

Counter Terrorism Communications Guidance Communicating effectively with community audiences

INTRODUCTION

To deliver the objectives of the PREVENT counter-terrorism [CT] strategy, the UK Government and its partners must engage effectively with local communities. Only by building resilient communities, able to challenge robustly the ideas of those violent extremists who seek to undermine our shared values, will we be able to meet the security challenge.

To engage effectively with local communities, we need consistently clear and appropriate communications. If our messages are ambiguous or untargeted, they will not reach or be understood by those who need to hear them, and we risk having a negative impact on our audiences.

On the basis of in-depth qualitative research into how messages are received by community audiences commissioned by the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) and informal feedback from communities, this paper sets out:

- General principles for communicating with community audiences;
- The topline CT messages – unpacked into detailed messages;
- Guidance on the use of specific terminology.

This paper is intended to be used only as a general guide for communicating with PREVENT audiences. It is not intended to be prescriptive. The success of any communication depends upon the consideration of a number of specific factors, including the context in which it is delivered and the relationship between the messenger and the audience.

CT communications is a sensitive area and one where we face considerable knowledge gaps. There remains much more to be done. We must continue to listen to our audiences to understand the impact of our communications activity.

GENERAL COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

- It is important to demonstrate that you **have listened to and understand the concerns of your audience**, making specific references to your experiences in doing so if possible.

RICU

Research, Information and Communications Unit

RICU/12/07

04 Sep 07

- The messages and language you use should be **clear and straightforward**. If the communication is over-complicated, it provides the audience with an excuse not to listen to you or consider your arguments. In addition, where audiences are already sensitive, language and concepts that are not easily understood may be assumed to be an attack on them.
- Whilst you should talk openly about the nature of the terrorist challenge, it is important to **avoid implying that specific communities are to blame**. Apart from being untrue, this is divisive and undermines the unified community response required to tackle the terrorist threat. For the same reason, you should avoid talking to specific communities solely in the context of terrorism.
- Be aware of **direct and overhearing audiences**. Messages aimed at one target audience can have an inadvertent, negative impact on others. It is important to weigh up the potential secondary impact of a message before going ahead. In today's media, a message delivered domestically can quickly be replayed internationally, and in turn recycled back into the UK, including through terrorist propaganda.
- If you recycle language used by terrorists, you risk **reinforcing their message**, thereby conferring legitimacy upon terrorist groups.

TOPLINE CT MESSAGES

The three top-line messages to community audiences are:

1. **Terrorism is a real and serious threat to us all.**
2. **Terrorists are criminals and murderers and they attack the values that we all share.**
3. **We all need to work together to tackle the terrorist challenge.**

These messages work by firstly establishing that there is a serious threat - cutting through any culture of denial that may exist. Secondly, they deglamorise terrorism and separate terrorists from the rest of society. This then provides the 'inclusive' basis from which to start a conversation about what we all need to do to tackle the problem - as individuals, in communities and as a society.

DETAILED MESSAGES

1. Terrorism is a real and serious threat to us all.

1.1) The terrorist threat to the UK and UK interests abroad is severe and sustained.

In July 2007, the Security Services and police were working to contend with approximately 200 groups or networks, totalling around 2000 identified individuals, who are actively engaged in plotting or facilitating terrorist acts here and overseas - and there will be many more we don't know about. British and foreign nationals linked to or sympathetic to terrorist activity are known to be present within the UK. They are supporting the activities of terrorist groups in a range of ways – by providing resources, false documents, training and fundraising for terrorist groups, as well as by engaging in the direct planning or implementing of terrorist attacks.

1.2) As with other criminal activity, we will pursue terrorists through our criminal justice system.

This includes robust legislation to deal effectively with those who are suspected of and found guilty of carrying out terrorist activities. The UK has achieved some significant successes in dealing with potential attacks by terrorist networks, since before 2001. A number of credible plots to cause loss of life have been disrupted; in many cases the individuals involved have either been successfully prosecuted and imprisoned or are awaiting trial.

1.3) We are determined that the terrorist threat will not undermine our commitment to a diverse and open society built on democracy and shared values.

We understand that certain communities feel under particular pressure as a result of the terrorist threat. The measures we have put in place to deal with the increased threat apply equally to all citizens regardless of their background. We are working to protect our shared values (respect for human rights; the rule of law, equality of opportunity, freedom of speech, and freedom of religious practice) and ensure that in Britain all forms of discrimination are eliminated and communities are well integrated. These values belong to everyone – to those across all religious denominations and to those with no religious faith.

What works about this message?

- Tough messages can resonate well - audiences need to understand the reality of the situation and the severity of the threat, especially if they are in denial.

- Avoids accusations of deliberate scaremongering by providing specific examples of the nature of the terrorist threat.
- Specific evidence of what the Government is doing, in partnership with communities, to tackle the threat can provide reassurance to balance what can be a frightening message. Recognises that some people feel singled out, but robustly rejects the accusation that this is racially or religiously motivated.

2. Terrorists are criminals and murderers and they attack the values that we all share.

2.1) Terrorists actively aim to damage community relations, undermine the values we all share and create divisions.

The words and acts of terrorist groups and individuals encourage hatred and feed further extremism against minority communities. Terrorists attack the values that we all share, as decent and peaceful people, and aim to destroy the societies on which those values are based.

2.2) Terrorism is not the product of any one religion or community.

Terrorists talk about violence, murder and hatred. None of the world's major religions teach this, and I know that people are appalled when their religion is twisted in an attempt to justify terrorism. We are opposed to all forms of extremism, including that of the far right, which glorify or lead individuals to commit acts of violence. This is why we brought in religious hatred legislation which was designed to tackle those who incite hatred and by doing so cause divisions within our communities.

Violent extremism is emphatically condemned by all communities in the UK. Whilst there is a current CT focus on individuals from particular communities, we know that these individuals in no way represent the views and beliefs held by the vast majority. Terrorists operate in isolation from mainstream communities and are the enemies of us all.

What works about this message?

- It builds a common sense of purpose, reinforcing the idea that terrorists are enemies to us all, and provides the basis from which to enlist community support in preventing further terrorist atrocities.

- Talking about 'dividing lines' between terrorists and everyone else is often misunderstood (even when it is explicitly explained). This message needs clear explanation and credible delivery if it is to work effectively – and works best when inclusivity through the concept of shared values has been established.
- It avoids implicitly branding whole communities as being responsible for terrorism. This has previously been a source of objection and defensiveness from some key audiences.
- It distinguishes and defines terrorists by their actions (e.g. 'criminals') rather than their motivations (e.g. 'ideological') and therefore avoids implying that any one religion is to blame. This approach is used regularly by commentators who see it as a description of how base the action is and how far removed the perpetrators are from normal societal or religious values.
- It avoids use of terms which can be seen to link terrorism with religion and therefore confer misplaced legitimacy on the violent extremist cause.
- It avoids militaristic metaphors, which can be negatively received and can reinforce terrorists' claims to be soldiers fighting a legitimate battle, rather than mere criminals.
- It makes reference to our opposition to all forms of extremism (e.g. right wing extremism).

3. We all need to work together to tackle the terrorist challenge.

3.1) Security measures are only one part of the solution. The responsibility to tackle violent extremism is one we all share.

We will not be successful without the active support and engagement of all parts of Government; our partners; the public, private and voluntary sectors; and all of us as individuals and members of communities. It is everyone's responsibility to do what they can to tackle the challenge. We must work together towards a secure Britain that offers safety and the protection of rights for everyone – regardless of their faith, race or ethnicity. We are working with communities to challenge violence, hatred and terrorism of all forms, including racial bigotry and gang violence. Communities can help by building on the excellent work they are already doing in leading the debate against violence, hatred and terrorism.

3.2) The most important challenge for us all is to work towards creating cohesive and resilient communities within which the terrorist messages will not resonate.

