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Reaction of Muslim Women's Network UK to Prime Minister's Speech on Tackling Extremism

Representatives from Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) attended the Prime Minister's speech in Birmingham today and welcome his acknowledgement that most Muslims contribute to our country and that the extremist acts of a minority do not represent Islam. We also agree that to defeat extremism, we must all work together including Muslim communities, government, police, schools, universities and social media. Muslim communities do have a role to play in challenging ideologies scripturally because unfortunately ISIS and their supporters do self identify with the Islamic faith.

Commenting on the speech, Chair of Muslim Women's Network UK, Shaista Gohir MBE, who attended the event said: *"We must do something. I agree with the Prime Minister when he says that some young Muslims are being drawn into extremism by non-violent hate preachers who themselves manage to stay inside the law. To add to this, ISIS are using online platforms and combining religion with grievances, excitement, and empowerment. Although the practices of ISIS contradict Islamic values, they claim to follow Islam using flowery language. Their strategy is proving successful because a small number of young Muslims are willing to give up comforts of living in the UK and sacrifice family ties for them. Hence any counter narratives must expose their superficial and perverted understanding of Islam and that anyone dying for ISIS will not be considered a martyr with ticket to heaven."*

She added: *"However, any government strategy must be carefully implemented and it cannot become the 'thought police.' Although the Prime Minister did say the strategy would narrowly target extremists, I am worried in practice this may not happen. For example, I am concerned British Muslim school children may start getting profiled when expressing legitimate grievances given the new responsibility of schools to identify extremist views."*

The Prime Minister also stated in his speech that we must promote British values such as fairness, justice, tolerating difference, religious freedom, being equal before the law and freedom of speech. However, such discourse must apply to everyone. For example, if Muslim hate preachers are regarded as extremists, then those who preach hate against Muslims cannot be regarded exercising freedom of speech. The government must also make a commitment to tackling discrimination and Islamophobia faced by Muslims in their daily life.

Additional Information:

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2. About Muslim Women's Network UK: MWNUK is the only national Muslim women's organisation in Britain. We are a national network of women and men with membership across the UK. We find out about the experiences of Muslim women and girls through research and helpline enquiries. We identify policy and practice gaps for our advocacy and campaign work. Find out more from our website www.mwnuk.co.uk