

## Talk from Hizb ut Tahrir Britain, Women's Section

### PREVENT: The UK Government's Strategy to 'De-Islamicise' Muslim Children

Sisters if I made the suggestion to you that a 4 year old boy who drew a cucumber and mispronounced its name, could be considered to be in need of referral to a de-radicalisation programme, you might in another world sadly accuse me of bordering on insanity. However we live in 2016 in the UK and it is at this moment in time, that the child in this case actually caused someone to worry enough to warrant such a course of action to be taken- Welcome to the British Governments' PREVENT Strategy

Let me tell you about some other Muslim children who have also sadly had an encounter with this arm of the government's counter terrorism strategy:

- A 15 year old boy wearing a badge in support of Palestine, hounded by his school and questioned by police
- A 14 year old boy who in a French lesson used the word 'ecoterrorism' and then questioned by a child protection officer.
- A 10 year old who complained about not having a prayer room at school was reported to the police by his primary school on suspicion of extremism
- A schoolgirl who started to wear hijab on returning to school after the holidays caused her teachers to become concerned and referred her for de-radicalisation support
- A child who did not want to play a musical instrument at school referred over concerns of extremism

These are just a few of the hundreds and hundreds of children who have been targeted by PREVENT.

Sisters, for some time now the Muslim youth in the UK have been viewed through the lens of counter terrorism by the government and if this wasn't enough of a worry for us, now we must contend with the PREVENT DUTY which has opened the floodgates for Muslim children to be monitored and pulled up for exhibiting adherence to the most basic of Islamic practices, and in some cases only for being known to be Muslim like in the cucumber/cooker bomb case.

As shown by the available data, PREVENT targets our children and our youth, and is part of a host of measures which deal with the Muslim community as a suspect and problem community.

In 2004, a leaked home office draft report entitled '*Young Muslims and Extremism*' demonstrated a commitment by the government to focus on Muslim youth as part of wider counter terrorism strategy- CONTEST. The report was dedicated to the subject of the youth and exposed what can only be referred to as social engineering within the Muslim community. The report discussed how handpicked scholars, and imams would be supported to voice particular opinions in youth events backed by the government, how through the British council and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Muslim youth in the UK would be put in touch with Muslim youth abroad to facilitate a government approved Islamic discourse.

And now 12 years on, under the same pretext of dealing with terrorism, the state sanctioned monitoring and intervention of our youth is taking place via the PREVENT strategy. Although PREVENT has been around for a number of years, it was only last year after the CTS ACT was passed, that it became a **legally binding duty** upon public sector workers including teachers in schools colleges and universities, nursery workers, doctors and nurses, all charged with the statutory PREVENT DUTY whose stated aim is

**'to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism' and includes what the government refers to as 'non- violent extremism'**

So naturally, we would sit here and ask how is it, according to this policy that a teacher, nursery worker or a doctor can arrive at the judgement that a 4 year old drawing a cucumber might become a future terrorist, and therefore in need of so called de-radicalisation? Well PREVENT has been conceived from an idea, a theory, one which is actually at the root of similar counter-terrorism policies across Europe and the in U.S. And the idea, the pivotal narrative is this:

A person, (an adult or a child) holds particular non-violent thoughts and opinions, as a result of which he or she is thought to be an extremist. That then sets him or her upon a pathway to becoming violent or a supporter of violence.

This narrative is what is often referred to as the 'Conveyor-belt' theory, referred constantly to by politicians and rubber stamped by government funded bodies and much of the mainstream media. But in fact sisters, this narrative has actually been widely discredited by academics including terrorism experts around the world YET, despite this - the theory continues to be the foundation of the policy which seeks to criminalise our children like those in my earlier examples. PREVENT has been dubbed a 'toxic brand' by many key figures including Dal Babu a former police chief superintendent, and has been described as 'fundamentally flawed' by the National Union of teachers who recently passed a motion for the strategy to be scrapped.

The pernicious nature of a policy which promotes spying on young children by those who they are supposed to trust, is becoming more and more evident with the increasing number of cases which have exposed PREVENT in action. At the end of the day, those who are charged with the PREVENT DUTY are people, people who may have their own prejudices, who have undergone the government training on spotting extremism and ultimately these are individuals who live in a time when the dominant views on Islam and Muslims are so negative. When normative Islamic opinions and practices such as halal slaughter, segregation of men and women, the hijab and niqab and the view of homosexuality being haram, are all labelled as **extreme** by not only the media, but by senior politicians including the Prime Minister.

Alongside this, the idea of Extremism is repeatedly discussed as the **precursor** to terrorism and so what we are often dealing with is PREVENT MINDSET. This is the mind-set which the policy seeks to create and so it is no surprise that Muslim children are identified as possible extremists when they display any semblance of an Islamic identity and as such referrals are readily made to CHANNEL, which is the governments de-radicalisation or more accurately a 'de-islamification' programme.

This vague and wide casting of the net is so absurd in reality; just take a look at an example of the guidance provided by one London borough, on spotting children who may be at risk.

