

Press Statement on the Lee Rigby Trial

We have been following the trial in relation to the murder of the late Lee Rigby and the verdict which has been handed down today. It is with sadness that we read details of the tragic, barbaric, and shocking manner in which he was unlawfully killed. Our views in relation to the incident are as was set out in our press release following the incident (see <http://www.lewishamislamiccentre.com/downloads/upload/22-05-13-pressreleases.pdf>) and as was set out by our Imam, Shakeel Begg during his Friday sermon immediately following the incident on 24 May 2013 wherein he stated that:

“The tragic events which took place in Woolwich, the brutal killing and murder of Lee Rigby goes against the very foundations of our Religion and the characteristics of a Muslim. As Muslims, we find this act to be something totally abhorrent and unacceptable and we extend our and the condolences of the Lewisham Muslim Community to family and friends of Lee Rigby for their loss”.

It is also with shock and regret that we hear disruptive murmurs within certain sections of the media that the individuals who carried out the unlawful killing were allegedly members of our congregation – this we **emphatically** and **categorically** do not accept and this is an allegation which is wholly unfounded, baseless and full of conjecture. Unfortunately, false logic can at times seem plausible, and even outright lies repeated often enough begin to sound like the truth. Sadly, when this happens, stereotypes and rumours replace facts and knowledge with ignorance and misperception; and ignorance fuels hatred and bigotry. It is with this in mind that we have decided to make this statement to dispel these allegations.

It should be made clear that a Mosque is a public of worship and it does not exclude any member of the public from entering therein. It should also be noted that unlike a Church for example, a Mosque is not only attended to by those who are part of its Parish/Congregation but also by those who may be within its vicinity when the time for prayer is upon them, and therefore, they would attend the closest Mosque to perform their prayers. Our Centre has up to approximately 2,000 people attending Friday prayers on a weekly basis. It is therefore probable that the individuals in question visited the Centre as they were likely to have done with many other centres in and around the London area. At no point however, were these individuals members of our congregation. At no point did these individuals use our services or attend any of our classes. At no point did they have a personal relationship with anyone at the Centre and/or members of the mosque/management. The Police are fully aware of all this and it should be noted that at no point did the Centre and/or any of its staff form part of the investigations in relation to the criminal proceedings.

In view of the above, we can categorically confirm that the individuals were not associated in any way, shape or form with the Lewisham Islamic Centre and/or its staff. The Centre and its Imam encourage constructive engagement in society and a rejection of extremism in all its forms. **We unequivocally reject all terrorism.**

The public has unfortunately been bombarded with negative, distorted and even fabricated messages regarding the Centre and an entire community, and we urge the media to avoid sensationalism and to report responsibly and not fuel racial and religious tension in our, and/or any other community.

We would like to take this opportunity to state that the current climate of Islamophobia which is unfortunately rapidly on the increase, as seen with the recent arrest in Salford of a suspected nail bomber, the death of Muhammad Saleem, and a sharp rise in attacks on Mosques, needs to stop. Muslims need to stop being scapegoated and collectively held guilty for the actions of one or two individuals. Muslim leaders need to stop being vilified and held responsible in some way simply because 'a Muslim' who commits a crime simply happened to do so or live within the same location as his/her institution. For example, are priests or leaders of other faiths held to account simply because a person who happened to share the same faith as them and lived within the same locality committed a crime?

In our collective struggle against those who seek to endanger our lives and country, we must not exacerbate the situation by demonising and marginalising innocent British Muslims, Imams and Scholars, whose role is vital in propagating and explaining the true teachings of Islam, in a world where political grievances and unjust policies have caused some Muslims to misinterpret the religion to justify their own political but unIslamic acts to counter the injustices they witness. In a time when some Muslims are misunderstanding and misapplying the religion of Islam, what is needed is a greater teaching of the true normative Islam and not a suppression of its teachings by marginalising and vilifying innocent Imams and Islamic Scholars.

Lewisham Islamic Centre

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