

PO Box 2278  
Ilford  
Essex  
IG1 9XT

**T:** 020 7330 8796  
**E:** [info@iengage.org.uk](mailto:info@iengage.org.uk)  
**W:** [www.iengage.org.uk](http://www.iengage.org.uk)

17 September 2009

ENGAGE submission to the Communities and Local Government Committee Inquiry into 'Preventing Violent Extremism'

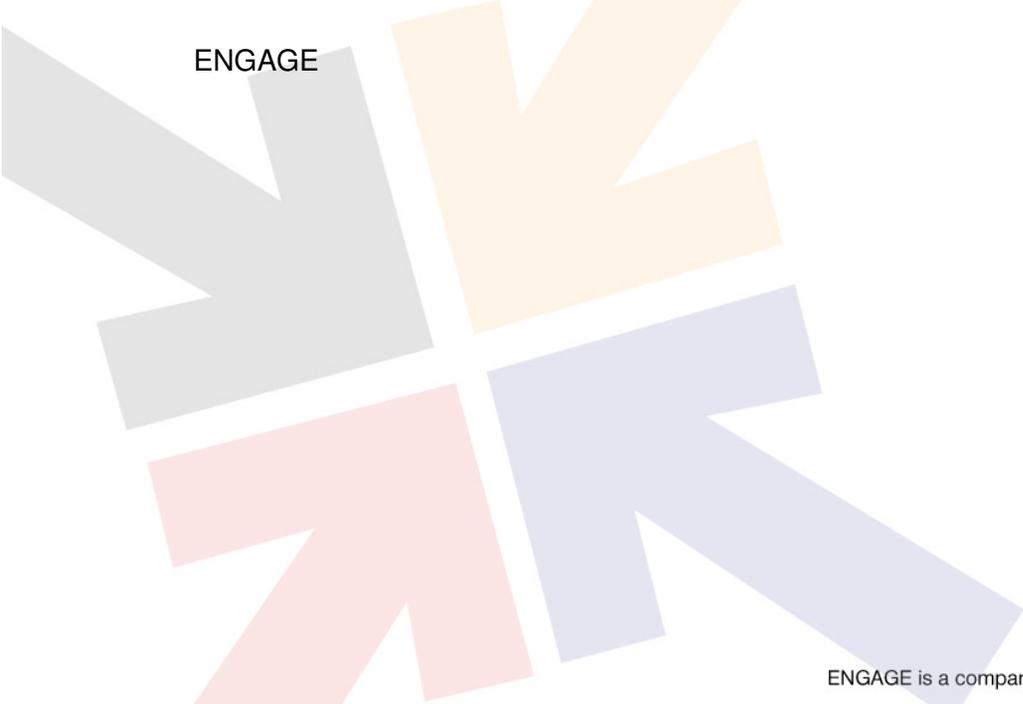
This submission is the work of ENGAGE, a not for profit non-governmental organisation established in September 2008 and dedicated to promoting greater media awareness, political participation and civic engagement by British Muslims. Our work and publications are available on our website: [www.iengage.org.uk](http://www.iengage.org.uk).

This submission addresses the questions posed by the committee's inquiry and call for evidence and makes use of material already available in the public domain. All citations are provided in the endnotes.

This submission addresses the effects of the Preventing Violent Extremism programme in the areas of:

- Community cohesion and integration
- Engaging with Muslim communities at the local and national level
- Political discourse and democratic debate
- Transparency and accountability of PVE

ENGAGE



## 1. Is the Prevent programme the right way of addressing the problem of violent extremism, or are there better ways of doing it?

