

Confronting Extremism Together

Growing up in the seventies, looking like this, extremism was part of my life.

I changed my route to school to avoid members of the National Front.

I watched my mum time and time again scrub the word 'Paki' from the front of our shop.

And – rightly or wrongly – as a child, I punched a bully who used the same racist slur to my face.

Although perhaps it's not a great idea to bring up my past indiscretions just before I get a new boss!

We've undoubtedly come a long way since my school days.

I'm proud to say we're now a more multi-racial, more welcoming, and a more tolerant society.

But just last week I met schoolboy Jamal Hijazi, whose heart-breaking story took me right back to my childhood.

A Syrian refugee who wasn't just insulted by a classmate, he was attacked.

Not in the 1970s, but just a few months ago.

No one can hear his moving story and deny we still have a problem in this country.

And it's not just racism, with the blind hate of extremism showing its face in many ugly forms.

In 2015 we published our ground-breaking Counter Extremism Strategy.

Back then, the Prime Minister led the charge as Home Secretary, and I commend her pioneering work.

But four years on, it's time to take stock and to talk openly about the threat, and to admit it's got worse.

Yes, progress has been made.

But when I hear what happened to that schoolboy, I know we have to do more.

So we set up the Commission for Countering Extremism to help us do just that.

I thank them for their work so far, and while I do welcome their first findings, they lay bare the ugly truth.

Just over half of the respondents to their consultation had witnessed

extremism in some way.

One in five had seen it in their own area.

Almost a quarter online.

The targets are many and varied.

And the top group identified by the Commission as most at risk of extremism?
Everyone.

When over half of us have witnessed extremism, it's gone from being a minority issue to one that affects us all and the way we all live our lives is under unprecedented attack.

People are getting angrier about more things – and extremists are quick to try and exploit that.

In 2015, our focus was on extreme Islamists, particularly the lure of Daesh.

While their physical stronghold has now been wiped out, that threat certainly remains.

But now the fault lines dividing our society have splintered and spread.

Reports of far-right extremism, antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate are on the rise.

Women are being robbed of opportunities by religious extremists.

The internet has further emboldened those that are inclined to hate.

Angry words whip up a climate of fear and incite hate, violence, public disorder, oppression and segregation.

Women beaten on a bus because they are gay, sledge hammer attacks on mosques, children being forced into marriage.

Christians, Muslims and Jews being slaughtered in Sri Lanka, Christchurch and Pittsburgh.

Public discourse is hardening and becoming less constructive.

Around the world populism, prejudice – and even open racism – have catapulted extremists into power.

Now I'm proud to say this has not happened in mainstream politics here.

We're naturally liberally minded people.

We remain the most successful multi-racial democracy in the world.

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Thankfully, our politics has not gone down the same road as much of Europe and the US.

But we must act now, to avoid sliding into the barely masked racism of nationalism.

Because there's one thing I know for sure about this country: we're better than that.

We won't just accept rising anger.

We won't just slap ourselves on the back and talk about the success of the Counter Extremism Strategy.

We won't deny the threat is now worse than ever.

That's why I'm here to set out my three part approach to counter that threat.

Because if we are to stop extremism in its tracks we must have the courage to confront it, the strength to take decisive action, and the foresight to tackle the root causes.

Firstly, we all need the courage to confront this issue.

Why? Because tackling extremism isn't easy.

People are scared to talk about it.

This is a sensitive issue and sometimes it can easily cause offence.

But I'm here regardless, because we desperately need a national conversation about extremism.

I will not stay silent and create a vacuum where extremist views can fester and grow.

So I want to be frank about some of the challenges we face.

For a start, what exactly is extremism?

Why have we struggled to come up with a definition?

The threat is not black and white.

There are countless shades of grey between a loaded comment, an online threat, and a terror attack.

Extremism can be the thin end of a wedge.

The unpleasant words that skate on the right side of the law, but stir up hate and drive violence in others.

Of course, you shouldn't arrest everyone with a suspect view.

