# David Cameron: Bringing down the barriers to cohesion

**INTRODUCTION**

It's an honour to be here with you today, to pay tribute to the work that you're all doing to bring this community together and to keep it together, to move forward together.

What you're doing here, we have to do all across our country.

And that's what I want to talk about today.

**THE CHALLENGE OF COHESION**

In the last few years, politicians have been talking a lot about this subject, using words like community cohesion.

But this is not a new challenge for our country, and you don't need politicians' jargon to talk about it.

It's a question that is as old as humanity itself: how do we live together.

Throughout our history, there have been moments when that question has become more important.

When people from other parts of the world have come to this country and made it their home.

Each time, over time, we have found the answer to the question of how we live together.

We have kept our country together, and we have moved forward together by having faith in the things which make Britain great.

And there's something else we need to remember.

When there have been tensions, when things threaten to divide us, we've always reacted in a very British way.

We haven't been hysterical.

We haven't lost sight of the British way of doing things.

We've been calm, and thoughtful, and reasonable.

That is the British way, and that's the way we should face the challenge of this moment, today.

**BRITISH MUSLIMS**

What does that mean?

First it means avoiding the easy option.

The easiest option when we face any problem in our lives is to try and blame someone.

So when we face a national problem, it's easy and understandable to try and blame not just someone, but a group of people.

But blame can never be the answer to the question of how we live together.

Because if we want to live together, we need to bring down the barriers that divide us.

And today, I can feel the barriers going up, not coming down.

Let me be clear what I mean.

This debate we're having – about what's called community cohesion, about Britishness.

We know why we're having it today.

It's because two summers ago, young men chose to blow themselves up on London's transport system, killing fifty two innocent people in the process.

They were British Muslims.

And they were acting under the influence of a terrorist ideology that is one of the great threats of our age.

We have to face down that threat.

But let us not in the process ever give the impression that this question of Britishness, this question of community cohesion, is all about terrorism, or all about Muslims.

If we do, then we actually make it harder to beat the terrorist threat.

And we make it harder to bring our country together.

We need to bring our country together not just to help beat terrorism, but because it is the right thing to do.


**BARRIERS TO COHESION**

So how do we do it?

We need to bring down the barriers that divide people in our country today.

Those barriers are not just differences in faith, or race.

Not just barriers between those who speak English and those who don't.

They are the barriers that divide rich from poor, that divide those who have opportunity from those who are left behind.

Yes we must demand from everyone in this country that they obey our laws.

But loyalty is not just about laws.

Loyalty is about giving people something to believe in.

So we must inspire loyalty by building a Britain that every one of our citizens believes in.

And we must each of us do all we can to bring down those barriers that make that dream more difficult to achieve.

There is no easy shortcut: there are five barriers, five Berlin walls of division that we must tear down together.

Each is different and each will require different solutions.

**EXTREMISM**

First there are the ideologues and ideologies that don't want us to live together in harmony.

Whether it's the BNP, or those who want to separate British Muslims from the mainstream.

Their aim is to act within the law to subvert its ends, changing the law as and when they can to achieve their ends.

We must mobilise the instruments of public policy to draw people away from supporting such ideologies.

The BNP pretend to be respectable.

But their creed is pure hate.

For the BNP, racism isn't a scourge, it's a political philosophy.

They prey on voters who are disillusioned with mainstream politics.

And those who seek a sharia state, or special treatment and a separate law for British Muslims are, in many ways, the mirror image of the BNP.

They also want to divide people into 'us' and 'them.'

And they too seek out grievances to exploit.

Tomorrow, our Policy Review will publish a report which exposes the truth behind those activities.

And I will soon be setting out our approach to dealing with this growing problem.

It is vital that we all recognise the extremists - wherever they come from - for exactly what they are…

…and for the threat they pose to our vision of a Britain that lives together peacefully.


## MULTICULTURALISM

The second barrier we need to tear down is less extreme, but more widespread in its effects.

For many years, the ruling class in this country believed in something called multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism sounds like a good thing: people of different cultures living together.

But it has been manipulated to favour a divisive idea - the right to difference…

…instead of promoting a unifying idea - the right for everyone to be treated equally despite their differences.

So multiculturalism has come to mean an approach which focuses on what divides us rather than what brings us together.

It often treated ethnic or faith communities as monolithic blocks, rather than individual British citizens.

It led to public housing being allocated along ethnic lines.

It lies behind mistakes like the police allowing some of the protestors against the Danish cartoons last year to publicly incite violence.

And it lies behind the growth in the translation of public documents and signs into other languages.

What ought to be about helping people to access essential public services has in some cases become an end in itself…

…making it less of an incentive for people to learn English and participate fully in our national life.

All of these things just create resentment and suspicion.

And they undermine the very thing that should have served as a focus for national unity – our sense of British identity.