- 1.1 The Prevent programme places a burden of responsibility on British Muslim communities requiring their participation and involvement in the delivery of the programme's objectives.
- 1.2 The five primary and two secondary objectives imply a conflation of community empowerment with counter-terrorism work and the perception of Muslims being engaged with solely on the basis of their suitability to Prevent objectives. This is a dangerous precedent for its securitization of cohesion and its politicization of community relations.
- 1.3 The programme's dependency on Muslims as partners in preventing violent extremism has given rise to the widespread belief that participation (co-option) is a function of intelligence gathering or spying on communities from within. There are a number of cases involving Muslim organisations that have refused to undertake community work under the Prevent scheme on just this basis.<sup>i</sup>
- 1.4 It has led to a two tiered situation in the Muslim voluntary sector with groups that avail themselves of the Prevent funds enjoying greater financial resources than those engaged in no less important community cohesion work, but who refuse to partake of the PVE funding stream.
- 1.5 Building community resilience should be about building a sense of belonging and strengthening civic responsibility. It is through assisting efforts to integrate Muslims into British society, and seeking to remove obstacles to that process, that community resilience can be best achieved, rather than see integration and community resilience as an (un)intended consequence of preventing violent extremism.
- 1.6 There is some disquiet over what is considered to be the state's interference in theological and religious matters. This extends to criticisms of the Mosque and Imams National Advisory Board. There is some concern that such interference is intended to neuter religious debate and develop an 'officially approved' Islamic doctrine and practice.<sup>ii</sup> Many British Muslims view the development with concern given the absence of similar state-funded bodies for other faiths in Britain.
- 1.7 There is cause to believe that the Prevent agenda curtails the parameters of legitimate Muslim political expression, including dissent, for fear of opening the floodgates to violent extremists, or through denying the influence of foreign policy on radicalisation.

A DEMOS report in 2006 noted that '*Building meaningful relationships with Muslim communities will require the government to take their grievances seriously, which could open up difficult discussions and disagreements for the government, not least around foreign policy and the war in Iraq*'.<sup>iii</sup>

There is some considerable need to distinguish with greater clarity the parameters of permissible ideas and debates within a liberal democracy and the identification and elimination of ideas that justify and encourage terrorism.

Careful use of terminology and descriptive analysis of individuals and groups is essential to avoid unnecessary prejudice against Muslim political views.<sup>iv</sup>

- 1.8 Yet organisations that have enjoyed considerable support under Prevent have actively and consistently argued against any such causal relationship between foreign policy and radicalization.<sup>v</sup>
- 1.9 Further organisations like the Quilliam Foundation and Policy Exchange (report on ‘Choosing our Friends Wisely’) associate a Muslim political agency with a spectrum whose end point is violent extremism. This is the so-called ‘conveyor belt theory’ which narrows the legitimate parameters of political expression and mobilization as symptomatic of ‘communalism’ and ‘separatism’; harbingers of violent extremism.
- 1.10 Maher and Frampton contend: ‘*Would this be such a bad thing? ...Do we really want more religion in politics? Do we want to see more people adopting faith based political identities?*’<sup>vi</sup>
- 1.11 The assertion is a remarkable one given recent statements by Church of England bishops on the need for a more robust Christianity in Britain’s political and social life.<sup>vii</sup>
- 1.12 We would also strongly contest the causal relationship suggested between Muslim political activism, inspired by religious teachings on citizenship and civic responsibility, with radicalization or violent extremism.

Robert Lambert in an article drawing on his work in the Muslim Contact Unit argues, ‘*Indeed, in London, a handful of Salafi and Islamist groups have been at the forefront of groundbreaking community work that successfully counters the adverse influence of al-Qaeda propaganda among susceptible youth. In doing so they face the double jeopardy of attack from within their own increasingly alienated communities...and suspicion from without – where Islamists and Salafists are pejoratively conflated with the al-Qaeda threat.*’<sup>viii</sup>

## **2 How robust is the Government's analysis of the factors which lead people to become involved in violent extremism? Is the 'Prevent' programme appropriately targeted to address the most important of those factors?**

- 2.1 There is some consternation among British Muslims over claims of the suspected ‘pathway to radicalisation’ and its fusion of democratic Muslim political activism, however radical, with violent extremism.
- 2.2 This is created by the use and promotion of organisations and individuals that are believed to be ‘reformed jihadists’ and therefore suited to the task of identifying ‘radicalization traits’. Notably, the work of the Quilliam Foundation – a body which has received a very large amount of state funding and promotion and which is regarded with undisguised contempt by most UK Muslim organizations. This has unquestionably impacted negatively on how the Prevent programme is viewed by many UK Muslims.

