

## **RADICALISATION IN PRISONS**

I want to talk about radicalisation and Muslim extremists today. Prisons hold extremists from the far right and other persuasions too but I am going to speak specifically today about radicalisation and Muslim extremists, the largest group. There are estimates of the numbers involved but I am not today going to get into a debate about definitions that a precise estimate of numbers would require.

The Prime Minister has called for a total rethink of what we do in prisons to tackle extremism. I do not want to pre-empt that. The PM made a distinction between Islam and Islamist extremism and drew attention to some of the complexities of the issue. In prisons distinctions need to be made between:

- Devout behaviour and prisoners developing a religious faith which we know can reduce the likelihood of future offending
- Criminal and gang related behaviour hiding behind an assumed Muslim identity that may not last 10 minutes once the prisoner is outside the gates or may continue in criminal networks outside prison
- Extremist attitudes and behaviour seeking to radicalise others
- Prisoners convicted of terrorist offences who are assessed as posing a risk to the safety of others in prison or after release

I want to suggest five elements that should form part of any new strategy to combat radicalisation and extremism in prisons. I do not say they are an exhaustive list and put them forward as a contribution to the development of policy rather than a final position:

1. Physical and procedural security to disrupt criminal behaviour - however motivated -and effective co-ordination between prisons, the police and other agencies
2. Dynamic security - the relationships between prisoners and staff that form the bedrock of how most prisons work. Staff must feel confident to use their existing skills and experience to interact with all prisoners, challenge anti-social, bullying or intolerant behaviour and attitudes, and ensure prisoners co-operate constructively with others in the ordinary domestic life of a prison. This should be the ordinary bread and butter work of all staff.
3. Promote citizenship in education and in the contribution prisoners make to the running of the prison.
4. Supporting the already effective Muslim chaplains so they can challenge extremist views and ensure there is not a vacuum for self appointed leaders to fill
5. Demonstrate that Muslim prisoners are treated fairly, without advantage or disadvantage by effective monitoring, investigating and addressing discrepancies, and making sure all prisoners know the result

All of this is happening to some degree but what we have to do now is bring all prisons up to the standard of the best. That has will only be successful if it forms part of a strategy to address the wider concerns about the treatment of prisoners and conditions in prisons the inspectorate has identified. I suggest attempts to radicalise will be less successful in a prison where prisoners are and feel safe, where there human dignity is respected whatever their background or faith, where they are engaged with in productive activity and where they have real hope they can build a new life with their families after release. We need to see combating radicalisation as a wider part of prison reform.