

One Society Many Cultures



The case for multiculturalism

A joint UNISON/NAAR campaign briefing



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Today's diverse Britain is the result of hundreds of years of migration.¹ Every single community which has made its home on these shores has brought with it their culture, traditions and religions, all of which have contributed to our diversity. Simultaneously, Britons have left to settle in countries all around the world throughout the centuries. Multicultural Britain is the consequence of these massive movements of people both into Britain and out of Britain to other parts of the world.

Multiculturalism has come under sustained attack over the last few years, not solely from those who have always been hostile to it in principle, but increasingly, also from more liberal voices in society. This briefing gives a comprehensive definition of multiculturalism and outlines the nature of these attacks. It includes examples and evidence that counters the myths that have become common place. It also provides sources for more in-depth reading and highlights some action points for celebrating and defending multiculturalism.

N.B. This document contains footnotes that you can click on to visit the source of the information

Centuries of migration²



Photo: David Williams and courtesy of Holocaust Memorial Day Trust



Photo: Insight Steve Forrest

Prior to 1066	invasions by Romans, Saxons, Jutes and Vikings
1066	Normans invade England
1560	Dutch Protestants fleeing persecution arrive
1685	French Huguenots fleeing persecution arrive
1840s	Refugees from the famine in Ireland arrive
1848	Refugees from various revolutions in Europe arrive
1880s	Jewish refugees fleeing persecution arrive
1914–1918	Refugees from the First World War arrive
1930s	Refugees from Nazi persecution arrive
1948	Empire Windrush arrives, as does further migration from the Caribbean
1972	Settlements of Asians arrive following their expulsion from Uganda
1980s	Migration of immigrants from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa seeking economic opportunities
1990s	Refugees from the Balkans arrive
2000s	Members of European Union accession countries arrive

What is multiculturalism?

The Canadian example

It is useful to look at the Canadian experience, because 'in 1971, Canada became the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as official state policy. By so doing, Canada affirmed the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens, regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation. The 1971 Multiculturalism Policy of Canada also confirmed the rights of Aboriginal peoples and the status of Canada's two official languages.

'Fundamental to the Canadian model of multiculturalism is the belief that all citizens are equal. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. This kind of acceptance gives Canadians a feeling of security and self-confidence, making them more open to, and accepting of, diverse cultures.

'The Canadian experience has shown that multiculturalism encourages racial and ethnic harmony as well as cross-cultural understanding. It discourages ghettoisation, hatred, discrimination and violence.'⁴

Multiculturalism is the right of individuals and groups to pursue their cultural choices, heritage and faith, while respecting the right of others to do the same.

The definition which comes closest to explaining the framework of multiculturalism is from John Stuart Mill when he wrote about liberty and said: "...the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."³

If applied to multiculturalism, the definition can be interpreted as: the only reason for which a society is warranted to curb the freedom of cultural and religious expression of others is to prevent harm.

Multiculturalism allows for the full and complete expression by all sections of our society, of their cultural values, heritage and faiths. It is this freedom of expression that has come under sustained attack over the last few years.

Multiculturalism: a historic fact with the backdrop of the anti-racist struggle

The attacks on multiculturalism and diversity have historically coincided with obstructions to measures for increased equality and challenges to racism. Throughout the second part of the 20th century, the fight against racist violence and murders, the opposition to gross racist discrimination, and demands for equality in society for different minority communities have formed the basis of the anti-racist movement. Out of these struggles have emerged many examples of celebration of diversity as well as changes to public policy.

Celebrating diversity

Notting Hill, the largest street carnival outside of the Caribbean and Latin America, was the response by a group of African Caribbean-heritage people in West London to a spate of horrific racist attacks and violence in London in 1958.⁵

In the 1970s, the growing levels of support for extreme neo-Nazi, racist groups such as the National Front were countered by vast popular movements organised around Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League, who themselves held huge carnivals of music and culture, bringing together Black communities and the organised labour movement, with artists, musicians and anti-racists.