Of course not. I won't be the thought police – people are entitled to hold and express their own views.

But the challenge is being able to identify where an opinion crosses the line into extremism.

When it goes from free speech to the corrosive spread of dangerous propaganda.

When it incites harm and becomes criminal.

At its heart, extremism is a rejection of the shared values that make this country great: freedom, equality, democracy, free speech, respect for minorities, and the rule of law.

It attacks our society and tears communities apart.

It turns us against each other and can lead to violence, discrimination and mistrust.

But there's a delicate balance between personal and religious freedom and protecting our shared values.

In this country, everyone has the right to observe their cultural and religious practices without any fear of abuse.

We celebrate differences and in part that's what makes us great.

Our shared values are not about forcing everyone to drink tea, eat fish and chips, and watch the cricket – although I hope they watched it the weekend!

But cultural sensitivities must not stop us calling out extremism.

To back away from a problem because of someone's ethnicity is not liberal, it is weak.

Of course, we need to be measured.

But we must not be afraid to confront any problem in any community.

Whether group-based child sexual abuse, or the oppression of women through FGM, forced marriage, so-called honour-based violence, I refuse to stand silently by.

The protests at Parkfield and Anderton Park schools in Birmingham bring this balancing act, I think, into sharp focus.

Earlier this week Panorama focused on the row over lessons on equality that include teaching about families with same sex parents.

Sara hit out at the extremists who have hijacked the protests, distorting genuinely-held religious views of parents. It is entirely right that parents with legitimate concerns talk to their schools about what is being taught in a calm, constructive way.

The right to protest and oppose Government policy is one we hold dear, but where that spills over into intimidation of pupils and teachers, it is unacceptable.

And I agree with Sara that it is entirely wrong if any situation is exploited by extremists.

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Of course, words alone are not enough.

So the second part of my approach is showing strength with decisive action against extremism.

As the threat comes in many forms, so must our response.

So we need to combine the more gentle approach of working with communities and promoting shared values with an unashamedly tough approach to those who spread extremist poison.

So our work embraces those we need to help fend off extremists:

- Strengthening communities through our Building A Stronger Britain Together programme and the Integrated Communities Strategy.
- Protecting religious institutions from hate crime with our Places of Worship Protective Security Programme.
- And boosting integration by committing to new British Values Tests and strengthened English Language provision.

But we've also been unafraid to be robust in our approach to the people and organisations that pose the highest threat:

- Refusing to let the worst extremists into the country to spread their vile views – I've personally excluded 8 since I have become Home Secretary – from a far-right white supremacist, to a US black nationalist, and extremist hate preachers from a number of faiths.
- Removing British citizenship from dual nationals to keep dangerous individuals with the most extreme views out of the UK.
- And launching our Online Harms White Paper, to ensure companies take more responsibility for harmful content on their platforms.

But we know that more needs to be done, and we know that we must keep pace with the changing threat.

So, I can announce today that in anticipation of the Commission's full report, I've asked my officials to start work on a comprehensive new Counter Extremism Strategy.

And while we wait, I will continue, in that time, to call out extremism wherever I see it.

We all have a role to play in stopping any normalisation or legitimisation of these views.

Extreme views can be found on all sides of the spectrum, from Islamist organisations like Hizb u-Tahrir and IHRC, to far right groups like Britain First and Generation Identity.

And those that spread intolerance and division from all corners are often given a platform by media and political figures.

Supposedly mainstream groups can be guilty of that too – groups like MEND. They aren't always as intolerant of intolerance as they may claim to be.

One of the most prominent organisations that rejects our shared values is called CAGE.

When challenged they claim the Government is anti-Muslim.

Something they will no doubt say about me later today.

I will act against those who seek to divide us wherever I can.

So I have amended the guidance for sponsoring migrant workers.

This will allow us to refuse or revoke a sponsor licence where an organisation behaves in a way that is inconsistent with British values, or that's detrimental to the public good.

