

Mosques Update

News from the Labour Party

w: labour.org.uk/faith Issue 1, 2008



Britain's new Labour Prime Minister outlines his vision for the future: “This is my moral compass”

In September last year, Gordon Brown gave his first speech to the Labour Party Conference as Party Leader and Prime Minister. In it he outlined his vision for the future of Britain—and it was a vision inspired in part by his own religious roots.

Speaking to the packed auditorium in Bournemouth, the Prime Minister explained that his upbringing as the son of a Church of Scotland minister had played an important role in shaping his political beliefs and in spurring him into public service. He explained how one passage from the Bible had persuaded his father that everyone has something to offer and a role to play. Today, Gordon is putting this into practice.

For Gordon Brown, Britain must continue to be an inclusive society: a “Britain of all the talents”. Under his leadership, we will continue to confront and dismantle unfair discrimination and prejudice—because everyone has a role to play, whatever their age, religion, gender or ethnicity.

One of the most important ways of achieving this is by ensuring that everyone is given the best possible start in life. Labour has already been making progress. Since 1997, for example, child poverty rates have fallen faster than in any other European country.

Message from the Prime Minister to mark Eid al-Adha

I am delighted to send my best wishes to everyone celebrating Eid al-Adha.

As one of the most auspicious events in the Muslim calendar, Eid al-Adha brings friends and families together, and encourages Muslims to think about those less fortunate than themselves. As such, it is a festival that we can all learn from.

At this special time for our Muslim communities we can also reflect on the tremendous contribution of Muslims to British life over many decades.

My best wishes to you and your family. Eid Mubarak.



But the Prime Minister recognises that we have an obligation not only to Britain, but to the whole world. Gordon mentioned the situation in Darfur, Burma and Sudan and declared: “human rights are universal and no injustice can last forever”. And we will continue to confront dangerous extremism around the world.

Since 1997, Labour has more than doubled development aid to £5 billion. In his Pre-Budget report, Chancellor Alistair Darling announced that this will rise even further—to £9 billion by 2012. At the Conference Gordon stated his aim that we should be the first generation to ensure that every child in the world has the right to attend school.

This investment is already making a real difference. It is because the Labour Government has taken its international responsibilities so seriously that we have been able to respond quickly and effectively to international disasters. Following the recent cyclone in Bangladesh, for instance, DFID was quick to offer emergency support and relief.

Gordon's vision of Britain is of a society in which people are included and rights are respected. It is a society in which everyone is equipped to reach their potential and realise their goals. His is a vision which is desperately needed in the world today.

First ever faiths reception at Labour Conference

At this year's Conference, the Labour Party held its first ever reception for Faith Groups. The event was hosted by Harriet Harman MP and Stephen Timms MP, and was attended by around a hundred people, including several MPs and Government ministers. Muslim MPs Sadiq Khan and Shahid Malik were among those present.

The event launched a new initiative by the Labour Party to work with people of faith. When Gordon Brown became Prime Minister, he asked Stephen Timms to become the Party's first ever Vice Chair for Faith Groups. Stephen also advises the Government on issues concerning faith communities at the new Government Equalities Office.

Speaking as the reception began, Harriet welcomed the contribution of faith groups in our society and expressed her enthusiasm for Labour's commitment to developing strong links with faith communities. Parmjit Dhanda MP, the Government minister who co-chairs the Faith Communities Consultative Council, also welcomed the Labour initiative.

In his speech, Stephen Timms said, "what we want to say as a party is that, in our view, faith is a very good starting point for politics." He added, "we want people whose starting point is faith to come and work with us, join us, tell us your ideas."

Stephen acknowledged that the Labour Party has sometimes in the past shied away from talking about faith. But he was clear that this would no longer be the case.

A message from Harriet Harman MP



Labour's Chair & Deputy Leader

Throughout our history, the Labour Party has championed a fairer, more equal society in which every person is valued and respected. As I meet people from across the country, I find that there are many who share this vision who are motivated by religious faith.

That is why Gordon has appointed a Vice Chair who is responsible for working with faith groups. Stephen Timms is very well placed to fulfil this role, and I am looking forward to working with him in it.

