



MANCHESTER ARENA INQUIRY:

DIDSBURY MOSQUE RESPONDS TO MISLEADING COMMENTS AND SMEARS

We respond to misleading comments by one of the lawyers (John Cooper of Slater Gordon) representing families at the Manchester Arena Inquiry and by Dominic Scally of Counterterrorism (CT), reported in some media.

1. Whilst it is stated that Didsbury Mosque did not support violence or have anything to do with the attacks, their subsequent comments still attempt to associate Didsbury Mosque with extremism and radicalisation. We believe this is a diversion from focusing on the very real failings of those agencies with a duty to protect the public and prevent such attacks. We are further of the opinion that Didsbury Mosque has been continuously demonised to make the case for government measures that will securitize places of worship and believe the recommendations of Mr. Cooper are trying to influence the Inquiry in that direction.
2. It is open-source knowledge that one of the families, represented by Mr. Cooper has a relationship with the government, collaborating with them on the expansion of the Protect Duty. If this bill is passed, it would also apply to places of worship. We will be raising with the Inquiry the possibility of a conflict of interest and seeking reassurances that the Inquiry will remain independent of the government in making recommendations as far as Didsbury Mosque (mosques) and Muslim charities are concerned.
3. The comments reported in the media are from only one of the lawyers representing the families. We note and agree with the comments made by another lawyer representing the families which are less biased and more balanced. It is made clear Didsbury Mosque had no role in the radicalisation of Salman Abedi nor ignored violent extremism (point 126). This statement also more comprehensively reflects on the failings of government agencies.
<https://files.manchesterarenainquiry.org.uk/live/uploads/2022/03/14085853/INQ042714.pdf>
4. Didsbury Mosque cannot be held responsible for the fallout of a decision of the British Government, working with some Libyan groups to remove the Gaddafi government, which encouraged some Manchester Libyans to go and fight in Libya, creating a radicalising environment and extremism among some in Manchester. Given that environment, the Didsbury Mosque believes we successfully kept Libyan politics out of the mosque. Didsbury Mosque has been aware of such overseas politics and tried its best to keep it out of the mosque since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Mosques are places of worship and should not become places where intelligence gathering on people's lives and politics should take place.

5. We observe that M15 and M16 have not provided a full account of any relationship they may have had with Ramadan Abedi. We will ask the Inquiry to investigate this further and consider if that in any way could have contributed to the failure to adequately monitor Salman and Hashim Abedi.
6. It is obvious that Abedi escaped the attention of all, and there must be better communication between all in the future. Didsbury Mosque will be writing to the Chairman of the Inquiry with our own recommendations of how we think such attacks may be avoided in the future.
7. It is disingenuous to try to give the impression Didsbury Mosque has not condemned the Manchester Arena attack, and bizarre that the Charity Commission should be asked to revoke our charitable status on that basis. We made it clear that this barbaric act had nothing to do with Didsbury Mosque, Islam, or the Quran, immediately after the attack. This was in front of the world's media which had a greater reach than the few people who visit our website. The main Imam of the mosque at the time also condemned it on his social media. On the day Mr. Haffar was giving evidence at the Inquiry he had prepared a statement of condolences and condemnation to be read out at the outset. Permission was not granted to do so. If the families wanted us to put a condemnation statement on our website, they could have simply written to us requesting it. Rather this appears to us to be a demand of Mr. Cooper.
8. The mosque has co-operated with and provided several detailed statements (with evidence) to the Inquiry which have not been made public. Mr. Cooper instead has focussed on the evidence given in person by Mr. Haffar. In our opinion, Mr. Cooper has been the most hostile to Muslims and Libyans appearing at the Inquiry and seems to view us through the lens of collective responsibility, disingenuousness, and dishonesty.
9. Mr. Graf our former Imam, has already responded with his own statement to the allegations made against him and these are available on the Inquiry website.
10. We ask Dominic Scally to provide evidence to substantiate that Didsbury Mosque co-operated less than other mosques in Manchester prior to 2016 (when, where, what we did not do compared to others), not simply make assertions. We have had a close working relationship with the police for a very long time and will now provide evidence of that relationship to the Inquiry. In 2016, Imam Graf also arranged a Prevent training event for Muslims across Manchester at Didsbury Mosque. The truth is that according to our knowledge at no point has anyone from the police, CT, or M15 ever contacted us with concerns about the Abedi's.
11. We further point out that the smearing and demonisation of Didsbury Mosque by some at the Inquiry, and in the media, has put our mosque at risk from extremist elements. There has already been an attempted arson attack last year. After the recent media coverage, we became aware of discussions on social media about "a solution" to the problem of Didsbury Mosque, namely, to blow it up. We have taken that seriously and reported it to the Police.
12. Mr. Wilkinson, (the Inquiry's radicalisation expert) has already concluded that Didsbury Mosque has not played any role in the radicalisation of Salman Abedi and that he was radicalised in Libya's civil war. We, therefore wonder what the purpose of continuous speculation about Didsbury Mosque in the context of the failure to prevent an attack, serves.

Manchester - March 2022