

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE

CLAIM NO: HQ09X01238

QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION

B E T W E E N:

SHAKIL AKHTAR

Claimant

-and-

NEWS GROUP NEWSPAPERS LIMITED

Defendant

STATEMENT IN OPEN COURT

Edward Yell, Solicitor for Mr. Shakil Akhtar:

My Lord, I appear on behalf of Mr. Shakil Akhtar and appear in connection with an article entitled "Evil on Benefits" by Mazher Mahmood, which appeared as a double page spread, along with an editorial entitled "Sick parasites spawn terror," in the News of the World on 3 February 2008.

In this article Mr. Akhtar was described as a central figure in a dangerous and militant Islamic cell, where he was responsible for channelling funds to banned terrorist organizations, including Jaish-e-Mohammed, and that he did so knowing and intending that the money would fund the purchase of weapons to be used against British forces in Afghanistan.

A dossier containing the supposed evidence upon which the News of the World based these allegations was at the same time delivered to Thames Valley Police by the newspaper which prompted the Police to issue a search warrant for the Claimant's home which, in light of the News of the World's serious accusations against Mr. Akhtar, was understandable and foreseeable. This search warrant was executed between the morning of 3 February 2008 and the evening of 7 February 2008 and resulted in Mr. Akhtar and his family being forced out of their home for several days while the police conducted an extensive search of the property and his personal effects.

Predictably the allegations contained within the article were also seized upon by elements of the far-right and have been presented as being indicative of the problems facing multicultural Britain.

However the truth of the matter, which the News of the World now accepts, is that Mr. Akhtar is not and never has been involved in the funding of terrorism in any way whatsoever, and nor is he or has ever been a member of a militant cell. The News of the World now accepts that he has no connection with terrorism whatsoever and in fact earns his living honestly as a car mechanic in High Wycombe. Further, notwithstanding the prolonged Police investigation, Mr. Akhtar has never been arrested or charged over any offence related to this or any other matter. Mr Akhtar would like to make it clear that he does not support or condone violence against British forces in Afghanistan, or indeed anywhere.

Mr. Akhtar and his family have been caused great hurt, distress and fear by the baseless allegations which were made against him by the News of the World. He is a devout Muslim and his standing in the local community has been badly affected by the article and we take the opportunity to reassure his friends and neighbours that there was no truth in these allegations.

Following service of proceedings for libel the News of the World have made an Offer of Amends, agreed to pay damages of £100,000 to Mr. Akhtar together with his costs. They have also agreed to publish an apology.

In all the circumstances Mr. Akhtar is content for this statement to serve as a vindication of his good name and I simply ask your Lordship for permission to withdraw the record.

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Edward Yell of Carter-Ruck,
on behalf of the Claimant.