**Sara Khan Overview**

On 24th January 2018, the Government announced that Sara Khan (co-founder of Inspire) will be the new Commissioner for Countering Extremism, prompting over 100 mainstream Muslim community organisations and leaders to sign an open letter objecting to the appointment.

Before the question even arises as to who fills the post, it is firstly debatable whether the post of Commissioner for Counter Extremism is necessary, as the legislation contained within the current criminal justice system and counter-terror infrastructure would appear sufficient without the need for the commission.

However, if the position must exist, it is obvious that ***the person appointed must command the respect of communities such as the Muslim community.***

In light of this, the appointment of Ms Khan to the position is deeply troubling due to her ***lack of experience in counter-extremism, her lack of community credibility, historic conflicts of interest, perceived dishonesty and links to extremism and Islamophobes,*** to name but a few concerns.

Beyond a reflection of deeply flawed judgement by the Home Secretary, if Ms Khan is allowed to adopt the role, there is a severe concern that Muslim communities will refuse to liaise with her, thereby defeating the purpose of her appointment to the role. As such, a lack of community co-operation would make the intended purpose of her role impossible to achieve. Consequently, it is imperative that more suitable candidate is appointed.

This document is intended to provide a brief overview of some of the key issues which the Home Secretary and Prime Minister must consider in understanding the unsuitability of Ms Khan for the position of Commissioner for Countering Extremism.

* **Lack of credibility within the Muslim community**: Over 100 mainstream Muslim organisations and community leaders have signed an open letter condemning Ms Khan’s appointment to this position. Notwithstanding the concerns below, Ms Khan has been largely ostracised from the Muslim community due to the lack of ‘value or community benefit’ in her work. Considering the immersion of Inspire within the Prevent programme, and given the hostility and scepticism with which the Prevent programme is viewed by Muslim communities, Ms Khan and her work enjoys virtually no support from the British Muslim community. Rather, her work is largely regarded not only as unrepresentative of the issues affecting Muslim communities, but also damaging to these communities themselves. For some, it also begs the question as to whether her appointment is merely an example of cronyism and a reflection of her willingness to toe the party line in her loyalty to a largely right-wing and Islamophobic establishment.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* **Lack of expertise and experience**: It appears that Ms Khan has no academic background or serious practical experience that would prepare her for the role. In fact, the lack of any firm definition of “extremism” and “radicalisation” is itself problematic considering that Ms Khan's only work in this area presupposes a specific focus on "Islamist extremism". As such, we must question her credentials to tackle the threat of far-right extremism with equal vigour. Furthermore, there is no available evidence on either the Inspire website, nor Ms Khan’s own website, of any published peer-reviewed articles or academic studies detailing methodological rigour in her investigation and evaluation of differing forms of extremism and the process of radicalisation.
* **Lack of independence**: Despite claiming to be an independent body, Inspire has been uncovered to be a project financed by the Home Office. As such, Inspire is intimately associated with highly-criticised governmental strategies to counter terrorism – namely Prevent – and has thus been accused of feeding into a toxic narrative that stigmatises and marginalises communities, Muslims in particular. Meanwhile, even Ms Khan’s book, *The Battle for British Islam: Reclaiming Muslim Identity from Extremism*, was co-authored by a Home Office consultant, Tony McMahon.[[2]](#footnote-2) Indeed, Ms Khan’s open support of Prevent has been pointed to as the reason she has risen to prominence so quickly and has given many people reason to view her merely as a government stooge – further diminishing her credibility within Muslim communities.
* **Links to extremism** – Ms Khan and her organisation Inspire have troubling links to extremism and Islamophobia. Indeed, members of Inspire have appeared in the publication commissioned by Baroness Caroline Cox,[[3]](#footnote-3) who has been identified in Spinwatch reports as an ardent Islamophobe and someone who:
  + Invited Geert Wilders to the UK in 2009.
  + Spoke at a conference in Israel in May 2014, arguing “Islam is using the freedoms of democracy to destroy it”.
  + Sits on the board of governors of the notoriously Islamophobic Gatestone Institute, whose director, Nina Rosenwald, has been described as the “sugar mama” of anti-Muslim hatred.[[4]](#footnote-4)

It is certainly a disturbing development to find an organisation like Inspire co-operating with individuals whose Islamophobic credentials are well established.

* **Conflicts of interest and misleading information**: Inspire’s history is plagued by apparent conflicts of interest, as its personnel have secured lucrative government work for Inspire (which claims to be independent), whilst simultaneously in the employment of public authorities. Meanwhile, confusion over when Inspire was founded has been caused by inconsistencies on its website and in its submissions to the Home Affairs Select Committee. This is arguably an attempt to obscure funding sources and its actual lack of independence from Government influence.[[5]](#footnote-5)

***In light of the concerns discussed within this document, MEND and over 100 other Muslim organisations and community leaders are of the firm belief that that this appointment will further damage relations between the Government and Muslim communities. We therefore urge the Government to remove Ms Khan from this role.***

1. “100 Muslim organisations call on UK government to fire Sara Khan”, *Middle East Eye,* January 25, 2018, accessed 29.01.2018, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/100-muslim-organisations-call-uk-government-fire-sara-khan-547374411> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Top anti-extremism campaigner linked to UK 'covert propaganda' firm”, *Middle East Eye,* May 3, 2016, accessed 29.01.2018, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/feted-counter-extremism-campaigner-linked-covert-propaganda-company-746667480> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. # See “Equal and Free? Evidence in support of Baroness Cox’s Arbitration and Mediation Services (Equality) Bill”, May 2012, accessed 29.01.2018, <http://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/equal-and-free-16.pdf>

   # See also “UK: Sharia Courts Abusing Muslim Women”, Gatestone Institute, April 8, 2015, accessed 29.01.2018, <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/5512/sharia-courts-muslim-women>

   [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Tom Griffin, Hilary Aked, David Miller, Sarah Marusek, “The Henry Jackson Society And The Degeneration Of British Neoconservatism: Liberal Interventionism, Islamophobia And The ‘War On Terror’“, *Spinwatch,* June 2015, accessed 29.01.2018, <http://spinwatch.org/images/Reports/HJS_spinwatch%20report_web_2015.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Local Delivery Best Practice Catalogue Prevent Strategy”, *Office for Security and Counter Terrorism Home Office,* March 2015, accessed 29.01.2018, <http://powerbase.info/images/8/8c/OSCT-Prevent_catalogue-March_2015-OCR.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)