

**Welcome Speech**  
by  
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*In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.*

Lord Chief Justice, Lords, Excellencies, Sisters, Brothers, Ladies and Gentlemen. Assalamu Alaikum and Good Evening. Welcome to the London Muslim Centre.

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to tonight's event, the first lecture of its kind organised by Pro Bono and the London Muslim Centre and sponsored by Islamic Bank of Britain. I am delighted, Lord Chief Justice, that you have chosen our Centre to speak on a subject that is of central importance not just to the Muslims in the UK, but to the whole of the British society.

This Centre, inaugurated four years ago, was built by the Muslim community in the East End of London, whose determination and philanthropic spirit led to the raising of some £8 million. Today, the fruits of that labour are found in the many projects housed here, including Pro Bono, our joint host. I am proud to say that the users of this Centre are not only Muslims, but people of other faiths and none.

Given the current sad state of affairs in most of the Muslim world, it might come as a surprise to many of our non-Muslim friends to know that the notion of Rule of Law in Islamic jurisprudence is the same as that in the English legal system. Equality before the law and equal protection of the laws are the most cherished and central pillars of the Islamic legal system. Out of the many references on this issue in the Noble Qur'an, please allow me to quote two verses

*Whenever you judge between people, you should judge with justice. (Ch4: V58)*

and

*And if you judge, judge with justice between them. Verily, God loves those who act justly. (Ch5: V42)*

Today, in the context of discussions on the future of a plural Britain, the notion of Equality in

Justice could not be more important. Muslims seek equality before the law, and sometimes challenge, as they are entitled to in our democracy, the manner in which the State treats or is perceived to treat Muslims. Unfortunately, this *bona fide* expectation often results in hysterical media overreaction, as we witnessed with the Archbishop's thoughtful remarks on the role of Muslim personal law in Britain or when we make legitimate criticism of some of the draconian anti terror legislation.

If we as Muslims have any quarrels, these are with politicians and not the Judges. We are not unaware of the difficulties that the judiciary has had with the government in a number of areas and cases. Lord Chief Justice, you are among friends and admirers. You lead an independent and robust judiciary and it commands our respect and confidence. I should like to make one plea though. I believe I speak for a vast majority of Muslims when I say that we do not want separate Courts or parallel legal system. What we do want is a judiciary that is sensitive to our divine laws on personal relationships and family matters. Judges involved in family matters need to have knowledge of our rights and obligations as Muslims in Sharia law.

In addition, there are 3 key areas of particular importance to us:

1. The right to religious belief, practice and representation on a par with other faith communities in the UK.
2. The right to be protected from discrimination, disadvantage, harassment and vilification on grounds of religion whether perpetrated by individuals or institutions.
3. The right not to be targeted or disproportionately impacted upon by particular legislation or how it is implemented – for example, in the fight against terrorism.

Lord Chief Justice, you speak to us today at a particularly poignant time. The difficulties and challenges we face as a nation and the Muslim communities as part of this nation can be overcome by mutual effort and understanding and most importantly by honest discourse.

Lord Chief Justice we are grateful and indebted to you for coming here and speaking tonight.

As Lord Chief Justice, the head of the judiciary in England & Wales, and head of the Courts of England & Wales, your views on Equality and Justice are of paramount importance and we look forward to hearing from you.