

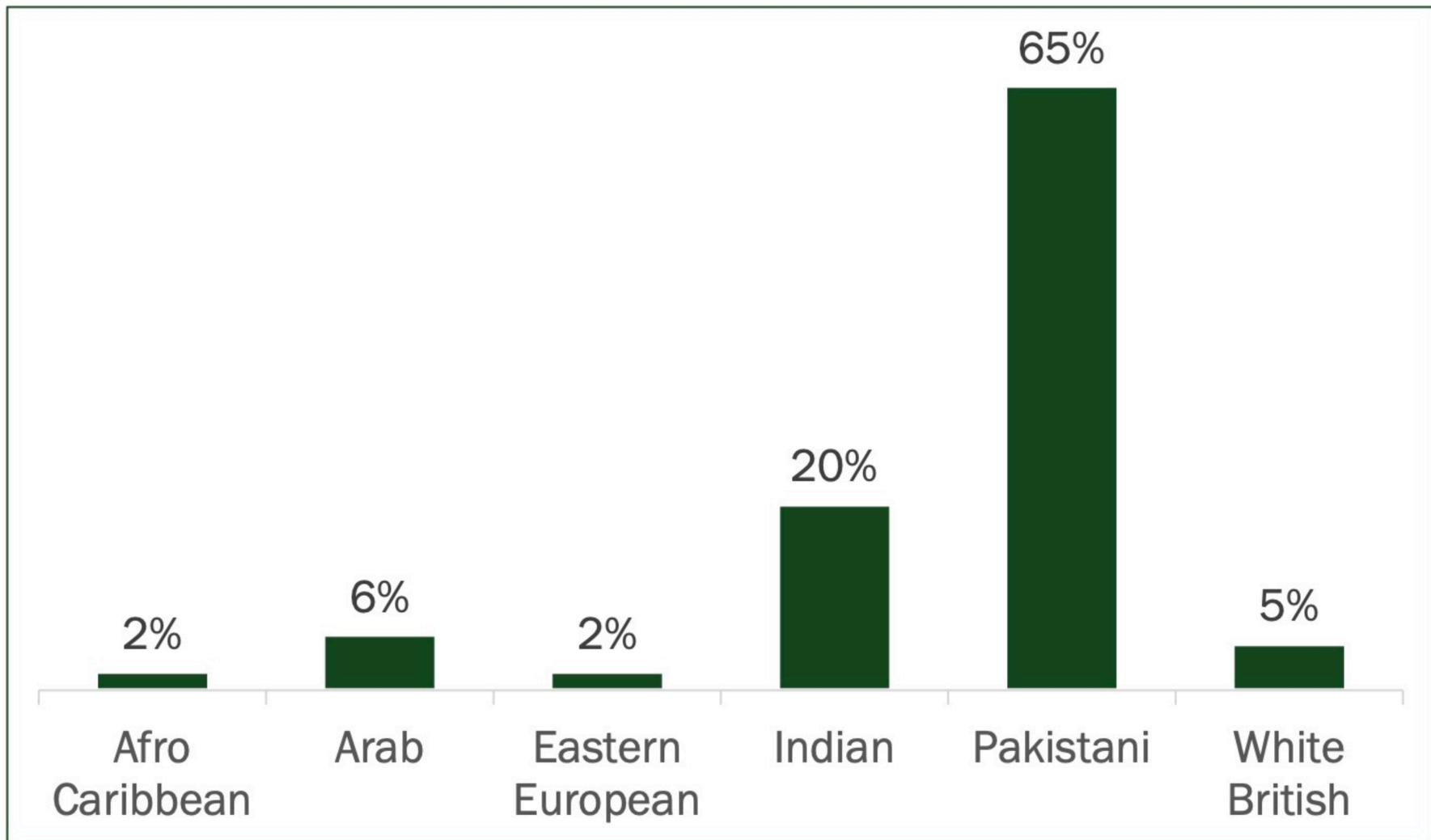


# **BENEATH THE SIRENS – REFLECTIONS FROM JERUSALEM**

**JUNE 2025**



## Ethnicity of Participants



## Introduction

On the evening of June 25th, Pearls Tearoom in Bradford was filled with 100 women who came together to witness a deeply personal and moving account of a recent journey to Jerusalem. Organised by the Muslim Women's Council (MWC), the event titled "*Beneath the Sirens-Reflections from Jerusalem*" provided a platform for reflection, storytelling, and spiritual solidarity. The room reached capacity within hours of registration opening, demonstrating the community's deep emotional and spiritual connection to the issue and the urgency of the stories that needed to be shared.

## Reflections by Bana Gora

Bana & Saadia opened the session with heartfelt gratitude for the prayers and support the group received during their ordeal.

Bana began by recounting how the journey, carefully planned through Zarvel Travel in Leicester, was considered low-to-medium risk before departure. No one could have predicted the escalation that would take place shortly after their arrival.



