

## **K ALAM: STATEMENT**

I hope you are all well.

My name is Kishor Alam and I am Muslim who has lived all his life in Finsbury Park and have prayed in Finsbury Park Mosque for over thirty years.

The reason why I am speaking briefly is that in the late 90's- bear in mind at the time the Mosque was known as the Suicide Factory- I was asked by special Branch to let them know what was going on inside.

We've all heard about Abu Hamza, Abu Qatada, Richard Reid (the shoe bomber) and Zaharias Mossaoui (convicted for his part in 9/11) but as well as them, younger pseudo academics, I remember came over from Egypt, Yemen and Pakistan. They spoke in perfect English, led prayers and gave lectures.

That's was the first time I had really heard Holocaust denial. It was clear that its purpose was as kindling to start a fire of hateful antisemitism with the very real intention of promoting violence/ a race war, call it what you will, against young Jewish boys round the corner in Stamford Hill.

For me the Holocaust was an undeniable fact – like the moon landings. Sure, there were people who didn't believe in it but there are always flat earth believers. They are marginalised. Nothing really to be concerned about and usually the butt of jokes. But this was different. There were charismatic, visiting Imams whose sole purpose was to influence. And the argument they began with, was this:

The biggest lie in history is The Holocaust - told by the biggest liars – the Jews.

I reported what was going on in these lectures and the books that were being used to back up the claims. In order to have sort of argument countering this, I was put in touch with Prof. Klier – the late Prof Klier at UCL- who was an expert on the Holocaust and its denial. I spent many hours with him and I like to think it had an effect. When the Imams went back to their countries and I was with those boys, I could work on them and try to show them the other point of view.

There were several circumstances where we thought there may be an imminent attack but these never came to pass. There was of course a price to pay and those elements in the Mosque who I was railing against...well let's say they didn't take too kindly. Before the MP Stephen Timms and Drummer Lee Rigby I was attacked and stabbed by someone loyal to the Imam.

Fortunately, I was fine – he missed – just cuts and wounds to my back and shoulder.

My life changed and I had to move away. From everything. I cut ties with my parents and friends; left a university course where I was studying management; broke up with Ellie.

But I was looked after and went to Scotland, to St Andrews Uni to read for the MLITT in Terrorism Studies. I went on to an MSc in Transnational Security Studies, an LLM in Law and a further research degree regarding Security and Surveillance. I hope to progress and eventually complete doctoral studies. What I'm trying to say, is that I have been at point of the sword, literally, and have studied Terrorism from an academic perspective too.

I absolutely know that in Islamist terrorism, Holocaust denial - and I want to separate this from general antisemitism- lies pivotal to radicalisation. And regretfully, we've all seen where that can lead. You won't find this in every textbook but believe me it's the truth that I've learned. And anyone actually working in CT or the PREVENT and PURSUE arms or CONTEST will agree. We learnt these from real operations such as RHYME and CREVICE which are still seminal to our understanding of Islamist Terrorism.

They may even say some nice things about me.

This is how it works:

Step 1 -praise the glories of Islam

Step 2 -question the western view. Show how Muslims have been downtrodden. That they are on their own, isolated and it is the lying Jews, controlling the US who are behind this. They Jews have invoked sympathy from the world by conjuring a holocaust that did not happen. And here's the proof it didn't happen

Step 3- Muslims must fight back.

Step 4- This is the point of no return – acts of terrorism are legitimised and promoted by the elders.

Step 5 – deployment on a mission.

And because it's so crucial to the argument, I've seen how disrupting the holocaust denial at step 2 can give that moment of pause.

It's too broad and easy to say that education is a silver bullet – there's a far more nuanced discussion to be had. But I want to emphasize in this case, I've seen how learning of what happened, changed attitudes and then behaviour in the young men from the Mosque that I knew.

Nowadays, I take such men from various Mosques to different places to learn about the Holocaust. The first time at the IWM, I was really unsure – I pretty much thought they would just see it as a day off from the Mosque – like any school trip and I was pleased that it would be at the IWM as there are Spitfires hanging from the roof. I took a ball as it's in a park. I was very surprised – they spent the whole time in the Holocaust exhibition and afterwards, we sat in the park chatting -without needing the kickabout. There was one photograph in particular that made it a real thing, about real people like them, and not just something abstracted, historical, something to write about for a project. It was a photograph of Jews in Vienna, on their hands and knees, made to scrub the pavements while their neighbours looked on. It looked just like the devotion pose in Islamic prayer.

And then there's the shoes. People just like them, who wore shoes, were tortured and killed for their beliefs and all that was left of them was their piled-up shoes. Discarded, tossed away and anonymous, like the people who they belonged to.

I've since tried to help with that education and Jonathan Bruck at the *Anne Frank House* has asked me to be a trustee there – I don't know if I will but I'm certainly going to continue taking lads to Amsterdam, the IWM and I hope the Holocaust Centre in Westminster.

I've been to many parts of the world visiting Holocaust memorials and I'll always get the book of the exhibition and take it to UCL.

Prof. Klier has since passed away but I get to see Prof. Berkowitz, (Professor of Modern Jewish History) and I'll give him the book for the Klier memorial library.

To sum up, I am a Muslim. A devout one and a Londoner too. I've seen first-hand how education changes people's attitudes and their subsequent actions. If it didn't, I couldn't have come back - Kolkhan has gone but some of his acolytes are still there and yet I am no longer in danger. I talk to them. Mosques are buildings – they are not good or bad – only the people that inhabit them. It used to be called the *Suicide Factory* and now there is a banner outside that proclaims a quote from the Koran: *...and we have made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other...*

It's not just lip service or PR.

It's clear that I am in favour of Holocaust memorials and education centres. If it were up to me there would be one in every city, town, village and hamlet. But of course, that's not real life. I love Sir David's design and I am aware of my own bias. Liking something is subjective and he's preaching to the converted but it has to be in Westminster. It has to be in the most important of places, because the Holocaust, the attempted annihilation of European Jewry was a unique cataclysmic event and the darkest chapter in the history of Western Civilisation. Westminster is and should be the place where deeper meanings are pondered and the lessons from the past are considered to help shape the decisions which affect all our futures.

Last year my tutor took us to see Scarlett Crawford's photography on the Race Relations Act displayed in the Hall at the House of Commons. I went back again with some lads from the Mosque and apart from the exhibition, they were genuinely thrilled to see the plaque on the floor where Nelson Mandela spoke to the members of both houses. They asked if it was OK to take photos at the top of those steps.

We met in Parliament Square and it resonates that there are monuments to Gandhi and Mandela at the very centre, at the very core. They are not interested in Viscount whoever or Marquess so and so, who put down some rebellion centuries ago. But to see Gandhi and Mandela sharing the same space as Churchill is such a demonstrative acknowledgement of importance. And how attitudes can, and have changed.

It has to be Westminster with the Cenotaph and all the other monuments because the Holocaust Memorial must be seen to be of no less importance – not just an adjunct in a South London Museum that has existed for decades. The Holocaust is distinct from all other

conflicts and has to be considered as such by giving it, its own place at the heart of where Government operates today and every day.

And just one last thing- I am sure that everyone will politely thank you for the opportunity to speak and be heard. But for those working in counter-terrorism there are no traditional legacies. Their successes are secret and failures public. They don't get medals and glory in the same way. They'll do a risk assessment and probably won't get married or have children. What I am saying is, if this happens and in some small measure my words have made a difference then it will probably be the most important thing I've done.

So truly, thank you for the opportunity.