

# Birmingham – Muslim leader blames Christians and women for domestic violence

From the [\*The Times\*](#)

The under-fire Central Mosque Chairman is said to have made the controversial comments at a meeting with Shaista Gohir, MBE, and her organisation, the Muslim Women's Network UK.

The nationally-respected group had arranged a meeting at the mosque in December with trustees to discuss the possibility of holding a joint event to raise awareness about the often hidden problem of forced marriages.

But in a [battering David Cameron an Islamophobe.](#)

The group had met Mr Afzal and a number of other trustees at the meeting held at the mosque, a registered charity.

In her complaint letter, Ms Gohir said: "We provided examples of case studies from our helpline and explained that other women's helplines across the country were regularly receiving calls on forced marriages and that a high percentage of these concerned Muslim women and girls, particularly from Pakistani background.

"Mr Afzal responded by saying forced marriage was no longer a problem... he went on to say that many marriages took place at the mosque, that the couples who got married were happy and that the mosque would know if forced marriages were taking place. We were made to feel that our claims about forced marriage being a problem were dishonest."

Before leaving Ms Gohir and her colleague, who had taken notes, had asked the mosque trustees about another possible joint project to highlight domestic violence.

Ms Gohir wrote in her letter: "Mr Afzal responded by saying more men than women suffered domestic violence these days...He then went on to state that 'domestic violence was happening mainly in the Christian community because they get drunk'.

"I explained that the problem was also significant in Muslim communities and that women have been murdered as a result. However, Mr Afzal questioned why he had not heard about these murders in the media if they had taken place. We explained that cases had been reported in the media and that, in fact, there had been several murders in the West Midlands alone.

"...We were surprised by his views given that the mosque runs a well-known divorce service where domestic violence is regularly raised as a reason for divorce."

"By the end of the conversation it was clear that the trustees, and especially Mr Afzal, were not interested in women's issues and had little, if any, intention of working with us on any women's rights and issues."

As well as making the complaint to the Central Mosque about Mr Afzal, the group is complaining to the Charities Commission pointing out the mosque has 39 male trustees – and not a single woman. Ms Gohir said in her letter: "This emphasises the blatant nature of the discrimination against women. Are you suggesting that not a single woman had the skills, knowledge and ability to fill one of the trustee roles?"

The group is also making a complaint to the Labour Party about Mr Afzal.

We previously told how he had attended an anti-Prevent meeting last week where he labelled the Prime Minister an Islamophobe – a claim he denied but