

20/11/2009

bmsd's letter to "Stop the Islamisation of Europe".

Dear Mr Gash,

We are a group of Muslim democrats who are committed to the values that define the British state, including legal and constitutional equality for all, equal rights for women and minorities, and religious freedom, including the right to be free of faith.

We take such pride in these virtues that we actively seek to defend them against any individual, political group or organised religious outfit which seeks to impose their religious beliefs upon others (thereby infringing the right of all people to practice any religion or to be free of any religion).

As an attendee at our counter-demonstration against Al-Muhajiroun on 31st October 2009, you would have seen for yourself how we thwarted their attempts to portray themselves as representatives of the British Muslim community. Not only did they abandon their "March for Sharia" at the last minute, but we were joined by pro-democracy activists of all faiths and none, and from a wide range of backgrounds (including the English Democrats). This was hailed by both Muslims and non-Muslims as a victory for freedom and democracy.

We have come to know about your proposed demonstration outside Harrow Mosque on 13th December 2009, opposing the building of the mosque extension. According to your letter to the Harrow Times on your website – which appears not to have been published in the paper as yet – you believe that, "Muslims are attempting to make Islam the dominant theocratic-political system across the world and are actively eradicating democracy, non-Islamic cultures and all other religions."

To counter this assertion, we would like to point out that just like the majority of law-abiding British Muslims and non-Muslims, we too are extremely concerned about the rise of extremism and political Islam in Britain, which has been used to justify or demand non-democratic practices. On this issue, I am sure your organisation and ours share a common concern and would like to see a halt to the spread of these. We acknowledge that in the past several mosques and madrassahs have been involved in anti-democratic activities and extremism, through the political and religious leanings of their management and patrons. This undermines the confidence of the peace-loving British public and results in fragmented communities. It is clear that mosques and madrassahs should not be used as a vehicle for hate-preaching and spreading discord within society. In this vein, we would like to point out that just because Muslims attend certain mosques out of pure necessity, this does not mean that they subscribe to the views of the mosque committees and management. More likely, it signifies that they have no other choice and are not organised enough to be able to challenge such community leadership.

For further enquiries and comments please email: info@bmsd.org.uk or visit our website www.bmsd.org.uk

We also maintain that the vast majority of British Muslims are law-abiding citizens who are happy with secular democracy and do not wish to Islamicise Britain or Europe. We would like to fight for the rights of ordinary British Muslims to practice their religion, free of any coercion by organised hard-line groups who follow a particular brand of Islam based on rigid interpretations of Islamic teachings. By demonstrating outside a mosque under the banner, "Stop the Islamisation of Europe," ordinary peace-loving British Muslims end up feeling threatened and have begun to believe that their fundamental right to practice their religion is being curtailed. In any case, Harrow is an exemplar of good community relations, facilitated by strong communication and co-operation between different faith communities and various agencies such as the police and the local council. Our Director Tehmina Kazi can testify to this, as she has lived in Harrow for over 20 years. Individuals affiliated with Harrow Central Mosque joined our counter-protest against Al Muhajiroun and their leading members wholeheartedly support the merits of secular democracy alongside bmsd."

Your campaign is also fuelling the notion that somehow organisations such as SIOE are against all Muslims and the religion Islam in itself. This is being used by the extremist elements within Muslim communities to enhance their recruitment.

We therefore urge you to call off your protest and start open dialogue with British Muslims for Secular Democracy and other pro-democracy groups, so that we could jointly work together in reducing the spread of fascism and extremism from our communities.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Shaaz Mahboob
Vice Chair
British Muslims for Secular Democracy