Together with the extremism of the BNP, they created a situation in which many people were even scared to be proud of their country, because to say you're British was practically the same as being a racist.

We've got to stop all this.

We've got to make sure that people learn English, and we've got to make sure that kids are taught British history properly at school.

I believe that the Government should redirect some of the money it currently spends on translation into additional English classes.

This would help people integrate into society and broaden their opportunities.

But the Government seems to be going in the opposite direction.

Recently it announced that many new immigrants will no longer be able to get free English lessons.

Quite how that helps bring the country together I don't know.

We must make sure that all our citizens can speak to each other in our shared national language.

But let us not pretend that that is the end of the story.

There are other barriers we must tear down.

**IMMIGRATION**

The third is the division that can come from uncontrolled immigration.

We wouldn't be half the country we are without immigration.

But you can't have a situation where a country doesn't know - and can't control - who is coming in and out, and who is settling here.

That puts pressure on housing, on public services, and helps create division, fear and resentment - among British people of all ethnic backgrounds.

The government needs to be in control of the situation.

We can only live together if there is proper integration.

And you can't have proper integration if people are coming into Britain at a

faster rate than we can cope with.

**POVERTY**

The fourth barrier we need to tear down is the one caused by poverty.

As the gap between rich and poor in Britain gets wider, there is an emerging underclass of people left permanently behind.

Social mobility is falling.

It's now among the lowest of any wealthy country.

A child from a family in poverty today is less likely to rise to the top of the income scale than a child in 1970.

Persistent, long-term poverty - the sort that really damages someone's aspirations, confidence and life-chances - is just as bad as it was a decade ago.

The problem is that many of the consequences of poverty…

…family breakdown and fatherlessness…

…drug and alcohol addiction…

…unemployment…

…ill-health…

…and crime…

…are also its causes.

It's a self-perpetuating cycle.

In some of our urban areas people are living in conditions of multiple deprivation.

Not only is this an affront to social justice; it's also a breeding ground for resentment and division.

So tackling poverty is a priority.

And the most effective way of beating poverty in the long run is to give people in deprived areas decent schools.

**EDUCATION**

So the fifth barrier we need to bring down is the educational apartheid in many of our towns and cities.

No, not between faith schools and non-faith schools.

But between good schools and bad schools.

A good education is important for everyone, but for children in poor areas it's absolutely vital.

And for parents it's the key to ensuring their kids get the opportunities they never had.

Yet many of our worst schools are in deprived urban areas.

We're constantly told about all the rights we have in modern society.

What about the right to a decent education in a good local school?

Without a proper education, many people will be stuck for their whole lives in poverty and ignorance…

…instead of becoming productive citizens who can make a constructive contribution to the community and the country.

Some make it despite the obstacles - but too many don't.

Those who get left behind are prime targets for extremists who offer easy explanations and point the finger of blame at other people.

Young white men are told, "the blacks are all criminals."

Young Afro-Caribbean men are told, "the Asian shopkeepers are ripping you off."

Young Muslim men are told, "the British want to destroy Islam."

The best answer to ignorance like this is a good education.

And let's be clear: that applies to everyone, in every community.

There's a myth in this country about Muslim women.

The idea that somehow all Muslim women are subservient observers of, rather than active participants in, British society.

I recently met a group of British Muslim women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin: articulate, well educated, confidently spoken - even if in a broad Yorkshire accent...

These women are successfully running a community centre providing training and business opportunities for women.

Women like these are playing a vital role at the heart of their communities.

But we must not be naïve.

There are still issues we must tackle.

In certain sections of the community women are being denied access to education, work, involvement in the political process - and, surprisingly, even denied access to mosques.

I'm told time and time again by women that the denial of these opportunities is not because of their Islamic faith but because of current cultural interpretations in Britain.

We must therefore be bold, and not hide behind the screen of cultural sensitivity…

…to say publicly that no woman should be denied rights which both their religion and their country, Britain, support.

## CONCLUSION: EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

So as we think about how to bring our country together, let's not pretend there are simple, quick solutions.

And let's not pretend we can bully people into feeling British.

We have to inspire them.

The things that divide us are not the differences in our faith or colour.

We know in this country - because we have done it so well in the past - that people of all faiths and none, people of all colours and backgrounds have the compassion and the wisdom to know how to live together.

No, it is not these things that divide us.

What divides us are the barriers.

The barriers between rich and poor.

Between those who have opportunity and those who do not.

Between those who see this country as a place of hope and those who can only see despair.

We must bring down the barriers in our country.

We must push forward the frontiers of fairness.

We must create equal opportunity, so everyone has the chance to get on in life, to fulfil their dreams, and to feel that their contribution is part of a shared national effort.

In the end, this is not just about government and politics.

It is a social responsibility.

We must each do all we can to make this a fairer and more just society…

…helping others, creating opportunity and ensuring that no-one is excluded from it.