



Regarding The Times article of 20 March 2017

We are writing in response to an article which appeared in The Times on 20 March 2017.

The article appears to be based on information provided by the neo-conservative "think tank", the Henry Jackson Society ("HJS") as regards the Lewisham Islamic Centre ("LIC") and its Imam.

The Henry Jackson Society

The HJS is known for its anti-Muslim views and association with the far right. Douglas Murray, who is the Associate Director of the HJS in his book, 'Neo-conservatism: Why We Need It, Encounter Books: New York, 2006' references (on p. 239) a book by extremist, anti-Muslim Robert Spencer called 'Islam Unveiled'. He has called Spencer a "spectacular scholar" [1]. In 2013, Spencer was banned from entering the UK and whose writings are reported to have inspired the far right terrorist, Anders Breivik [2].

The HJS and Murray's association with individuals with abhorrent views does not end there. He has also defended the Dutch right wing politician, Geert Wilders [3].

The HJS has been reported to have received funding from Nina Rosenwald, who has been dubbed the "sugar mama of anti-Muslim hate" by journalist Max Blumenthal [4]. She has been accused of funding the Gatestone Institute, where she is also president, via her New York-based mega-foundation, the Abstraction Fund, and through Abstraction she has also reportedly channelled money to HJS via its U.S. fundraising arm [5]. Unsurprisingly, Mr Murray is also a part of the Gatestone Institute.

Douglas Murray has also stated in the past that "Conditions for Muslims in Europe must be made harder across the board" [6]. Murray's colleague, Soeren Kern at Gatestone, has promoted extreme far-right conspiracy theories against Muslims when he sought to provide legitimacy to the much ridiculed claim by Steve Emerson of Fox News that there were no go zones for non-Muslims in Europe and that Birmingham was allegedly a Muslim city [6].

In addition, earlier this year, the HJS were caught being paid £10,000 a month by Japan to wage a propaganda campaign against China as a result of which, the Charity Commission confirmed that they were looking into the matter as charities are not permitted to engage in political activities [7]. This is the same HJS that was exposed in a court case recently to have been collecting information about mainstream Muslim speakers in the UK to present to the Home Office's "Extremism Analysis Unit" to smear as "extremists" [8]

Other issues

LIC and its Imam, Shakeel Begg have been at the forefront of creating community cohesion and working for the betterment of all in the London Borough of Lewisham and beyond. LIC is one of the few Islamic Centres that is celebrated across the UK as a model Mosque due to its active role in the wider community.

Instead of celebrating the great community work being undertaken in Lewisham, we find HJS yet again seeking to whip up mistrust, suspicion and division of the community. What the HJS is doing is what should be regarded as 'Hate Preaching' and 'extremism'.

As regards the Judgment and the "extremist" label, this is fully rejected and we are reminded of those who made sacrifices for justice. Dr Martin Luther King and Malcolm X both paid the price for their ideals with their lives and Nelson Mandela with his liberty. Each of these luminaries, in their respective times, were erroneously considered extremists because of their struggles for justice.

LIC would like to take this opportunity to thank all our community and partners for trusting and working alongside LIC and Imam Begg for many years knowing full well that any label of extremism towards LIC or Imam Begg is either misconceived and/or in the case of HJS, out of sheer malice and hatred. Your continued support, knowing first-hand the work that we do is testimony and the clearest refutation of the false allegations made against Imam Begg and LIC. Despite attempts to create discord, we have actually witnessed an increased surge in interest in the LIC and Islam by the open-minded public where over 400 non-Muslim guests attended as part of the recent Visit My Mosque initiative.

Finally, we wish to remind those with far right alliances and anti-Muslim bigotry and hatred that the London Borough of Lewisham is no ordinary place, but rather a place of inspiration for unity, and humiliation for those who seek to sow the seeds of division as was the case in 1977 when the National Front were defeated in the Borough. Collectively, we will once again overcome the far right and not be deterred by those vile individuals and groups who thirst for hate and division and we will continue our work in striving for a more cohesive, peaceful, tolerant, just and balanced society.

[1]<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGIAwMv8c-8&feature=youtu.be&t=8m52s>

[2]<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2018976/Norway-shooting-Anders-Behring-Breivik-inspired-Robert-Spencer-Unabomber.html>

[3]<https://www.spectator.co.uk/2017/01/geert-wilders-doesnt-threaten-dutch-liberalism-hes-defending-it/>

[4]<https://www.thenation.com/article/sugar-mama-anti-muslim-hate/>

[5]<http://www.alternet.org/investigations/one-americas-most-dangerous-think-tanks-spreading-islamophobic-hate-across-atlantic>

[6]<http://web.archive.org/web/20080201133647/http://www.socialaffairsunit.org.uk/blog/archives/000809.php>

[7]<http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/charity-commission-looking-henry-jackson-society/governance/article/1424329>

[8]<https://www.islam21c.com/special/web-posts/fresh-calls-for-charity-commission-to-investigate-henry-jackson-society/>