

MURDER IN THE NAME OF GOD

A policy debate on the rise of extremism internationally and its impact on Britain.

*Hosted by the All Party Parliamentary Group
for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community*

in conjunction with the

Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK

HELD AT

The Jubilee Room, House of Commons

Wednesday 18 May 2011



SPEAKERS



THE RT HON DOMINIC GRIEVE QC MP

The Attorney General

- *The impact of extremism in UK*



ZIAUDDIN SARDAR

Writer, broadcaster and cultural critic and author of Reading the Qur'an

- *Religious persecution in Pakistan – what feeds extremism?*



DR JOHN BEW

Co-Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation

- *The ideological roots of radicalisation*



SAM ZARIFI

Director of Asia Pacific at Amnesty International

- *Extremism and religious persecution, an international perspective*



SHEHRBANO TASEER

Daughter of the Late Salmaan Taseer

- *Blasphemy, extremism and vigilantism*

Chair: Rt. Hon Hazel Blears MP

Introductory Speech: Rafiq Hayat – National President,
Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK

Closing Remarks: Lord Eric Avebury

Introduction

In May 2010 terrorists attacked two mosques belonging to the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Lahore, Pakistan and proceeded to massacre 86 innocent worshippers. Despite the fact that some of the attackers were captured and handed over to the authorities, not one individual has been charged with this heinous crime.

To mark the first anniversary of the Lahore attacks the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the UK organised a policy debate to highlight the growing menace of religious extremism in Pakistan and other countries and to discuss how, if left unchecked, such extremism could impact on Britain and other western countries. The recent assassinations of both the Governor of the Punjab and Minister of Religious Affairs in Pakistan, simply for speaking about the country's blasphemy laws, had further brought this issue sharply into focus.

All of these crimes arise as a direct result of state sanctioned and state condoned legislation that is both repressive and unjust and is often used as a pretext to settle scores and pursue vendettas. If ministers can be killed in cold blood then what hope is there for the people to speak up against this injustice?

To think that these events, in a country far away, have little relevance to Britain or other western democratic states would be a grave error of judgement. International experience has shown that religious ideology can be usurped by extremists for their own purposes and Britain is no exception. This debate, featuring leading experts in this field, sought to explore these issues further to better understand the underlying causes and inform thinking on how such issues could be addressed.

Special Message from Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad – Head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

Assalamu alaikum warahmatullah wabarakatuhu

Peace and blessings of Allah be upon you all.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, honourable Members of Parliament, noble members of the House of Lords, distinguished speakers and honoured guests, can I firstly thank you for convening this policy debate on the rise of extremism internationally and its impact on Britain.

I am also deeply conscious of the fact that today's debate is nearly a year after when 86 Ahmadi Muslims attending Friday prayers were killed in two mosques in Lahore. However, the message to my community then and now remains that we shall forbear this loss steadfastly with patience and prayers for those who choose to be our enemies and deny us our rights. Come what may, we shall not take the law into our own hands.

Patience is an extremely important virtue because God Almighty our Creator has stated that He loves those who show patience. Normally the world considers patience to be a cowardly thing, but the exercise of patience is a great asset in the making of peace.

Whenever our community is caused emotional suffering or pain we exhibit patience and tolerance. When we are deprived of our due rights as citizens, we display patience and tolerance. When financial harm is purposely inflicted upon us, we display patience and tolerance. When our properties and possessions are looted or destroyed, we display patience and tolerance. Even when our lives are taken, we display patience and tolerance.

In Pakistan we are forbidden by law from practising our religion, but despite this we do not create any disorder. We bore the tragedy of May last year with patience.

The Holy Qur'an states:

There shall be no compulsion in religion...
(Al-Baqarah Ch.2:V.257)

And this is the beautiful teaching that the Ahmadiyya Muslim community tries to act upon. Religion is a personal matter between God and man and force plays no role in it. Force, power and severity can erect walls of hatred but cannot win hearts. This attitude can briefly be explained as '*Love for All, Hatred for None*'.

Unfortunately, there are some Muslims who believe that the solution to all their problems lies in adopting a cruel and barbaric attitude. According to some non-Muslims, therefore, there is no concept of tolerance, reconciliation or love and affection in Islam.

Non-Muslims draw this conclusion based on the incorrect behaviour and improper actions of the so-called Jihadi organisations (that is to say those who are trigger-happy and call their act a holy war), and the attacks of their suicide bombers. Then, some scholars of today, unfortunately, express support for such Jihadi organisations even though their actions are totally opposed to the teachings of Islam.

On wider reflection we can see that the trend not to conform to the teachings of one's faith is as prevalent amongst followers of all religions.

When such cruelties and double standards prevail, a reformer is needed to guide people to the true peaceful teachings of God.

The Founder of our community, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who claimed that he was the Reformer for this age sent by God, stated:

"I have not appeared to stoke up the battlefield for war and conflict but I have appeared like the earlier Messiah, so as to open the ways for peace and harmony. If the objective of peace and reconciliation is not amongst us, then this movement is futile and to believe in it is useless."

[Taryaqul Qalub Ruhani Khazain Vol. 15 p.521]

So peace-making is a cornerstone of our beliefs and we will work tirelessly with all good natured people for this noble goal. In another place, the Promised Messiah *alaih salam* (on whom be peace) says:

"God has sent me as the Promised Messiah and has clothed me with the garment of the Messiah, son of Mary. I, therefore, admonish you: Shun evil and be truly kind towards mankind. Cleanse your hearts of malice and spite as this habit will make you like angels. What a filthy and unholy religion is it that is devoid of sympathy for human beings and how polluted is that path that is riddled with the thorns of a rancour based on selfish desires. O ye who are with me, do not become like such people...For the sake of God, be kind towards all so that you may be shown mercy in the heavens. Come and I will teach you a way that will cause your light to prevail over all other lights. Abandon all lowly spite and jealousy, be compassionate to mankind, and lose yourselves in God. While being with God, attain the highest level of purification for that is the path on which miracles are bestowed, prayers are accepted and angels descend to one's aid. But it is not a one day task: advance and continue to progress."

[British Government and Jihad, Ruhani Khazain Vol.17 p.14]

"Islam certainly does not teach Muslims to behave like thieves and bandits or to use jihad as an excuse to satisfy their most base inner desire."

[ibid. p.18]

He adds:

"It seems that God in Heaven wishes that wars and conflicts should come to an end and that ways of reconciliation and mutual affection and love should be opened. If there is any truth in a faith, it should be displayed. One should not continue to recite the deficiencies of other faiths."

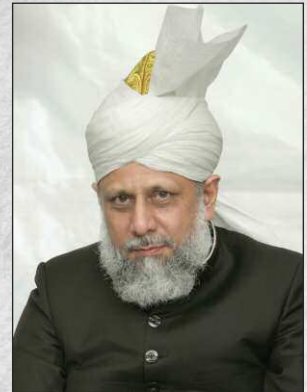
[ibid. p33]

Finally, I wish to thank all of you who have come to participate in today's programme, share your views and show your good feelings about us. May God Almighty bless you.

Thank you once again.

MIRZA MASROOR AHMAD

Head of the Worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community



**Hadhrat Mirza
Masroor Ahmad**
Head of the worldwide
Ahmadiyya Muslim
Community

"Patience is an extremely important virtue because God Almighty our Creator has stated that He loves those who show patience. Normally the world considers patience to be a cowardly thing, but the exercise of patience is a great asset in the making of peace."

MURDER IN THE NAME OF GOD:

A policy debate on the rise of extremism internationally and its impact on Britain.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP



This is an extremely good turn out this afternoon so I can see already the level of interest there is in the very important matters that we're going to discuss. My name is Hazel Blears I'm Member of Parliament for Salford and

Eccles and I'm a former Secretary of State for Communities. During my time I got to know lots of the people or some of the people who are on this panel and many of you in the room today. We've got a packed agenda, some really good speakers.

Can I give you sincere apologies from Siobhain McDonagh who was supposed to chair this afternoon's event and has been very, very involved with the Ahmadiyya Community in her area. Siobhain today is organising the funeral of David Cairns MP who was her very close friend and indeed my close friend too and they'll be a mass for him this evening so Siobhain's asked me to step in and chair the event and I'm sure you'll all understand why that's the case.

I wanted to also say thank you to the All Party Group for Ahmadiyya Muslim Community who've actually organised and are hosting this event this afternoon, as I say there's a great deal of interest and I think that we will have some thought provoking contributions. I just want to say that in the time that I had responsibility for some of the policy in this area it was one of the most challenging, fascinating and rewarding pieces of work that I have ever been involved with and I've kept my interest certainly in the radicalisation agenda to date. I don't think there's anything more important really than trying to promote the true message of Islam, of peace and tolerance and compassion and understanding and that very often gets distorted by people who use it for some pretty horrible ends. I know that the Ahmadiyya Community in particular have always been a very strong voice for the true meaning of Islam and also against terrorism, against violence and have stood up and been brave as a community and I'm also very aware that the Ahmadiyya Community do a huge amount of good work with other communities and that's so important in terms of integration, being part of our country and part of our values.

I just wanted to say you have a very, very proud record and sometimes your voice is perhaps not heard as loudly as we'd like it to be so this afternoon is an opportunity I think for that to happen.

Right enough from me, we're now going to have I think an introduction [by Rafiq Hayat] and a message from His Holiness Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad who's the head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

Rafiq Hayat



Thank you very much Hazel. Respected panellists, ladies and gentlemen, *Assalamu alaikum warahmatullah wabarakatuhu* may peace and blessing of Allah be upon you.

Firstly can I say that it is good to see so many people here. Obviously the subject that has been selected is of great interest to a large number of people in this country and probably abroad, therefore it's good to see that we have very eminent speakers here this afternoon and also a number of personalities here and I'd like to thank all of you. I think one of things that, and one of the reasons why we decided to hold this event was that we are soon going to have the anniversary, the 28th of May, when the attack took place in two mosques in Lahore and a large number of Ahmadis were murdered, martyred and a large number of them were also injured on that occasion. And the question that was asked by everyone was 'Why is it that we have so much intolerance and what was the reason, why were these people targeted?'

In order to understand this we have to look at the history of Pakistan. Pakistan when it was initially formed was formed as a secular state and the founder of Pakistan wanted it to be a secular state where all the various faiths could live in peace and harmony with each other and enjoy a tolerant society. Unfortunately politicians being politicians and with due respect to all the politicians that are here, we had Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who came and decided to change the status quo. He decided for political reasons, and I must say that to appease the more fundamentalist people, he decided that he would declare the Ahmadis as non-Muslims and that unfortunately was the start of intolerance, firstly towards the Ahmadis but this never stops in one place.

Then unfortunately he made further mistakes that he bought a General called Zai-ul-Haq to power although Zia-ul-Haq was not the most senior person at that stage he promoted him. Again unfortunately he felt that by promoting somebody junior he would

“.. in the time that I had responsibility for some of the policy in this area it was one of the most challenging, fascinating and rewarding pieces of work that I have ever been involved with and I've kept my interest certainly in the radicalisation agenda to date. I don't think there's anything more important really than trying to promote the true message of Islam, of peace and tolerance and compassion and understanding and that very often gets distorted by people who use it for some pretty horrible ends. I know that the Ahmadiyya Community in particular have always been a very strong voice for the true meaning of Islam but also against terrorism, against violence and have stood up and been brave as a community and I'm also very aware that the Ahmadiyya Community do a huge amount of good work with other communities and that's so important in terms of integration, being part of our country and part of our values and I just wanted to say you have a very, very proud record...”

