



THE GOVERNMENT REPLY TO THE SIXTH  
REPORT FROM THE HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
SESSION 2004-05 HC 165

# **Terrorism and Community Relations**

**Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State  
for the Home Department  
by Command of Her Majesty  
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# HOUSE OF COMMONS HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Sixth Report of Session 2004-05

**Terrorism and Community Relations: The Government's Response**

**Community relations: existing problems and policies**

**1: We believe that the analysis in the Cantle report remains valid. Key issues in the report, such as the importance of leadership, especially at a local level, the need to overcome segregation, the role of schools and the importance of opportunities for young people and the need for clarity over what it means to be British, are central to the problems discussed in this inquiry. The threat of international terrorism brings a new dimension to existing issues, and perhaps makes their resolution even more pressing – it does not change them. (Paragraph 13)**

The Government has drawn on the Cantle report in its work to build community cohesion since the disturbances of 2001.

The Government's strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion 'Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society', published in January 2005, builds on the progress made by various government initiatives over the last 4 years and places particular emphasis on tackling inequalities as well as improving the overall quality of local leadership in the context of tackling racism and extremism. It also contains commitments to increase opportunities for all young people to participate in society, particularly those from more disadvantaged communities, and to help foster an inclusive sense of national and local identity.

**2: We are aware that the police, and particularly the Metropolitan Police Service, have made significant efforts to overcome the institutionalised racism criticised in the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. But we are concerned by continuing gaps between the police and minority communities in perceptions of police work and by evidence that there is still much work on diversity to be done in the police. We have made recommendations on diversity in the police in our recent report on Police Reform. (Paragraph 35)**

Increasing the trust and confidence of minority ethnic communities remains a priority of this Government. A key element of this is ensuring that black and minority ethnic communities are aware of the changes which are happening in policing and that they feel the benefits of this when they come into contact with the police.

In fact, a great deal of progress has been made since the Lawrence Inquiry. All the recommendations which were accepted have now been put in place. Nevertheless, there is continuing evidence from a number of sources that a significant gap remains between police and minority ethnic perceptions of police work.

In response to this, and particularly in response to the CRE report, we have embarked – jointly with ACPO and the APA – on a major programme of work to tackle these issues at every level of policing and reduce the gap.

Improving diversity in the police service is essential. We are taking forward the Committee's recommendations on Police Reform with regard to increasing our efforts on positive action and disseminating good practice. There is evidence that minority communities are keen to find out more about policing and we are

looking at how to strengthen forces' engagement with minority and faith communities and build sustainable relationships aimed at breaking down barriers and perceptions, providing greater reassurance and feeding into our recruitment pool.

We are also looking at how we might take forward the Committee's recommendations that the police service should be able to prioritise the appointment of individuals who have passed the assessment centre and who have additional, relevant, operationally desirable skills and knowledge which can be used to improve the service provided to communities.

Although employment targets for the police service are challenging, we are discussing with ACPO setting additional annual recruitment targets based on the economically active minority ethnic population in each force area.

The Government is equally determined to root out racism and other unacceptable attitudes and to ensure that the police service is able to attract the right people and appreciate their diversity. We will be considering carefully the CRE's recommendations in relation to screening of applicants and the training and behaviour of officers (including the need for confidential reporting systems) and a more effective disciplinary system.

A new programme for probationer training is being rolled out. This moves the initial training for police officers from district training centres back into the community so new police officers learn policing skills within the communities which they will police. There has also been concern that race and diversity training was doing little to change underlying attitudes of officers. We have now published a new strategy for race and diversity training designed to improve police performance and understanding in this area.

Managers and leaders have key roles to play in ensuring that respect for diversity is fully rooted in all aspects of police delivery and police employment. Their values and attitudes guide behaviour. It is essential therefore that the senior levels of the service are more diverse and more culturally astute. The progress of women, for instance, has been unacceptably slow and must be accelerated and we are looking at the barriers to promotion.

The aim of the Government's race equality programme is to deliver a police service which has a common understanding of diversity and which appreciates the benefits which diversity can deliver in terms of improved service delivery to all communities. Improving the diversity of the service, ensuring equality in all areas of employment, and developing a culture of respect are essential to this.

### **Developments since 9/11**

**3: Despite the current lack of information about terrorist cases, it is our view that in due course the majority will probably prove to have been related to international terrorism. (Paragraph 58)**

The Government notes this conclusion.

### **Britain's communities and community relations**

**4: We conclude that community relations have deteriorated, although the picture is by no means uniform, and that there are many positive examples to set against our overall assessment. International terrorism and the response to it have contributed to this deterioration, particularly in relations between the majority community and the Muslim community. However, the problems are by no means only associated with these communities or with international terrorism; we have seen that international events, such as communal violence in India, the Kashmir**

**dispute and the Israel-Palestine conflict can be reflected in deepening tensions in this country. (Paragraph 88)**

The Government has no evidence that terrorism and the response to it has led to an overall deterioration in community relations. However it is certainly the case that the picture on community relations is not uniform and that efforts to build cohesion between different communities should be sensitive to the international factors that can impact on community relations. As part of the strategy to improve community relations, the Government is committed to ensuring that Muslim and other faith communities are engaged and involved in the formulation of policies that have a direct relevance to them.