Photo: Andrew Wiard



From 'rivers of blood' to political representation

In 1968, the Conservative Party politician Enoch Powell made his infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech which led to a mass legitimisation of racism. It is still referred to as one of the most racist interventions by a mainstream politician in the last fifty years. Powell, a Conservative shadow minister at the time, lost his position in the shadow cabinet as a result.

Although the first Black MP in Britain was elected in 1892 for the Liberals in the Central Finsbury seat⁶ and the first Black Labour MP was Shapurji Saklatwala, elected in 1922, the most important campaign for Black representation took place in the 1980s. 1987 saw the election to Parliament of the first four Black MPs. These were: Diane Abbott, Paul Boateng, Bernie Grant and Keith Vaz. 21 years on, however, Parliament still does not reflect the diversity of Britain, with only 15 Black MPs. There would need to be 51 MPs elected to be proportionate to the percentage of the Black community in the population.

Photo: Insight, Steve Forrest



Equality at work

After a long fight to get the dress rules changed in order to access jobs such as bus driving which excluded Sikhs, a group of Sikh men won the right to wear turbans and keep their beards in 1969.^Z Today, the freedom to wear what one chooses still comes under scrutiny and attack but it is a fundamental principle of equality that people living in a diverse society have the freedom to practice their culture and religion.

In 1976, the Race Relations Act reached the statute book, making it illegal for direct or indirect discrimination in employment and services as well as victimising people on grounds of race, ethnicity, nationality, colour and national origin. Following the publication of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report, the Act was amended in 2000, creating a duty on public authorities to promote race equality and enable anyone to challenge those authorities on this question.

Policing

The early 1980s were marked by the struggle of young Black people in the face of intense police harassment under the 'sus' laws. These laws enabled police to stop and search anyone without having to provide a reason for their actions. Stop and search continues to be a contentious practice, as it still produces disproportionate targeting of young Black people.

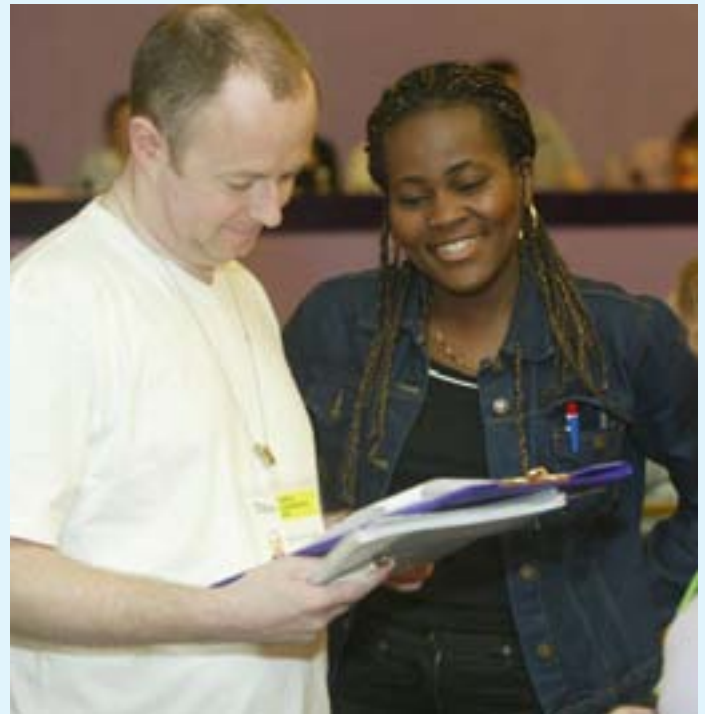


Photo: Paul Herrmann

Multiculturalism under attack

The attacks on multiculturalism have fed misunderstanding of what it is and how it operates, in an attempt to undermine the overwhelming support the concept enjoys in Britain.

