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STAND UP TO BE COUNTED: YOUNG BRITISH MUSLIMS ARE VOICING THEIR DISSENT, AND THAT'S A GOOD THING

The Muslim Youth Helpline (MYH) has today published a new report, *British by Dissent*, which explores the meaning of dissent to young British Muslims keeping in mind the underlying question of their integration within the larger British society.

Authored by Sughra Ahmed, it takes a look at how young British Muslims respond to social, economic, religious and public policy debates through various manifestations of dissent. The report covers various themes, including:

- Understanding of dissent
- Forms, methods and actions of dissent
- Motivations for engaging in dissent
- Personal boundaries where dissent became unjustified
- Impact of the discussion on an individuals' view of dissent

A discussion on the history of dissent in Britain as well as the development of Muslim organisations and Muslim faith based activism in the UK places the current research in its context.

Some key findings of the report are:

- 97% of survey respondents saw themselves as having contributed to dissent or social activism in some way.
- 84% agreed that dissent is important for a society to remain fair and just, and 76% held it is a healthy thing for society.
- The research shows a mainstream focus over and above a focus on more minority or individualist issues. 77.3% felt that British Muslims should focus on more general issues of social justice and equality, and a lower score of 50.7% said they should focus on issues that have a more direct link to British Muslims.
- The research shows that issues with a high national media coverage attracted the highest levels of engagement overall, followed by issues dealing with discrimination of any kind (women's rights, economic unfairness and social inequity, anti-Muslim hatred), and environmental concerns.
- Large sections of survey respondents did not identify with political parties or did not know what they did. 84.4% said this about the Conservative Party, 76.3% about the Liberal Democrats and 56% about the Labour Party.

- 64% said they did not identify with the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) or did not know what they did.
- 73.4% said their faith encouraged and inspired their dissent, and 77.3% agreed dissenting made them feel good knowing their own involvement was making a positive difference.
- 86.7% were active on social media and over 30% were very active in this way. However, 13.3% were not active in this way.
- Only 10.7% agreed that dissenting is mainly about troublemaking and disruptive behaviour and only 20% agreed it is mainly a youth activity.

The report has found young Muslims increasingly active in participating in dissent and activism, but points out this should not be seen as 'un-British' or harmful to integration, but rather it's opposite. Young British Muslims are channelling passion and energy towards more mainstream issues, seeing their engagement as a healthy and responsible thing in society. However many young Muslims feel that while they are constructively engaged thus, this is not appreciated or even acknowledged in a positive sense by the government, Muslim institutions and the media.. Society is confusing dissent with disaffection and this runs counter to positive social inclusion.

Lord Rowan Williams, Master, Magdalene College, Cambridge states about this report,

'Islamic identity is so often taken in public discussion in this country as a clear instance of the way in which religious conviction is a social problem, a source of division or alienation. What we see in this excellent and intelligent piece of research is a very different picture, which gives grounds for much hope – for younger British Muslims, but also for wider British society if it is willing and able to receive the gifts it is being offered.'

The report will be delivered to policy-makers and includes several recommendations – including the recommendation that Educational institutions should help create safe spaces for the exploration of dissent by young Muslims and that the Government and civil society (including Muslim institutions) should work in partnership to provide better training resources that can enhance the ability of young Muslims to contribute to mainstream causes and the wider social good.

END

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

[1] The Muslim Youth Helpline is a national award-winning, registered charity which provides pioneering faith and culturally sensitive services to Muslim youth in the UK.

Our core service is a free and confidential emotional support service available nationally via telephone, email, internet and through the post. The service uses male and female volunteers trained in active listening skills and effective questioning techniques to respond to client enquiries.

As well as a dedicated helpline, MYH runs a youth advocacy service based around a website (muslimyouth.net). Our aim is to encourage British Muslim youth to develop peer-support networks, access specialist and mainstream support services, and care for their social and mental well-being. We also run creative projects with diverse groups of young people in London.

[2] To download the report, go to: www.myh.org.uk . The report will be on the website from 5pm on 6/2/2013.