**5 and 6: Much greater recognition should be given to the problem of both Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. All communities, including the majority community, have a responsibility to tackle such problems, condemning without reservation prejudice, discrimination and violence against other communities. Whilst all communities will be sensitive to attacks upon them, no community should turn a blind eye to prejudicial actions by members of its own community. (Paragraph 89) + Islamophobic incidents should be treated as seriously as any other form of racism. Islamophobia is not only an issue for Muslims: it is a problem that can only be resolved by the majority community in this country, who must acknowledge its existence. (Paragraph 90)**

The Government is committed to tackling all forms of racism and extremism.

The Government plans to complement the existing legislative provisions to combat racially and religiously aggravated offences, by the introduction of legislation to outlaw incitement to religious hatred. A bill will be reintroduced shortly. Measures to outlaw religious discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services are included in the Equality Bill.

The Government has acted to address the problem of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, for example by developing guidance to schools on tackling racist and Islamophobic bullying, and in its support of the annual commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day which reinforces the message that racism and prejudice can have catastrophic consequences and that there are still important lessons to be learnt.

By April 2005 all police forces are committed to complying with detailed best practice advice designed to improve the way in which police and other agencies handle reports of racist or religiously-motivated incidents. They will be assessed on their performance by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary.

The Crown Prosecution Service Public Policy Statement on Racist and Religious Crime issued by the CPS in 2003 undertakes to deal with such offences firmly, fairly and robustly.

**7: It is unfortunate that there is as yet no reliable central collection of data on Islamophobia. We urge the Muslim community to follow the example of the Hindu Forum in seeking to draw on the experience gained by the Community Security Trust in monitoring anti-Semitism. (Paragraph 91)**

The Government notes and agrees with this recommendation.

**8: The rise in anti-Semitic incidents since September 2001 is extremely disturbing and should be acknowledged as such by all. Anti-Semitism among some members of the Muslim community is also worrying. We welcome the condemnation of anti-Semitic attacks by leaders of the Muslim community: it is important that they should continue to do so, forcefully and unequivocally. (Paragraph 92)**

The Government notes and agrees with this recommendation.

**9: We are also concerned by anti-Semitism on campuses. We urge university authorities to act swiftly when cases are brought to their attention. The duty to promote good race relations imposed on other bodies by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 should also apply to student unions, subject to the provisions on free speech at universities of the Education Act (No 2) 1986. (Paragraph 93)**

While it would not be right for the Government to become directly involved in the running of a particular university, the Government has made clear that it deplores anti-Semitism on campuses. We strongly welcome the initiatives taken by Universities UK in asking the Equality Challenge Unit to look at the issue of extremism and intolerance with a view to updating guidance to universities.

On the specific point about legislation, it would be possible to include student unions in the list of bodies to which the general statutory duty in the Race Relations Act 1976 as amended applies only if it were true that student unions had public functions.

However, section 22 of the Education Act 1994 places obligations on universities' governing bodies in respect of student unions. These include taking reasonable steps to ensure that student unions are accountable for their finances; that they operate in a fair and democratic manner; that procedures for allocating funds and resources to groups and clubs should be fair and transparent; and that the student union should have a written constitution that is subject to the governing body's approval and is renewed no less frequently than once every five years. Clearly in discharging these duties a university's governing body is indeed subject to the statutory duty in the Race Relations Act 1976 as amended.

Finally, section 25 of the Race Relations Act 1976 provides that certain "associations of persons" with 25 or more members may not discriminate against their members in the way that they afford the members access to any benefits, facilities or services. It is possible that this provision would apply to a student union.

**10: We note that the allegations that either the Neasden Hindu Temple or the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission, or both, are associated with terrorism have not been substantiated. These allegations are new to the Home Office and are disputed by a wide range of authoritative witnesses, both in the Neasden area and nationally. (Paragraph 94)**

The Government notes and agrees with this conclusion.

**11: It is clear that the problems faced by France and the Netherlands have both similarities and differences to those faced here. (Paragraph 105)**

The Government notes and agrees with this conclusion.

**12: On the positive side, this country has a long tradition of race relations legislation and reasonably frank and open discussion of community and race relations. At local and national level there is a habit of dialogue, if sometimes patchy, on which solutions can be constructed. Our impression was that neither France nor the Netherlands have explicitly considered these issues in the recent past (though for different reasons) and this meant that, at national level at least, there was some real uncertainty about the most effective way forward. (Paragraph 106)**

The Government agrees with the committee's view about the situation in the UK, and is seeking to build on this tradition through the implementation of its strategy 'Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society'.

