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### UK lawyers join forces to tackle forced marriages

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**British Muslim lawyers have come up with a plan to tackle the growing problem of forced marriages in their community.**

**Forced marriages in the UK present a huge problem, particularly between British citizens of South-Asian origin.**

In an attempt to tackle the problem, the Muslims Arbitration Tribunal (MAT) proposed a voluntary system whereby a British Muslim seeking to bring a foreign spouse into the country should provide testimony before a panel of Muslim judges.

In a report, the MAT calls on the British government to hold a summit on forced marriages with the aim of encouraging Muslims to work with the government to tackle this growing problem.

"We will work closely with the Government. It has to be joined forces but up to now the leadership of the Muslim community have not been forthcoming. We are trying to achieve an awareness that the community is now taking very bold steps to self-regulate," Sheikh Faiz Siddiqi said.

"If all forces join together, forced marriages can no longer jeopardize the lives of Muslims, who know that their religion didn't ask them to get married without their consent."

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), which investigated forced marriages in the UK, concluded that the government figures regarding the problem are inadequate.

While the British government claims that 300 forced marriages take place every year, a new study by the federation has proven that the figure is near 4,000 cases.

"This report is living proof that the government's figures on forced marriage are woefully inadequate, said Margaret Moran, a member of the Commons home affairs select committee, which is investigating forced marriages and domestic violence.

"If you multiply the statistics up and down the country, we're talking about 3-4,000 cases per year rather than 300," she added.

Dr Nazia Khanum, who took part in the study, also said that "forced marriages should be recognised as a form of bullying and domestic abuse and tackled in accordance with the normal professional standards and guidance for such cases".

The MAT agrees with this view, describing forced marriages as a crisis within the British community.

"These figures reflect the crisis that has loomed within the Muslim community without being noticed or dealt with for the past two decades. The figures that are reported to the authorities are only the tip of the iceberg", the MAT report said.

Source: AJP



British Muslim lawyers have come up with a plan to tackle forced marriages in their community.

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