

Our Ref: 75082.1

FAO: The Editor and Legal Department
Byline Times
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London | Cambridge | Oxford | Hong Kong | Singapore

11 July 2024

BY E-MAIL

Dear *Byline Times*

Our client: Faith Matters Community Interest Company (Faith Matters)

We refer to your letter dated 2 July 2024, and to your further enquiries to our client dated 9 July 2024.

As regards your letter dated 2 July 2024, we do not propose to incur time and costs engaging in lengthy debate regarding the factual matrix in respect of the Article, except to say that, whichever distorted account you seek to portray (which, for the for avoidance of any doubt, is rejected), our client did not suppress Dr Ahmed's findings, and that it is not for you to attempt to inaccurately recast Mr Mughal's deeply personal reasons for withdrawing his candidacy to be appointed as the Government's independent adviser on anti-Muslim hatred (which we understand at least two Government sources can corroborate). Our client's position remains as stated in our letter dated 20 June 2024.

As regards your further enquiries to our client, we are surprised that you appear to be ploughing on with publication notwithstanding the points made in our letter dated 20 June 2024. This is demonstrative of the agenda you and Mr Ahmed appear to have developed against our client. It appears from your further enquiries that your proposed article will focus on two key allegations: firstly, that there is "*poor governance*" at Tell MAMA, including that Ms Atta acts as both a director and board member of Faith Matters (the **Governance Allegation**); secondly, that, while Faith Matters has received substantial government funding to monitor and deal with anti-Muslim hate crime, it has in fact not been carrying out this work, and has instead been using its funding to deal with "*Muslim extremism*" (the **Monitoring Allegation**).

Our client has instructed us to respond as follows:

1. The allegations you make appear to be based entirely on two letters apparently sent by Baroness Gohir to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Secretary in January and March 2024. As set out in our letter of 20 June 2024, our client has not been provided with copies of these letters – rather than raising her concerns directly with our client and allowing it an opportunity to respond, Baroness Gohir appears to have instead decided to made serious allegations about our client to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary, referred to these allegations publicly in Parliament, under the protection of parliamentary privilege, and provided copies of her letters containing the allegations to you, presumably for the purposes of enabling you to run articles attacking our client.

2. Your e-mail refers to *"irregularities in Companies House filings by two directors of Faith Matters"*. The only *"irregularity"* appears to be that Ms Atta erroneously recorded her date of birth as April 1978, rather than April 1976, in respect of Stop Funding Hate CIC, an organisation from which she resigned in February 2021. We note that you appear to have now rowed back from the very serious allegation made by Mr Ahmed in his enquiries to our client dated 19 June 2024, in which he claimed that directors of our client *"have provided false information deliberately to Companies House"*, a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment and/or a fine. We note that you have sensibly confirmed that you *"have no intention of publishing anything to the effect that any directors of Faith Matters or any persons connected with Faith Matters have committed any criminal offence"*. That you accept that this allegation is insupportable is indicative of your Mr Ahmed's journalism and irresponsible approach to the preparation of your threatened story. Rather than objectively and forensically assessing evidence and drawing the appropriate conclusion based on that assessment and supporting evidence, you reframe and selectively apply the facts and cherry-pick evidence to suit your conspiratorial narrative.
3. As regards the Governance Allegation, it is simply wrong to allege that there is poor governance at Tell MAMA and/or Faith Matters. Firstly, it appears to be based on a misunderstanding of the relationship between Faith Matters and Tell MAMA. Tell MAMA is not, as Baroness Gohir appears to suggest, a separate organisation/entity to Faith Matters: it is a national project run by Faith Matters. Ms Atta is on the board of directors of Faith Matters. While she feeds into project-related matters, including management of projects and associated risks, her role on the board is, in effect, secretarial (as company secretary). She takes no part in decision-making by the board, including refraining from voting on any board matters. This is a perfectly normal and acceptable arrangement within CICs. Any suggestion that there is anything untoward in this, and any allegation of poor governance at Faith Matters, is wrong and, if published, would be defamatory.
4. As regards the Monitoring Allegation, you allege *"that while the organisation has received very substantial Government funding to do so, it has not in fact provided a robust and consistent national anti-Muslim hate crime monitoring service through Tell MAMA"*, and you appear to endorse Baroness Gohir's view that Tell MAMA has been *"funded to tackle Muslim extremism which is being hidden under the guise of monitoring"*. In essence, you appear to intend to deliberately portray our client, an organisation set up in order to serve and help protect Muslim communities in the UK, as covertly misusing Government funds to in fact attack and *"tackle"* parts of these communities. This is an

incredible and extremely serious allegation to make, and one which strikes at the heart of Faith Matters's and Tell MAMA's credibility. It is also demonstrably false:

