

U. K. Muslims combat marriage 'crisis'

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LONDON - Muslim lawyers in Britain said yesterday they had decided to take matters into their own hands with a radical plan to combat the forced marriage "crisis" in their community.

Backed by influential sheiks and muftis, the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal (MAT) proposed Muslims set up their own system to tackle forced marriages between British Muslims and spouses from South Asia.

Sheik Faiz Siddiqi, a lawyer and a leading community figure, said the resentment and alienation created by such marriages drove young British Muslims toward extremism.

The MAT claims that more than 70% of marriages in the Muslim community involving a foreign spouse have some element of coercion or force, but is almost nonexistent in marriages between British Muslims.

Marriages without consent have led to suicides and honour killings in Britain, shocking a nation generally deemed to have successfully absorbed immigrant communities and practices.

The government has taken steps to tackle the forced marriage culture and has been looking for credible grassroots partners.

The MAT now wants to start sorting out the problem "inhouse."

Going through the British courts to resolve a forced marriage leaves the victim "ostracized by the community" said Mr. Siddiqi as he launched the proposal in London.

Forced marriages leave young Muslims feeling frustrated by the British system and their communities, he explained, saying it was "little wonder" some went off the rails.

"A lot of people who are steering towards extremism are those who have been rejected by the mainstream Muslim society or the mainstream establishment," he added.

"If we can fill those vacuums, we will be moving towards pre-empting those people that steer towards extremism."

Forced marriage led to domestic violence, and were therefore abusive and out of control, he said.

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