

Speech: A strong country needs strong and vibrant communities

Introduction

Good evening everyone; Assalamu Alaikum.

It's a real pleasure to be here again at the Muslim News Awards for Excellence surrounded by friends, parliamentary colleagues from all political parties and leaders from across our Muslim community.

We are all here to celebrate the fantastic achievements of this wonderfully rich and diverse community we have here in our country.

For that is what I want to briefly touch on with you here this evening: that word, community, and why the strength and vibrancy of strong communities is so important to us all.

I hope I'll be forgiven if I quote The Holy Quran, which teaches: "O mankind! We have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another."

I made a speech earlier this year in Wales, and I talked about the value of our United Kingdom. My argument then and my argument again tonight is that there is no contradiction between one's loyalty to one's country, and loyalty to one's community as well.

People across the country derive a sense of who we are from a variety of different sources. From family and community; town and village; political persuasion and of course, religious faith.

It is precisely the plurality of these sources, and of those bonds, which come together to form a whole that is greater than the mere sum of its parts. And a country that is truly united and stronger, confident in itself and its purpose in the world.

You can be British, but also English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish. Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jew. Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cornwall, Brummie, Cockney.

None of those loyalties make us feel less loyal to the country. Less entitled to stand up and take our place in the mainstream of our society in the United Kingdom.

There really is no community which demonstrates more pride, enthusiasm and pure inspiration, than that of British Muslims across our country – many of whom are gathered here in this room tonight.

In the words of the Prime Minister, for whom the value of community is appreciated more than many people, your influence as community reaches every

sphere of our society – from sport; charity, the arts and youth work; to business and enterprise. There are British Muslims who really are the role models, the thinkers, the visionaries. Everywhere I look around this country, British Muslim men and women are leading the way in whatever field they choose.

Sir Mo Farah, with yet another record yesterday, is one of the finest sportsmen the United Kingdom has ever produced.

Or in the media, Mishal Husein, who regularly relishes the opportunity to skewer myself and other government colleagues in the early hours of the morning on Radio Four.

Or you look at politics, and my colleague Nusrat Ghani, the first female Muslim minister to speak at the dispatch box in the House of Commons, alongside my Cabinet colleague Sajid Javid, the first British Muslim and the first British Asian to hold the office of Secretary of State.

And of course yourself Ahmed Versi, the editor of the largest and oldest Muslim newspaper in Britain. I haven't read the write-up of this speech, but I do hope you say nicer things than what I tend to have dished out on a daily basis back in House of Commons!

Quite simply, British Muslims include some of the brightest lights that make up the constellation of brilliance that is our diverse United Kingdom.

And it's why it is right that we come together tonight to recognise the achievements of the whole British Muslim community. Those achievements are something of which we should all be proud, wherever we come from in society, and can celebrate with enthusiasm, pleasure and sheer gratitude.

Divisions and disparities

But it is also why we must never cease our mission to strengthen our communities further – and bring people closer together

One of the events I most enjoyed in my own constituency last summer was when my local mosque in Aylesbury decided to celebrate the end of summer by holding an Eid fete. Bringing together the British tradition of a summer fete, with the Muslim festival of Eid.

The doors of the mosque and the arms of the community were thrown open to everybody in Aylesbury. I remember going to the mosque and standing next to the head of the local police, the command of the local RAF station, and the Mayor, to hear the Imam talk about the faith, and the head of the mosque committee describing the local community there.

But it's also true that while Britain is a proudly multi-ethnic and diverse country, we cannot pretend that divisions and disparities do not still exist within our society; that examples of prejudice and injustice are still too common in everyday life; and that for too long, if we are honest with ourselves, governments of all political colours have not acted sufficiently

to correct them.

Nearly two years ago, the Prime Minister set out a mission on the steps of Downing Street to build a country that works for everyone. No simple task, nobody said it would be easy, or that it would happen overnight.

