

UK TODAY: THE ANTI-MUSLIM BACKLASH IN THE WAKE OF 11th SEPTEMBER 2001

**A Summary of Incidents of Anti-Muslim Harassment,
Discrimination and Hostility Reported to the Islamic Human
Rights Commission @ 19th October 2001**

October 2001

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VI. Introduction

This is a preliminary report of anti-Muslim incidents reported to the Islamic Human Rights Commission. As such its definitions and categorisations are not finalised. There are a number of issues that need significant discussion, however, time limitations have prevented further elaboration in this report.

In particular the issue of media coverage of events in the wake of September 11 and its relationship to anti-Muslim attacks needs further consideration than can be given in this report. The Broadsheet cry to root out Islamists and fundamentalists, and cruder calls for bombing fundamentalists in the tabloids and their radio and television counterparts have clearly left the community reeling both in terms of their psychological effect on the Muslim community as target of these calls and the non-Muslim community as respondents to the calls.

There are also a number of issues relating to effective and professional policing that need to be raised. Some are mentioned or are apparent in the course of this report. Again there is insufficient time to address these in significant detail in this report.

In both the cases of the media and the police there have been notable exceptions of good practice (more in the latter than the former), and IHRC welcomes those. It also recognises that it has received and has had reported to it many incidents of non-Muslim support for Muslims at a time when they have been targeted and demonised.

Clearly the figures given below do not reflect the full experience of hostility and discrimination faced by the community in recent weeks.

IHRC has made certain provisional recommendations at the end of this report based on its findings and its consultation with the community through its membership and campaign network. This is not a final document. We hope its findings will be used to assist appropriate bodies in planning for the protection of minorities, as well as those who wish to break out of the cycle of anti-Muslim demonisation and violence that the country appears to be descending into.

VII. Nature of Cases

Cases can be loosely broken down into the following categories:

1. Verbal and written abuse

74 incidents reported.

Verbal abuse reported has ranged from offensive and obscene to threatening. Its forms have included malicious phone calls (the majority of cases reported) to Muslim institutions and alarmingly also to individuals. In a number of cases congregations of worshippers were abused whilst praying by persons entering the places of worship at prayer time and leaving before prayers were completed.

Written threats have likewise been received by institutions and individuals in the form of emails, notes through letterboxes, notes left on cars etc.

Of the verbal and written abuse reported approximately half involved death threats.

2. Discrimination

8 incidents reported

Discrimination can take many forms. In particular school children have been faced with pressure from peers and even more alarmingly from teachers who have isolated them, often specifically citing the fact that they are Muslim and should therefore be shunned.

Other forms of discrimination reported include economic boycotting. Some Muslim run businesses have reported a significant drop in non-Muslim custom since the September 11 attacks.

3. Psychological harassment and pressure

17 incidents reported

A number of those reporting incidents to IHRC and of those calling in generally or for advice have stated that either they or someone they know has felt pressurised into doing something contrary to their religious principles due to fear for their physical safety. This type of incident ranges from Muslim women removing their hijab (headscarf) to Muslim men shaving off their beards.

Muslim people have reported being wary of leaving home. At least two Muslim schools felt that they could not open in the days immediately following the September 11 attacks, for fear of reprisals.

Other cases include verbal abuse and discrimination against children at school. Whilst these also fall under the sub-categories above and below, IHRC sees them as being psychologically disturbing for their victims, some of whom are as young as 4 years of age. Incidents include children being isolated or being informed by their non-Muslim friends that their parents will no longer allow them to play with Muslim children. In some schools disparaging remarks about Islam and Muslims have been made in the presence of teachers and gone unchallenged and in a number of cases have been made by teachers themselves. In one incident that took place on the afternoon of September 11, a teacher announced the news of the attacks on the WTC to a class of 12 year olds saying 'the Palestinians have attacked America.' Needless to say this was an irresponsible description, but sadly one which will have a profound impact on the impressionable minds of pupils. In another incident a young child was given two weeks of detention for making what was deemed by the teacher to be a pro-Bin Laden remark.

Other forms of bullying have included taunting by non-Muslim children that Muslim children are murderers etc.

Much of the community perceive that they are being shunned by the non-Muslim population e.g. people who were previously friendly have begun to ignore and avoid Muslims they know. There is a general feeling that there is a sense of tension in public arenas where visible Muslims are present. This has been compounded in areas where anti-Muslim graffiti e.g. the slogans in South Shields and Liverpool calling for Muslims to be killed, create a highly pressurised public environment.

In some cases where harassment was reported to the police, the advice given to the victims was to 'stay at home.' This is particularly worrying for IHRC. The current spate of attacks on Muslims clearly creates a pressure on Muslims to remove vestiges of their identity or retreat from public arenas in order to protect themselves and this should be recognised as a form of harassment in itself. Police advice that victims should stay at home is a depressing acknowledgement, albeit unintentional, that such harassment is acceptable. IHRC recognises that police forces around the country are overstretched. However this type of advice without any other form of victim support is not acceptable as it legitimises the further isolation and marginalisation of an already excluded community.

4. Serious Crimes of Violence

88 incidents reported in total

(i) Physical violence

52 incidents reported

This has ranged from pushing, shoving and being spat at to violent attacks leaving victims hospitalised and in one case paralysed.

A large number of reported incidents involved victims being spat at. One case involved rotten fruit being thrown at two Muslim women as they walked out of college.

Many cases have been reported of Muslim women having their scarves forcibly pulled off. These types of incidents are serious assaults in themselves but have an added element. They have a particularly humiliating aspect to them involving both the removal of essential clothing and dousing in a liquid that is considered impure in Islamic teaching. In another incident a schoolgirl had her scarf pulled off by a female adult at her school gates.