Gordon has outlined his vision of a Britain "of all the talents", in which everyone has a part to play. Faith groups continue to perform a vital role in many communities, and I want to see this continue.



Parmjit Dhanda MP, Rushanara Ali (Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Bethnal Green and Bow) and Stephen Timms MP at the Faith Groups Reception

"You are welcome in our party and we respect the commitment which you have made," Stephen stressed. "We are not going to ask you to apologise for your faith, or demand that you justify it – we simply want to listen to what you have to say, to welcome the fact that your thinking starts with faith in God, because we think you can help us develop the policies which will be the right way forward for Britain."

Speaking after the event Stephen added: "This evening's reception demonstrates the lasting influence that faith has within our Party. I am delighted that so many Labour activists—including several MPs—were able to attend and I look forward to working alongside them again in the future".

Launch of Muslim Labour Movement

November 2007 saw the launch of the Muslim Labour Movement. MLM is grassroots-based, democratic, and aims to promote a stronger relationship and better understanding between British Muslims and the Labour Party. MLM's General Secretary, Muddassar Ahmed, said: "I look forward to working with Muslim Labour Party members across Britain in order to help shape party policy and help Labour win a fourth term."

Stephen Timms, Labour's Vice Chair for Faith Groups, said: "I warmly welcome the establishment of the Muslim Labour Movement, which I hope will provide a good bridge between the Labour Party and Muslim community".

For more information about MLM, please see their website at www.mlm-uk.org

Labour is stronger with Muslims

A message from **Stephen Timms MP, Labour's Vice Chair for Faith Groups**

When Gordon Brown took over as Prime Minister, I was delighted that he asked me to be the Party's first ever Vice Chair for Faith Groups. I am looking forward immensely to working with Muslims and other faith communities across the country.

My constituency is in Newham where, according to the 2001 census, around 25% of the population are Muslims. Newham is an extremely diverse society and faith plays a substantial role and I am certain that our community is richer as a result.

As the local MP, I regularly visit local mosques. Many Muslim community groups in my constituency provide important services. As the Labour Party, we want to support you in this sort of work.

More than any other political party in Britain, the Labour party has an outstanding record in working with Muslims. In 1997, Britain elected a Labour Party candidate as its first ever Muslim MP. We now have four Muslim MPs in Parliament—all of them Labour! And we now have two Muslim groups linked to the Party: Muslim Friends of Labour and the Muslim Labour Movement.

People often say that faith and politics should never mix. I disagree. Faith is a great starting point for politics. My own experience is that my politics has been deeply influenced by my Christian faith, and I know many Muslims who feel the same.



In November, I spoke for the second year at the Islam Channel's "Global Peace and Unity" event at the Excel Centre in London Docklands. It is a massive event, attended by thousands and with a huge variety of exhibition stands by Muslim groups of all kinds.

In my speech I said: "We need more people taking up politics from the starting point of faith. Because faith is the source of decent values: generosity, solidarity, cohesion, family loyalty, support for peace and anger at injustice and poverty.

"Decent values which the Muslim community shows in abundance. Those are the very values which we need in our politics, and which this event can help us to promote".

News in Brief

Since being elected in 1997, Labour has been working hard, both locally and nationally. Here is just some of the latest news about what we have been doing.

Muslim support for Ken's London re-election

The British Muslim Initiative has issued a document calling for the re-election of Ken Livingstone as London Mayor on **1 May 2008** as being "in the best interest of the Muslim communities of London". The document has been signed by over sixty Muslim organisations and personalities and notes that Ken "has stood out in support of a multi-cultural society and has supported the Muslim communities of the city against racism and Islamophobia as well as all other minorities against all types of prejudice."

Government promotes inter-faith work

In December 2007, the Government launched its consultation document on inter-faith work. At the launch, Hazel Blears, the Communities Secretary, spoke of the Prime Minister's vision for an inter-faith council in every community, and expressed her own enthusiasm for helping faith communities to make a positive contribution to Britain. Parmjit Dhanda, the Government minister who co-chairs the Faith Communities Consultative Council, thanked members of the Council for their support of the consultation.