I can tell you now that I plan to revoke CAGE's licence on this basis, subject to representations.

I will do all I can to ensure groups like CAGE are not trusted with the privilege of sponsorship and I will see it removed.

Now the third part of my approach is having the foresight to tackle the root causes of extremism before it takes hold.

I know what it's like to be an outsider.

I want everyone to have the opportunities that I had, to feel they belong to our brilliantly diverse Britain.

But, sadly not everyone does, and that cultural separation can sow the seeds of extremism.

The extremists set out to fracture our society, therefore we must unite to defeat them.

We need fewer labels that divide, and more overlapping layers that draw us together.

First, community – when people truly come together we build unbreakable local networks that extremists cannot breach.

Second, language – I saw how hard it was for my own Mum when she came to this country speaking very little English.

We estimate that 1 million people living here today that cannot speak English well or at all.

And if we can't communicate with each other, how can we build bridges?

So, I'm making it my mission to ask for more money in the Spending Review to properly fund lessons and break down language barriers.

Third, integration – A couple of years ago I visited a primary school in my home town of Rochdale where around 95% of the pupils were Asian. 95%.

And only a mile or so down the road was another primary where around 90% of the pupils were white.

If we want to see more social cohesion we must rally against segregation and have a more positive approach to integration.

And finally, national identity – we must celebrate the qualities that define us as a nation.

My parents were proud to choose to be part of this country and I want to inspire that same passion in others, to encourage citizenship and a sense of belonging.

Of course, I understand that there are some concerns about immigration.

Loose language is used at all levels.

I'm from an immigrant family, I know what it's like to be told to go back to where you come from – and I don't think they mean Rochdale!

Some worry that new arrivals will take over their communities – that our national identity will be diluted. I firmly reject that.

I've seen how immigration can enrich our country and I welcome it.

I know how much immigrants have contributed to our culture, our society, our economy and our public services. Just this week I was thrilled to meet three cricketers who helped win the World Cup for this country.

One was born in Barbados, one was born in New Zealand, one was born in Ireland – all three of them English heroes.

I recognize the huge benefits of immigration, but if people from different backgrounds are living separate lives in modern ghettos then it's no good for anyone.

To be truly pro-immigration we must be pro-integration too.

And to do this, we must confront the myths about immigration that extremists use to drive divisions.

We know the scale is exaggerated to stoke up fear and that they use immigration as a proxy for race. Sweeping plans to cut immigration as if it's

automatically bad can add to the stigma.

In 2015 a survey of school children found the average estimate was that nearly half of people in the UK were foreign born. That's what the children thought.

The truth according to the 2011 census? 13%.

A staggering 60% of the same group believed it was true that "asylum seekers and immigrants are stealing our jobs".

I won't ignore that some people feel this way, but we must not be afraid to confront these issues with an honest and open public debate.

Only by talking about this can we show how much integration enriches our communities.

We all benefit, because an integrated society is a strong one, where different cultures form the layers of a watertight national identity: interlocking to form a united front. A united front so smooth there will be no footholds left for extremists.

This multi-layered approach will help us tackle extremism.

This is not just a job for the Government alone.

But we will lead from the front.

It takes the whole of society to challenge these vile views.

Everyone has a part to play: *broadcasters who must not give platforms to extremists... *police who must swoop on the worst offenders... *and public figures who must moderate their language.

And anyone can challenge the myths that are peddled by extremists that deepen divisions.

So tell your friends and shout it loud and proud: people from minority backgrounds do not steal their jobs, they're not terrorists, and that there is no global 'Zionist conspiracy'.

Extremism is a problem that isn't going to go away so I'm here to redouble our commitment to tackle it head on.

I will not flinch from confronting extremism.

I will do everything in my power to stop those who seek to undermine our country.

And I will tackle the root causes.

To unite communities, to protect our fundamental values, to protect those most at risk.

I've made this my mission and I'm asking you to do the same.

Together let's call out hate and unite our society and create a stronger, better, bolder Britain.

Thank you very much.