

Lord Shaukat Khan

Britain's communities post 7/7

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, may I first of all offer my apologies for coming late. As you know, the events outside [Tour de France] are such that it made us tour around the city more than we wished for but I hope that I am not inconveniencing you too much.

Today and every day since the 7/7 we remember those who lost their lives, and also those who suffered tremendously after that fatal incident where 52 people lost their lives. And as we remember those, we also remember those who on that day worked tirelessly to help and deal with such an enormous tragedy from public services to many other individuals and people in order to support those people suffering.

That day, and those that followed demonstrated the strength and resolve of the communities that make this city and this country a model of tolerance for all to see. Over the past two years, people of all faiths, languages, colours, different backgrounds and ages have come together not only to show their abhorrence to extremism of any kind but also to work together in building bridges between communities, creating better understandings; isolating those that are trying to create divisions and fears; and of course there are many who have tried to allow the Muslim community in every event that has happened in the city or anywhere else in the world; and the good thing has been that people have stood fast; and have not let those people get away with it.

Muslims like others have also been affected, both emotionally and socially. Attempts have been continuously made to malign them, as I've said in any negative event that occurs or happens. But it is a credit to the community leaders, the community members for staying calm and working with authorities, neighbours, friends and organisations to distance themselves from criminal elements of our communities and societies. And as Lord Taverne reminded us that these are existing in all communities whether they be Muslim, Christians, Jewish or others.

The communities have become more aware of the environment that they are living in and the need to take their roles and responsibilities seriously and proactively. And this has a positive effect on our communities. The increase in joint activities between all faiths, and this has been quite evident from the inter-faith dialogues that are going on, and other activities, both the Churches and the Jewish communities and Muslim communities are undertaking. Secondly it is also the inclusion of Tolerance and understanding of others at all levels, both in educational institutions as well as in community organisations.

There is a promotion of activities; both cultural activities that are also involving all communities and are also a positive sign of such tolerance; as well as debates and discussions about the issues and problems that are taking place amongst the communities.

All of these signs are of a positive development for the Tolerance programme and issues; hence the need to build upon such progress and positive desires is essential. But at the same time, we must also look at some of the issues that affect those people and certainly are of concern, both internally and externally.

We still have alienation of young people amongst our communities. We still have social isolation of groups, particularly the Muslims. We still have social deprivation amongst the communities, both in the inner cities as well as in the outer cities. We still have a problem of external issues as like the previous speaker said; Lord Taverne, that we have issues like Kashmir. We have issues like Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan to name but a few. These are also of concern. We cannot isolate those or assume that they have nothing to do with what people feel and think and which affects them. Britain is a multi-cultural and tolerant country. We are proud of it. We need to ensure that that tolerance and understanding is built upon, both at a political level, a social level, economic level and at community level.

We can be negative and keep thinking about the past and be stuck in the blame culture. We must not let ourselves be held back by such views and by those people. We need to be positive. We need to look ahead. We need to be creative and positive in our approach and in our thinking, and that also means that we need to make decisions which are hard but important. That we look at Islam, not for what few people present but in a wider context. As the previous speaker said, as is well-known, Islam is a good religion that talks about tolerance, and talks about love and talks about understanding. And why do we pick up only the negative things or only a small minority and highlight those things. It is up to us. It is up to all of us who believe in tolerance, who believe in a fairer and good society to promote those people, those projects that seek tolerance.

We have a common interest, Muslims as well as others. We are part of this society. We will be affected as much as anybody else. So we have a vested interest in having a tolerant and a caring society. And we must not allow those people who are always looking at creating division and thus creating an intolerant society. I believe that we have the resolve. I believe that we have the means and we have the resources to do far more positive work and far more creative thinking in creating a tolerant society; and that will be happening at all levels. We need to be helping our young people to understand what tolerance is. We need to be helping those communities who are living, not only in the inner cities of London but also in the rural communities. They are as important as we are here. Their understanding of a multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-religious society is as important as it is in the centre of London. We have all got to work together and make sure that we never allow extremes of any religion to dictate to what we need to be a tolerant society.

Thank you very much.