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Muslim bodies must rise to tackle extremism, make all efforts to fight radicals, urges Shahid Malik

Bemoans MCB's decision to boycott holocaust memorial ceremony. John Battle MP, Danny Rich, Dr Reza Shah Kazemi and Mehri Niknam also speak at interfaith gathering

By Abdul Sattar

LONDON: Bemoaning MCB's decision to boycott holocaust memorial ceremony, Muslim MP Shahid Malik said Muslim organisations must rise to the challenge of extremism and make all efforts to fight those who are defaming Islam by misinterpreting this great religion.

He was speaking at a seminar on "Is Religion the Cause of Integration or Isolation in Today's British Society?" at School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS) organised by The Joseph Interfaith Foundation on Tuesday.

The seminar was presided over by John Battle MP, Rabbi Danny Rich (chief executive Liberal Judaism GB), Dr Reza Shah Kazemi (author & researcher associated at IIS) and Mehri Niknam (executive director of the Foundation) also spoke on the occasion.

Mr Malik said, "People are still turning a blind eye to the threat of extremism and hoping it will all go away. It cannot and it will not of its own accord. Of course the Government has a role, but with the Muslim com-

munity itself more has to be done to acknowledge that this challenge exists."

For years, I have argued that the British National Party is a white phenomenon which it is up to the white community to address. Well, extremism exists in the name of Islam and that's something the Muslim community has to take leadership on.

"It's my view that the mainstream, umbrella Muslim organisations have not risen to the challenge and don't accept the depth of the problem that's facing them."

He said that Muslims did not have to be apologetic or ashamed of the acts of those who carried out terrorist activities on the name of Islam. "But that does not mean that they (Muslims) do not have any responsibility at all. They must keep an eye on those who misinterpret Islam and exploit the feelings of our youth. They must enable our youth to express their grievances in a democratic way. I am not saying that Iraq policy of the government was right but if anyone has an objection to government policy, he must protest against it

in a democratic way. Violence or terrorist activities cannot be justified on any ground."

If said that some sections of media were trying to project a negative image of Muslims. "First they spread many negative things against Muslims. Then they ask Muslims to have a debate on a certain topics. When Muslim refuse, they even look they are not ready to even have a debate on things. This is very negative approach."

Recently I was asked by a journalist as to how I felt giving a speech at holocaust memorial ceremony. "I do not know as to why the media people ask such questions. Do they think Muslims do not have sympathy for the six million people who were killed during the Second World War?"

Dr Reza Shah Kazemi said that extremists were the enemies of traditional Islam. "I would say that traditional Islam is the real enemy of fundamentalism. Islamic ideology and spirituality must be distinguished. Spirituality can enable us to see reality. God created man in His Image. He created diverse communities to test human beings. Differences have

put us in a situation where we could compete in doing good works. It is a competition of goodness."

He asserted that Islam is strongly opposed to religious chauvinism. The Quran is the confirmer of early scriptures. It tells us to fight evils and fighting evil is the greatest jihad.

Rabbi Danny Rich said that there was nothing like pure religion. "We always learn things from cultures and traditions. For instance Greek philosophy greatly influenced Judaism and Christianity was influenced by Judaism. Many Christian and Jewish thinkers learned a number of things from the Arab philosophers."

He said that there was no

harm in having a better understanding of one's own religion. "Having a better understanding of one's own religion does not make him hate the people of other faiths. On the contrary it helps them to learn many things from the people of other faiths."

Mehri Niknam, executive director of the Foundation, said that the purpose of her organisation was to promote a better understanding of different faiths.

She says, "Inter-faith dialogue is a long process, it cannot be truly achieved in a lifetime because it is something that has to be constantly worked at."

"But both Judaism and Islam believe that human

beings are put on this earth as vice-regents of God, to carry out God's will for the benefit of all humankind."

"To desist from creating this peace is a negation of one's duty as a religious person."

The programme was attended by a large number of academics, students and people from various faith organisations.

John Battle MP in his concluding remarks said that it was heartening to see that many organisations were working for interfaith harmony. "We need interfaith harmony to promote community cohesion. Joseph Foundation deserves our appreciation for organising this programme."



LONDON: Shahid Malik MP, Dr Reza Shah Kazemi, Rabbi Danny Rich, John Battle MP and Mehri Niknam MP address the seminar entitled "Is Religion the Cause of Integration or Isolation in Today's British Society?" (Nation pictures)