



NO
ANTI SEMITISM
NO
HOMOPHOBIA

NO TO
RACISM

MEND REBUTTALS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ANTI-SEMITISM AND HOMOPHOBIA

MEND rebuttals to allegations of anti-Semitism and homophobia

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Introducing Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)

Our mission

Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) is a community funded organisation that seeks to encourage political, civic and social engagement within British Muslim communities through empowering British Muslims to effectively interact with political and media institutions. We firmly believe that enhancing the mainstream participation of vulnerable and under-represented communities is an important step towards deepening and strengthening our democracy.

We attempt to achieve this in a variety of ways:

- MEND encourages voter registration and political engagement by British Muslims through our 'Get Out and Vote' campaign, providing educational workshops, and through hosting events – such as hustings and debates – that are intended to promote and facilitate participation in the political sphere.
- MEND provides educational courses and training designed to equip Muslims with the skills, resources and materials necessary to foster active citizenship and socio-political participation.
- MEND provides commentary and analysis on the high volumes of news content and coverage that maligns Islam and Muslims and foments Islamophobia in the UK and across Europe.
- MEND works with other Muslim and non-Muslim organisations to tackle Islamophobia and all forms of hatred, including anti-Semitism, homophobia, xenophobia, racism, and hatred based upon disability.
- MEND encourages greater participation by British Muslims in voluntary bodies and institutions in order to deepen democratic and civic engagement at the local level.

Who are MEND

Volunteers

The vast majority of MEND's grassroots work is achieved through a network of 26 working groups and a number of satellite groups across the UK. These working groups deliver MEND's national strategy on a local level through their work with delivery partners such as the police, councils, schools and inter-faith organisations, to name but a few.

What makes these working groups unique is that they are almost entirely comprised of local community volunteers. As such, working groups function on the basis of enthusiastic and dedicated individuals – almost none of whom are employees of MEND. Consequently, almost 1,000 people across the country freely give their time and expertise to MEND because they believe passionately in the causes and principles we espouse.

Our volunteers are drawn from a variety of different backgrounds and professions, including (but not limited to):

- GPs, hospital doctors, medical and non-medical NHS staff, and healthcare workers,
- Teachers,
- Solicitors,
- Academics,
- IT professionals,
- Businesswomen and Businessmen,
- Housewives and househusbands,
- Students.

Many of these volunteers also dedicate their time to other organisations and simultaneously fulfil other civic duties within the community, such as school governor work. Consequently, MEND volunteers are firmly located within the heart of their communities, and have important relationships with local councils, police forces and schools. Through their external community roles and responsibilities, MEND volunteers are often well-known and highly credible figures within their local communities, and thus provide MEND with significant local credibility.

It is through this network of volunteers that MEND can boast to be a truly grassroots organisation which is representative of a wide cross-section of British Muslims. As such, we reasonably believe that we are an organisation that should be consulted by politicians, policy makers and public bodies if they genuinely wish to engage with a representative cross-section of the British Muslim community.

Staff

In comparison to the hundreds of volunteers, MEND has a small number of staff. At present, MEND has 20 members of paid staff.

Amongst these employees, we have a network of regional managers who cover the different geographical areas of the UK. Typically, these regional managers support local working groups within their territories, and work closely with them to deliver the national strategy alongside local delivery partners.

MEND has a small centrally based team in London, comprising of administration staff, graphic designers and our Social Media Lead.

Finally, and also based in London, MEND has an advocacy team consisting of our Policy Team, a Parliamentary team, and our Islamophobia Response Unit Co-ordinators.

The Board

Sufyan Ismail, Founder

Sufyan Gulam Ismail is an award-winning serial entrepreneur and philanthropist who has been ranked amongst the 500 most influential Muslims in the World. He graduated from the

University of Manchester before starting his career training with Deloitte. Mr Ismail has built numerous businesses over the years, specialising in financial services, private equity and real estate. His businesses have won numerous awards including 'UK's fastest growing company', NW Entrepreneur of the Year, and have been listed in the Sunday Times Top 100 Fast Track corporate listings. His businesses have donated over £5m towards alleviating poverty in developing countries, supporting orphans and providing emergency medical relief in disaster zones. Mr Ismail has also authored various briefing papers and co-authored a university textbook on Islamic finance.

In 2014, Mr Ismail formally retired from full-time business activity to focus on philanthropic ventures with a key focus on tackling Islamophobia. To this end, he became the founder of MEND which specialises in tackling Islamophobia via a dual approach of advocacy in Westminster and media engagement, as well as through improving media and political literacy of grassroots British Muslims across the UK. Mr Ismail stepped down as CEO of MEND in 2015.

In recognition for his outstanding leadership and activism, Mr Ismail was recently awarded the Community Leadership Foundation award for tackling Islamophobia.

Dr Shazad Amin, CEO

Dr Shazad Amin is Chief Executive Officer of Muslim Engagement & Development

He qualified in Medicine from the University of Manchester in 1990 and spent 26 years working as a psychiatrist. He retired in 2017 from his post as a NHS Consultant in Adult Psychiatry based in Manchester, having spent 17 years in that position. He works as a Court Expert Witness, mainly in the area of Clinical Negligence. He is also a Chair of the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service, which makes decisions about a doctors' fitness to practise. He is a Care Quality Commission Specialist Advisor.

He is married with three children and supports Liverpool FC. He also has interests in the art of MC Escher, optical illusions, 80s pop music and acting.

Aman Ali

Having spent two years as MEND's Regional Manager for London, Aman Ali is now MEND's National Community Head.

Aman currently is undertaking his Master's studies at UCL's Institute of Education, having initially graduated from Queen Mary University with a BSc in Biology with Psychology.

He has many years of experience working with various Muslim youth organisations, having started out as a Muslim youth worker at the age of 17. He then moved onto various roles including being previously Head of Media at FOSIS and teaching science at secondary level.

Isobel Ingham-Barrow

Isobel Ingham-Barrow is MEND's Head of Policy and Research.

Isobel received her BA (Hons) in Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies with Persian, an MA in Middle East and Islamic Studies, and an MRes in Middle East Studies from the University of Exeter. Alongside her work with MEND, she lectures at the University of Exeter and is a

postgraduate researcher in Area and Development Studies at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies. Her PhD research project is an exploration of masculinity within British Muslim communities.

Our funding

MEND is entirely community financed and run. This is so that MEND may maintain its freedom from political and economic agendas, and thus fully represent the interests of British Muslims without any conflicts of interest. Our determination to remain fully community funded stems from experience of past organisations that have attempted to represent minority and vulnerable groups, but which have become restrained to working within government narratives due to their reliance upon government, or other similar sources of funding. To honestly represent any community, organisations must be able to criticise and debate freely for the benefit of those they claim to represent.

It is on account of this desire to independently represent the interest of vulnerable communities that MEND is proud of our community funded model. Our successful financial structure not only demonstrates our large grassroots support, but also our autonomy from political and economic narratives and agendas.

Our achievements

Global accolades and commendations

Through the course of our work, we have accumulated numerous global accolades and commendations, including:

- The World Economic Forum commended our work as *“best practice”* in Human Rights *“protection and promotion”*.
- The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights rated us the *“best example for civil society organisations”*.
- The EU Parliament Magazine stated that *“The EU could learn a lot from MEND’s work on counter-radicalisation through engagement”*.
- The Runnymede Trust in their 20th Anniversary report ‘Islamophobia – still a challenge for us all’ commented that *“MEND made an extremely comprehensive and compelling submission to the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the British Press”*.
- A number of politicians, officials and public personalities have spoken at many of our¹ events, including Home Secretary Amber Rudd, Jeremy Corbyn, Sir Lynton Crosby, Baroness Warsi, Andy Burnham, Diane Abbott, Sir Peter Bottomley, Jack Straw, Wes Streeting, Stephen Kinnock, James Caan, and many more.

Community recognition

MEND has the largest grassroots support and community recognition of any Muslim organisation in the UK. With over twenty-six working groups and close to 1,000 volunteers

¹ Or events that were joint hosted by MEND and other third-party organisations.

across the country, MEND can provide the Government and policy makers with greater access and insights into Muslim communities than any other organisation.

Furthermore, our educational programs have had a huge outreach and impact amongst British Muslims. To date, over 40,000 British Muslims have attended our Islamophobia presentation that highlights the causes and possible solutions to Islamophobia, and well over 3,000 people have completed our full-day masterclass covering the importance and methods of becoming actively engaged within politics and media. Meanwhile, our 'Get Out and Vote' campaign has empowered tens of thousands of British Muslims through facilitating their involvement in the democratic process.

MEND has recognition beyond Muslim communities through our Islamophobia Awareness Month (IAM) campaign. This is an inter-community campaign which runs throughout November each year in partnership with Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC), local councils, journalists and local media, councillors and local MPs, mosques, universities, schools, community organisations and others, in order to highlight the positive contributions of British Muslims and raise awareness of Islamophobia.

Another example of MEND's recognition and credibility amongst British Muslims is the success of our newly launched Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU), which has already recorded and dealt with hundreds of cases since its launch in April 2017. Considering the notorious difficulty of encouraging victims of all forms of hate to report incidents either to the police or to third-party-reporting centres, our success in receiving such a huge number of reports is testament to the trust that MEND occupies amongst British Muslims.

Recognised partners

MEND enjoys the support of a wide range of political and public bodies and organisations. As one example of our work, MEND continues to work with local councils across the UK to ensure Islamophobia is part of their hate crime strategy, and we were also responsible for successfully working with UK police forces to record Islamophobia as a separate category of hate crime – similar to racism and anti-Semitism.

Examples of our other partners include:

- MEND is an official partner with the Electoral Commission.
- MEND sits on the CPS' hate-crime accountability forums.
- MEND served as Secretariat to the first Islamophobia APPG.
- IPSO recognises MEND as a representative body for the Muslim community.
- Over 20 police constabularies across the United Kingdom have worked with MEND to tackle Islamophobia and many participate in Islamophobia Awareness Month run by MEND.
- MEND works with numerous teaching unions to deliver Islamophobia lessons in schools.

MEND's achievements can be read in full at:

Our advocacy work

MEND firmly believes that active engagement with political, media and public institutions is the only way to successfully address issues and challenges facing British Muslims and other minority communities. To this end, we regularly collaborate with parliamentarians and other organisations to highlight and address social, political and economic problems affecting vulnerable groups in Britain.

In combination with our parliamentary outreach, we also deliver resources to members of the public that provide informative insights into these issues.