- 2.3 The work of organisations like the Quilliam Foundation obscures clear analysis as terms like 'Islamist' and 'Islamism' are used to denote staging posts to radicalization rather than treated as legitimate political orientations.
- 2.4 The International Peace Institute paper, 'Beyond Terrorism: Deradicalization and Disengagement from Violent Extremism', detailing the work of Professor Tore Bjørgo in this area, contains useful information on deradicalisation techniques and reveals the importance on working with genuine 'radicals' in developing deradicalisation strategies, and not relying on the personal histories of fringe activists who bear limited expertise in this realm.<sup>ix</sup>

**3 How appropriate, and how effective, is the Government's strategy for engaging with communities? Has the Government been speaking to the right people? Has its programme reached those at whom it is—or should be—aimed?**

- 3.1 Government attitudes to major Muslim organisations, like the Muslim Council of Britain, has been a cause for concern in sections of British Muslim society as has the Government's flirtation with newly established organisations, such as the Sufi Muslim Council.
- 3.2 Public funds given to organisations (British Muslim Forum, Sufi Muslim Council, British Muslims for Secular Democracy) under 'organisational capacity building' whilst some Government ministers have publicly denounced the MCB, a Muslim organization of independent standing and a broad affiliate base among UK Muslim organisations, for its position on Holocaust Memorial Day and other matters, has raised the spectre of the Government 'pre-approving' compliant partners in work on engaging with communities.
- 3.3 Ruth Kelly in 2006 said, *'I can't help wondering why those in leadership positions who say they want to achieve religious tolerance and a cohesive society would choose to boycott an event which marks, above all, our common humanity and respect for each other. When society's core values are transgressed, it can, as a minimum, lead to resentment. But at worst if we fail to assert and act to implement our shared values this makes us weaker in the fight against extremism and allows it to flourish'*.

The speech of the CLG minister at the time set the precedent for the MCB's deliberate exclusion in various areas of work, complemented by the promotion of other organizations that had far less support among British Muslims. This understandably created distrust about the government's motives and agenda.

- 3.4 Broadening the scope of interaction with genuine Muslim community organisations, both at the national and local level, is an important plank in engaging with Muslims through organisations that merit their support. Understanding and respecting the scope for Muslim dissent and disagreement over policy must go hand in hand with any policy of engaging with communities.
- 3.5 There is, in addition, the question of the role of advisors in DCLG in determining the right sort of partners to work with among UK Muslim organisations. Recent

articles by Paul Richards revealing details of his work as a Special Advisor to Hazel Blears in the Jewish Chronicle has raised concern over the ideological orientation of advisors themselves and the perceived 'divide and rule' strategy they have favoured.<sup>x</sup>

- 3.6 Moreover, the Policy Exchange report cited earlier contains further evidence of ideological influence determining the selection of desirable interlocutors and partnering organisations. It is crucial to the vibrancy of democratic Muslim life and important to the objectives of Prevent itself that efforts to foreclose legitimate political ideas and thought should be resisted. In championing 'our shared values' we must be wary of imposing an ideological homogeneity.

#### **4 Is the necessary advice and expertise available to local authorities on how to implement and evaluate the programme?**

