



Prevention (of atrocity crime) is an ongoing process that requires sustained efforts to build the resilience of societies to atrocity crimes by ensuring that the rule of law is respected and that all human rights are protected, without discrimination; by establishing legitimate and accountable national institutions; by eliminating corruption; by managing diversity constructively; and by supporting a strong and diverse civil society and a pluralistic media. Failure by the State to provide such protection and guarantees to its population can create an environment conducive to atrocity crimes. In such cases, prevention involves efforts to halt a likely course of events.

*from the UN Framework for Analysis of Atrocity Crimes,
Tool for Prevention*

United Kingdom Coalition for prevention of incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes

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Meeting report, 29 November 2016, Luton

Media headlines make it clear the United Kingdom (UK) is suffering under the weight of hate and fear. Both sides of the Brexit vote inappropriately fed on fear in their campaigning over whether or not to remain in the European Union, and that rhetoric has not lessened, with continued focus on Muslims, immigrants, and the unemployed. Fear seeks something to blame, seeks an object of that fear, an object to hate. Perpetrators of hate crime target the most vulnerable on

which to focus their vitriol and violence, which in the case of the United Kingdom turns out to be anyone perceived as an immigrant or who is different in any way, whether it is to do with race, religion, gender, sexuality, ability or age – targeting the ones who don't 'belong'. And it is the young among the most vulnerable groups who tend to be the greater targets.

In September 2015, the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect brought together in Treviso, Italy, a group of religious leaders/actors and faith based organisations to discuss their role in preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes in the European region. The meeting followed the April 2015 Fez Forum the outcome of which was the Draft Fez Plan of Action on the Role of Religious Leaders and Actors in Preventing Incitement to Violence that could lead to Atrocity Crimes (thereafter referred to as the Fez Plan of Action).¹ Based on the Fez Plan of Action, participants in the Treviso meeting developed the European Plan of Action on the Role of Religious Leaders and Actors in Preventing Incitement to Violence that could lead to Atrocity Crimes (thereafter referred to as the European Plan of Action).² The latter identified two main trigger factors which could lead to incitement to atrocities: increasing radicalisation to violent extremism among the younger generations, and the current global humanitarian crisis of those seeking safe refuge from war or acute poverty.

As of January 2016, United Nations statistics indicate 129 million people have been affected by the crisis, with now 1 out of every 113 people across the globe forcibly displaced from their homes. Of those, over half are under the age of 18, many of them unaccompanied by or separated from any adult guardian. With continuing higher rates of unemployment among young people in general, without hope for establishing a home or family, the response to this frustration is often exploited in incitement to violence. This risk of radicalisation among younger generations, however, can also offer opportunity for appropriate challenge to those in power through positive use of social media and local, community social action.

Another main outcome of the Treviso meeting was the establishment of the UK coalition on the prevention of incitement to violence. On 29 November 2016, the UK Coalition, the OGRPtoP and KAICIID Dialogue Centre brought together faith-based organisations working on the ground in areas relating to the identified triggers. These include those working to counter xenophobia and hate crime in all its forms, preventing radicalisation – whether towards violent extremism in support of the likes of the so-called Islamic State or the far right, those working in grassroots communities or with young people, and those involved in reconciliation and peace-building. The meeting took place in Luton at *Youthscape*, a faith-based organisation working with young people at risk. Luton has been subject to the presence of hate groups on both ends of the spectrum, and the local community has worked hard at strengthening relations and expelling those who seek to sow hatred and fear.

¹ Fez Plan of Action <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/Fez%20Plan%20of%20Action.pdf>

² The European Plan of Action

<http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/Europe%20Plan%20of%20Action.pdf>

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the sharp increase in hate speech and hate crimes after the Brexit referendum, in particular in areas of the country that strongly voted to leave. The meeting in Luton focussed on the specific contribution that religious leaders and faith-based organisations with different religious affiliations could provide to reduce societal tensions, prevent incitement to violence, and increase intercultural and interreligious understanding and dialogue in the UK after “Brexit”.

Based on the Fez and European plans of action, the meeting aimed in particular at developing a UK strategy for religious leaders/actors and FBOs in the UK to:

- monitor and public report hate speech and hate crimes;
- developing alternative messages and countering hate speech;
- and deepen inter cultural and religious education and dialogue.

The meeting also sought to gather examples of lessons learned and good practices in this regard, and, in addition, touched upon issues related to preventing violent extremism and the current refugee and migrant crisis.