**13: On the other hand, in both countries there was a more explicit willingness, particularly at local level, to recognise the central importance of the Muslim communities and their future development within national society. In France, too, counter-terrorism powers were more developed than our own – possibly because of their longer experience of dealing with this form of international terrorism. (Paragraph 107)**

The Government notes this conclusion. We recognise the important role that all faith communities play in public life at both a national and local level, particularly through their contribution to community cohesion and provision of services to members of their own faith and to the wider community.

The Government recognises that there has been a rise in incidents of Islamophobia since the events of 9/11 and subsequent international events, in Iraq, Afghanistan and Israel/Palestine. The Government is committed to working with Muslim communities to support them in preventing disaffection and isolating extremism, to counter Islamophobia and to ensure good relations with others in the community.

#### **Central and local government**

**14: We welcome the positive comments about the role of the Home Office, but we fear that the absence of a direct reference to community cohesion in their evidence to this inquiry suggests that the Home Office does not yet appreciate that the implementation of its community cohesion strategy is central to its ability to deal with the community impact of international terrorism. We recommend that the Home Office review the links between its work on community cohesion and anti-terrorism. (Paragraph 111)**

The Government has taken steps to remedy the perceived lack of co-ordination between community cohesion policies and its counter-terrorism initiatives. Home Office officials working on terrorism and community cohesion are working closely together to take forward a programme of engagement with the Muslim community as part of the Government's wider approach to working with faith communities. The Minister of State for Policing, Security and Community Safety, Hazel Blears, has overall responsibility for the Home Office's responsibilities in both counter-terrorism and community safety.

**15 and 16: We are impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm of a number of young people we met, including those who worked with PeaceMaker. We agree with their view that schools have a vital role to play in the building of tolerant and cohesive communities. (Paragraph 117) + But if Peacemaker's small consultation proves representative of young people across the country there is clearly a major problem of perception and understanding to be tackled. We are alarmed that some schools are reluctant to discuss these issues. We are also concerned by the absence of explicit central Government support that would enable and encourage schools to promote discussion about these sensitive issues. Both the Home Office and the DfES should share responsibility for developing a coherent cross-Government approach. (Paragraph 118)**

The Government notes and agrees with these conclusions.

The Government believes that schools and Local Education Authorities are best placed to understand and respond in a culture-sensitive manner to the concerns of their local communities and their pupils. Citizenship education provides a context within which schools may discuss sensitive issues as and when they arise, in a way that is appropriate to the age and understanding of their pupils. Religious education provokes challenging questions about issues of right and wrong and offers opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development.



The daily act of collective worship provides an opportunity for pupils to reflect on important events.

In October 2004 the Government launched a non-statutory Framework for RE which is designed to support the delivery of high quality RE in schools. It provides opportunities for pupils to study all of the principal religions in Great Britain, as well as other religious traditions and secular philosophies in line with the Government's goals of inclusion, tolerance and diversity, whilst reinforcing the position of Christianity as the dominant religion of this country.

**17: We were struck by the energy and imagination shown by some local councils in this country and in France and the Netherlands. Their readiness to confront difficult issues is to be applauded and we detected an optimism sometimes lacking at the national level. But such readiness should be reinforced by a concerted central Government strategy to explain national policy and to encourage local discussion, including discussion of challenging issues such as the response to terrorism. We did not see clear evidence of such a strategy. Indeed it appears some of the necessary actions of central authorities, such as raids by anti-terrorist police, are carried out without a proper appreciation of the effect on local communities and organisations, such as the local police. (Paragraph 127)**

The Government agrees that a wider public understanding about the threat from international terrorism is necessary. As we refer to in our response to recommendation 14, Home Office officials working on terrorism and community cohesion will be undertaking an engagement programme with the Muslim community to reassure and inform the community.

This engagement will encompass local and national issues including counter terrorism and we will be working with communities at a variety of levels to encourage healthy debate.

All counter-terrorist operations involve assessment of local impact and every recent operation has involved a senior member of the local police force in planning. The Home Office encourages this good practice, but it is important to recognise that dealing with these most serious offences will inevitably have community impact. Our aim, working with local police forces is to manage and minimise negative impact through effective communications and engagement work, where possible involving local community leaders and groups such as the Muslim Safety Forum.

**18: One of the issues frequently raised in this inquiry, and stressed by the Cantle report, is the importance of local leadership. As the Chief Executive of Leicester City Council put it, “the role of community leaders – formal, informal, civic, faith, the media – is critical”. We believe that this holds true on the national level as well. Community leaders should support each other and seek to build bridges with other communities: in some cases this will mean giving up defensive and reactive stances in order to create a climate of tolerance and mutual respect. (Paragraph 128)**

The Government welcomes and agrees with this conclusion, which echoes the commitment in the strategy ‘Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society’ discussed above.

There are a number of occasions when key members of faith communities have exercised their leadership at the national level by coming together to reinforce interfaith collaboration and dialogue. Recent examples include the Holocaust Memorial Commemorations and the Memorial Service for Pope John Paul II at Westminster Cathedral where religious leaders of all faiths and interfaith representatives were in attendance.



**19: Faith leaders have an important role to play in community relations. Although it is clear that in some places this responsibility has been accepted, whether through inter-faith work or by educating their own communities about other faiths, much more needs to be done both to bring such work to all areas and to ensure that larger numbers of people are involved. We encourage them to develop these activities and to challenge prejudice and encourage tolerance both locally and nationally. (Paragraph 131)**

The Government welcomes and agrees with this conclusion.

The Government supports interfaith and inter-communal dialogue at both a local and national level to support the development of good relations between faith communities in Britain.

Through valuable work carried out by the Inter Faith Network for the UK (core funded by Home Office) and the Local Government Association, guidance has been issued to local authorities on involving the faith communities in local decision making.

The Inter Faith Network has also produced valuable guidance to those wanting to set up local inter faith groups and on inter faith activity for young people.

It has also produced a directory of inter faith groups, of which there are now around 200. The development of local inter-faith structures, bringing together representatives of different faith communities in a local authority area, provides a valuable framework both for promoting mutual understanding and co-operation between them.

In addition the Home Office has recently facilitated Imam/Rabbi dialogue which brings together Orthodox ministers of religion from the two communities to talk about commonalities between these two Abrahamic faiths. It also provides an opportunity for the religious leaders to demonstrate that despite differences, it is still possible to engage with and exchange views in the spirit of learning and mutual respect.

**20: Diversity is important in police forces, local authorities and the media, not only for its own sake, but because it can provide clear evidence that ethnic and religious minorities are valued in this country. The presence of individuals from minority backgrounds at all levels in such organisations – and, indeed, in political parties – also provides role models for young people and thus helps integration. (Paragraph 135)**

We agree that diversity within the police service and within local authorities is vital for an effective service and integrated society where every section of that society has trust and confidence in the authorities. Minority ethnic police officers and staff play a vital role in representing the police service in promotional materials and at recruitment events. The police service also benefits from their deployment as outreach workers engaging with local communities.

**21: Public policy which recognises the common identity of British Muslims but which does not recognise or respond to their diverse backgrounds is unlikely to be successful in developing full community cohesion. (Paragraph 140)**

Community cohesion depends on a recognition of a common sense of identity and belonging which is characterised by tolerance and fairness rather than prejudice or hate. A culture of inclusiveness and respect for the diversity of all communities.

In October this year the Government will pilot the first Citizen's Day, which will seek to celebrate approaches to inclusive citizenship. This will be about engaging with and enabling people from all diverse backgrounds to come together. Recognising and responding to positive relationships and actions based on a sense of inclusiveness defined by common opportunities and mutual expectations on all citizens to contribute to society. Looking at what binds us together in order to achieve the social progress that benefits all.

#### Use of anti-terrorism powers

**22: We note that the stop and search powers under the Terrorism Act have been used very varyingly by forces across England and Wales and that the large majority of such stops and searches have been carried out by the Metropolitan Police Service: in these cases the proportion of Asians stopped and searched is very close to their proportion in the population of London. We also note that the proportion of Asians stopped and searched under the Terrorism Act fell in 2003-04. We do not believe that the Asian community is being unreasonably targeted by the police in their application of Section 44 of the Terrorism Act or of the other legislation enabling stops and searches. (Paragraph 152)**

Operational decisions concerning the use of section 44 stop and search lie with the Chief Officer of the force concerned. An authorisation may be given only if the person giving it considers it expedient for the prevention of acts of terrorism. Forces consider a wide range of factors before authorising the powers, such as an assessment of how the terrorist threat corresponds to a particular area or location at a particular time. Around 75% of all stops and searches under section 44 take place in the Metropolitan and City of London police areas. This is because London has a high concentration of targets that are potentially attractive to terrorists.

We note the Committee's observation that the proportion of Asians stopped and searched in London under section 44 is very close to their proportion in the population of London. We welcome the Committee's conclusion that the Asian population is not therefore being unreasonably targeted in the use of the powers.

**23: Nonetheless, we accept that there is a clear perception among all our Muslim witnesses that Muslims are being stigmatised by the operation of the Terrorism Act: this is extremely harmful to community relations. We recognise the efforts being made by police forces, notably by the Metropolitan Police Diversity Directorate, to engage with minority communities. But we believe that special efforts should be made by the police and Government to reassure Muslims that they are not being singled out unfairly. (Paragraph 153)**

We welcome the Committee's observation that the Asian community is not being unfairly targeted by the operation of stop and search powers. However we do recognise that there is a perception within the community that Muslims are being unfairly targeted or discriminated against. We are undertaking a specific programme of work with local partners and community organisations to reassure the Muslim community on these issues.

