'Promoting good campus relations: dealing with hate crimes and intolerance'
Issues affecting Freedom of Expression

A presentation by Abdurahman Jafar, Vice Chair, MCB Legal Affairs Committee to the Parliamentary University Group, 15th March 2006 – a response to the Ebdon Report

Islamophobia the fastest growing source of hate crime, since 7/7 hate crime increased fourfold, latest CPS statistics show that over 50% of religiously motivated crimes have been directed at Muslims, significant when you consider that Muslims make up about 3% of the population. The growth in Islamophobic hate crimes is proportionate to the growth of Muslims as being perceived to be associated with terrorism.

Education Secretary Ruth Kelly told a conference of University UK on 15 September 2005, that vice-chancellors and principals had a duty to inform the police where they believed that students or staff were breaking the law or committing "possible criminal acts" and that freedom of speech and thought on campus did not extend to tolerance of unacceptable behaviour[1]. The same day, a right-wing think tank, the Social Affairs Unit, released a report warning that some British universities "may have become, and may still be, safe havens for terrorist ideas and recruits."[2] The authors, Anthony Glees and Chris Pope, claimed that a thread linking many of the British terrorists "about whom we know something" was that they had spent time at a British university.

The Mail on Sunday has just been exposed as having promised cash to students to pose as Muslims and report back from Muslim student societies. The NUS president Kat Fletcher condemned the move saying "That the journalist has been forced to resort to this type of low tactic, clearly illustrates that the hysteria surrounding extremism on campus has little basis in reality and no concrete evidence to back it up." She added: "This kind of sensationalist journalism contributes nothing to the serious debate about combating terrorism. Instead, it is encouraging discrimination towards certain religious groups and students on campus by playing on fears.

The Glees and Pope report falsely names UK students as being involved in Terrorism on the basis of such links being alleged anti-terror media reports: Zeeshan Siddiqui, completely acquitted in December 2005 of possessing false identity documents but never charged with anything to do terrorism[3], was named on the basis that he went to the same school as fellow Londoner Asif Haif, who carried out an attack in Israel. "Other terrorists found on UK campuses" [4] 'exposed' by Pope and Glees who were ultimately acquitted or had charges dropped against them include Tahira Tabassum[5], Zahid and Parveen Sharif,[6] Urslaan Khan[7], and ex-Guantanamo detainee Feroz Abbasi. Despite their innocence, they are still labelled as "terrorists". The parallels can be drawn with

McCarthyism where students and academics were encouraged to name names and little was needed to accuse and convict; indeed most people were convicted on a person's statement.

The report makes findings that approximately 30 university campuses are breeding grounds for terrorism, that finding is based on a total of 9 cited interviews – a member of the Special Branch; an elected student sabbatical at Brunel Unive rsity; a member of the Socialist Society; the head of security at an unnamed British university; the managing director of resources at an unnamed British university; a member of the Community Security Trust; a former member of the BNP; Andi Ali (a PhD student at Newcastle University); and a member of the Union of Jewish Students (UJS).[8] The naming University of Manchester arises from a singular primary source, the Community Security Trust[9], an organization at the forefront in making anti-Semitism charges, often rounding on critics of Israel[10].

The report is characterized by inaccuracy, hyperbole and plain scaremongering. Academic David Renton mentions a few examples such as the authors' contention that "the Baader-Meinhof Gang gained close to five million sympathizers, chiefly in West German universities". Renton contends that there are only two million students in the combined German university system today and points out that according to the US State Department and the Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Israel, the actual figure is more likely to be in the low hundreds.[11]

Similarly German security services are cavalier with regard to identifying "Islamic extremists". One member of the German security services claimed that there were an estimated 50,000 "Islamic extremists" in Berlin.[12] When questioned as to how they knew this, the officer stated that they had infiltrated the mosques and heard Muslim leaders advise the congregations "not to send their daughters to mixed swimming classes". According to this officer, to want single-sex swimming classes for females was to "hate our way of life" and fall within the ranks of the "extremists".

So far we have identified two primary concerns, first is the integrity of sources that inform us of a threat, secondly the definition of the threat itself. The definition of "extremism" given by the government in a report into Muslim youth is so broad as to include support for legitimate resistance groups fighting foreign occupation abroad. International law not only condones such support but actively encourages it. The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Right endorses the need for man to rebel "against tyranny and oppression" and Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Convention of 1949, (Act 1 C4), passed in 1977, declared that armed struggle can be used as a method of exercising the right of self-determination and that "all states (are encouraged) to provide material and moral assistance to the national liberation movements in colonial territories."