The meeting included working groups on:

1. The link between racism/xenophobia/Islamophobia and hate speech/incitement;
2. Examples from within the UK and other countries or regions when religious leaders and faith-based organisations have prevented or responded to incitement, and the role they can play in countering hate speech.
3. Government policies and initiatives, their strengths and weaknesses, and how the work of religious leaders connects to these;
4. The range of preventive measures that religious leaders and faith based organisations could take to prevent and respond to incitement to violence in the UK;
5. How countering and preventing incitement to violence can increase the resilience of UK society to atrocity crimes and violent extremism.

Working groups

The salient points from our discussions are as follows:

- (1) *The link between racism/xenophobia/Islamophobia and hate speech/incitement.*

Austerity measures have hit young people and the vulnerable first, with higher unemployment rates among the 16-24 age range more than double of those who are older. This combines with higher rents, and the acknowledgement this generation will end up less well off than the previous. When employment and housing become inaccessible, younger people are less likely to develop long-term relationships necessary for building family and community. This makes for a climate susceptible to scapegoating of vulnerable, easy targets. Those in search of a sense of belonging and community, without the resources to build these independently, are subject to grooming into violent, extreme groups.

Most people seek to lead a decent life, where they are able to have equality of access to housing, employment, education and health care, as well as an environment in which to develop and sustain family and community relationships. *The Happy City Index* refers to those same aspirations as being critical elements necessary to happiness. Excess wealth has little impact when these factors are present. What makes for discontent are blatant inequalities and lack of opportunity. While accessible education, employment and housing are among the qualities which make for a higher happiness index within communities, other factors which can bring decline are when any particular group has been identified as different, and a cause for fear. The introduction of fear, into communities which are relatively content, makes for unhappiness and disruption. Whether that difference made fearful is one of race, language, sexuality, gender, faith is not relative. It is the introduction of the element of being something to fear. Challenges and differences do not prevent a sense of common humanity. Fear does. Hate in all forms has the same roots and the same end.

There needs to be better education and discernment within organisations, state, local authorities, particularly with regard to economic policies affecting the issues stated above. The group seeks to examine further what are the roots of scapegoating? What elements segregate any community or group as being a cause for fear?

- (2) *Examples from within the UK and other countries or regions when religious leaders and faith-based organisations have prevented or responded to incitement, and the role they can play in countering hate speech.*

Counter demonstrations to ultra-right wing groups like the English Defence League (EDL) or Britain First, and previously the British National Party (BNP), have proven counterproductive in that they have provided them with more attention. Rather, a mix of strategies is needed - including online campaigns, solidarity events, films shared on social media etc. A further important element is building local resilience through working across faiths and cultures, and strengthening local networks.

Theatre and performing arts are excellent tools for getting stories and issues across. Radicalisation happens quickly, but actions to prevent or to bring about solutions are the slow work of building long-term relationships of trust. But performance can have quick effect as it touches the heart, and sparks the desire to build better relationships.

Khayaal Theatre presents stories from the Islamic tradition in the form of theatrical plays and storytelling performances. *Khayaal* provided examples of real change achieved through a short time - Christians who may hold discriminatory attitudes towards Islam gain both a greater understanding of the faith and express astonishment at there being so much common ground and vice versa. This approach also helps to give Muslims a variety of perspectives on their own faith, to prevent binary attitudes. And the plays give young people - both Christians and Muslims - a safe space to explore and gain a more nuanced view of Islam.

It is also important to reach those who hold discriminatory attitudes. One participant described a powerful programme being run in Tennessee of 20-person dinners, bringing together people of different faith traditions to learn more about one another and develop relationships. There is another involving evangelical Christians attending study sessions to learn more about Islam, and to discuss their concerns with one another, and in the second stage, into discussion with their Muslim neighbours. Invitees attend upon the suggestion of their pastor – an invitation they are less likely to turn down. This is painstakingly slow, but there is also value in working slowly as it builds stronger foundations. This work needs to happen on many tracks.

The blurring of lines between mainstream and extremist media is also of concern. The public's assumption that news is infallible makes it easy for ultra-right wing actors to infiltrate with fake news. And discriminatory notions can quickly become mainstream. Along the same lines, the government, the media and the entertainment industry also spread discriminatory and Islamophobic messages that can easily be mainstreamed in daily narratives and attitudes about 'strangers.' These messages are exacerbated by a general lack of faith literacy and an antipathy towards all faiths.

Humour can be a useful tool to weaken the appeal of extreme right-wing groups, which preach and use hate speech and violence. Drawing out the ridiculous and unappealing stance of ultra-right wing leaders and sharing information in the public square of their criminal records and/or their poor attendance records if they hold public office, or photos demonstrating their hypocrisy can help weaken their reputation and appeal, especially among youths.