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

be protecting his position but the rest is history.

What General Zia-ul-Haq did when he took power was he unfortunately introduced more legislation which created a more intolerant Pakistan. Pakistan which used to be open minded, friendly, where people were all welcoming unfortunately moved towards fundamentalism.

At the same time we found that after the independence of Pakistan, where to start with there were only 200 Madrassahs in Pakistan, the Saudi government put money into Pakistan and started opening Madrassahs rather than giving secular education to people of Pakistan it started introducing the fundamentalist education to the poor people of Pakistan. And today we have thousands and thousands of Madrassahs in Pakistan which are unfortunately teaching intolerance, that everyone is a *kafir* according to them and the West in particular is the *dajjal*, which means that there should be a fight against these people, the jihad against the so-called (*dajjal*).

This is the basis upon which, unfortunately, the society in Pakistan has moved and there are imams and religious clerics who for their own political reasons are exploiting this position and are taking advantage of the situation that exists.

Originally the target in Pakistan was our community but now you will know that the blasphemy laws are being applied widely to other communities as well and the latest case was of the

Christian lady who although wasn't guilty but, as unfortunately happens in Pakistan, people make up false accusations and use the law to try and get a person convicted and sometimes they have other reasons for that and a lot of the time it is regarding personal issues and trying to resolve personal issues by using the legislation.

One very brave man who stood up, and his daughter – Shehrbano – is with us this afternoon, actually paid with his life which is tragic and it shows the intolerance. His own bodyguard eventually took that man's life. So it shows how deep the intolerance is now ingrained in the psyche of some of the Pakistanis.

What we are now finding is that those same clerics are also now moving into Britain and over recent months we have found that they have had an open voice on the air through various channels, Pakistani channels, and they have been repeating that voice of intolerance to the people of this country and unless, I know in the West one of the big things that we value is freedom of speech but there has to be a limit especially when people incite other people towards violence and hatred, I think that is where the freedom of speech has to come to an end. At the last APPG meeting that we had, we had representation from Ofcom who assured us that they would be dealing with some of these issues and I'm certain that hopefully we will be able to bring this to an end at least in this country.

Now how do we deal with the youngsters in this country who are being radicalised? I think it is only through actually getting them to understand the true teachings of Islam that we'll be able to change them. At the moment the fundamentalists have the upper hand; they have been trying to instil in the youngsters, the young Muslim boys in this country and girls, the incorrect teaching of Islam. Our community has been at the forefront of trying to bring the true teaching of Islam to the people of this country including the Muslims, and we've been holding press conferences, peace conferences throughout the country, villages, towns, everywhere, to try and bring the true message of Islam to the people of this country. Also we have started a leaflet campaign, door to door, and so far we have visited 2 million households. There are 27 million households in the UK and it is our intention to reach each and every household. Also through media we have been trying to reset the balance and, most recently, we have actually started 'The True Teachings of the Holy Qur'an' exhibitions to actually take the true teachings of the Holy Qur'an to the people of this country.

So I think it is only through love and understanding and prayer that we will be able to bring about change in this country. Now I have a message from his holiness which I would like to read to you if I may [see page 4].

Thank you very much.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Well thank you very much Rafiq for both your own thoughts and that inspiring message. It's not very often you come to a meeting in the House of Commons and we talk about love and affection and mutual respect and I think that's a very, very good tone to have for our discussion. I'm delighted to welcome Dominic Grieve our Attorney General who's joined us this afternoon to take part in our proceedings. Our next speaker is Shehrbano Taseer and Shehrbano's going to talk to us in a very personal way about her thoughts on this issue. I want to say a huge thank you to you both for your courage and your determination, your steadfastness and I think that is an inspiration to us and I know that you've come all the way from Pakistan to be here with us for the event this afternoon and I just think that shows a tremendous steel in you as well and we're so grateful to have you with us so the floor is yours Shehrbano and we'll be delighted to hear your contribution.



Shehrbano Taseer

Good afternoon. I'm here today because my family has suffered directly due to the prevalence of this ideology, murder in the name of God and religion. I am the daughter of the former Governor of Punjab Salmaan Taseer who was assassinated earlier this year by his bodyguard for his stance on Pakistan's draconian blasphemy laws.

Last year in November an illiterate Christian woman Asia Noreen was sentenced to death in a tiny village outside my home town Lahore for allegedly committing blasphemy and my father took my mother and I along with him to visit her in jail and to get her thumb impression on a mercy petition seeking pardon from our President Asif Ali Zardari. My father held a press conference later that day and he gave many interviews in which he said that this person, like the thousands before her, had been unfairly accused of blasphemy and he said that Pakistan's blasphemy laws are vague and open ended and as a result they're being misused far too often to settle personal vendettas and land disputes and they required an amendment to prevent this from happening. The religious right instantly flared up. They lack legitimacy, they've never gotten more than 10% of the popular vote, but they have a disproportionate amount of street power, they're loud, they're well armed, they're well funded, they're well organised and they're lusting for power.

They protested and they burnt my father's effigy and they issued religious edicts, fatwas, against him, calling for his murder. The biggest thing that they did was they made something that was about humanity into something about religion. They twisted my father's views to suit their own incendiary narrative. My father had stood up for a voiceless woman who had been wasting away in jail for over a year and for this he was declared a blasphemer and marked for violence. Then on January 4th 2011, my brother Shehreyar's 25th birthday, a member of my father's security team Mumtaz Qadri casually strolled up behind him and shot him 27 times until he died. According to the autopsy report that I read each one of my father's vital organs was punctured by the hail of bullets except for his heart and his larynx so even in his death they could not get him.

The aftermath of my father's murder was frightening. Every progressive, every liberal, every supporter of my father was silent. There was a deafening silence that spread in Pakistan because everybody was scared, if they could get the Governor of the most populous province in Pakistan was anyone safe?

Two hundred lawyers garlanded my father's murderer at his first court appearance and they showered him with rose petals. There were 30,000

“.. Two hundred lawyers garlanded my father’s murderer at his first court appearance and they showered him with rose petals. There were 30,000 clerics that took to the streets supporting this murder and supporting the blasphemy laws. And all of this brought a rather alarming reality home because it showed that Mumtaz Qadri is not just a man he is a mindset, he is an environment and it is this kind of poisonous mindset and environment that is created and allowed to flourish in Pakistan because it’s all done under some kind of warped piety and it’s done in the name of God and once that label is there no one can argue with it..”

Shehrbano Taseer

clerics that took to the streets supporting this murder and supporting the blasphemy laws. And all of this brought a rather alarming reality home because it showed that Mumtaz Qadri is not just a man he is a mindset, he is an environment and it is this kind of poisonous mindset and environment that is created and allowed to flourish in Pakistan because it’s all done under some kind of warped piety and it’s done in the name of God and once that label is there no one can argue with it. Puny dwarfs become giants under this righteous cloak of religion. Anyone can point fingers at anyone accusing them of anything and killers are heroes and the few courageous men like my father who try to stand up for what they believe in, they’re gunned down and silenced which of course serves as a future warning to anyone else who dares to criticise the law or to criticise religion.

Two months after my father was murdered Shahbaz Bhatti, a (Christian) Minorities Minister, was gunned down outside his mother’s home for a similar stance on the laws and what’s worrying is that this vigilantism, whether it’s shootings or suicide bombings is that it’s become alarmingly common, and in my opinion it’s prevalent for two reasons. Firstly because of weak legislation and a lack of will to implement existing laws; people’s first instinct is to take the law into their own hands and to kill someone and they can get away with it because the courts don’t punish them because the policemen are on their side. They’re hailed as heroes, they not shunned by society, they’re not punished by the judicial system. Pakistan has had anti-terrorism courts in place since the 90’s but these records are clogged with cases that are not even about terrorism and they have a sorry record for convictions, they let

all the bombers, all the shooters, all the perpetrators of these attacks just go. And also the Pakistani constitution is rife with poorly crafted and discriminatory laws that have been dictated by the ulema.

These laws allow others to label whether you are a good Muslim or not and in a country that calls itself a democracy as a result the frontiers of freedom of expression have shrunk drastically. Dissent and debate are stifled, rivals are harassed and violence is legitimised. The blasphemy laws is obviously one example but another example would be that, as you have mentioned, that Ahmadi Muslims were declared heretics by the state in the 1970s. The Pakistani constitution forbids them from calling themselves Muslims or from calling their places of worship Mosques. They are disenfranchised and they are persecuted on a daily basis. Over 86 Ahmadis were killed during their Friday prayer last May when a member of the Taliban snuck in and opened indiscriminate fire. My father was the only politician to condemn the act publicly and the rest of Pakistan watched silently.

When the floods ravaged Pakistan in August the Ahmadis were denied aid because they are ‘not Muslims’ and once again this cruelty happens because it’s done in the name of God.

But another reason why this hard-line Islamist ideology is firstly so prevalent and it’s created is because of the curriculum of many Madrassahs in Pakistan. Madrassahs are educational institutions that are attached to Mosques and they first came about during the Soviet-Afghan War where the ISI, the Saudi Arabian intelligence agencies and Pakistan’s intelligence service led by General Zia-ul-

“Not all of them, but most Madrassahs, also teach children to fire guns and to build bombs so the average 8 or 9 year old in a Madrassah won’t know much about history or math or science but they know how to build a bomb and how to shoot a gun, they’re being taught not only how to live but how to die and that’s really worrying.”

Shehrbano Taseer

Haq, trained and indoctrinated thousands of Mujahideen fighters to kill the Soviets who they had deemed godless communists. The war ended but the Madrassah culture and this hard-line Islamist ideology is very much still alive today and it’s coming back to haunt not only Pakistani’s but people all around the world.

There are over 15,000 Madrassahs in Pakistan and the government has abdicated its responsibilities in this regard because the syllabus is virtually unchecked by the government and these clerics are raising generations of children to be merchants of hatred and to have a very narrow world view, to believe in this right wing and radical Islam, to hail people like Osama Bin Laden and Mumtaz Qadri as heroes and to think that their only contribution to Islam and to the world is Jihad and the only way to achieve that is by strapping on a vest and blowing yourself up. Not all of them, but most Madrassahs, also teach children to fire guns and to build bombs so the average 8 or 9 year old in a Madrassah won’t know much about history or math or science but they know how to build a bomb and how to shoot a gun, they’re being taught not only how to live but how to die and that’s really worrying.

So the murder of my father Salmaan Taseer and the rise of religious extremism in Pakistan puts forward a very frightening reality. It shows that the biggest danger faced by Islam today comes from those who are claiming to serve it and the fact that it’s a mindset means that you don’t always know where your enemy is. In my father’s case it was his bodyguard but in the majority of bombings and attacks that happen in Mosques or in marketplaces, it’s often the policemen who allow these people through and the security guards who allow this to happen.