Some of the resources we provide in this regard include:

- **Submissions to government inquiries:** MEND has submitted evidence to a variety of public inquiries, including the Leveson Inquiry, the Shami Chakrabarti Inquiry into antisemitism and other forms of racism in the Labour Party, the House of Lords Select Committee Hearing on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, and the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee Inquiry into Fake News.
- **Bi-monthly parliamentary updates:** These are regular updates we send to parliamentarians that highlight events and issues arising within Muslim communities, and which are designed to keep our political representatives apprised of the achievements and concerns of British Muslims.
- **Briefing Papers:** MEND has authored dozens of briefing papers on areas such as hate crime, press regulation, policing and counter terrorism to name but a few.
- **Factsheets:** MEND has created a catalogue of dozens of easy-read factsheets that provide brief overviews and statistics on a plethora of subjects ranging from the demographics of British Muslims, to education, employment discrimination, the NHS, media and minority rights.
- **Toolkits:** MEND has devised a series of simple toolkits for guidance on questions surrounding how to report a hate crime and how to make a media complaint.
- **MEND Exhibition:** MEND has developed an educational exhibition showcasing the positive contributions of British Muslims in sport, politics, medicine, and business, as well as demonstrating the effects of Islamophobia, media representation, and other issues on Muslim communities. The exhibition itself has been displayed in various schools, universities, libraries, businesses, councils and public organisations as an educational and informative resource promoting community interaction.
- **Manifestos:** In the approach to both general and local elections, MEND produces manifestos to advise candidates on the issues that are of interest to Muslims within their constituencies. In addition to this, MEND also provides summaries of major party manifestos in order to help British Muslims to understand the main issues that may concern them and opposing parties' positions on them.

MEND's advocacy resources and publications can be found at:

What do we believe in?

There are several principles guiding our work:

- **Democracy & empowerment:** political participation of British Muslims is our *raison d'être*. Our 'Get Out and Vote' campaign and the educational masterclasses we deliver encouraging political engagement have empowered tens of thousands of Muslims to become politically involved in the democratic process. Increasing political participation and civic engagement strengthens our democracy and should be supported.
- **The rule of law and individual liberty:** MEND fully supports the rule of law and individual liberty. MEND works closely with parts of the CPS and police constabularies across the country to this end. In fact, we successfully advocated for Islamophobia to be recorded as a separate category of hate-crime similar to racism and anti-Semitism.
- **Mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs:** MEND has developed a series of educational resources and training programmes to aid in the teaching of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and all forms of hatred. The issues surrounding anti-Semitism were mentioned 11 times in our 2017 Manifesto, where we also called for better legal protections against homophobic and disability related hate crime as well.² Furthermore, there have been numerous occasions when our working groups have shown solidarity and support to Jewish and other communities in times of crisis.³
- **Freedom to review government policies and legislation, and constructively criticise for the benefit of strengthening our democracy:** We believe it is a cornerstone of our democracy that any individual or organisation should be free to robustly criticise any aspect of government policy or legislation. To do so is a natural and integral part of the democratic process and is no indication of extremism or disloyalty. Indeed, we believe the Government should welcome honest criticism from 'critical friends', such as ourselves, in order to approach any inadequacies within policies constructively and through engagement. We recognise that there are a multitude of views in key policy areas, however, Muslims – as British citizens – have an inalienable right to express views on all policies that affect their communities. Moreover, there are certain policy issues that Muslims are frequently portrayed as being ineligible to lodge criticism. One such area is the delicate balance between preserving civil liberties and security. In reality, Muslims are arguably amongst the most affected by counter-terror policies, and thus are entitled to constructively engage with the development and implementation of these strategies, as are all British citizens.
- **Upholding human rights, both in the UK and abroad:** We believe that all people have the ethical and moral obligation to promote human rights and humanitarian wellbeing both domestically and beyond our borders. On occasion, this may involve criticism of the policies of our own government, or being critical of repressive regimes abroad which our government has close ties with. Once again, this criticism is not an indication of disloyalty,

² See "MEND Muslim Manifesto 2017", MEND, accessed 17.11.2017, https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MEND-Muslim-Manifesto-2017_FINAL_lowres-1.pdf

³ "Muslims offer 'wonderful' gesture of support to local synagogue after it is daubed with swastika graffiti", *The Independent*, October 14, 2017, accessed 17.11.2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/muslims-leeds-synagogue-swastika-graffiti-facebook-jewish-support-hate-crime-police-a8000441.html>

or that we are 'anti-government'. Rather, we are upholding human principles of justice, and using the vehicle of democracy to ensure that those principles are upheld.

- **A free, fair and accountable press:** We fully support a free and accountable press and believe that the press' ability to hold political powers to account is a cornerstone of a democratic society. However, such a right is also accompanied by responsibilities and it is clear that sections of the press have a history of irresponsible, misrepresentative and distorted reporting on minority groups – and Muslims in particular. One of the greatest challenges facing the active civic, social and political engagement of British Muslims is the current atmosphere of hatred and mistrust which is being fuelled by these high levels of irresponsible and inaccurate media reporting. In a climate lacking in respect, stigmatised communities become vulnerable to hatred – hatred that in many cases has escalated to violence and even to deaths, as demonstrated by the attack in Finsbury Park in 2017. We thus believe that the Royal Charter – as recommended by the Leveson Inquiry – must be implemented in full, in order to facilitate a press that is both free and accountable by offering legal protection to vulnerable communities.

What we DON'T believe in

It is important we dispel some of the truly surprising hysteria and myths surrounding our organisation:

- **We are NOT 'anti-government' or 'extremists':** As previously mentioned, the ability to criticise government policy and hold our political representatives to account is an integral component of the democratic process. Indeed, constructive criticism of governmental policies is the method through which society thrives and progresses. It is true that we have concerns with a limited number of governmental policies, however, constructive criticism and collaborative engagement is a sign of healthy democracies wherein ideas are challenged and debated. Moreover, there are naturally large areas of government policy that we fully support, thus it would be disingenuous for our critics to focus exclusively on our disagreements in order to portray us as being intrinsically anti-government or extremist.
- **We do NOT support nor sympathise with terrorism:** A great deal of emphasis has been placed upon our opposition to one strand of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy, Prevent. However, our opposition to this component of the overall strategy is based on the lack of an evidentiary basis supporting its development, and the discriminatory manner in which it is applied, disproportionately affecting Muslims. Indeed, MEND is not alone in this criticism; two special rapporteurs to the UN, the NUT (now the NEU), the NUS, the former Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Rights Watch UK, and the Open Society Justice Initiative have all criticized Prevent, along with more than 140 academics, politicians and experts in a single letter alone. Any suggestion that opposing this singular aspect of the Government's multifaceted counter-terror strategy is tantamount to supporting terrorism is thus clearly a ludicrous charge. This is especially surprising when one considers that MEND set up a charity appeal for the victims and families of the Manchester Arena terror attack, in which we raised £38,000.
- **We are NOT anti-Semitic:** Many of the accusations in this area have been due to a wilful misrepresentation and conflation of views criticising Israel with anti-Semitism. We believe that anyone should be free to criticise the policies and practices of the state of Israel without

fear of being labelled anti-Semitic – in much the same way as one could criticise the policies of Iran, Saudi Arabia or Pakistan without fear of being labelled Islamophobic. However, we accept that there are occasions when some of the language used by employees and volunteers could have been clearer to avoid such a misinterpretation.

Our Policy Pledges

As a result of our work within British Muslim communities, we have devised a series of policy pledges which we believe to be essential in order to effectively tackle Islamophobia in all of its forms in the UK. We therefore urge the Government and political parties to debate and commit to the following pledges:

1. Commit to fostering social cohesion and community resilience to all forms of extremism, and support de-radicalisation programmes that work with Muslim communities not against them.
2. Commit to providing greater transparency of Channel referrals.
3. Commit to a review of the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act and consider primary legislation to deal with social media offences and hate speech online.
4. Commit to preserving the Human Rights Act and the protection of minority rights including rights to religious slaughter, male circumcision and wearing of religious dress or symbols.
5. Commit to developing teaching materials to educate young people on Islamophobia, racism, and antisemitism, and prioritise religious education in the national curriculum to prepare young people for life in a religiously plural society.
6. Commit to strengthening powers of teachers to deal with racist and Islamophobic bullying in schools, whilst supporting the education sector in developing Islamophobia awareness training programmes designed to equip staff with the skills to identify and tackle hate incidents in schools.
7. Commit to tackling religious discrimination in the workplace and addressing the low level of economic activity amongst Muslims through targeted interventions at all stages of recruitment, retention and promotion, and improving access to employment for British Muslim women in particular.
8. Commit to media reform and the full implementation of the Royal Charter on a Leveson compliant regulator.
9. Commit to improving BME recruitment to the police service, including with affirmative action measures.
10. Commit to reducing the high number of Muslim prisoners through schemes to facilitate rehabilitation, cut re-offending and develop pathways for social inclusion.
11. Commit to supporting for the creation of an independent state of Palestine and an end to Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories.

12. Commit to democracy and human rights promotion abroad, including the rights of religious minorities.

The context of allegations against MEND

MEND firmly believes that all citizens have a responsibility in contributing to the positive and sustained development of a Britain in which all members of society are valued and respected, whatever their religious, racial or ethnic background, their gender or their sexual orientation. However, British Muslims have remained on the margins of public and political debate about their religion and place in modern Britain for too long, and the level of Muslim participation in media and politics remains woefully low.

It is saddening that, in the face of this mission to promote the political and media engagement of British Muslims, the increased political participation of Muslims is perceived as a threat to the interests of certain groups and individuals. As such, there is a concerted effort exerted largely by some right-wing groups in the UK which, taking advantage of significant funding and international connections, attempt to marginalise Muslim communities through techniques of sensationalist media coverage, methodologically flawed-research and scaremongering strategies.

One example of this was the repeated attempts to smear London Mayor Sadiq Khan by suggesting he had links with ISIS.⁴ Indeed, Khan was demonised by the political opposition (Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and Zac Goldsmith fiercely criticised Khan, most notably accusing him of being unsafe to run London because of his history of defending extremists in his previous job as a human rights lawyer)⁵ and was smeared in leading right-wing newspapers, including the Daily Mail, The Sun, The Evening Standard and the Telegraph.

The Islamophobia Industry and Professional Islamophobia

It is useful to acknowledge the large corpus of research that has unequivocally evidenced the existence of a well-financed campaign of right-wing extremist organisations and individuals, whose goal is to fuel Islamophobia and maximise the marginalisation of Muslims across the world. This practice has been described as *Professional Islamophobia*, in reference to the fact that these organisations and individuals have made careers through the spreading of Islamophobia.