Islamic Finance

Kitty Ussher MP, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, has continued to support Islamic Finance. She recently said, "The UK is at the forefront of developments in Islamic finance and London continues to seize new opportunities". Lord Digby Jones, UK Minister for Trade and Investment, has also said, "Our goal is to position the UK as the international partner of choice for the provision of Islamic financial services, including developing strong partnerships with other centres of Islamic finance".

Gordon Brown supports Darfur concert

In October 2007, Islamic Relief, among others, sponsored a concert in London to highlight the conflict in Darfur. In a video message, Gordon Brown said, "I want to thank all of you who have been active on this issue from the artists and musicians who are performing here today to religious leaders from all communities who have been leading prayers and campaigns for the people of Darfur". He added, "we will continue working together with all of you to bring this suffering to an end".

Muslim MP leads way in International Development

When Gordon Brown took over as Prime Minister in June he appointed Shahid Malik, one of Labour's four Muslim MPs, to a ministerial post at the Department for International Development.

International Development has played a prominent role under this Labour government and, since 1997, we've more than doubled spending on it. And it's having a significant impact. DFID has committed £100 million to an education programme in Bangladesh which will help provide 17 million children a year with primary education. In Afghanistan, an immunisation programme has saved around 35,000 lives.

Following the earthquake in Pakistan, Britain gave over £120 million in humanitarian relief and reconstruction. Labour is providing significant aid to the Pakistan. In contrast to 1997, where UK aid was only £26 million, in 2006/07 UK aid is over £100 million. In Bangladesh the figures are £43 million in 1997 and £109 million in 2007, typically used for health and education projects.

Upon his appointment, Shahid said: "DFID has made a real difference to people's lives in the developing world, especially Asia, where fewer people are living on the poverty line, where more children are in school, and when disaster has struck – such as the Pakistan and Gujarat earthquakes and the Boxing Day Tsunami – lives have been saved."

As part of Douglas Alexander's team, Shahid's responsibilities include the Middle East. In 2007, Britain gave almost £27 million in aid to the Palestinians. Shahid welcomed the Prime Minister's announcement towards the end of last year that



between 2008 and 2011 the support provided to the Palestinian Authority will more than double to £243 million, subject to political progress.

Since Shahid was appointed, DFID has been heavily involved in responding to the cyclone in Bangladesh. Over 6 million people were affected by the disaster, which has claimed thousands of lives. DFID has already committed more than £10 million, which will be spent both on emergency relief and on helping survivors to rebuild their lives. This follows £3.6 million which was provided for Bangladesh following the floods in August.

In early December Shahid said: "It's been two weeks since Cyclone Sidr devastated large parts of Bangladesh, but the lives of people are still at risk. There will be difficult times ahead for those affected but I am incredibly proud of the contribution being made by Muslim communities throughout the UK to help those in need".

We want to hear from you

More than ever before, the Labour Party is committed to listening to and learning from those of religious faith—including those in our mosques. We realise that many of you cannot commit to supporting any particular political party. Even so, we are interested to hear what you have to say, and to help you to continue your valuable work across the country. There are a few things you can do to help us in this work.

- 1. Tell your friends about this newsletter.** We want to be in dialogue with as many people of faith as possible. Encourage others to join our mailing list at www.labour.org.uk/faith.
- 2. Ask to display this newsletter.** Ask if this newsletter can be displayed in your mosque or community centre so that others in the Muslim community can read about what Labour is doing.
- 3. Tell us how we can help you.** Write to Stephen Timms MP (Vice Chair for Faith Groups) at The Labour Party, 39 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0HA, or email stephen@stephentimms.org

To join the Labour Party visit www.labour.org.uk/join or telephone us on 08705 900 200.

For further information about the *Muslim Labour Movement* and *Muslim Friends of Labour*, contact:

- The Muslim Labour Movement, PO Box 62511, London, E6 9DW • w: www.mlm-uk.org
- Muslim Friends of Labour, PO Box 56307, London, SE1 7XS • e: mail@mflabour.org.uk