But part of creating that fairer country we all want to see involves working harder and faster to break down those barriers that still hold people back from achieving their true potential, and that objective is something I believe politicians of all political parties in this country believe in too.

That is why one of the Prime Minister's first acts upon entering Downing Street was to commission an unprecedented Race Disparity Audit of the whole public sector, the first of its kind in the world.

What that is doing is shining an unsparing light on the disparities faced by many people from different ethnic groups using public services in Britain – from health to education; employment to criminal justice.

Now of course, British Muslims belong to many different ethnic backgrounds – and those of you here tonight are a direct testament to the success stories which come out of the British Muslim community.

But what these figures in that audit show is that too many people are still left behind in this country – and that is something we cannot and will not let continue.

Prejudice and injustice

But while it is our mission to tackle these social policy challenges into the future – we know there are also more serious and very direct threats that face the Muslim community in the here and now.

Frankly, when I read letters or emails that encourage people in this country to participate in 'Punish a Muslim' day, and when I hear directly from British Muslims – people who are British citizens, who are paying taxes, who are working, who are active participants in our society – they tell me about the fear which that sort of comment and incitement causes to them and their family, I feel a mixture of outrage and disgust.

And when I see reports, particularly on social media, of regular incidents of anti-Muslim hate crime in our society, it gets me angry.

And when I hear and see, and again it's often online commentary where this is seen, divisive, xenophobic and racist language in political argument, whether it comes from the far left or the far right – I am not only utterly appalled but determined that we must work together among our different traditions of religion and ethnicity, and redouble efforts to overcome and defeat the forces of hatred and intolerance.

My message and this government's message is clear: that kind of bigotry and intolerance has no place in the United Kingdom, and we will stamp it out

wherever we find it.

And when I read other letters calling for people to take part in 'Love a Muslim' day in response to the bigotry, I am reassured that, no matter how long the struggle, the values of solidarity and unity will always prevail.

When I see those who commit hate crimes rightly punished, I am confident that our zero-tolerance attitude – whether from government or boarder society – is the correct one.

And when I hear racism in our politics condemned – from all sides of the democratic tradition – I have more faith than ever that, as my late colleague the Labour MP Jo Cox put it, what unites us is far greater than what divides us.

For it is the actions of those who call out and refuse to tolerate bigotry wherever they find it – and the actions of those who believe in the eternal principles of kindness, charity and compassion – that is what fills me with optimism.

Actions like those of Mohammed Mahmoud, the young imam, who ran towards and protected a man who had just driven his car into a group of worshippers outside Finsbury Park mosque in north London, nearly one year ago.

In his words he wanted to make sure the driver, Darren Osborne “answered for his crime” and sure enough, in February this year, that man Darren Osborne was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment.

That is justice. That is tolerance. That is the United Kingdom today at its best.

Inspirational Leaders

Mohammed Mahmoud is a true leading light in the British Muslim community, as are all gathered here this evening.

A strong country needs strong and vibrant communities, and those communities need leaders who inspire those around them.

And those here tonight, especially those we are celebrating and honouring are an inspiration and an example to us all.

Congratulations to all of those winning awards; thank you for everything you have done for this country; and please continue all your work to make this a better, fairer, more tolerant country still. One in which we can all feel we can live in peace and pride.

Thank you very much.

News story: Historic statue of suffragist leader Millicent Fawcett unveiled in Parliament Square

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- Statue unveiled in a ceremony attended by Prime Minister Theresa May, Communities Secretary Sajid Javid, campaigner Caroline Criado Perez and the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan

A statue of suffragist leader Millicent Fawcett has been unveiled in Parliament Square in a ceremony attended by the Prime Minister, Communities Secretary Sajid Javid and the Mayor of London today (24 April 2018).

Following Caroline Criado Perez's campaign, the Mayor of London commissioned Turner Prize-winning artist Gillian Wearing OBE to create the statue. It is funded through the government's £5 million Centenary Fund and is the first-ever monument of a woman, and the first created by a woman, to stand within the square.