This problem, I feel, is not just Pakistan’s problem any more, it’s spread to the shores of every nation now, every country is plagued with this problem of terrorism and so it puts the people who want change,

whether we have been directly affected or not, it forces us to be part of the solution now and it puts us in a position of responsibility where we have to talk about implementing ways of turning back the tide and curtailing this mindset and extremism and I hope that we can build on that conversation during the question and answer session today, thank you.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thank you very much Shehrbano, it’s not very often that you see a demonstration of courage and commitment in that way and I think your father would rightly be very, very proud of you being here today. I think it’s a hugely important message that when things happen there should not be a deafening silence and all good people should stand up and speak out and you’ve done that brilliantly this afternoon. Our next speaker is Ziauddin Sardar who will be known to many people in this room, he’s got a tremendous list of contributions, author, cultural commentator and fascinating analyst of some of these issues. Born in Pakistan himself and brought up here... we’re delighted that you’re with us and please do make your contribution.



Ziauddin Sardar

Thank you very much Hazel. The very young Shehrbano Taseer made a very profound statement; I wonder if you noticed it? She said that Mumtaz Qadri, the guard who killed her father, was not so much an individual but a mindset and I think that’s a profound insight and we need to ask ourselves, where does this mindset actually come from? Because we are not dealing with individual murderers we are dealing with a way of looking at

others from which the kind of extremism that led to the murder of her father actually emerges.

Now ladies and gentlemen all religions are concerned with and deal with truth. Islam of course is no different and the source of truth in Islam is the Qur'an and one of the best descriptions I have seen of the Qur'an comes from the classical Muslim scholar al-Ghazali who says that the Qur'an is like an infinite ocean and all you can do is dip your toe in that ocean. In other words there are numerous interpretations possible from reading the Qur'an; it's full of allegories, stories, metaphors which require interpretation. But there are a certain groups of people, certain individuals and communities if you like who think that their interpretation of Islam, their reading of the Qur'an is the only possible reading.

Now if you make an assumption like that, that my reading of the Qur'an is not only the correct one but the only possible reading that can exist then you're making a certain claim to truth. And what these people are saying is not just that we believe in the truth but that we are the truth and they take the argument further and say that we own the truth. Now that's quite a profound change from just reading the Qur'an and interpreting it to the jump which says that we not only believe in the truth but we actually own it, we are the truth in that sense. Now how is this truth then expressed in, if you like, in real life? So the only way that this truth can be realised is by constructing a romanticised history of Islam and going right back to the life of the Prophet and looking at it almost as a romantic history, as a utopia that existed in history. And it's not just the life of the Prophet but also the four Caliphs who followed, the Rightly Guided Caliphs, so all that history then becomes a romanticised utopia. Now if you remember what Thomas Moore said about utopia, 'Utopia is no place and no people'.

In a sense by romanticising the early phase of Islam they also dehumanise it because they leave humanity out of it so you can never say that any of the Rightly Guided Caliphs did anything that could possibly be wrong, that because that history is fixed, it's the manifestation of truth, then clearly there cannot be any error in it. So truth and absence of humanity and absence of error then becomes a profound part of the kind of mindset we are talking about.

Now it would be very glib to say that this is a recent phenomena, actually it is not. It has existed in Islam and we as Muslims have to acknowledge the fact that this phenomena has existed in Islam almost from the formative years of Islamic history. So in the 7th Century, towards the end of the 7th Century, there was a group called the Kharjites who believed that since God had revealed truth in the Qur'an and since their interpretation was the only valid one everybody else was basically a kafir [ie a disbeliever] and in fact those

“...there are a certain groups of people, certain individuals and communities if you like who think that their interpretation of Islam, their reading of the Qur'an is the only possible reading.

... if you make an assumption like that, that my reading of the Qur'an is not only the correct one but the only possible reading that can exist then you're making a certain claim to truth. And what these people are saying is not just that we believe in the truth but that we are the truth and they take the argument further and say that we own the truth. .”

Ziauddin Sardar

“At the end of the day the ignorant mullah in the mosque who denounces other sects or members of other faith communities and incites hatred towards them, what he’s essentially doing is trying to show that even though he may be an ignorant mullah of every mosque he still has power and in a sense it all comes down to a power struggle that is going on in Pakistan. ”

Ziauddin Sardar

who deviated from what they believed in any way whatsoever were apostates and their murder and killing them was justified and in fact the Kharjites created quite a lot of problem and they lasted for almost 200 years before the Abbasites Caliphs finally put an end to Kharjites . But immediately after the Kharjites who had Sunni background emerged the Karamathains in the 9th Century who are from the Shia background and who argued the same kind of position. So it’s not a monopoly of a particular sect it’s something that, if you like, all Muslims can actually produce.

Now two things come out of this, one is fear. Now a person with a mindset like that, the first thing he or she fears is committing an error, they cannot commit an error themselves so you as a human being, as a follower of this particular understanding of Islam, are not allowed to commit error. So in a sense sin, if you like, has been outlawed with a divine sanction and therefore your own humanity is lost because what makes us human? Making mistakes. If we don’t commit errors then we are not human, simple as that. So in a sense the first thing you notice is these people begin the process by dehumanising themselves in a sense and they lose all humanity and that’s why when they do inhuman things it does not affect the conscience, it is not part of their ethics. That’s the first thing, the fear that comes from error of the self.

Then of course there’s the broader notion of fear and that is that error should not be allowed to be committed beyond themselves by other people and other communities. So if they see that another community has interpreted Islam in a different way or has gone out from the prescribed dogma of orthodoxy then that community is committing error and therefore it’s justified for them to other communities, other people from committing that error in that sense. And how this translates basically is that it becomes the fear of all otherness. It is not just that they hate liberals, they also hate women. It

is not just that they hate the Ahmadis they hate Christians and Jews as well. I mean the fear of all otherness, of all kind of difference that is basically central to this kind of mindset that is actually produced and this fear often translates as violence.

If you step back and look at what is going on in Pakistan at the moment you can bring in other elements that also play a part. The notion of victimisation I mean, I’ve just been to Pakistan I spent three weeks there, I just came back a couple of weeks ago, this idea that ‘the world is out to get us’ has become a central part of Pakistan’s psychology, in their psyche as it were, that ‘the world is out to get us’. And why is the world out to get us? Because we are the people on the right path, we do not commit errors and all those who are committing errors are there who do not have the truth that we not just believe in but also own, are trying to undermine the truth as such, in a sense. So victimisation then plays a very, very important part but I think we should step back a little bit and see that this is not just a Pakistani phenomena in fact something very similar is happening in other parts of the world so all those Egyptians who go and burn Coptic churches are victims of exactly the same mindset.

And certain states are not only part of the same mindset but they actually support and perpetuate this mindset in various forms. I would argue that Saudi Arabia does that very strongly; I would argue that Iran does that very strongly, that in fact these two states coming from two different Islamic traditions in the end promote exactly the same mindset that eventually leads to fear of otherness and then violence that is actually associated with it.

My final point will be that we should not see Pakistan simply from these terms. Yes, there are people in Pakistan who are, who suffer from this mindset but there are also others, like Salmaan Taseer and Asma Jehangeer. Pakistan is a very diverse society and you are talking about 170 million

people. Somebody came to me and said, look you know all lawyers in Pakistan are nasty extremists, they are out there you know supporting this Mumtaz Qadri. Actually the Pakistani lawyer community runs into hundreds of thousands and actually I've talked to many, many and most of them were actually pretty shocked and couldn't believe that their colleagues could do that, I mean it's a human society and in any human society you will find in any profession some extremists who will take that action and the colleagues who did that literally were a few hundred in that sense. So I think we, what we must not do at the end of the day is to do exactly what we are accusing the people of that mindset to do. In other words look at human communities in monolithic terms and therefore deny their humanity.

At the end of the day Pakistan is a very complex, in my opinion highly sophisticated place, which is going through a very crucial part of its history where a particular mindset has become if you like, the mindset that is out to get power and is essentially a power struggle. At the end of the day the ignorant mullah in the mosque who denounces other sects or members of other faith communities and incites hatred towards them, what he's essentially doing is trying to show that even though he may be an ignorant mullah of every mosque he still has power and in a sense it all comes down to a power struggle that is going on in Pakistan. Thank you very much.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Well that was very, very thought provoking I think and the message there about dehumanisation I think we've all seen from our history that the way that people are dehumanised and then made to be easier victims if you like by those who seek to harm them have much in common with the Holocaust and other situations so I think that's a very powerful message today about the fear of otherness as well. Our next speaker is Sam Zarifi who is International Regional Director at Amnesty International, again a huge amount of experience so you're really welcome to the panel and we look forward to hearing what you have to say.



Sam Zarifi

Thank you very much and thanks to the All Party Parliamentary Group for organising this and for inviting Amnesty International. I'm the Director of Amnesty's work in Asia and the Pacific and this year, Amnesty's 50th anniversary,

reminds us again that the issue of religious discrimination and intolerance and violence justified under the name of religion has been an issue that Amnesty International has been dealing with for the past 50 years.

We of course look at issues from the point of view of the individuals and often unfortunately from the victims and the victims can range from Asia Noreen, a villager – a Christian villager – who would never have imagined she would be at the eye of an international storm as she has been but also to powerful people like the Governor of the largest, most populous province in Pakistan and we heard from Shehribano that the price that people pay when they speak out.

We've talked a lot about Pakistan today and unfortunately, certainly in the Asia and Pacific region, Pakistan stands as a model for everything that can go wrong when religious discrimination and intolerance are allowed to run rampant and I'll talk a little bit about the tremendous challenge but also the obligation that the Pakistani government, not just the civilian government but the very powerful military establishment have in addressing that problem, not just for the people of Pakistan but, of course, for the rest of the world and certainly the region. But this is not just a problem for Pakistan and notwithstanding the name of this session today 'Murder in the name of God', the problem of discrimination against religious minority is also not just a problem, not just a violation perpetrated in the name of God... in some cases [it has occurred] where it's a validly secular government like the Chinese government that has been targeting Christian groups and Muslim groups.

If you look at the Asian Pacific region unfortunately we see almost every permutation of religious intolerance and violence. Muslim against Muslim, Muslim against Christian, Hindu against Christian, Hindu against Muslim, Muslim against Hindu, Buddhist against Hindu and so this is a problem that international law has been trying to deal with and what I will hope to convince you and seek your help on is to point out that this is a problem for the international community, for almost every community of beliefs and therefore it requires an international response.

I've spent quite a bit of my own time in Pakistan and Afghanistan where these issues of course have come to a boil and where the violence has international ramifications but just recently, last month, I was in Indonesia and I had a chance to speak with a number of people from the Ahmadi community there, in particular a number of children who had seen their family being murdered on February 6th by a mob, in this case a Muslim mob, that attacked this Ahmadi community in the small village of Cikeusik in West Java province as the police were

“... the groups that seize on the political capital to be gained from attacking a very weak group like the Ahmadis, a group that’s not supported by a country or a regional bloc somewhere, will also then expand their attacks as we have seen to take in Christians, the Shia and the path there unfortunately blazed by Pakistan, is that you will start seeing not just attacks on the Ahmadis, the Christians and the Shias but also on Sufis and mainstream Sunni groups and the incredible violence that has engulfed large parts of Pakistan. ”

Sam Zarifi

watching. And it is of course alarming when a country like Indonesia, a country that has seen a lot of advances in terms of respect for human rights and a country that has a deserved reputation for tolerance begins to show signs of religious intolerance like this. And I raise the issue of Indonesia because when I was there and I had a chance to speak with not just the government but with the very large Muslims groups there, the Nahdatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah which are, I believe actually are the largest Muslim groups in the world, it was illuminating and hopeful to see both of those groups disavowing the violence and pointing out that this had nothing to do with the religion and the beliefs that they profess.