- 4.1 This will be contingent on the experts and community partners and organizations local authorities have drawn upon to implement Prevent. There is reason to believe that this is likely to be deficient, particularly where Muslim communities are averse to engaging through the Prevent programme.
- 4.2 The New Local Government Network report details many of the difficulties experienced by local authorities tasked with delivering Prevent as a 'core business' as well as the multi-agency approach which bring Prevent into the work of frontline and other staff in the health, social and education sectors.
- 4.3 Anna Turley argues '*Councils have a key role to play in reducing social exclusion and health inequalities and improving life chances for all. These aims require a multitude of approaches and the support of various agencies, with partners such as housing, social services, PCTs, probation, education and youth offending teams playing key roles.*'<sup>xi</sup>
- 4.4 While this is to be commended as a 'community cohesion' objective, it is its delivery under the Prevent programme that invites concern and criticisms of Muslims being targeted through fundamental local authority services that should be concerned with issues of social exclusion, health inequalities and quality of life irrespective of Preventing Violent Extremism.
- 4.5 The National Muslim Women's Advisory Group and the Young Muslims Advisory Group have both been touted for their ability to provide local authorities with contacts at the grass roots relating to women and young people respectively. Whether these national quangos established by the former CLG Secretary, Hazel Blears, are able to offer valuable advice and assistance is questionable given their bureaucratic origins and their semi-establishment status. One can question the extent to which these groups are involved in outreach work in their respective jurisdictions and with what level of success. Are adequate evaluation procedures in place to assess their utility, and how is group membership revised to ensure fair and democratic representation?
- 4.6 Where established and respected community groups have deliberately shunned the Prevent programme, there is good reason to suspect that local authorities will

be hampered both in the quality of advice received and outreach to local Muslim communities. This has the potential of divesting the Prevent scheme of any significant impact and effectiveness.

- 4.7 The question of evaluation is a difficult one. How is one to evaluate the success of integration or cohesive communities? Is the Prevent scheme itself contributing to the outer presentation of cohesion, in the interests of soliciting public funds, without making any significant inroads into community well being and community cohesion?
- 4.8 The recent Taxpayers Alliance report on Local Authority funding of projects with full disclosure of organization, objectives and sums paid, has been the efforts of consistent requests under Freedom of Information. This reticence on the part of national and local government begs the question of how communities themselves might assess the impact of projects selected and sums given when this information is not available for public scrutiny.

## **5 Are the objectives of the 'Prevent' agenda being communicated effectively to those at whom it is aimed?**

- 5.1 It would seem from the widespread suspicion in which the programme is held that this is not the case.
- 5.2 Examples of bad delivery of the programme also reinforce the notion that the objectives are not adequately disseminated or through suitable mechanisms. A news report of Sheffield City Council's allocation of funds reveals this:

*'Just £200,000 of the £505,000 budget - to be spent over the next two years - has been allocated to community work, only £50,000 of which will go to voluntary organisations at grass roots.'*<sup>xii</sup>

- 5.3 The Muslim communities' own resistance to any efforts to conflate community empowerment and cohesion with work against violent extremism would indicate that the message is not only not getting through, but where communicated effectively, it is rejected for its premises.
- 5.4 Further, there is the question of the Prevent objectives and recent political actions by politicians and agencies which, in our view, raise difficulties for the effective communication of Prevent objectives to Muslim communities. For example, the Joint Committee of Human Rights' recommendation of an independent inquiry into UK complicity in torture because ministerial responses were deemed insufficiently robust.

This is exacerbated in the community with media disclosures of mistreatment suffered by Binyam Mohammed, Rangzieb Ali *inter alia*, as well as the alleged blackmail of young Somali men to become MI5 informants.<sup>xiii</sup>

- 5.5 There is also our own experience of writing to the Foreign Secretary with questions on FCO policy during the Israeli bombardment and invasion of Gaza in December 2008/January 2009 and the pro forma and substandard replies we

have received in return. To our last letter, we have received no reply despite a second reminder. We have placed all correspondence on our website for free and open access, a valuable tool in disseminating and challenging ideologues and their exploitation of grievances. This, however, merited no considered reply from the Foreign Secretary David Miliband or the Gaza Correspondence Unit, despite the FCO's commitment to a 'Bringing Foreign Policy Back Home' outreach programme intended to 'debate and explain foreign policies to challenging [domestic] audiences.'<sup>xiv</sup>

- 5.6 In expecting the effective communication of Prevent objectives to those to whom it is aimed, it is important that Government, Ministers and agencies do not undermine the objectives themselves making the task of communicators all the more difficult.

