

PRESS RELEASE

Imam Shakeel Begg Vs the BBC

STATEMENT OF THE TRUSTEES (October 29th, 2016)

Following Mr Justice Haddon-Cave's judgement against Imam Shakeel Begg in his libel suit against the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), we the Trustees of The Lewisham Islamic Centre (LIC) confirm our unequivocal and unwavering continued support of our Head Imam. We reassert that Imam Begg is not an extremist, has never espoused extremist views, nor is he by any stretch of the imagination an extremist speaker. Imam Begg will shortly release a personal statement countering what in our opinion was an unfair and pervasively one sided judgement.

Imam Begg has been the Imam at the LIC for more than 15 years and remains one of the most cherished and beloved members of the London borough of Lewisham Muslim community, just as much as he is respected and held in high regard within other religious and non-religious institutions in the borough and beyond. His efforts within the borough promoting unity, tolerance, cooperation and peaceful co-existence between different faith groups and with the wider community are well documented and easily accessible.

We are truly disappointed and disturbed by this judgement, by its skew replete with incorrect and fanciful assumptions that rely unequivocally on the speculative, specious and rigid testimony of one "expert" witness – even when this testimony clearly contradicts the Quran and authentic Hadiths of Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) – as representing the myriad of normative Islamic opinions.

The charge of extremism is a false charge. Extremism is an ignoble concept to Islam and Imam Begg remains committed to espousing the true teachings of Islam and the public condemnation and unreserved disavowal of terrorism. Several online videos and joint open letters attest to this. He is also an outspoken campaigner against transgressing nation states in defence and support of the oppressed such as victims of "rendition", persons detained without charge, and aggrieved peoples such as in Occupied Palestine. Not one of these stances is illegal or not shared by a great many people of faith and no faith.

Mr Justice Haddon-Cave's Jekyll and Hyde characterisation, in other words, a mastery of hypocrisy, is therefore fanciful and an impossible position for a personality like Imam Begg, whose entire professional life as faith and community leader is open to public scrutiny. Absolutely none of his speeches, sermons, lectures are ever conducted in secret or to a select few, nor are the audience at public events ever vetted for "suitability". We remind the reader that it was Imam Begg, having nothing to hide, who brought this case against The BBC, not the other way round.

Imam Begg is a pillar of the community, and to decontextualize the words used in some of his speeches and rule them "coded" language to espouse extremist Islamic positions is to stretch the language of extremism and terrorism beyond breaking point. For the avoidance of doubt, the LIC unequivocally condemns all forms of unlawful violence and terrorism. Imam Begg and the LIC distance themselves from the views attributed to him in this judgement because these are not shared or endorsed by either.

We shall continue to review this judgement.