So where does this come from? Mr Sardar spoke about the desire to monopolise the truth or not but certainly in our view this tends to be a political problem. We tend to see religious intolerance and discrimination arise when there is a failure to fulfil obligations to avoid religious discrimination or to protect religious minorities.

International law views it not in terms of a monopoly on truth or what, which religion is correct and which is not but rather simply in terms of protection for the right of individuals to profess their religion or in fact their non-religion. So under international law, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is quite clear in protecting theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. That’s an important concept, the right to religious freedom is captured under international law, it’s non-derogable, under no conditions whether it’s war, whether it’s a condition of a national emergency can the right to religious freedom be abridged. It’s one of the few rights that has that privilege.

Along with that is the notion of non-discrimination which is, in many ways, fundamental to the whole point of human rights. People can’t be discriminated against on the basis of religion, that’s Article 2 of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and those two notions, the fact that nobody can be discriminated against on the basis of their religion or non-religion and that people should have the freedom to express and manifest their own religion or non-religion are crucial to the international human rights legal system.

As we heard unfortunately in many governments’ case it is easy to violate these fundamental principles, typically in an effort to reach out to a certain political constituency. It is very easy to target religious minorities when you are trying to reach out to a religious majority. It is easy to target the Ahmadis in Pakistan in the mid 70’s when you are under pressure for your own perhaps not entirely Muslim-friendly lifestyle or facing the problems that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was. So from Amnesty International’s point of view this is not a problem of one religion or of one region and it’s not a problem that we can ever take our eyes off of. I mentioned the Chinese and their religious discrimination but when we see the French pass a ban on the burka or the Swiss ban the building of minarets, these are manifestations of the same politically motivated beliefs and problems and for us the response is always the same, which is to go back to the international obligations that these governments have.

In our experience governments, certainly under the law, have the responsibility but very frequently they have the ability to at least improve the situation if not entirely solve a problem of discrimination and communal violence and it’s when governments pass discriminatory laws or engage in discriminatory activity or when governments fail to protect religious minorities that almost inevitably we see that taken as a signal that non-state actors can also attack religious minorities and it’s those signals that, as was pointed out in Pakistan beginning in the 70’s began to target the Ahmadi community and from there have spread. We’ve seen manifestations of this in

Bangladesh, in Malaysia and recently in Indonesia. So what is it that can be done?

Again we effectively look to the governments. Certainly discriminatory laws like the law on the status of the Ahmadis in Pakistan are simply in violation of Pakistan's human rights obligations and need to be taken care of. We've seen unfortunately in Indonesia in the last couple of years efforts to put legislation that also effectively deals with the status of Ahmadis as something separate and it's in those cases where it's justified as protection for the Ahmadis – the argument in Indonesia was that if we could just get the Ahmadis to admit that they're not Muslims everybody would stop attacking them. At the time it was pointed out that this would very likely result in escalation of attacks against the Ahmadi communities, in fact that's exactly what happened but of course those attacks are not just limited to the Ahmadi communities because the groups that seize on the political capital to be gained from attacking a very weak group like the Ahmadis, a group that's not supported by a country or a regional bloc somewhere, will also then expand their attacks as we have seen to take in Christians, the Shia and the path there unfortunately blazed by Pakistan, is that you will start seeing not just attacks on the Ahmadis, the Christians and the Shias but also on Sufis and mainstream Sunni groups and the incredible violence that has engulfed large parts of Pakistan.

So is this an inevitable issue or intractable? And certainly again in Amnesty's experience the answer is no. In places where the government has stepped in, where it has gotten rid of discriminatory laws, where it has prosecuted people who have attacked religious minorities, where the government has clarified that it will protect religious minorities we've seen the situation improve. Not necessarily solved but just to look at some examples, India a country which is of course no stranger to horrific communal violence going all the way back to its very foundations, to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, to the Gujarat, to the events of Gujarat and the Ayodhya but let's take a less notorious example for instance, over the few years in central India in Orissa we have seen tremendous violence between Hindus and Christians. This was clearly linked to the politics of the province, at vote banks and politicians were doing what and what the government was not doing which is saying clearly that it would prosecute people who were attacking religious minorities, in this case the Christians. We've seen over the last couple of years some prosecution of the perpetrators, some clear signals from the government that they won't do this and as a result we have seen a de-escalation of the violence. The problem hasn't gone away, tensions still remain, but it's not at that level of white heat and that is of course a positive sign.

Similarly in Bangladesh we have seen the government step back, for instance from allowing persecution of the Ahmadis. Just recently the government has tried to curtail the ability of religious scholars to issue fatwas that would supersede national law and that again is a positive sign. Where does this leave Pakistan?

When the civilian government of President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani took over and especially in 2009 we'd heard some positive signs. There was a declaration that the government would begin to look at the issue of religious discrimination. That the government would start looking at the very problematic blasphemy laws, which are not just problematic on their face because blasphemy laws are discriminatory and as such stand against international law, but of course in Pakistan this law is very poorly conceived and even worse implemented. It is frequently used spuriously on land disputes, it's brought on the basis of almost no evidence and these are things that the Pakistani government itself has pointed out, that the Council of Islamic Ideology has pointed out and so we had hoped that we would start seeing some positive developments on this. Of course given the events of late 2010 and 2011 this has, the government has lost [traction. It's going to be very difficult and it will certainly require the assistance of Pakistan's friends and allies in the international community but it is absolutely essential that this has to happen for the people of Pakistan who I think now, as Shehribano pointed out and as Mr Sardar pointed out, recognise that they are facing the abyss and that what happens to Pakistan has tremendous ramifications not just for the large Pakistani British community in the UK, but for the entire region and frankly for the whole world.

So Amnesty International is looking at the Pakistani government and other governments in the region very simply to fulfil their obligations under international law to avoid religious discrimination and protect the rights of religious minorities.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thanks very much. Sam I'm so grateful that Dominic Grieve has given this block of time I think that indicates his commitment to this agenda so Dominic over to you.



Rt Hon Dominic Grieve QC MP

Hazel thank you very much and may I first of all thank the Ahmadiyya Community for organising today's event and actually for the opportunity and I'm sure I'll stay as long as I can

just to sit and listen to some really remarkable and interesting contributions on a difficult topic.

I wanted to try and give a little bit of my own perspective and have been asked specifically to look at the impact of extremism in the United Kingdom. I think the starting point we've always got to remember is that I don't think that religious extremism in this country is something new. Just outside this room there is a statue to Oliver Cromwell and Oliver Cromwell famously had to deal with difficult religious extremists during the course of that period in 1647 to 1649, not always easy for him and indeed he used authoritarian methods and shot some of them. He referred to them as 'poor fantasticals, individuals whose millenarian visions of the perfectibility of the earthly condition' meant that they couldn't be accommodated within the commonwealth which he was trying to create.

I suppose one of the features of living in Britain however is that if you look on a sort of 500 year span of history we have, rather extraordinarily, succeeded in moving from an autocracy underpinned by a very strict religious orthodoxy before the reformation to the situation which we now enjoy today, which of course is one of the reasons why so many of you, whose origins may come from other cultures and religions have been able to find a home here amongst us. We have, bit by bit, and by degree, realised the virtues of tolerance over trying to impose one's own model on other people and it's wrong to think it's always been easy. I suspect very frequently it's happened through gritted teeth and it really isn't such a long time ago, and I'm afraid in the context of Northern Ireland and parts of Scotland is still an issue, that there was sectarian disharmony of a traditional kind and for a long time traditions of anti-Semitism persisted in this country and remained a real problem. But on the whole we've been pretty successful in dealing with it and marginalising it to the ranks of the odd, the bizarre and frankly the no-hopers on the fringes of society.

So it's a bit of a challenge for us to suddenly find us confronting it in a new form and I have to say, and I think we have to acknowledge this although politicians like to stress it's a tiny minority which it is in its most absolute sense, I have to say my own experience is the tiny minority is surrounded by a bigger group of individuals who are certainly not willing to speak up against it and in many cases have attitudes, particularly on the issue of compulsion in religion, which in fact fuels that development because it fuels the justification for anger.

I think the other problem we have in British society which is perhaps something of a novelty, is that modern life is in some ways, although for some people it may be difficult, but modern life in some ways allows individuals to lead astonishingly

compartmentalised lives whilst at the same time communicating only with those of a like mind. The development of the internet allows somebody to sit in a room in this country, to have very little interaction with their neighbours, but to be drip fed a diet of hatred based on theories and attitudes that originate from far away and the evidence in terms of those who have turned themselves into suicide bombers in this country, is that the internet has had an enormous role to play in that process. So I would suggest that in fact this sort of rather strange modern means of communication and the absence of having to interact with neighbours is one of the things which creates a virtual world which fuels paranoia and I so agreed with what Mr Sardar said when he identified this phenomenon of perfection, of aiming for the perfect and then saying that anything which is outside of it is hostile to you. Quite apart from anything else it creates immediately a paranoid mindset because the person themselves will have great difficulty achieving the perfection that they have set themselves in their own goals and is of course a denial of our humanity. How then should we respond to this problem?

I always say I think the first thing we need is a good sense of humour. This may sound odd, particularly in the circumstances of the tragedies we've had to contemplate in today's meeting including mass murder and the murder of individuals who have stood up against violence of this sort, but we need I think above all to puncture this atmosphere which creates a justification for hatred and humour is actually one of the great tools that can do it. Secondly I think we have to recognise that while the state has to respond in trying to protect people, the last government did it, we ourselves have had to consider it and do it ourselves, in itself it is not going to solve the problem. I'm certainly not coming before you this afternoon to suggest that we need at the moment new laws. There are lots of them on the statute book at the moment from going abroad to train as a terrorist, to acts preparatory to terrorism, to glorifying terrorism, some of which indeed have been argued, I think with some justification, might be too wide as it leads to me as the Attorney General the task of deciding not to prosecute the 'Robin Hood Appreciation Society' in Nottingham because it might be glorifying terrorism within the definition of the Act. But what we do need to do I think is to develop a strategy to challenge the assumptions.

Now here I happen to be an optimist, how have human beings got to where we are today, from the time when we were in caves and first trying to light fires? Well the answer is it is by the interchange of ideas and as we know, particularly in the setting of this parliament where Hazel and I went off to vote in different lobbies, actually the process of debate is not

“The development of the internet allows somebody to sit in a room in this country, to have very little interaction with their neighbours, but to be drip fed a diet of hatred based on theories and attitudes that originate from far away and the evidence in terms of those who have turned themselves into suicide bombers in this country, is that the internet has had an enormous role to play in that process.”