Although multiculturalism has always faced attack in its forty-year history, mainly from right-wing media and politicians, the last few years have seen a sustained attempt to undermine it by some mainstream commentators and politicians who attack the concept of multiculturalism as the root cause of many problems in our society.⁸ For example, multiculturalism has been falsely accused of causing segregation and being a barrier to integration, aiding Muslim radicalisation or even being responsible for the attacks in London on 7 July 2005.



Photo: Philip Wolmuth



Segregation

The claim that multiculturalism leads to, or exacerbates, segregation has been advanced by a range of commentators and public figures, often without any evidence to support it. The segregation claims are countered by academics such as Prof Ceri Peach at Oxford, Dr Ludi Simpson at Manchester and Prof Danny Dorling at Sheffield.

Dr Ludi Simpson, for example, states that: "Segregation is not increasing, it is decreasing — government and academic studies all show that each group is increasingly spread throughout Britain. The only thing that is increasing is the proportion of Black and Asian people in Britain and in every city. And that is because there are relatively few elders: most of the growth is the natural growth of a young population."⁹

Prof Ceri Peach also argues that segregation is declining for minority ethnic communities, because when people from those backgrounds become wealthier they move to different areas. Whilst there are some areas where there is a concentration of people from Bangladeshi or Pakistani origins, these are an exception¹⁰.

The use of emotive terms such as 'ghettos' conjure up images of complete separation, which not only has no basis in reality but also is not supported by the facts. Prof Danny Dorling argues that the separation in British society is based on wealth rather than ethnicity.

Guardian journalist
Jonathan Freedland,
18 October 2006:

"I've been trying to imagine what it must be like to be a Muslim in Britain. I guess there's a sense of dread about switching on the radio or television, even about walking into a newsagents. What will they be saying about us today? Will we be under assault for the way we dress? Or the schools we go to, or the mosques we build? Who will be on the front page: a terror suspect, a woman in a veil or, the best of both worlds, a veiled terror suspect. Don't laugh. Last week the Times splashed on "Suspect in terror hunt used veil to evade arrest". That sat alongside yesterday's lead in the Daily Express: "Veil should be banned say 98%". Nearly all those who rang the Express agreed that "a restriction would help to safeguard racial harmony and improve communication". At the weekend the Sunday Telegraph led on "Tories accuse Muslims of 'creating apartheid by shutting themselves off'"¹⁵.

Terrorism

Contrary to some of the wilder assertions made, multiculturalism is not the root cause of terrorism, in fact the opposite is the case. Treating minority ethnic communities with respect and allowing them to pursue their cultural choices is the best way to ensure social harmony and make society safe. The official response of the London government to the events of 7 July 2005 (when 52 people were killed and hundreds were injured in the four bombings across the London transport system) indicated the correct way to oppose terrorism was by emphasising the unity of Londoners against terrorism. Led by the then Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone¹¹, a vigil demonstrating that unity brought much of London to a standstill and filled Trafalgar Square with thousands of Londoners¹².

With the discovery that the four bombers were British citizens, three of whom were born in Britain and the fourth had lived in Britain most of his life, right-wing commentators alleged that it was multiculturalism that had led to the terrorist attacks. This was strongly contradicted by the background of the bombers¹³. In fact, all four were widely considered to be integrated into British society, leading ordinary lives. Those who argue that terrorism is rooted in culture want entire Muslim communities to be put under the microscope and their loyalty questioned. This is also found to be untrue, as demonstrated by a MORI poll conducted in 2007, which showed that Muslims overwhelmingly support Western democracy.¹⁴

Such discrimination is more likely to create widespread resentment and hinder the task of locating and isolating any potential terrorists — a recipe for a more dangerous society — than increasing security. Furthermore, the constant blaming of entire communities for the actions of a tiny minority contributes to the unfair treatment of large numbers of people, inequality and injustice.