In his powerful book “The Islamophobia Industry”, Nathan Lean examines the interconnected, and highly organized industry of manufacturing fear against Muslims. Within his discussions, Lean exposes the scare tactics, motives, and interests that drive this dangerous and influential network. As Lean states:

“Fear sells and the Islamophobia Industry – a right-wing cadre of intellectual hucksters, bloggers, politicians, pundits, and religious leaders – knows that all too well. For years they have labored behind the scenes to convince their compatriots that Muslims are the enemy, exhuming the ghosts of 9/11 and dangling them before the eyes of horrified populations for great fortune and fame. Their plan has worked.

⁴ “The bus driver's son who became London's first Muslim mayor: How ex-human rights lawyer Sadiq Khan has been dogged by links to extremists - but claims he's a moderate who loves manicures and wooed his wife with a Filet-O-Fish in McDonald's”, *The Daily Mail*, May 6, 2016, accessed 17.11.2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3575614/Introducing-London-s-Muslim-mayor-Sadiq-Khan-bus-driver-s-son-human-rights-lawyer-dogged-links-extremists-claims-moderate-loves-manicures-wooed-wife-McDonald-s.html#ixzz4ygsWGBjn>

⁵ “Sadiq Khan 'isn't fit to be Mayor of London because of his links to extremists', declares Theresa May as a string of senior Tories turn up heat on Labour candidate”, *The Daily Mail*, April 10, 2016, accessed 23.01.2018, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3532474/Sadiq-Khan-isn-t-fit-Mayor-London-links-extremists-declares-Theresa-Tories-turn-heat-Labour-candidate.html#ixzz50BIUVyb>

The tide of Islamophobia that is sweeping through Europe and the United States is not a naturally occurring phenomenon. It is their design. In recent years, Muslim-led terrorist attacks have declined yet anti-Muslim prejudice has soared to new peaks. The fear that the Islamophobia Industry has manufactured is so fierce in its grip on some populations that it drives them to do the unthinkable.”⁶

In its report “Fear Inc.”, the Center for American Progress Action Fund (CAP) conclude that “there is a small, tightly networked group of right-wing influentials producing misinformation against Muslims that reaches millions of Americans”. A number of foundations, including William Rosenwald Family Fund, Donors Capital Fund, and Richard Mellon Scaife, among others, provide a seemingly limitless stream of money “to a core group of ‘scholars’ who produce talking points, which activists and media figures then disseminate and politicians help mainstream”.⁷ This tendency happens too often in the United Kingdom as well, where groups such as the Henry Jackson Society – incidentally funded by Nina Rosenwald herself⁸ – bring Islamophobia into the mainstream discourse and attempt to influence the public as well as policy-makers.

Undoubtedly, one organisation guilty of perpetuating attempts to marginalise Muslim voices in the UK is the Henry Jackson Society (HJS), the anti-Muslim nature, connections and funding of which were comprehensively exposed by the *Spinwatch* report “The Henry Jackson Society and the Degeneration of British Neoconservatism: Liberal Interventionism, Islamophobia and the ‘War on Terror’”.⁹

In their book “What is Islamophobia?”, Massoumi, Mills & Miller comprehensively survey the anti-Muslim landscape of the UK. Within the book, the authors devote an entire chapter to analysing the influence of neoconservative think-tanks like HJS, concluding that “the neoconservative movement has been extremely important in advancing Islamophobic ideas and practice. It has performed a specific role in relation to policy and public debate... It can include liberal or high minded statements about issues of moral principle and the spread of democracy, and the arguments are addressed to elite audiences rather than street armies, though of course they help to legitimise Islamophobia on the street.”¹⁰

In parallel with these efforts to marginalise Muslim voices within political and social discourse, is the problem of scapegoating and negative portrayal of minorities within mainstream media. It is well known that “fear sells”, and it is evident that large segments of the press have profited from newspaper sales capitalising on emotive and negative portrayals of minorities.

Considering the need to end this narrative based on distortions, fear and hatred, MEND is working towards a more ethical and accountable system of press regulation on a Leveson compliant basis through the complete enactment of the Royal Charter and Section 40. This would severely hinder publishers’ abilities to continue unethical practices of smearing

⁶ Nathan Lean, “The Islamophobia Industry”, Nathan Lean WordPress, accessed 20.12.2017, <https://nathanlean.wordpress.com/books/the-islamophobia-industry/>

⁷ “Ending Islamophobia”, Center for American Progress Action Fund, August 29, 2011, accessed 17.11.2017, <https://www.americanprogressaction.org/progress-reports/ending-islamophobia/>

⁸ Who is herself described as the “sugar-mama of anti-Muslim hate”.

⁹ Tom Griffin Hilary, Aked David Miller and Sarah Marusek, “The Henry Jackson Society and the Degeneration of British Neoconservatism: Liberal Interventionism, Islamophobia And the ‘War on Terror’”, *Spinwatch*, accessed 17.11.2017, http://spinwatch.org/images/Reports/HJS_spinwatch%20report_web_2015.pdf

¹⁰ Griffin, T., Miller, D., & Mills, T., *The Neoconservative Movement: Think tanks as elite elements of social movements from above. In What is Islamophobia?: Racism, Social Movements*, Eds Massoumi, Mills & Miller. (Pluto Press: London, 2017), p. 231.

minorities for the sake of sales, so is frequently perceived as a severe threat to publishers' interests.

Attacks on MEND

During the final months of 2017, the combined efforts of anti-Muslim, far-right organisations (such as HJS) and sections of the right-wing media were clearly visible in a coordinated attempt to smear MEND as an extremist organisation, thus closing down an important platform for British Muslim voices. In the week prior to the publication of HJS's report on MEND, there were no less than 7 negative mainstream news articles written about MEND. The day following our Parliamentary event, on 1st November 2017, there were no less than ten articles portraying MEND and those who attended or supported our event in the same negative vein. This is no coincidence. As such, it is evident that there is a purposeful and coordinated attempt by right wing think-tanks such as HJS and elements of the right-wing press to attack MEND and put pressure on parliamentarians and political representatives to dissuade them from engaging with us. The primary ammunition for this attack was linking a selection of social media posts and selective extracts from presentations in order to produce a manufactured narrative of an 'extremist' organisation.

MEND's attackers

Neo-conservatives

As many of MEND's attackers, including HJS and Nick Cohen, hail from staunchly right-wing, often extremist, neoconservative positions, it is useful to briefly clarify what is meant by the term 'neoconservative'.

Having emerged in the US in the 1960s, neoconservatism has often been described as "*Wilsonianism on steroids*" to indicate a hard-line, Christian crusader-like approach to protect western values and interests, defeat adverse ideologies, and export the American model of liberal democracy everywhere through an interventionist foreign policy. In relation to the Arab world specifically, neoconservatives believe in an almost messianic mission to defend Israel and defeat Islam, which is framed within a Huntingtonian-like view of a *Clash of Civilizations* between democratic and Islamic societies.¹¹

A senior fellow at the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, Jonathan Clarke, highlighted the main characteristics of neoconservatism as "*a tendency to see the world in binary good/evil terms*", a "*low tolerance for diplomacy*", a "*readiness to use military force*", an "*emphasis on US unilateral action*", a "*disdain for multilateral organizations*" and a "*focus on the Middle East*".¹² In foreign policy, neoconservatives' main concern is to prevent the development of a new rival.

British neoconservatism does not differ much from the American one, yet as pointed out by Lee Jarvis and Michael Lister, British neoconservatives are far more careful in labelling themselves in such a way due to the very negative association of the term and with George W.

¹¹G. John Ikenberry et al., *The crisis of American foreign policy: Wilsonianism in the twenty-first century*, (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, cop. 2009).

¹² "Viewpoint: The end of the neo-cons?", *BBC News*, February 9, 2009, accessed 22.12.2017, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7825039.stm>

Bush and the “*deceptions of the war in Iraq*.”¹³ Even so, they fully embrace the concept of the West’s struggle with “*the Other*”, as well as the domestic mission of protecting society from the perceived threat posed by Islamic ideologies, and the foreign mission of securing Israel’s interests.¹⁴

These missions translate into a hard-line, exclusionary approach to issues surrounding the engagement and inclusion of Muslims in British society. Although this is often masqueraded as a legitimate, and largely shareable, effort to prevent the proliferation of radical ideologies, it conceals a clear opposition to anything and anyone who does not share the neoconservative way of looking at the world. Such an approach entails highly selective engagement with Muslim associations and organisations; engagement that is exclusively limited to those with whom will cooperate in the advancement of a specific political agenda. Meanwhile, anyone who proposes legitimate concerns about specific counter-terrorism strategies, or even an alternative way of looking at the world, is demonised and singled out following a standardised smearing campaign. Accusations of radicalism, anti-Semitism and opposition to democracy are thus frequent weapons in these smearing attempts.

The Henry Jackson Society (HJS) and Tom Wilson

The Henry Jackson Society (HJS) is a UK based, neoconservative think-tank that claims to combat extremism, advance democracy and promote human rights. However, since its inception, HJS has been exposed for adopting a progressively more neoconservative agenda, fiercely advocating in the interests of Israel, and advancing increasingly Islamophobic objectives. Indeed, one of its own founders has described it as a ‘corrupt’ think-tank.¹⁵

Having long been embroiled in controversy, HJS has gained notoriety through frequent anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant comments made by its senior members, particularly figures such as Associate Director Douglas Murray and current Director Alan Mendoza. As but one example, during a speech made by Murray in 2006, the HJS Associate Director said: “*Conditions for Muslims in Europe must be made harder across the board: Europe must look like a less attractive proposition.*”¹⁶

As another example of Douglas Murray’s activities, he has also participated in anti-Muslim conferences organised by the David Horowitz Freedom Center in the US, alongside Robert Spencer (who incidentally was banned from the UK), Frank Gaffney and right-wing journalist Melanie Phillips.¹⁷

The HJS political agenda and narratives are largely established by Alan Mendoza, who is undoubtedly the most senior figure in the organisation. Dr Mendoza is himself an outspoken supporter of Israel, with strong connections with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), arguably the best-known pro-Israel lobby in the world. As evidenced by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, AIPAC is run by hardliners who generally support

¹³ Lee Jarvis, Michael Lister, *Critical Perspectives on Counter-terrorism*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 192.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “Brendan Simms and the racist corrupt Henry Jackson Society”, *LinkedIn*, February 18, 2017, accessed 05.01.2018, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/brendan-simms-racist-corrupt-henry-jackson-society-matthew/>

