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Monday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2009

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing about the disclosures published in The Guardian newspaper this weekend ('Communities fear project to counter extremism is not what it seems', The Guardian 17 Oct 2009) and the latest Institute of Race Relations report, 'Spooked: How not to prevent violent extremism', concerning the Government's Prevent programme.

The claims printed in the newspaper at the weekend are of very serious concern to all right-thinking people committed to an open society and a respect for fundamental rights.

The Guardian says that the sort of information that is being gathered about Muslims who are not suspected of involvement in unlawful activities – under Information Sharing Agreements - includes:

*"...political and religious views, information on mental health, sexual activity and associates, and other sensitive information."*

Needless to say the implications of this, if true, are far reaching. At a time when vociferous debates on ID cards in the UK and the holding of DNA profiles of individuals not charged with any crimes have brought to the fore huge reservations concerning legislation encroaching on the privacy of individuals, the Guardian disclosures point to a colossal attack on the civil liberties of British Muslims.

While the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) states as a 'Prevent' objective:

*'...to challenge the extremist ideology, strengthen institutions, support individuals at risk of radicalisation, help our communities resist promoters of violent extremism and address the grievances on which extremists prey.'*

Details published in The Guardian will leave few assured that the Prevent programme is not defeating its own purpose through heavy-handedness and the funding and promotion of groups like the Quilliam Foundation and the Sufi Muslim Council, which have no legitimacy whatsoever amongst British Muslims.

Indeed, as a result of their mischievous activities and pronouncements, including the smearing of leading Islamic organisations and figures as being 'Islamists', many British

Muslims have understandably come to view these organisations as constituting a government-backed attempt to destabilize leading Islamic bodies in the UK.

Researchers have noted the dangers of a counter-terrorism policy that takes a counter-subversion turn, something the Government's backing of the Quilliam Foundation is seen to endorse.

The former head of the Muslim Contact Unit at the Metropolitan Police, Robert Lambert, has outlined the perils of such an strategy and has exhorted the government to *'reject the Quilliam Foundation's counter-subversion approach and return to the Demos model of genuine community partnerships if it wants Muslims to help tackle al-Qaida influence in the UK without creating and targeting suspect Muslim communities.'*

Preventing violent extremism should be a shared endeavour between British citizens and the state. We fully accept that Britain continues to face a serious terrorist threat and that we need to have an effective and successful counter-terrorism strategy in place to safeguard all our communities.

We commended your earlier joint statement with John Denham MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, that:

*'We do not want terrorism to define or be perceived as defining the relationship between Government and Muslim communities. We need constantly to reflect and make clear in our public statements that the vast majority in our Muslim communities are against violent extremism. We otherwise create difficulties for ourselves in our work with local communities and community organisations.'*

An essential and necessary first step to help rebuild relations with British Muslims and increase trust must be for the Home Office to state publicly and candidly that the government does not in any way condone spying on individuals who are not suspected of involvement in unlawful activities. A second essential step must be for the Government to loudly distance itself from the actions and views of organisations that undermine its strategy of engaging with mainstream Muslim organisations.

This matter has caused great consternation to many British Muslims and I hope you as Home Secretary will take this opportunity to reassure all citizens of the Government's respect for their privacy and their fundamental rights.

We look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Trustees,  
ENGAGE