Why we must defend multiculturalism

The attacks on multiculturalism create a false dichotomy between the celebration of diversity and integration. As many academics and commentators have argued over the last few years, this is a false distinction. The main barriers to integration are racism, discrimination and poverty.

As the Canadian experience shows, multiculturalism actually enables more integration and a counter to racism. Whilst progress has been slow, and the anti-discrimination laws can be made much stronger, it is the case that the principle of equality is embedded in the general framework of social policy. The attempts to undermine multiculturalism must be opposed very strongly because it is these principles of equality and justice that would be undermined if multiculturalism is eroded.

The French example

Assimilationist policies in other countries such as France have served to exacerbate barriers to integration, rather than lead to the creation of a cohesive society. The blinkered approach to diversity in France, based on the declared principle that everyone in France is either a French citizen or a foreigner, and that all citizens are equal, does not show real equality. In fact, in 2001, 2006 and 2007, thousands of youths in the 'banlieues' (suburbs) of big cities engaged in street battles with the police, burning hundreds of cars, following incidents that led to the deaths of other young Black people at the hands of the police.

The discussion that followed these events further alienated these marginalised sections of French society. Generations of French citizens of Arab or African origin are condemned to a life without prospects and cannot see a future for themselves. In fact, the outlawing of ethnic monitoring in France means that there are no measures of how deep this discrimination is running across French society, where the sound of one's name or the postcode where one lives all contribute to whether one gets the job or not.