**24: We have no doubt that this perception is fuelled by the high profile reporting of some police raids and arrests. Such coverage also helps to fuel more widespread fears of the Muslim community. It is particularly damaging when little coverage is given when suspects are subsequently released without trial. It seems clear that some of the most sensational coverage has sometimes been caused by unauthorised briefing from within the police service. It is essential that police forces take firm action against any officers or staff involved. (Paragraph 154)**

The Government recognises that high profile media reporting can have a negative impact on community relations. While it is difficult for the Government to influence what the newspapers choose to print, we will continue to work with the police service to ensure that operational briefings to journalists are accurate and provide as full information as possible, including on releases without charge where appropriate.

**25: We believe that there should be independent scrutiny, involving the Muslim community, of police intelligence and its use as a basis for stops and searches and arrests. We do not recommend adding religion to extensive information already required on stops and searches, but do believe that some additional research could be carried out into the impact of these police tactics on different religious groups. (Paragraph 155)**

We will continue to ensure there is greater transparency and openness about CT powers and how they are used. There are however sensitive operational issues that limit the amount of information that can be made public. ACPO have indicated that they will give consideration to the proposal that communities be given some level of scrutiny of the factors that inform section 44 authorisations.

There are serious issues to consider with regard to the recording of an individual's religion during a stop and search. A person's religion can be an intensely private matter and we are mindful that requesting this information as part of the stop and search process could be overly intrusive and offensive. We note the Committee's opinion that religion should not be included in the information collated on stops and searches. The Community Panel set up to scrutinise the Stop & Search Action Team have been asked to consider this issue further.

**26: It may also be the case that stops and searches of Asians under legislation other than the Terrorism Act are nonetheless perceived by Muslims but not by Hindus or Sikhs as being related to terrorism. This possibility should be examined by the Home Office's Stop and Search Action Team. (Paragraph 156)**

We note that the Committee found anecdotal evidence of members of the Muslim community mistakenly believing that stops and searches conducted under PACE (where there was reasonable suspicion that a crime had been committed) were being conducted under anti-terrorist legislation. In order to test this hypothesis members of the Home Office Stop and Search Action Team are currently working with the Metropolitan Police Service to develop a "customer satisfaction" survey for those stopped and searched. This survey can be used to identify whether an individual understood the power being used.

The solution to the potential issue, if it exists, is already couched within our recently published Stop and Search Manual on good practice and PACE i.e. that officers should clearly explain the powers they are using to stop an individual.

**27: We believe that statistics on the length of time that individuals are held under the Terrorism Act before being released without charge should be collated centrally and published as soon as possible, since they will be an important indicator of whether the counter-terrorism detention powers are being misused. They should also show whether the extension of the period of detention without charge to 14 days, permitted since early 2004, is being used. (Paragraph 158)**

We will explore with the Police and Home Office Research, Development and Statistics whether effective, reliable and accurate statistics can be collected and published.

**28: We are concerned by the lack of detailed information about arrests under the Terrorism Act. To maintain public trust, it is vital that statistics about arrests, charges and convictions under the counter-terrorism legislation be as detailed and reliable as possible. In particular, cases involving domestic terrorism should be clearly distinguished from those arising from international terrorism. (Paragraph 161)**

The Home Office publishes a table showing outcomes from arrests under the Terrorism Act on its website. It is not appropriate to publish material about individual cases.

**29: Within the constraints of the sub judice rule and any reporting restrictions, the Government should also examine ways of publicising the number of current trials for terrorism-related offences. (Paragraph 162)**

The Government does not comment on individual cases.

**30: There is no doubt that the authorities face a real challenge in acting against terrorist suspects from within particular communities, without been seen as targeting – or stigmatising – that community. We do not believe that the Government has yet found an answer to this question, as the reaction to the Minister's comments illustrates. More needs to be done to reach agreement both on tactics and strategy and the way in which these are to be described. (Paragraph 169)**

The actions of the Government and/or police service can have an impact on minority communities and it is important that the Government works with the police service and community groups to have an open dialogue about the use of police powers, to ensure that their use commands the support of the whole community. Powers are directed at terrorists, not at any faith or ethnic group and are designed to protect the safety of the entire community.

#### **Tackling international terrorism, building cohesive communities**

**31: The Government has now made a commitment to new anti-terrorism legislation and a review of existing powers. It is essential, in our view, that British Muslims are engaged fully in this review from the earliest possible moment. We believe that this should be made an explicit responsibility of the reviewer of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. In parallel, the Home Office should initiate its own consultations. (Paragraph 174)**

The Government believes that it is essential to aim for an open and meaningful dialogue with the public generally on the subject of tackling the current threat of terrorism, as well as with the Muslim community in particular.