¹⁶ “Paul Goodman: Why the Conservative frontbench broke off relations with Douglas Murray – and what happened afterwards”, *Conservative Home*, October 17, 2011, accessed 03.11.2017, <https://www.conservativehome.com/thecolumnists/2011/10/by-paul-goodman-the-struggle-against-islamist-extremism-demands-from-the-start-the-separation-of-islam-a-complex-religion.html>

¹⁷ “Jihad against the West”, *Daily Motion*, undated, accessed 05.01.2018, <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x52fm2>

the expansionist policies of Israel's Likud party.¹⁸ In June 2011, Mendoza addressed AIPAC by raising fears about Muslim demographic growth in Europe. He contended that “*The European Muslim population has doubled in the past 30 years and is predicted to double again by 2040*” and that “*it has been difficult for European countries to absorb immigrants into their society given their failure to integrate newcomers*”.¹⁹ The argument was later proven to be completely untrue, and nothing more than a “*hyperbolic and inflammatory claim*”, based largely on data manipulation.²⁰

Beyond the comments made by senior HJS figures, is also worth noting that in 2014, HJS was removed from the All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) on homeland and international security for failing to “*make available on request a list citing any commercial company which had donated more than £5,000 either as a single sum or cumulatively in the last 12 months*”.²¹

Although HJS does not disclose its sources of funding, investigations conducted by the non-profit organisation *Spinwatch* have revealed a worrying record of pro-Israel/Zionist and Islamophobic donors.²² With the exception of the Eranda Foundation, all of the thirteen largest identified donors identified in *Spinwatch*'s report²³ contributed to the United Jewish Israel Appeal. Meanwhile, the UK Friends of the Association for the Well-being of Israel's Soldiers and the Jewish National Fund each received funding from six HJS donors, while four donors contributed to the Jerusalem Fund.²⁴

HJS also receives funds from US organisations, such as the Abstraction Fund, presided by Nina Rosenwald. Famously dubbed “*the Sugar Mama of anti-Muslim Hate*”,²⁵ Rosenwald is the founder and director of the famously right-wing and Islamophobic Gatestone Institute. Furthermore, since 2000, Rosenwald has contributed nearly \$3 million to finance the Center for Security Policy, Project Ijtihad, the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, the Middle East Forum, the Clarion Fund, Commentary Magazine and the Hudson Institute as well as

¹⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, Stephen M. Walt, “The Israel Lobby And U.S. Foreign Policy”, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, Fall 2006, p. 40, accessed 22.12.2017, <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/IsraelLobby.pdf>

¹⁹ “The Henry Jackson Society And The Degeneration Of British Neoconservatism...”, p. 39.

²⁰ “Why the Muslim 'No-Go-Zone' Myth Won't Die”, *The Atlantic*, January 20, 2015, accessed 10.11.2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/01/paris-mayor-to-sue-fox-over-no-go-zone-comments/384656/>
See also Doug Saunders, *The Myth of the Muslim Tide: Do immigrants threaten the West?*, (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2013). See also John Feffer, *Crusade 2.0: The West's Resurgent War on Islam*, (New York: City Light Books, Open Media Series, 2012).

²¹ “Rightwing thinktank pulls funds for Commons groups after disclosure row”, *The Guardian*, December 30, 2014, accessed 05.01.2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/dec/30/rightwing-thinktank-pulls-funds-commons-groups-disclosure-rules>

²² “Student Rights 'Campus Extremism' Study: Dishonest Pseudo-Science in Support Of a Toxic Narrative”, *Huffington Post*, July 7, 2013, accessed 03.11.2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/hilary-aked/student-rights-campus-extremism-study_b_3277503.html

²³ These are: Atkin Charitable Foundation, Stanley Kalms Foundation, Catherine Lewis Foundation, Bernard Lewis Family Charitable Trust, Eranda Foundation, Mintz Family Foundation, Sir John Ritblat Family Foundation, Maurice Hatter Foundation, G.R.P Charitable Trust, Wigoder Family Foundation, City of London, Phillips and Rubens Charitable Trust, Loftus Charitable Trust, Ann Zachary Foundation, Control Risks Group[453], Henry Jackson Society Inc., Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, Henry Jackson Foundation, Star Family Foundation, Abstraction Fund, Somekh Family Foundation, Koret Foundation, Michael Koss Charitable Foundation.

²⁴ “The Henry Jackson Society And The Degeneration Of British Neoconservatism...”, p. 60.

²⁵ “The Sugar Mama of Anti-Muslim Hate”, *The Nation*, June 14, 2012, accessed 03.11.2017, <https://www.thenation.com/article/sugar-mama-anti-muslim-hate/>

the Gatestone Institute. All these institutions have the common goal of fanning “*the flames of Islamophobia.*”²⁶

HJS is also currently under investigation by the Charity Commission for allegedly receiving £10,000 by the Japanese embassy to promote anti-China propaganda.²⁷

HJS activities span from lobbying the Government, to controlling narratives across media and university campuses on subjects such as the war on terror, terrorism and radical Islam. Student Rights (SR) is the ‘on campus’ arm of HJS and has been accused of seeking to pressure universities to “*impose restrictive measures on Muslim students that would, in effect, institutionalise Islamophobia*” and its work has been described as seeking “*to narrow the space for all radical political dissent on campus.*”²⁸ Student Rights has also been condemned by the NUS for its use of flawed methodologies and has subsequently been widely criticised for its “*dishonest pseudo-science in support of a toxic narrative*”.²⁹ Meanwhile, the conclusions of SR’s reports have been discredited and labelled “*a witch-hunt which makes sweeping judgments about student Islamic societies*”.³⁰

Furthermore, figures within HJS and SR – such as former UKIP candidate Raheem Kassam – have been found to feed false stories to the BBC and other news outlets in order to both disseminate pro-Israel information and to demonise pro-Palestine groups.³¹

In light of this established history of controversy, several public figures have distanced themselves from HJS. For example, Assistant Commissioner for London's Metropolitan Police, Mark Rowley, snubbed an event hosted by HJS after complaints by Muslim groups that the “*right-wing think tank ‘demonised’ Islam.*”³² Similarly, Amber Rudd and a number of other members of Theresa May’s cabinet recently resigned from the Political Council of the Henry Jackson Society and quickly distanced themselves from the organisation.³³

Finally, it is important to note that HJS is registered as a charity but, as noted above, pursues clear political objectives. This is in contrast with the UK Government’s guidelines for charities, which clearly state that “*a charity cannot exist for a political purpose, which is any purpose directed at furthering the interests of any political party, or securing or opposing a change in the law, policy or decisions either in this country or abroad*”.³⁴ It is further stressed that “*charities may undertake campaigning and political activity provided... they retain their independence and political*

²⁶ “The Sugar Mama of Anti-Muslim Hate...”

²⁷ “Charity Commission looking into the Henry Jackson Society”, *Third Sector*, February 15, 2017, accessed 05.01.2018, <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/charity-commission-looking-henry-jackson-society/governance/article/1424329>

²⁸ “*Critical Perspectives on Counter-terrorism...*” p. 192.

²⁹ “Student Rights ‘Campus Extremism’ Study...”

³⁰ “‘Extremists’ preaching to UK student societies,” *BBC News*, May 13, 2013, accessed 07.11.2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-22509757>.

³¹ “The Henry Jackson Society And The Degeneration Of British Neoconservatism...” p. 34.

³² “Police chief snubs ‘Islamist terrorism’ event after criticism”, *Middle East Eye*, March 7, 2017, accessed 05.01.2018, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/police-chief-fails-appear-henry-jackson-society-panel-after-criticism-1594113197>

³³ “Theresa May’s cabinet scrambles to disassociate from extremist think-tank tied to Donald Trump”, *The Canary*, July 20, 2016, accessed 05.01.2017, <https://www.thecanary.co/uk/2016/07/20/theresa-mays-cabinet-scrambles-disassociate-extremist-think-tank-tied-donald-trump/>

³⁴ “Campaigning and political activity guidance for charities”, Gov.uk, *Charity Commission for England and Wales*, March 2008, accessed 03.11.2017 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities>

neutrality."³⁵ The clear political bias of HJS is therefore in complete contradiction with the governmental campaigning and political activity guidance for charities.

The evolution of HJS into a right-wing think-tank signals its increasing subscription to illiberal approaches, particularly towards British Muslims. Marrying issues of integration with the larger "War on Terror" narrative, HJS has repeatedly distanced itself from charitable activities, neutrality and democratic values, and turned itself into a powerful instrument to advance a neoconservative agenda. As such, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to argue that HJS exists for the public benefit.

Tom Wilson

Tom Wilson is currently a Fellow at the Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism and the Centre for the New Middle East at The Henry Jackson Society. Being a strong supporter of Israel, Wilson's unipolar view often prevents him from providing rational and unbiased opinions or prescriptions on the issues of foreign and domestic policy he attempts to deal with. For example, Wilson wholeheartedly defended Israel's illegal settlements in Palestinian territories by shifting the blame on Palestinians. He said: "*It seems than many people... are more angry about the building of Jewish houses in the West Bank than they are about the abuse of Palestinian rights by Palestinians... the focus is exclusively on finding reasons to boycott and demonise the world's only Jewish State.*"³⁶

On another occasion in an article appearing in *The Times of Israel*, Wilson contended that Israel's checkpoints are "*a crucial and non-violent means of protecting people from terrorists*",³⁷ despite the fact that they have been – together with the separation wall – strongly criticised and described as an abuse of human rights.³⁸ While the separation wall itself was labelled "illegal" by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the checkpoints were described by *Human Rights Watch* and a number of other international institutions as yet another "abusive" practice carried out by the Israeli government in its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories.³⁹

Tom Wilson's writings evidence a clear political bias that sits well within HJS's overarching narratives and objectives. In a piece for the *Commentary* conveniently titled "The Israeli Left Hates the Israeli People", Wilson wholeheartedly expressed his support for the Israeli Likud Party, which was incidentally described by former Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Ya'alon as containing "*extremist and dangerous elements*".⁴⁰

Finally, Wilson is associated with a number of pro-Israel organisations which claim to combat extremism and anti-Semitism but are, in truth, highly manipulative pressure groups that distort and misrepresent information about Palestinian territories to promote the goal of

³⁵ "Charities and Campaigning", *The Electoral Commission*, undated, accessed 03.11.2017, http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/165961/intro-campaigning-charities-npc.pdf

³⁶ "HJS Research Fellow Tom Wilson on BBC The Big Questions Discussing Israeli Boycotts", *YouTube*, February 13, 2017, accessed 22.12.2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLS7MMVzD9E&feature=youtu.be>

³⁷ Tom Wilson, "What have Methodists got against the Jews?" *The Times of Israel*, September 19, 2016, accessed 03.01.2017, <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/what-have-methodists-got-against-the-jews/>

³⁸ "Israel: New report condemns Israel's 'blatant violation of International Law' in West Bank", *Amnesty International Press Release*, undated, accessed 03.11.2017, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/node/11525>

³⁹ "Israel: 50 Years of Occupation Abuses", *Human Rights Watch*, June 4, 2017, accessed 07.11.2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/04/israel-50-years-occupation-abuses>

⁴⁰ "Extremists have taken over in Israel, says departing defence minister", *The Telegraph*, May 20, 2016, accessed 07.11.2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/20/extremists-have-taken-over-in-israel-says-departing-defence-mini/>

“Greater Israel”. One example of these organisations with which Wilson is associated is *StandWithUs*, an organisation that, according to Israel’s former Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, is indeed used by the Israeli government to “amplify” its power.⁴¹

Media figures and outlets

Aside from HJS, allegations against MEND come from a small group of largely discredited journalists, who have a history of subscribing to the political agenda of several right-wing organisations for the benefit of personal financial gain. The strategy followed by these individuals and outlets to advance their arguments against MEND is thus merely a politically motivated aggregation of false claims based on distorted stories, and is highly misrepresentative of what MEND does and what it stands for.

