

Dear Sir/Madam

It is disappointing that Lib Dem councillor Jackie Slesenger should be so lazy and careless in her attack on fellow councillor and Holocaust Memorial Day committee chair Dipu Ahad ('Harmonious race relations are being damaged and may take years to repair', Journal, November 15).

Although the threats of Islamophobia from far right groups like the EDL are very real, a report by the European Muslim Research Centre shows that physical attacks on Muslims are linked to anti-Muslim rhetoric of government and the media. Stop the War Coalition argued on its founding in 2001 of such consequences.

There is no contradiction in both supporting the rights of the Palestinian people and recognising the injustice inflicted on the Jewish people in the horror that was the holocaust. But it is cheap, disingenuous and deeply offensive for councillor Slesenger to imply that support for Palestine is anti-semitic.

Councillor Ahad has a genuine record of standing against oppression in all its forms. He has visited Auschwitz and attended international conferences against the holocaust and racism. And he has organised and marched in Newcastle against both the Islamophobic EDL and the fascists of the BNP & NF. He needs no lessons on campaigning for racial harmony.

There is no reason for Councillor Slesenger to either resign from Newcastle Holocaust Memorial Day committee nor to criticise councillor Ahad. I hope she will reconsider her remarks and continue to contribute to the committee's valuable work.

Whatever course she chooses, however, Newcastle Stop the War Coalition, together with councillor Ahad and all those committed to "harmonious race relations," will continue to campaign for the rights of the Palestinians AND against racism and anti-semitism wherever and whenever it occurs.

Yours faithfully,

Tony Dowling

Newcastle Stop the War Coalitio