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Asylum report: inadequate assessment of religion-based claims

APPG (07.06.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1PXikH5> - Can you name the twelve apostles or when is Pentecost? How many books are in the Bible? Who betrayed Jesus to the Romans?

These are some of the questions asked of asylum seekers during their interview with the Home Office as part of their application to stay in the UK. Whilst they may seem reasonable, a new report reveals that such questions, often referred to as "Bible trivia", are a very poor way of assessing a conversion asylum claim and result in wrong decisions and expensive appeals.

An enquiry was set up to look at the quality of the assessment of religion-based asylum claims in the UK and the impact of the asylum procedure on the fairness and quality of decision-making.

Evidence was submitted to the **All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for International Freedom of Religion or Belief** and the **Asylum Advocacy Group (AAG)** by a wide range of stakeholders holding a broad spectrum of religious beliefs and no beliefs as well as asylum seekers; both those going through the judicial system and those who have been granted leave to stay in the UK.

Statements and claims from all parties were scrutinised alongside consideration of UK standards in light of international policy and law.

While the law is clear that religious persecution constitutes grounds for asylum, assessment of religion based asylum applications is complex and challenging due to the inherently internal and personal nature of religion and belief. This is compounded by the fact that persecution on the basis of religion or belief encompasses a wide range of human rights violations and relates to complex dynamics of communal identities, politics, conflicts and radical organisations.

The most recent Home Office guidance on assessing credibility and refugee status from January (and March) 2015,¹ does include more nuanced guidance regarding those seeking asylum on the basis of religious persecution.

Additionally, guidance pertaining to credibility is not always followed in practice. Further training is required to ensure that UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) decision-making is consistent with UKVI guidance. This report demonstrates that there is a disparity between Home Office policy guidelines and what is actually happening in practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report concludes with recommendations to the Home Secretary that include:

- Keep a record of the number of asylum claims made on the basis of religious persecution as well as the acceptance vs. rejection rate of such cases so as to

assess the true scale of such claims and how sensitively such claims are being dealt with.

- Provide focused training on freedom of religion and belief and assessments of religious freedom and persecution based asylum applications to decision makers.
- Ensure that the policy guidelines and judicial decisions that relate to freedom of religion or belief cases are used by decision makers.
- Ensure that the case workers and interpreters used by the Home Office and decision-makers uphold the same standards of professional conduct expected from Home Office staff.
- Ensure that cases involving religious persecution are also checked by an expert supervisor to ensure consistency and due process in all cases.
- Work with faith-communities and charities specialising in freedom of religion and belief to check credibility of applicants, and keep up to date information on global developments.
- Ensure that applicants should not be caused unnecessary distress and should feel able to speak freely, especially in cases where the case worker/interpreter is a member of the religious community that has carried out the applicant's persecution.
- In cases where individuals have been granted asylum on grounds of religious persecution, the UK Home Office should fast-track dependents' applications and visas for them to join the successful applicant. While it is of course welcome that dependents are permitted to settle outside the country in which they are persecuted, the current 3 – 6 month processing period of dependents' applications is a time during which the applicants may also be at real risk of persecution.

Read the report in full: <http://bit.ly/1PiV8gJ>

Read the short version: <http://bit.ly/1Yo6MOA>

MEDIA COVERAGE

BBC TV News [Asylum claims from Christian converts 'being rejected'](#)

BBC News [Are Christian converts seeking asylum getting a raw deal?](#)

BBC Radio 4 Sunday (begins 26:20)

The Telegraph [Asylum claims from Christian converts being rejected if they cannot recite the Ten Commandments](#)

The Independent [Christian convert asylum seekers 'asked to name colour of Bible cover' as MPs warn claims are assessed on 'trivia'](#)

The Guardian [Refugees seeking asylum on religious grounds quizzed on 'Bible trivia'](#)

The Daily Mail: [Officials are REJECTING asylum claims from Christian converts if they are unable to recite the Ten Commandments](#)

Times Live (South Africa) [Christian converts rejected](#)

The Christian Times [Christian converts seeking asylum quizzed with Bible trivia in the U.K.](#)

Christian Today [Christian asylum seekers denied entry to UK if they cannot recite ten commandments](#) [Home Office interpreters accused of deliberately jeopardising asylum claims](#)

Premier [Home Office urged to change asylum process for Christian converts](#)

Pakistan Christian Post [Converts to Christianity seeking asylum in the UK](#)

[rejected on very spurious grounds](#)

Christianity Today [Can You Name All Ten Commandments? If Not, This \(and 18 Other Questions\) Could Get You Deported](#)

The Christian Institute [Parliamentary group: 'Govt's religious literacy is lacking'](#)

The Blaze [If You're a Christian Convert Seeking Asylum in the UK, You Might Want to Brush Up on Your Bible Trivia](#)

CrossMap [UK Asylum Claims From Christian Converts Being Rejected If They Cannot Recite The Ten Commandments](#)

Christianity Daily [Christian Asylum Seekers Rejected if Not Well Versed with Bible Trivia](#)

Independent Catholic News [House of Lords launch report on religion-based asylum application process](#)

Christian Examiner [No fake Christian refugees: UK tests asylum seekers](#)

The Muslim Council of Britain is failing Ahmadis like Asad Shah

These are difficult times in the UK for Ahmadi Muslims as some seek to demonise us – and the MCB is an enabler

The Guardian – By Tahir Nasser (25.04.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1Nw4xWT> - In 2013, I organised an event at University College London for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Student Association UK titled Innocence of Muhammad. The aim of the event was to portray the true and peaceful character of the prophet of Islam, in light of the wild and violent responses of some Muslims to the slanderous video, The Innocence of Muslims. Unfortunately, towards the end of the event, a prominent member of the university's Islamic society entered and distributed leaflets calling for the social boycott and "capital punishment" of Ahmadi Muslims.