The Government does not however, consider it appropriate, specifically to require that the independent reviewer of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005 should take responsibility for ensuring that British Muslims are fully engaged in a review of the current legislation. Considerable importance is attached to the independence of the reviewer and his ability to consider and report on those aspects of the legislation he believes to be of most significance. At the same time, there are already a number of demands on the independent reviewer's time and a number of statutory requirements to be fulfilled, which must be balanced.

As part of his independent role, it is open to the independent reviewer to take such steps as he sees fit in the pursuit of his statutory responsibilities. None of the foregoing precludes the independent reviewer from seeking the views of British Muslims as he deems necessary for the purposes of his role. The current reviewer (Lord Carlile of Berriew) welcomes observations on the legislation for which he is responsible from all interested parties.

The Government's view is that proper engagement with the Muslim community would best be achieved by an ongoing dialogue and via a variety of means and different fora, and accordingly, that the Home Office is best placed to take this forward. There has for example, already been (in the course of 2004), consultation with representatives of Muslim and other ethnic and religious communities on potential legislative proposals. During the passage of the Prevention of Terrorism Act the Home Secretary also made clear his intention to open up a wider debate to ensure that all parts of the community were well informed on key issues. Work is already underway to build on these initiatives.

**32: However, it is not clear that there is a coherent strategy, developed with the Muslim community for tackling extremism, still less that these issues have been addressed with other communities. We can contrast this, perhaps, with the broad consensus that exists amongst the police, political parties and local and national government in tackling a terrorist organisation like the Provisional IRA or a racist organisation like the BNP. (Paragraph 175)**

As set out in its strategy 'Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society', the Government is committed to tackling all forms of racism and extremism. We agree that this is an issue for both the Government and the Muslim and other communities. We are seeking to build a partnership between the Government, the police service, other agencies and community groups to combat the risk of young people being drawn into extremism. The Committee has received evidence on several examples of good practice in the community and we will be seeking to learn from and spread such good practice.

**33: If recruitment of prisoners to extremist groups is a problem in both France and the Netherlands, it is likely to be one here. The Government should examine the issue as a matter of priority. (Paragraph 176)**

The Government is examining this issue in partnership with others.

**34: We reject any suggestion that Muslims are in some way more likely to turn to terrorism than followers of other religions. It is clear from the evidence presented to us that there are some individuals who advocate violence against others in the name of a number of faiths. Faith leaders must condemn, without equivocation, those of their co-religionists who advocate violence. It is perhaps important to note that there is a distinction to be made between the expression of what might be seen in a western European context as reactionary social views, but which falls within the bounds of free speech, and the advocacy of terrorism or other forms of violence. However, we are concerned that preachers from other countries, who have a reputation for extremist views, can during their visits to Britain harm community relations. (Paragraph 177)**

The Government notes and agrees with this conclusion. A person who wishes to visit the UK may be refused a visa on the grounds that their presence in the United Kingdom is deemed to be not conducive to the public good. The Home Secretary also has a personal power to exclude people from the United Kingdom on the same grounds. These powers have been, and will continue to be, used to stop people who advocate violence, on whatever pretext, from travelling to the United Kingdom.

**35: It follows from what we say that the new terrorism legislation cannot and must not simply be a set of police and judicial powers. It must be part of an explicit broader anti-terrorism strategy. In the context of international terrorism, it must explicitly and specifically set out how British Muslim leaders will be supported in assisting British Muslims in resisting extremist views. (Paragraph 179)**



We agree that a deeper relationship between the Police Service, the Government and the Muslim community is necessary if we are to tackle extremism together and we will be taking forward a programme of work in partnership with them. However, we do not feel that it would be appropriate to enact this relationship in legislation.

**36: It is clear that a number of issues need to be tackled. Among the first priorities are those organising and propagating extremist ideas sympathetic to terrorism. They must be identified and dealt with effectively – not only by the authorities, but most importantly by the Muslim community itself. (Paragraph 180)**

There are legislative powers to catch those who cross the line from legitimate debate into inciting violence, or who commit offences motivated by racial or religious hatred as discussed above. If there is any evidence of criminal or terrorist activity, the police will take the appropriate and necessary action.

The Government is working with the Muslim community to improve their capacity to fight the extremists who are intent on radicalising their young people. Ministers of Religion have an important role to play in helping minority communities to engage with British society, in combating extremism and distortion of religion and strengthening community cohesion. The Learning and Skills Council worked with Muslim religious leaders to run a pilot management and community leadership course for Muslim faith leaders.

**37: The development of a deeper faith amongst young British Muslims should be entirely compatible with a secure and comfortable British identity (Paragraph 191)**

The Government notes and agrees with this conclusion.

