



East London Mosque and London Muslim Centre Statement on Anwar Awlaki

6th November 2010 –East London Mosque Trust Management

When did Anwar Al-Awlaki visit the East London Mosque (ELM)?

Anwar Al-Awlaki spoke at the East London Mosque in 2003. He delivered a series of lectures on the life of Umar bin al-Khattab, Islam's second Caliph. He also gave a guest Friday sermon (audio available on [YouTube](#) in four parts at time of writing) *"that talks [about] the duty of the Ummah to be a support for one another, and the consequences if Muslims ignore the plight of other Muslims."*

Did you host an event called "Stop Police Terror"?

On 26 December 2003, a guest Friday sermon was given by Anwar Awlaki. Contrary to claims there was no event held called "Stop Police Terror". A YouTube user has uploaded the sermon (see video description on YouTube) and chosen to name the audio/video "Stop Police Terror". In addition at no point in the sermon does he say that Muslims should not co-operate with the police. This was the last time Al-Awlaki visited the East London Mosque.

Why was Noor Pro Media allowed to show an Anwar Al-Awlaki video in the London Muslim Centre (LMC) on 1 Jan 2009?

A group called Noor Pro Media booked the halls in the LMC for a ticketed event 'The End of Time... A New Beginning' planned for 1 January 2009.

On 27 December 2008 *The Telegraph* [published an article](#) about the event. In particular, they said of Al-Awlaki that he was *"banned from entering the United States"*, and that he was *"acting as a spiritual adviser to three of the September 11 terrorists"* according to *"the US Department of Homeland Security, which has accused him in recent months of using video lectures to 'encourage terrorist attacks'"*.

This surprised the mosque management, as we had not read of anything like this in the British media before. We note that some commentators imply more was known, often citing sources written much later. It is important to judge events by the information to hand at the time.

Our first action on *The Telegraph* article was a discussion between our Executive Director and the police (the chairman of the ELM Trust who is not involved in day-to-day activities was on a family holiday during this period). The police confirmed they had already spoken to a reporter from *The Telegraph*, though this information was omitted from *The Telegraph's* article. The police subsequently spoke to Noor Pro Media. They did not raise any objection to the event going ahead, nor was any concern expressed about the inclusion of a video of Anwar Al-Awlaki.

We then contacted Noor Pro Media. They confirmed they wanted to show a pre-recorded video of Anwar Al-Awlaki speaking on the topic of life after death, which they wanted to follow with a live telephone link for questions and answers on the topic. We asked to see a copy of the video, and also wanted to know Al-Awlaki's response to the allegations in *The Telegraph*.

That same day Al-Awlaki posted a refutation to *The Telegraph* (preserved online by the [Nefa Foundation](#)):

“The truth of the matter is I am not banned from return to the US. I left the US on my own accord and refuse to return by my own choice. In fact the opposite is true. The US consul encouraged me to return to the US during his visit to me while I was incarcerated...”

Al-Awlaki's categorical refutation was a challenge to the claims in *The Telegraph*. Surprisingly, there was no response from *The Telegraph* or other sections of the media. We understood the claim that Al-Awlaki was banned from entering the United States at that time was not true, which is perhaps why *The Telegraph* produced no corroborative evidence to support their claim. This further undermined *The Telegraph's* claims.

The Centre for Social Cohesion (CSC) has taken credit in its inconsistent report of November 2009 as the source for *The Telegraph's* article. Unlike in other instances mentioned in their report, at no time did the CSC contact the East London Mosque as the venue to raise concerns or offer evidence of Al-Awlaki's extremism.

Quilliam declares itself to be a counter extremist think-tank, has [claimed](#) it “contacted East London Mosque and the London Muslim Centre to ask them not to host a live video link from Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen.” We have no record of Quilliam ever contacting us regarding this matter in December 2008. To further clarify once more, it was a ‘pre-recorded video’ not a live video link as Quilliam have described.

A review of the video showed it contained no extremist or controversial material. In the absence of any further information available to the mosque at that time, or in the British media or other sources to hand, and in the light of Al-Awlaki's published refutation that produced no response from *The Telegraph* or other sections of the British media, Noor Pro Media were allowed to go ahead with their event and show the pre-recorded Al-Awlaki video and to follow it with a live telephone question and answer session only on matters related to the topic.

The event passed peacefully with nothing extreme or controversial being said.

It is vital to note, if we had known then what emerged afterwards about Al-Awlaki's views and connections, then we would not have allowed the video to be shown in any circumstance. Indeed, in the light of events and revelations that came to surface by the end of 2009, this is what happened with a message of strong condemnation from the mosque.

What actions did ELM undertake after the event?

When our Chairman returned to the UK in early January he ordered a review of our hiring policy. We clarified that the list of speakers needed before a booking is confirmed should henceforth include those speaking “*via a live link or via a pre-recording*”. This condition was later amended so that now speakers must be approved before giving even a provisional booking.

We also added a new condition: “All publicity materials for the event must be submitted for approval to the LMC before the booking will be confirmed. The booking will only be confirmed if the materials are approved. The Management of the LMC reserves the right to require that publicity materials are changed or withdrawn. The Management of the LMC also reserves the right to refuse or confirm any booking if it is not satisfied with any aspect of the publicity materials.”

It is worth noting that the Noor Pro Media maintained that their poster, which showed a ruined Statue of Liberty in the foreground and fireballs raining down on the city in the background, was not a reference to 9/11. Given that their event was about the apocalypse at the end of the world, we had no reason to doubt their word. However, we accept that this is not a reference that Muslims can make without the appearance of a link to the atrocities of 9/11.

The emergence of Al-Awlaki’s extreme views

In late January 2009 Al-Awlaki published his views on Jihad, as more information about him gradually emerged. The East London Mosque decided that Al-Awlaki could no longer be a conference speaker either by live link or pre-recording, even though some hirers of our facilities had already planned to use his materials.

Later in 2009 when Al-Awlaki expressed support of the Fort Hood murders, the mosque went on record to condemn his words. At the end of 2009 when possible connections to Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab emerged, ELM again went on the record to condemn his views extreme views. (We note the CSC wrongly claims in its report that the mosque refused to condemn Al-Awlaki.)

We also took the decision in 2009 to prohibit the sale or distribution of Al-Awlaki materials in our mosque or centre, a decision we upheld when Noor Pro Media indicated they wanted to sell his materials in a subsequent booking. This decision was not uncontroversial, and even now a year later it is a topic of debate as YouTube begins to remove his extremist material. Whilst we are keenly aware of the importance of maintaining free speech, and we recognise that the materials people wanted to sell here did not contain extreme views, we felt that the mosque needed to demonstrate a clear dissociation from Al-Awlaki his links to extremism.

Our position on extremism

We would like to reiterate our position on extremism, especially violent extremism, and the roads towards it, as having no moral or religious justification and we completely abhor it. We are all part of a pluralist society and hold dear to the protection of our civil liberties as individuals, which are based on our British values of fairness, equality and justice. These are the concepts fundamental to the Muslim faith and we find them enshrined in Islam.

We remain committed to supporting a democratic society based on rights and responsibilities. We continue to work hand-in-hand with our partners in the law enforcement authorities, as well as others in the society, for a common good to ensure a safe and respectful environment is sustained for our diverse communities. We are determined to oppose bigotry that may trigger racial and religious tensions.