

Muslim Professionals Forum's Round Table Discussion on Growing Knife Crimes in the Capital

London: 19th July 2017

The Muslim Professionals Forum (MPF)'s round table discussion on growing knife crimes in London was held last night (18th July 2017) at a Committee Room in the House of Lords. It was noted that after hearing about the death of a 20 year old student Syed Jamanoor Islam, brutally stabbed to death yards away from his home in Mile End in East London on 12th April 2017, the Muslim Professionals Forum were moved to address the issue of gun and knife crime in London. The purpose of the discussion was to bring different sections and stakeholders within the community to come together to discuss, raise awareness and to make recommendations in tackling growing knife crimes in London.

Lords, Baronesses, a Member of Parliament, representative from the Metropolitan Police, academics, the families of victims of knife crimes, leading campaign groups, lawyers, activists, community and faith leaders were in attendance. Lord Ahmed, Baroness Uddin and Lord Sheikh supported the MPF's initiative to organise this round table discussion with Mohammed Khaled Noor, the MPF's Chairperson, moderated the discussion.

The panel of guests speakers included Rushanara Ali MP, Dr. Neville Lawrence, Dr. Janet Foster from Department of Sociology at the LSE, Sean Yates – the Chief Superintendent at Metropolitan Police; Dr. Angela Herbert MBE from Inside Out Solutions; Simon Woolley – the Director of Operation Black Vote, Pastor Lorraine Jones MBE - the Director of Dwaynamic, Dalwardin Babu OBE – the Former Chief Superintendent of Metropolitan Police, Janette Collins - the CEO of The Crib Social Inclusion, Cllr Caroline Selman who is a Cabinet Member for Community Safety & Enforcement in Hackney and Mine Conkbair who is an author and consultant.

Speakers in unison raised their concerns on growing knife crimes in the capital, which has been on the rise in recent months. It was reported that in London alone, 11 people were stabbed to death within a 16 day period. The numbers are truly horrific and without being able to identify any specific correlations, this is simply unacceptable. Those responsible for the attacks should be brought to justice and we do not want to see any more lives being taken away at the hands of guns, knives and acid attacks. This cycle of violence must be stopped. One death is too many. It is imperative that the collective initiatives of law enforcement agencies, local authorities, the community, voluntary groups and community leaders are needed.

It was highlighted that police do not always have adequate expertise to establish a correlation; so involvement of community, voluntary and youth organisations are very important. Young people have the opportunity to succeed. The key is to work in partnership with community organisations as they are best placed to understand what is going on and how to tailor a solution. It is important to work with other stakeholders and local authorities need to support all families as it is evident that physical and psychological deprivation can lead to a chain of violence. One person said that when a child gets expelled, you can already write the date for them to go to prison. It is important to look after the families as a whole and fathers play an important role in the family to be bold and brave enough to confront the symptoms as they arise. Another speaker said that the Government needs to invest in longer-term initiatives that truly cause change at a roots level – which includes specifically trained professionals giving closer support for prospective parents who are at risk of not forming that critical attachment/relationship with their child – because this is the root of the self-loathing, mistrust and hatred which soon develops in these children who go on to commit these knife crimes.

The police need the community involved because there is a big concern by the community that any interactions with the young black community and the police has led to complaints of feeling automatically dehumanised and criminalised. One comment that was made was that white police officers often look through a prism that black kids are criminals. The community needs to be able to trust the police before getting consensual policing and more black and minority officers are needed to reassure the whole community. We need to be able to influence what is happening on the streets and if one stakeholder within the community does not play an active part within the community then they do not know what is happening. If the community does not trust the police then they will be reluctant to approach them to report crimes. More support is needed from the government to the police service instead of increased cuts.

All in all, the event was very successful and hopes to create recommendations from the discussion.