

Challenging Racial and Religious Prejudice

Wednesday 11th June 2025

CR4, The Scottish Parliament / Teams

Present

MSPs

- Foyso Choudhury MSP (Convenor)
- Fulton MacGregor MSP (online)
- Monica Lennon MSP (online)
- Stuart Alexander MSP (online)

Invited guests

- Prof. Vian Bakir

Non-MSP Group Members

- Zara Mohammed (Secretary)
- Daniel Gilius
- Lindsay Taylor (CEO, Muslim Engagement and Development)
- Mohammed Shahid Farooq (Multicultural Society & Muslim Council of Scotland)
- Matthew Shapps (Jewish Council for Scotland)
- Parvin (Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council)
- Dr Adrees (Muslim Council of Scotland)
- Asifa Hussain
- Farooq Malik
- Naseem Anwar
- Various faith leaders, academics and community representatives (online)
- Nibal Saleh (Scottish Parliament)

Apologies

- Nurul Hoque
- Mercedes Villalba MSP
- Maggie Chapman MSP
- Billy Singh
- Marilyn

Gordon

Agenda item 1 - Welcome & Introductions

The meeting opened with a welcome from Foysol Choudhury MSP, who stressed the importance of the Group's work in tackling racial and religious prejudice, particularly in the current political and social context. He welcomed Zara Mohammed as the new Secretary, thanking Peter for his contribution in the role prior to moving to Newcastle. Zara expressed her gratitude and set out her commitment to ensuring the Group remains collaborative, active and action focused.

Members introduced themselves both in person and online. It was noted that the Group now has over 51 members, representing a diverse mix of MSPs, faith leaders, academics, campaigners, and community representatives.

2. Approval of Previous Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated ahead of the meeting. No amendments were raised. The minutes were proposed by Foysol Choudhury MSP and approved.

3. Group Focus, Code of Conduct and Priorities

Zara outlined the refreshed focus for the coming session:

- A new Code of Conduct was introduced, emphasising active participation, regular attendance, constructive communication, professional conduct, and commitment to improvement.
- Members discussed the need for the Group to deliver tangible action, not just symbolic support, and to influence policy in the Scottish Parliament and wider Scottish society.
- Members highlighted persistent issues including anti-immigrant rhetoric, Islamophobia, and the impact of emerging technologies such as AI and misinformation on prejudice and hate.
- Feedback gathered showed priorities include combating racism in education, tackling the rise of far-right sentiment, addressing under-reporting of hate crime, and ensuring Scottish elections are conducted free from divisive rhetoric.

4. Guest Speaker: Prof. Vian Bakir — “Confronting the Threat: Emerging Trends and Issues in the Spread of Misinformation and Deepfakes”

Prof. Bakir gave an in-depth presentation on the challenges of misinformation and deepfakes, including:

- Global trends showing declining trust in media and institutions.
- The risks posed by AI-generated deepfakes that can manipulate public opinion, target religious and community leaders, and incite conflict.
- How algorithms amplify harmful content and the difficulties in legislating against disinformation while safeguarding freedom of speech.
- The need for a multi-stakeholder approach involving governments, tech companies, the media, and communities to tackle disinformation.
- Recommendations included regulating political deepfakes, investing in media and emotional literacy, and supporting quality journalism.

A Q&A session followed. Members asked about legislation, the role of policing, community education and how citizens can push politicians and media to act responsibly. It was noted that better digital and emotional literacy within communities is vital to tackling the issue

5. Open Discussion: Members’ Reflections and Priorities

An open floor discussion invited members to share practical priorities for the Group. Key points included:

- The urgent need to tackle online harms affecting young people, including guidance for parents and community leaders on misinformation and hateful content.
- A call for systematic, government-backed education on race, religion and equality in schools, with stronger interfaith engagement and involvement of the Scottish Youth Parliament.
- Members agreed to develop a focus on the conduct of Scottish elections and the need to challenge harmful political rhetoric, including recommendations for enforceable codes of conduct.
- Poverty and deprivation were identified as underlying factors fuelling prejudice and extremism, needing to be addressed in tandem with anti-racist policy.
- It was agreed that the Group should support community leaders with clear, practical information on building community resilience, fact-checking and combating misinformation.
- Members stressed the importance of amplifying minority voices in the media and promoting better representation in journalism.

6. Next Steps

- Zara and Foysoil will circulate a schedule of meetings for the coming year.
- The next meeting will have a dedicated theme on Education and Youth Engagement, with input from schools, universities and the Scottish Youth Parliament.

- Members are invited to suggest presentations or lead discussions on their areas of expertise.
- A CPG email address will be set up for members to send ideas, suggestions and updates.
- Any further feedback is welcomed via email.

Foyso! Choudhury MSP thanked everyone for their contributions and the Secretary for coordinating the meeting. He emphasised that the Group remains open and inclusive to all communities, and encouraged members to reach out with ideas and to stay actively involved.

Meeting

Closed

Date of Next Meeting: TBC