The speech of the oppressed against the politics of the powerful, is exactly the type of speech that international human rights law is designed to protect. Yet, following the lead in the US we are also increasingly criminalizing such speech. The Terrorism Bill of 2005 attempts to create a new offence of glorification of terrorism, which would have criminalized any support for the ANC and Nelson Mandela's struggle against apartheid. Charles Clark explanation that in today's world there can never be a justification for armed struggle belies the reality of the world where Human Rights abuses and totalitarianism in states are increasing in a GWOT world. The Association of University Teachers (AUT) and NATFHE have come out in opposition to the Terrorism Bill out of fear that it will criminalize entirely legitimate forms of academic enquiry.[13]

Curiously, Pope and Glees recommend a careful scrutiny of the content of courses being taught to test whether they appear to extol or glorify violent revolution.[14] McCarthyism also hunted books in schools, universities and libraries, and teachers in the same way, whatever their competence. They were guilty of having the ability to teach and share ideas. Books dealing with Russia or Communism were to be banished, people could not be trusted enough to let them have their own view. Many academics were delayed and could not do their job, because it became hard for them to collect material for their study.

Then there is the issue of integrity of sources. Tariq Ramadan identified by Sir John Turnbull as a necessary figure in the fight against extremism named as one of the 100 most influential thinkers in the world by *Time* magazine, had his US visa revoked preventing him from taking up his teaching position at a University there on the basis that he poses a threat to national security. The State Department acted on the basis of information given to it by pro-Israeli groups based in France.[15] On the basis of that same information on 5 October 2004 in the UK Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL) supporter Alan Clarke persuaded the National Executive Committee of the NUS to adopt a resolution calling for Tariq Ramadan to be banned from speaking at the European Social Forum, which was to be held in London later that month. Subsequently, a majority of the NUS NEC raised concerns that the motion was passed without a fully-informed debate, and requested that the motion not be acted upon, and this was accepted. The allegations were properly checked with the sources and the NUS NEC voted to formally overturn the decision on the basis the allegations were "baseless and completely misrepresent Tariq Ramadan's views."[16]

Again it is important to look across the pond to see the conclusion of this trend of political censorship. In the US an organization called Middle East Forum headed by Daniel Pipes established Campus Watch in 2002 which monitors the teachings and writings of U.S. professors specializing in the Middle East, with the goal of promoting Mr. Pipe's virulently anti-Arab approach to Middle Eastern studies, censoring criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic and blacklisting professors who refuse to share his vision.

Mr. Pipes wrote, in 1990, that "Western European societies are unprepared for the massive immigration of brown-skinned peoples cooking strange foods and not exactly maintaining Germanic standards of hygiene ... All immigrants bring exotic customs and attitudes, but Muslim customs are more troublesome than most." This week he wrote in the New York Sun that all Muslims should be considered "potential killers" and that "normal-appearing Muslims" may become violent at any time, leading to the "legitimate consequence of casting suspicion on all Muslims."

You may think it incredible that someone of these views would be influential or even be listened to. In the whole anti-terror campaign at policy level it is such voices that are not only influencing but leading. President Bush recently appointed Daniel Pipes to the board of the influential taxpayer-funded think tank, the U.S. Institute of Peace. Campus Watch no longer merely blacklists professors but advises on funding, doled out by the Department of Education, for Middle East studies programs housed in universities.

Pro-Israeli factions such as the Union of Jewish Students, the Community Security Trust and senior academics claim that students sympathizing with the Palestinians have exploited the conflict to spread anti-Semitism on campus. Anti-Semitism, they claim, is equivalent to anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist propaganda and thus a precursor for violent terrorism. One example of the effectiveness of that campaign is SOAS. In May 2005, a dossier of evidence documenting alleged instances of anti-Semitic behaviour at SOAS was delivered by the Board of Deputies of British Jews to Professor Colin Bundy, the head of the school. In March 2005, *the Times* reported that Hazel Blears, Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing, Community Safety and Counter Terrorism, had ordered a report into activities at SOAS.[17] Following the "allegations" of anti-semitism the university intervened overturned a democratic decision taken in the Student Union[18] to elect Mayor of London Ken Livingstone as honorary president.

