**UK ‘counter-extremism’ risks complicity in killings, torture, disappearances in Indonesia**

**(London, 23 April 2024)** The UK is helping Indonesia violate the freedom of religion and risks complicity in other abuses such as torture and disappearances by exporting its ‘Prevent’ counter-extremism strategy to the country, Rights & Security International concludes in a new report released today. Recent controversies about how the UK defines ‘extremism’ add to concerns about what the country may be secretly doing abroad, the organisation said.

The report shows that the UK supports harmful counter-extremism practices in Indonesia – the world’s largest majority-Muslim country – even though the Indonesian government has official policies of repressing non-approved faiths. The UK is also training police and military officers from departments and units that have allegedly gone on to commit serious crimes.

‘The UK government is actively collaborating with Indonesia on so-called “extremism” even as Indonesia uses that label to shut down minority religions, force people to adopt government-imposed religious views, and target critics,’ said Jacob Smith, RSI’s UK Accountability Team Leader. ‘The UK must be aware of the religious oppression and allegations of deadly violence, as well as “counter-extremism” apps that tell people to spy on their neighbours – yet, it apparently remains an enthusiastic partner.’

RSI’s research indicates that the UK government advised its Indonesian counterparts to adopt a Prevent-style counter-extremism approach, culminating in the creation of Indonesia’s National Action Plan on Countering Violent Extremism (RAN) in 2021. During the RAN’s drafting process, UK representatives trained members of the drafting team on Prevent, and the Indonesian government also told the drafters to introduce aspects of Prevent into the RAN.

The UK government has spent at least £18 million since 2014 on activities to prevent and counter ‘extremism’ in Southeast Asia, although the real figure may be much higher. RSI finds that these programmes reinforce harmful practices in Indonesia, including those that focus on ‘religious moderation’ or ‘community policing’, which aim to force people to change their lawfully held views under a threat of government intervention.

The report raises concerns that the UK is exporting the Prevent counter-extremism model – which has been highly controversial at home – and related support as a way of building political influence in Indonesia, one of the world’s most populous countries. As the report documents, much of this modern UK interest in Indonesia appears to have emerged post-Brexit, as the UK has tried to develop political influence and markets abroad.

The report suggests that the UK has been promoting Prevent-style counter-extremism in Indonesia as a political and financial sweetener, while paying little or no regard to oppression on the ground.

For instance, the Indonesian government targets people who do not hold one of six officially recognised religious beliefs as ‘extremists’ and tries to change their beliefs. Those who speak out risk being arrested and prosecuted under ‘blasphemy’ laws. People who belong to minority Muslim groups face similar dangers.

In West Papua, the UK government is or should be aware of the repressive manner in which its Indonesian counterparts operate, yet has chosen to ignore how it may be contributing to this situation, the report concludes. Researchers and journalists have documented widespread allegations of unlawful killings, torture and enforced disappearances against the Indonesian security services operating in the region.

Under international law, governments are prohibited from assisting other governments in breaching their international obligations – including those under human rights laws.

‘Prevent’ is the counter-extremism strategy that authorities use within the UK, and it creates a legal duty on doctors, teachers, social workers and others to report people they suspect of having ‘extremist’ beliefs. Over the past decade, RSI and other organisations have documented numerous human rights problems with Prevent, including Islamophobia, harms to children’s education and free speech on campus, and failures to protect personal data.

In March, Michael Gove, a UK cabinet minister, announced a new definition of ‘extremism’ that attracted public criticism from a wide range of MPs, including several in the governing Conservative party, as well as rebukes from human rights organisations.

‘One could also ask what the Indonesian government is doing collaborating with the UK, when the British approach to “extremism” is so shambolic and increasingly repressive,’ Smith concluded. ‘In the meantime, the UK should ensure it is complying with human rights laws at home before telling others to use its policies elsewhere.’

For more information, see the published report here.

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