



Conservative Party Response to MCB Vote Card

1) The law currently forbids racial discrimination. However, several recent studies have shown that British Muslims are increasingly being discriminated against on the basis of their religion.

WILL YOU support legislative measures to provide equal protection to Muslims and other faith groups from discrimination in all areas with a positive duty to promote equality on grounds of faith as is provided to racial groups under the race laws?

Conservatives totally oppose discrimination on the basis of religion. Religion should be no bar to opportunity, and everyone should be free to practise their religion within the law of the land. We have supported legislation to provide tougher penalties for religiously inspired violence. Nevertheless, we opposed Labour's measures to create an offence of incitement to religious hatred – and forced the Government to drop the relevant clauses as a condition of giving our consent to the Serious Organised and Police Bill becoming law in the negotiations before the dissolution of Parliament last week.

For centuries the United Kingdom has had a tradition of religious tolerance, and at the same time a tradition of extremely robust religious disputation. That has produced a healthy society in which religious freedom and free speech have co-existed to the advantage of all. The freedom to criticise ideas – even if they are sincerely held beliefs – is one of the fundamental freedoms of society.

We saw the proposed offence of incitement to religious hatred as a danger to the freedom of religion – a view which was shared by many Muslims. For example, Tayib Ali from the London Central Mosque said: 'I am concerned it will be used to gag Muslims. It may become extremely difficult to express my beliefs as clearly as my faith demands for fear of someone shopping me to the police.'

2) Far right groups are exploiting a loophole in the law, which prohibits incitement to race hate but does not explicitly forbid incitement to religious hatred.

WILL YOU support legislative measures to make incitement to religious hatred illegal so that Muslims and other faith groups enjoy the same protection as is enjoyed currently by the Jews and Sikhs under the race laws?

We believe that the current race laws provide adequate protection. The Conservative Party consistently opposed the proposed incitement to religious hatred clause, introduced through the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill. We saw the proposed offence of incitement to religious hatred as a danger to the freedom of religion – a view which was shared by many Muslims (see previous answer).

3) The discriminatory application of the anti-terror laws has served to stigmatise British Muslims. High-profile raids, stop and search activities and sensationalist media coverage has increased anti-Muslim sentiment.



WILL YOU oppose all measures that compromise the Rule of Law and instead promote steps that ensure that no individual loses their liberty or dignity without the proper and transparent process of law?

The Conservative Party's position has been clear and consistent. Whether in Government or Opposition, we will never shirk our duty to do what is necessary to protect the public – domestic or international. We have consistently sought to remind the Home Secretary that he is not just protecting our lives, he is protecting our way of life – and that includes our ancient British liberties such as the presumption of innocence, the right to trial by jury, and habeas corpus. We support the introduction of new legislation to deal with new threats to our security, but it needs to be carefully framed and it must not threaten our fundamental liberties.

Government measures we have opposed include detention without trial; the offence of incitement to religious hatred; the 'snoopers charter' to allow more organisations to retain communications data; and proposals to lower the burden of proof in the case of terrorist trials. National security cannot be protected simply by legislation. Strong intelligence and effective policing are crucial. We must not sacrifice fundamental rights and liberties in pursuing the war on terror.

We believe that terrorists should be given no special status and ought to be treated as the criminals they are. This means that they should be brought to trial and that, while they await trial, they should be detained in prison. Their innocence or guilt must be determined by a court of law – not by the Home Secretary and, if they are found guilty, they must be detained in a prison cell, not in their living rooms. Furthermore, we feel that, as far as possible, anti-terrorist legislation should follow in the mould of ordinary criminal law and procedure.

4) British Muslims rank near the bottom of all major social-economic indicators (education, employment, housing, health, criminal justice etc.)

WHAT POSITIVE ACTION measures would you and your party take to enable Muslims to achieve equality of opportunity and to address the causes of their social exclusion, deprivation and marginalization?

We will govern in the interests of all sections of the community – whatever their background, class, creed, or colour. That has always been a fundamental principle of our Party. It can be seen as a thread running through our policies today. For instance our policies for health and education based on the Right to Choose will bring better services and higher standards to less well-off families, giving them access to a variety of first-rate schools and excellent hospital treatments that have in the past tended to be confined to those who can pay for them out of their own pockets. And we trust local communities – with their own particular needs and aspirations – up and down the land to bring all their members together to express clear views on what matters to them – in housing and planning in particular. That is why we are so strongly opposed to Labour's approach – which is to impose housing and development plans on communities from above. But



nothing is more important than to ensure that all members of the community are protected from crime. We recognise that it is the poorer members who suffer most from crime. The 5,000 extra police we will recruit each year will work on behalf of everyone. They will be seen day by day on the street, in the community - and answerable to it, through an elected police commissioner.

5) International law is enforced very selectively following some countries (e.g. Israel, Russia, India) to flout United Nations Resolutions with impunity. The resulting inequality and injustice contributes towards creating a less stable world.

WILL YOU promote a foreign policy that is based on justice and fairness?

Conservatives understand the importance of international law, which requires Chapter VII UN Security Council resolutions to be enforced. That is why we think the Government should publish the Attorney General's advice on the legality of the Iraq war. But we also believe that the most important duty in international affairs is to resolve those festering conflicts that undermine stability. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict will only end when Israel is secure within its 1967 borders and Palestine is a viable and independent country. The bus route connecting Srinagar to Muzaraffabad has brought hope to Kashmiris. A Conservative Government will be ready to help Pakistan, India and Kashmiri nationalists reach a peaceful settlement, which must be acceptable to the people of Kashmir.

