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## 12.06.08: Seven in ten marriages 'forced'


Dato publisert: 12.06.2008 Siste gang redigert: 12.06.2008


More than seven in ten marriages involving an English citizen and a spouse born in Asia could have an element of 'force or coercion' about them, according to [document published today](#) that contains some of the strongest language used by community leaders to date. The [Muslim Arbitration Tribunal](#) claims that forced marriages reflect a 'crisis that has loomed within the Muslim community without being noticed or dealt with for the past two decades.' The tribunal, founded last year and based in Nuneaton near Coventry, says the official figures of 300 forced marriages a year represent the tip of the iceberg. Muslim lawyers on the tribunal council based their figures on decades of experience within the community, and from observing their own friends and families.

They believe that the number of marriages involving an element of coercion is in fact far higher than 300 a year and could represent as many as 70 per cent of those involving one foreign spouse. The tribunal is chaired by **Shaykh Faiz Siddiqi** and includes on its council about 75 Muslim lawyers, barristers and judges from around the country.

The 28-page document, Liberation from Forced Marriages, to be published in London this morning, where Shaykh Siddiqi will deliver a lecture, represents the first attempt by a grass-roots Muslim organisation in Britain to tackle the problem head-on. It comes on the eve of tomorrow's 168-page report by the Commons Home Affairs select committee on domestic violence and forced marriage. MPs heard evidence that marriage visas are issued in cases where the sponsor has been forced into marriage and ordered to sponsor the visa. The committee also heard that some schools seem reluctant to discuss the issue of forced marriage because they fear offending parents and the wider community.

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