

LETTER TO MEMBERS OF THE LONDON ASSEMBLY

FROM REPRESENTATIVES OF MANY LONDON COMMUNITY
AND FAITH-BASED GROUPS

9 November 2004

London Community Coalition
PO Box 35500
London
NW4

Dear Member of the London Assembly,

CALL FOR LONDON ASSEMBLY INQUIRY INTO QARADAWI INVITATION

Our community coalition wrote to the Mayor on 9 September to express our collective dismay and request a meeting with him to present very specific, hard evidence backing up our concerns about his embrace and public defence of Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi

Enclosed you will find a copy of an extensive report documenting the deep concerns of our unprecedented coalition of London communities regarding the Mayor's actions in relation to this one individual.

We came together as a group following the Mayor's repeated failures to answer the questions posed by our communities regarding his embrace of Sheikh Qaradawi; and his provocative behaviour in inviting him to return for the GLA-funded European Social Forum in October (although the Sheikh did not, in fact, attend).

After three weeks had passed without any reply to our letter of 9 September requesting a meeting with the Mayor, we published the letter. Extracts appeared in the Guardian on 28 September.

Many members of our communities asked us to intervene. It was right and proper to make them aware of our request and the lack of response. We genuinely wanted a constructive dialogue with the Mayor. We felt that he had been badly advised and that he would appreciate this after reviewing the enclosed material.

It is highly regrettable that despite his failure at that point to reply to us, the Mayor and his close associates wrote to, and briefed, the national press; offensively characterising us as Islamophobic, despite the presence of Muslims within the coalition. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our objection is to the intolerance of Qaradawi himself.

We oppose any form of prejudice or discrimination against Muslim people.

Much of our message is aimed at defending Muslims from the tensions inevitably caused by the statements of Sheikh Qaradawi and his supporters.

The Mayor finally sent us a reply on 27 October, six weeks after we wrote to him. He refused to meet us.

Instead of agreeing to hear our concerns, the Mayor attempted to aggressively refute what he assumed we would have raised had we met. His own speculation about our agenda, coupled with his offensive and false construction of our arguments is filled with the Mayor's ill-tempered, prejudicial assumptions. They do not fairly characterise us, or the real matters we sought to address.

We are shocked that the Mayor chose to act as he did, in taking the belligerent course of action described here. We expected him to agree to meet us in order to hear and address our concerns.

As a consequence of this refusal, we, the undersigned, have decided to send you, as the elected Members of the London Assembly responsible for scrutinising the actions of the Mayor, the evidence and documentation that we had hoped to present to the Mayor.

We request that you use your powers to thoroughly scrutinise the behaviour of the Mayor and his advisors in all aspects of Sheikh Qaradawi's visit to London and the aftermath of the visit, via a public inquiry conducted by members of the London Assembly.

In particular we request that the following matters are addressed by this inquiry:

- Was it appropriate for the Mayor of London to host Sheikh Qaradawi at City Hall as his honoured guest? How did the invitation to Sheikh Qaradawi arise? Who in the GLA took the initiative to invite Sheikh Qaradawi? Why did the Mayor uncritically praise and embrace Sheikh Qaradawi and treat him as his honoured guest?
- When and how the Mayor was advised of the background of Dr Al Qaradawi? Given that all the information in the enclosed document is publicly accessible, did the Mayor or his advisors know of its contents? If they did, how and when did they choose to react to criticisms such as those presented by our coalition? How did the Mayor's political advisors and non-partisan GLA officers interact? Who took the lead role in formulating the Mayor's public responses?
- Was the non-public and public conduct of the Mayor and his advisors in relation to our letter an appropriate way to respond to the concerns of legitimate London community representatives? Does the London Assembly feel that the behaviour of the Mayor was conducive to good community relations in London? Was it pursuant to his statutory obligations to promote good community relations? Did it encourage respect for the diversity and varying concerns of London's many communities?
- Do the current mechanisms for forum and stakeholder consultation function adequately? Is there evidence that communities affected by this issue were properly consulted and were their concerns addressed in any way whatsoever? Was it correct procedure for a Mayoral advisor to veto debate on a motion critical of the Mayor at the LGBT Forum?
- Is there a better way to address such matters in future? What lessons can be learnt?

Yours truly,

Luciana Berger (NEC - National Union of Students), Alan Clarke (NEC - National Union of Students), Matt Cooke (President, University of London Union), Bob Hodgson (Co-Chair, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Advisory Group), Rachael Hopkins (Co-Chair, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Advisory Group), John Hunt (Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association - GALHA), Ramesh Kallidai (Secretary General, Hindu Forum of Britain), Rev Richard Kirker (General Secretary, Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement), Derek Lennard (Chair, Gay & Lesbian Humanist Association - GALHA), Brett Lock (Outrage!), Nadia Mahmood (Middle Eastern Centre for Women's Studies / Iraqi Women's Freedom), Maryam Namazie (Iranian Organisation for Women's Liberation), Fariborz Pooya (Director, Iranian Secular Society), Amrik Singh (Chair, Sikh Federation UK), Daljit Singh Shergill (Co-ordinator, National Council of Gurdwaras), Gurjeet Singh (Co-ordinator, Khalsa Human Rights), Dabinderjit Singh (Co-ordinator, Sikh Secretariat), Jasvir Singh (British Organisation of Sikh Students), Bahram Soroush (Iranian Secular Society), Peter Tatchell (Outrage!), Venilal Vaghela (Vice-President, Hindu Council of Brent), Mike Whine (Spokesman, Board of Deputies of British Jews)

The material contained in the enclosed pack can be found in PDF format at www.londoncommunitycoalition.org