Dear Labour,

Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) requests clarity – perhaps naively – from the New not New Labour Party as to what difference there is on its conceptualisation of minorities, Muslims and the marginalised. Whilst bold claims have been made about the reversion to certain old values by your party, we remain (understatedly) concerned.

Those of us who are or work with or hail from groups that bear the brunt of non-discriminating societal ills, targeted social and political discrimination as groups, and crushing prejudice against us as individuals, have seen little difference in past, present and future stances on the problems we face but also the way we are seen in the political realm. In short, we are the victims of misrepresentation, racism(s), otherisation and discriminatory and targeted laws and policies, and yet who is there to complain to for change?

Rather than finding an ear to listen to the traumas we have faced, whether as victims of new Sus laws, or targeted policing and anti-terrorism regimes, we are faced with the same demonisation and prejudice we need political actors to overturn. At this very moment, Muslims are facing an Islamophobic and racist assault on their beliefs and values through so-called works of art and satire. Rather than understand the anger and the injsutice we are once again being told that we should understand and respect free speech. Muslims and all marginalised ‘others’ are not, despite the outpourings of system compliant so-called representatives, unable to understand. Indeed clarity is what we actually bring to the situation. We know that our young men and women find themselves criminalised, often imprisoned for the political expressions in support of justice e.g. after the Gaza demonstrations of 2008-09, or for some off the cuff remark on a social networking site, or a few lines of poetry on the back of a till receipt as with the ‘Lyrical Terrorist’. There is no free speech for us, just against us. We are not free to speak and we are fit to be protected from hate speech despite such provisions existing in law.

Will the Labour Party take any stance on this other than that of its predecessor? This is not an aberration of opinion that can be blamed, as so much actually can, on the Blair years? It goes right back to the support party luminaries gave to Salman Rushdie to open the racist tirades against Muslims and thus so many over two decades ago. This process of dehumanisation continues to accelerate, and its effects can be seen in the relentless warmongering of the last decade led by your predecessors where the hundreds of thousands killed and millions affected can be forgotten and dismissed as a swarm of unworthy others.

This is the challenge of newness for the Labour Party. To change its mindset and to become real leaders and motivators for change. Unless your philosophy adapts to accept its complicity in events past, no amount of new or old posturing will change the destructive trajectory this society is on.

Yours sincerely,

Massoud Shadjareh

Chair of the Islamic Human Rights Commission