

Islamic hardliner is invited to address civil servants

From [Daily Mail](#)

The founder of a hardline Islamic lobbying group accused of making derogatory remarks about Jews and spreading conspiracy theories was invited to speak to civil servants, it has emerged.



Sufyan Ismail, 45, is the founder of Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), an NGO that aims to encourage British Muslim communities to be more involved in British media and politics. It has been revealed that Mr Ismail, a former businessman, was invited to speak in an online event organised

by the Civil Service Muslim Network on the topics of Islamophobia and racism.

The advocacy group also ardently opposes the government's anti-radicalisation strategy.

The invitation from the cross-government diversity body, discovered by [The Times](#), would have given more credibility to MEND, which was accused in a 2017 report of 'promoting extremism'.

Sara Khan, the government's commissioner for countering extremism, said Mr Ismail should not have been invited to speak, calling MEND a divisive organisation where some of whose staff had engaged in hate.

Mr Ismail himself has also funded the terrorism suspects' advocacy group Cage, where one of its leaders described

Mohammed Emwazi, the terrorist known as 'Jihadi John', as having been a 'beautiful young man'.

Mend has a reputation for taking a harsh line against those who oppose its approach. Ms Khan said in an official report last year that Mend staff had "posted hostile messages on Twitter relating to several politically and socially liberal Muslims, especially those involved in counterextremism work. One Mend tweet labels some Muslim groups as 'Uncle Toms' and the public messaging of Mend's founder describes civil society groups involved in counterextremism as 'government stooges'."

Mend risked stoking tensions this month when Jay Singh-Sohal, the Conservative candidate for police and crime commissioner in the West Midlands, accused it of undermining counter-radicalisation, which the organisation disputes. He made no mention of religion. In an incendiary riposte, Mend used a photograph of him beside a claim on Twitter that he had been "attacking Muslim organisations" and "furthering Islamophobic tropes".

Mr Singh-Sohal, an anti-hate crime campaigner, said readers "would just see a turban-wearing Sikh being accused of attacking Muslims. It's a provocation to incite a community against another person of a diverse faith."

Mend denied being anti-Sikh and said that all pictures of Mr Singh-Sohal showed him wearing a turban.

The Civil Service seminar had been called for this Thursday to mark Islamophobia Awareness Month, promoted by Mend every November. *Following hard on the heels of October which is Black History Month.*

David Toube, of the think tank Quilliam, said: "Civil servants should be actively engaged in disrupting the activities of this organisation, not hosting its founder as an honoured guest."

After being contacted by *The Times* the government said that the event had been scrapped. It added: "This invitation should never have been issued." *That is was issued shows the quality, concerns and sphere of interest of the modern young cadre of officials, and yes my tongue is firmly in my cheek as I type. .*