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Lessons not learnt about counter-terrorism and social cohesion as Muslim communities made 'suspect'

As the UK government reviews its Prevent programme new research from London Metropolitan University highlights the urgent need to learn from the past.

According to research published today *'Suspect communities'? Counter-terrorism Policy, the Press, and the impact on Irish communities and Muslim communities in Britain* the ideas underpinning counter-terrorism measures and the way politicians, policymakers and the media discuss who might be responsible for bombings have not changed over four decades.

Prof. Mary Hickman, Director of the research, said: "The frequent mention in the same breath in public debate of 'innocent Irish' and 'Irish terrorists' or 'moderate Muslims' and 'Muslim extremists' means that 'law-abiding' Irish and Muslim communities are always defined in relation to 'extremists'."

Ambiguity surrounding who is an 'extremist' or a 'terrorist' has resulted in hostile responses in everyday life - at work, in shops, on the street - from members of the public who think they are under threat towards those they associate with that threat.

This research reveals the extent to which the Irish in Britain lived with the fear of association with the IRA and the impact it had on their lives.

Lessons must be learnt. While the focus of counter-terrorism policy remains fixed on rooting out extreme ideas it encourages the public to treat Muslims as potential 'suspects' or legitimate objects of abuse. Future policies should ensure they do not undermine the trust Muslim communities have in state institutions and their sense of belonging.

Muslim communities, like other groups, need to be addressed in terms of issues such as education, employment and political representation, rather than always through the prism of terrorism and counter-terrorism.

The report will be launched in the Houses of Parliament on 7 July at an event hosted by Keith Vaz, MP, Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

Keith Vaz MP said: "This excellent report poses crucial questions about the Prevent programme and the way in which we approach and engage with communities. The Home Affairs Committee will be considering the findings during our upcoming inquiry into the Roots of Radicalisation."

The research was led by Prof Mary Hickman at London Metropolitan University with Prof Lyn Thomas and Dr Henri Nickels. They worked alongside Dr Sara Silvestri, a specialist on Islam in Europe at City University London.

Notes to editors:

Event launch 7 July 2011

Houses of Parliament, Westminster, London,
Committee Room 11, 4.30pm-6pm

Attendance is free but registration is necessary.

To reserve a place please contact suspectcommunities@londonmet.ac.uk – Phone:
0207 133 2927.

Three of the research team are members of the Institute for the Study of European Transformations (ISET) at London Metropolitan University, and a fourth was based at City University London. Professor **Mary J Hickman**, is an expert on Irish migration and Diaspora, and in immigration and social cohesion in Britain. She is the founder of the Irish Studies Centre and the Director of ISET. Professor **Lyn Thomas** (ISET) is a specialist in media and cultural studies. Dr **Sara Silvestri** is Senior Lecturer in Religion and International Politics, in the Department of International Politics at City University London. Dr **Henri Nickels** was the Research Fellow (ISET) on the project; he currently works for the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Vienna, Austria.

For more information, to interview Professor Mary Hickman or for an embargoed copy of the report, please contact:

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