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Friday 6th November 2009

Dear Secretary of State,

We thank you for your swift reply to our letter dated 19<sup>th</sup> October concerning revelations published in the Guardian newspaper, and in an IRR report, that the Government's programme is being used to gather information on British Muslims unsuspected of any involvement in criminal activity.

We also welcome the extensive and detailed response to each of the allegations published in the newspaper by the Research, Information and Communication Unit (RICU), which we have also received.

You will no doubt agree that the allegations printed and subsequent commentary in the pages of the Guardian expose the serious nature of the claims made, the grave concern amongst the British Muslim community, the seismic shift in counter-terrorism strategy portended by the claims and critical reflections on what lessons the Government will learn from the events of recent days.

You stated in your reply that ISAs are 'used to guide information sharing on all preventative activity. Having them is good practice and is intended to ensure conformity with the law'. Of the Islington ISA mentioned in the Guardian article, which refers to the collection of data on '*mental health, sexual activity and associates, and other sensitive information*', you state that this ISA '*has not so far been used to share any information between partners*' (original emphasis).

We would question whether data on mental health and sexual activity should ever be considered a legitimate field of data collection and what end its inclusion in an ISA will serve? It is of deep concern that such private information should be considered legitimate, even if its gathering or sharing has not been practiced to date. There is considerable concern at the prospect of such information being used for blackmail purposes.

The use to which such information may be deployed raises serious questions of the moral boundaries being observed in the Prevent programme and in the development of ISAs.

We welcome your undertaking to investigate any cases where ISA guidelines have not been adhered to by practitioners. We hope such cases will be dealt with quickly and transparently to avert any potential damage to partnerships between respective stakeholders.

We would however draw attention to particular allegations published in the Guardian to which the RICU response suggests a lack of sufficient information for further investigation.

It is our understanding that there is much work being done under the Prevent programme which is not always or consistently subjected to control and oversight. We would contend that maintaining an accurate and detailed record of all work done under Prevent must form an essential part of the effort to ensure compliance.

This was among recommendations made by Arun Kundnani in his report for the Institute for Race Relations, Spooked! How not to prevent violent extremism, in which he advises:

*'The minutes of all decision-making meetings in the local authority, local strategic partnership or Prevent Board should be published along with exact details of what has been funded, which organisations are carrying out the work, what funds they have been allocated and how it will be evaluated.'*

Rt. Hon. Secretary of State, we commend your distancing the Government from the position adopted by the Quilliam Foundation on ISAs and indiscriminate intelligence gathering. Needless to say, the remarks of the Foundation's co-director are at great odds with the feelings of the overwhelming majority of British Muslims, and others, that such information should form an inevitable part of counter-terrorism strategy and should thus be tolerated.

There are of course sustained concerns of the Government's support for the Quilliam Foundation and the counter-subversion strategy that the working relationship is deemed to imply, something we referred to in our previous letter.

As you take the time to reiterate the premises of the Prevent strategy, and dispel allegations of its incorporating as a matter of principle and practice intelligence-gathering, we would also urge you to re-think the perception and receptiveness of the Prevent strategy among British Muslims that a partnership with certain organisations entails. We would contend that it is not only the message that is of significance, but also the messengers.

Secretary of State, we thank you for your prompt reply and we reaffirm our stance that preventing extremism in all its guises should be a shared endeavour between citizens and the state as we work to counter ideologies and ideologues that threaten our security and the vitality of our multicultural democracy.

It is in all our interests to ensure that arguments employed by those determined to sow divisions in our society are not aided and abetted by our own failings in preserving and defending our hard-fought civil liberties which as a nation we should take great pride in.

Yours sincerely,

Trustees  
ENGAGE