

A woman with dark hair in a bun, wearing a white top and a pearl earring, is speaking into a microphone at a podium. The background is a light-colored wall with vertical lines. A green banner is overlaid on the image, containing white text.

# **DAUGHTERS OF EVE: VOICES FROM BRADFORD**

**OCTOBER 2024**

Daughters of Eve: Voices from Bradford  
Muslim Women's Council | Daughters of Eve Conference  
Friday 18<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2024

Attendance: 200 Women

Ethnicity: 45% Pakistani, 25% Indian, 20% White British, 5% Arab, 3% Afro Caribbean, 2% Eastern European

## Introduction

The *Daughters of Eve Conference 2024*, organised by the Muslim Women's Council, continues its vital work as a transformative platform for Muslim women's expression, leadership, and visibility in the UK. Since its inception in 2011, the conference has convened women from around the globe and local communities, addressing critical issues at the intersection of faith, identity, justice, healing, and resistance.

Set in Bradford, a city known for its rich industrial past, history of activism, and one of the largest Muslim populations in the UK outside London, the conference location powerfully contextualised the lived realities of Muslim women navigating the complexities of race, faith, gender, and class.

## Thematic Intentions

1. Visibility - Muslim women have always been present in social, political, and domestic spheres. The conference reaffirmed their presence not as supporting characters but as central narrators of their own stories.
2. Breaking Stigma - From confronting mental health taboos and racism to dismantling gendered expectations, the conference created space for radical truth-telling that challenged silencing norms.

3. Empowerment - Empowerment was both spoken and embodied. Through shared storytelling, participants offered testimonies of resilience that encouraged others to reclaim agency in their lives.
4. Faith and Healing - Faith was not treated as peripheral but as a central force. The conference highlighted how Islam provides comfort, clarity, and strength, even in the face of injustice, grief, and displacement.

## Conference Highlights

### Opening the Conference: Heartfelt Reflections on Gaza



**Dr. Naema Al-Modallal – "Our Faith Will Not Be Shaken"**

The 2024 Daughters of Eve Conference opened with a voice from the heart of one of the world's most devastated and resilient regions - Gaza. We were honoured to begin our gathering with a powerful keynote speech from Dr. Naema Al-Modallal, a teacher, academic, and witness to unimaginable hardship. Her address, titled *"Heartfelt Reflections on Gaza – Our Faith Will Not Be Shaken"*, set the tone for the entire weekend: grounded in faith, charged with moral clarity, and steeped in the lived reality of women navigating trauma, survival, and hope.

As the bombs fall and the blockade continues, Gaza is not just a site of political tragedy - it is a place where women continue to teach, to love, to raise families, to pray, and to resist despair. Dr. Al-Modallal brought this truth into our space, not as a distant observer, but as a woman living it daily. Her words were not only a reflection of suffering, but of extraordinary spiritual resilience. "Our faith," she told us, "is not shaken by destruction, because it is built on something unbreakable."

Opening the conference with Dr. Al-Modallal was both an act of solidarity and conscious intention. In a time when media narratives often strip Palestinians of complexity, dignity, and voice- and when Muslim women's voices are routinely marginalised - we made a deliberate choice to centre both. Her presence reminded us that the personal is political, and the spiritual is revolutionary. Her voice brought Gaza into the room, not as an abstract cause, but as a community of real women, with real lives, who continue to uphold faith and dignity under siege.

Her message resonated deeply with the conference's broader themes: visibility, resistance, faith, and healing. It was a reminder that while our conference takes place in the relative safety of the UK, our struggles - though shaped by different contexts- are interconnected. The fight for justice, for women's voices to be heard, for communities to thrive, and for faith to be a source of strength, crosses all borders.

In starting our gathering with her reflections, we began not with theory or debate- but with truth. Raw, painful, beautiful truth. Dr. Naema Al-Modallal offered us a lens through which to see our entire conference: as a space of witnessing, of standing firm in our values, and of connecting our hearts to the struggles of others, even thousands of miles away.

Her testimony connected the global to the local, reminding attendees that struggles across borders are intertwined through shared resistance, faith, and humanity.

## Panel 1: Anti-Muslim Sentiment – Challenges & Solutions

**Speakers:** Zara Mohammed (Secretary-General, Muslim Council of Britain)

Christa Ackroyd (Journalist & Broadcaster)

**Chair:** Muslim Women’s Council representative (Selina Ullah)

The first panel of the Daughters of Eve Conference opened up an urgent and deeply relevant conversation: the rise and normalisation of Islamophobia in the UK, particularly its gendered impact on visibly Muslim women. Framed as “*Challenges & Solutions*,” this session set a crucial foundation for the rest of the weekend- one that named the reality of Islamophobia while also seeking grounded, actionable responses.

The panel was graced by Zara Mohammed, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain and the first woman to hold that leadership position in its history. Zara brought both clarity and authority to the discussion, addressing the structural, cultural, and media-driven nature of anti-Muslim sentiment. She highlighted the way Muslim women, in particular, are often targeted- visible through their clothing and faith identity, yet often rendered invisible in policy, representation, and leadership.

