

Cross Party Group on Racial Equality

Thursday 3rd December 2020

14:00 – 15:30

(via Zoom)

Attendees (31)

Fulton MacGregor	Member of the Scottish Parliament (Convener)	Lindsay Isaacs	Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (SIAA)
Isobel Ingham-Barrow	Head of Policy, MEND (Speaker)	Mahmud Al-Gailani	VOX Scotland
Mohammed Razaq	West of Scotland Regional Equality Council (Secretariat)	Martin Hayward	Equality Human Rights Commission
Ashleigh Alexander	West of Scotland Regional Equality Council (Secretariat)	Mateo Urquijo	Phoenix Group - Mosaic
Anita Shelton	Individual	Milind Kolhatkar	Score Scotland
Danielle Bett	Jewish Leadership Council	Nasar Meer	University of Edinburgh
Davidson Chademana	STUC Black Workers Committee	Naseem Anwar	Network Rail
Faten Hameed	Scottish Iraqi Society	Nikhat Yusaf	City of Edinburgh Council
Hajra Khan	Edinburgh Napier University	Olivia Carson	CIPD
Harriette Campbell	African Caribbean Women's Association / WSREC	Oudwin Griffith	Individual
Jenny Galbraith	CRER	Rabya Akhtar	Phoenix Group - Mosaic
Kash Taank	Glasgow Life	Raza Sadiq	Active Life Club
Katie Mackie		Richard Lyle	Member of the Scottish Parliament
King Omeihe	Edinburgh Napier University	Ruth Ann McCalla	Individual
		Surjit Chowdhary	EMCC
		Trishna Singh	Sikh Sanjog
		Zahra Hussain	Individual

Apologies (6)

Kousar Javid	Individual	Oluwatoyin	Individual
Mohammed Afzal Chaudhrey	Individual	Sukhi Bains	University of St. Andrews
Nasar Meer	University of Edinburgh	Traci Kirkland	Govan Community Project

1 Welcome & Introductions

Convener Fulton MacGregor called the meeting to order at 14:00 and welcomed speakers and members to the CPG's 2020 AGM and the last meeting of the year.

The Convener then went on to introduce himself to the group and announce that the meeting was quorate as the minimum number of MSPs were present.

The Convener noted that camera visibility could either be turned on or off, depending on the individual's preference. But asked that attendees to keep their microphones off during the meeting, unless they were invited to speak, in order to ensure that there was no background noise interference.

As there was a larger than normal turnout and because attendee names were displayed on screen, the Convener dismissed with introductions, but asked those who spoke to introduce themselves.

The Secretariat (Ashleigh Alexander) proposed that, to save time, the apologies should just be circulated in the minutes – this was agreed by the Convener and the other group members.

2 AGM

The Convener recommended that the group go through the AGM promptly, to provide enough time to get through the presentations and agenda items in the main meeting. The Convener the meeting over to the Secretariat (Mohammed Razaq) to take over the proceedings as he was seeking re-election to the role of Convener (Chair).

The Secretariat took over the meeting and opened the floor to nominations for Chair of the group. Richard Lyle nominated Fulton McGregor as Convener and this was later seconded by Anita Sheldon and other members of the group. There were no other nominations for Chair, so Fulton McGregor was re-elected.

The Secretariat handed the meeting back over to the Convener who opened the floor up to nominations for Vice Chair. The Convener nominated Anas Sarwar for this, which was seconded by Faten Hameed and other members of the group. Richard Lyle then nominated Jeremy Balfour as Vice Chair, and was seconded by the Convener. Both Anas Sarwar and Jeremy Balfour were elected to the role of Vice Chair.

The Convener then moved on to elections for the role of Secretariat. He announced that the current Secretariat were happy to continue the role but were keen for it to be put to the group in case another organisation wanted the role. The Convener nominated WSREC to continue the role of Secretariat and was seconded by Anita Sheldon and other members of

the group. There were no other nominations, so WSREC was re-elected to the role of Secretariat.

The Convener went on to note that the next meeting (set for February 2021) would be the group's last meeting because the group will need to be re-established from full when the next Parliament takes over. As such, the results of this AGM will only run for the next meeting.

The Convener then asked the group if they had any questions regarding the AGM. As no questions were asked, the Convener closed this part of the meeting and moved onto the main meeting agenda.

3 Minutes from Previous Meeting

The Convener went on to approve the minutes from the previous CPG meeting on Thursday 29th October 2020. This was proposed by Harriette Campbell and seconded by Faten Hameed, both of whom attended the previous meeting.

4 Presentation on Islamophobia by Isobel Ingham-Barrow

The Convener went on to introduce Isobel Ingham-Barrow, Head of Policy at MEND, who very kindly agreed to do a short presentation, then a question and answer session.

Before the Convener handed the meeting over to Isobel, he stated that he did not want anyone to worry about overlap with the Cross-Party Group on Islamophobia. He is the Vice Chair of that CPG and the group is happy for an issue of such importance to be discussed in as many forums as possible. The Convener then passed the meeting over to Isobel.

Isobel thanked the Convener for inviting her to speak at the meeting and went on to discuss the purpose of her presentation – which is on the basis of MEND's recent submission to the Scottish Trade Union's Congress (*link to this is included in the Zoom chat*).

Isobel went on to discuss the large topic of Islamophobia, paying particular attention to the difference between Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred. She discussed how MEND firmly advocates for the term Islamophobia instead of anti-Muslim hatred because it includes the forms of discrimination and stereotyping. These forms can often be overlooked and they can create barriers to Muslim communities on a daily basis. MEND view Islamophobia as a form of racism because, even though Muslim communities are obviously not a race, they have become racialised through Islamophobia over the last few decades to the point that they are treated as a racial group. She went on to point out that Islamophobia functions as a mechanism for excluding Muslim voices and Muslim individuals from participating fully in their civic, political, socio economic freedoms and opportunities on equal footing with their non-Muslim counterparts. MEND have created guidelines to make this policy applicable (*included in MEND submission in chat*).

