Supplementary written evidence submitted by the Board of Deputies of British Jews

1. The Board of Deputies of British Jews is the democratic representative body of the Jewish community, and the first port of call for Government, the media and others seeking to understand Jewish community interests and concerns.

2. This is supplementary evidence, in addition to evidence submitted to the Committee on 1 September 2016. It will focus on anti-Muslim hatred.

3. The Board of Deputies stands firm in its opposition to all forms of discrimination, including anti-Muslim hatred.

4. The proliferation of anti-Muslim hatred – whether online, on public transport, or on the street - is a scourge on our society and an affront to the values of tolerance, diversity and equality that make Britain a great place to live, and a welcoming home to people of all faiths and ethnicities.

5. While antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred differ significantly in their histories and manifestations, we recognise that efforts to tackle both will only reach their full potential when minority communities including Jews and Muslims work in partnership.

6. To this end:

   a. The Board of Deputies commends the work of Tell MAMA, a charity that monitors and advocates against anti-Muslim hate crime and endorses the ongoing cooperation between the Jewish community’s Community Security Trust (CST) and Tell MAMA, as a prime example of the kind of partnership that is needed to tackle hate crime in all its forms, in particular anti-Muslim hatred.

   b. The Board of Deputies has a longstanding record of speaking out against anti-Muslim hatred in statements to the media and to Government. To cite a few examples:

      • In the Board of Deputies’ Jewish Manifesto, we have called on politicians to, “oppose extremism and hate crime, including antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of hate.”

      • In January 2017, Board of Deputies President Jonathan Arkush criticised President Donald Trump’s ban on refugees: “bans based on national origin are indiscriminate and unjust. They would be unlawful in U.K. law. While we all understand the need to properly check those who enter our countries, this needs to be balanced with compassion towards the plight of those fleeing for their lives. This is a dismaying beginning to a new US Administration. Good government needs cool, rational judgments delivered professionally, not hasty policy-making on the hoof. All those who respect and admire the USA’s commitment to freedom will call on President Trump to review this misconceived Executive Order.”

      • In July 2016, Channel 4 news anchor Fatima Manji was attacked in an article by Kelvin Mackenzie. Board of Deputies Vice-President Marie van der Zyl responded: “The article makes the unhelpful and unsupported assumption that a Muslim presenter cannot give adequate balance to a story on Islamist extremism. This drives a wedge between Muslims and others, which will alienate British Muslims, when in fact most Muslims are as appalled at extremism as the rest of us and are the most important constituency in the fight against it.”


In 2013, after a series of anti-Muslim attacks following the murder of Lee Rigby, the Board of Deputies co-signed a statement spearheaded by the Joseph Interfaith Foundation, condemning the attacks.

In 2010, when the English Defence League stepped up intimidation of Muslim communities and was waving Israeli flags at its demonstrations, the then Board of Deputies' Chief Executive, Jon Benjamin, said, "the EDL’s supposed 'support' for Israel is empty and duplicitous. It is built on a foundation of Islamophobia and hatred which we reject entirely. Sadly, we know only too well what hatred for hatred's sake can cause. The overwhelming majority will not be drawn in by this transparent attempt to manipulate a tense political conflict."

In 2009, when voters in Switzerland voted in a referendum to outlaw the building of minarets, a spokeswoman for the Board of Deputies said: "We must condemn intolerance wherever it occurs. Swiss Muslims should be made to feel at home in Switzerland, just as we hope that Muslims, Jews and other minorities in this country should be allowed to practise their faiths freely and without restraint. In our own country, we have seen the continuing victimisation of Muslims and other minorities by these groups. These have ranged from intimidatory protests outside mosques, to cemetery desecrations, to arson attacks, and even to murder. The Board of Deputies is appalled by such developments and stands with the vast majority of British society who condemn them."

c. While continuing in our commitment to calling out anti-Muslim hatred, the Board of Deputies' President, Jonathan Arkush, has made engagement with Muslims a priority for his presidency, and we are undertaking a new programme of outreach to Muslim communities across Britain, aimed at increasing cooperation and understanding between our two communities, and tackling hate-crime is an important part of these discussions. So far we have undertaken visits to Leicester, Leeds and various mosques and Islamic centres in London, with many more to come.

d. In December 2016, at Limmud Conference – arguably the British Jewish community's most important cultural event – the Board of Deputies organised sessions including a panel on tackling antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred together. It also included an interfaith tour which brought Jewish conference participants to a mosque in Birmingham where they engaged in a Q+A with Muslim community members. This builds on years of similar events.

e. Nisa Nashim, the Muslim-Jewish women's network incubated by the Board of Deputies, is an inspiring example of what can be achieved by Jewish and Muslim women working together. We are proud that the work of this network continues to go from strength to strength, with Jewish and Muslim women inviting each other for meals, mixing at social and cultural events, organising mosque/synagogue visits and carrying out learning and leadership development together.

7. It has come to our attention that an organisation - Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) – has cited the Board of Deputies in their submission to this inquiry.

a. We wish to clarify that we agree with Tell MAMA, that the approach taken by MEND risks increasing hostility and suspicion between the Jewish and Muslim communities, rather than building trust and empathy.

---

b. We remain greatly disturbed by statements attributed to MEND such as one by its CEO Sufiyan Ismail, in which he claimed that “in 300 years the Israeli lobby has not lost a vote in Parliament”\(^6\). Given that the state of Israel has only existed since 1948, the “Israeli lobby” in this quote can only be a synonym for British Jews, of which Ismail celebrates that “they were battered, absolutely battered”.

c. While we have met representatives of MEND in the past, we would not intentionally meet with the organisation again until we are confident that it intends to promote a positive relationship towards Jews, the Jewish community and communal bodies and stands unequivocally opposed to extremism. As matters stand at present we are unable to work with MEND on any projects, and recommend that others look for alternative partners – such as Tell MAMA - in the work of combatting anti-Muslim hatred.

8. For further information, please contact Phil Rosenberg, Director of Public Affairs.

\(^6\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGBwOYrTUzg