

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP

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Home Secretary: A New Partnership to Defeat Extremism

The Foundation for Peace is one of the finest examples of how families, communities and government can come together and, by working in partnership, respond to the issues at the heart of what I want to talk about today.

We all remember the awful events that took place in Warrington all those years ago. The Foundation for Peace was the vision of two families, who in the face of tragedy, chose to turn grief into good. Your work with young people in helping them to see the emptiness of extremism is truly inspiring. And it is also great to see here today so many others whose tireless energy is deployed working with young people to push back against the influence of extremists across the country.

We meet today in the shadow of other tragic events around the world. I want to send my sympathies, and those of the Government, to the family and friends of Sally Adey, who was killed in the terrorist attack carried out last Wednesday in Tunisia. As events in Tunisia and elsewhere around the world show, the threat we face from terrorism and extremism is changing, almost by the day.

That is why last October, I announced that the Home Office was for the first time taking responsibility within government for developing a completely new counter-extremism strategy. This strategy aims to tackle the whole spectrum of extremism, violent and non-violent, ideological and non-ideological, Islamist and neo-Nazi – hate and fear in all their forms.

The strategy is based on the belief that the response to extremism must come from the whole of government and it must be delivered by all agencies. But it also recognises that neither government nor civil society can do this alone – we must form a new and real partnership between individual people, families, local communities, internet companies, government and civil society as a whole to defeat the extremists. So today, I want to talk to you about what we will need to do to defeat extremism in Britain, what our new strategy will deliver, and how we build the partnership we will need to prevail.

The starting point of the new strategy is the emphatic rejection of the misconception that in a liberal democracy like Britain, “anything goes”, the belief that living in a society like ours means there aren’t really any fundamental rules or norms. Instead, the foundation stone of our new strategy is the proud promotion of British values.

These values – such as regard for the rule of law, participation in and acceptance of democracy, equality, free speech and respect for minorities – are supported by the overwhelming majority of British people. They are sustained by our most important local and national institutions. And they are the means by which we have made our multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious society succeed.

They are the values that unite us. They are what allow us all to enjoy our individual freedoms, to lead varied lives, to live in diverse communities and to do all of these things while still living peacefully, respectfully and harmoniously alongside one another.

At the heart of our values is a simple – and inclusive – proposition. Everybody living in this country is equal and everybody is free to lead their lives as they see fit. We are free to practise any faith, follow any religious denomination, or ignore religion altogether. We are free to wear whatever clothes we choose. We are free to establish our own faith schools and give our sons and daughters the best education possible. We are free to build our own churches, temples and mosques and worship freely.

But in a pluralistic society like ours, there are responsibilities as well as rights. You don't only get the freedom to live how you choose to live. You have to respect other people's rights to do so too. And you have to respect not just this fundamental principle but the institutions and laws that make it possible. Democracy. Equality. Freedom of speech. The rule of law. And respect for minorities.

The overwhelming majority of people in Britain accept and positively cherish this proposition. We choose to live here, immigrants come to live here, and many millions of people around the world dream of building a life here precisely because we have a free society, diverse communities and pluralistic values.

And the reality of those values is far superior to anything the extremists have to offer anybody. Where they seek to divide us, our values are what unite us. Where they seek to dictate, lecture and limit opportunity, our values offer young people hope and the chance to succeed. The extremists have no vision for Britain that can sustain the dreams and ambitions of its people. Theirs is a negative, depressing and in fact absurd view of the world - and it is one we know that in the end we can expose and defeat.

But there is increasing evidence that a small but significant number of people living in Britain – almost all of whom are British citizens – reject our values. We have seen the Trojan Horse plot to take over state schools in Birmingham. Some concerns about religious supplementary schools. Widespread allegations of corruption, cronyism, extremism, homophobia and anti-Semitism in Tower Hamlets. Hate speakers invited to speak at British colleges and universities. Segregation by gender allowed at universities and even endorsed by Universities UK. Charities and the generosity of the giving public abused by extremists. Examples of Shari'a law being used to discriminate against women. Thousands of 'honour' crimes committed every year. And hundreds of British citizens who have travelled to fight in Syria and Iraq.

Recorded hate crime has risen every year since records were first collected in 2008. According to the Community Security Trust, the number of anti-Semitic attacks in Britain has more than doubled in the last year and, at 1,168, it now stands at the highest on record. According to Tell MAMA, a charity that records anti-Muslim attacks in Britain, there are hundreds of incidents every year, including arson attacks on mosques and threats against worshippers.

It's clear from these examples that extremism can take many forms. It can be ideological, or it can be driven by social and cultural norms that are contrary to British values and quite simply unacceptable. We have been clear all along that the Government's counter-extremism strategy must seek to defeat

extremism in all its forms, but it's obvious from the evidence that the most serious and widespread form of extremism we need to confront is Islamist extremism.

Islamist extremists believe in a clash of civilisations. They promote a fundamental incompatibility between Islamic and Western values, an inevitable divide between "them and us". They demand a caliphate, or a new Islamic state, governed by a harsh interpretation of Shari'a law. They utterly reject British and Western values, including democracy, the rule of law, and equality between citizens, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion or sexuality. They believe that it's impossible to be a good Muslim and a good British citizen. And they dismiss anybody who disagrees with them – including other Muslims – as "kafirs", or non-believers.

We must always take care to distinguish between Islam – a major world religion followed peacefully by the overwhelming majority of one billion Muslims worldwide – and Islamist extremism. Islam is entirely compatible with British values and our national way of life, while Islamist extremism is not – and we must be uncompromising in our response to it.

Because extremism is not something that can just be ignored. It cannot be wished away. It must be tackled head on. Because where extremism takes root the consequences are clear. Women's rights are eroded. There is discrimination on the basis of race and sexuality. There is no longer equal access to the labour market, to the law, or to wider society. Communities become segregated and cut off from one another. Intolerance, hatred and bigotry become normalised. Trust is replaced by fear, reciprocity by envy, and solidarity by division.

But tackling extremism is also important because of its link to terrorism. Not all extremism leads to violence and not all extremists are violent, but there is without doubt a thread that binds the kind of extremism that promotes hatred and a sense of superiority over others to the actions of those who want to impose their beliefs on us through violence.

Taking on the critics

I know there are some people who disagree with me. They say what I describe as Islamist extremism is simply social conservatism. But if anybody else discriminated against women, denounced people on the basis of their religious beliefs, rejected the democratic process, attacked people on the basis of their sexuality, or gave a nod and a wink in favour of violence and terrorism, we wouldn't hesitate to challenge them or – if the law was broken – call for their prosecution and punishment.

Some say we are picking on religion or religious beliefs, but to them I say – as a practising Anglican myself – we are doing no such thing. Islamist extremists may say they are acting in the name of Islam, but there is no legitimate basis for extremism in Islam or in any major religion. The Qur'an says "do not go to extremes in your religion" and "let there be no compulsion in religion." Leviticus tells Jews and Christians to "love your neighbour as yourself." Sikhs believe that "no one is my enemy, no one is a foreigner, with all I am at peace", while the Hindu Shanti Mantra seeks peace for all, saying, "May all beings experience prosperity. May none in the world suffer."

There are others who say we are picking on Islamist extremism when there are other forms of extremism we need to tackle. But that is untrue too. We want to defeat all forms of extremism, ideological or not, and where it is driven by ideology, we draw no distinction between a neo-Nazi and an Islamist extremist. The murderer of Mohamed Saleem in Birmingham in 2013 was driven by neo-Nazi ideology just the same as the murderers of Lee Rigby were driven by Islamist extremist ideology.

Some say we cannot base a counter-extremism strategy on British values because it is too difficult to define them. But we are not calling for a flag to be flown from every building, or demanding that everyone drinks Yorkshire Tea and watches Coronation Street. Our definition of extremism is “the vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs”. And we regard calls for the death of members of our armed forces as extremist behaviour. This is a limited, practical and inclusive definition – and I challenge anybody to say it is unreasonable.

Others imply that promoting British values is somehow narrow-minded or jingoistic. But British values are open, inclusive and pluralistic. And we must promote them not just because we are proud of them and because they form an important part of our identity – but because we know they are the means by which a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious society can function. Because our values haven't just sprung out of nowhere. They have evolved over centuries in response to our political, cultural, religious and intellectual history. We believe in religious freedom because the alternative is conflict and bloodshed. We believe in democracy because the alternative leads to the arbitrary abuse of power. We believe in equality because the alternative is discrimination and suffering. We believe in our values because they are what make a successful society.

Other critics say it is all too complicated, that attitudes are too deeply ingrained, that actually what we regard as extreme lots of people find quite appealing, that so long as people don't turn violent we should just put up with behaviour we don't very much like. To these critics we must emphatically say “no”. We know there is a link between non-violent extremism and violent extremism. We know how people suffer when extremism flourishes. We know people from all walks of life want to be free to lead their lives as they see fit. I am not prepared to write off any British citizen as if they deserve fewer rights than the rest of us just because of where they're born, who their parents are or what religion they happen to have – and neither should anybody else.

And if it is so difficult to deal with extremism, imagine what the country would have been like if our political leaders had taken the same defeatist approach to racism. As Britain began to become a more multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious country, political leaders took concerted action to prevent racial discrimination and make racist attitudes socially unacceptable. Legislation was passed prohibiting discriminatory behaviour and punishing racially-aggravated crime. Organisations were established to monitor racism and report on progress. Civil society campaigns – including action in sport, the arts and media – helped to build social norms that conveyed the message that racism is never acceptable.

We need to take the same kind of approach to extremism, and that is what our counter-extremism strategy will do. The content of that strategy will be for the next government to take forward, but I believe we will need to take action in four main ways. We will need to develop a far better understanding of the threat we face from extremism. We will need to promote more assertively our values, the benefits of living in Britain, and the rights and responsibilities of living in a pluralistic society. We will need to ensure the most effective response possible from the state in tackling

extremism. And we will need to do everything we can to build up the capacity of civil society to identify, challenge and defeat extremism.

A better understanding of extremism

The starting point is, of course, the need for a better evidence base for dealing with extremists and extremist organisations. The Government's new Extremism Analysis Unit is already up and running and helping to inform not just this strategy but government decision making on matters such as visa applications. As the Unit grows and develops it will inform more and more of what government and the wider public sector does.

In particular, the Extremism Analysis Unit will help us to develop a new engagement policy – which will set out clearly for the first time with which individuals and organisations the government and public sector should engage and should not engage. This will make sure nobody unwittingly lends legitimacy or credibility to extremists or extremist organisations, and it will make very clear that government should engage with people directly and through their elected representatives – not just through often self-appointed and unrepresentative community leaders.

The Extremism Analysis Unit will also inform the development of a counter-entryism strategy. We know from examples such as the Trojan Horse affair in Birmingham that extremists use entryist tactics to infiltrate legitimate organisations to promote their own agendas. The counter-entryism strategy will ensure that government, the public sector and civil society as a whole is more resilient against this danger.

There are some areas where – like in the application of Shari'a law – we know enough to know we have a problem, but we do not yet know the full extent of the problem. For example, there is evidence of women being "divorced" under Shari'a law and left in penury, wives who are forced to return to abusive relationships because Shari'a councils say a husband has a right to "chastise", and Shari'a councils giving the testimony of a woman only half the weight of the testimony of a man. We will therefore commission an independent figure to complete an investigation into the application of Shari'a law in England and Wales.

The promotion of British values

If we want to put British values at the heart of the counter-extremism strategy, we need to make sure that every single person living in the UK is fully aware of the rights and responsibilities of living in a pluralistic society.

We will therefore develop a positive campaign to promote British values and show clearly the opportunities they bring. We will be more proactive in helping people from all backgrounds understand the values that drive our foreign policy and international aid work. We will promote the work of civil society organisations who every day work to defeat extremism. We will help to promote those who challenge the false and dangerous narratives propagated by extremists. And we will help young people to see the value of active citizenship and participation in society.

Strong state action

We want to make sure the state plays its full part in defeating extremism. In particular, we will improve the resilience of institutions against extremism and empower them to fight back. In schools, we will toughen up the requirements to make sure that the identities of all governors are known to their school and the wider community. We will clarify the rules to make it clear that governors should only serve on more than two governing bodies in genuinely exceptional circumstances. And we will establish a national database of school governors, held centrally by the Department for Education. Outside the state sector, we will initiate a review of supplementary schools – which at present are unregulated and not inspected – to protect children from extremists.

And we will take similar action in other institutions and sectors. We will review and reform the governance and inspection arrangements for further education colleges. We will make sure that major state employers such as the NHS have robust procedures in place to identify extremism and deal with it. We will publish a clear framework which will set out the circumstances in which central government should intervene when councils fail to respond to extremism or have been infiltrated by extremists. We will commission Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary to conduct an all-force inspection of the police response to 'honour' crimes, female genital mutilation and forced marriage. We will require police forces to record anti-Muslim crimes as well as anti-Semitic crimes. And we will create new extremism officer positions in prisons to deal with extremist prisoners and prison gangs.