Andrew Gilligan

Current Sunday Times correspondent Andrew Gilligan has come under severe criticism in the past for his often ethically-dubious journalistic practice. Indeed, he was condemned during the Hutton Inquiry for “*loose use of language and lack of judgement in some of his phraseology*”, and for his journalistic style, which was highlighted as being “*marred by flawed reporting*”.⁴² In disregarding all forms of ethical conduct, Gilligan was described as adopting the tactic of “*sock-puppetry*” (defined as “*the act of creating a fake online identity to praise, defend or create the illusion of support for one’s self, allies or company*”)⁴³ in order to secure Boris Johnson’s victory in the 2008 and 2012 mayoral campaigns. Furthermore, Boris Johnson himself has expressed disturbing views on homosexuals⁴⁴ and Congolese children.⁴⁵ As such, the ‘golden goodbye’ Johnson paid to Gilligan – amounting to no less than £50,000⁴⁶ – is perhaps evidence of Gilligan’s pragmatism in his personal convictions. Furthermore, this fluidity of personal morals is also evidenced by Gilligan’s employment as a presenter on the anti-Semitic Iranian broadcaster Press TV⁴⁷, a position he was reportedly paid £5,000 per week in as one of the channel’s highest paid employees.⁴⁸

⁴¹ “The Sugar Mama of Anti-Muslim Hate...”

⁴² Lord Brian Hutton, “Report of the Inquiry into the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of Dr David Kelly”, Great Britain, Parliament, p. 207, accessed 23.01.2018, <https://fas.org/irp/world/uk/huttonreport.pdf>

⁴³ “Andrew Gilligan, “kennite” and sockpuppeting”, *The Guardian*, November 3, 2008, accessed 30.11.2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/davehillblog/2008/nov/03/gilligan>

⁴⁴ “Owen Jones: The 1 per cent have an interest in demonising Ken Livingstone”, *The Independent*, April 12, 2012, accessed 30.11.2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/owen-jones-the-1-per-cent-have-an-interest-in-demonising-ken-livingstone-7640660.html>

⁴⁵ “If Blair’s so good at running the Congo, let him stay there”, *The Telegraph*. January 10, 2002, accessed 30.11.2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3571742/If-Blairs-so-good-at-running-the-Congo-let-him-stay-there.html>

⁴⁶ “Nine aides to Boris Johnson handed ‘golden goodbye’ payouts totalling £450,000”, *Evening Standard*, June 13, 2016, accessed 01.12.2017, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/nine-aides-to-boris-johnson-handed-golden-goodbye-payouts-totalling-450000-a3270121.html>

⁴⁷ Mehdi Hasan, “The truth about Andrew Gilligan,” *New Statesman*, November 22, 2010, accessed January 05, 2018, <https://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/mehdi-hasan/2010/11/andrew-gilligan-islamism-press>.

⁴⁸ Dilly Hussain, “Which Muslim figure or group hasn’t Andrew Gilligan labelled an “extremist”?” *5Pillars*, August 12, 2015, accessed January 05, 2018, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2015/08/11/which-muslim-figure-or-group-hasnt-andrew-gilligan-labelled-an-extremist/>.

Ultimately, it is arguable that Gilligan's efforts against Muslims do not stem from moral principles or genuine concerns, but merely by financial interests that motivate him to distort facts and manipulate stories to fit into the anti-Muslim narrative.

Dominic Kennedy

The Times investigative journalist Dominic Kennedy too is an unreliable source of information, as he holds a troubling attitude towards anti-Semitism, Racism, Homophobia, Islamophobia and women's rights. For instance, a comment made on Twitter in 2015 caused national outrage when Kennedy stated that "*So many of the VIPs accused of being Paedophiles are Jewish or gay. Maybe we could have a system to identify these people: triangles, stars*".⁴⁹ Kennedy was heavily criticised for these comments by figures within British Jewish organisations, including Simon Johnson, chief executive of the Jewish Leadership Council, Jonathan Arkush and Richard Verber, President and Senior Vice-President of the Board of Deputies.⁵⁰ While he did eventually apologise for the disgraceful remarks, this is an example of how such irresponsible conduct can cause emotional trauma to persecuted minorities for the sake of either utterly distasteful banter or Kennedy's own professional purposes.

Furthermore, despite framing his work as 'investigative journalism', from MEND's own experience of contact with Kennedy, his approach falls far short of what would be expected of an ethically balanced and open-minded investigation. In sourcing information for his stories on MEND, Kennedy has not contacted MEND in order to understand our work nor to understand the people within the organisation. His contact with MEND has been limited to a right to respond after having prepared a compilation of largely previously discredited allegations. In other words, his investigations have been confined to the story he intended to write - his pre-defined narrative informed his investigation. Considering the power of investigative journalism in holding the powerful to account, it is unfortunate that such disreputable and unethical reporting should tarnish the reputation of this profession.

Nick Cohen

Nick Cohen is a journalist who holds a neoconservative view of world affairs, which also informs his stance on domestic social issues and policies. In light of these firm neoconservative beliefs, Cohen was a strong advocate of the 2003 war in Iraq⁵¹ as well as for Western intervention in Syria.⁵²

Cohen is also one of the signatories of the *Euston Manifesto*, which was created in 2006 as a direct result of Europe's growing criticism of and opposition to the War on Terror. Within this manifesto any criticism of the US foreign policies is condemned and opposed, as well as portrayed as a traitorous attempt to halt the development of "new democratic life to [Iraq]"⁵³

⁴⁹ "Times Editor apologises for gay, Holocaust, paedophilia tweet", *PinkNews*, August 5, 2015, accessed 01.12.2017, <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/08/05/times-editor-apologises-for-gay-holocaust-paedophilia-tweet/>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Nick Cohen, "The Left isn't listening", *The Guardian*, February 16, 2003, accessed 20.12.2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/feb/16/foreignpolicy.iraq>

⁵² "The west has a duty to intervene in Syria", January 1, 2012, accessed 20.12.2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jan/01/nick-cohen-intervene-in-syria>

⁵³ "The Euston Manifesto", accessed 20.12.2017, <http://eustonmanifesto.org/the-euston-manifesto/>

Many of the principles expressed in the Euston Manifesto are also shared in the Henry Jackson Society's statement of principles.⁵⁴

Considering that *"the neoconservative worldview is characterised by militarism, unilateralism and a firm commitment to Zionism"*,⁵⁵ rhetoric surrounding the American invasion of Iraq has become the symbol of the wave of neoconservatism that has spread from Washington to certain parts of Whitehall, and has attracted criticism from a number of institutions, scholars and experts.⁵⁶ In Britain, the neoconservative notion that there is a *"clash of civilizations"*, has contributed in reinforcing the divide between Muslims and non-Muslims, and has resulted in the demonisation of many Muslim organisations and individuals in the pursuit of the neoconservative agenda.

The Sun and the Daily Mail:

Martin Robinson, Ian Drury and Larisa Brown (Daily Mail),

Ben Lazarus (The Sun)

Robinson, Drury and Brown are reporters for the Daily Mail, which was recently accused by The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of playing a *"prominent role in encouraging prejudice"* against vulnerable groups. The report pointed at both the **Daily Mail and the Sun**, claiming that they *"are responsible for most of the offensive, discriminatory and provocative terminology"*. Concluding that *"hate speech in some traditional media continues to be a serious problem"*,⁵⁷ the report highlighted articles such as the Sun's *"Rescue boats? I'd use gunships to stop migrants"*, in which the columnist, Katie Hopkins, likened migrants to cockroaches, and also highlighted The Sun's front-page headline *"1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis"* which was subsequently found to be wholly inaccurate and a forced retraction and apology was issued.

Furthermore, in 2017, the Daily Mail was banned as a reliable source on Wikipedia due to its *"reputation for poor fact checking and sensationalism"*.⁵⁸

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), also highlighted the disturbing journalism of the Sun and the Daily Mail, arguing: *"The two right wing tabloids in our sample, the Daily Mail and Sun, were unlike anything else in our study... what really differentiated these two titles was their aggressive editorialising around threat themes, and in particular how they presented refugee and migrants as a burden on Britain's welfare state. Both papers also featured humanitarian themes at a much lower level than any other newspapers in our study. Overall, this meant that the Sun and the*

⁵⁴ "Statement of Principles", *The Henry Jackson Society*, accessed 20.12.2017, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/about-the-society/statement-of-principles/>

⁵⁵ "How Neoconservatives led us to war in Iraq", *The National*, December 11, 2014, accessed 22.12.2017, <https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/how-neoconservatives-led-us-to-war-in-iraq-1.605396>

⁵⁶ See for example "Iraq: the Biggest Mistake in American Military History", *Forbes*, December 15, 2011, accessed 22.12.2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lorenthompson/2011/12/15/the-biggest-mistake-in-american-military-history/#ca1ba232d3b0>

⁵⁷ "ECRI Report On The United Kingdom", *Council of Europe*, October 4, 2016, accessed 20.12.2017, https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/united_kingdom/gbr-cbc-v-2016-038-eng.pdf

⁵⁸ Jackson, Jasper. "Wikipedia bans Daily Mail as 'unreliable' source." *The Guardian*. February 8, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/feb/08/wikipedia-bans-daily-mail-as-unreliable-source-for-website>.

