

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) will be holding its Annual Members Meeting (AGM) this month to elect a new Secretary General and office bearers. I have put my name forward to be considered for that position of the Secretary General and feel honoured to inform you all that I am now an official candidate. The election will take place on the 25th of January 2021 and it will be open to all the affiliates of this largest Muslim representative body in the UK. This election is particularly important as it offers the affiliates, and by extension, the wider British Muslim community, a great opportunity to elect representatives they feel could lead the MCB.

I have served the Muslim community for 25 years in various capacities. I believe I am ready to take the most important challenge of my life and represent the community to the best of my ability. I have been involved with the MCB for many years. I volunteered from the day it launched at Brent Town Hall, where I was one of the first to arrive and amongst the last handful to leave after helping to clear-up. I have been involved in various committees over the years. These included chair of the first Youth Committee, member of the Europe and International Affairs committee and actively fundraised for the MCB. I have worked with others to recruit organisations to join the MCB and continued to support the MCB in the local and national media.

I entered this election knowing fully well that the other candidate is a female. It was a difficult decision for me, as I have known the young sister for some time. Most of you will know that I have been advocating for women's rights all my life, especially within the Muslim community. Whilst I respect and commend the sister standing for the Secretary General position, I want to make it clear that my candidacy is not about undermining the role of women. Rather, it is purely about who can best lead this great organisation to grow and prosper.

#### My priorities for the MCB

### If I am elected, my immediate priorities would be to:

- Make MCB a stronger voice for all sections of the Muslim community in Britain.
- **▼**Put greater investment in young people.
- Build confident Muslim families.
- **▼**Take MCB closer to the grassroots
- ▼ Foster better relationship with the media.
- Encourage greater Muslim participation in civic and political arenas.
- Eradicate all forms of inequality, discrimination, racism and Islamophobia.
- Promote better cooperation between Muslim communities for social and economic development.
- Help create a more inclusive, for the common good of all.
- Make MCB financially more stable and self-sustainable.

# Muslim community needs confident Muslim identity

If I am elected as the Secretary General, I will work with all sections of our community to help develop a confident and vibrant Muslim identity. We should be proud of our Muslim identity, which is grounded in the ethics of our religion. Our children should not feel embarrassed about their faith in school, college or university. They should not feel the need to hide their Muslim-sounding names from friends for fear of losing friends. Adult members of our community should not face discrimination at work because they are Muslims. Our sisters should not contemplate or take off their headscarf because of fear of physical and verbal attacks on the streets. We need confident Muslims who can stand proud as British citizens and Muslims at the same time. We are equal citizens with equal stake – Britain is our home.

#### I believe the above is possible when we:

- **▼**Come together as a community and stand firm as Muslims.
- Invest in building confident Muslim families.
- Inform our children on the values of our faith.
- Inspire our children to dream big and aim high.
- Embrace our British Muslim identity wholeheartedly.



SWE ARE EQUAL CITIZENS WITH EQUAL STAKE...

# 2 Celebrating our diversity, being proud of our unyielding unity

The British Muslim community is composed of diverse ethnic, ideological, political and other interests. We are a mosaic of cultures, customs, languages and backgrounds, enriched by our respective histories. We should celebrate this diversity. MCB is the most representative Islamic umbrella body in the UK and it must maintain this by ensuring there is fair representation in all parts of its membership, representation and work streams. We come from different theological schools of thoughts but ultimately what unites us is our faith.

If I am elected as the Secretary General, I will strive to achieve unity within our community whilst respecting diversity. I will commit to:

- Ensuring MCB remains impartial in its religious, political and ideological positions.
- **▼** Refraining from taking-up exclusive theological interpretations.
- **▼** Having representatives from diverse schools of thoughts in its National Council.
- **■** Democratising decision-making process, including increasing the culture of transparency, consultation and consensus.

■ Making the collective interest of the community the foremost reason for all its work.



36 WE SHOULD **CELEBRATE** THIS **DIVERSITY.** 9

# Muslim community empowered

Everyone who claims to be a Muslim has a stake in the MCB and should feel they have a space to realise their vision and have their voices heard. MCB should be a facilitator of Muslim communities' socio-economic aspirations, political dreams and a conduit for championing rights. It has taken the British Muslim community nearly a century to arrive where it is today, however inadequate it may feel, the achievements have been phenomenal.

If am elected as the Secretary General, I will work with affiliate and non-affiliate organisations to empower the community to realise its full potential by campaigning for:

- Adequate and proportionate representation in all spheres of public life in the UK, including more elected politicians in all public offices.
- More members of the Muslim community in the House of Lords.
- More Muslims joining the civil service, local government, police, fire services and army in all their ranks.
- Have more Muslims in policy forums, decision-making bodies and lobby organisations.
- Acceptance of British Muslims as equal citizens.



CONDUIT FOR CHAMPIONING RIGHTS.

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# Investing in Muslim future, promoting sustainable programmes

We have nearly 5 million Muslims in the UK and yet our programmes are often run hand-to-mouth, and we often go out with begging bowls desperately seeking support. We can change this forever. We can inspire Muslims to invest in their future by making space for them in the MCB, have them take a stake in the overall vision of MCB to become partners in delivering the collective vision.

#### If I am elected as the Secretary General I will:

- Work with MCB affiliates and non-affiliates to diversify and increase our membership and aim to reach a thousand signed-up members by the end of the session.
- I will help set up a specialist team to explore setting-up of a UK-wide WAQF (endowment) fund that brings in philanthropic investors to take part in money-generating schemes with charitable aims to support MCB and the wider community projects.
- Help MCB purchase a commercial/public building to locate its head office and generate income from retail units that it rents to other users/businesses. It needs a vibrant hub at the heart of the community.
- Help consolidate the existing institutional funds and raise more institutional funding for projects.



