



For immediate release

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UK Government's draft anti-terror bill can have a serious chilling effect on freedom of expression

“A serious chilling effect on freedom of expression, precisely at a time when it is necessary to have a public debate about terrorism and its causes”, ARTICLE 19 warns in a statement issued today in response to the UK Government's draft anti-terror bill.

While ARTICLE 19 welcomes the redraft of the government's earlier proposals of a Terrorism Bill as demonstrating the UK government's intent to bring the Bill in line with international human rights standards, ARTICLE 19 is nevertheless seriously concerned that the current proposal violates the right to freedom of expression.

Clause 1 of the revised draft Bill proposes to criminalise the ‘encouragement’ of terrorism, including through statements that may be understood to ‘glorify’ terrorism. ARTICLE 19 considers the current proposal in violation of fundamental human rights principles for two reasons:

- First, the **offence remains too vague** and broadly stated to serve as the basis for a criminal restriction on the right to freedom of expression.
- Second, there is **no requirement to show** that there was any *actual intent* to encourage terrorism. The clause criminalises any statement that may be understood as *indirectly* encouraging terrorism. International human rights principles establish that there must be a clear, intentional call for violence before freedom of expression can be restricted.

While ARTICLE 19 strongly denounces terrorism and incitement to terrorism, it emphasises that any action taken must be consistent with the government's obligations to respect the right to freedom of expression. Under international law, any restriction on the right to freedom of expression must be clearly and unambiguously stated in law and be a proportionate response to a real threat. ARTICLE 19 does not believe that the current proposal complies with this test.

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