

# Independent advisor calls for overhaul of extremism strategy

Sara Khan, who heads up the commission for Countering Extremism, has carried out the first-ever national conversation on extremism and reviewed the government's current approach.

The commission is today (Monday 7 October) publishing its findings and recommendations in a new report, Challenging Hateful Extremism.

The report identifies a new category of extremist behaviour outside of terrorism and violent extremism, which it calls hateful extremism.

It summarises hateful extremism:

- behaviours that can incite and amplify hate, or engage in persistent hatred, or equivocate about and make the moral case for violence
- that draw on hateful, hostile or supremacist beliefs directed at an out-group who are perceived as a threat to the wellbeing, survival or success of an in-group
- that cause, or are likely to cause, harm to individuals, communities or wider society

The commission puts forward examples, case studies and the testimony of victims to show the harmful and dangerous consequences of hateful extremism.

- Examples of inciting and amplifying of hatred against others include the active propagation of anti-minority hatred from Far Right demonstrations in Sunderland or activists from Hizb ut-Tahrir spreading hate-filled views about LGBTQ+ people during the row over relationships teaching in Birmingham.
- Examples of making the moral case for violence include a director from an Islamist organisation describing a British suicide bomber's act as "a price worth paying" or an activist from a banned Far Right group tweeting that the man who murdered Jo Cox MP was "a hero, we need more people like him to butcher the race traitors".
- Examples of persistent hatred towards individuals including the shocking finding that three quarters of those countering extremism on the ground had personally received abuse, intimidation or harassment – because of their work.

Sara Khan says that, unlike our response to terrorism, the current response to hateful extremism is inadequate and unfocused, leaving victims unrecognised and those countering it unsupported.

She calls for a new focus on hateful extremism and a robust, victim-centred and rights-based approach to ensure we respond proportionately to the threat.

The commission recommends a rebooted government strategy and a new taskforce led by the Home Secretary.

Through the taskforce the Home Secretary will provide leadership within government, building on the expertise of those who have been working to challenge hateful extremism elsewhere in society – as with the serious violence taskforce. This will be vital while developing the new strategy.

The report demonstrates the need to recognise and respond more effectively to incidents when they emerge. Victims need to be better protected, counter extremists better supported and hateful extremists better challenged.

Under the proposals the commission would work with the Home Secretary, task force, government bodies and civil society to assess any ongoing or emerging situations and put this response in place.

The report also confirms that the commission will “generate a full, working definition of hateful extremism, to allow everyone to feel more confident in identifying and countering it”.

## **The Commission**

Established in March 2018, the Commission’s work is built on impartiality, evidence and engagement.

The lead commissioner visited 20 towns and cities; held a series of workshops, roundtables and interviews; spoke to experts, activists and critics and received almost 3,000 responses to a call for evidence.

The commission has also gathered evidence from inside and out of government – including publishing 17 papers from academics.

The report reveals:

- Deep concern about extremism, with some 76% of people saying more needs to be done to challenge extremism and almost 50% of consultation respondents having witnessed some form of extremism – many in their own area.
- Analysis that identifies a category of harmful issues that are not terrorism, which the report calls “hateful extremism”. The report shows how hateful extremists are exploiting local tensions in our towns and cities to propagate their hate and recruit others.

- Heart-breaking testimony of victims and those on the frontline. The commission reveals a first-of-its-kind breakdown of the harms of hateful extremism which include social division, censorship and restriction of freedom, crime, violence and harassment.
- The results of a review of the government's current counter-extremism strategy, which it concludes suffers from being "broad" and "unfocused" and is built on a definition considered "unhelpful" by 75% of public respondents to the call for evidence. The report assesses that despite the threat of hateful extremism, the response is insufficient.
- Recommendations for a rebooted government strategy and whole society response to hateful extremism built on greater leadership, deeper understanding and effective interventions – including plans for a strengthened commission to help drive the changes. Summary of recommendations below.
- The assessment that the commission has "not yet heard a strong case for more powers to directly counter extremism". But has heard, and believes, that existing powers need to be applied better and more consistently.
- The need for a clear distinction between work to counter violent extremism or terrorism, challenge hateful extremism and build cohesive communities. It also says our right to be radical, to protest and be offensive should be protected.