## **6 Is the Government seeking, and obtaining, appropriate advice on how to achieve the goals of the 'Prevent' programme?**

- 6.1 There are a number of specialist groups whose involvement would assure the programme of a level of success. These include:
- Theologians and Muslim intellectuals – domestic and foreign
  - Think tanks and advisors – whose involvement should be known
  - Academics and analysts - with a competence in deradicalisation
  - Muslim community activists with a history of working with disenfranchised and vulnerable individuals – demonstrable competence is an important factor
  - Reformed radicals – those who are willing to share their personal experiences to help others avoid the path to violent extremism
- 6.2 It is unclear from the organisations that have been funded through Prevent and the various consultancies that have been created to bid for Prevent projects that expertise and specialism have been the driving factors in selection. There is wide perception of monies being allocated to projects that bear little relation to the Prevent agenda, or is granted to groups and individuals of no proven track record.<sup>xv</sup>
- 6.3 There remain questions of accountability and transparency at local government level with Local Councillors expressing disquiet over decisions taken that have not been adequately debated by elected officials or have been undertaken without prior assessment of utility.<sup>xvi</sup>

## **7 How effectively has the Government evaluated the effectiveness of the programme and the value for money which is being obtained from it? Have reactions to the programme been adequately gauged?**

- 7.1 It would seem no suitable mechanisms exist to assess either the effectiveness of the programme or its impact.
- 7.2 Reactions to the programme both among Muslims and non-Muslims have been unsatisfactorily addressed with the result that Muslims, even those critical of Prevent, suffering the stigma of far right racism and the BNP's exploitation of the Prevent programme to foment tensions.<sup>xvii</sup>
- 7.3 The NLGN report highlights the extent to which far right racism has become a significant challenge to community cohesion:

*'The recent election of two BNP representatives to the European Parliament, as well as 55 local councillors around the country, underlines the fact that racial hatred and extremist ideology is not limited to any one faith or community. Animal rights activism, far-right extremists, anarchism and hate crime constitute a serious threat to the safety and security of our communities.'*

- 7.4 The current CLG Secretary, John Denham's recent remarks on focusing attention on the violent threat posed by the far right is welcome. It remains to be seen how local government efforts, in devising greater transparency in the handling of Prevent and working with other faith and non-faith groups in disseminating its important objectives, will take shape.

**8 Is there adequate differentiation between what should be achieved through the Prevent programme and the priorities that concern related, but distinct, policy frameworks such as cohesion and integration?**

- 8.1 No, there is not adequate differentiation, with the two often conflated by Prevent agents themselves.
- 8.2 We would agree with Madeleine Bunting's assessment that *'It is crucial to delink terrorism from the integration and diversity agenda. They have nothing to do with each other...[G]o back to basics and reiterate that integration is about equality of opportunity, breaking down intergenerational cycles of poverty, and harmonious social relations. These goals may – or may not - depending on international affairs, reduce the appeal of terrorism in the long run, but any serious government should be interested in them in their own right, not simply as a means to the end of defeating terrorism.'*<sup>xviii</sup>
- 8.3 The MCB in its briefing paper on Multiculturalism and the Commission on Integration and Cohesion stated that it would have preferred an independent inquiry into the events of 7/7 rather than the establishment of a Commission tasked with Integration and Cohesion. The benefits and lessons drawn from the former would far outweigh all cosmetic attempts to 'do something' about violent extremism. It is an opinion and viewpoint that we would second.
- 8.4 Many Muslims are baffled at the expense of the Prevent programme, with its £58.5 million budget<sup>xix</sup>, and the paucity of policy action on matters that compound Muslim disenfranchisement, poverty and alienation; low levels of educational attainment,

low labour market participation and increased threats to Muslim properties and persons through enhanced far right activities.<sup>xx</sup>