Isobel then went on to discuss how Islamophobia perpetuates across society through the media. Within the U.K. media, research has shown that for every single positive or neutral reference to Muslims, there are 21 negative references. Media is the main vehicle through which public opinions are formed, so everything that they learn comes from the media. This is hugely important, particularly considering how research has also shown that Muslim men are overwhelmingly presented as criminals, terrorists, extremists, sexual threats. Meanwhile Muslim women are presented in this very kind of Orientalist trope of being submissive, victims, oppressed, backwards. She then went on to discuss how these media forms of Islamophobia seep into the public consciousness and create what they call kind of private Islamophobia, which is the Islamophobia that is held by individuals and organisations. Isobel went on to provide examples of how this comes out in social media. She also discussed the impact of this on not only adults, but also children in school who are experiencing bullying at such a level that they talk about self-harming and wish that they could be somebody else.

Isobel then went on to highlight how MEND have setup the Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU) which supports victims of both hate crime and discrimination through in-house solicitors, through caseworker's and through agreements with big city law firms. She then presented a quick case study of one of their cases . An NHS employee was called the Black Witch for wearing the hijab, was humiliated in meetings, was spat at and called a terrorist. After a very long complaints process with the NHS, all her complaints were upheld, but nothing changed. There was no apology. There was no policy changes. She was just kind of left. MEND joined her at the employment tribunal stage and helped her with pro bono representation from a big city law firm to get a settlement of £25,000.

Isobel then went on to discuss structural Islamophobia. She highlighted that one of the main things that media does is act as a sounding board of public opinion. This can often create moral panic - when a particular group is taken and held up as the cause for a number of societal ills, basically they become a scapegoated community. Amongst all the stereotypes and the hate and everything that comes with that, there are also calls for punitive restrictions to curtail the freedoms of that particular group, which often results in policies that are structurally Islamophobic.

Structurally Islamophobic policies have embedded anti-Muslim biases within their functioning, whether consciously or unconsciously. PREVENT is a good example of this. PREVENT is a statutory duty placed upon public bodies to have due regard for signs of radicalisation. The problem comes in application, in that what it essentially does is require teachers, doctors, librarians, anyone who works for public body to have due regard for radicalisation. But, firstly, there are no definitions as to what British values are, what radicalisation is, what extremism is. This is then combined with inadequate training. Research has shown that people are actually applying PREVENT, are doing so in line with their own preconceptions and in line with popular culture rather than with any kind of guidance or training. So wearing the hijab, going on Hajj, praying, are suddenly being seen as signs of radicalisation and being reported. It has significant barriers in stopping Muslims from engaging in everyday processes.

MEND's submission focuses primarily on employment. However, it also highlights the four channels for change – legislative change, industrial and government initiatives, Muslim community empowerment, and wider community engagement.

Isobel then went on to answer questions from the group and discussed topics such as:

- Some changes in media as a result of working with them
- Policy pledges that companies, councils, all of the kind of institutions commit to
 - For example, encouraging and supporting employers to be aware of and support religious observance for religious festivals and to accommodate things like fasting
- Helping individuals and communities to know what their rights are
- How can we monitor / address / oppose media narratives?
- Asking about ethnicity in the job application stage
- Lack of newspaper stories that highlight the positive contributions of Muslim communities
- How the issues raised are transferable across other visible ethnic minority communities
- Some of the work MEND does, e.g. advocacy, capacity building
- How can we hold politician accountable?

Isobel then thanked everyone for listening and invited members to contact her after the meeting for further discussion (*Isobel's contact details are in the Zoom chat*).

The Convener thanked Isobel for her presentation, and then moved onto the next agenda item.

5 Response to COVID Letter Sent to MSP Christina McKelvie (Minister for Older People and Equalities)

The Convener explained that the group sent a letter to Christina McKelvie ahead of October's CPG meeting. A response to this letter was received on 23rd November and was circulated to the group on 24th November.

The Convener then asked the Secretariat (Ashleigh) to share the letter on screen with the group. The group was then given 5 minutes to read through the letter. The Convener then opened up the group to discuss any major points, which he will reflect back to the Minister.

Faten voiced that 9 months into the pandemic and still no measures are being taken in regard to BMS workers or the BMS community. The Convener responded to this saying that while he agrees that there is action that should be taken, it should also be noted that new information on COVID is being learned every day, so no one really knows a lot about the correct steps to take.

Harriette stated that she would like the Minister to be present at one of the group meetings. The Convener responded saying that this would be one of the next steps to take in response to the letter and asked the group if they would like to look into asking Christina to attend the next CPG meeting. This was agreed by both Faten and Harriette, as well as other group members. It was decided that, if the Minister is able to attend, her presentation would take up the majority of the next meeting.

6 Any Other Business

Martin discussed taking a few minutes to inform the group about the enquiry that the Equality and Human Rights Commission has just launched. The enquiry looks at the experiences of lower paid black and minority ethnic workers in the health and adult social care sector.

It was decided that Martin will send an update through the Secretariat (Ashleigh) and, given the topic's relevance to the pandemic, give a short presentation / discussion on the enquiry after Christina's presentation at the next meeting.

7 Date of Next Meeting

The preliminary date of Wednesday 24th February @ 2pm was previously set for the next meeting, however the group decided that this could be changed to work around Christina's diary and availability.