Marking 100 years since some women won the right to vote, the statue was unveiled by 3 generations of women – Jennifer Loehnis, a descendant of Millicent Fawcett; campaigner and activist Caroline Criado Perez; Deputy Mayor for Culture and Creative Industries, Justine Simons; and 2 schoolgirls, from Millbank Academy in Westminster, and Platanos College, Lambeth.

Prime Minister, Theresa May, said:

I would not be here today as Prime Minister, no female MPs would have taken their seats in Parliament, none of us would have the rights and protections we now enjoy, were it not for Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett.

The struggle to achieve votes for women was long and arduous and Dame Millicent was there from the beginning. For decade after decade, in the face of often fierce opposition, she travelled the country and the world, campaigning not just for the vote but on a whole range of issues.

I want to thank Gillian Wearing for creating a beautiful and fitting tribute to Dame Millicent and to everyone involved in making this happen.

For generations to come, this statue will serve not just as a reminder of Dame Millicent's extraordinary life and legacy, but as inspiration to all of us who wish to follow in her footsteps.

Communities Secretary, Sajid Javid, said:

Today's unveiling is a landmark moment, a celebration of the legacy of the women that fought tirelessly for equal rights and transformed our nation for the better.

The statue of Millicent Fawcett, now facing Parliament, will remind us all of how we must keep up the fight against inequality and injustice in everything we do.

Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said:

Today is an historic day. Finally, Parliament Square is no longer a male-only zone for statues. From the very first week of my Mayoralty, I supported Caroline Criado Perez's campaign to put up a statue of a woman in Parliament Square, and I'm so proud that the day of its unveiling is now upon us.

This statue of Millicent Fawcett, the great suffragist leader, will stand near Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela – 2 other heroic leaders who campaigned for change and equality. There couldn't be a better place to mark the achievements of Millicent Fawcett, in the heart of UK democracy in Parliament Square.

I hope this statue sparks further change across society – driving forward gender equality and inspiring women and girls across the capital and the UK. My huge thanks to Caroline, for her passionate campaigning and to Gillian Wearing – who has brought Millicent Fawcett and her legacy to life through this magnificent work.

Caroline Criado Perez also spoke at the ceremony, talking about her campaign for the statue, which included a change.org petition signed by almost 85,000 people. Following the endorsement of the campaign from both the Prime Minister and the Mayor, the Suffrage Statue Commission selected Turner Prize-winning artist Gillian Wearing to create a statue of suffragist leader Millicent Fawcett.

Artist, Gillian Wearing OBE, said:

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has worked on this sculpture and plinth. It was so heart-warming to see the care and attention that went into the work. I can only say I am truly grateful.

I hope those viewing the work will be able to appreciate this along with being able to celebrate Millicent Fawcett along with all the other suffrage supporters and activists also honoured.

Campaigner, Caroline Criado Perez OBE, said:

When I went for a run in Parliament Square two years ago and first noticed that all the statues there were of men I could never have imagined quite how perfectly the dream would eventually be realised.

Gillian Wearing's design is everything I could ever have wanted – and more – for the first statue of a woman in Parliament Square.

I'm so grateful to everyone who worked so hard on this campaign to make this happen. It's been a brilliant team effort, and one I'm so proud to have played a part in.

The statue unveiling is one of the many events taking place this year to celebrate the centenary year of suffrage. The Government Equalities Office has allocated £5 million to mark the centenary of voting rights for women in 2018. This fund will support projects that raise awareness of this crucial milestone, educate young people about its significance, and inspire people to build a diverse political system that reflects the nation it serves.

So far, over £600,000 has been awarded from the Women's Votes Centenary Grant Scheme to standout schemes across the country, including projects that train women to become leaders in their communities, and events that celebrate the lives of prominent suffragettes.

