

Cross Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia
Scottish Parliament
Wed 20th March at 6pm in the Fairfax Somerville Room

Attendance:

Sarina Ahmad	CEMVO
Samina Ansari	AMINA
Ghizala Avan	AMINA
Camira Brown	Women's Forum and Coalition v Islamophobia
Paul Cameron	Police Scotland
Julia Davidson	SACC
Arun Gopinath	CSREC
Richard Haley	SACC
Faten Hameed	Scottish Iraqi Society
Peter Hopkins	Newcastle University (Secretary)
Amjed Hussain	Polwarth Mosque
Ishrat Hussain	Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society
Avais Ijaz	Falkirk Central Mosque
Johann Lamont	Scottish Parliament
Martin Lennon	Racism the Red Card
Monica Lennon MSP	Scottish Parliament
Peter MacDonald	Church of Scotland
Bashir Malik	EIFA
Jenny Marra MSP	Scottish Parliament
Debbie McCall	Midlothian Council
Ruth McGuire MSP	Scottish Parliament
Nina Munday	Fife Centre for Equalities
Frehana Raza	Minhaj-ul-Quran
Anas Sarwar MSP	Scottish Parliament
Mahrukh Shaukat	AMINA
Fariha Thomas	YCSA
Fiona Williams Hubert	Coalition to Counter Islamophobia
Annie Wells MSP	Scottish Parliament
Rachael Yates	City of Edinburgh Council

Apologies

Fulton MacGregor MSP	Scottish Parliament Socialist Educational Association Scotland
David Woodrow	NFRN

Introduction

Anas Sarwar welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that funding had been secured to enable the CPG to produce guidelines on the reporting of Islam and Muslims. Focus groups are being held to support this work including: a CPG focus group in the Scottish Parliament; a children focus group supported by Action for Children and Bellahouston Academy; a student focus group in Dundee; a women's focus group; and a focus group with journalist and editors. The plan to publish this in June.

The APPG on British Muslims have produced a working definition of Islamophobia. Both dates previously agreed to have them share their work have had to be postponed due to Brexit negotiations but we are hoping to arrange a meeting in the future.

Deepest condolences were expressed to the families who lost loved ones in Christchurch as well as to the many others who are suffering because of this incident. It was noted how important it is to feel safe, particularly in a place of worship. The Place of Worship Security Fund does not exist in Scotland and the importance of raising such a fund in Scotland has been raised in the Scottish Parliament. One minute of silence was held to reflect on those suffering following the Christchurch incident.

Anas Sarwar introduced AMINA emphasising the gendered nature of Islamophobia.

AMINA presentation

Samina Ansari discussed the important work of AMINA and the context of a sharp upsurge in online hate. It was noted that Muslim women who wear a veil are disproportionately victimised. Political events increase the likelihood of Muslims being targeted. There are countless stories about Muslim women being abused, beaten, denied service, spat at and mistreated in diverse ways. Many fear using public transport. There is already gendered inequality but Muslim women are further marginalised due to the intersections of religion and race with gender. There is a serious under-reporting of hate crime yet hate crime has increased significantly. Concerns were expressed about the dehumanisation of Muslim women through political rhetoric and the platforms given to far right organisations and groups through the media.

Ghizala Avan discussed a small survey undertaken by AMINA with Muslim women. 101 completed the survey and 74% of these said that they had experienced a hate crime. These took place on the street or local neighbourhood (57%), the workplace (23%) or on public transport (21%). 78% involved shouting and swearing, 34% felt intimidated and 6 women had their headscarf pulled off, were spat at, physically abused or had their car vandalised. 90% said that no one intervened to help them and 65% did not report the incident to the Police or to a third party reporting service.

It is hoped that Scottish Government will invest more funding into challenging all forms of hate crime including homophobia, anti-semitism and other forms of discrimination.

Personal testimonies were shared from Muslim women about their experiences of everyday Islamophobia and racism. A video was shared with those attending: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DWxirkKdtI>

Balraj Watson noted that everyday racism and Islamophobia manifests in many different ways. Also very insidious when it comes to employment practices. Problematic stereotyping is a big issue including in the public sector. A very high number of incidents are not reported. Almost half said they had experienced racism when applying for work. 45% had experienced bullying due to being a BME staff member. Through the whole employment journey from applying, to be interviewed, through to experiences of employment included incidents of discrimination. Training and development needs are an issue in terms of how managers handle reports of incidents.

AMINA exists to help women challenge misconceptions and links many of its programmes to issues happening in the world today. Examples include: training for trainers for women who work in the community; schools projects working with 10-14 year olds around presenting confidently to others; a toolkit for those who work with young people (<https://mwrc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Teachers-Toolkit.pdf>); and a project that work to empower Muslim women to speak out.

The video 'Lets Talk: Reporting Crime' was shared https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2uNZIK7n_uA

Anas thanked AMINA for their contribution as well as the MSPs who have attended the meeting.

The room was opened to questions and discussion which focused on:

- The need for government funds to support community organisations and groups to challenge racism and Islamophobia
- Exactly the same issues about BME women's disadvantage in employment has been ongoing for a long time and was shown in earlier research around 10-15 years ago. Underemployment amongst Muslim women is also an issue as many Muslim women are highly qualified and talented are prevented from entering careers relevant to their qualifications
- There is a big issue about encouraging BME people to use public transport due to concerns about racism and Islamophobia. It was noted that there were more concerns for bus users compared to train users.
- Barriers in encouraging reporting focus on people not thinking it is worth it because results from reporting are not obvious. Concerns were expressed about Police Scotland systems not being clear in terms of what happens to reports of hate crime and how these are monitored. AMINA are encouraging people to report on behalf of others too.
- Institutional racism and Islamophobia in particular in relation to public sector recruitment
- A possible future session on public transport
- Encouraging minority women to participate in public life and factors preventing women from engaging more fully.
- Training people to be ambassadors against Islamophobia
- EIS guidance and Action for Children charter mark
- The role of mosques in assisting with reporting
- Differences in experiences of Islamophobia between African and Asian Muslims
- The inclusion of Islamophobia regularly in khutbas in order to promote understanding about the issue and about reporting
- Create a hate crime charter amongst public transport providers
- Opportunity for Scottish Government to push for a campaign to raise awareness about hate crime and bystander intervention in light of changes to hate crime legislation

Concluding remarks

It was noted that the Places of Worship Security fund in England and Wales has been doubled to 5 million but that no such fund exists in Scotland so Anas Sarwar proposes to write to the Justice Minister to request that a fund be established in Scotland to support all faith groups.

Action points for the CPG going forward include

- To write to the Scottish Government about public sector disparities in equalities issues
- To share public transport agreements and to write to public transport providers to schedule a future CPG on this
- To consider using khutbahs to increase awareness
- To explore the issue of employability
- To set a date for a session about the APPG definition of Islamophobia

Anas thanks AMINA for their contributions to the session and for the important work that they do.

It was noted that there will be a launch of the Countering Islamophobia kit on Thurs 28th March from 7.30-9.30pm in Renfield St Stephens Centre in Glasgow.