

IHRC draws attention to United Kingdom and Northern Ireland's PREVENT Programme

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Individual Oral Statement- Islamic Human Rights Commission

Mr. President/ Mr. Vice President

The Islamic Human Rights Commission would like to draw your attention to the United Kingdom's PREVENT policy.

Prevent, an acronym for Preventing Violent Extremism, is one of four pillars of the government's anti-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, which emerged as a response to the July 2005 terrorist bombings in the capital. Its stated aim is to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

The policy is predicated on the idea that British Muslim society lacks an effective counter narrative to 'extremist' ideological positions on Western governments' foreign policies and in particular the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan as well the Syrian Civil War, which are increasingly appealing to young Muslims.

PREVENT has become an aggressive social engineering and spying exercise to transform attitudes in the community and gather intelligence on its members. Shami Chakrabarti, former director of Liberty and current shadow attorney general, has branded it the biggest spying programme in Britain in modern times.

One high-profile example of this was the installation of 200 surveillance cameras in Muslim populated areas of inner-city Birmingham in 2010 by West Midlands Police and Birmingham City Council.

Since then Prevent has become more aggressive requiring Muslims to promote "core British values" which include foreign policy objectives.

The definition of extremism has also grown to cover non-violent extremism. This has stretched to such proportions that it covers those who oppose government policies or hold conservative views such as disapproval of abortion, music or same-sex marriage. It is nothing short of an attack on freedom of thought and expression.

To police this new 'thoughtcrime', in 2015 the government made it a statutory duty on public sector workers to implement Prevent by identifying those at risk of extremism, effectively making every public official a spy and every Muslim a suspect. Figures published by the National Police Chiefs Council show that the number of Muslims tagged by Prevent has almost doubled since the duty came into force, to 2810 in 2015/16 from 1541 in the previous financial year (accounting for 68% of all referrals).

The damaging impact of viewing Muslims through a security lens, as Prevent does, has been widely established. In April 2016 the UN Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Assembly, Maina Kiai, said that Britain's anti-terrorism policies were counter-productive, undermining democracy and victimising the Muslim community. In October the same year a report by the George Soros funded Open Society Initiative concluded that Prevent undermined Muslims' right to manifest their religion, often targeting them for displaying increased religiosity. Another report in July 2016 by RightsWatch UK called for Prevent to be abolished saying that a strategy that "alienates vulnerable children is counterproductive and inconsistent with the very 'British values' that the Government is supposedly promoting."

More recently the government has set in motion a review of after-school education in an alleged bid to tackle the so-called radicalisation of children in "unregulated education settings". This effectively means government oversight of the Muslim religious education sector dominated by after-school madrasas. Quite how the madrasa system is breeding extremists has never been shown but the government seems intent on controlling them regardless.

There is little doubt that Prevent is proving to be counter-productive in the fight against terrorism. The authorities seem so concerned with remoulding British Muslims that their energies and resources are taken up pursuing this latter day "*mission civilisatrice*" rather than seeking out real terrorists. Prevent has also alienated the Muslim community instead of making it a partner in the fight against terrorism; it has become a byword for indoctrination and intrusion.

The Prevent strategy is an attack on the rights and liberties of Muslims and the wider population and as such will never make Britain more secure from the threat of terrorism.

Thank you.