Its clear sisters that PREVENT is not about violence and terrorism, and that's why the policy extends its scope of action to '**non-violent extremism**'. In the words of the policy itself: **prevent deals with the ideological challenge of terrorism**. PREVENT is about ideas, about the Islamic values we hold onto, about how we understand Islam. The Prime Minister explained this in his speech last May when he said

***'For too long, we have been a passively tolerant society, saying to our citizens: as long as you obey the law, we will leave you alone. It's often meant we have stood neutral between different values'***

What is being asked of us, and if we decline, is then forced upon us through policies such as PREVENT is to accept a state approved version of Islam, state approved thinking, even one of the country's most senior Police Chiefs sir Peter Fahy described the current approach as 'thought policing'. Let's just take a look at the government's definition of Extremism which is employed throughout the policy guidance.

"Vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas."

Many who have spoken out against PREVENT have said this definition of EXTREMISM is vague, after all British values are not set in law, they seem to be anything and everything to so many different people living here. But let's just take a moment to examine this definition sisters. Rather than being vague, the definition of extremism is fairly specific when you look at it from the perspective of the Islamic belief.

If we even just consider the mention of Democracy and individual liberty; as Muslims we recognise ALLAH swt as the AL MALIK, AL HAKAM, AL HAKEEM, AL RAQUEEB, AL BA'ITH, the very names and attributes of our RABB which we teach our children. We as Muslims submit to ALLAH swt as the rule maker and the rule giver, as the judge, the one who we will be answerable to on Yawmul Qiyama for everything we do. We recognise it is Allah swt who decided what is right and wrong and that these standards are permanent so we will teach our children these values and standards whether they concern the Islamic dress, or the relationship between the sexes or our perspective on history, or our love and attachment to the Ummah or the fact that Islam has its own unique system of governance which is an alternative to Democracy.

It is these values which do not conform to the government's definition of 'British values' given and it is the opposition to these values which the government states is extremism. So our fundamental beliefs which we recognise can actually elevate the conduct of a person and rid societies of oppression and darkness, these core beliefs are **constantly being defined as extremism, and then the false claim is made that such extremism leads to violence, resulting in Islam being presented as being unacceptable to society unless it is altered and reformed to fit a secularised template.**

### **The implications for our children are dire.**

Prevent has made the Muslim teenager fearful of giving his view on politics. It is making the Muslim girl scared to ask to change separately from boys. It is making Muslim parents feel like the only way their children will be safe from intervention by the authorities is to not exhibit their Islamic opinions and practices. Shall we accept such coercive measures aimed at reforming how we understand and practice our deen?

### **So what will we do about it sisters?**

We are responsible for the next generation of Muslims and we absolutely must rise to this challenge we face today, by doing our utmost to withstand it and in the face of it, raise our children as strong and confident Muslims who do not cower to such pressure. Yes its easier said than done....I accept that wholly. I can only share with you some key principles by which we may biithnillah deal with such challenges.

Firstly sisters our deen teaches us that we must as believers unite and ALLAH swt tells that we are the awliyaa of one another. We must stand by each other, this is not a time for us to allow any differences to divide us; we must raise our voices collectively against these policies which criminalise our children. The united voice which rejects the false narrative and the goals of PREVENT is louder and stronger than the lone voice sisters. Support one another in your communities, in your madaaris, masaajid, schools, and committees **and together stand up to PREVENT.**

Secondly sisters, in order to stand up to PREVENT we must equip ourselves with the correct awareness of the issue. The government's approach to our community and the use of PREVENT against our youth is fundamentally a struggle of ideas. Without the awareness of the false premises of the narrative, we cannot have the necessary conversations with those who have a responsibility to our children like their teachers at school or madrassah.

We must feel confident sisters in having the conversations which demonstrate clearly for example that not wanting your child to participate in the school nativity play is due to our belief in tawheed and in the prophethood of Esa (as) AND the notion that such an action is extreme and in some way a precursor to becoming a terrorist is absolutely outrageous.

We must sisters equip ourselves with the understanding which allows us to confidently hold the position that our children will be taught about the Ummah to which they belong and its global struggles, whether that be in Palestine or the crisis which is taking place in Syria, and we must in the face of PREVENT demonstrate that this is central to the life of a Muslim.

Thirdly sisters let us take our strength from our Iman. We know life for the believers cannot remain easy, we know the path of haqq is thorny and rife with tests. If we are to raise our children to not be fearful and to be confident in upholding their Islamic identities then we must set the example ourselves. Many of us aspire for our children to study hifdh of the Qur'an al Kareem, let us also aspire to allow them to know and understand how many young believers like them in the past, had to stand for the truth, be it the youth of the cave in surah Kahf, or the young boy who stood up to the king in the story from surah Burooj or the young prophet Ibrahim (as) who even as a child challenged those who did not believe.

Remember sisters for as long as we are able to uphold the Haq, we can do a great deal and we can raise our children to be the voices of Haq in shaa Allah.

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