliefs and attitudes underpinning such crimes and to working with young people and schools. This must involve addressing the core curriculum and ensuring the history of migration and its afterlife is taught effectively. See www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk.

Finally, and in line with the concluding recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the government should ensure that public officials do not partake in hate speech, and that they robustly challenge hate speech and condemn any hateful ideas or policies that promote intolerance and hostility.

As my evidence highlights, defining Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism isn't just an academic or technical question. How we define and understand an issue or problem informs how we then respond to it. Both in terms of creating a wider civil society response across all forms of racisms, and for expanding our policy response and vision beyond a narrow hate crime agenda, defining Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism is the most productive way forward.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today and look forward to your report on this hugely important issue, for the wellbeing and opportunities of British Muslims, as well as for charting a better path for us as a country.