- (3) *Government policies and initiatives, their strengths and weaknesses, and how the work of religious leaders connects to these.*

The Prevent strategy is one of four elements of the UK government's strategy for counter terrorism:

- *responds to the ideological challenge we face from terrorism and aspects of extremism, and the threat we face from those who promote these views*
- *provides practical help to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure they are given appropriate advice and support*
- *works with a wide range of sectors (including education, criminal justice, faith, charities, online and health) where there are risks of radicalisation that we need to deal with*

*The strategy covers all forms of terrorism, including far right extremism and some aspects of non-violent extremism. However, we prioritise our work according to the risks we face.*³

Faith leaders in the UK have emphasised the importance of working with government and local authorities in working to a common purpose, the safety and security of our communities, and to keep the doors of cooperation open. This increases the ability to change perceptions and gain in depth understanding

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-counter-terrorism/2010-to-2015-government-policy-counter-terrorism#appendix-2-prevent>

of constraints and challenges for all. This is especially important in the light of the positive affects the Prevent Strategy has had in intervening in the lives of some individuals in keeping them from joining or participating in violent extremism of all persuasions. There has been some fine work done, much of which for safeguarding purposes must be kept confidential. And it is because of this it is vital that the programme work to repair the damage that has been done in the way of community relations if there is to be future support for Prevent and if it is to continue in an effective manner.

Many faith leaders of all traditions warned against heavy-handed monitoring of discussion in educational and public institutions. This ham-fisted approach has resulted in a shutting down of discussion out of fear of being branded an extremist – which has meant counter arguments to violent extremism have not been fully aired, nor questions/challenges answered. Most organisations, police, schools, universities, etc. have not had the resources or religious literacy for understanding or working with the strategy in an effective manner.

There has been haste in proving the Prevent strategy's political aims without acknowledging the flaws which have caused real damage in the lives of individuals, families and communities, traumatised children, and affected future generations' perception of life in the UK. While there has been some good, the strategy has also created fear and suspicion, and pushed minority communities further to the margins.

The role of the media - and one that is not only free but also fair - is of paramount importance. Media also has a responsibility to be fair, ethical and rigorously precise. At the same time, the freedom to speak one's mind without fear contributes to greater rigour in examining sensitive issues, including radicalisation, and speaking out against injustice and violent extremism. Social media has played its part in providing an alternative, but often-times has contributed to the climate of incitement to hate and violence. It is essential community leaders counter hate messaging and contribute positive narratives.

Home Office racial profiling at ports, particularly with regard to faith leaders and members of faith-based organisations, students, spouses and visiting families, is problematic and contributing to a climate of suspicion.

Immigration policy in general needs a more humane overhaul. Decisions made for political expediency adversely affect the most vulnerable, particularly with regard to the asylum system.

Unlimited detention of those seeking asylum is also a continuing source of injustice within the system. The UK is the only European nation which maintains a policy of unlimited detention, with detainees often left in limbo for months if not years.

Re-patriation of minors born in the UK - Children born and brought up in the UK by parents who are foreign nationals, often who have indefinite leave to remain themselves, or those who sought asylum as unaccompanied minors but have turned 18, are often returned to their country of origin, into a context where they have no links, no family, no cultural knowledge and no language.

Victims of rape and torture - One of the essentials for recovery from torture and rape is to be believed, and to not have to repeat the story except in a place of trust and confidentiality. And yet demands are made upon victims of rape and torture that they repeat their story to various officers, often in aggressive circumstances, have their stories questioned as invalid, and not provided with adequate care and attention to their physical, mental and spiritual welfare. It is well-known that victims of such atrocities re-live the horror each time they have to tell it, and hence may be reluctant to repeat certain moments. Physical evidence is often questioned and not determined by those qualified to recognise evidence of torture.

These are but a few of the instances where common human decency and internationally recognised human rights are violated. Even if the Government determines there must be a cut in immigration, this must be done humanely and fairly, with full regard for human rights. What some of our political leaders have not harnessed is the groundswell of support there has been, particularly among the younger generation, for those seeking asylum and safe passage across Europe, and particularly in Calais. That support has not dwindled. A challenge to our leaders, political, religious, financial and in the media, is what will posterity say about the actions, or non-action, they have taken in response to this human crisis, worse in terms of number than those following WWII.

- (4) *Range of preventive measures that religious leaders and faith based organisations could take to prevent and respond to incitement to violence in the UK.*

There is a challenge here in involving community in interpreting religious scripture through stories of co-existence, peace and the audacity of hope. Faith and religious tradition have the power to direct community relations, as well as individual imagination, sometimes for good, and sometimes for ill. And they also have the power to release, in the way of encouraging forgiveness, reconciliation and letting go of past resentments or fears. Faith-based organisations have the advantage of being rooted in the community, in positions of trust. As such they have a responsibility to promote interpretations of the holy scriptures that respect human life and dignity, including the theological understandings of who or what is 'other', of our common humanity, of expressing the 'we' rather than 'they', of bringing in rather than shutting out.