- 8.5 According to a recent BBC programme, Muslim women in Scotland avoid reporting incidents of hate crime, and an EU MIDIS report suggests that victims are often not familiar with the process of redressing grievances and reporting hate crime.<sup>xxi</sup>
- 8.6 The continued media hysteria and malign presentation of Muslims point to other sources of Muslim demonisation and threats to community cohesion.
- 8.7 Institutional improvements that might mitigate some of the worst instances of these threats to community cohesion and Muslim well being in Britain, better guidance on reporting Islamophobic crimes being made available to Muslims; public statements of support with victims of Islamophobic crimes; toughening our legislation on inciting religious hatred so that it is on par with inciting racial hatred laws; setting up an all-party parliamentary committee to examine anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination – similar to the one that already exists concerning anti-semitism; and a Muslim member of the Press Complaints Commission would, in our view, achieve far more in support of Prevent objectives than many of the projects that have been funded to date.

---

<sup>i</sup> 'Muslim communities in the North reject Government PVE strategy', Asian News, 20 August 2009; the Reading Crisis PVE group which formed in reaction to the presumption that Muslims were to be engaged in counter-terrorism work under the cloak of community cohesion (<http://pvecrisisgroup.com>). Further examples can be found in 'PVE and Prevent: A response from the Muslim community' (An-Nisa Society 2009).

<sup>ii</sup> Criticisms here include funding of organisations that have yet to demonstrate their popular legitimacy but whose work is of a particular theological or ideological line. eg Sufi Muslim Council and British Muslims for Secular Democracy.

<sup>iii</sup> R Briggs, C Fieschi and H Lownsbrough, 'Bringing it Home: Community-based approaches to counter-terrorism'. (Demos 2006). pg.38

<sup>iv</sup> See Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 'The Demonisation of British Islamism', The Guardian Comment is Free, 1 April 2009

<sup>v</sup> Ghaffar Hussain, of the Quilliam Foundation, 'The real roots of extremism', Guardian Comment is Free, 17 Oct 2008

<sup>vi</sup> S Maher and M Frampton, 'Choosing Our Friends Wisely'. (Policy Exchange 2009), pg. 86

<sup>vii</sup> 'Church of England must do more to counter twin threats of secularism and radical Islam', Daily Telegraph, 29 August 2009 and 'The intolerance towards Christians in the public sector is an affront', Daily Mail, 13 February 2009.

<sup>viii</sup> R Lambert, 'Empowering Salafis and Islamists', Political Studies Jan 2008, pg 33

<sup>ix</sup> E B. Hearne and N Chowdhury Fink, 'Beyond Terrorism: Deradicalization and Disengagement from Violent Extremism'. (International Peace Institute 2008).

<sup>x</sup> Paul Richards, 'Radical Islamists must be exposed, not invited to tea', Jewish Chronicle, 11 June 2009

<sup>xi</sup> A Turley, 'Stronger Together: a new approach to preventing violent extremism', (New Local Government Network 2009), pg 14

- 
- <sup>xii</sup> 'Is this politically correct pussy-footing', The Star, 12 August 2009
- <sup>xiii</sup> 'How MI5 blackmails British Muslims', The Independent, 21 May 2009
- <sup>xiv</sup> CONTEST 2, p. 92
- <sup>xv</sup> Y. Birt, 'Promoting Virulent Envy', RUSI Journal, Sept 2009, pg 55.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Salma Yaqoob on BBC Radio 4 Today Programme, 24 October 2008.
- <sup>xvii</sup> 'Taxpayers Cough Up £3million for Birmingham 'Fight against Muslim Extremism'' BNP website, <http://bnp.org.uk/tag/pve/>, accessed 8 Sept 2009.
- <sup>xviii</sup> M Bunting, 'Integration and terrorism have nothing to do with each other', The Guardian, 4 Dec 2006,
- <sup>xix</sup> 'Delivering the Prevent Strategy: An Updated Guide for Local Partners', August 2009, p.25.
- <sup>xx</sup> Firebombing of Luton Islamic Centre and Greenwich Islamic Centre are two examples.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Muslim women avoid reporting racism, BBC Asian Network, 6 August 2009 and 'Data in Focus Report 2: Muslims', European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Fundamental Rights Agency, 2009.