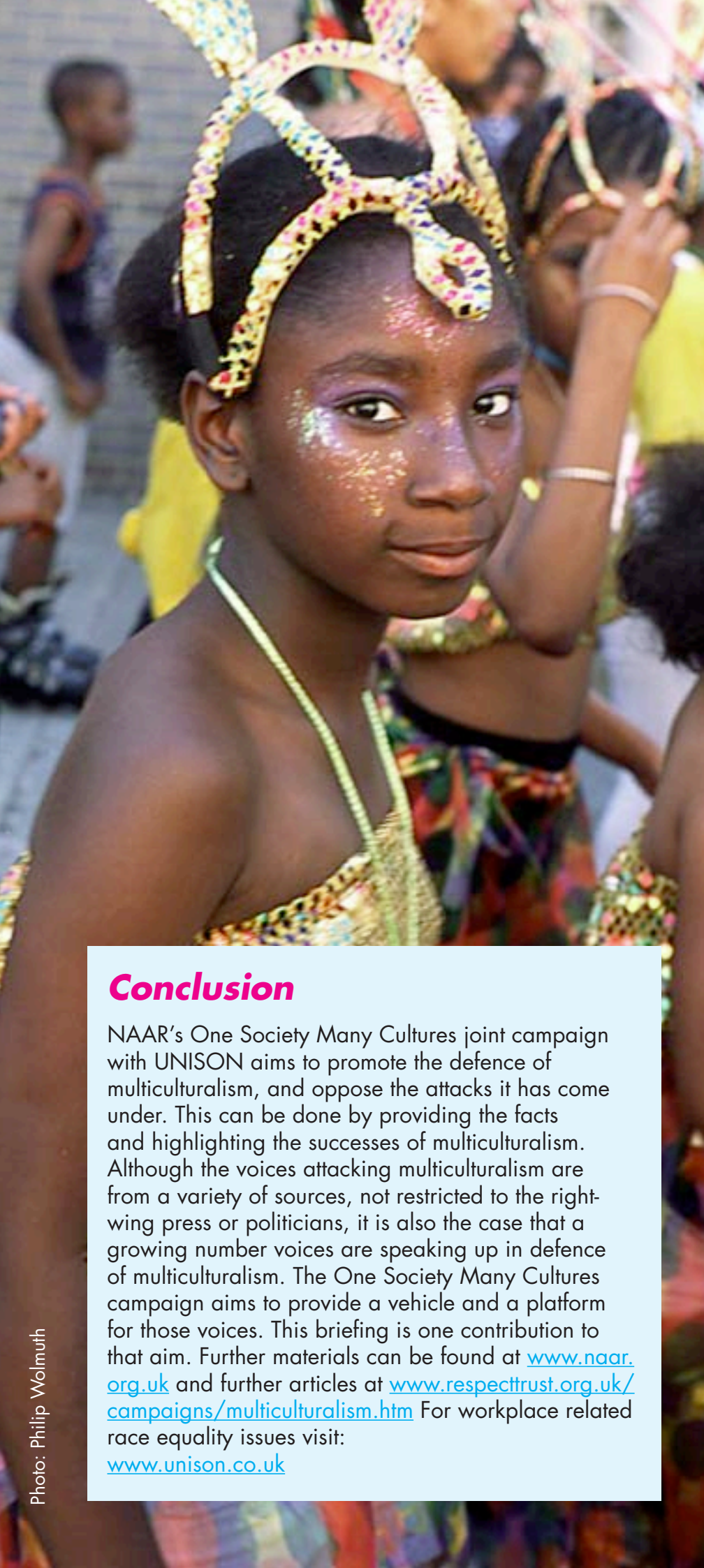


Photo: Philip Wolmuth

Conclusion

NAAR's One Society Many Cultures joint campaign with UNISON aims to promote the defence of multiculturalism, and oppose the attacks it has come under. This can be done by providing the facts and highlighting the successes of multiculturalism. Although the voices attacking multiculturalism are from a variety of sources, not restricted to the right-wing press or politicians, it is also the case that a growing number of voices are speaking up in defence of multiculturalism. The One Society Many Cultures campaign aims to provide a vehicle and a platform for those voices. This briefing is one contribution to that aim. Further materials can be found at www.naar.org.uk and further articles at www.respecttrust.org.uk/campaigns/multiculturalism.htm For workplace related race equality issues visit: www.unison.co.uk

Ten things you can do

- Invite a speaker from NAAR to a meeting to discuss why, and how, multiculturalism can be defended
- Visit the NAAR web site www.naar.org.uk to order leaflets, badges, stickers and One Society Many Cultures t-shirts
- Hold an information stall in your union or workplace with One Society Many Cultures materials
- Use this briefing, or model materials on the NAAR web site, to write an article for your union publication
- Submit a model motion to your local union branch in support of multiculturalism
- Lobby your MP to support the Parliamentary Early Day Motion calling for a defence of multiculturalism
- Order the picture exhibition from NAAR and display it in your local union branch or community
- Organise a joint community event with local groups and organisations
- Take the [multicultural test on the NAAR web site](#) and find out how much you really know about diversity in Britain
- Respond to any articles or letters in the local media that unfairly attack or blame multiculturalism



Useful contacts

The Anthony Walker Foundation

Liverpool Community College
Bankfield Campus
Bankfield Road
Liverpool. L13 0BQ
Tel: 0151 2523945

British Organisation of Sikh Students (BOSS)

PO Box 4350, Handsworth
Birmingham. B20 2FB
www.boss-uk.org
info@boss-uk.org

Churches Racial Justice Network (CRJN)

3rd Floor, Bastille Court
2 Paris Garden
London. SE1 8ND
Tel: 020 7654 7254
Fax: 020 7654 7222
www.ctbi.org.uk
info@ctbi.org.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Manchester
Arndale House
The Arndale Centre
Manchester. M4 3AQ
Tel: 0161 829 8100 (non helpline calls only)
Fax: 01925 884 000
info@equalityhumanrights.com

Cardiff
3rd floor, 3 Callaghan Square
Cardiff. CF10 5BT
Tel: 02920 447710 (non helpline calls only)
Textphone: 029 20447713
Fax: 02920 447712
wales@equalityhumanrights.com

Glasgow
The Optima Building
58 Robertson Street
Glasgow. G2 8DU
Tel: 0141 228 5910 (non helpline calls only)
Fax: 0141 228 5912
scotland@equalityhumanrights.com

