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Islam-is-Peace

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On 24 September, posters stating "Islam is Peace" and "Proud to be a British Muslim" appeared on London buses, London Underground trains and in airports around Britain - the latest phase in a campaign by the group Islam-is-Peace to "address the negative perceptions and stereotypes of Islam and British Muslims," according to the [group's website](#).

But although Islam-is-Peace presents itself as independent, its only known senior members are also prominent figures in the Muslim Association of Britain - a Hamas-linked group whose founder and a chief ideologue have publicly defended Islamic terrorism.

The Centre for Social Cohesion fully supports all efforts to encourage understanding, but is concerned that the Islam-is-Peace campaign's message of tolerance is undermined by the forces controlling it.

DOES THE M.A.B. RUN ISLAM-IS-PEACE?

The public face of Islam-is-Peace is campaign coordinator Yusra Khreegi and spokesman Ihtisham Habitullah - both also high-profile figures in the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). Islam-is-Peace's website does not name the group's directors, and the group has refused to name any of its 15-member leadership committee.

In July 2007, Muslims United ran newspaper advertisements calling for Muslims to unite against terrorism and Islamophobia. Khreegi (described as the group's campaign coordinator) [wrote](#) a column in The Guardian supporting the campaign. Islam-is-Peace has since [claimed](#) the ads as part of its campaign, and a link in Khreegi's Guardian column now takes readers to Islam-is-Peace's website. On 11 October, Khreegi conducted an [online Q & A](#) about Islam-is-Peace on www.islamonline.net, a pro-Muslim Brotherhood website, which again named her as the group's campaign coordinator.

Khreegi has previously served in the MAB in senior capacities. She was ["research manager"](#) of IslamExpo - a 2006 event partly [organised by the MAB](#) on the first anniversary of the 7/7 bombings. In 2004, Khreegi [acted](#) as MAB spokeswoman to defend statements by Islamonline's director, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, during his 2004 visit to Britain.

Press releases on Islam-is-Peace issued by the [Muslim Council of Britain](#) and the [British Muslim Initiative](#) (a MAB offshoot run by Anas Altikriti) name Ihtisham Habitullah as the group's media contact. Habitullah is long-time [Media Director](#) for the MAB and has also acted as [spokesman for the BMI](#), using the same mobile phone number in all three capacities.

When contacted by The Centre for Social Cohesion, Habitullah said that the MAB supported but did not direct Islam-is-Peace, and that his own involvement was personally motivated. He refused to name the group's leaders.

On Habitullah's recommendation, the Centre wrote an email to info@islamispiece.org.uk. An unsigned reply stated that Islam-is-Peace was an all-volunteer organisation but did not address the Centre's specific questions about the group's leaders and relationship with the MAB. Islam-is-Peace did not answer a second email from the Centre re-stating the questions.

M.A.B. LINKS TO EXTREMIST ORGANISATIONS

The MAB is dominated by four men: founder Kamal Helbawy, former president Anas Altikriti, spokesman Azzam Tamimi and former president Mohammed Sawalha - all [allegedly involved](#) with the Muslim Brotherhood, including its Palestinian branch, Hamas.

Egyptian-born Kamal Helbawy [joined the Muslim Brotherhood](#) at age twelve, and later served as its [spokesman](#) in Europe. He founded the MAB in 1997.

Anas Altikriti is the son of [Osama Altikriti](#), leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Iraq.

Azzam Tamimi, a Palestinian, worked as [spokesman](#) for the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood from 1989 to 1992. Ihtisham Habitullah, the Islam-is-Peace spokesman, has [described](#) Tamimi as "one of our leading political thinkers and a leading member of the Association".

Mohammed Sawalha fled the Palestinian territories for Britain in 1990, wanted by Israeli authorities for Hamas activism. From London, he [allegedly raised and channelled funds for Hamas](#) until 1993, when Israeli authorities arrested one of his key operatives.

M.A.B. DEFENCE OF ISLAMIC TERRORISM

While the MAB styles itself a voice of moderation and has condemned the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks in Washington, New York and London, its leading members have defended Islamic terrorism elsewhere.

