

Lead Commissioner's speech on a positive vision for countering extremism

Good morning everyone. My name is Sara Khan and I am the Lead Commissioner at the Commission for Countering Extremism.

It's great to be here – with a room full of people all committed to challenging extremism.

I'm honoured to be introducing the Home Secretary.

Today is one of the first major public interventions by government since the Counter Extremism Strategy was launched in 2015.

As the Commission's work has shown – and you all know this – we face very different challenges in 2019.

For the last 18 months, I've been discussing extremism...

With communities impacted by it; those working to challenge it and those who are sceptical of the agenda.

I've been sharing what I've heard with the government ahead of our report of my conclusions and recommendations due out in September.

I'm therefore looking forward to the Home Secretary starting to map out a refreshed direction for countering extremism.

If I've learnt one thing from my work over the last 18 months, it's this...

When we talk about 'extremism' we tend focus on what we're against.

I believe we need to start talking about what we stand for as a country and what we are defending.

Let's celebrate that we live in a wonderfully plural, tolerant and open-minded society.

An inclusive society embodied by our incredible and diverse world cup winning cricket team.

Let's be unashamedly patriotic, proud and positive when we're talking about countering extremism.

But I don't want to wait until September to share what I've found with you.

Today we have published academic papers on the Far Right.

Dr Chris Allen from University of Leicester, Dr Joe Mulhall from Hope Not

Hate, and Dr Ben Lee from Lancaster University, have written about the modern and changing British Far Right.

From the violent and now proscribed neo-Nazi National Action to those targeting the mainstream with anti-Muslim politics, exploiting the free speech debate and distrust of the media and politicians.

Professor Hilary Pilkington and Dr Ajmal Hussain from Manchester University and experts from the Peace Foundation have brought together young men and women with Islamist and Far Right beliefs to begin a unique dialogue to help counter the extremist narrative

Finally, we have a paper from Dr Daniel Allington, Dr David Hirsh and colleagues, which uses innovative polling to explore the attitudes of the Far Left.

These are all important and powerful contributions.

Today we're also publishing figures from our call for evidence.

We had 3,000 respondents.

Many of you here today kindly shared your views and experience.

The headline is that just over half of respondents had witnessed extremism in some way.

Of these, two fifths reported seeing it in their local area and 45% had seen it online.

That's a shocking number and one I'm relieved government are responding to.

Our findings show extremism isn't confined to one race, one religion or political ideology.

People are scared that violent extremists will incite or carry out an attack.

People are also deeply worried about the non-violent impact of groups exploiting local tensions to spread hate and division.

There are concerns from women, minorities within minorities and LGBT people... concerned that their right to choose how they live their life, or to talk about what is important to them, has been stripped away by repressive activists and community leaders.

There is a real worry about the intolerance, abuse and polarisation in our public debate and how this is linked to extremism.

The voices of victims of extremism have been missing from traditional counter extremism policy.

I believe we can, and must, do more to address the concerns we have heard.

In 2019 the threat is broad, it's severe and we need to keep up.

Yet we must guard our right to debate and speak our minds.

Our right to be radical.

We are free to protest, to speak truth to power and to be offensive.

This is our amazing – and at times infuriating – democracy.

Making sure it stays that way, is for me, the vital role of counter extremism.

We shouldn't lazily throw around the word 'extremism'. We need to use it with precision and care

We need to develop proportionate, open-minded and fair responses, based on our rule of law and human rights standards.

Leadership is essential in challenging extremism.

The government's 2015 strategy was an important milestone that laid the foundations for vital work.

But as I have made clear to the Home Secretary, there's a real need to update the strategy to keep pace with the nature of the problems in 2019.

Yet in a democracy the state must only have a limited role in countering extremism. We must all play our different parts.

Our new figures show that people expect to see politicians, social media companies, the media, faith and civil society leaders taking on intolerance, harassment and abuse in their own backyards as well as sounding the alarm about hate from outside.

Politicians in particular – whatever party you represent – my message is you all set the standard. And once this bar slips others are emboldened.

Before I finish I want to say thank you to the members of my expert group for their ongoing advice and challenge.

And he would hate this... but I'm going to single out Lord Anderson who is standing down after a year on the group.

I am so grateful for the time he put into the Commission. Few people bring such experience and thoughtfulness to this agenda.

Impartiality is crucial to this Commission.

In the last 18 months I've praised the government when they've made good decisions and I've criticised them when I don't agree with what they'd done.

I want to thank the Home Secretary for his unwavering support for my work and my approach.

But also, for his outspoken commitment to challenging extremism in all forms.

Few politicians have been as consistent and courageous in their approach.

Today he is going to start to set out plans for a new strategy.

I hope this work begins as I did today with a positive vision for the country we love...

I hope it unambiguously makes the case for our right to be radical...

And I hope it doesn't shy away from the breadth and severity of the challenges we face and the need for a proportionate, fair and open-minded response.

It is therefore with huge pleasure that I introduce Sajid Javid, the Home Secretary.