Rt Hon Dominic Grieve QC MP

just about imposing the will of the majority on the minority but it is actually about moderating each other's opinions by being obliged to listen to each others points of view. That is the single best weapon we have against extremism but the difficulty we have, particularly as a society which is hosting people with such views, is how we can best tackle them to force them to start listening to other people's points of view other than their own.

Now the last government instituted a prevent strategy and we are trying to build on it and I'm certainly not going to this afternoon talk about details of policy and I don't think it would be very helpful, but that there is a need for engagement I have no doubt and I think, just coming back to the point I made earlier, we should always remember that that engagement also needs particularly to be targeted towards those who whilst possibly not espousing these views are nevertheless in some way vaguely sympathetic to them and to ask ourselves the question, why that should be?

Clearly some of it may be fear. If you come to a country where the culture is very different to that of your country of origin then the tendency potentially to retrench into a narrow community mindset may be tempting and yet they need only look at the Ahmadiyya Community in this country to see that it is perfectly possible to maintain your values and to participate fully in the society around you. But if one of the fundamental things that drives you is the belief that within your own community you can impose your will on each other, even if you say that you respect the views of others outside of it, then in my view you are on the slippery slope which undermines all respect for human beings' dignity because, as was so rightly said, the words no compulsion in religion must mean exactly that and it has to imply freedom of conscience for people to adopt a religion, to give it up, to shift a religion, to have no religion and to make their own independent choices in their relationship with their Maker. I sometimes think that this is

something we don't place enough emphasis on in this country because we slightly shy away from it and talk more about communities and not about individuals. Ultimately our society is dependant upon the individuals who make it up and their rights as individuals to develop themselves and manifest their faiths in whatever way they wish compatibly with basic principles of law.

So I simply end on these words before we have the panel discussion. That there is a challenge I have no doubt, but it requires collective will to deal with is essential, the state on its own cannot do this. That more laws in themselves I don't think are the answer but that the role of government in succeeding in mobilising people of moderate goodwill to go out and argue as to why the benefits of cooperation, tolerance and pluralism vastly outweigh any fantasy world of some perfectible human society is the thing that we need to aim for collectively and drive forward together. Thank you very much.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thanks very much Dominic, I think that's a very powerful message about growing isolationism of individuals and I've always found in all the work I've done, that if you bring people together, they share food, they share conversation, it's much more difficult to hate someone that you've got to know. It's a lot easier to hate people when they're strange and different and dehumanised and I think that government does have a significant role to play in bringing people together to have the kind of debate that Dominic's talked about today. Now our final speaker. John you've got the most unenviable task after all these contributions but I'm so pleased that you're with us, again you've got a huge amount of experience. You're Co-Director at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation.



Dr John Bew

First of all I'd like to thank the Ahmadiyya Community for the invitation to speak today and of course the All Party Parliamentary Group. It's a pleasure to sit alongside so many distinguished speakers and it's a testimony to the community that they continue to play an active and a bold part in addressing the issue of extremism in the UK.

So as you've heard I've been asked to discuss the ideological roots of radicalisation and to which end the first thing I should say is that I am entering into extremely controversial ground. This is hotly contested terrain, not only among academics but also among politicians, MPs, the 'commonariat' if you like and the public at large. There is also a tendency in that debate at all levels and a risk in this to simplify the discussion and the division of the debate about the root causes of extremism between those on the one hand who ascribe extremism to social, economic or political grievance and those on the other who say it's ideology that matters, 'it's the ideology stupid'. Now if you were to really push me on that and demand that I choose one side or the other, grievance or ideology, I would probably just about be in the ideology camp and we can discuss that more in questions. But I think that would actually be to do a disservice to both myself, the institution I represent and more importantly to the complexity of the debate and the issue we're discussing today. So that is my first big point if you like and it's a pretty boring one but it's a point that should be made which is that the complexity and the variety of what we're talking about today should be stressed at every opportunity. But let me put some flesh on the bones if you like and before today I was also given a series of smaller questions which the organisers thought might be useful for me to discuss and I want those to frame the rest of my remarks and hopefully say something which might spark a little debate at the end.

The first question that I was asked is 'Why do some apparently well-integrated youth become attracted to extremist views and specifically how are they influenced?'. Well in terms of recent trends the key thing to consider here, in the years since 9/11, is the Westernisation of Al-Qaeda ideology in the first instance and strategy, which I'll come to in a moment. That is not to say the ideology in inception has changed or that the roots are different than what we previously understood and it's not a western ideology per se but it has been intentionally and directly made more relevant to Muslims living in the West and directed to them. That has been called the al-Suri strategy or more recently it's associated with the figure of Anwar al-Awlaki who I think is becoming increasingly prominent on our consciousness. Strategy,

in terms of how that translates into strategy, well in terms of Al Qaeda's strategy what has become clear again since 9/11 is the fact that the internet, and we've heard a bit about this already, has proven by some measure to be the most effective tool for the spread of Salafi Jihadi ideology.

If you like, and this is a tribute to the government over the last 10 years, we have nipped the problem in the bud that we saw with figures like Abu Hamza. There is less public space, less of a problem with extremism in mosques than there has been - I wouldn't say the problem has been eradicated but that is not the chief source of radicalisation and the majority of British and American Muslims who've been arrested or convicted of terrorism charges in the last 5 to 6 years have admitted or made it quite clear that they have been introduced to these concepts and the Al Qaeda narrative through the internet.

Significantly, I think this is an additional point to what Dominic Grieve already mentioned, Al Qaeda and its sympathisers have proven far more effective in their use of new media than their enemies and their critics and most importantly I think in terms of their near rivals. In once sense it's not rocket science and any one of us this room or a substantial portion could put up a You Tube video which would rival in production value anything done by Anwar al-Awlaki and yet, and this is very important and it's very striking, it's obvious that the most effective critics of Al-Qaeda ideology and that's in particular from within the Muslim community, have yet to harness new media nearly as effectively as those peddling the Al-Qaeda message. Thousands of pages of scholarly recantations simply do not have the same effect and do not perform the same trick when it comes to disseminating a simple message and you could say this, and I think many analysts do say this, that the battle for cool if you like is being well and truly lost and let us not forget when we're talking about radicalisation we are talking largely in most cases of men and in most cases of young men, below the age of 35 in most instances.

The second question I was posed following on from that is 'How can Muslims and non-Muslims as well as state and society co-operate in order to counter extremism?'. Well first of all when it comes to Muslim groups there's undoubtedly a lot of great work being done and this event is an example of that. It's important to understand when we consider that work in the broad context that there are no decisive arguments which knock over extremist views like skittles. Extremists have a simplistic world view but that also means that it is one that's hard to break down, it's hard to dent and it's hard to sort of knock over in one go. Like any narrative it is binary, it's teleological but that means that those who are there

“...Al Qaeda and its sympathisers have proven far more effective in their use of new media than their enemies and their critics ...”

“Extremists have a simplistic world view but that also means that it is one that’s hard to break down, it’s hard to dent and it’s hard to sort of knock over in one go.”

Dr John Bew

to offer alternatives to the narrative have to engage in what I would describe as an attritional form of debate, ceaseless and consistent in conveying its message but with a recognition that sometimes that might be hapless, hopeless and frustrating.

As I said there will be no knockout blow but that doesn’t mean we should cede space whether in public or online to those with extremist views because again, and I would reiterate this, a quick Google search will tell you that extremists are often the first out of the traps and the most effective when it comes to dominating this space with their own definitions and concepts such as Jihad and others in this room will be far better qualified than me to offer views on the precise message that might be used to counter that from within the Muslim community but what I would say is that groups, moderate groups, groups like the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community should continue working, as many do already, to reconcile Islam and the West in particular and explain that a person for example can be both British and a Muslim without diluting any of the core aspects of either of these. For example it’s often Muslims who point out the many advantages of freedom of worship, freedom of speech that Muslims have in the UK and America as compared to other places in the world.

There is a tougher side to this too which should also be mentioned and that is to accept, as many have done, that there is a small but significant number of Muslims in this country who do wish to do harm. And finally I think this is an issue of growing importance and we’ve seen its significance in Pakistan but I think it also applies to the communities in the UK, there is a need, a pressing need, to reject and undermine ongoing conspiracy theories whether they be about 9/11, 7/7 or this broader idea of every controversial parliamentary act or speech being a war on Islam.

What should the state do? Well I think our previous speaker touched on that more effectively than I’ll ever be able to do and it’s where it gets really controversial if you like, but I think the Prime Minister in his Munich speech has been pretty emphatic about this,

about his preferred approach, and I think also to a certain extent we are arriving at something approaching a consensus after 10 years of debating and contesting this. The headline thing that David Cameron said in Munich was that multiculturalism had failed but there are many sorts of subsets, smaller points which he made that I think are of more significance and one was that the government should be much more strict when it came to the admission and the toleration of those who peddle extreme messages. Not because their messages can’t be heard elsewhere, they can on You Tube and other places but because the government will no longer give them any legitimacy. Another line was that government should take a more sceptical approach when it comes to dealing with these groups who create the mood music for extremist ideology, anti-Semitism, anti-integration, anti-democracy views even if they reject the use of violence in the UK. So in other words what the Prime Minister said, and I think he’s broadly right on this, is that he’s decided to engage with those groups which put themselves forward on the basis of values which are palatable to the majority of British people and do not encourage separation or apartness as their *raison d’être*. Dominic I think described this as ‘puncturing the atmosphere’, I think the bottom line rather than necessarily puncturing the atmosphere and I also express some scepticism that the state could actually puncture the atmosphere, I think the difference is not to give legitimacy to these groups. Others can decide whether they are operating or speaking within the law that’s not the government’s job in the first instance.

The final question I was asked and this is the hardest one and I think it’s where research from academia and government strategy collide in a way, which was, ‘Why and when do some people move from violent talk to violent action?’. It is the perennial conundrum for researchers in this area to pin down what’s called the jump off point when those with radical or extremist ideas decide to move into or graduate to take violent action and to explain the

reasons behind that. In my view the temptation to categorise in this way fails to appreciate what is a kinetic process and our research suggests, and I hate to do this and disappoint, that the jump off point does not exist in any discernable form and it depends on the individual, we've heard about the individual, but also the group. And that the whole notion of a trajectory, a path towards radicalisation, is a problematic one.

Now I should say, and this is an important caveat, having a sophisticated understanding of the twisted roots of extremism is important but sophistication does not always translate easily into government policy at the macro level, certainly a policy which would extend to the Foreign Office or the Home Office or the police or beyond. There are distinctions for example between politically driven Salafists and non-political Salafists which need to be understood. Between Islamists who come from the same school of thought as some in Al-Qaeda or Islamists who would lean towards the model of development pioneered by the Muslim Brotherhood. Between those who oppose violence in the UK but say it's acceptable in other places such as Israel and Afghanistan and between Islamists who refuse to recognise the distinction between that and the Western enemy. All of these things important, the boundaries are important and the boundaries between these two worlds are real and tangible but they are also crucially fluid and ambiguous and above all while we can be as clever as we want about them they are not often understood and I think this is an absolutely crucial point, they are not often understood by the people who pass between them. It is an imperceptible change in many cases and the individual who jumps from one category to another, I could give you lots of examples, is not often conscious of having graduated, the word I used earlier or being radicalised in the way that we would like from a government or a policy making perspective to understand.