The unveiling of the Millicent Fawcett statue is a major event in the Mayor of London's [#BehindEveryGreatCity](#) campaign, which celebrates the role of women in the capital. Alongside Fawcett, the names and portraits of 59 women and men who campaigned for women's suffrage are inscribed on the plinth.

The unveiling ceremony was presented by BBC broadcaster Mishal Husain and featured poet Theresa Lola, performances from the cast of *Sylvia* and the Suffragist Singers and an adaptation of Millicent Fawcett's 1918 Victory Speech* by award-winning actress, Helen McCrory OBE.

The statue was commissioned by the Mayor of London with 14-18 NOW, Firstsite and Iniva to commemorate the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, through the government's national centenary fund.

To mark the day of the statue unveiling, Google Arts & Culture is collaborating with its creator, the artist Gillian Wearing and the Mayor of London to show the spirit and stories of the suffrage campaigners on a new online platform at [g.co/roadtoequality](https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/exhibitions/millicent-fawcett).

*Adapted for a transcript of Millicent Fawcett's Victory speech in March 1918

published in The Common Cause (Newspaper first published in 1909, that supported the policies of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, "the organ of the women's movement for reform'.) Looking Backwards, by Mrs. Henry Fawcett

Previous press releases

Background on government's centenary fund

In 2017, the government announced a £5 million Centenary fund to coincide with International Women's Day.

To date, £1.2 million has been awarded to 7 Centenary Cities and towns in England with a strong suffrage history to help inspire a new generation with the legacy of women's campaign for equal representation. Manchester has chosen to spend a portion of their funding to commemorate Emmeline Pankhurst, as only the second woman alongside Queen Victoria, to be represented with a statue in the city. The 7 Centenary Cities are Bolton, Bristol, Leeds, Leicester, London, Manchester, and Nottingham.

In February, the Minister for Women and Equalities Amber Rudd announced £1.5 million would make up a Women's Suffrage Centenary Grant Scheme for bids of up to £125,000 for projects running throughout the centenary year to encourage communities to celebrate and to help make modern politics more accessible. Over 600,000 has been awarded to stand out scheme across the country including projects that train women to become leaders in their communities, and events that celebrate the lives of prominent suffragettes.

A new [Celebrating Votes for Women](#) web page will help people find out more about getting involved in centenary events through the year. The page includes links to information about the history of the suffrage movement and details of how to apply for a grant, as well as an events hub to show what is happening across the country.

[Press release: Queen approves appointment of President of the Family Division](#)

Her Majesty The Queen has been pleased to approve the appointment of The Rt Hon Sir Andrew McFarlane as the President of the Family Division from 28 July 2018. This appointment follows the retirement of Sir James Munby on 27 July 2018.

Sir Andrew McFarlane was called to the Bar in 1977 and took Silk (Queen's Counsel) in 1998. He was appointed a Recorder in 1995, a Deputy High Court

Judge in 2000 and a High Court Judge in the Family Division in 2005.

He co-wrote Children Law and Practice which coincided with the enactment of the Children Act 1989 in 1991, and he has been noted for his speeches and lectures around the country on all aspects of child law.

His expertise resulted in his selection as the only legal member of the Family Justice Review (Norgrove) and as the judicial representative for the current sector-led review financed by the Nuffield. The review is due to report this summer.

Sir Andrew has held or holds leadership posts including Chairman of the Family Law Bar Association, Chairman of the Clergy Discipline Commission and President of the Clergy Disciplines Tribunals. He was Family Division Liaison Judge for the Midland circuit until his appointment as a Lord Justice of Appeal in 2011 where he is the Supervising Lord Justice for Family Cases.

The appointment

The appointment of the President of the Family Division was made by Her Majesty The Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor following the recommendation of an independent selection panel chaired by Lord Burnett of Maldon, the Lord Chief Justice.

