

My Lord, friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen...good evening and assalamualaikum wa rahumutalhi wa barekatu!

My name is Faruk Miah. As the newly elected Chairman of the Conservative Muslim Forum it gives me immense pleasure to welcome you all here today at the Carlton Club...founded in 1832 as the original home of the Conservative Party.

Firstly can I say a heartfelt THANK YOU to all of you for attending this evening because I know it couldn't have been an easy decision? I'm glad you've made it and I hope you are all enjoying the afternoon tea?

Like me, many 2nd and 3rd generation South Asians grew up in inner city, working class areas of towns and cities across the UK but through hard work, determination and the blessings of our parents every single person in this room is a success story and role model for the next generation.

Growing up in Yorkshire, my father worked 12 hour shifts as a labourer in a factory in Leeds. He didn't want me to become a labourer like him, he worked those 12 hour shifts to ensure I got everything I needed to get a good education...very soon I realised the importance of education and the part it plays in social mobility.

Mashallah I've done pretty well for myself, I've worked in mainstream education for more than 25 years, resulting in awards from the Minister for Further Education and an MBE from the Queen. So, I am very much a living example of the journey taken by many 2nd and 3rd generation Muslims living in the UK.

There comes a point in everyone's life where you either want to take on a new challenge or a challenge presents itself in a way that you can't walk away ...last Friday I was elected the new Conservative Muslim Forum Chairman with 91% of the votes amongst 3 candidates. I am now only the 3rd ever Chairman of CMF following in the footsteps of Lord Sheikh and Mohammed Amin, both formidable figures in the British Muslim community.

I haven't always been a Conservative; in fact it was a chance meeting with Asif a fellow educator and Conservative Councillor that introduced me to CMF back in 2011. Talking to Asif, I realise Conservative politicians aren't as bad as they've always been portrayed in our community. The more CMF events I attended, the more I could relate to the values and principles of the Conservative Party, values of hard work, values of family, values of low taxation etc. The myth that you had to be rich to support Conservatives was unfolding in front of my very eyes.

Whilst it's sometimes very easy to talk the talk, it's not always easy to deliver and walk the walk...I'd like to think...I'm one of those people who can deliver and walk the walk, whether it's changing lives in my professional role as a Senior Manager in Education or as an Executive on CMF.

Not only have I helped CMF organise events for those that aspire to get more actively involved in politics from the "Be a Councillor" event with the LGA or the "Be an MP" event with James Cleverley MP and Nusrat Ghani MP...we've tried to educate and inform people with our 3 visits to the European Parliament, the health events, the interfaith events, events on difficult topics like the Israel/Palestine conflict, special viewing of the Mogul Exhibition at the British Library, Hajj Exhibition at the British Museum to name just a few.

How do we as individuals learn and make informed choices? I guess we can read newspapers, magazines, books, stuff on the internet? watch television? attend classes? If we are always surrounded by people who think the same as you, have no diversity of thought, don't ever challenge your thinking...will you ever learn something new?

To me, this is what CMF does best...challenges your thinking, opportunity to hear different points of view, opportunity to learn something new, opportunity to get involved, opportunity to have your voice heard. We don't force anyone to support the Conservative Party, we don't force anyone to vote for the Conservative Party but I challenge you and your friends to attend a few of our events and see for yourself why the Conservative Party should be the natural home for British Muslims.

I'm sure you know that at the last general election more than 80% of Muslims voted for Labour. There were many factors why that was the case...but the one that I cannot quite get my head around is one of "loyalty"...“my family have always voted Labour, therefore I have to be loyal and remain with Labour”. It's a statement that has no logic nor reflected in so many other aspects of our lives that are ever changing.

Let's talk about loyalty...as a show of hands; can you raise your hand if you are still driving the same make and model of car today as your first car?

So, every single person in the room has switched brands...no issue of loyalty?

One more question on loyalty...a show of hands, who still lives in the same house they first ever lived in?

So, every single person in this room has moved...no issue of loyalty?

So what's this thing about loyalty to Labour for so many Muslims? If you can move house because it's in the best interest of your children's education...where's the loyalty?

If you now drive a BMW, Mercedes or even a Bentley or Ferrari where's your locality to Datsun, Nissan or Toyota?

You see, in both these situations I believe it's ASPIRATION that led you to work hard, to desire that new home and the new car. As the Muslim community becomes more

and more successful and economically stronger, does the Labour party still represent you and the best interest of your family? Who you vote for is your individual choice, but whilst Labour might have been the right choice for my father's generation I am an aspirational, hardworking British Bangladeshi Muslim and I haven't seen any policies that Labour have to encourage hard work, enterprise and ambition.

With an 80 seat majority, the Conservative Party will be in power for at least the next 5 years if not the next 10...making it 15-20 years in power.

So, my simple question to you all tonight is "should the Muslim community remain on the outside and remain part of the opposition for the next 5/10 years or join robust debate and try to influence the government from the inside?"

Whether you are a supporter, a member, an ambassador or a patron, CMF gives you a unique opportunity to not only engage with the Muslim community, listen to their concerns but also have the ear of the present government and its hierarchy.

As I embarked on my Chairmanship for the next 3 years not only do I seek your blessings, I would really like you to join me on my journey in whatever capacity you feel fit and get more actively involved with CMF.

Once again, thank you so much for attending tonight, very much appreciated. I very much look forward to seeing you all at the next CMF event.

Thank You

Faruk Miah MBE
Chairman CMF
E: Faruk_Miah@yahoo.com