Lead Commissioner Sara Khan said:

We are a wonderfully diverse and inclusive society. We must not allow extremists to normalise their hatred.

I am putting forward a clear description of hateful extremism – the inciting or amplifying of hate, the hateful targeting of individuals and making the moral case for violence.

Our country's response to terrorism is robust. This is not the case for hateful extremism. Yet if we are to be successful in reducing the extremist threat in our society, we need to focus our efforts on challenging hateful extremism.

We are not doing enough to protect victims. We underestimate the impact of those that make the moral case for violence.

We can, and must, do more to address the spread of hateful extremism on our streets and online.

The government must urgently overhaul its approach to challenging extremism, starting with a new definition of hateful extremism, a

new government strategy and a Home Secretary-led taskforce.

But this is not just a job for government.

“The challenge of hateful extremism requires a whole society response built on greater leadership, deeper understanding and innovative interventions.

We must get behind those who are bravely challenging individuals and groups who are engaged in hateful extremism in society.

I am proposing a strengthened commission to drive the changes we need.

I want to thank everyone who has contributed experience, expertise and evidence.

## **Recommendations for government**

- A rebooted Counter-Extremism strategy based on a new definition of hateful extremism
- A Home Secretary-chaired hateful extremism task force bringing together those inside and outside government to oversee the response to extremism incidents.
- Clarity on the difference between counter terrorism, countering hateful extremism and building cohesive communities.
- More support and protection for organisations and individuals who are countering extremism.

## **Recommendations for a whole society response**

- National and local politicians, community and faith leaders must be consistent in their actions against hateful extremism.
- Organisations countering extremism must continue their efforts, and work with the commission to build understanding and interventions against hateful extremism – backed by sustainable funding from charitable sources.
- Social media companies must reduce the hostile atmosphere on their platforms.

## **Recommendations for a strengthened Commission for Countering Extremism**

- the commission should be placed on a statutory basis to guarantee independence along with information sharing powers.
- two additional commissioners for specific areas of work, including a review of existing legislation.
- a small and dedicated network of counter extremism organisations to identify emerging issues and put in place interventions
- pioneering research including a commitment to develop and test a full, working definition of hateful extremism
- review existing legislation that addresses hateful extremism and can protect victims and counter extremists from abuse
- trial new and innovative interventions and develop a new toolbox of measures.

Alongside the full report the commission will publish a series of supporting documents:

- a paper from NatCen summarising a series of focus groups
- two papers from Kings College London which analysed the findings of the Call for Evidence
- four further academic papers, three on Islamist extremism and one on Sikh activism.
- a survey of people working to counter extremism
- the commission's latest summary of engagement

### **Expert group members**

Fiyaz Mughal, Founder and Director of Faith Matters, said:

This report by the Commission for Countering Extremism captures what many activists, campaigners and counter-extremism professionals have been saying for years.

There is a cumulative personal, organisational and societal set of extremism impacts that toxifies local and regional communities and the values of the nation. For years, activists challenging extremism have been intimidated, smeared and maligned, and the centrist voices of our communities have been pressurised to keep quiet. This report highlights the national cost of extremism and

why we need to redouble our efforts to challenge the purveyors of hateful extremism, and their ideologies and funders.

Dr Julian Hargreaves, Research Fellow at the Woolf Institute, said:

A working description of 'hateful extremism' will allow us to assess everyday situations from the viewpoint of the victim, giving us a much better tool to protect and understand those who are targeted by extremist hatred and hostility.

The previous government definition lacked clarity and has not been well-received by the public. The new approach focuses on people and their everyday experiences of victimisation. This will make extremism easier to measure and therefore easier to tackle at a community level.

Peter Tatchell, Director Peter Tatchell Foundation, said:

This is a timely and valuable report as the UK faces on-going threats from far right and Islamist extremism. It demonstrates the need for a new approach from the government and communities to tackle hateful extremism, while also protecting freedom of expression.

Sunder Katwala, Director of independent thinktank British Future, said:

Our society can often feel more divided than any of us would like, with a coming General Election likely to raise the temperature yet further. The commission sets out a framework for building consensus on how to define, isolate and take down hateful extremism – without limiting free speech or being derailed by the polarised political climate. People can express opposing views strongly – but there should be no place for hatred in Britain.

The commission has an expert group which has provided independent advice and challenge. A list of members is on the [commission's website](#).