6) Parliament voted to go to war in support of the US invasion of Iraq. This took place against the wishes of half the country, without the support of the international community or the United Nations.

WILL YOU support the immediate publication of a timetable for the withdrawal of all British forces from Iraq, and oppose their deployment under similar conditions in the future?

We supported the war. Although Mr Blair did not tell the country the truth about his reasons for going to war, it was necessary in order to enforce the series of Chapter VII Security Council resolutions Iraq had broken. Despite Mr Blair's failure to plan properly for the aftermath of the war (failure which allowed the insurgency to develop), Iraq is a better place without Saddam Hussein. We must now do everything possible to ensure Iraq becomes a stable democracy governed by the rule of law. Our Armed Forces have been asked by Iraq's independent Government to stay in Iraq to provide security. They are working tirelessly to train Iraq's new security forces, so that their job can be completed and they can return to Britain.

If we should ever have to go deploy troops abroad we will tell the truth about why they are going, ensure our soldiers get the right equipment and plan properly to secure the peace.

7) Muslim students in state schools are under achieving, and consequently suffer from limited opportunities and a higher than average rate of unemployment after leaving school.



WILL YOU work to ensure that the necessary resources and programmes are put in place to address this problem, and will you support equality of treatment for Muslims in the provision of state funding for Muslim schools?

Conservatives, unlike other parties, recognise and appreciate the values, achievements and legitimacy of faith schools. We will encourage new ones to be set up, existing ones to expand, and will provide taxpayer-funding for parents currently forced to pay for wholly private schools in order to uphold their faith (such as Islamic schools, where fees often average under £2,000 a year). In return, those faith schools which want to be eligible for public funding will have to agree to deliver the National Curriculum, to accept OFSTED inspection, and to provide at least 10 per cent of their places for pupils from a different faith or no faith background. This policy will therefore not only open up opportunity to faith groups currently excluded under Labour - it will also promote much greater integration than the politically correct doctrines of the Left. In addition, we will take action to support children from underachieving backgrounds and those with special needs, including in particular those with English as a second language.

8) According to 2001 Census there are 1.6 million Muslims in the UK. This is more than the numbers of British Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists combined. The representation in all walks of life including politics needs to reflect this diversity.

WHAT WILL YOU and your party do to achieve this objective?

The Conservative Party is committed to represent all Britons, regardless of their religion or the colour of their skin. The candidates we are fielding as a Party come from all walks of life, and a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. We have selected 39 candidates from ethnic minorities – more than Labour or the Liberal Democrats – 15 of whom are Muslims. And under Michael Howard's leadership, the Party has established the Conservative Muslim Forum to promote discussion and closer links between the Conservative Party and the Muslim community.

9) We believe all human life is sacred.

HOW WILL your party ensure that religious and moral contributions to discussions on issues such as abortion and euthanasia are fully taken on-board?

Moral issues of the kind you mention are traditionally decided by members of Parliament on a free vote. That means that they can put forward their beliefs and convictions with complete freedom. It also means that the decisions that Parliament reaches on such issues are determined by the unfettered consciences of elected representatives mindful of the particularly important duty that they owe directly to their constituents on moral and ethical questions.

10) Immigrants have always contributed to the growth and prosperity of our country. And they continue to do so today.

WHAT IS YOUR position on immigration policy and what will you do to ensure that the tone of this debate does not fuel a racist agenda?



For centuries Britain has welcomed people from around the world. We have a proud tradition of giving refuge to those fleeing persecution. And we have offered a home to families who want to come here, work hard and make a positive contribution to our society. You are quite right that Britain has benefited enormously from immigration – both economically and culturally. We are a stronger, more successful country because of the immigrant communities that have settled here.

At the same time, however, immigration must be properly controlled and limited. There are literally millions of people in other countries who would like to come and live here. Britain cannot take them all. Firm but fair immigration controls are essential for good community relations, national security and the effective management of public services. Conservatives believe we need a fair immigration system which helps genuine refugees and gives priority to those who want to come to Britain to work hard and make a positive contribution. Our approach will, we believe, create a more humane and much fairer system than today's haphazard and chaotic state of affairs. It will ensure that Britain fulfils her moral obligations more effectively than she does today and takes her fair share of the world's refugees. It will undermine the international trade in people smuggling. It will deter claimants who are not genuine refugees – they will no longer be able to come to Britain and claim asylum, secure in the knowledge that even if they are rejected they are unlikely to be removed. By deterring applications which are false, we will be able to deal with genuine refugees far more quickly. And if we can successfully eliminate false claimants it may be possible to take a larger number of genuine refugees.

For too many years, immigration has been a no-go area for political debate. If we don't speak up now and have a proper debate about immigration, we will only help the bigots who preach racial hatred and the people smugglers who profit from other people's misery. Mr Blair has created problems by losing a grip on immigration, which has more than doubled since he was elected. Uncontrolled immigration poses a real threat to good community relations and the chaos we see today has to be tackled. Doing nothing would play straight into the hands of extremists like the BNP.