IHRC has received direct reports of serious physical assaults. It has also monitored press coverage of attacks. Amongst the more severe assaults, there have been: at least three clubbings with bats, an attack on a child with pepper spray, and a Muslim being deliberately run over with a car.

Additionally there have been several cases involving beatings and kickings. Reports of three rape cases are currently circulating. Whilst there has yet to be an official recognition that these cases may have an anti-Muslim component there is a strong feeling amongst those communities from which the victims hail that this component is part of these attacks.

(ii) Criminal Damage

36 incidents

These have predominantly taken the form of attacks on mosques and Islamic centres. There have been some cases of individuals having their homes and cars vandalised. In the majority of these cases there were persistent and repeated attacks on the victims' property. Damage included graffiti, burning, hammer or heavy object attacks, egging and, more sinisterly, petrol bombing. In a number of incidents across the country mosques had dog excrement put through their letterboxes.

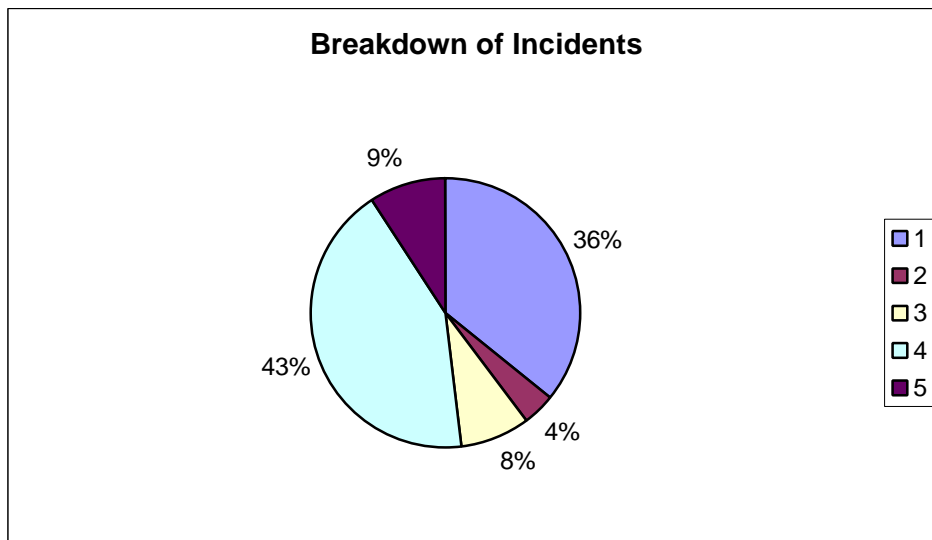
In one incident a Muslim graveyard was vandalised and many graves desecrated.

The use of alcohol – either poured through letterboxes or around properties - is again noticeable.

Breakdown of incidents reported.

A total of 206 incidents have been reported

I.	Verbal & Written Abuse	36%
II.	Discrimination	4%
III.	Psychological Pressure & Harassment	8%
IV.	Serious Crimes of Violence	43%
V.	Other	9%



Conclusions & Recommendations

IHRC is deeply concerned that there has been a significant rise in anti-Muslim attacks, hostility and discrimination in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the USA. It notes that women and children have been particularly targeted.

Whilst this report focuses largely on the statistical breakdown of incidents reported it should be noted that the nature of incidents, however few, in any given category have very worrying implications. The number of businesses reporting economical boycotts may so far be relatively small, but the possible repercussions and implications are profound. The historical precedents of economic boycotts, particularly in 1930s Germany, should sound alarm bells. This is compounded by the fact that both the British National Party and the National Front have called for such action to be taken at various times in the last year.

We are also disheartened to note that a large number of incidents reported to us, including some serious crimes of violence, were not reported to the police. We are also deeply concerned that there is a chronic shortage of victim support schemes both in mainstream and Muslim communities.

Our provisional recommendations are as follows:

- I. Victims of crime and other forms of harassment should be encouraged to report these incidents to the police and monitoring groups such as IHRC.
- II. The government and appropriate agencies should encourage and support the development of community based support groups and networks.
- III. The law should be changed and the current protection afforded to other religious communities under the Race Relations Act 1976 should be extended to include Muslims.
- IV. The proposed legislation to make incitement to religious hatred a criminal offence should be carefully drafted so that legitimate religious, political and philosophical debate is not stifled.
- V. Muslim organisations should become more security conscious both in terms of their own physical security as well as the security of their congregations. They should develop into first points of call and reference for victims and agencies when dealing with the type of incidents detailed above.
- VI. Muslim organisations should organise Muslim groups in local areas to assist the community to maintain a high level of security, as the Jewish community already does.
- VII. That the government, police and other relevant agencies should provide similar support and training to such groups as has been given to the Community Security Trust and other Jewish groups concerned with security issues for their community.
- VIII. That police include anti-religious motivation in their monitoring of hate crimes.
- IX. That crimes aggravated by religious hatred incur harsher penalties, as they currently do if found to be aggravated by racial hatred.

Acknowledgements

The IHRC would like to acknowledge the campaign and monitoring work of the many members and campaigners associated with it. Many organisations and other groups have also assisted in the monitoring and feedback that formed the basis of this report. In particular we would like to acknowledge the Kafel Centre and RAHMA (Racial Attacks & Harassment Monitoring Association) in Swansea. Other groups have expressed the wish not to be named given the current spate of reprisal attacks.



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