London
3 More London
Riverside Tooley Street
London. SE1 2RG
Tel: 020 3117 0235 (non helpline calls only)
Fax: 0207 407 7557
info@equalityhumanrights.com

FOSIS

38 Mapesbury Road, London.
NW2 4JD
Tel: 0208 452 4493
Fax: 0208 208 4161
info@fosis.org.uk
www.fosis.org.uk

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

PO Box 61074
London
SE1P 5BX
0845 838 1883
louise.hector@hmd.org.uk
www.hmd.org.uk

Imaan

LGBTQ Muslim Support
28 Commercial Street
London. E1 6LS
www.imaan.org.uk
info@imaan.org.uk

Immigration Law Practitioners Association

Lindsey House
40–42 Charterhouse Street
London. EC1M 6JN
Tel: 020 7251 8383
Fax: 020 7251 8384
info@ilpa.org.uk

Inquest

89-93 Fonthill Road
London. N4 3JH
Tel: 020 7263 1111
Fax: 020 7561 0799
www.inquest.org.uk
inquest@inquest.org.uk

Jewish Council for Racial Equality (JCORE)

PO Box 47864
London. NW11 1AB
Tel: 020 8455 0896
www.jcore.org.uk
admin@jcore.org.uk

Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture

111 Isledon Road, Islington,
London. N7 7JW
Tel: 020 7697 7777
Fax: 020 7697 7799
www.torturecare.org.uk

British Muslim Initiative

36 Millennium Business Centre
Humber Road
London. NW2 6DW
Tel: 0845 108 5101
Fax: 0845 108 5102
info@islamexpo.com

Muslim Council of Britain

PO Box 57330
London. E1 2WJ
Tel: 0845 26 26 786
Fax: 0207 247 7079
admin@mcb.org.uk

NUS Black Students' Campaign

2nd Floor, Centro 3
19 Mandela Street
London. NW1 0DU
www.nusonline.co.uk/
blackstudentscampaign/

National Hindu Students' Forum

P.O. Box 46016, London. W9 1WS
Tel: 07092 377 304
Fax: 07092 869 726
www.nhsf.org.uk

National Assembly Against Racism

28 Commercial Street,
London. E1 6LS
020 7247 990
info@naar.org.uk
www.naar.org.uk

Operation Black Vote

18a Victoria Park Street
London. E2 9PB
Tel: 020 8983 5430/5431
Fax: 020 8983 5492
info@obv.org.uk
www.obv.org.uk

Sikh Federation (UK)

Tanglewood House
Pine Walk, Chilworth
Southampton. SO16 7HQ
info@sikhfederation.com

Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust

The Stephen Lawrence Centre
39 Brookmill Road
London. SE8 4HU
Tel: 020 8100 2800
information@stephenlawrence.org.uk
www.stephenlawrence.org.uk

STAR (Student Action for Refugees)

18 Victoria Park Square
Bethnal Green
London. E2 9PF
Tel: 020 8980 7036
Fax: 020 8981 6719
www.star-network.org.uk

Student Assembly Against Racism

28 Commercial Street
London. E1 6LS
Tel: 020 7247 9907
contactsaar@hotmail.com
www.naar.org.uk/saar/

The Refugee Council

240-250 Ferndale Road
Brixton
London. SW9 8BB
Tel: 020 7346 6700
Fax: 020 7346 6701
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

REGARD (Organisation of Disabled Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered People)

BM REGARD,
London. WC1N 3XX
Fax: 08444 431277
secretary@regard.org.uk
www.regard.org.uk

Union of Jewish Students

1-2 Endsleigh Street
London. WC1H 0DS
Tel: 020 7387 4644
www.ujs-online.co.uk

UNISON, the public services union

1 Mabledon Place
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0845 355 0845
www.unison.org.uk

The 1990 Trust

Suite 12, Winchester House
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www.blink.org.uk