As an Ahmadi myself, I am sadly familiar with such harassment. This minority community of Islam faces persecution in countries like Pakistan and Indonesia, and we are often treated with open hostility by many orthodox Muslims in the UK. The reason can seem arcane to those not of the Muslim faith: Ahmadis, who believe in their founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the expected Messiah and Mahdi of Islam, differ from the mainstream belief that prophethood ceased after Muhammad, as orthodox Muslims believe is laid out in the Qur'an.

I reported the leaflets to the university union and the matter was resolved internally. I thought that was the end of it. It was then a great shock to read media reports of similar leaflets recently discovered in the Stockwell Green mosque. Their discovery came a few short weeks after the fatal stabbing of another Ahmadi, the shopkeeper Asad Shah, in Glasgow. The man charged with his murder, also a Muslim, later released a statement saying Shah had "disrespected" Islam.

These are difficult times for my community in the UK. The leaflets in question were written by the now dead leader of an organisation called Khatam-e-Nabuwwat, meaning "the Seal of Prophethood", which in Pakistan calls for the elimination of Ahmadis. This organisation also has branches in the UK, where it is a registered charity and an affiliate of the Muslim Council of Britain. A posting on the Facebook page Anti-Qadianiat (Tahafuz Khatme Nubuwwat), included the Guardian's report of Shah's death, with the message "Congratulations to all Muslims".

It couldn't be any clearer that Khatam-e-Nabuwwat is a hate organisation dedicated to the demonisation and social ostracism of Ahmadi Muslims. Yet somehow, it isn't obvious

to the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) who, until this past week, registered the Khatam-e-Nabuwwat organisation as one of their affiliates. Only after the furore raised in the media at this did the MCB release a statement that it would temporarily suspend the affiliation of Khatam-e-Nabuwwat, and would launch an independent investigation into whether it really is a hate organisation. But what further proof do they require?

The MCB cannot be ignorant of the history of Khatam-e-Nabuwwat. It was founded in Pakistan as a movement under the umbrella organisation of Majlis-e-Ahrar-ul-Islam by Syed Ata Ullah Shah Bukhari in 1953. The next year, Majlis-e-Ahrar along with Khatam-e-Nabuwwat sent an ultimatum to the then prime minister of Pakistan, Khawaja Nazimuddin, to remove all Ahmadis from leading government positions and to declare Ahmadis as non-Muslim. Unless these demands were met, Majlis-e-Ahrar and Khatam-e-Nabuwwat threatened "direct action". The government refused to capitulate, and the two groups responded by setting ablaze Ahmadi homes and businesses, resulting in the death of hundreds of Ahmadis, the demolition of mosques and the displacement of thousands. Thus was Khatam-e-Nabuwwat born, bathed in the blood of its fellow citizens.

Since then, Khatam-e-Nabuwwat has been instrumental in doing exactly what its leaflet claims – encouraging "Islamic" theocracies around the world to enact legislature making Ahmadi Muslims liable for capital punishment. Indeed, in Pakistan, Ahmadi Muslims are liable to three years imprisonment and a fine under its anti-Ahmadiyya laws, or death under its blasphemy laws, both of which were lobbied into existence by Khatam-e-Nabuwwat clerics.

The "independent investigation" into whether the activities at Stockwell Green mosque (where Khatam-e-Nabuwwat is based) spread hatred is utterly defunct – especially since it ends with a disclaimer that "the investigation panel shall not involve itself in matters of theology or in actions/conduct/laws in countries other than the United Kingdom". In other words, the MCB investigation is little more than a rigged jury, since all the evidence of Khatam-e-Nabuwwat's hate-mongering is widespread in "countries other than the United Kingdom". Do the crimes of an organisation abroad cease to be relevant when considering their potential harm in the UK?

It is easy to point the finger and blame Khatam-e-Nabuwwat for anti-Ahmadi hate speech, but the reality is that the MCB is also culpable. After Shah's murder, the MCB released a statement, expressing its condolence and grief at his murder, but re-affirming that Ahmadis aren't Muslim, despite Ahmadis self-identifying as such. Thus, the MCB has taken a position that is fundamentally at odds with the British values the MCB claims to hold dear: namely that a person must be accepted in accordance with their own self-identification. The right to self-identify, and to be acknowledged by others in accordance with that identity, is the cornerstone of religious tolerance.

By sitting in God's seat of judgment, the MCB enables hate organisations to take it one step further by acting as God Himself, dealing out death to whomsoever they deem heretical. Until the MCB recognises this, its rigged "independent investigation" won't be worth the paper it's written on.
