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15 May 2007

Rt. Hon. Tony Blair MP  
The Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1A 2AA

Dear Mr Blair,

Last week I received a letter from the secretary for appointments at 10 Downing Street informing me in confidence that The Prime Minister has it in mind to submit my name to The Queen for an OBE 'for services to Black and Minority Ethnic Mental Healthcare'. I find this puzzling since the Government has taken no notice at all of what I have been saying recently about ways of improving mental healthcare for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Communities. But what seems most strange is that the Government say they want to recognize my services to BME Mental Healthcare at a time when they are trying to push through legislation that would make things worse for black people caught up in the mental health system, *in spite of strong objections by many people from BME communities (including myself)*, expressed both publicly and in private to government ministers. Although I appreciate this offer, I cannot possibly accept it while the government is pursuing its present policy regarding mental health legislation. But more than that, the serious issues which form the context for this offer are too important for this matter to be left confidential. Therefore, I intend to take this matter into the public domain by releasing this letter in order to make a determined public plea to Government.

The failure by the mental health system to deliver services that meet the needs of BME communities is well known. In my view much of the failure results from institutional racism, and injustices are evident mostly in the experience of black Caribbean people who are disproportionately sectioned and subjected to inappropriate – often damaging – 'care'. For many years, I have been advocating changes in both service delivery and law to meet these problems, while at the same time working to alleviate them via (for example) the voluntary sector. All the books I have written, the lobbying I have undertaken with others, and the work I have done in supporting the voluntary sector have been pursued in these two avenues of endeavour.

The Government Bill currently before Parliament is deeply flawed. So my plea to Government is to withdraw the Bill as it stands today and get back into a consultation mode. I have been involved personally with colleagues in the BME Mental Health Network and Diverse Minds (section of Mind) in trying to advise civil servants and even ministers, but so far they have not taken any notice at all of what we have had to say about the implications of the proposed Government Bill amending the Mental Health Act. At the very least, what the Government can do is to amend the Act so as to include a set of principles that would oblige professionals to provide a fair and just system - a system that will minimize the risk of injustice and protect the public in a real sense. A new Leader of the Labour Party is about to take office and become the next Prime Minister. What better time than *now* for Labour to show the country that it will deliver a fair and just mental health system. May I hope with countless others that the Government will change direction with regard to mental health legislation?

Yours sincerely,

Suman Fernando

Copy: Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown MP