She described the early moments in Jerusalem: the warm hospitality of the Palestinian people, the cultural richness, and the spirituality of Al

Aqsa. But within days, the atmosphere turned. The first morning of attacks began with the sounds of sirens and phones flashing alerts in Hebrew. Over 600 missiles were launched toward Tel Aviv, and although the group had set the intention to pray, they found the streets barricaded by the IDF and armed forces.



What followed was an experience both terrifying and surreal. Missiles overhead, army patrols on every street, and the constant sound of sirens created an environment of deep uncertainty. Yet, Bana described a strange peace that accompanied their spiritual commitment. Some members stayed awake on the hotel roof watching the night sky, too anxious to sleep, but still connected to their faith and mission.

When the group decided to evacuate, what should have been a short journey to Jordan turned into an eight-hour ordeal. Elderly women and those with health conditions- some even on dialysis, carried their luggage by hand through the Old City as no carts were available for exit. Despite physical exhaustion and logistical chaos, the group remained united.

Once in Jordan, they were told by the Foreign Office that no emergency help would be available, as Jordan was considered “safe.” Flight costs skyrocketed and coordination for a group of 46 became nearly impossible. Saadia Mushtaq worked tirelessly to book small batches of tickets, sometimes at extraordinary personal cost, up to £4000 per person. It was a logistical and emotional challenge unlike any they had ever faced.



Bana’s reflections moved into more intimate territory when she recounted an encounter with a Palestinian shopkeeper. Asked by a friend to find a traditional dress, she located one hanging in a familiar store.

Without bartering, she paid the asking price. The shopkeeper was overcome with emotion. “You are a living example of the Prophet,” he said through tears. “This has been here for three months. Now I can feed my children chicken tonight.” That moment encapsulated the essence of the trip, a reminder of privilege, humility, and the human cost of injustice.

Despite witnessing physical abuse of Palestinian men and Muslim men in general, by IDF forces and experiencing discrimination firsthand, Bana’s resolve was unshaken. She emphasised that while visitors like them had options, Palestinians did not. And despite everything, she affirmed that she would return to Al Aqsa again without hesitation. The group was the last to leave the sacred mosque before it was closed, a symbolic and emotional experience that reinforced their connection to the land and its people.



## Reflections from the Panel and Saadia Mushtaq

The panel of women who had travelled with the group shared personal memories that left a profound impact on the room. Many described the sense of calm and spirituality that surrounded them despite the chaos. Praying in the open air at Al Aqsa, reciting zikr on rooftops, and finding courage in each other's company transformed fear into faith.

One participant shared how she felt more spiritual depth in Jerusalem than even in Mekkah or Medina. Others spoke of the resilience of the Palestinian people, their generosity and warmth in the face of oppression. These women bore witness to daily humiliation, forced shop closures at gunpoint, and the inhumanity of military presence in everyday life.



Saadia was praised as a calm and resourceful force throughout the crisis, managing bookings, supporting group members, and helping navigate multiple border crossings under pressure. Tour leader Numayr captured their complementary dynamic poetically, calling Saadia “the still water that reflects truth” and Bana “the rushing river that carves paths forward.”

## **Guest Address by Naz Shah MP**

Naz Shah offered a political and personal perspective, sharing her own experiences visiting Palestine and the difficulties she has faced advocating for Palestinian rights in Parliament. She praised the group’s courage and acknowledged the emotional and logistical struggles they endured.

She expressed deep frustration with the government’s lack of urgency, explaining that once a group leaves Israel and enters a “safe” third country like Jordan, they fall off the priority list. Naz reinforced that discrimination plays a role, non-Israeli, Muslim, or visibly Muslim British citizens often do not “tick the right boxes” for urgent support.

Naz encouraged attendees to continue to write directly to her. She reaffirmed her commitment to holding the UK government accountable and ensuring that such failures are addressed in Parliament. Her message was clear: without constant pressure and documentation, stories like these, risk being ignored.

## **Conclusion**

*Beneath the Sirens* was more than an event, it was a testament to resilience, sisterhood, and unwavering faith. The stories shared were not only about trauma, but about purpose, strength, and spiritual awakening. The evening served as both a warning and a call to action: a reminder of

the human cost of conflict, the importance of bearing witness, and the urgent need for peace, justice, and solidarity.

The Muslim Women's Council closed the evening with a renewed vow to continue its mission. As Bana said, "We returned with a pearl of peace in our hearts." It is a pearl they now pass on to others, urging the community to stand with Palestine, not just in prayer, but in presence, purpose, and persistent advocacy. This journey has renewed the Muslim Women's Council's vow towards peace, justice and interfaith solidarity which is needed more now than ever.

**Report created by the Tea & Chat participants  
supported by the MWC Team**

