

'Community leaders' represent no-one but themselves, says Nazir Afzal

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Former Chief Crown Prosecutor Nazir Afzal has said that the authorities are "lazy" in reaching minority groups, and still rely on self-appointed 'community leaders'.

Mr Afzal recently resigned his position as chief executive of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners so that he would be free to speak out in the media following the Manchester bombing. He said he had a duty to speak out about Islamist extremism.

He told [The Times](#), "There's no way that me speaking about deradicalisation and protecting all our communities could be seen as conflicting with what the [Police and Crime Commissioners] would want to say. I should have been able to talk about these things without having to leave my job."

Since then he has been vocal in challenging the authorities to do more to combat extremism. He accused the Muslim Council of Britain and other Muslim groups of spreading "myths" about Prevent and said there was an "industry which is trying to undermine Prevent."

He said the much-maligned strategy "is simply safeguarding" and had done "phenomenally good work."

He said that it had stopped 50 children and 100 others from going to Syria, but that its work was being "constantly undermined".

Mr Afzal condemned "self-appointed" community leaders whose sole agenda was to present Muslims "as victims".

"I've spent 25 years meeting so-called community leaders who represent no one but themselves," he said.

He also called for more funding for women's groups, pointing out that "women, particularly in the Muslim community, are already engaged with the families, they're identifying people at risk. But they're doing it on a shoe string."

The former Chief Crown Prosecutor also questioned the need for new laws to combat terrorism. "I think we've had 11 bits of legislation on terrorism since 2000; counter terrorism act, prevention of terrorism act, I think we're running out of names for them", he said.

During his career Mr Afzal has worked on combating 'honour'-based violence, forced marriage, FGM, and played a critical role in prosecuting a predominantly Pakistani grooming gang, which was recently depicted in the BBC's *Three Girls* drama.

Meanwhile, the director of the counter-extremism organisation Inspire, Sara Khan, has criticised "naïve politicians" for their "singular myopic lens" about the Muslim community.

She accused them of being "so eager to stand up against anti-Muslim hatred they end up legitimising the very people who provide the climate for extremism, and attack progressive Muslims

who seek to counter Islamist extremism."

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