Daily Mail exhibited both a hostility, and a lack of empathy with refugees and migrants that was unique."⁵⁹

However, the Sun and the Daily Mail are reflective of a wider problem. Indeed, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein, drew similar conclusions in 2015, when he noted that "*decades of sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner abuse, misinformation and distortion*" were identified as a major problem in British press. He called on all European countries to take a firmer line on racism and xenophobia which "*under the guise of freedom of expression, are being allowed to feed a vicious cycle of vilification, intolerance and politicization of migrants, as well as of marginalized European minorities*". Moreover, Al-Hussein identified the UK as a country in which the problem is particularly evident.⁶⁰

Harry's Place

Harry's Place is a right-wing, pro-Israel political blog that has earned itself a controversial reputation due to its neoconservative views on world affairs and Islamophobic posts. As its founder, Harry Hatched, recalled in *The Guardian* in 2003, Harry's Place was originally created to support the 2003 invasion of Iraq.⁶¹ As such, and in line with Nick Cohen, several Harry's Place bloggers, including Harry Hatched himself and David Toube, figure among the signatories of the neoconservative *Euston Manifesto*, within which any criticism of the US foreign policies is condemned and opposed.⁶² Another contributor to Harry's Place, George Readings, has also worked for the Quilliam Foundation and blogged for another famously neoconservative blog, *The Spitoon*.⁶³

Over the years, a number of progressive politicians (such as Jeremy Corbyn, Jenny Tonge and Ken Livingstone) and international organisations (such as *Amnesty International*, *Human Rights Watch*, and *Spinwatch*) have come under attack by Harry's Place for supporting the Muslim community and being critical of Israel's policies towards Palestine. As but one example of the impact of Harry's Place's often distorted reporting and analysis, in 2008 *The Spectator* magazine was the subject of a legal action over an article that appeared in its pages claiming that Islam Expo, a biennial Islamic exhibition, was a supporter of clerical fascism, genocide and racism. The basis of the *Spectator* magazine article was a piece that originally appeared on Harry's Place.⁶⁴ The *Spectator* was forced to issue an apology following the ruling of the UK High Court.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ "Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries", UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), accessed 20.12.2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/operations/56bb369c9/press-coverage-refugee-migrant-crisis-eu-content-analysis-five-european.html> p. 253.

⁶⁰ "UN Human Rights Chief urges U.K. to tackle tabloid hate speech, after migrants called "cockroaches"" , *United Nations Human Rights, Officer of the High Commissioner*, April 24, 2015, accessed 20.12.2017, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15885&LangID=E>

⁶¹ Harry Hatched, "A blogger writes", *The Guardian*, July 15, 2003, accessed 05.01.2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2003/jul/15/weblogs.egovernment>

⁶² "The Euston manifesto" ..., <http://eustonmanifesto.org/the-euston-manifesto/>

⁶³ "So Long, And Thanks For All The Fish", June 19, 2009, accessed 05.01.2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090627120541/http://www.spittoon.org/archives/1227>

⁶⁴ "The Honourable Mr Justice Tugendhat Between Islam Expo LTD -and - (1) The Spectator (1828) Ltd (2) Stephen Pollard", *England and Wales High Court (Queen's Bench Division) Decisions*, accessed 23.01.2018, <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/QB/2010/2011.html>

⁶⁵ "Islam Expo: Apology", *The Spectator*, August 28, 2010, accessed 22.12.2017, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2010/08/islam-expo-apology/>

Most of Harry's Place's bloggers have been embroiled in controversy due to defamatory and libellous claims. For example, David Toube (incidentally the author of Harry's Place's entries against MEND), was threatened with legal action by George Galloway and Kevin Ovenden over repeated articles traducing the character and reputation of both as trustees of Viva Palestina, a charitable organisation which, since its formation in 2009, has succeeded in taking 5 humanitarian convoys to Gaza comprising of tens of thousands of pounds worth of children's toys, food, medicines and other essential humanitarian supplies. In particular, Toube has repeatedly sought to paint the former Respect MP, George Galloway, as 'funding terrorism'. It is an accusation with absolutely no basis in fact and is designed to prevent and obstruct the provision of desperately needed humanitarian aid to the besieged people of Gaza.⁶⁶

Similarly, Gene Zitver, another blogger at Harry's Place, republished an article by Moshe Halbertal from The New Republic that tried to discredit the report produced by the United Nations on Israel's 2008-2009 assault on Gaza (Operation Cast Lead). In the article, it is clear that Zitver attempts to justify Israel's military operation (which resulted in the deaths of 1400 Palestinians, including 400 children) by claiming that the report was "fundamentally flawed and biased against Israel".⁶⁷

Why is MEND perceived as a threat?

MEND is largely seen as a threat because we are seen by some as 'uncontrollable'; in other words, because we are independent of political and financial agendas and are thus free to question the current socio-political status-quo. As mentioned previously, this independence is a positive consequence of our community funded infrastructure and subsequent ability to fully pursue the interests of British Muslims without the limitations of external agendas.

To date, the Government, sections of the press and right-wing organisations have only engaged with and tolerated Muslim organisations that into one of the following categories

- Those that the Government funds or has funded historically or helped to create.
- Those which right-wing (frequently neoconservative) organisations have created and/or strongly support.
- Those that essentially reflect the Government's own existing stance on Muslim related issues.

In addition to not fitting into the aforementioned categories, MEND holds three policy positions that create the perception that we are a threat to the interests of small sections of the Government, right-wing press and right-wing organisations.

- **Counter-terror:** our opposition to PREVENT creates an uncomfortable situation for policy makers. While these policy makers are undoubtedly exerting their best efforts to devise effective strategies in protecting our nation, there is a great deal of pressure created if flaws within these strategies are exposed.

⁶⁶ "George Galloway -v- Mr David Toube", *Farooq Bajwa & Co Solicitors*, accessed 23.01.2018 <http://www.hurryupharry.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/SDOC2136.pdf>

⁶⁷ "A clear-eyed look at Cast Lead", *Harry's Place*, November 14, 2009, accessed 22.12.2017, <http://hurryupharry.org/2009/11/14/a-clear-eyed-look-at-cast-lead/>

- **Israel:** One of the policies put forward in our 2015 and 2017 Manifestos is a commitment to supporting for the creation of an independent state of Palestine and an end to Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories. As previously discussed regarding the neoconservative leanings of many of our detractors, this position is inevitably perceived as a threat by those staunchly committed to defending against any and all criticism of Israel.
- **Media Regulation:** Lord Justice Leveson included all of the recommendations put forward by MEND following the first part of his inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the press. In the aftermath of the inquiry, newspapers lost their ability to continue unethical practices of tapping phones and pursuing family members of subjects of interest. Having lost this avenue of reporting, a section of the press has resorted to demonising Muslims and minorities in their attempt to maintain sales. Needless to say, MEND's continued efforts to hold the media account and to ensure the full implementation of Section 40 of the Royal Charter on Press Regulation have not been welcomed by these sections of the press. Were it to be implemented, Section 40 would severely curtail the press' ability to demonise minorities for the sake of profit.

Considering this perceived threat, organisations such as HJS, certain small segments of the Government and sections of the media have an explicit agenda of discrediting us by distorting facts and perpetuating innuendo in their efforts to promote a very false image of MEND. **The basic premise of their approach is to present us as being 'beyond the pale' in the hope that politicians and public bodies will refuse to work or engage with us.**

The importance of engagement

It is natural that attacks from the right-wing – often extremist neoconservative – movement, coupled with negative and deeply misleading right-wing press coverage, would make individuals and organisations who are unfamiliar with our work wary of us. However, in our experience, those who have had the courage and open-mindedness to sit down with us on a 1:1 basis and discuss the work of our organisation first hand, have come to see that we are not the 'Islamist' organisation that we are portrayed, and have been eager to work with us.

However, if policy makers implement a policy of non-engagement towards organisations such as MEND, they can only serve to lose valuable insight and engagement opportunities with vulnerable and marginalised communities. Engagement does not mean agreement on every issue, but it does mean working together to tackle issues of mutual interest and concern.

If the Government truly intends to tackle issues affecting Muslim communities, it is going to have to engage with a wider spectrum of organisations – and, considering MEND's grassroots support, that includes MEND.

Lessons must be learned from the Citizens UK's report, chaired by former Attorney General and Conservative MP, Dominic Grieve QC, entitled "The Missing Muslims: Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All" and which recommended: *"For the Government to reassess the way in which it engages with the UK's Muslim communities, and both the Government and Muslim communities to play their role in ending the current stalemate. There is a broken relationship that needs to be resolved, and both parties need to be proactive in addressing this. The Commission suggests that wider engagement, including the robust challenging of views with which it disagrees, rather than the apparent boycott of certain organisations, could best enable the Government*

to hear from the widest possible cross-section of the UK's Muslim communities, including young people and women." ⁶⁸

Ultimately, the broken relationship between the Government and Muslim communities must be fixed, and engagement is the only way to achieve this. MEND believes that everyone has a responsibility to end the current atmosphere of hatred – a goal that is only going to be achieved by engagement. Engagement is MEND's raison d'être and promoting engagement between minorities and majorities, Muslims and non-Muslims, and between political representatives and their constituents continues to be our mission.

In her book, "The Enemy Within", Baroness Sayeeda Warsi laments the failure of successive governments to engage with Muslim organisations, including the Muslim Council of Britain, and concludes, *'the rules of engagement must be clear, but engagement there must be, as a disengaged community neither matters nor belongs'*.⁶⁹

We are ready to take up this challenge.

⁶⁸ "The Missing Muslims", *Citizens UK*, accessed 17.11.2017, http://www.citizensuk.org/missing_muslims

⁶⁹ Sayeeda Warsi. *The Enemy Within: A Tale of Muslim Britain*, (London; Allen Lane, 2017), p.133

Allegations against MEND

MEND's approach to these allegations

We have approached these allegations with an open mind. Every organisation makes mistakes and can learn from criticism from its most ardent of enemies. We are also mindful that we are a relatively young organisation, having only been present on the political stage since 2014 (although our predecessor organisation called iEngage had been present since 2007). Additionally, we are not politicians or seasoned campaigners in the world of politics, media or lobbying. We are simply ordinary British citizens (Muslim and non-Muslims) from different walks of life, seeking to help build a better society in the UK.

