



*7 Longdon Drive, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield. B74 4RF*

**Date: 14<sup>th</sup> December 2015**

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Fire and Rescue Service challenging Islamophobia**

The purpose of this letter is to respond to concerns about the growing rise of Islamophobia globally and what this means in the context of the Fire and Rescue Service as an employer of Muslim staff and a provider of services to Muslim communities in the UK.

The term "Islamophobia" was first introduced as a concept in a 1991 Runnymede Trust report and defined as "unfounded hostility towards Muslims, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims." The term was coined in the context of Muslims in the UK in particular, and Europe in general, and based on the more common "xenophobia" framework.

The importance of countering Islamophobia cannot be underestimated. For example hate crimes against Muslims in London indicates rose by 70% in the past year, according to Metropolitan Police statistics. Figures for the 12 months to July 2015 record 816 Islamophobic crimes, compared with 478 for the previous 12 month period.

Furthermore, the Republican Presidential candidate Donald Trump said, 'We need a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States while we figure out what the hell is going on' and claimed there are 'no-go areas for police officers in London because of Muslim extremism'. This led to condemnation of Trump's comments by the Prime Minister, the Mayor of London and the Head of Scotland Yard and others in senior office.

The Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) has a long history of challenging intolerance and social injustice against minorities who find themselves the subject of undue attention and possible and actual victimisation. Following the 9/11 attacks on the USA, the Fire and Rescue Service organised several conferences under the leadership of Chief Fire Officer Steve McGurk under the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) banner and the CFOA equality practitioners. These conferences helped support the Fire and Rescue Services deal with the possible impact on Muslim communities, raise awareness of the issues and develop internal programmes and engagement events with faith communities. The conferences also helped to reassure serving Muslim Fire and Rescue Service staff and prospective recruits from the Muslim community that the service was a welcoming employer of choice.

We believe that Fire and Rescue Services have moved on significantly since the events of 9/11. We now have an active Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) that offers advice and support and we have produced guidance documents for a number Fire and Rescue Services on engaging with faith communities, together with a guidance document on Ramadan. (The documents are available on request). We are also aware that a number of Fire and Rescue Services are active in engaging with faith groups and run bespoke

sessions with operational staff and faith communities which are now helping to build positive relationships.

Following discussions with members of Muslim and non-Muslim staff we, the AFSA Executive, believe that our Muslim members feel there is the likelihood of tension increasing in fire stations and in their place of work and that other Asian staff feel under threat and undervalued at work and in society. It is our view that the Fire and Rescue Service has a key role in challenging the rhetoric of Islamophobia and this issue is no different to other cancers of society such as racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, homophobia and ageism.

We therefore encourage you all as leaders of Fire and Rescue Services to take the necessary steps to challenge Islamophobia in line with the Equality Act and from a moral perspective. Furthermore, use your means to highlight the valuable role of all minorities including Muslim staff and the contributions they make to the Fire and Rescue Service.

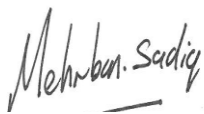
The AFSA Executive and our members are more than willing to do our part. We are happy to meet and discuss the issue and to be active in training and producing guidance. However, we believe the need at this time is clear leadership and a message to all staff in the manner offered by the Prime Minister and others that the rhetoric of the likes of Donald Trump is not only unacceptable but will not be tolerated by any Fire and Rescue Service staff.

Fire and Rescue Service staff from Muslim backgrounds play an integral part in the work of AFSA. They have made it clear that despite the rhetoric they remain proud of serving and the role they have played in developing the services we provide. They are willing to go the extra mile and help make the Fire and Rescue Service the best place to work in providing an equitable service to the diverse communities of the UK.

In 2016, AFSA will look to address Islamophobia as a key area of concern.

Your support would be greatly appreciated

Yours sincerely



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**AFSA National Chair**  
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