

Joint Public Statement: NGOs Condemn Appointment of William Shawcross and Announce Civil Society-led Review of Prevent

February 16, 2021

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, express grave concern at the UK government's appointment of William Shawcross as the new reviewer of the counter-terrorism strategy Prevent. Shawcross has been appointed to replace Lord Carlile, who was removed from the post following a legal challenge last year. The appointments of both Shawcross and Lord Carlile have made clear, beyond doubt, that the UK government has no interest in conducting an objective and impartial review of the strategy, nor in engaging meaningfully with communities affected by it. Instead, it is apparent that the government intends to use this review to whitewash the strategy and give it a clean bill of health, without interrogating, in good faith, its impacts on human rights and fundamental freedoms. Without these perspectives, it is impossible to impartially assess the Prevent policy.

We, the undersigned groups, cannot be complicit in a process that serves only to rubber stamp a fundamentally flawed strategy. We therefore announce a collective boycott of the Prevent review. In lieu of participating in the government's review, civil society groups will conduct a parallel review that properly considers the harms of Prevent, including documenting discrimination and rights violations caused by it.

We, and other non-governmental organisations, have long raised concerns about the discriminatory and anti-Muslim impact of Prevent and its potential to violate core human rights. Many of us were eager to provide evidence to a properly independent review, and to engage with the appointed reviewer. However, Shawcross's appointment, given his well-known record and previous statements on Islam, and following the debacle of the Carlile appointment, brings into question the good faith of the government in establishing the review and fundamentally undermines its credibility. As a director of the Henry Jackson Society, Shawcross expressed patently Islamophobic views, saying: "Europe and Islam is one of the greatest, most terrifying problems of our future. I think all European countries have vastly, very quickly growing Islamic populations." As far as we are aware, he has never publicly disavowed these comments. During the period when the Charity Commission was chaired by Shawcross, it was accused of disproportionately focusing on Muslim charities, including by putting them under investigation.

The UK government must fundamentally reconsider its flawed and counter-productive counter-terrorism strategy, which has profound and far-reaching human rights impacts. We condemn its lack of political will to carry out this crucial task—the price of which continues to be disproportionately paid by Muslims across the UK.

Amnesty International

ARTICLE 19

Big Brother Watch

C.A.R.E. – Coalition of Anti-Racist Educators

CAGE

Child Rights International Network (CRIN)

DefendDigitalMe

Inclusive Mosque Group

Liberty

Maslaha

Medact

MEND

Network for Police Monitoring (Netpol)

No More Exclusions

Northern Police Monitoring Project

Open Society Justice Initiative

The Runnymede Trust