

4 December 2023

Islamophobia Awareness Month

November was Islamophobia Awareness Month and the theme this year was Muslim Stories; throughout the month we have seen the lived experience being shared by our Muslim colleagues

I mean the first thing is to say that it should be Islamophobia Awareness every day because it is relevant to our lives both in the workplace and outside to see a spotlight shone on the awful cases Muslims face in this country and abroad.

As we see so much destruction and death in Gaza on social media and on the TV, we have seen an increase in Islamophobia here in the UK. Since 7 October, there has been an 140% increase of reported cases of Islamophobia. A mosque had a pig's head dumped on its roof, a woman had her hijab ripped off and Muslim protesters at the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign were labelled terrorists for supporting Palestine. It is deeply offensive and racist to describe Muslims as terrorists as it is used to stereotype Muslims. This is not happening in isolation, for years now we have seen open season declared on Muslims, from politicians, commentators, the media and the think tanks. If it isn't how we dress, how we eat and how we speak, then it is our very existence which is questioned.

Across DWP since the violence in Israel and occupied Palestinian territories began, we have seen an uptake in disciplinary investigations into our members. In two cases I have represented, one member was threatened with being sacked for going on a Gaza protest in London and the other was standing next to a banner at the protest which some have deemed offensive. The rights of our members to exercise their legal rights as a trade union member to support official PCS union policy is being questioned and ignored. Thankfully, after my intervention we have seen both cases quietly dropped, however I strongly believe these attacks and complaints from managers are rooted in Islamophobia and we as a union stand resolutely opposed to it and see it as an attack against the whole union. The law protects trade union activities for our members so continue to support the protests and support official PCS union policy.

These attacks on British Muslims are not happening in isolation and we know the anti-equality narrative of the UK Government. If you or your colleague are feeling

under siege, scared, threatened, or don't know what to do, remember:

- If you are or your friends are not a member of PCS union, [join NOW](#).
- Continue to raise your voice against Islamophobia.
- If you have been a victim of Islamophobia, make sure you report it to DWP and PCS union.
- Support PCS Union Conference adopting the all-party parliamentary group definition of Islamophobia which the UK Government is opposing.
- Continue supporting your union as we stand with Palestine.
- Finally, be an ally, together we can win.

Mohammed Shafiq is the PCS DWP Group Assistant Secretary leading on the corporateCentre, Chair of the PCS National Black Members' Committee and a member of the NEC.