

# STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

As a colleague of Dr Patrick Sookhdeo and at the same time a Muslim who has been an outspoken and vocal critic of the policies of both UK, US and other governments in relation to actions which violate the blood and the rights of both Muslims and non-Muslims, I wish to issue this statement in response to the article by Mehdi Hassan "How the Fear of Being Criminalised Has Forced Muslims to Silence" (The Guardian, 8 September 2011).

Brother Mehdi Hasan's article places Dr Sookhdeo in the category of "crude anti-Islam propagandists". I would ask my brother, Mehdi, how this characterisation of Dr Sookhdeo corresponds with my knowledge of his tireless campaigning jointly with the late Sheikh Dr Zaki Badawi to defend Muslim minorities from slaughter in the Balkans by fascist Serbian so-called Christians, his ongoing robust defence of persecuted Muslim minorities suffering violence at the hands of far-right Indian nationalists who desecrate Hindu teachings to foment communal hate, and here in Britain the way in which the church congregation he led in East London went to protect the local mosque at a time of anti-Muslim hostility. Dr Sookhdeo's strong stand against the war on Iraq is also clear evidence that he is not against Muslims.

I would also ask you how you can make a criticism like this of anybody when you yourself are on record as referring to non-Muslims and atheists by the derogatory term "kuffar" and also as "cattle" and "people of no intelligence". Is it appropriate for you to apply such epithets to the vast majority of your own New Statesman readers and the vast majority of your fellow British citizens?

In fact, Dr Sookhdeo and I have worked together on the very serious issue of the persecution of Christian minority communities in Muslim-majority settings, where daily, innocent children, women and men are murdered or mutilated and churches are burned, while Muslim minorities in the West remain silent in their enjoyment of freedom of religion. In stark contrast to the example of Islam's prophet (may peace be upon him) granting leave for a Christian delegation to conduct Christian services in the Prophet's own mosque in Medina, the present day Muslim world has desecrated the Quranic teaching that the Muslims must be a people who "enjoin that which is just and forbid that which unjust".

You write of Dr Sookhdeo's involvement in military training. Dr Sookhdeo's primary purpose has been to give British officers a greater cultural understanding in their various deployments as well as to address racial issues. He is well qualified academically to do this, has an in depth knowledge of classical Islam, and has lectured on race, culture and ethnic issues for many years while working in inner city Christian ministry. At the Defence Academy of the UK, he has ensured that Muslim voices from a broad spectrum are heard, such as Dr Azzam Tamimi, Professor Tariq Ramadan, Sheikh Ibrahim Mogra of the Muslim Council of Britain, Dr Tawfik Hamid of the Potomac institute, and others including myself. His approach is based always on facts and statistics, and it is unacceptable to expect any researcher of integrity, such as Dr Sookhdeo, to hide facts or distort statistics in order to satisfy or dissatisfy others.

Your article also speaks of how fear of state authorities has reduced British Muslims to silence. I will have to say while this feeling may be the case for some, there is not evidence of that tendency in the very robust and articulate critique presented of British government and religious establishment by my own Muslim colleagues. Rather, the only attempts at silencing and persecution that I have ever experienced have come from self-appointed "UK religious leaders", both Muslim and some Anglican, who are not willing to hear dissident Muslim voices who object to their overweening arrogance, hypocrisy and obsessive greed for power, political influence and consumption of British tax-payers' money.

It is these establishment faith leaders who have sought to muzzle and silence those religious believers who are prophetic voices for justice, and I can assure you that Dr Sookhdeo himself has paid a very heavy price in persecution from establishment Christian institutions, not only denominations but also mission organisations, for the integrity he has shown in challenging the institutional racism of the Church in its neglect of poor, non-white persecuted Christian minorities. While he argues for the vital necessity of protecting people, both Muslim and Christian, he is equally robust in declaring that ideas, both Muslim and Christian, must be open to be critiqued. For this prophetic integrity in speaking out for poor and persecuted Muslim and Christian minorities, those who have no voice to defend their innocent blood, Patrick has my absolute support.

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