

More than 500 imams in landmark gay marriage protest

More than 500 imams have joined forces to protest against David Cameron's plans for gay marriage in an unprecedented intervention from the British Muslim community.



More than 500 imams join unprecedented protest over gay marriage Photo: ALAMY

By [John Bingham](#), Religious affairs Editor/Sunday Telegraph

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Leaders representing tens of thousands of worshippers at mosques across the country, have signed a [joint letter to The Sunday Telegraph](#) accusing the Government of attacking "the cornerstone of family life"

It is the first time that Muslim leaders have made a collective intervention on the issue and underlines the strength of feeling among ethnic minority voters.

Organisers said Muslim opposition should be seen as a challenge to David Cameron's claims to be acting in the interests of "equality" and "diversity".

In the letter – published as MPs prepare for their final Commons debate on the Government's same-sex marriage bill – they quote the Koran and say they are fulfilling a "sacred trust to God" by airing their views.

Echoing comments by Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy, they describe marriage as a "sacred contract between a man and a woman" which they say "cannot be redefined".

- [Muslim leaders stand against gay marriage](#)

18 May 2013

They also voice concerns about the status of teachers in faith schools and claim Muslim parents will be "robbed" of the opportunity to bring their children up in line with the faith.

Organisers acknowledged that the Muslim voice had been virtually "silent" on the issue thus far but said they now felt compelled to speak.

Imam Suliman Gani, of Tooting Mosque in south London, who led efforts to gather the signatures, said Muslim leaders "salute" the Christian clergy who had been vocal opponents of the Government on the issue. He said many imams had been wary of airing their views publicly because of the negative way Islam is often portrayed, leaving them believing they would be ignored.

But, significantly, he said that because Christianity appeared to be under "attack", Muslim leaders felt compelled to enter the fray.

Referring to [a letter published in The Daily Telegraph earlier this year](#), he said: "There were 1,000 priests who signed a letter – yet they have been ignored so we felt we had to do this. "I salute those priests who have taken a stand."

He added: "The Muslim community will take this issue very, very seriously because now the Government has interfered with family.

"To us that is like taking children away from their mother: it will definitely have an effect on Mr Cameron's vote. "We cannot understand how it was possible that this was introduced so fast – but we cannot give up. "We celebrate diversity, we want to have a peaceful coexistence with all people but our main concern in the mosques is the way the Government is changing the definition of marriage and what impact that will have on the children." The letter has been [signed by 505 imams](#) and mosque chairmen from London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leicester, Luton, Preston, Blackburn, Burnley, Dewsbury, Newcastle, Bradford, Huddersfield and Nottingham among other cities.