

Bereaved families criticise Manchester mosque over extremism

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Families of victims of the Manchester Area bomber have condemned the mosque he attended for failing to challenge extremist ideology.

A statement issued by solicitors on behalf of the bereaved families said, "there can be no complacency and no turning a blind eye."

The statement follows an evidence session of the Manchester Arena Inquiry with Fawzi Haffar, chairman of Didsbury Mosque. Haffar denied the mosque, which was attended by the Manchester Arena bomber Salman Abedi and three other terrorists, had issues with extremism.

The 2017 Islamist terrorist attack led to 23 deaths with a further 113 hospitalised.

"Whilst there is no evidence that Manchester Islamic Centre and Didsbury Mosque played a direct role in radicalising Salman Abedi, it is clear that they failed in the years before the bombing to take adequate steps to challenge extremist ideology", the statement said.

The bereaved families expressed "shock" at the carelessness of the mosque in failing "to do all that it could and should have done to combat and prevent radicalisation amongst the community it purports to serve".

They "commended" Mohammed El-Saeti, the former Imam at Didsbury Mosque for attempting to tackle extremism, but found it "deeply troubling that his efforts were rubbished by the leadership of the Mosque both at the time and this week".

The families urged "all communities around the country to heed the lessons of this week's evidence, to redouble efforts to combat extremism of all kinds, and to be clear and vocal in doing so".

The families also called for better resourcing of the Prevent programme, calling it the "best opportunity to combat the evil ideology". They encouraged communities around the country to "to engage with Prevent and do everything they can to ensure its success".

Manchester Islamic Centre and Didsbury Mosque has been a registered charity since 1986. Its charitable objects include "The advancement of Islamic education".

Comment

Stephen Evans, NSS chief executive, said:

"Tackling Islamic extremism is one the greatest challenges of our time. Mosques and Islamic centres are uniquely placed to play their part. A failure to confront the extremists in their midst can lead to an environment conducive to radicalisation and, as witnessed in Manchester, have tragic consequences. We therefore hope this heartfelt plea from families of victims of the Manchester

Arena bombing is heeded.

"The failure of mosques to tackle extremism also points to flaws in our charity system. Charities have a duty to provide a public benefit; under no circumstances should an organisation that enables extremist ideology become a registered charity. This public inquiry should prompt a re-think of our laws regarding what is and isn't a charity, including a review of the charitable purpose of 'the advancement of religion.'"

Image: Didsbury mosque - Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0

The full statement reads as follows:

This is a statement on behalf of the families we represent, following the evidence yesterday and today regarding Didsbury Mosque and Manchester Islamic Centre:

"We have absolutely no doubt that the vast majority of Muslims in this country are peace loving, law abiding and totally opposed to terrorism. Where pockets of extremism and violent ideology exist, it is imperative that those who seek community leadership confront and combat that extremism without hesitation or equivocation.

" Whilst there is no evidence that Manchester Islamic Centre and Didsbury Mosque played a direct role in radicalising Salman Abedi, it is clear that they failed in the years before the bombing to take adequate steps to challenge extremist ideology.

"We are shocked by the complacency displayed yesterday by the chair of trustees at Didsbury Mosque. We believe that the Mosque failed to do all that it could and should have done to combat and prevent radicalisation amongst the community it purports to serve.

"We are dismayed at the Mosque's continuing failure to acknowledge this. We believe that most Muslims will also be dismayed by this failure. We commend Mohammed El-Saeti, the former Imam at Didsbury Mosque who tried to confront extremism and we find it deeply troubling that his efforts were rubbished by the leadership of the Mosque both at the time and this week.

"When it comes to combating terrorism and terrorist ideology, there can be no complacency and no turning a blind eye.

"The evidence we heard yesterday and today must be a wake up call. We urge all communities around the country to heed the lessons of this week's evidence, to redouble efforts to combat extremism of all kinds, and to be clear and vocal in doing so.

"Further, whilst the Prevent programme is imperfect, and needs much better resourcing, it currently represents our best opportunity to combat evil ideology. We therefore urge communities around the country to engage with Prevent, and do everything they can to ensure its success.

"With unity of purpose and an implacable opposition to extremism, we have an opportunity to build a better future for all of us".

What the NSS stands for

The Secular Charter outlines 10 principles that guide us as we campaign for a secular democracy which safeguards all citizens' rights to freedom of and from religion.

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