In other words the radicalised individual doesn't get the distinctions themselves. So it's dangerous for policy makers to second guess the complex ideology that fuels extremism. Knowing more about it is extremely important but being too sophisticated, being too clever about it also has its own dangers.

Finally if you like, my final observation is that we should be willing to ask the difficult questions which we've asked today about the ideological roots of radicalisation as this event has done but we should be equally wary of thinking that this will provide us with a formula or an approach that could work across government departments and I think basically we are arriving at a point of consensus on this. Thank you.



Hazel Blears

Thanks very much John for sharing your work with us and convincing us all yet again that there's an awful lot more we don't know than actually we do know and I think this territory of

looking at what drives, particularly young people, to all kinds of extremism is an area where we do need more research and more evidence base in order to inform our practical programmes about what we can do about it so that was really, really helpful thank you.

Right now we're going to move to questions and contributions, I'm proposing to take two or three because I want to get as many people as possible and then to ask members of the panel to respond so if we could have an indication?

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Question

Mushtaq Lashari from APPG on Third World Solidarity which works for peace, justice and democracy through dialogue. Can I ask the panel that the doctrine and mindset which Mr Sardar has alluded to and then Dominic also mentioned it, is it not the reason that we in the International community harboured it, financed it in the 60's, 70's and 80's in Pakistan which we are facing and we didn't even do anything when we defeated communism which was the reason for harbouring it and I remember during the Zia-ul-Haq period when the Western leaders used to pride themselves training with them and saying we are fighting against communism and now that doctrine, well it is being faced by the Western world and Pakistan particularly, they are not doing as much as they did in 60's, 70's and 80s when they financed, harboured and trained those people. Thank you.

Question

Thank you very much. [Baroness] Sarah Ludford I'm a Lib Dem MEP for London and I speak on Justice and Human Rights for the Lib Dems in the European Parliament. Thank you very much for this very interesting conference, I was a bit late but I think I've heard most of the speakers and it was very interesting, very important and thank you to the Ahmadiyya APPG and the community. I very much agree with Dominic Grieve that we don't need more law but I think we do need the proper implementation of the law that we do have and I raised with Ofcom some broadcasts on the Ummah Channel last May and June which were brought to my attention by Rafiq Hayat and others. I was a little

surprised that they concluded that there had not been a breach of their rule 3.1 for the aficionados, 'material likely to encourage or incite the commission of crime' but only of rule 2, 'that the religious beliefs should not be subject to abusive treatment'. I would be among the first to say there shouldn't be criminalisation of insulting religion and that has been controversial in the UK when some of the material was about beheading and killing and describing members of the community as physical filth it did strike me that Ofcom was not taking this seriously enough.

Question

My name's McCluskey I'm a member of the House of Lords, I was a Law Officer of the Crown in the 1970's like Dominic and I then spent 20 years as a judge and have made some study of the Sharia and the various schools of jurisprudence. Now Dominic Grieve said we should challenge assumptions and Dr Bew talked about difficult questions. I want to say I've had no comfort at all from what I've heard today. It seems to me that too many Muslims are hardwired for intolerance. It is quite wrong to suggest that the fundamentalists so-called or the extremists or the distorted ones are a tiny minority. If you go to any of the Muslim states in the world, Saudi Arabia for example, there is intolerance in many respects of women in the law and indeed that's built into the Qur'an. Go to Pakistan there are over 20,000 Madrassahs financed by Saudi Arabia on the basis that they spread Wahhabism. If you go to Iran you will find a different form of Islam but it is highly intolerant toward various people, you mention Jews, Christians, women, homosexuals have not been mentioned but they should be mentioned because they are a substantial minority themselves. And so when we look at the Qur'an itself which I've done, whether you look at the various forms of the Sharia which you must do, you will find that intolerance of non-Muslims is built into the system. It is time, it seems to me, that Islam should start to recognise what Western Europe and North America began to recognise during the enlightenment and afterwards, namely that the fundamental human right is the right to disbelieve, the right to blaspheme. If I choose to say that all religion is nonsense, that there is no God I am blaspheming according to many religions of the world, I should have the right to say that and when you reach that stage you have reached a degree of enlightenment and I say that when I hear people saying it's not just a question of interpretation well it is a question of interpretation of the Qur'an, when I hear them say that you have a right to say there is no God etc, etc, you've a right to say that whether or not other people believe it.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

That's it, a lively start to our discussions I think. As Dominic's still with us perhaps I could ask him to comment certainly on the Ofcom point and maybe some of the other questions.



Rt Hon Dominic Grieve QC MP

Yes, Trying to get back to basics a moment, I mean I don't know what turns somebody from, on this sort of line as to the point where they take off and start doing violent things but I think there's no doubt that before you do violent things you think violent things and there's absolutely no doubt that if you live in a society where violence is endemic and indeed to that extent the area of Pakistan and the border lands in Afghanistan was a place of great violence as a result of the Russian invasion and our own actions, you are clearly promoting the pre-conditions where people are going to live with violence as an institutionalised mind process. I'm afraid I've always thought that you think and then you do and we know for example dealing with paedophiles that they are both stimulated by looking at paedophile material and they then go on to commit acts of paedophilia and I'm afraid I think violence is very similar. So I take your point but it doesn't actually give a solution to the problem, it is something that has gone on throughout human history.

Ofcom; I don't know enough about the individual case but all I can say is that Ofcom strikes me, if what you describe is correct, as being very questionable in its interpretation but it's something that I don't have a formal power in this area I should make quite clear, but you ought to communicate your concerns to the Home Office and indeed to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport because there are, and I think there is a tendency within our society to say 'oh well people are just getting a bit excited we won't talk about that' and that was one of the very things I was trying to challenge earlier, we've got to talk about those things not just about the violence.

Now I'm a bit more hesitant towards Lord McCluskey about this issue. All I can say is it's quite obvious to me there are a very large number of Muslims living in this country, not just Ahmadis, who have no difficulty reconciling their faith and its practice with pluralism, tolerance and indeed with respect for the possibility of people blaspheming their religion or performing apostasy by leaving it and simply treat that as something which is perfectly compatible with their own interpretation of the faith.

That said it's equally right that there are plenty of examples to show that there are large numbers of Muslims who do not accept that premise and I agree with you that I think that is a major challenge for us and one that we shouldn't ignore. But I would be very wary of arguing that it is inherent in the beliefs and practices of Islam that that level of intolerance should exist.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thanks very much Dominic. I was just going to ask Shehribano really your response to the final question about Islam and Muslims being hardwired towards intolerance, what is your

view?



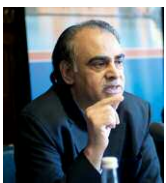
Shehribano Taseer

Well I mean you pointed out the worst of the worst, you pointed out Saudi Arabia and Iran but I think if you look at Bangladesh you can see that Islam can be applied in a very peaceful way

and that Islam is a religion that actually grants I think the most rights to women and it certainly recognises other religions and it has space for people who believe in other books and this is written in many of the verses in the Qur'an. It's sad that these merchants of hatred who have managed to misconstrue the true message of Islam, these are the people that are given the most amount of space in the media, they grab the headlines and they're doing it for themselves because everybody begins to believe that this is what Islam is. But I think that it's incorrect to believe that Islam is a discriminatory religion and that it's an evil religion.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thank you very much. Ziauddin.



Ziauddin Sardar

I think it deserves a robust answer because it was a robust question. Let me begin by saying that I regard it as exceptionally arrogant and very intolerant for an individual to stand

up, even if that individual is a peer of the realm, and say 'I have read the Qur'an and this is what it says' because what he is saying is that this is my interpretation of the Qur'an and to make a statement that it is full of intolerance, basically what he is saying 'this is my statement, this is my interpretation of the Qur'an and I am right' in a sense, so basically

it's a reflection of the Taliban view in a sense. Now any religious text by the very nature that it's a religious text is complex, contradictory, involves you know, connections and interconnections and the Qur'an is a specific type, the Qur'an's a good example of a text that is very interconnected, that requires two or three contexts you know for you to look at before you can understand.

In fact I've just written a book that I recommend Lord McCluskey reads called 'Reading the Qur'an' that takes you through it and shows in fact how complicated it is to interpret and put interpretation on a particular verse, how many different layers of context you need to know before you can actually reach a conclusion. So the first thing is in my opinion it's a very arrogant thing to say. The second it is the most dehumanising thing to say and I think that is totally and utterly ignorant of Islamic history. How can a great civilisation that produced the kind of knowledge and thought, that in fact taught the West the very humanism that we are defending here, that Amnesty International, the humanism that comes from Ibn Sina now, the humanism that comes from what we call Adab literature, the literature of etiquette, how to be human, the literature and the thought that gave us universities so even the Chair that we have, I used to have a Professorship Chair at City University, so even the chair comes from the term used there, that used Islamic history to actually teach and educate people, the Professor sat on a little chair, a little stool actually and the students sat around them in the mosque in Al-Azhar when it was first opened in the 8th Century was one of the first universities in the world. So in a sense it belies Muslim history, it belies 800 years of Muslims in Spain where multiculturalism thrived and Christians, Jews and Muslims produced a dynamic, thriving multicultural and multi-intellectual society where in fact in the same period you could have Ibn 'Arabi the greatest Sufi mystics of the same time, you could have even Ibn Rushd one of the greatest philosophers and defenders of rationality and you could have lots of theological thinkers arguing from each other. So it requires, I would say a little amount of humility while you look at the other is very, very important and in a sense very, very productive so I would not make sweeping statements like that.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

I knew that would get us going, so right could we take the next three contributions.



Sam Zarifi

Can I jump in on that because there were two questions that I think deserve answers. One is the first one which is a very important one about the roots of this, especially in Pakistan

and the role of the international community, the UK and the US in particular in light of what John said about what can happen in Pakistan, and one of the huge problems was the notion of expediency. That we accepted quite a bit of what General Zia-ul-Haq, what General Musharraf did in the name of very poorly conceived response to the war on terror, turned a blind eye to this and I think it is essential to recognise that this is a problem that faces multiple communities, multiple beliefs or non-beliefs and therefore requires assistance from the entire global community and that this notion that we will, especially in the West, that we will agree to work with certain groups, or countries and governments, despite the fact that they violate basic human rights in the notion of some immediate short term gain almost inevitably ends up coming back and biting us.

On the third question of course the right to blaspheme is a fundamental right and it is something that the international human rights system looks at and has tried to protect. As Mr Grieve suggests we should respond, we should have a sense of humour when responding to questions that are caricatures of the Western arrogance as Mr Sardar pointed out. But in terms of the hardwiring again let me emphasise just kind of, all you have to do is to go to Vietnam a country that has a fundamentally non-believing system and which does a very, very good job of crushing any kind of religious belief that gets out of control or you look at the Chinese which are in no way Muslim and which have a very strong ability to crush religions. If you have to go to Gujrat to see what happens when Hindus believe that they have a monopoly on the truth. So this notion that any particular religion has this hardwired is, as John pointed out, binary, teleological and creates the background music to extremism.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thanks very much. The audience have been really patient so I'm going to bring some more people in and I know that Dominic has to go, that's fine, thank you very much for coming.