**38: It is important to stress that this is not a debate for Muslims alone, nor, indeed, for other minority communities. Part of the problem is the racism and rejection which is experienced from some parts of the majority community in which unjustified fear, suspicion and simple lack of understanding play a large part. An inclusive British identity for the 21st century can only be created by the full participation of all parts of society. (Paragraph 192)**

The Government welcomes this conclusion, which reflects the commitment in the strategy ‘Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society’, to improve the life chances of all members of society, and particularly those suffering disadvantage. The strategy acknowledges that the progress achieved towards ensuring that everyone in Britain has the life chance they deserve has not been uniform, and certain communities still suffer poorer outcomes. National cohesion rests on an inclusive sense of belonging which couples the offer of fair mutual support with the expectation that people will play their part in society and will respect others. The strategy emphasises the importance of helping young people from different communities to grow up with a sense of common belonging; helping immigrants to integrate; and ensuring racism is unacceptable.

**39: Questions of identity may be inextricably linked with the reasons which may lead a small number of well-educated and apparently integrated young British people to turn to terrorism. No one should be forced to choose between being British and being Muslim and we do not believe the two are in any way incompatible. The relationship between rights and responsibilities and opportunities in this country cannot be separated from the concept of Britishness. These issues were raised by the Cantle Report in 2001. They have not lost their relevance today, and we endorse the Cantle Report's conclusion that a wider debate, in which young people must play a leading role, about a modern British identity should be developed. (Paragraph 193)**

Compared to many societies, Britain has done well to build a sense of inclusive membership, among the majority and minorities. The British Social Attitude Survey has indicated that self reported racial prejudice is on a slow long-term downward trend, although concerns about prejudice in society may be rising and certain minorities experience particular hostility. Racially motivated incidents are noticeably fewer than just seven years ago. Mori surveys in September 2004 indicate that nearly nine out of ten of people disagree with the statement that you need to be white to be British. Most consider that Britain is a place that has good relations between different ethnic communities. Today, Britishness encompasses the collective contribution diverse communities make to the country. People should not need to choose between their British identity and other cultural identities, they can be proud of both.

The Government's strategy 'Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society' heralded the intention to give greater emphasis to promoting a sense of common belonging and cohesion among all groups, setting out a vision for an inclusive British society. But such a cohesive society relies on more than equal opportunities for individuals. It also relies on a number of social conditions that help people from all backgrounds to come together and develop a sense of inclusion and shared identity, defined by common opportunities and mutual expectations on all citizens to contribute to society. This is not about assimilation of cultural differences, but it does signal a greater focus on helping build a stronger sense of common belonging and social participation, at national and local levels, in partnership with civic organisations and communities themselves.

**40: We welcome the Government's efforts so far to ensure that foreign ministers of religion have the language skills and knowledge of this country to make a contribution to communities here. The success of these efforts should be kept under review and, if necessary, ideas from other countries should be studied. (Paragraph 195)**

The Government introduced an English Language requirement for Ministers of Religion from abroad in August 2004. We agree that the success of these efforts should be kept under review therefore we have invited views from faith communities on the success of this measure as part of the second stage consultation on pre-entry qualifications and post-entry qualifications.

#### **The media**

**41: The Committee believes that the loose use of terms like "Islamic terrorism" should be discouraged and care taken to distinguish between the claims made by the terrorist groups and the faith of the vast majority of Muslims. (Paragraph 210)**

The Government is fully aware of the damage that can be caused by the use of inappropriate and insensitive language when referring to terrorism. We acknowledge that the tiny number of people who advocate and practice violence have nothing to do with Islam and do not wish to give the impression that we hold any other view.

The Government agrees that phrases such as 'Islamic terrorist' and 'Muslim terrorism' are misleading and unhelpful. We believe that referring to 'international terrorism/terrorist groups' accurately captures the international ramifications of terrorist networks inspired by Al-Qaida without fuelling public misconceptions.

**42: Of course we reject the idea that British Muslims are not actively opposed to terrorism. It is clear that extreme views are challenged every day of every week within Muslim communities. Nonetheless, this work needs to be developed in the years to come and it is important that public policy**



**supports those people who will shoulder the responsibility of doing so. (Paragraph 212)**

The Government agrees with this conclusion and is committed to working with and supporting faith communities to this end.

**43: It is also clear that some anti-Semitic attacks are being perpetrated by young Muslims. This is almost certainly quite a distinct phenomenon from international terrorism but must also be tackled: leadership from within Muslim communities will again be key, and those leaders must be supported in that work. (Paragraph 213)**

We note and agree with this conclusion.

The Government deplores all acts of anti-Semitism and understands the fears and concerns of the Jewish community, given the rise in the number of anti-Semitic incidents from 2002 to 2003 and again in 2004 which has been reported by the Community Security Trust.

The Government has a strong record in combating anti-Semitism as described above.