The same month, a Muslim student at SOAS, Nasser Amin was reprimanded without notice or disciplinary hearing for writing an article in the student magazine *Spirit* in which he discussed the morality of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation. The author faced calls for his prosecution by journalists and parliamentarians for his prosecution [19] and numerous death threats on pro-Zionist websites[20]. Of course he had broken no law nor were his views unique, they are shared by numerous students, activists and academics coming from a diversity of religious and cultural backgrounds.[21] Senior politics academic at SOAS, Dr Mark Laffey, criticized the decision to reprimand stating that "it is part of the job description of an academic institution that you are willing to give offense. Our job is to seek the truth, no matter how uncomfortable or unpleasant for various groups or interests …freedom of expression must include the right to air unpopular or unpleasant arguments."[22]

And it is this conflating of the threat of terror with legitimate and necessary free speech that is the greatest threat to academic freedom and integrity of British universities and research institutions. Such an approach will only drive such speech underground and transform it from proper social activism in line with a long British tradition into clandestine modes; a climate where extremism flourishes best. There are lessons to be learned from the experience of tackling Irish terrorism.

It is not enough to allow freedom for opposing groups to merely continue to freely air their grievances and fight their own corners, there should also be attempts made to pro-actively bridge understanding. The use of Conflict Resolution methods should be used more widely and student with identifiable grievances should be encouraged to engage. I was in Kosovo where I witnessed the methodology work wonders in integrating Serb students into Kosovan schools.

The effect of terror suspicion directed at a distinguishable minority because of a threat they are purported to pose to the majority will mean that the majority will inevitably internalise that relationship and manifest that relationship in the form of prejudice. We draw attention to Peter Hillyard's study (Suspect community-people's experience of the prevention of Terrorism Acts in Britain), which noted that one of the results of the police treating the Irish as a suspect community is that the public are encouraged to do the same.[23]

Last year the British Psychological Society carried out at a study of teenagers' attitudes towards Muslims 15 York schools[24], some of their findings were:
- More than 9%, mostly the younger children aged 13 to 15, supported the ultra right wing views of the British National Party
- Their attitudes towards Muslims had also hardened considerably since the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, and the invasion of Iraq.
- The view of Muslims of 18% of boys and 12% of girls had worsened since the invasion of Iraq. Some 12% of boys and 6% of girls said it had become "much worse" since the war.
- < FONT size=3>In addition, 23% of boys and 10% of girls said they would object if Muslim girls wore headscarves to school.

Such attitudes can also be seen to manifest themselves in ad hoc decisions made by University authorities. In November 2005, Imperial College London issued a ban on staff and students wearing veils as part of an effort to improve campus security after summer bombings in London. [25] Such policies only create the atmosphere in which racist and Islamophobic attitudes are allowed to fester and thrive. The Education Secretary Ruth Kelly showed her support for restricting freedom of expression for Muslims when she decided to back the appeal of a school found guilty of discriminating against High School student Shabina Begum by refusing to allow her to wear the *jilbab*.[26]

The move at Imperial College move must be seen in a broader context of worsening relations with it's Muslim student population, the ban came shortly after Muslim students and staff at the College had their weekly allocated location for Friday prayers taken away, and it never consulted with the Islamic Society or Federation Of Students Islamic Societies or any Muslim students prior to introducing the ban and has since refused to enter into any discussions.[27]

'The FOSIS Muslim Student Survey 2005' found that 1 in 4 (26%) Muslim students do not feel that their study institution accommodates their needs, with the top grievance being the lack of a prayer room. The provision of a prayer area, Halal food and alcohol-free events were the top three suggestions on how to improve the situation. Among many useful recommendations by FOSIS were the following:

- University and college authorities should maintain close links with their Islamic societies in order to understand better the local needs of their Muslim student population.
- Universities, colleges and schools with a sizeable Muslim population should encourage students to set up Islamic societies because the evidence suggests that they encourage integration. The further education sector needs to address the shortfall in Islamic society existence on college sites by making Muslim students aware that they can establish an Islamic society and how to do it.
- Vice Chancellors and College Principals should maintain good relationships with their local student Islamic society and recognise the value of the work that they contribute to student life Student unions and NUS should encourage involvement from Muslim students directly through Islamic societies and also via other student activities

Historically, terrorism and extremism has always been defeated by communities working together, especially the communities wrongly tarnished by association. As such the FOSIS recommendations must be seen the wider light of encouraging open Student relations between Muslims and others. Rather then allowing the anti-terror debate to freeze debate and scare Muslims and others it should be used to encourage greater free cooperation and integration.