Rt Hon Dominic Grieve QC MP

Thank you very much. Thank you I've really enjoyed coming.

Question

Hello I'm Annabelle Bentham I work for Christian Solidarity Worldwide which is a religious freedom advocacy NGO. I'd just like to come back to the question of grievance versus ideology but in the Pakistani context and I wondered how far the panel thought that the question is one of theology, when we think of recruitment to extremist causes, is it a question of theology which needs to be addressed with increased theological debate or is it indeed a reflection of frustrations with other problems in the country such as developmental issues, economic issues, political, justice related and so on?

Question

Thank you my name is Nasser Butt I'm a human rights campaigner and Liberal Democrat and my question really is in the way the government here in the UK and much of the alliances have reacted to 9/11 in the sense that labelling terrorist groups in a wide sort of sense where as in many countries they were freedom fighters but what has happened is by putting them on the terror list the whole genuine campaign has been undermined [and] in many of the cases government policy has allowed it - I particularly give you one example of the Kurds which have been labelled as a terrorist group in Turkey. What has happened in this country is that many of the people who are Kurds have been picked up by MI5 services under the government protection and without any legal jurisdiction or legal right and this is the outcome of the way the government has responded to labelling every group as a terrorist group and I think we need to have a balance in the way we approach different causes, different persecution and different kinds of problems that we have.

Baroness Flather

Thank you Hazel, Baroness Flather, that's me of course. I just wanted to make a couple of short comments. One was to defend Lord McCluskey because I think how you spoke to him about his arrogance showed yours as well and I will tell you one thing which is certainly not acceptable to the Muslims is any kind of a joke or a cartoon. I mean all our religions accept jokes and cartoons now India is supposed to be, has no state religion and you can make as many jokes as you like about the Hindus but you can't about the Muslims because they don't

accept it and I think that is a bad thing, if you can't laugh at yourself it's a very serious matter. The second thing that was mentioned was the women and I would have liked, I'm sorry I have a very pressing meeting at the moment, but I would have liked to have known why there are so few women here and I think that if the Ahmadiyya's are more liberal in the way they treat women then I think there should have been many more women attending this conference and it's all very well to say 'Qur'an says this, Qur'an says that', I have very close friends who are very learned in the Qur'an and they tell me all that but the actual practical application of all those ideas to the women is not happening, not in this country anyway. Maybe it's happening in some other wonderful country which I haven't seen but it's not happening here and I am really concerned about that. And finally to Mr Zarifi, you gave examples about the Gujrat thing and about Orissa but you didn't say that after the Mumbai attack there was no retaliation, there was no retaliation after the attack of the Indian parliament. I think these are positive things in India and they should be mentioned as well and there's no doubt about it that it was Muslims possibly from across the border. Thank you very much.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Very trenchant contribution there, thank you very much for that. Right John I'm going to come to you on the question of grievance and theology and the economy.



Dr John Bew

Just extremely briefly before I respond to that directly because Lord McCluskey's comments sparked so much debate, just to say very, very briefly, rather than a reflection of what is hardwired into Muslims I do think his comments are a reflection of the fact that Wahhabist and politically assertive forms of Islamism punch above their weight when it comes to aspiring or at least pretending to represent the Muslim community, I think it's a symptom of that broader fact. On the grievance versus ideology question as they say it's not that simple to put one camp above the other, these things converge. I would say in terms of profiles of people who've gone over to violence in the West that grievance in terms of social economic grievance has not been a huge factor. It has been there in some instances but it's not been a huge factor. You mentioned could theology be used to tackle and undermine these ideas? I think that is an ongoing

process, it does happen, it must happen at source yet we must remember just how simple and how easy to convey these messages are and how adaptive they are, sort of miniscule shifts in theology may take as I say, 80 pages of intense theological discussion. The bottom line is that the person linked to the most plots over the last two years is an individual called Anwar al-Awlaki can talk in these theological terms but his message is conveyed in a very politicised, direct way which relates to events around the world both within, events that affect Muslims in terms of Western foreign policy but also the circumstances within which Muslims live in the West. So theology matters at source but this is a very politicised and very adaptive and very hard to challenge narrative.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Right in relation to the second question obviously Dominic would have dealt with the current government's policy on that. I would just say from my own personal experience having been a Minister and dealt with these issues one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter which is the way the argument goes. I think it is difficult but nevertheless you need a definition of terrorism and that's using violence to secure political ends and that inevitably means you are going to catch people because it's a very broad definition. The European Union has found it impossible to reach consensus around that definition but for our own domestic law that's basically where we are. So they'll always be cases to be argued but I think you do need at least some sense that if you're going to charge someone with a terrorism related offence it is different from the normal criminal law in that it's using violence to secure a political end so we could probably have that debate for a long time to come.



Rafiq Hayat

Can I just say a couple of words; firstly can I come back to Lord McCluskey's view on Islam? You see what I'd like to say firstly I would invite you to come and please sit down with us, the Ahmadis and see what our version of Islam is and then maybe you'll be able to pass judgment on what the Muslims think. You see Islam gave right to women 1400 years ago that to be honest with you, even in this country, it was only very recently that those rights were given to women and people forget, and even the Saudi's forget that Hadhrat Khadija who was the first wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was a trader, she was a business woman and in fact she gave employment to the Holy Prophet

Muhammad, peace be upon him. That was the enlightened world and of course Mr Sardar has mentioned about the history of Islam after the demise of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him. If you look at the time when the Muslims followed the true Muslim teaching and that was to seek knowledge, that was under the fundamental teachings of Islam, as long as they sought knowledge Islam flourished and as soon as this went away from that teaching and became narrow minded and bigoted that is when the fall of Islam came. And this is where we believe now that it needed a reformer and that is why we believe a reformer has come and that is our belief. Please come and sit down with us and maybe we can have a discussion on this topic.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

I think that's an excellent idea. I was just going to ask Ziauddin about jokes and cartoons and if you can't laugh at yourself then there's no hope for you, what do you think?



Ziauddin Sardar

I don't think there's any community that doesn't laugh at itself. Pakistan is a very good example and one of my favourite programmes that I've mentioned a number of times is a Geo programme called Hum Sab Umeed Se Hain, it's a weekly satirical programme. Hum Sab Umeed Se Hain means basically if somebody is expecting, if a woman is expecting she is with umeed it means hope and this is a pun on all the Pakistanis they are expecting something which never materialises and it is an incredibly funny and satirical programme that attacks everything under the sun, I mean nothing is taboo and it is a very popular programme and if you look at any of these Pakistani TV channels they are full of that. Now the problem here is I think we need to try and understand the complex situation that we are in at the moment. It's not a question of whether we need to settle the grievances, of course we should try and settle the grievances but it's also equally important to realise that Islamic theology also needs a serious reform and there are efforts to reform Islamic theology in places like Morocco where they've totally reformed the family law aspect of Islam, it's been very, very successful and one needs to look at the complicated situation. Somebody pointed out that the internet plays a very important part in radicalising people. But suppose we had the perfect British Muslim society, a perfect society in Britain where all the Muslims were integrated and everything was perfect but then people will still have

to gain access to the internet that could still radicalise them. So we need to step back and look at the complications that are there, that in fact the problems are not simple they are living in an interconnected, globalised world where the problems are very, very complicated and one of the reasons we need to pay attention to the problems of Pakistan is because we live in a globalised interconnected world and the problems of Pakistan can become the problems of Britain tomorrow.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Just in terms of the point about women if Baroness Flather was still here I would say that I do personally agree with the point that she's making and certainly when I was a Minister I would often say to groups coming to see me that you'd have a lot better chance of getting into my office if there was a mixed group of men and women and I do think it's important to use your power to achieve some change and Shehribano's obviously talked about some of the practice but I do think that there's a great deal more to be done and we established a National Muslim Women's Advisory Group of women from all over the country who were a really, really powerful voice and one of the things that I've been disappointed about and I would say this to Dominic is that the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group and the National Young Muslims Advisory Group who advised me as Secretary of State and were a real force for progress actually are no longer meeting or supported by government and I think that that's a lack and I think we should try and rebuild some of that.



Rafiq Hayat

Can I respond because she also mentioned about Ahmadis also not bringing women to the function today. Most of the people that were invited today were not from our community and because of the lack of space here we restricted people who were going to come here. However I can tell you a few months ago we had a function in the room across the way where we had almost an equal number of women and men who participated so I think her point was completely wrong in respect to our community.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Ok I will convey your message that she was completely wrong when I'm feeling really brave. I think if we take the final round of contributions and then Lord Avebury is just going to say a few words

to us.

Question

I'm Naseer Ahmed I'm CEO of a computer company. I look at the problems and try to think of the solutions now in my mind one of the problems in Pakistan is mixing state and religion. Now I would ask the panel and especially the Western media and also the powers that be what can you do to influence Pakistani society, politicians and people in that country to recognise the fact that these two things have to be separated before even Pakistan can progress or we can solve these extreme problems?

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Very good, succinct question there thanks very much, thank you.

Question

[Tom Cox, former MP]. I would like to follow up some of the points that the speaker from Amnesty referred to and especially about the role of governments. But coming back to the point made about the closeness of relationships between our two countries. I and [a political] group were involved in two particular issues that deeply affected Pakistan and they looked here to the British parliament and their friends in the British parliament of all parties on two specific issues.

Firstly when Pakistan was expelled from the Commonwealth when the General took over and we here in the United Kingdom within the Commonwealth led the campaign for the return of Pakistan back into the Commonwealth. The other point we were deeply involved in and Hazel Blears will remember and other colleagues who have been in parliament, when Patricia Hewitt was the Secretary of Trade and Industry we were approached by Pakistan, the government of Pakistan to help allow Pakistan to sell their textiles into the European Union because there were countries Italy, Spain, Portugal, who were opposed to Pakistan being allowed to sell goods into the EU. And I make those points because it clearly shows the influence the United Kingdom can have.

Now we've talked about extremists but I'm concentrating solely on religious intolerance and persecution and I believe the British government and

British political parties, the Labour party, the Liberals, the Conservatives and all parties should make very, very clear to Pakistan; we want to work with you, we want to associate with you but there are certain standards that we expect you to follow. So that is the point that I make, that we really do have to expect the British government to use the influence that it certainly has in Islamabad on this specific issue.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thanks very much for that.

Question

Thank you, Adam Baxter Ofcom. I had come here wanting not to say anything this afternoon but without getting bogged down in particular points, just a couple of things. First of all Ofcom takes any allegations of any of our licensed channels advocating extremism incredibly seriously and we would investigate any such channel with vigour and due diligence and we have very good relations with exchanging information with the Ahmadi community, in fact we're in the middle of an investigation now against a particular channel which will be coming out in a few weeks hopefully. On the Ummah channel case I would like to say that I can discuss the details of that case with the MEP colleague here but we did find that channel in breach of a few rules, in particular abusive treatment of religion in this case the Ahmadi religion and from intelligence I know from Ahmadi colleagues that channel has been behaving itself since which is something to take away from that but thank you.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thank you very much for that.

