

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE

Claim No: QB-2020-000863

QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS LIST

BETWEEN:-

QARI ASIM MBE

Claimant

-and-

ASSOCIATED NEWSPAPERS LIMITED

Defendant

STATEMENT IN OPEN COURT

Solicitor for the Claimant

1. My Lord, I appear for the Claimant in this matter, Qari Asim MBE.
2. Mr Asim is a senior Imam at Leeds Makkah Mosque and Chair of Mosques & Imams National Advisory Board. He is also a trustee of a number of charitable organisations as well as a governor of Leeds Beckett University. Mr Asim regularly advises statutory bodies and law enforcement agencies in respect of Islamic and cultural issues (including the Government's Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hatred). He was recognised in the Birthday Honours list by the Queen in 2012 for services to inter-faith relations and the community. He is also a practising solicitor.
3. On 7 April 2019, the Defendant, Associated Newspapers Limited published an article in the Mail on Sunday entitled "*Revealed: Government adviser on Islamophobia... and cleric who called for hanging of Christian*". A version of the article was also published by MailOnline under the headline "*Revealed: Government adviser on Islamaphobia [sic] gave his backing to a Pakistani cleric who called for a Christian mother to be hanged for blasphemy*". (together the "Articles").

4. As the Defendant accepts, the Articles would have been understood by readers to suggest that Mr Asim, through his support of a protest led by a number of individuals including the extremist cleric, Khadim Rizvi, supported and endorsed:
 - a. the proposed hanging of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman in Pakistan, for blasphemy:
and
 - b. the brutal murder of Asad Shah, a shopkeeper from the Ahmadiyya community in Glasgow in 2016.
5. As ANL accepts, the allegations that Mr Asim supported and endorsed the proposed hanging of Asia Bibi and the brutal murder of Asad Shah were both defamatory of Mr Asim and also entirely untrue.
6. Not only was Mr Asim vehemently opposed to the imposition of the death penalty on Ms Bibi, but he publicly and vociferously campaigned for the UK Government to give Ms Bibi asylum. Indeed, Mr Asim was one of a number of prominent British Muslims who were signatories to a public letter to the Home Secretary in support of Ms Bibi's cause.
7. Equally, and as the Defendant also accepts, Mr Asim believes the murder of Asad Shah to have been a grotesque and repugnant crime, and he publicly denounced the murder as such at the time.
8. The purported context of the Articles was that in 2017, Mr Asim participated in the issuing and sharing of a statement by British Muslim Scholars (an organisation of which Mr Asim is a member) which supported the democratic right of Pakistanis to protest peacefully *'to ask the government to expose those people who have tried to amend the constitution of Pakistan regarding Khatam-e-Nabwat (the idea that Muhammed is the last prophet) behind closed doors'*. The statement also expressed the hope that *"through dialogue a swift and sustainable resolution is achieved between the parties so that any civil unrest and violence can be avoided"*, as there was concern that violent clashes had begun between the government and the protestors.
9. The protests were led by a number of individuals, including Khadim Rizvi, an extremist Islamist cleric who has called for and endorsed extreme violence against blasphemers. However, the statement by British Muslim Scholars was not in any way demonstrative of Mr Asim endorsing those abhorrent views ,
10. Naturally, the publication of these false and defamatory allegations caused great distress to Mr Asim, In recognition of the falsity of the allegations made against him, the Defendant has published an apology on its website and in the print edition of the Mail on Sunday, and

agreed to join in the reading of this Statement in Open Court. Further, ANL has agreed to pay Mr Asim damages, as well as his legal costs.

Solicitor/Counsel for the Defendant

11. My Lord, on behalf of Associated Newspapers Ltd, I confirm all that my friend has said. ANL withdraws these false allegations and apologises unreservedly to Mr Asim.

Dated: 19 March 2020