

BRITISH MUSLIMS: WHERE BRITAIN AND ISLAM INTERSECT - continued

As long as we let faith communities be narrowly defined by a few fringe elements, we are giving ammunition to those who want to emphasise the divisions between us. All of us – the media, the government and the Muslim community – have to work harder to challenge such easy stereotypes and cliché. We all need to work harder to ensure our voices are heard more clearly over that of the extremists, domestically and internationally. We should be telling the story about how faith communities – including the Muslim communities – are making a visible, tangible difference to British society. The Charity Commission, for example, lists over 22,000 religious charities of all shapes and sizes working in England and Wales today. Some of those charities have the sole aim of advancing a particular faith but for many of them their faith is not the end goal but rather the force which drives them to work for a better world. It would probably come as a surprise to some non-Muslims in this country that Islamic Relief is a British-based charity – or that it works with world's poorest people regardless making no distinction between those of differing faiths. The Department for International Development considers them an extremely valuable partner and has provided the organisation with over £3.6 million over the years to help their humanitarian relief efforts.

Similarly, a great deal was made, quite rightly, about the generosity of the British people as a whole following the tsunami on Boxing Day in 2004. But I don't think that enough has been said about the quite exceptional effort which many Muslims made in the aftermath of the earthquake in Pakistan last year, as well as their efforts after the tsunami. Some British Muslims, tragically, lost family members in the Pakistan disaster but, on the whole, Muslims in this country supported the relief to an extraordinary degree motivated by a much wider sense of charity and community.

The release of the British hostage, Norman Kember, and two of his companions has been very prominent in the media over the past few days. I believe the calls by many Muslims in this country and fellow British citizens for the safe release of those kidnapped victims and showing their solidarity with their plight may have contributed to their survival. The truth is that people of conviction have always made a massive contribution to the life of this country. Not just through social and charitable work but in politics, science and the arts. The Muslim community today is no exception to this rule. They are giving so much to Britain. And they have much to offer the rest of the world. I would like to see more interaction between British Muslims and Muslim communities in other countries. British Muslims can lead

the debate on how we can overcome challenges which matter to all of us – Muslims and non-Muslims. They can use their skills and thinking to help the economic and political development of others.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I can make the intellectual argument that faith and modernity, British and Muslim are complementary. But the most eloquent, living proof of this is in the people that are here tonight – and in those who will be accepting awards. British Muslims are where Britain and Islam intersect. Celebrating their success is the best way of showing that these two identities can and do thrive in the same place and in the same person.

The Muslim News Awards for Excellence 2006 winners

Ibn Battuta award for excellence in media:
Jon Snow

Fazlur Rahman Khan award for excellence in engineering, science and technology: Saghir Akhtar

Al-Biruni award for excellence in community relations: Islam Awareness Week

Ummul Mu'minin Khadijah award for excellence in enterprise: Mazhar Butt

Annemarie Schimmel award for championing a Muslim cause: Cynthia Capey

Uthman Dan Fodio award for excellence in community development: Haroon Karim

Faezeh Hashemi award for excellence in sports: Bilal Shafayat

Alhambra award for excellence in arts: Jamil Ahmed/Jamilarts.com

Allama Iqbal award for excellence in Islamic thought: Abdelwahab El-Affendi

Malcolm X Young people's Award: Sujel Miah/CSSP

Ibn Sina award for health: Medicern

Alija Izetbegovic award for good citizenship: Mudassar Arani

Sankore University award for excellence in education: Sophie Gilliat Ray

Ibn Khaldun award for excellence in promoting understanding between global cultures and faiths: Ahmad Al-Rawi

Iman wa Amal special award: Muslim Hands