Question

David Griffiths I work on religious freedom issues. There have been a few mentions of the role of the internet in spreading extremism however the report launch of the Foreign Office's Human Rights and Democracy launch, perhaps the right that was given most prominence was the right to freedom of online expression and the need to protect that. Now I know that Shehribano Taseer for example is a veracious user of Twitter, as are many other people who engage in these debates so I'd be very interested in the views of the panel on the extent to which social media can be part of the solution as well as the problem. Thank you.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thanks for that question and just in deference to Baroness Flathers I'm going to take the woman in the middle because I didn't see you before.

Question

Thank you Maya Qureshi I'm a management consultant with Deloitte. My question is a little bit different; a lot of blame has been placed on Pakistan in terms of Pakistani's harbouring extremists etc., etcetera and my question to the panel in general is that it has come out in discussion today a lot of the Madrassas etc. are being funded by the Saudis. My question is mainly to the UK government is that why is it not being picked up that it is the Saudis who should be blamed and it's always in the media that Pakistan should do more in terms of it's terrorism and it feels it should bring back security, there have been so many killings etc., why is that never picked up by the UK government and general public? Maybe some blame game if it has to be played then it should also be to the Saudis in terms of funding coming from because Pakistan cannot really afford to fund the Madrassahs etc, many issues would be solved. Thank you.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thanks very much for that very powerful point. Lord Avebury is going to make some closing remarks. I'm going to just go through the panel really and just ask them to make not long concluding remarks but anything that's particularly struck you and think you can take away and make a bit of a difference so I'm going to ask Shehribano to just start us off.



Shehribano Taseer

Just in response to your question, your comment, certainly social media is very much to blame for the spread of extremism because that's the power of technology, I can make video right now and I can be a pro-Osama supporter and it can play and in towns that I don't even know of and rile people up to go and commit violence and you know to partake in terrorism. But certainly I feel that the social media is definitely a part of the solution as well but in order to do that there needs to be some kind of regulation just like there is regulation in speech as well. In countries that are democracies where there is freedom of speech there is also, they outlaw

incitement to murder or hatred or hate speech and in the same way I think that that needs to be applied to the internet as well.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thanks very much.



Ziauddin Sardar

I would just like to confirm that I think that Saudi Arabia has a great deal to answer for but equally importantly over support for Saudi Arabia also has a great deal to answer for that has been going on for decades. I think social media has an absolutely vital role to play I mean just look at the Arab Spring, without the social media Mubarak would still be there, there would be no kinds of attempts to get rid of Gaddafi and certainly Tunisia would not have been transformed. But what we should not do is to assume that social media is the panacea. Social media is important for initiating the kind of conditions that lead to transformation but then you also need a vision and some sort of basic belief and understanding of society to actually take that transformation forward which is what we notice in Tahrir Square. It is important I think to understand that everybody who was in Tahrir Square stopped for pray and they all prayed and then they started demonstrating and nobody was Sunni or Islamist or this, everybody had a very clear goal and the goal was not just to get rid of Mubarak but to separate all authoritarian notion from the notions of governance which meant the Islamist and the standard kind of Islamic state model as well. So in a sense I think there's a great hope we shouldn't be too pessimistic.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Good if we can finish on a message of optimism that would be brilliant, Sam.



Sam Zarifi

In terms of the role of Saudi Arabia of course this goes back to the issue of making sure who we're in bed with and of course the power of the oil is well known but the job of Amnesty and other organisations like that is to point out these problems and to suggest, as I said, to governments around the world that short term expediency rarely plays out well in terms of the long term, and this is a particular example of it.

Regarding the link between state and religion in Pakistan and what can be done. Pakistan faces huge

challenges, I think it's clear that if I may be colloquial, the wheels are coming off the bus of the Pakistani state, they recognise it. Much has to be done but there are some concrete things that will be perhaps painful but Amnesty has been pushing the government to do and we hope that the UK government will do. They have to address the blasphemy law, no matter what happens they have to understand that this is a problem, this has been an ongoing process for the last 10 years. The Pakistani government needs to be brave enough to challenge this issue in parliament. They have to start prosecuting some of the perpetrators of violence. I want to see the people behind the killing of Shehrbano's father be brought up in court, be vigorously prosecuted, be given a fair trial and be put away much as the Indians did in fact with Kasab after the Mumbai attack, let's see that happen.

And finally about social media in general of course the media is not a panacea; Amnesty International recent annual report highlighted the importance of social media but also its dual aspect. In this regard I should just point out that international law is also careful to suggest that while freedom of religion is something to be protected, hate speech is something to be very careful about and so we do have to be careful as probably folks from Ofcom can tell us to make sure that religious discussions don't veer into incitement of war and violence and so that's part of the package.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thanks very much. John.



Dr John Bew

Very briefly on the online freedom of expression point and social media. On You Tube for example you can get a video by Anwar al-Awlaki very easily, you can't so I'm told get any pornography on You Tube so there is regulation, it does happen already and while there are no hard and fast rules one thing I would say in terms of the proportion of the material, that the extreme message is still winning the day even if there may be many more moderates out there.

In terms of finding a solution to this one thing I'd say is the government is extremely clumsy and as I said earlier uncool in responding to it. The first ever vote I had was for the Good Friday Agreement, I grew up in Belfast, the one thing that nearly turned me off voting yes was the government video that was sent out to encourage young kids to vote yes! Government is clumsy, corporates simultaneously clamour for contracts and we know, and I've had meetings and I will un-name corporate firms discussing this issue,

there is a big fight for US government contracts, I know the FCO is doing some messaging work out in Pakistan for example. Again I don't think that's necessarily the answer. The one time when social media really took off and we've heard about it already in a way that Al-Qaeda could not control and those sympathetic to the extremist message hated, was in the Arab Spring and that was organic. So I think for this to happen it has to be organic and therefore it's more likely to be authentic.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thanks very much John. Right Rafiq.



Rafiq Hayat

Thank you. Firstly because we are now summing up can I just thank the APPG for organising this event this afternoon. I think we've had a fabulous discussion and a great debate and hopefully this is the start of a process which we'll be able to expand in the future. The main purpose of today's event is to also get the politicians to take note because I think until the politicians take note as has been said, unless our country deals correctly with countries like Saudi Arabia, change will not come because Saudi Arabia continues to finance extremism throughout the world. Even Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, all of these countries you will find, even in this country, it is the Saudi money that is the source of the problem so unless we deal with that strictly I don't think we will find a solution to this problem and the politicians are the ones to have to deal with it, thank you.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Thanks very much Rafiq. We're now just joined finally by Lord Avebury who's the Vice-Chair of the Parliamentary Human Rights Group I think and he's just going to make a few closing remarks at the end of our event.



Lord Avebury

Well I'm a bit of a fraud being asked to wind up when I missed part of the discussion but you think it was in a good cause because there was a question down on the order paper about the Schools Inspectorate and I asked the Minister who was replying, 'What are the Inspectorate doing about the importation of Saudi teachings into our schools? How do they look at that

and what measures are they taking against it?' and the Minister said 'I will get the Chief Inspector to contact you and you can have a discussion on this'. So I hope you'll think that my absence was partly worthwhile.

But may I say what a privilege it's been to listen to those parts of the discussion that I have been present for. I thought as Rafiq has said, it was absolutely brilliant and as far as I know it's the first time that anything of this kind has been attempted.

I've said on numerous occasions, both in the House and elsewhere, that we need to look at the underlying causes of violence and hatred and that hasn't rung a bell yet. I went into the library at our end of the corridor and I asked 'What works have you got by either Qutub or Maududi?' and they said 'Sorry we haven't got any at all'. So this seems to me a symptom of what's lacking, that people are not looking at the teachings but come from those two ideologues, I mean Maududi in particular in Pakistan, but Qutub also and I think unless we get down to an analysis of how that doctrine has led to the situation that we have now where so many young people are taking up violence then we'll be missing the most important part of the task of curbing extremism and violence.

But I agree also, if I may take up the last point, about Saudi Arabia and I do think it's shocking the way that governments, all governments not just this government, ignore what happens in Saudi Arabia and what the Saudi Arabians are doing in the region. I mean for instance the occupation of Bahrain by the Saudis, I mean that is surely a violation of international law and the Bahrainis who are in contact with us say they can't do anything because of the Saudi troops are there to back up their own security forces in repressing the people. So I think that more outspokenness on both Saudi Arabia's actions in the region and on their own internal human rights problems where they persecute the Shia, prevent them from praying in the way that they like to. There was a horrific episode last year when Shia women were trying to pray at what was the Prophet's tomb and they were beaten up by the police and escorted off the premises. So I mean the Saudi's have got a lot to answer for and we shouldn't be silent about the human rights violations that they're perpetrating in their own country as well as encouraging those overseas who are minded to listen to their message.

Even in England as we heard there is some indication that a foothold is being maintained here, it came out in the General Election you know Hazel, that in a particular constituency in Wandsworth there were messages placed on the premises of tradesmen saying don't trade with this butcher because he's Ahmadi and an apostate and there is a particular mosque in that constituency that was

encouraging this conduct and I think we should stamp on this.

I think that the law on incitement to religious hatred is inadequate. In 2006 Parliament passed that incitement act and there's only been one prosecution in all the time since then and the reason is because the prosecution have to prove two things; not only that the person in question incited religious hatred but that he intended to incite religious hatred and that makes it almost impossible for the Crown Prosecution Service ever to initiate proceedings. So I think we should address our own law to make sure that we are adequately protected against incitement to religious hatred in this country.

But may I just conclude Hazel by saying I think this has been a terrific contribution that you've made this afternoon and I thank Ahmadi Muslim Community for having arranged it and I think when you look at their message of 'Love for all and hatred for none' you hope that that can be spread and that more and more people in the Muslim community as a whole will agree with the foundation of that message being applicable to their own conduct. As we've heard many times during the course of this discussion there are ways of interpreting the Qur'an, just as there are means of interpreting every religious text which vary considerably, but the interpretation which the Ahmadi's have settled on strikes me as being the one that we should advocate and try to spread throughout our own community, thank you very much.



Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Well thank you very much for that. I think that's a really wonderful note to end on, 'Love for all, hatred for none' and if we could all subscribe to that, whatever our religion then we would live in a much better world. I just want to thank all of you, the Ahmadiyya Community, the All Party group, everybody who's been involved in the organisation. I have never known an audience sit here for two and a half hours in such good spirits and I want to thank everyone of our contributors but I suppose especially Shehrbano for having come here specifically to make our event really come alive and to wish her all the very best for the future so thank you very much to all the panellists, thank you to you and we'll close the event.

MURDER IN THE NAME OF GOD:

A policy debate on the rise of extremism internationally and its impact on Britain.

Selection of photos of the policy debate held at the House of Commons







www.LoveForAllHatredForNone.org

Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK

The London Mosque
16 Gressenhall Road
London SW18 5QL

Tel: 020 8874 5836

Fax: 020 8874 4779

www.ahmadiyya.org.uk
www.alislam.org • www.mta.tv

Email: APPG@ahmadiyya.org.uk