As such we recognise we will make mistakes occasionally and could express views in a more accurate manner than we sometimes have. We have used language at times that, with the benefit of hindsight, we regret and will endeavour to be clearer in how we express ourselves.

We are willing to reflect on these mistakes, learn the lessons and move on. The learning curve since our inception has been steep but we are ultimately on a journey, and no such organisation ends up in the same place that it started. Indeed, there are many professional politicians and parties who have changed their views on a number of social issues over the years, and of course many social views that were unacceptable a generation ago are now mainstream.

Allegation: MEND's stance on Israel

*"Mr Ismail... told the Bolton meeting how the group had organised to "batter the Israeli lobby" in the Commons."*⁷⁰

Author: Andrew Gilligan

Time and Date: 14:11, April 4, 2015

Publication: The Telegraph

Both Mr Ismail and MEND recognise that the use of the word 'batter' was perhaps not the best choice of words and could have been expressed in more appropriate terms. Thus, with the benefit of hindsight, a better word would have been 'defeat'.

However, Mr Ismail's comments regarding the Israeli lobby were made in connection to the successful vote in Parliament to recognise Palestinian statehood, which many in the pro-Israel lobby had objected to and lobbied very heavily against.⁷¹ To the contrary, MEND and large sections of British Muslims had supported Palestinian statehood.

Certain commentators and organisations work tirelessly to force discussions surrounding Palestine and Israel's actions towards Palestinians outside the realm of legitimate political debate. It is unfortunate that this is once again happening in this case. MEND, along with countless academics, politicians, human rights campaigners, faith groups (including Jewish faith groups), and activists, is unequivocal in its desire to see a peaceful solution to Israeli

⁷⁰ Andrew Gilligan, "Muslim group with links to extremists...", <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/general-election-2015/11515630/Muslim-group-with-links-to-extremists-boasts-of-influencing-election.html>

⁷¹ Mr Ismail has unequivocally clarified his comments on the above issue. See "Setting the record straight: comments at Cheadle mosque, 2014", *Sufyan Ismail*, January 4, 2016, accessed 23.01.2018, <http://www.sufyanismail.com/blog/setting-the-record-straight-comments-at-chedle-mosque-2014/>.

occupation of Palestine. Indeed, recognition for an independent state of Palestine has been highlighted in both the Labour and Liberal Democrat 2017 election manifestos.

As occurs so frequently, presenting support for an independent state of Palestine as something sinister and 'extremist' equates to a slur against all those who support the Palestinian cause and serves as an attempt to shut down legitimate political debate.

Some right-wing journalists have sought to use Mr Ismail's reference to 300 years of the Zionist lobby as pointing towards links with anti-Semitism, claiming that as Israel itself didn't exist until 1948 and Mr Ismail was actually referring to Jews. This accusation clearly overlooks the fact that a Jewish state has been an objective for Zionists from biblical times and beyond, let alone the last 300 years.

Accusation: Anti-Semitism and Homophobia

"MEND have also resorted to one of their favourite low tactics when attacking Quilliam – link it with Israel. In a talk for MEND at a mosque in Bolton in 2014, MEND's founder, sole shareholder, and former CEO Sufyan Ismail said this in an appeal to the audience for donations to MEND:

"We're not Quilliam Foundation, yeah, where we get government money and pro-Israeli lobby funding and things like this. We don't want the Government to fob us off with some phony thing called Tell MAMA, which has got a pro-Zionist pretty much heading it or in a very senior capacity and is making all sorts of comments we might not agree with when it comes to homosexuality, to be recording Islamophobia. You might wonder who we are, who funds us at the end of the day. Are we some kind of Prevent-funded body or government-funded organisation? Well there's good news and bad news here. The good news is we are 100% community funded, alhamdulillah (all praise be to God). So, I think you should all go "alhamdulillah" to that, yeah? I promise you not one penny comes from any government of any description, yeah. 100% of our funding comes from the Muslim community... Put one drop of urine in a bucket of water, who's going to drink it? Who's going to drink it or bathe in it? Simple as that. This thing has got to be kept pure. It's got to be kept pure.""⁷²

Author: David Toube (AKA habibi)

Time and Date: 19:21, September 25, 2017

Publication: Harry's Place

This accusation has culminated in Nick Cohen suggesting that, in an attempt to deride the reputation of Tell MAMA, MEND has decided that *"the best means...of turning it [Tell MAMA] into a satanic organisation, is to say that it associates with gays and Jews."*⁷³

Mr Ismail has unequivocally stated: *"I condemn all forms of anti-Semitism and Homophobia and I challenge anyone to provide any comments by myself to the contrary"*.

The wider point made in Mr Ismail's speeches in Bolton and Cheadle relate to the points made earlier, and concerns the lack of trust that many British Muslims feel towards organisations that receive government funding - or have received government funding in the past - as they are not free from political agendas and thus cannot truly represent Muslim communities as they are forced to work within government narratives. To honestly represent any community,

⁷² "MEND and Parliament...", <http://hurryupharry.org/2017/10/24/mend-and-parliament-this-is-no-way-to-help-muslims/>

⁷³ Nick Cohen, "How brave Muslims are being silenced", *The Guardian*, October 4, 2015, accessed 16.11.2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/04/how-brave-muslims-are-being-silenced>

organisations must be able to criticise and debate freely for the benefit of those they claim to represent.

Consequently, and evidenced by their attitudes towards the Israeli occupation of Palestine amongst other statements, Quilliam and Tell MAMA are clearly two such organisations that cannot claim to represent the sentiments and interests of Muslim communities.

Mr Ismail's words have since been used to suggest that MEND has "*a troubling attitude to antisemitism.*" The accusation has been levelled by the Community Security Trust (CST) and first emerged during a campaign (which according to former Blackburn MP Jack Straw, was led by the Jewish Chronicle) to oust MEND's predecessor, iENGAGE, from its role as secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia. The remark was attributed to the CST's Mark Gardner, in an article published in the Jewish Chronicle, and though he suggested we had "*a troubling attitude to antisemitism*" there was no evidence offered to substantiate the accusation. **Critically, neither the CST nor Jewish Chronicle were able to accuse MEND or Mr Ismail of anti-Semitism explicitly, which perhaps indicates the weakness of the accusation itself.**

Regarding the discussion of Zionism, as the audio clearly shows, Mr Ismail was attempting to highlight the inappropriateness of the appointment of a prominent UK Zionist to head up the Islamophobia reporting unit (Tell MAMA). When considering the huge concerns that British Muslims have regarding the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, this is not an unreasonable assertion by Mr Ismail.

This is an issue of appropriate representation and not remotely an indication of anti-Semitism. The corollary of this would be appointing a life-long Palestinian human rights supporter like George Galloway as head of a UK anti-Semitism recording service (like the CST), an action that many British Jews may have concerns with.

Concerning his remarks about homosexuality, Mr Ismail, again as the audio highlights, was commenting on views expressed by the founder of Tell MAMA, Fiyaz Mughal, surrounding the theological position of Islam and homosexuality. Mr Ismail was not expressing any views about homosexuals in general.

Mr Mughal has inferred that age-old Islamic religious texts do not object the concept of homosexuality. To be clear, **we are not talking about the rights of homosexual individuals to equality and respect, but rather the technical Qur'anic view on homosexuality** which is similarly found in the Bible and the Torah.

Fiyaz Mughal, perhaps for strategic purposes, was clearly misrepresenting the religious texts. Islam, in line with Christianity and Judaism, shares the view that homosexuality is sinful. Mr Ismail was attempting to highlight that it is not the place of Mr Mughal to re-write biblical or Qur'anic text in this regard out of political opportunism or the need for funding.

However, it must be emphasised that, while an *action* in monotheistic faiths may be considered sinful, that does not imply that the *person* should also be condemned. Followers of Christianity, Judaism and Islam generally face no contradiction between privately holding their religious views on homosexuality, and fighting discrimination against homosexual communities and fully respecting their equal rights and value.

In other words, beyond scriptural prescriptions, and especially in a modern democracy like Britain, (and as Mr Ismail has publicly stated) no individual – regardless of religion, ethnicity,

gender or sexuality – should ever face discrimination at any level. As previously mentioned, within our recent 2017 Manifesto, MEND explicitly called for better legal protections against homophobic hate crime.⁷⁴ MEND unequivocally attests that hatred on the basis of religious, sexual, ethnic or gendered identity is categorically unacceptable and should be resisted wherever it is found.

To deny people of faith the right to follow their scripture is in itself a contravention of their right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as dictated by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Regarding Mr Ismail’s personal circumstances, it would be very difficult to defend any accusation claiming him to be either anti-Semitic or homophobic. As Mr Ismail has previously pointed out, his PA and Chauffeur of many years are Jewish and homosexual respectively. It is unlikely that someone holding anti-Semitic or homophobic views would have employed such people for such a long period of time. Clearly, the accusation that Mr Ismail is homophobic is unfounded.

The crux of the allegation about MEND having “*a troubling attitude to antisemitism*” actually rests on a different point of contention: Mr Ismail’s stance on anti-Zionism and Palestinian human rights.

As previously mentioned, what is concerning about attempts to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, is the implication that discussions surrounding Palestine and Israel’s actions towards Palestinians are somehow outside the realm of legitimate debate. MEND, along with countless academics, politicians, Human Rights campaigners, faith groups (including Jewish faith groups), and activists, is unequivocal in its desire to see a peaceful solution to Israeli occupation of Palestine. Indeed, recognition for an independent state of Palestine has been highlighted in both the Labour and Liberal Democrat 2017 election manifestos.

Accusation: Holocaust Memorial Day Boycott

*MEND had been accused of organising boycotts of Holocaust Memorial Day by the Muslim Council of Britain.*⁷⁵

Author: Ian Drury and Larisa Brown

Time and Date: 23:59, November 2, 2017 UPDATE 15:45, November 6, 2017

Publication: Daily Mail

The accusation levied by the Daily Mail that MEND organised to boycott Holocaust Memorial Day is entirely untrue and the Mail has subsequently apologised for it.⁷⁶ Indeed, several

⁷⁴ “MEND Muslim Manifesto 2017” ..., https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MEND-Muslim-Manifesto-2017_FINAL_lowres-1.pdf

⁷⁵ “Cosying up to extremists: Corbyn is speaker at hardline Islamic meeting - just 24 hours before he snubs invitation to honour the birth of Israel”, *The Daily Mail*, November 2, 2017, accessed 16.11.2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5044983/How-Corbyn-speaker-hardline-Islamic-meeting.html#ixzz4yapDYu4G>

⁷⁶ The text of the apology reads: “An earlier version of this article said that MEND had been accused of organising boycotts of Holocaust Memorial Day by the Muslim Council of Britain. In fact, no such accusation has been made: it was the MCB that did not take up its invitation to the event from 2001 to 2007 (though they have attended since). We apologise for the error are happy to set the record straight.” “Cosying up to extremists...”, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5044983/How-Corbyn-speaker-hardline-Islamic-meeting.html#ixzz4yapDYu4G>

speakers from MEND are already scheduled to speak at events supporting the Holocaust Memorial Day this year.

