

SEEN, HEARD, SUPPORTED

MUSLIM WOMEN AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA

TEA & CHAT • 18 MAY 2026

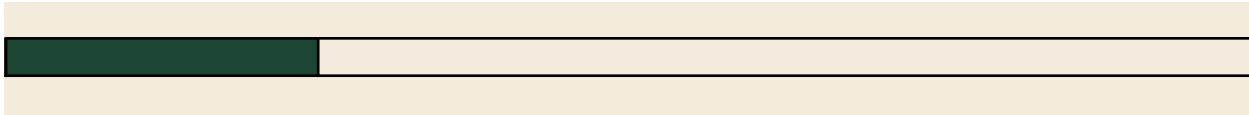


Ethnicity of Participants – 55 Attendees

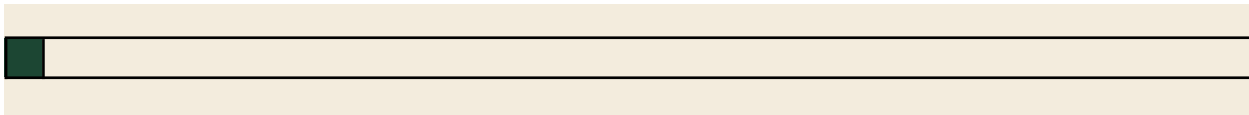
Pakistani 70%



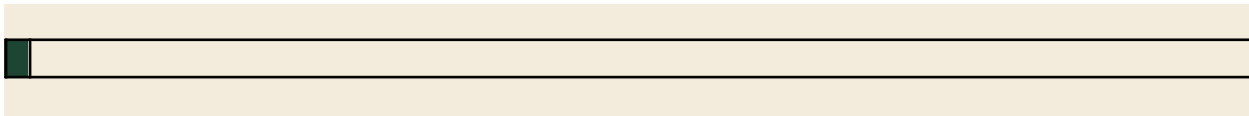
Indian 25%



White British 3%



Afro Caribbean 2%



Led by Akeela Ahmed MBE

Location: Kunafa & Tea Restaurant

Time: 6:00pm – 8:00pm

Attendance: 55 women

About the Speaker

Akeela Ahmed MBE is Chief Executive of the British Muslim Trust, with over two decades of experience supporting vulnerable people and tackling hate and discrimination. Founder of She Speaks We Hear, she has advised government, led national initiatives, and remains a leading advocate for equality, inclusion and social justice.

Before joining the Trust, Ahmed was a business leader, social entrepreneur and equalities campaigner. She is a Trustee of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and previously served as Lay Member for Patient and Public Involvement and Equalities Champion at NHS Brighton & Hove CCG. In January 2017 she addressed over one hundred thousand people at the Women's March on London, and was named one of Stylist's Women of the Year that year. Her portrait featured in the National Trust's We Are Bess exhibition at Hardwick Hall, alongside modern and historic female leaders.

Session Overview

The May Tea & Chat brought Akeela Ahmed MBE to Bradford to speak about the work of the British Muslim Trust and the everyday reality of Islamophobia. Ahmed opened by asking how many of the women present had experienced hate at work or in the street; almost every hand in the room went up. When she then asked how many had reported what happened, most hands went back down. That gap between experience and reporting, she said, is the reason the Trust exists.

A Trust Born of Necessity

Ahmed traced the organisation's founding to the wave of riots that spread across more than thirty towns and cities in the UK, marked by open and sustained anti-Muslim sentiment. In their aftermath, funding was made available to monitor and address the rise in hate crime, and the British Muslim Trust was awarded support to build a response: a helpline, a reporting process, and a source of trust for communities and government alike.

Recognising and Reporting Hate

Much of the session focused on what counts as a hate crime and how the Trust's helpline works. It is not an emergency line, Ahmed was clear: anyone in immediate danger should still call 999. But for incidents that fall outside that, from being spat at to verbal abuse telling someone to "go home", the Trust offers a route to support, and where the person wants it, to police involvement. Advisors from a range of backgrounds can help someone report an incident, signpost further support, or provide up to twelve sessions of counselling. Reports can be made by phone, WhatsApp or an online form, and everything shared is confidential unless the person consents to it being passed to police.

Ahmed noted that the fear generated by these incidents can change how women live: some stop going out and turn to online shopping instead. That, she said, is not something anyone should have to accept, and it is exactly the kind of impact the Trust wants to help address, alongside its casework with people affected in schools, workplaces and the NHS.

Rising Attacks on Mosques

Alongside its casework, the Trust conducts its own research. One study, drawing on reports made to the Trust and on public data, found 27 attacks on 25 mosques across 23 towns and cities between the end of July and the end of October 2025. Ahmed said the findings pointed to a policing response that had not matched the scale or seriousness of the problem, and the Trust has since made recommendations to government and police on how attacks on mosques, like attacks on any other place of worship, should be treated and investigated.

Voices from the Room

The discussion gave several women the chance to share their own experiences. One spoke of working in a professional environment and not wearing a headscarf, yet still hearing casual, disparaging remarks about Muslims from people who assumed she was not one of them; she said the same respect extended to a nun in religious dress should be extended to a Muslim woman in a headscarf. Another recalled an incident from her teenage years in Dewsbury in the 1980s, when she was targeted with what was later found to be glue; at the time, she said, there was little recourse, and while things have since improved, it can still feel as though the clock has been turned back.

Several women raised concerns about the pressures facing children in school, including inconsistent rules on what pupils are allowed to wear or express in support of Palestine, in contrast with the latitude given to other causes. One woman, having reverted to Islam, reflected that the community also bears some responsibility for how it is perceived, and spoke of the importance of integration, patience, and continuing to build relationships across faiths.

A Shared Responsibility

Ahmed closed by returning to the Prophetic example of responding to hostility with patience and compassion, while stressing that this does not remove the need to report hate crime and hold perpetrators to account. She encouraged the women present to see the Trust's helpline as a practical, confidential first step, and to recognise that speaking up, individually and collectively, is what allows the true scale of the problem to be seen and addressed.

**Report created by the Tea & Chat participants
supported by the MWC Team**