We live in a world where many people hold multiple belongings, in the way of identifying with more than one cultural or religious tradition, language, or nationality. This can be the result of having lived in several countries, or of parents coming from different cultures or traditions. This has created a new experience of identity, and may be behind some of the more recent explorations of what it is to be British. But the key focus here is one of finding a process of reconciliation between a variety of identities – of bringing together the variety of identities and personalities within each individual, family, community and nation – a need to 'reconcile' humanity to itself. Within the UK, it is about learning to embrace the best of what is British – our varied cultures and influences that have touched on these islands throughout the centuries, including that of a religious tradition originating in the Middle East and becoming the recognised state religion.

Faith and community based organisations are also able to provide a means by which young people especially are able to explore identity across boundaries, of exploring common humanity between people rather than what divides, and of integrating multiple belongings. Faith-based organisations can involve youths in particular in their humanitarian work, such as sharing food, and cultural activities (music, theatre, film, literature, art, festivals). They are able to offer a safe space in which to build trust and to model the community we are seeking to shape.

In the wake of Brexit, the organisation *Hope Not Hate* initiated their campaign *#MoreInCommon*, which captured the imagination of communities across the nation as demonstrated on their web page: <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/more-in-common/> They also have a pilot project for introducing informal awareness education in schools and youth settings, running, for example, workshops on challenging everyday discriminatory language.

(5) *How countering and preventing incitement to violence can increase the resilience of UK society to atrocity crimes and violent extremism.*

Atrocity crimes do not just happen spontaneously in conflict. It is the result of long-term, endemic prejudices, inequalities, and injustices. Greater understanding of differences and building of trust helps ensure that when tensions escalate or conflict bursts out, they do not lead to atrocities. Understanding of differences can be enhanced by:

- Building respect, we need to examine how we look at other people. Do we define them as 'other' or as part of a collective 'we'? What is our attitude to difference within that 'we'? How do we learn acceptance/respect?
- Communication
- Protecting human life and dignity. (Among the 53,000+ social media post commenting on the death of Member of Parliament, Jo Cox, were many which celebrated her murder – this mentality needs to be discouraged. For a full report, see this link: <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/cyber-hate/>)
- Encourage bystanders to take positive action, non-action is still action.
- Holding politicians and media to account.
- Encourage partnership with the community.
- Avoiding use of discriminatory and stigmatising language when referring to vulnerable groups.
- Becoming role models.

Conclusion

Participants at the meeting in Luton were asked to work on developing recommendations for UK religious leaders/actors and FBOs to contribute to wider UK efforts to prevent incitement to violence. It became immediately evident that a single day's discussion is not adequate to complete the writing of such a strategy. However, this meeting provided a key opportunity to begin a

discussion around these issues. Those who were unable to attend will surely feed in at a later date.

As an initial proposal, it is suggested the original coalition group, participants on the day (see below), and supporting invitees, form a coalition of faith-based individuals and organisations working at the grassroots level in the UK, working in the areas of youth work, countering hate speech and crime, preventing violence, supporting refugees and those seeking asylum, inter cultural and inter faith engagement, academia, peace-building and reconciliation. This coalition would be able to coordinate its efforts, and act collectively in an advisory capacity to the UK Government, the UN Office for Prevention of Genocide, academia, the media and business.

To this end, we would encourage our own organisations to act both independently and in cooperation with others in:

- (1) Promoting education of the public through arts-based programmes, working with young people and practitioners on transforming the feared 'other' into the respected, and loved, 'we'. This can be done within places of worship as well as within the public square;
- (2) Building community through social action and support of young people through programmes that encourage a sense of belonging, confidence and self-respect;
- (3) Transforming attitudes of fear and suspicion into those of a common human decency through theological engagement with issues of human rights;
- (4) Participation of faith leaders, faith-based organisations and people of conscience in open platforms where informed, rigorous debate can take place; in particular through engagement with social media and ethical journalism.
- (5) Responding well to the global humanitarian crisis through transformed attitudes to migration, human decency, and the human rights to safety, family life, employment, housing, health care and education.

It will take the combined efforts of all our organisations, working hard on the ground within our respective areas and in cooperation with one another, to eradicate the fear and hatred that seems to have become endemic within our media and unfortunately become part of mainstream political rhetoric. This notwithstanding, we are ready to face the challenges ahead and contribute to a UK that is more respectful of ethnic and religious differences and of human life and dignity. A UK that is free from hate speech and hate crimes, and that is ultimately able to prevent atrocity crimes

*Report compiled by Bonnie Evans-Hills
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