The other panel members were:

- the President of the Supreme Court
- Baroness Hale
- three lay Judicial Appointments Commissioners namely, Professor Lord Kakkar (Chairman of the Judicial Appointments Commission), Dame Valarie Strachan and Mr Andrew Kennon

The President is the Head of the Family Division of the High Court of Justice and may sit as of right in the Court of Appeal, the High Court and the Family Court either alone or as part of a panel. He is also Head of Family Justice, Head of Probate, President of the Court of Protection and chairs both the Family Procedure Rule Committee and Family Justice Council.

The exercise

This selection exercise was run under the relevant sections of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 as amended by the Crime and Courts Act 2013.

In accordance with section 70 of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, as amended by the Crime and Courts Act 2013, the panel determined the selection process to be followed. As required by the Crime and Courts Act 2013, the Lord Chancellor was consulted as part of the selection process.

In accordance with s.10 (3) of the Senior Courts Act 1981, the selection exercise was open to all applicants who satisfy the judicial-appointment eligibility condition on a 7-year basis, or are judges of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, Court of Appeal, or High Court.

Research and analysis: Graduate labour market statistics: methodology note

The methodology we use to calculate the graduate labour market statistics for England.

Speech: PM words at unveiling of Millicent Fawcett statue: 24 April 2018

Behind me, outside the Supreme Court, stands a statue of the Great Emancipator.

To my right, we see the man who did more than any other to gain independence for India.

Opposite Parliament, the man who saved Europe from the grip of fascism.

They are all great men, important men, men who deserve their places in history and in this square.

But I would not be standing here today as Prime Minister...

No female MPs would have taken their seats in Parliament...

None of us would have the rights we now enjoy, were it not for one truly great woman: Dame Millicent Garret Fawcett.

The struggle to achieve votes for women was long and arduous. Dame Millicent was there from the beginning, and devoted her life to the cause.

As a teenager, she collected names for the first pro-Suffrage petition even though she was too young to sign it herself.

As a young woman she overcame a dislike of public speaking and took to the platform at the first women's suffrage meeting to be held in London.

For decade after decade, in the face of often fierce opposition, she travelled the country and the world, campaigning not just for the vote but on a whole range of issues.

She was a tireless advocate for equal access to education, pressuring universities to admit women on equal terms and establishing her own Cambridge college.

She fought for the rights of sex workers, convincing politicians to overturn the discriminatory Contagious Diseases Acts.

She campaigned to protect children from exploitation and abuse, reported on the treatment of civilians in the Boer War...

She was even responsible for Blake's And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time being set to music by Sir Hubert Parry.

History has many authors. In our own small way we each help to shape the world in which we live.

But few of us can claim to have made an impact as significant and lasting as Dame Millicent, and it is right and proper that, today, she takes her place at the heart of our democracy.

On behalf of the whole country, I would like to thank all those who have made this possible.

Caroline, of course, who spearheaded the calls for a lasting memorial to Dame Millicent.

Sculptor Gillian Wearing, who has created a beautiful and fitting tribute.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid, who has steered the project on behalf of the government from conception to completion.

And everyone who supported the campaign for this statue over the past two years: from Lord Finkelstein, a vocal advocate from the beginning, to the tens of thousands of individuals who signed petitions, wrote letters and lent their backing in so many ways. And around this square, the Mayor and others who had their role in this statue. This statue is your statue.

After Fawcett's death in 1929, a tribute in one newspaper read that, "Whenever a new victory has been gained by women or some individual woman has found her way in at a new door, the minds of many have turned at once to Dame Millicent."

Almost 90 years later, it is all too easy to forget those who forged a path for generations of women to follow.

To take for granted the progress that they achieved through years – decades – of bitter struggle.

We do so at our peril.

Because the fight for equality is far from won.

And as long as that is the case, we will need brave women and men to stand up

and speak out in the face of injustice and discrimination.

Doing so will not always be easy.

But courage calls to courage everywhere.

And, for generations to come, this statue will serve not just as a reminder of Dame Millicent's extraordinary life and legacy, but as inspiration to all of us who wish to follow in her footsteps.