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MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN TODAY

by John Patten

The Home Office Minister of State, Mr. John Patten has praised the responsible handling by the great majority of Muslims, of particular concerns raised by 'The Satanic Verses'. "Many people, quite undoubtedly upset and hurt by the book, have exercised their right to protest and to express their grievance openly and freely. The vast majority have remained within the law in doing so, and I commend their restraint and that of their leaders and spokesman," he said.

Recently he wrote a letter to a number of leading British Muslims. We are producing part of the text of his letter:

Diversity yes,
Segregation no.

The single most important guiding principle as we move forward must be the aim of full participation in our society by Muslim and other ethnic minority groups. Modern Britain has plenty of room for diversity and variety. But there cannot be room for separation or segregation. It is to the benefit of all, including the minorities themselves, that they should be part of the mainstream of British life. I can assure all ethnic minority groups, including Muslims, that the Government will do all it can to encourage this to welcome their full participation.

Since 1945, several million people from the new Commonwealth countries have chosen to settle in Britain or have been born here into ethnic minority communities.

They have brought with them a rich and diverse heritage which has added to Britain's wealth of culture and tradition. Many have come with values that can

only be admired such as a firm faith; a commitment to family life; a belief in hard work and enterprise; respect for the law and a will to succeed. To their credit, they have kept values at the core of their life in Britain, too.

Of course, the process of adjusting to large numbers of people with different backgrounds has not always been straightforward, nor could one have expected it to be. And similarly, it has not been easy for many people who have had to adjust to a way of life very different from the one they have left behind. There are inevitable stresses and strains.

Putting down new roots in a new community does not mean severing the old. No-one would expect or indeed want British Muslims, or any other group, to lay aside their faith, traditions or heritage. But new roots must be put down and must go deep, too.

Government's view

This is an appropriate occasion for me to re-state the Government's view on the "The Satanic Verses". We have throughout the last few months, been guided by two principles: the freedom of speech, thought and expression; and the notion of the rule of law.

The same freedom which has enabled Muslims to meet, march and protest against the book, also preserves any author's right to freedom of expression for so long as no law is broken. To rule otherwise would be to chip away at the fundamental freedom on which our democracy is built. That is why we have no power to intervene with publishers or to have "The Satanic Verses" removed from bookshop shelves. Nor would we seek or want any such power.

So freedom of expression prevails for as long as no law is broken. It follows that we must consider

whether the book is within the law.

Law of blasphemy

Many Muslims have argued that the law of Blasphemy should be amended to take books such as this outside the boundary of what is legally acceptable. We have considered their arguments carefully and reached the conclusion that it would be unwise for a variety of reasons to amend the law of blasphemy, not least the clear lack of agreement over whether the law should be reformed or repealed.

Firstly, the difficulties in re-defining what should or should not be blasphemous would be immense. People hold with great passion diametrically opposing views on the subject. For example, should protection be extended to all faiths, including the very minor or very obscure? Should it extend only to faiths believing in one God? Or to "major" or "mainstream" faiths only? I believe there is no equitable, just or right answer to these questions.

Secondly, an alteration in the law could lead to a rush of litigation which would damage relations between faiths.

I hope you can appreciate how divisive and how damaging such litigation might be, and how inappropriate our legal mechanisms are for dealing with matters of faith and individual belief. Indeed, the Christian faith, no longer relies on it, preferring to recognise that the strength of their own belief is the best armour against mockers and blasphemers.

Freedom of the individual

The important principle, and the only one the Government and the law can realistically protect, is that individuals should be free to choose their own faith and to worship without interference, in an

atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance.

At the heart of our thinking is a Britain where Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and others can all work and live together, each retaining proudly their own faith and identity, but each sharing in common the bond of being by birth or choice, British.

I very much hope this is a message you will be able to share with members of your Community.

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MWA BUSINESS

Monthly Meeting: The February meeting was held on 11th February 1990 at the Islamic Cultural Centre. The opening dua and the Quranic Recitation (from Sura al-Mulk) was read by Sister Saeeda Sharif.

Mrs. Khanam Hassan informed us of an invitation from the Muslim Welfare Association Leyton. It was decided that Mrs. Karima Mustafa would represent MWA and speak on "The Muslim Woman's Role in today's Society".

We were pleased to hear that Mrs. Nisa Ali, our Secretary, has accepted the post as house mother of Madina House. She has sent a letter to Mrs. Khanam Hassan: "Asela and I wish to thank you and the members of the MWA for your kindness and support at the time when we needed it. We felt moved that an entire meeting was dedicated to Qur'anic reading on Ashraf's behalf. May Allah reward you all.

Inshallah I will resume my post as Secretary in May when I return from my visit to my mother. Our salam to you all. Your sister in Islam, Nisa Ali."

'Can you stomach the best of Rushdie?' This is the name of a booklet by Ahmed Deedat. It is available free of charge from Islamic Propagation Centre, 481 Coventry Road, Small Heath, Birmingham B10 0JS.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

International Women's Day will be held at Greenhill College, Harrow, on 10th March 1990 from 9.45 am.

Admission £2.-

Muslim women are very much encouraged to take part.

PROGRAMME FOR THE MONTHLY MEETINGS OF MWA FOR 1990

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| March 11 | - | The Colour of the Skin
Talk by Sister Saeeda Sharif |
| April | - | no meeting during the month of
Ramadan |
| May 13 | - | MWA Eid Dinner |
| June 10 | - | 'Female Hormones'
Talk by Dr. Zubeda Osman |
| July 8 | - | 'Islamic Education'
Talk by Mr. and Mrs. Mustafa |
| August 12 | - | MWA Annual Bazaar |
| September 9 | - | Discussion on marriage |
| October 14 | - | Milad un Nabi |
| November 11 | - | AGM |
| December 9 | - | 'MadinaHouse'
Talk by Khanam Hassan |

A LETTER FROM KAMAL - ONE OF OUR SPONSORED CHILDREN IN LEBANON

My dear Ladies of the Muslim Women's Association,

Thank you for your help. I am writing this letter in the hope that God may keep you healthy. I and my family are well.

Dear ladies, my name is Kamal Saleh. I love you very much. Come here and see my country, she is very beautiful because now we have the season of Spring and the weather is very good.

Thank you.

Kamal