- a. Firstly, as set out in our letter of 20 June 2024, our client took the deliberate decision to refer less explicitly to the names of projects it works on in some public forums following the 2016 referendum on Brexit, and the increase in extremist right-wing attacks on Faith Matters and the work that it carries out, as well as specific targeting of members of Faith Matters.
- b. Secondly, notwithstanding the above, as was also set out in our letter of 20 June 2024, our client did in fact refer to Tell MAMA and its work on anti-Muslim hate crime monitoring in its CIC reports from 2016 onwards. The relevant excerpts of these reports is set out in that letter and we do not propose to repeat them here.
- c. Thirdly, details of the work carried out by our client in respect of anti-Muslim hate crime monitoring during this period is also publicly available on Tell MAMA's website. We refer you, for example, to '*A Decade of Anti-Muslim Hate*', a report published in July 2023 on Tell MAMA's website which, *inter alia*, includes statistics showing the number of users of Tell MAMA's monitoring and reporting service from 2012 onwards.¹ This shows that the number of cases reported has increased steadily over time, including increasing from 1,223 in 2016 to 2,301 in 2021. The figure for 2022 is 2,656 and the figure for 2023, which is yet to be published, is higher still, and you will no doubt be aware of Tell MAMA's reporting on the very concerning rise in anti-Muslim hate since October 2023.² In total, over 20,000 Muslims in the UK have used Tell MAMA's reporting and monitoring service. This report, which we presume Baroness Gohir has seen given that she liked a tweet by Tell MAMA from July 2023 promoting it, and which Mr Ahmed appears to have deliberately ignored, makes a mockery of the Monitoring Allegation. That Mr Ahmed should intend to make such a damaging allegation about our client despite the fact that the information which fatally undermines such an allegation is publicly available amounts to a dereliction of his journalistic duty and is consistent with his approach to date.
- d. Fourthly, both you and Baroness Gohir appear to be operating on the assumption that references to "*extremism*" in our client's CIC reports are to "*Muslim extremism*", as though that were the only form of extremism. They are not, and our client is surprised that you would interpret them as such. They are references to Islamophobic and other far-right extremism which result in incidents of anti-Muslim hate. You will no doubt appreciate that addressing Islamophobic and other far-right extremism is crucial to our client's work in protecting Muslim

¹ <https://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/A-Decade-of-Anti-Muslim-Hate-TellMAMAReport.pdf>

² <https://tellmamauk.org/greatest-rise-in-reported-anti-muslim-hate-cases-to-tell-mama-since-oct-7th/>

communities in the UK by tackling the ideologies that result in anti-Muslim hate, and the funding provided by the Government is to support our client's work in this regard as a whole.


You appear intent on seeking to portray our client as a malignant organisation with poor corporate structure and governance and which has covertly misused Government funds in order to undermine the communities it has been set up to serve and protect. It is clear from the above – and it ought already to have been clear to you from publicly available information and from the information provided in our letter dated 20 June 2024 – that this is false and, if published, would be highly defamatory.

Your proposed article would be indefensible under the Defamation Act 2013. As set out above, the allegations put to our client are false, precluding a section 2 defence. As regards section 3, the allegations relate to matters of fact, not opinion. Furthermore, there is no public interest in publishing false allegations which mislead the public, precluding a defence under section 4.

Our client is highly concerned that you appear fixated on attacking it and undermining its credibility and its work by making allegations on speculation and conjecture alone. It is also concerned that the publication of these allegations would have the affect of causing serious financial loss for the purpose of section 1(2) Defamation Act 2013 as it risks jeopardising any future funding it may receive by making the false suggestion that it has misused funds it has received to date. This is a particularly serious concern at a time when a new Government has recently entered office.

Should you decide to proceed to publication notwithstanding the above, our client's rights, including the right to seek damages for any serious financial loss it suffers arising from the publication of your defamatory allegations, are reserved.

Yours faithfully



Mishcon de Reya LLP