Zara spoke about:

- The institutionalisation of Islamophobia in public discourse and policy
- The role of media narratives in shaping fear and division
- The need for more Muslim voices in leadership, journalism, and education
- Building interfaith and cross-community coalitions to push back against hate



Christa brought her experience in journalism to the fore, acknowledging the responsibility of the media in shaping perceptions- but also the opportunities for change through inclusive storytelling and ethical reporting.

Audience members were invited to share reflections and ask questions, which added a deeply personal dimension to the conversation. Several women spoke of their own encounters with Islamophobia- on public transport, at work, and online- while also echoing Zara's call for proactive engagement, coalition building, and faith-rooted resilience.

Key themes that emerged included:

- The psychological toll of constant scrutiny and suspicion
- The intersection of gendered and racialised Islamophobia
- The importance of allyship and civic engagement
- The role of young Muslim women in reframing narratives and leading change

By grounding the discussion in both the challenges and the collective strength of the community, this panel moved the conversation beyond diagnosis- toward vision, agency, and empowerment.

As one attendee aptly put it during the Q&A:

“This panel didn't just name the problem- it gave us tools and reminded us of our power to shape the future.”

*Q: How do we maintain faith in times of despair?*

*A: “Faith is not the absence of pain—it is the anchor that keeps us from sinking in it.” – Dr. Naema Al-Modallal*

## Guest Speaker: Imam Adam Kelwick

### Bridging Fear and Faith: A Story of Courage and Connection

The second keynote address of the Daughters of Eve Conference was delivered by Imam Adam Kelwick, a well-known Imam and Khatib based at the historic Abdullah Quilliam Mosque in Liverpool- Britain's first registered mosque. Imam Kelwick is widely recognised for his work at the intersections of faith, social justice, humanitarian relief, and interfaith dialogue. He has travelled extensively in humanitarian missions, advocating for displaced communities in Yemen, Syria, and Palestine, while continuing to serve grassroots communities across the UK.



In his warm, down-to-earth manner, Imam Adam offered not just words, but lived experience. One of the most memorable moments of his talk came when he shared a story from the 2024 UK riots, which were sparked by tensions around immigration, race, and national identity in various towns and cities.

He recalled how, as unrest broke out across the country, including in parts of Liverpool, he and others felt an urgent responsibility to protect their mosque from potential attacks- while also refusing to retreat into fear. Rather than staying behind locked doors, Imam Adam made the bold and unexpected choice to go out into the streets and engage directly with those involved in the unrest.

In his words:

“I realised we couldn’t just protect our buildings. We had to protect hearts- and change minds.”

He approached groups who had gathered in anger and frustration- many expressing hostility rooted in misinformation and fear. Rather than confront them with blame, he extended something radical in its simplicity: an invitation to come inside. He invited them into the mosque for a cup of tea and a conversation.

What followed, he shared, was a remarkable moment of disarmament and humanisation. For some of these individuals, it was their first time inside a mosque. They asked questions. They listened. They saw the prayer space, the community photos, and the people behind the headlines. And in those quiet exchanges over tea, some of their assumptions began to shift.

Imam Adam’s story was a powerful reminder of the transformative power of presence, dialogue, and faith-led outreach. His message wasn’t just about safety- it was about bridging divides with courage, compassion, and curiosity. It also aligned deeply with the conference’s broader vision: Muslim communities not just surviving in the face of hostility but actively transforming society through moral leadership and prophetic example.

As he closed, he left us with this reflection:

“People don’t often change because they’re argued with. They change because they’ve been seen, and because they’ve been treated as human.”

## Panel 2: Anti-Muslim Sentiment – Challenges / Solutions

**Speakers:** Imam Adam Kelwick – Imam & Khatib, Abdullah Quilliam Mosque, Liverpool; Naz Shah MP – Member of Parliament for Bradford West; Sheikh Osman – Imam & Chaplain

**Chair:** Muslim Women’s Council representative (Selina Ullah)

Building on the momentum of the morning session, Panel 2 continued the urgent conversation around anti-Muslim sentiment, offering insights grounded in faith leadership, political advocacy, and community care. The session brought together a panel of figures deeply rooted in the realities of both street-level engagement and systemic reform.



### Imam Adam Kelwick

Following his keynote address earlier in the day, Imam Adam returned to the panel to expand on the community-level response to hate and division. He emphasised the need for grassroots courage, recounting how acts of openness- like inviting sceptics or protestors into Muslim spaces- can help disarm prejudice and shift public perception.

He also highlighted the emotional toll that anti-Muslim hostility takes on individuals and families, particularly Muslim women, who often bear the brunt of public-facing Islamophobia. His remarks reaffirmed the need to centre healing, hospitality, and community resilience as essential tools in confronting hate.

### Naz Shah MP

As the elected Member of Parliament for Bradford West, Naz Shah brought a powerful political and personal lens to the conversation. Speaking not only as a legislator but as a Muslim woman of working-class

roots, she addressed the institutional normalisation of Islamophobia- from media narratives to legislation and policymaking.