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- *An earlier version of this article said that MEND had been accused of organising boycotts of Holocaust Memorial Day by the Muslim Council of Britain. In fact, no such accusation has been made: it was the MCB that did not take up its invitation to the event from 2001 to 2007 (though they have attended since). We apologise for the error and are happy to set the record straight.*

MEND categorically rejects all accusations of homophobia and anti-Semitism. The issues surrounding anti-Semitism were mentioned 11 times in our 2017 Manifesto, where we also called for better legal protections against homophobic hate crime as well.⁷⁷ We applaud solidarity amongst all social and religious groups in a conjoined effort to tackle all forms of hatred. Indeed, MEND itself is proud to co-operate with both of these groups (homosexual and Jewish), and others, in joint efforts to tackle hate crime and hate speech. We have worked with many Jewish and homosexual MPs over the years and continue to do so. Accusations of homophobia or anti-Semitism are therefore baseless.

⁷⁷ "MEND Muslim Manifesto 2017" ..., https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MEND-Muslim-Manifesto-2017_FINAL_lowres-1.pdf

Allegations against MEND's volunteers

It should be remembered in addressing accusations against volunteers that all of these accusations stem from personal social media accounts, upon which the views expressed are not the views of MEND as an organisation. It is clear that the primary cause for conflict is over the topic of the Israeli government's continued occupation and human rights abuses in Palestine. This is a topic that a great number of British Muslims and non-Muslims feel very strongly about and there are countless occasions where legitimate debates surrounding this issue have become derailed through the use of terminologies. This confusion largely stems from the frequent deliberate conflation of criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism by our detractors.

While MEND as an organisation opposes human rights abuses in Palestine inflicted by the Israeli government, we categorically oppose anti-Semitism and actively work to tackle this very real problem affecting British Jews. Indeed, as previously mentioned, the issues surrounding anti-Semitism were mentioned 11 times in our 2017 Manifesto⁷⁸ and there have been numerous occasions when our working groups have shown solidarity and support to Jewish and other communities in times of crisis.⁷⁹ Solidarity in fighting anti-Semitism is a commitment we expect from all our volunteers – as is in line with our manifesto and pledges.

With close to 1,000 volunteers across the country, MEND cannot police the social media activities of every single volunteer. However, going forward, we are committed to ensuring that volunteers have an awareness of the implications of their comments made on social networking platforms – regardless as to whether these pages and profiles are private or public. To that end, we are currently devising a training course to educate on terminologies, and methods to effectively convey the intended messages within the boundaries of legitimate debate.

It is worth noting that Ms Heena Khaled, Ms Siema Iqbal and Mr Vaseem Ahmed were not staff members of MEND. Rather, they were local volunteers who are no longer involved with MEND.

Heena Khaled

Heena Khaled, a Mend representative in the Waltham Forest area of east London, has tweeted imagery suggesting that Israelis consume human blood. She wrote: "They call us savages while they rip our flesh and drink our blood! #gaza #israel #zionist #iraq #afghanistan #syria #war #justice". When the US announced military aid to Israel, she tweeted: "To blood suck more Palestinians?"⁸⁰

Author: Dominic Kennedy

Time and Date: 12:01, April 10, 2017

Publication: The Times

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ "Muslims offer 'wonderful' gesture...", <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/muslims-leeds-synagogue-swastika-graffiti-facebook-jewish-support-hate-crime-police-a8000441.html>

⁸⁰ Dominic Kennedy, "A body that courts controversy"..., <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/a-body-that-courts-controversy-ctpzwk65c>

Heena Khaled's response to Kennedy is as follows:

"Firstly, the 'imagery' referred to was a tweet with no actual image from 20 November 2012, which Dominic fails to mention. It was made in response to an attack on Gaza by Israel, as reported by mainstream media outlets including the BBC, in which the BBC emphasised the severity of the attack by stating "Israel's aerial and naval bombardment of the Gaza Strip is its most intense assault on the Palestinian territory since it launched a full-scale invasion four years ago." The tweet also refers to events taking place in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. Therefore, to suggest the case for blood libel by stating that the tweet suggested 'Israelis consume human blood', when there is no mention of Israeli people, nor exact reference to who "They" actually were in either tweet, is highly misrepresentative.

The comment 'To blood suck more Palestinians', was written as a visual expression of how much blood has been lost in the conflict. Again, it does not mention 'who' did this, and for me it relates to not just warfare but also the prevention of freedom of movement which has led to many Palestinians not being able to reach hospitals on time in Jerusalem or from Gaza when crossing the checkpoint. When Palestinian villages are prevented from regular water and medical supplies and are cornered within the growth of illegal settlements as per noted by the ICJ/ICC (That this is a breach of international law), then my comment was more of a poetic expression and not literal in its full sense. Visibly blood has been shed as we have seen on the news and to manipulate my comments into blood libel is detracting from the various meanings this comment presents in terms of the plight of Palestinian people and the mass human rights violations as noted by international law institutions.

In any case, my social media space is personal and as stated on twitter 'Views expressed are my own' hence not a representation of MEND. Accusations of antisemitism are very serious. As a Muslim activist working against islamophobia and religiously motivated hate crime, I would never tolerate the propagation of religious hatred against another person or community. Using these insinuations to smear Muslim activists is not only disrespectful to us, but also disrespectful to the Jewish community, as it delegitimises the cause and fight against antisemitism. It also sets up barriers at a time when we are trying to work together in our commitment to promoting an inclusive society which respects the fundamental rights and values of each other. These efforts are undermined by sensationalist and distorted media journalism, as is embodied in the articles of Dominic Kennedy."

Siema Iqbal

On 29 January 2017, shortly after international Holocaust Memorial Day – a point she references with a hashtag – Ms Iqbal reposted a tweet by the Israeli Prime Minister and wrote, "#Trump behaves like #HitlerinTheMaking and @netanyahu supports him? IRONY IS UNREAL. Remember #Holocaust? #MuslimBan #HMD2017 #maytrump.

In August 2014, she tweeted the same image which would later bring the Bradford MP Naz Shah into disrepute, showing an outline of Israel superimposed onto a map of the United States and advocating the transference of Israel. In the post Iqbal, wrote "the solution to #Gaza crisis".

That same month, Iqbal retweeted a tweet that read, "Truce in Gaza? Don't you believe it! The Jews are shopping around for cheaper bombs." Another tweet she is reported to have retweeted depicted a blood-stained Star of David with the words, "When a people who survived a genocide use it as an excuse to commit genocide".

In the words of Siema Iqbal herself:

"I have been made aware of a vicious campaign of misrepresentation and harassment against myself by an organisation known as North West Friends Of Israel (NWFOI). The campaign is undermining

essential work being done in our communities to counter bigotry and hatred, and appears to be aimed at forcing my withdrawal from civic affairs.

There has been a vindictive and targeted drive against me by NWFOI since 2014. Among tactics used by NWFOI to intimidate me and harass me are the posting of images of me on Twitter and Facebook without my consent and the publishing of a press statement which refers to my presence at a demonstration and re-tweets I made in 2014. In the statement, NWFOI accuses me of anti-Semitism which I regard as a malicious slur.

NWFOI have shared details of my workplace, something I can only regard as a breach of personal safety that places myself and my work colleagues in fear of reprisals. NWFOI have gone further and have contacted various civil organisations and public bodies petitioning them to stop engaging with me.

At no time have NWFOI disclosed the full facts behind their long-running campaign against me. They fail to mention that Mr Raphi Bloom (Co-chairman of NWFOI) was interviewed by the police in 2014 because of his behaviour towards me.

Another fact that has been omitted from the NWFOI press statement which is currently being circulated is that Mr Bloom had complained to NHS England in 2014 about my participation in political protests during the Israeli attack on Gaza in the summer of that year. Following an investigation, which doubtless took a toll on my personal and professional life, NHS England and the General Medical Council concluded no wrongdoing on my part. In my statement in response at the time I explained my presence at the protest in Manchester during the military offensive was to highlight my concerns about the Palestinian people. I also made clear that my retweets were not endorsements. Furthermore, in 2014, I clearly stated that I was "sorry to learn of the disappointment caused by my tweets and would be more mindful of my actions". The statement was accepted by Mr Bloom and the matter closed by all parties.

Since then I have worked tirelessly on speaking out against racism, xenophobia and hate crime and have been involved in interfaith work to build rapport and trust between faith and non-faith communities. Yet, despite this and the conclusion of matters arising from Mr Bloom's initial complaint to NHS England, the harassment and coordinated attacks have continued. In the press statement circulated by NWFOI, they go so far as to mis-describe one of my retweets as a tweet in their attempt to besmirch my reputation.

I find all of this to be deeply troubling and stressful.

I have taken pains to work with different communities to challenge the scourge of racism and xenophobia and the consequences of hate crime which affects all in our society. I firmly believe that there is much more that unites us than divides us and my engagement in civic affairs in Manchester is to ensure that this mantra becomes a reality as lived experience in our great city.

I wish to make clear that I am not and never have been anti-Semitic. My work in the community is ample evidence of this."

Vaseem Ahmed

It has been suggested that Vaseem Ahmed's Twitter background (featured left) is an attempt to propagate the anti-semitic troupe of Israel attempting to take over the UK. Far from displaying any kind of 'take-over', the image is actually a representation of land mass on a scale that is relatable to the British public.



Mr Ahmed has responded to these allegations with the following statement:

"The shrinking green areas over time accurately reflects the shrinking pattern of Palestinian land since 1967.

Their superimposition on a map of the UK simply allows people to get a sense of the amount of land that has decreased, since they will be easier able to relate it to areas or places they are familiar with, and for people in the UK this would naturally be

the UK. Indeed, such an image could be superimposed on any country to make the same point.

It certainly doesn't suggest "Israel is taking over Britain". In fact, if it did it would suggest that Israel has already 'taken over' most of the UK part from parts of Wales and the North East of England, which would be a ridiculous conclusion to draw.

It does imply a criticism of Israel. However, that is not the same as anti-Semitism.

I actively and unequivocally condemn any form of racism against Jews or anti-Semitism."