In August 2005 Kamal Helbawy [described](#) terrorism by Iraqi, Chechen and Palestinian fighters as a legitimate tactic, saying that suicide bombings were sometimes justified:

"We should make a distinction between people like Bin Laden and Zawahiri who are simply fighting a wrong battle and those people who fight for their freedom and dignity, whether in Palestine, Iraq or Chechnya."

When asked his opinion of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's remark that suicide bombings were universally wrong, including Israel and the Palestinian territories, Helbawy [answered](#), "Well, he is wrong! It is as simple as that!"

In August 2006, Azzam Tamimi [told](#) BBC News 24 that he would like to become a suicide bomber himself: "If I can go to Palestine and sacrifice myself I would do it....It is the straight way to pleasing my God and I would do it if I had the opportunity."

MUSLIM FIRST, BRITISH SECOND

One of the Islam-is-Peace slogans is 'Proud to be a British Muslim'. However, the MAB has stressed that, on the international stage, the first loyalty of Muslims is to other Muslims.

In August 2006, at an event in Manchester entitled "A Call to Humanity", Azzam Tamimi [told](#) a crowd of 8,000 that "We are Muslims in Europe, not European Muslims."

Tamimi went on to [declare his support](#) for Hamas, identifying himself with the group by referring to it as "we".

At an October 2006 rally outside the American Embassy in London, Tamimi [called](#) on his largely Muslim audience to make recovering Jerusalem for Islam their top personal priority:

"We are not here talking about a Palestinian issue. We are talking about an Islamic issue. We are talking about 1.2 billion people around the world for whom beit al-quds [the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem] is issue number one. We think of it, we dream of it, we live for it and we die for it."

ISLAM-IS-PEACE FUNDING LEVELS

It is unknown how much money Islam-is-Peace has or aims to have at its disposal. It is also unknown where its funds come from. However, a look at its advertising campaign suggests that the minimum that Islam-is-Peace has spent so far is an estimated £164,550 - money the group says comes entirely from donations.

Islam-is-Peace's media campaign began on 6 July 2007 with advertisements appearing in The Guardian and The Metro. These cost a minimum of £8,700 and £28,750 respectively, according to the two newspapers.

The Islam-is-Peace media campaign's second phase began on 24 October and consists of placards in London underground trains and stations, and on buses across the city, for six and four weeks respectively, Habitullah said. According to CBS Outdoor, the advertising company which Habitullah said Islam-is-Peace had contracted, this would cost at least £135,800.

Habitullah said Islam-is-Peace plans to continue the campaign for the next two years and that it was seeking funding from any and all sources, including the government.

According to Islamic Relief, which currently handles donations to Islam-is-Peace, the group has applied for charity status but not yet received it. The Charities Commission said it had not registered Islam-is-Peace, and that it could not disclose information about pending applications.

M.A.B. INVOLVEMENT IN BRITISH POLITICS

Islam-is-Peace presents itself as apolitical. However, the MAB involves itself extensively in British party politics through its support for the Respect Coalition, whose candidates have included former MAB leaders.

In January 2004 Ihtisham Habitullah [addressed](#) the Respect founding convention to offer the MAB's support. That summer Anas Altikriti stood down as president of the MAB to stand as [Respect candidate](#) for Yorkshire and Humberside in European Parliamentary elections.

CONCLUSIONS

The Centre for Social Cohesion applauds all efforts to promote peacefulness, tolerance and understanding.

However, the message of Islam-is-Peace seems disingenuous when associated with groups such as the Muslim Association of Britain, whose leaders have shown that they don't truly believe it.

Furthermore, [media statements](#) by Islam-is-Peace have couched the group's message in the language of victimhood - a discourse that threatens to entrench rather than ease distrust between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Islam-is-Peace would better serve Muslims - and Britain - if it addressed its message to those who do most damage to Islam's image: the voices of extremist Islam.

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The Centre for Social Cohesion is an independent think tank

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