**44 and 45: We have sympathy with the view that everyone, and not just minority communities, should be more tolerant of comment they dislike. But the concerns about media coverage of terrorism and community relations expressed forcibly by a wide range of witnesses should not be ignored. (Paragraph 214) + We received overwhelming evidence that media coverage of international terrorism and community relations has a powerful and often negative impact. Whilst some criticism was directed at particular publications, it is also clear that television coverage has a significant impact. We found representatives of the media unaware or dismissive of their importance in this issue. We believe that the media must live up to their responsibilities to report fairly and accurately. In particular, to link terrorists, asylum seekers and Muslims, whether explicitly or implicitly, cannot be a useful contribution to debate. (Paragraph 215)**

The Government notes and agrees with the above conclusions.

A free press is fundamental to any democratic society. But inaccurate and insensitive reporting and the misuse of language can polarize attitudes to religious, ethnic and national identity and so do great harm particularly at times of heightened tension.

We are helping to fund measures proposed by a media practitioners group which was set up following the disturbances in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford in the summer of 2001. The group's view, which we support, was that it would be wrong to attempt to prescribe to the press and broadcasting industry how they should deal with the issue of social cohesion. They focussed instead on practical guidance to support accurate and fair reporting.

The Home Office is funding practical guidance for editors and journalists produced by the Society of Editors and the Media Trust, which we expect to be published later in 2005. This is designed to increase literacy in religious matters and provide a good practice guide on staying within the law and avoiding traps of language and terminology.

In June 2004, with the help of funding from the Local Government Association and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Improvement and Development Agency produced an online toolkit for local authorities' communications officers. This is designed to help them build relationships with the media to ensure that reporting at times of heightened tensions is proportionate and responsible.

**46: We are satisfied that there is no Government strategy to manipulate media coverage of terrorism, whether to foster a climate of fear or to divert attention from other issues. (Paragraph 218)**

We welcome this conclusion.

**47: We are concerned that, although leaders of the Muslim community may have an accurate appreciation of the limits of the proposed legislation on incitement to religious hatred, this is not shared by their community as a whole. It is vitally important not to raise unrealisable expectations in minority communities, and rather than trusting to dialogue with leaders of faith groups, the Government should develop a strategy to ensure that the extent and limitations of the proposed offence are fully understood by all. We suspect that the extent of the legislation, and how often it is likely to be used, may also be misunderstood by some who oppose it. It is of course important to emphasise, as Ministers have tried to do, that such a change in the law should not be seen as a ban on criticism of any particular religion. The right to practice a religion, to criticise religious practices or to propagate non-religious belief is a basic right in a free society. (Paragraph 223)**

The Government acknowledges that efforts to manage expectations about the offence of incitement to religious hatred, proposed as part of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill, were only partially effective. This was particularly true in respect of unrealistic expectations which initially developed within the Muslim community. This is not to say however that extensive efforts were not made in this area. Ministers and officials worked closely with faith leaders and used the media where possible to get the right message across to communities as a whole. It is also true to say that the ambit of the offence was misunderstood by some who opposed it, though Ministers and officials also met opponents to listen to their concerns and to emphasise what the measure would and would not cover.

The Government have decided to reintroduce incitement to religious hatred in this parliamentary session. Preparations are already taking place to ensure that the Government's message is expressed more clearly and is better understood, not just by faith leaders but by the constituencies they represent.

#### **Overall conclusions**

**48: The United Kingdom is well placed to deal with the issues covered by this report. Our acceptance of religious and ethnic communities is a strength, not a weakness. Issues of integration and diversity have been part of our political discourse for longer than in some other EU countries and we believe that this country is further down the road to accepting that Britons of all faiths and none and of all ethnic backgrounds have a part to play in our society. But experience shows that to reach this goal will require active leadership at all levels: crossing our fingers and hoping for the best will not work. (Paragraph 224)**

The Government welcomes and agrees with this conclusion.

**49: We saw greater confidence at local levels than nationally. The task now is to create an infrastructure for dialogue that will enable that confidence, and that experience of tackling difficult problems together, to make a difference on a national scale. The Government's proposals for action on community cohesion should be implemented with vigour. A forward looking programme should include measures to ensure that central policy is properly understood at local levels, as well as work to establish what may be the causes of a very small number of young Britons turning to**

**violently extremist groups and measures to address them and a programme to engage schools and young people in discussion of these issues. In particular, the Government must engage British Muslims in its anti-terrorist strategy. (Paragraph 225)**

The Government welcomes and agrees with this conclusion.

The Government is examining these issues in partnership with others, although we believe that considerable progress has already been made, in terms of interfaith dialogue, citizenship education in schools and by building partnerships between the police service and community groups to combat the risk of young people being drawn into extremism. As stated above the Government agrees that it is important to engage British Muslims in its anti-terrorist strategy and will be taking forward a programme of engagement with Muslim communities in the coming months.





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