

# British connections of banned French Islamic Charity BarakaCity revealed

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A charity proscribed in France for inciting hatred in the wake of the Islamist beheading of schoolteacher Samuel Paty, has relocated to Turkey, whilst simultaneously stating it intends to develop its work in the United Kingdom, where it has had a base since at least 2016.

BarakaCity (also written as Barakacity) headed by Idriss Sihamedi, is one of several organisations closed down by the French authorities since Paty's beheading on October 16, 2020. Following the murder, French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin declared his intention to close BarakaCity and the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) for inciting hatred, describing both as "enemies of the republic". Darmanin warned there could be no accommodation with radical Islamism. Shortly after, on October 28, 2020, BarakaCity was dissolved by the French Council of Ministers in a decree which accused it of *propagating "ideas advocating radical Islamism"*. The decree stated

*Through the personal Twitter account of its president as well as the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the association, it disseminates and invites the dissemination of hateful, discriminatory and violent ideas.*

*Gabriel Attal, a government spokesperson, remarked*

*This association and its founding president, behind a humanitarian screen, disseminated anti-Semitic remarks, death threats and apology for crimes against humanity.*

Sihamedi's troubles did not end with the proscription of BarakaCity. In March 2021, he was found guilty of the online harassment of a columnist with RMC radio. Sihamedi was fined 5,000 euros and given a 10-month suspended prison sentence. He was acquitted of the online harassment of former *Charlie Hebdo* journalist Zineb El Rhazoui but, in a separate file, was sentenced to a fine of 3,000 Euros for racist insults against Ms. El Rhazoui.

In the United Kingdom, a company called Barakacity Limited has been registered with Companies House since 2016 under the directorship of a French national named "Yemou Driss." According to *Le Monde's* coverage of his cyber-harassment trial, Idriss Sihamedi's real name is Driss Yemou. Sihamedi has acknowledged his organisation's presence in Britain. In an interview with the 5Pillars website earlier this month, he stated of BarakaCity, "We are also here in England but it's a little bit complicated with the Charity Commission." The nature of this complication was not declared and there is currently no listing on the Charity Commission website for BarakaCity.

The most recent record on the Companies House website for Barakacity Ltd are dormant accounts for the period to 31 December 2019. These were approved by the board on 5 January 2021, and detail assets of £168,926. The same sum is outlined in the 2018 accounts, which refers to £160,794 as either cash in hand or at the bank. In 2018 £32,422 is listed under taxation and social security costs, indicating Barakacity Ltd has employed someone in the UK. The company was registered with SIC Code 94990, commonly used for associations and membership organisations. There is limited further information regarding the nature of the business Barakacity Ltd conducts, and no record of any other individual, other than Yemou Driss, being involved in the company.

In 2016 it was initially registered to a flat in Whitechapel, but on 12 June 2017 the French language BarakaCity Facebook page posted an article headed "Good news: BarakaCity now has an office in London." On 1 August 2017 Companies House records Barakacity Ltd moving from the east end to a mailing address at Carlyle House, Lower Ground Floor, 235-237 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London. That same address appears in the 27 November asset freezing documentation issued by the French government against BarakaCity, as does the UK company record number – 10540976.

In 2020 Idriss Sihamedi sought political asylum in Turkey, claiming that he, and his team, were under "threat of death." Barakacity has officially moved its charitable operations to Turkey, using the name "Gaza and Palestine" for its first campaign in that country. As for the UK, the precise nature of BarakaCity's intentions is still to be revealed, although Idriss Sihamedi now possesses a considerable platform in the Islamist media from which to articulate grievance. In his recent 5Pillars interview, for example, he argued that Muslims in France are being 'psychologically tortured' and are treated like black people in 1960s America. Organisations such as CAGE happily publicise Sihamedi's arguments. Somewhat awkwardly for British Islamists and the endlessly negative portrayals they articulate about life in the UK, Sihamedi also stressed to 5Pillars "We are currently making alliances with the Muslims of England who are much more active and are freer than us and have more room to act."

With freedom comes responsibilities. If BarakaCity is seeking to register as a charity here, when it is proscribed as an extremist organisation in a neighbouring country, the Charity Commission would be presented with a very challenging problem.

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