

# Sharia law being administered in shop basements, MPs told

From the [\*Telegraph\*](#)

Unofficial and unregulated Sharia law bodies are operating “everywhere in the country” performing marriages and handing out divorces, the head of a body set up to standardise the administration of Islamic law in the UK has told MPs.

Dr Ahmad Al-Dubayan, chairman of UK Board of Sharia Councils, based in Regent’s Park Mosque in London, said it was impossible to know how many so-called sharia “councils” are operating in Britain. But in some cases self-styled sharia authorities are operating out of small shops “maybe hidden in the basement or somewhere”, he said.

Several witnesses repeatedly rejected the word “courts” insisting on referring to them as sharia councils.

Supporters of sharia bodies insisted banning them altogether would simply lead to more “backstreet” panels springing up, often charging higher fees to provide a religious divorce.

Naz Shah, the Labour MP for Bradford West, who was herself forced into marriage at the age of 15, insisted during the meeting that many Muslim women, including some in abusive relationships, found Sharia councils a valuable source of help. She warned against “throwing the baby out with the bath water” and said many Muslim communities felt that calls to ban sharia bodies had an “air of Islamophobia”.

Dr Al-Dubayan said his board already had around 15 members affiliated but could not “force” others to join.

“And by the way we don’t know how many councils there are,” he added. Some people talk about 80 or 30 or 50, I don’t know...”

He added properly organised sharia bodies were essential to draw Muslims away from self-styled religious authorities.

“When they see you are well organised they will come to you,” he said. “They will not go to these small shops who are doing marriage and divorce, maybe hidden in the basement or somewhere.”

Speaking about discrimination against women, he said he could think of only two or three cases which had been said to be unfair out of “hundreds” handled by sharia councils. He added: “There are those small [bodies] who call themselves councils but we as the UK Board don’t even recognise they are councils: ...”