

FAITH, EQUALITY AND COHESION – ARE THEY COMPATIBLE?

a public meeting organised by Women Against Fundamentalism

Tuesday 25 November 2008 at 6.30pm in the House of Commons

All welcome – please email info@womenagainstofundamentalism.org.uk
to receive details of the venue and how to get there.

Chair: Clara Connolly, Women Against Fundamentalism

Speakers: Pragna Patel, Chair of Southall Black Sisters

Karon Monaghan QC, leading discrimination law barrister

Jeremy Corbyn, Labour MP for Islington North

Shamshad Hussain, feminist activist and policy officer
for black and ethnic minority community development

SBS LEGAL VICTORY OVER EALING COUNCIL: THE IMPLICATIONS

Earlier this year, Ealing Council cut its funding to Southall Black Sisters (SBS), who provide vital support in the borough for minority women suffering from domestic violence. In view of the devastating implications of this decision for women, minority groups and specialist services across Britain, SBS mounted a legal challenge.

THE JUDGEMENT

A day and a half into the hearing, Ealing withdrew their case. The judge issued guidance to the council (and by implication to all councils), stating: 'There is no dichotomy between funding specialist services and cohesion; equality is necessary for cohesion to be achieved.'

THE QUESTIONS

The case has raised important questions about equality and cohesion, particularly as many religious groups are now receiving public money to provide social and support services, while moves are also under way to extend the equality laws to include religion or belief. These developments could leave many women, non-believers and those who will not – or cannot – 'fit in', exposed to discrimination from within their communities, and deprived of the safety nets traditionally provided by the state.

THE CHALLENGES

Women Against Fundamentalism has a longstanding record of challenging discrimination in circumstances where race, gender, religion, sexuality and class intersect. This meeting has been organised by WAF to build on that tradition and to explore the implications of the SBS victory for secular spaces for women and minorities across Britain.

www.womenagainstofundamentalism.org.uk
email: info@womenagainstofundamentalism.org.uk