We also want to make sure that the immigration system is as strong as it can be when it comes to preventing foreign extremists doing damage here in Britain. We will therefore conduct a full review of citizenship law to make sure successful applicants for citizenship respect British values. We will expect people coming to Britain on time-limited visas to sign a declaration saying they will respect British values while they are here. We will create new powers to refuse or remove licences to sponsor visa applications from people or institutions that promote extremist views or knowingly and without challenge host extremist speakers. We will refuse asylum to extremists who pose a threat to national security. And we will – through the immigration rules – require all foreign religious workers in pastoral roles to speak English.

A stronger civil society

Government alone cannot defeat extremism, so we also need to do everything we can to build up the capacity of civil society to identify, confront and defeat extremism wherever we find it.

We want to go further than ever before in helping people from isolated communities to play a full and fruitful part in British life. We plan a step change in the way we help people to learn the English language. There will be new incentives and penalties, a sharp reduction in funding for translation services, and a significant increase in the funding available for English language training.

We will learn from the successful Troubled Families Programme by creating a similar place-based, multi-agency, single-pot funding model called the Helping Isolated Communities Programme. Starting with the most isolated communities, this will include training and skills projects, help for women to get into work, mentoring schemes, interfaith projects, getting school pupils mixing with children from other backgrounds, and intensive English language training.

We will deny extremists the opportunity to spread their messages of hate by introducing banning orders for extremist groups that fall short of existing terrorist proscription thresholds. We will introduce extremism disruption orders, which are civil powers to be used against individual extremists who incite hatred. And we will introduce closure orders, for premises that are owned or occupied by extremists or are used to host extremist meetings or speakers. When we decide whether to impose a banning order on an organisation based in this country, we will take into account the conduct of any organisations to which they are affiliated overseas.

We will seize the opportunities provided by the internet to promote British values. We will support civil society organisations who want to fight back against extremism online. We will work with our international allies and seek a partnership with social media companies and communication service providers to deal with extremist content online. And we will review Ofcom's remit to make sure it has the right responsibilities and the right powers to take action against extremist broadcasts.

We will bring in new powers for whistleblowers and a new extremism community trigger. This will allow members of the public to demand action if the police fail to investigate hate crime or other extremism-related offences, and it will allow them to demand a response from the relevant inspectorates if they have concerns about extremist behaviour in a particular institution.

A new partnership to defeat extremism

The approach I have set out today includes some bold proposals and asks some searching questions – questions that to be frank have probably not been asked in the past for fear of being insensitive. But what must not be lost amongst those difficult questions is that at the centre of this strategy is the same open, inclusive and pluralistic proposition that is at the centre of our national values.

Everybody in our country is equal and everybody is free to lead their lives as they wish. But our society does not just confer rights; it demands responsibilities of us too. You have the freedom to live how you choose to live – but you must also respect the freedom of others to live how they choose to live. That, I believe, is one of the most important reasons why this country is the best in the world to live in, whether you are Christian or Muslim, Hindu or Sikh, Jewish or of no religion at all, whether you're black or white, male or female, gay or straight.

So I want to end by saying this. In developing the strategy I have described today, we are saying we want to form a new partnership – a partnership consisting of every single person and organisation in our country that wants to defeat the extremists.

Government cannot act alone. Individual people, families and whole communities need help and those of you fighting the extremists deserve our support. So my invitation is clear – come and join that partnership. If you join us, we will do everything we can to help you. We will help you to stand up to the extremists by denying them the opportunity to spread their messages of hate and division.

For too long we have let the extremists define the 'them and us' – telling young people that they cannot be a good Muslim and a good British citizen. I want this partnership to reclaim that debate.

We, the 'us', will form a new partnership and show 'them' that we want nothing to do with their hatred, bigotry and ignorance.

This partnership will reclaim the debate from the extremists. This partnership will empower those who want to celebrate our values and defeat ignorance. This partnership will be a living testimony to show all that we can achieve together. How we are united – bound together by our values, a bond that will always prove stronger than any of the false and dangerous narratives dreamt up by our enemies.

But to those people who do not want to join this new partnership, to those who choose consciously to reject our values and the basic principles of our society, the message is equally clear. The game is up. We will no longer tolerate your behaviour. We will expose your hateful beliefs for what they are. Where you seek to spread hate, we will disrupt you. Where you break the law, we will prosecute you. Where you seek to divide us, we will stand united. And together, we will defeat you.