

Civil Society Urges Halt to Expanding Counter-Terrorism Policies

Dear Home Secretary,
cc: Security Minister

In light of recent announcements that you have ordered a review of the UK's counter 'extremism' strategy, we write as organisations critical of the expansion of counter-terrorism measures throughout civil society, including schools and health services, which followed the introduction of the Prevent Duty in 2015. Over 50,000 individuals have been referred to Prevent to date and the discriminatory and damaging consequences on society at large as well as racialised groups has been well documented.

Prevent's further reinforcement and expansion have followed in the aftermath of the previous government's acceptance of the Independent Review of Prevent by William Shawcross, and all the recommendations in his subsequent report of February 2023.

Many civil society organisations challenged the independence of Mr. Shawcross as reviewer and boycotted the review. The report was widely accepted as being deeply flawed, specifically with regards to its methodology, its lack of academic rigour, and in its failure to address relevant evidence. 5 All Mr. Shawcross's recommendations were adopted by the Home Office, after several press leaks, and with no proper parliamentary scrutiny.

We are concerned that there are several reviews and policy implementations that remain in place from the previous government. With regards to this, we request that:

1. The proposal in March 2024 by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities that a new definition of extremism be adopted against which Muslim civil societies should be assessed for the purpose of excluding them from public funding and consultation with public authorities, be suspended.
2. The Commission for Countering Extremism be suspended from its current – publicly unaccountable – role as responsible for the direction of Prevent within the Home Office and across government departments following the removal of its charter and statutory responsibilities in July 2023.
3. Following this, we request that Prevent be placed under the remit of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, as are the other three strands of CONTEST, pending further review.

We note that the previous government put in place a review of the whole of CONTEST (which includes the four elements of the counter-terrorism strategy; Prepare, Pursue, Protect and Prevent) in October 2022. This is yet to report.

4. We request that the current review of CONTEST include a reconsideration of the recommendations of the Shawcross Review.

We look forward to working with a government committed to inclusive social policies and upholding the rule of law as a means of creating a genuinely safer and more equitable society.

Yours sincerely,

Amnesty International
Prevent Watch
Liberty
Medact
Open Rights Group
Child Rights International Network
Netpol
Institute of Race Relations
Rights & Security International
European Legal Support Centre (ELSC)
The Runnymede Trust
Islamic Human Rights Commission
Race Equality Network
JUSTICE