



Press Release: Government commits to appointing the Independent Reviewer of Prevent through full and open competition, conceding to Rights Watch (UK)'s calls

The Government has today confirmed it will appoint the Independent Reviewer of Prevent through “full and open competition,” meaning “the Home Secretary will be advised on the appointment by an independent panel . . . open to potential candidates to apply for the role.”

“This is another victory for Rights Watch (UK) and all those advocating for a genuinely independent review of Prevent. We have always said that the first step to an effective and independent Review is a transparent and open appointment process. The failure to heed this advice led to the disastrous appointment of Lord Carlile in 2019.

While we are delighted with this development, we are frustrated that it took Rights Watch (UK) threatening legal action for the Government to confirm that this process would be followed” says Yasmine Ahmed, Executive Director of Rights Watch (UK). “

Last year, Rights Watch (UK) successfully challenged the appointment of Lord Carlile as Independent Reviewer of Prevent on the basis of his clear support for, and involvement with, the Prevent policy. However, the Government has subsequently stalled in outlining the process of appointment for the new Reviewer, when the appointment will take place, and to address concerns that is running down the clock to 12 August 2020 when the Review and the Government’s response to the Review must be completed.

“This decision from the Government represents a second significant step towards achieving the genuine and robust review of the Prevent strategy that we have been pushing for. The Government conceded to our calls to remove Lord Carlile as Independent Reviewer, and now confirmed that the appointment process will be done in an open and transparent manner,” says Yasmine Ahmed, Executive Director of Rights Watch (UK).

Ahmed continues, “Since we published our proposed Terms of Reference in March 2019, we have been clear that a transparent and open appointment process is necessary. The Government’s failure to take heed of this advice led to the disastrous appointment of Lord Carlile which wasted valuable time, resources and good faith. While we are delighted that the Home Office has finally come to its senses and adopted a transparent appointments process, we are disappointed that it’s take this long and required Rights Watch (UK) to take and threaten legal action. The Home Office must now work with impacted communities, Parliamentarians, and other stakeholders to establish a genuinely independent and effective Review that can properly consider the impact and efficacy of the Prevent Strategy. It’s a goal that we all share.”

Prior to the Government’s appointment of Lord Carlile, Rights Watch (UK) sought to work with the Home Office to help ensure that its Terms of Reference were fit for purpose. Those proposed Terms of Reference rested on six key principles, which Rights Watch (UK) with which Rights Watch (UK) reiterates its call for compliance now. They are:

- Independence;
- Full and effective Government cooperation;

- Consultation and participation;
- Effective resourcing and support;
- Transparency and Parliamentary oversight;
- Holistic and comprehensive.

Ahmed continued, “Given that a large part of the reason an Independent Review is being conducted in the first place is the utter lack of trust in the architecture of Prevent, the Government must work to restore trust in a number of impacted communities and stakeholders. The only way that this trust can possibly be restored is if the appointment is made in a transparent and fair manner.”

Rights Watch (UK) has been consistently calling for a genuinely independent review of Prevent since the publication of its landmark report, [Preventing Education: UK Counter Terrorism Policy in Schools in 2016](#). The report highlighted the adverse impact of the strategy—which is widely perceived to be, and evidence suggests is, a soft surveillance tool used against impacted communities including children¹—on freedom of speech, the right to education, and the right to privacy, among others. Rights Watch (UK)’s report also highlights the counter-productivity of a strategy that alienates the very communities with whom the Government needs to work.

Carolin Ott from law firm Leigh Day said: “We are pleased that the Government has confirmed that the Independent Reviewer of Prevent will be appointed through full and open competition. Our clients hope that the implications of the decision for the timing of the review will be carefully considered, and that a rigorous and thorough review of the controversial Prevent strategy will commence in due course.”

Ends

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¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/oct/06/counter-terror-police-are-running-secret-prevent-database> and <https://dpglaw.co.uk/police-agree-to-delete-prevent-referral-of-primary-school-child/>.