Naz discussed her work in Parliament, including:

- Advocating for official recognition of Islamophobia as a form of racism
- Challenging discriminatory immigration policies
- Calling out political rhetoric that scapegoats Muslim communities

She urged attendees not to underestimate the power of civic engagement, encouraging Muslim women to occupy spaces of influence- whether in schools, councils, or Parliament- and to shape the narrative from within.

“We are not asking for favours- we are demanding our rights. And we are doing it with dignity, informed by our faith.”

## Sheikh Osman

As both an Imam and Chaplain, Sheikh Osman brought a perspective rooted in spiritual leadership and pastoral care. He spoke movingly about working with vulnerable individuals in hospitals, prisons, and universities- many of whom suffer from the mental and emotional impact of being persistently viewed with suspicion or hostility.

He underscored the importance of faith-based compassion, drawing on Islamic teachings about justice, patience, and truth-telling. He also emphasised the need for more training for Imams and chaplains to deal with trauma and identity-based harm, particularly among young people grappling with Islamophobia in schools and online.

*Q: What can Muslim women do to combat Islamophobia locally?*

*A: "Engage with your councils, your schools, and your MPs. Don't underestimate your power in the everyday." – Naz Shah MP*

*Q: How can mosques become more inclusive and safer for women?*

*A: "By opening doors, both literally and metaphorically. The mosque should reflect the whole community – women included." – Imam Adam Kelwick*

## Key Themes and Takeaways:

- Anti-Muslim sentiment is layered: it operates at personal, institutional, and political levels
- Muslim women are disproportionately targeted, and their experiences must be centred in solutions
- The response must be multi-sectoral: faith, media, education, law, and politics all have a role
- Dialogue, education, and representation remain essential long-term tools
- Faith itself is a source of resilience: Islamic ethics call for justice, wisdom, and engagement

This panel not only named the harms of anti-Muslim sentiment but also reminded us of our collective capacity to respond with dignity, strategy, and soul. It left attendees with a renewed sense of purpose- and a call to action that echoes far beyond the conference walls.



# Conference Evaluation Summary

## Feedback Summary

### Overall Satisfaction

- 95% of attendees rated the conference as “*excellent*” or “*very good.*”
- Most found the atmosphere to be inclusive, safe, and emotionally impactful.

### Positive Highlights

- Keynote speeches were especially praised.
- Panels were described as educational, timely, and solution-oriented.
- Alina Khan’s interactive quiz was a surprise hit and lightened the mood.

### Areas for Improvement

- A few suggestions for more breakout discussion groups.
- Improved dietary diversity for lunch options.
- Requests for childcare or child-friendly spaces.

### Highlights & Attendee Reflections:

Attendees described the conference as *inspirational*, *empowering*, and *well-organised*. Speakers and performances were frequently mentioned as standout elements, with particular praise for the quality of speakers, meaningful discussions, and a strong atmosphere of sisterhood. Many attendees remarked on the emotional impact of talks, particularly those relating to Palestine and Muslim women’s experiences. The event was seen as uplifting, spiritual, and inclusive, with several calling it “phenomenal.”

The evening was also appreciated for creating a safe, friendly space that promoted confidence, interfaith understanding, and community bonding.

### Feedback on Speakers:

Most attendees praised all speakers, highlighting Dr Naema’s moving talk on Gaza and Zara Mohamed’s inspirational presence as especially memorable. Imam Adam and Alina Khan also received warm praise, with Alina’s quiz segment proving very popular

**Discussion Topics:**

The majority found the issues raised during the conference *valid*, with a small number feeling they were *too controversial*. Overall, discussions were seen as topical, educational, and necessary.

**Final Comments:**

The feedback demonstrates deep appreciation for the event's purpose, structure, and execution. Several respondents expressed a desire for the conference to be held more frequently and offered thanks to the Muslim Women's Council for their ongoing work. The event was described as both humbling and empowering, providing not only knowledge but also hope and unity among women from diverse backgrounds.

**Summary:**

This conference was a resounding success. It offered exceptional value, stimulated meaningful conversations, and created a deeply inspiring and safe environment for women to learn, connect, and reflect. While a few logistical and dietary suggestions were raised, the overall tone was celebratory and deeply appreciative.

## Conclusion

The *Daughters of Eve Conference 2024* was a resounding success—offering a space for truth-telling, reflection, and action. It bridged the local and global, rooted in Islamic values and woman-led leadership. With powerful speakers, raw honesty, and a spirit of resilience, it reinforced the importance of making Muslim women visible, heard, and central to both national discourse and community healing.



## Recommendations & Learnings

### Recommendations:

1. Host the conference annually with regional roadshows throughout the year.
2. Introduce breakout sessions to allow deeper dialogue on specific topics.
3. Establish youth and intergenerational panels to bridge perspectives.
4. Provide on-site childcare to increase accessibility.
5. Expand interfaith programming to further coalition building.

### Learnings:

- Visibility without voice is incomplete, platforms must empower, not just showcase.
- Faith continues to be a powerful tool for resilience and activism.
- Safe, inclusive spaces for Muslim women remain rare but crucial.
- Empathy-based engagement (e.g., Imam Adam's tea invitation) is a model worth replicating.

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

