
HOW THE PROJECT CAME ABOUT

The Holy Quran contains the oft-repeated verse “Oh mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has at-taqwa (God consciousness),” (49:13).

Principles in our faith are ideals to work towards and the MCB and PMB have endeavoured to bring them into practice. In the context of stark inequality and racism, such principles guide us towards equality, respect and recognition.

Britain’s Muslim community reflects our society’s diversity, including Muslims from the Caribbean, from Somalia, West Africa among many others. Their contributions and presence however, do not receive the acknowledgement they deserve. Research has shown that they face anti-Black racism from within Muslim communities, as well as anti-Black racism and Islamophobia from wider society.

The MCB first began directly addressing the issues of Black Muslim inclusion, representation, and equality in February 2019 with a day-long symposium in collaboration with over 10 partner organizations under the campaign name Proudly Muslim and Black. The event was many years overdue and was an attempt to explore the issues facing Black Muslims in Britain, as well as highlighting the important contributions made to Islamic civilization and British society by prominent Black Muslims.

Dozens of academics, scholars, leaders, and lay community members convened to discuss important issues around the way Black Muslims are perceived and treated. It included short talks, spoken word, and poetry presentations from Muslims of Ghanaian, Ivorian, Jamaican, Nigerian, Somali, Tanzanian and Trinidadian heritage. Themes included Black Muslims and their role in Muslim institutions, identity formation, and the role of Muslim women in African and Black Caribbean communities.

Subsequently, the Proudly Muslim and Black campaign continued to engage with and listen to a wide range of stakeholders on this issue through numerous working groups and public events. In October 2019 a session at the Houses of Parliament was organised entitled, “Being Black, British and Muslim Today.” The following year saw the horrific killing of George Floyd in the United States and the prominence of the global #BlackLivesMatter movement.

A two-part “Islam and Racial Justice” online conference in October 2020 was jointly organised with partner organisations, exploring the impact of the movement and exploring practical solutions. The second part of the conference focused on youth,

with participants as young as 10 years old sharing their lived experiences and aspirations for change. These listening exercises over the last two years have culminated in the publication of “Essays on African and Black Caribbean Muslims in the UK.”

The report brings together contributions from 40 community members, leaders, entrepreneurs on the lived experience of British Muslims of African and Black Caribbean heritage. Topics covered include Criminal Justice, Media, Education, Arts & Heritage, Sport, Religion, Politics, Employment, and reflections on #BlackLivesMatter.

The report aims to challenge stereotypes, accelerate introspection and initiate more serious debate on why anti-Black attitudes still exist – and often go unchallenged – within our communities. The report’s purpose is to educate, inform, and engage British society including the diversity of British Muslim communities.

The report is designed to foster mutual understanding between British Muslim communities of diverse ethnic heritage, reminding us of the Quranic imperative to understand one another.

It is intended to reinforce calls for stronger and fairer representation of Black Muslims in the leadership of Muslim-led community institutions like mosques and charities, as well as in our media outlets, school curricula, arts & culture and research areas. Above all it is an urge for greater unity.

The MCB’s Constitution opens with the verse “Hold fast, all together, to the bond with Allah and be not divided” (3:103) and losing sight of this will be losing sight of an essential *raison d’être*.

The journey does not stop with this report; there will be a series of public education workshops on racial justice and an online resource portal to engage even more sections of the community is in development. The struggle for a more just, cohesive community must continue.

The following partner organisations including groups and individuals that will be listed later in the report must be acknowledged for their contribution in making this report possible; Everyday Muslim Heritage and Archive Initiative; Centre of African Studies, Centre of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law, SOAS, University of London; Council for Nigerian Muslim Organisations; Muslim Association of Nigeria UK/Old Kent Road Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre; Civil Service Muslim Network; Black Lives Matter Redbridge; The Salaam Project; Peckham High Street Islamic & Cultural Centre; Black Muslim Forum; Being a Muslim Black Girl; Federation of Muslim Women Association (FOMWA UK); Barakah Cultural and Educational Association; Al-Ikhlās Islamic Society; Southwark Muslim Forum and Save Our Boys.