

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# THE MUSLIM LAW (SHARIAH) COUNCIL UK

Date: 22/4/2013

## Press Release

I was somewhat saddened to witness what Panorama had to say about some Muslim women's experiences of Shariah Council mediation in the context of abusive marriages in their programme on BBC One on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2013.

Muslim communities have come a long way in establishing many reputable and professional voluntary institutions in Great Britain. We only have to look at how many mosques now cater for the needs of the British Muslim youth, elderly and in particular women compared to say 10 years ago. This work has entailed reaching out to young people, giving support, good counsel and acting as role models in becoming good British Muslim citizens. At the same time giving opportunities to Muslim sisters, access to resources within our mosques and community activities.

The Muslim community has opened its doors to people of other faiths and to those who have no faith. This has not been an easy task over the years however we continue to struggle and work extremely hard to create a peaceful and harmonious society in which we face the challenge of balancing Islamic education in a secular based society.

I have long been involved with The Muslim Law (Shariah) Council UK which was established in 1985 and I appreciate the vital role played by many Shariah Councils. Since the majority of work handled by these councils involves divorce proceedings, there is no question that they take on a weighty responsibility. This work would ordinarily be dealt with by Social Services, legally aided solicitors or other government funded bodies. As a consequence Shariah Councils in fact save considerable amount of government funds from an already over-stretched benefits budget.

This is not at all meant to take away from the difficulties some Shariah Councils face as highlighted by the Panorama program but to simply put matters into perspective. Shariah Councils are a new entity trying to find a place in today's difficult society and will undoubtedly require time to transition and adapt. They ought not be judged and compared to the Law courts of England and Wales which have taken centuries to develop.

In my view, three things need to happen to make progress. Firstly, it is time for the Muslim community to have a thorough discussion about implementing safeguards for vulnerable women. Secondly, Shariah Councils must be clearer about their roles and must not, for example, impose reconciliation on an individual who is determined to terminate their marriage. Finally, Muslim organisations should come together to draw up a set of basic standards charter, which Shariah Councils would be actively encouraged to sign up. It is envisaged that as the British Muslim community develops, it will expect a high quality of service and assurances from institutions offering advice and mediation. This would not only eradicate any confusion on quality standards but would also assist Muslims in making significant life changing decisions by being fully informed about the body that is making it for him/her. It is for this reason that The Muslim Law (Shariah) Council UK supports MINAB's proposal of creating a self-regulatory body for this purpose.

From my personal past experiences, I believe that a community approach does work. It is in the Muslim community's own interest to give this matter immediate attention. I on behalf of the Muslim Law (Shariah) Council intend to discuss these matters with respected scholars, community leaders and organisations, inshaAllah I am sure we will achieve progress.

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