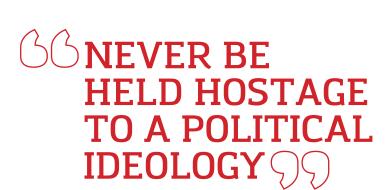
GOINSPIRE
MUSLIMS TO
INVEST IN
THEIR FUTURE

# Hold government and media to account

The strength of a community lies in its own confidence and the ability to articulate its identity confidently and proudly. The most significant sign of a powerful community is when the community can determine its own agenda. The Muslim community should never be held hostage to a political ideology by any political party in government or outside. It should never be blackmailed by the media or any private / public institution. The MCB should play a fair and proportionate role with all people of power and influence.

With my mainstream media profile/experience as well as engagement with the government, I am confident I can assist the MCB by:

- Helping develop and shape a British Muslim narrative, an agenda for fair access to power and influence as well as accurate and sensitive portrayal of the British Muslims.
- Engaging different channels of the government. Where the government refuses to engage, I will challenge and pressure the government to reverse its policies. Why should MCB be excluded or marginalised?
- Building and enhancing relationships with the media so that the Muslim community is respected and their faith and cultural sensitivities are considered when stories/events are broadcast. Freedom of expression, coupled with responsibility, must be at the core of such a relationship.
- Campaigning to make Islamophobia or anti-Muslim bigotry in the public offices, media outlets and the wider society totally illegal and unfashionable. Accurate depiction of events does not require racial or religious identification.





MCB can add substantial value and benefit to its affiliates. It can benefit and add value to the wider society. Under my leadership I will listen to you, I will work with you and I will be by your side to bring about change for the betterment of our community. My philosophy is simple: Britain is my home, British people are my people and I have to do everything in my capacity for the well-being of all. MCB is best-placed to further the true spirit of togetherness, unity, and a confident Muslim identity.

I am spurred on by the very powerful verse of the Qur'an, calling on people to work for the common good of all, regardless of religion, race or language.



"AND HELP ONE ANOTHER
IN FURTHERING VIRTUE
AND GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS,
AND DO NOT HELP ONE
ANOTHER IN FURTHERING
EVIL AND ENMITY"

(Qur'AN 5:2)







# My CALLING IN LIFE is to inform, inspire and influence people of all backgrounds towards positive change and harmonious co-existence.

I do this as an **Imam**, **teacher**, **broadcaster**, **author**, **fundraiser**, **family counsellor**, **community organiser** and **community activist**. I have devoted all my working life to bringing communities together and building bridges.

I come from a humble family in London's East End. At a young age, my father took me to his native Bangladesh for my Islamic education for some years. When I returned to school in the UK, I had to work very hard to catch up on the education I had missed. I graduated from University of London with a Master of Arts in Islamic Studies.

I began work as a youth worker and community development officer for local authorities across London, and with Citizens Organising Foundation. This led to founding Communities in Action, specialising in community development, cohesion and capacity building programmes.

Subsequently, I served on various platforms and bodies including:

- Vice-Chair, London Civic Forum
- Contributed to the London Mayor's strategy for the city.
- Led campaigns including the Vision, Voice and Vote campaign for Londoners, the Living Wage Campaign, and Standing Together Against Intolerance.

I have been a member of many Muslim youth and community organisations, including:

- FOSIS
- Islamic Society of Britain (Chair 2016-19).
- ▼I am a trustee at Britain's first mosque, the Abdullah Quilliam Mosque in Liverpool.

I twice stood for parliament.

As a London based imam, I have been leading Friday prayers for over twenty years in mosques in many parts of the UK.

I have designed a course on Islamic approaches to peace-making, "*Learning to be a peacemaker*" which was delivered to over 500 young European Muslims over the course of past 15 years.

I have been a robust champion of peace and harmony and vehement opponent of hate crime in all its forms. I actively challenge all forms of extremism and injustice. I believe moderation and tolerance is the essence/fundamental values of Islam and our intra-faith diversity as a source of strength.

I have been a production consultant and presenter on programmes about Islam and Muslims for Channel 4, BBC, ITV, CNN and National Geographic, as well as presenting my own shows on Islam Channel and Channel S. I have represented the Muslim voice authentically and honesty in the mainstream media for the last 20 years.

I have published articles in newspapers and magazines including *The Guardian, The Evening Standard, The Economist, The Statesman* and *The Huffington Post*, as well as books and booklets on issues including marriage and relationships, faith and identity, politics and society.

I have authored handbooks on diversity and community cohesion including "The Mark of Faith" for Southwark Borough Council, "Muslims in Britain" for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the "Ramadan Health Guide" for the Department of Health. I was also a cultural relations consultant for the British Council.

In 2014 I was honoured to be included in the list of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world.

As a fundraiser, I have been able to raise approximately £50 million over twenty-five years for Muslim NGOs.

I co-founded with my wife Henrietta Szovati, the Barefoot Institute that specialises in building Muslim relationships, providing relationship training, counselling and mediation.

When the English Defence League threatened to attack the central Mosque in Harrow, I was called to help the local community and succeeded in defusing the confrontation.

In the immediate aftermath of the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby, *The Economist* wrote about me: 'The bonne parole came from Ajmal Masroor... 'If you dislike Britain so much... why don't you just hand your passport over and leave? And if you dislike the policies of the government... participate in the electoral process, stand for election," he rhetorically told the soldier's attacker, in an interview with Sky TV which won big approval ratings on social media. At a time when ugly and vindictive threats were starting to hurtle through cyber-space, this was just the sort of message that many citizens wanted to hear...from a Muslim.