We must look beyond individuals, to the importance of strengthening society as a whole. We are committed to creating an inclusive and diverse society where all communities identify themselves as part of a wider British society and are accepted as such – and extremist activity is actively rejected. If everyone is able to participate fully in society and have the opportunities they deserve, regardless of race, faith or ethnicity, then individuals are likely to be far less susceptible to terrorist propaganda and active recruitment efforts. We will continue to work at national, regional and local level to help build cohesive communities from the ground up.

3.3) We are working with communities to help those who do find themselves in an isolated position and vulnerable to the terrorists' messages.

We must protect our young people, a minority of whom are at risk of being influenced by violent extremists and being recruited into dangerous and criminal activity. We know that communities are working hard to establish activities to challenge violent extremism. It is difficult to tell whether someone is involved with violent extremists, so it is important that we all work together and share information about how individuals are drawn into violent extremism in order to help prevent more vulnerable people from becoming involved in terrorist activity in the future.

What works about this message?

- It uses inclusive language that emphasises that it is everyone's responsibility to work together and avoids alienating particular communities by singling them out in any way.
- It talks about specific ways in which communities can support the CT effort only within this broader context of shared responsibility (and highlights what the Government itself is doing).
- It doesn't imply that communities necessarily know when a young person is being 'brainwashed' – they don't. It acknowledges that it is difficult to know when someone is being 'brainwashed' - terrorist recruiters are very subtle.

Annex 1: Language Table

The following guidance provides a summary of how certain words and phrases are received by community audiences. It is not intended as a definitive list of 'what not to say', but rather to highlight terms which risk being misunderstood and therefore prevent the effective reception of the message. This is not about political correctness, but effectiveness — evidence shows that people stop listening if they think you're attacking them.

Any assessment of the language to be used must take account of the context in which messages will be delivered and the crucial role of the messenger.

WHAT IS SAID	WHAT IS HEARD	POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES
The dividing line is between terrorists and the rest of us	This can be a positive message, but only with a credible messenger and if explained clearly	Ensure the context is clear
Communities need to stand up to extremism/weed out terrorist sympathisers	"Communities are to blame for extremism and are responsible for hiding terrorists in their midst"	We all share responsibility for tackling violent extremism, and there are specific tasks that communities can help us with
Struggle for values/battle for ideas	"Confrontation/clash between civilisations/ cultures"	The idea of shared values works much more effectively
War/battle/clash	"Terrorists/criminals are warriors/soldiers fighting a cause"	Challenge/threat
Radicalisation	"Terrorism is a product of Islam" (not easily understood or translated into Urdu/Arabic)	Brainwashing or indoctrination
Grooming or conditioning	Can be useful terms to describe 'radicalisation' process without reinforcing the link with religion, however not generally understood by all audiences	Brainwashing or indoctrination
De-radicalisation	As above, not easily understood or translatable to all audiences	Rehabilitation
Islamic/ Muslim	Be aware of the distinction – the former refers to the belief; the latter to the believer/individual	
Moderate/radical	Perceived as a means of splitting	Muslims (where

RICU

Research, Information and Communications Unit

RICU/12/07

04 Sep 07

	Muslim communities or stigmatising points of view/lifestyles that are deemed to be less favourable to Government	necessary mainstream Muslims)
Islamic/Islamist/Muslim extremism	"Extremism is the fault of Muslims/Islam"	Terrorism/violent extremism (including from non-Muslims)
Jihadi/fundamentalist	"There is an explicit link between Islam and terrorism"	Criminal/murderer/thug
Islamic/Muslim community/world "The West"	"Muslims form a homogenous community/world (in opposition to "The West")"	Highlight diversity, rather than reinforcing the concept of a homogenous Muslim world. Use national/ ethnic/ geographical identifiers or Muslim communities/societies
Islamophobia	Can be misunderstood as a slur on Islam and perceived as singling out Muslims (even though it indicates that we are positively addressing their concerns)	Discrimination