Britain, almost alone in Europe, has a long track record of dealing with many of the issues surrounding integration in a pragmatic fashion. This approach is precisely what is needed now. Practically, we can do more to turn the issue of British Muslim Student grievance into a more manageable one: the religious sensitisation of public policy. These efforts will involve three linked steps. First, removing direct causes of religious intolerance, i.e. protecting and promoting free speech equally for all and jealously scrutinizing any attempt from all sources to interfere with academic life. Second, identifying and tackling indirect obstacles to integration, i.e. ensuring that there is less opportunity for infringements of rights by standardizing policy with regards to provision of prayer rooms, flexibility for

religious holidays and dress codes. Finally, rectifying poor public understand ing about Islam.

The authors of the British Psychological Society survey thought negative depictions of Islam in the media, and the current climate of fear about Muslim terrorism, may be partly to blame for the trend in increased support for the far right. "I think the association that's been drawn in the media between being a Muslim and being a terrorist must have some impact on attitudes," said researcher Nathalie Noret. "The key finding from our study was that we need to improve education and knowledge of different religions … One thing we did find was a very poor understanding of Islam, little knowledge of it and the Middle East."

[1] Speech to Universities UK conference in London, 15 September 2005
[2] Glees A. & Pope C., *When Students Turn to Terror: Terrorist and Extremist Activity on British Campuses*, (Social Affairs Unit; Sept 2005)
[3] 'Forged ID Card: UK National Acquitted', *Dawn,* 23 December 2005
[4] *When Students Turn to Terror: Terrorist and Extremist Activity on British Campuses,* p40
[5] 'Suicide bomber wife cleared', *BBC News Online,* 8 July 2004
[6] 'UK suicide bomber family cleared', *BBC News Online,* 28 November 2005
[7] 'How Briton's £7 bus ticket to Baghdad turned dream pilgrimage into nightmare', *Guardian,* 24 December 2003
[8] Renton, D. '18 October 2005: against Anthony Glees', 18 October 2005
[9] See, *Muslim Profiling* (2002) IHRC, London, for an analysis of the CST's role in profiling opponents of Israel as Muslim and extremist at a demonstration in 2002. http://www.ihrc.org.uk/file/02Aug22_Muslim%20Profiling.pdf
[10] The Community Security Trust (CST) created to protect the Jewish community in Britain has come under sustained attack in recent months from a well-established figure in mainstream Jewish politics, Tony Lerman. Lerman, the incoming executive director of the think-tank Jewish Policy Research, has criticised the CST for exaggerating the extent of anti-Semitism in Britain and suggested that it has an institutional stake in making Jewish people scared.
 [11] Renton, D. '18 October 2005: against Anthony Glees', 18 October 2005; for figures, see http://www.hri.org/docs/USSD-Terror/95/append-b.html and http://www.ict.org.il/organizations/orgdet.cfm?orgid=35
[12] Statement made under Chatham House Rules at meeting in London in July 2005
[13] Association of University Teachers, *The Terrorism Bill and Academic Freedom,* November 2005
[14] *When Students Turn to Terror: Terrorist and Extremist Activity on British Campuses*
[15] Muslim Scholar Loses U.S. Visa As Query is Raised, Stephen Kinzer, New York Times, 8/26/04

[16] 'NUS congratulated for defending Muslim participation', *NUS Press Release* 6 December 2004

[17] 'Tide of extremism is rising against us, say Jewish students', *The Times*, 12 March 2005

[18] 'Tide of extremism is rising against us, say Jewish students', *The Times*, 12 March 2005

[19] Phillips, M., 'Jihad at the School of Orchestrated Anti Semitism', 10 March 2005, http://www.melaniephillips.com/diary/archives/001087.html ; Question by David Winnick MP to the Solicitor-General, Hansard Column 532W, 21 March 2005, http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200405/cmhansrd/cm050321/text/50321w03.htm

[20] For example, see http://littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/?entry=15018#comments

[21] For example, Professor Ten Honderich from University College London.

[22] 'Does freedom of speech only apply to non-Muslims?', *The Muslim Weekly,* 6 July 2005

[23] 'Suspect Community – People's Experience of the Prevention o f Terrorism Acts in Britain', Paddy Hillyard, Pluto Press (1993).

[24] Racism simmering in British schools, says survey, Press Association, Friday A pril 1, 2005

[25] 'Imperial bans hoodies on campus', *Guardian,* 23 November 2005

[26] 'Minister backs school hijab appeal', *Times Online* 30 July 2005

[27] Statement by FOSIS, 13 January 2006 http://www.fosis.org.uk/committees/media/imperial_2.html