A response to Commission for Countering Extremism's call for evidence

January 2019

Introduction

The National Secular Society works for the separation of religion and state, and for equal respect for everyone's human rights so that no one is either advantaged or disadvantaged on account of their beliefs. We regard secularism and freedom of expression as essential features of a fair and open society.

Whilst countering extremism is not the primary aim of our organisation, we believe that secularist principles have a key role to play in the increasingly polarised debate around religion, extremism and discrimination. Secularism provides a framework for countering extremism and minimising the harm that extremists can inflict upon society.

Our response omits answers to questions we consider to be beyond our remit, beyond our area of expertise or where we believe other organisation may be better placed to respond.

Section one – Experiences of and insights into extremism

Q1: What extremism looks like

Defining 'extremism' is one of the fundamental challenges of any counter-extremism initiative.

'Extremism' is an ambiguous and subjective term. Although we occasionally use the term 'extremism' and 'extremist', we try to use clearer and more specific language, e.g. 'religious fundamentalism', 'Islamism', 'far right nationalism' etc. It strikes us as reasonable to describe anyone who incites violence, hatred or discrimination for political, religious or ideological causes as 'extremists'.

We also recognise that labels like 'extremist' are liberally used by some to denigrate and smear perceived rivals, regardless of whether the target expresses an ideology that fits what could reasonable defined as 'extremist.'

Q2: How helpful is the definition of extremism?

"Extremism is the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also regard calls for the death of members of our armed forces as extremist". (HM Government Counter-Extremism Strategy, 2015)

We welcome the duty on all schools to promote the 'fundamental values' listed within the above definition, as this provides a mechanism to challenge practices including the promotion of bigotry and hatred against different groups.

However, we are concerned there are examples that may fit this definition which would be wrong to call 'extremism'. There are a number of harmful religious practices that we argue should not be tolerated, such as non-consensual genital cutting, gender discrimination and inhumane animal slaughter.

Vague definitions of extremism are prone to misapplication and risk storing up problems for the future. The government should therefore be very cautious about promoting such a broad definition.

The final sentence of the definition is incongruously specific. Calling for the death of any individual is in opposition to the values of the rule of law and individual liberty, and should therefore be deemed extremist.

Q4: What factors are important when considering extremism?

We are concerned by proposals to legislate against 'extremism'. Having and expressing views deemed to be extremist should not itself be a crime, unless those views are expressed in a way that directly incites criminal acts or constitutes harassment.

No counter extremism strategy should undermine our rights to freedom of expression. Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights protects not only the information or ideas that are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also those that offend, shock or disturb; such are the demands of that pluralism, tolerance and broad-mindedness without which there is no democratic society.

Q5: Have you witnessed anything you would regard as extremist

We are sometimes alerted by members of the public to issues that may be regarded as related to extremism. In our campaign work, we frequently encounter examples of religious fundamentalism that may be deemed extremist according to the HM Government Counter-Extremism Strategy 2015 definition.

Extremist events e.g. marches, events in community or commercial venues

A recent example: In December we were informed that a state-funded academy, Langley Academy in Slough was renting its facilities to an Islamic youth group called IslamHood[1]. IslamHood has hosted speakers such as Imran Ibn Mansur and Haitham al-Haddad, both widely regarded as advocates of extremist forms of Islam.[2]

We are regularly contacted by members of the public who are concerned about inappropriate religious evangelism at local schools. Whether these can be deemed "extremist" is dubious, but some of these groups express anti-abortion and anti-LGBT views. According to our research most schools do not have policies covering the participation, invitation or behaviour of external visitors, or concerning the partisan promotion of religious or political beliefs by external visitors.[3]

Segregation e.g. by ethnicity, religion or gender

We welcomed the 2017 ruling that segregating pupils by gender within the same school was unlawful, and that as a result Ofsted is able to penalise schools if they continue to practice gender segregation.

However, the provision of state-funded faith schools that segregate children according to their families' religions contributes to division in communities, and in some cases may fuel extremist views. Dividing children according to faith critically reduces opportunities for children from different backgrounds to interact and learn from each other, which in turn fosters misunderstanding and mistrust. Segregation according to faith can also lead to ethnic segregation, especially in faith schools of minority religions.

Incidents in regulated spaces, e.g. schools, universities, charities, prisons

We are aware that regulated spaces such as schools and prisons can make it easier for extremists to access and radicalise young and vulnerable people.

The inclusion of 'the advancement of religion' as a charitable purpose means organisations that also promote extremist political views can gain charitable status by cloaking those views under the guise of religion. Because religious and political ideologies are frequently intertwined, it can be difficult for charity regulators to spot when religious charities are promoting political views that are not in the public interest.

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[1] https://www.islamhood.org/; At time of access on 22 January, IslamHood still lists Langley Academy as its 'campus'.

[2] Talks by these speakers were featured on IslamHood's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/ISLAMHOODSlough/videos . When we informed Langley Academy of the nature of IslamHood and its past speakers, videos featuring these speakers were removed.

[3] https://www.secularism.org.uk/evangelism-in-schools/

Q6: The harms caused by extremism

Extremism is often harmful to society because it tends to reject the concepts of universal human rights, equality, tolerance of different lifestyles. It serves to undermine community cohesion, and secular democracy. Extreme ideology can sometimes be a motivation to commit crime.

Q7: Who is most at risk of harm caused by extremism?

Potentially anyone can be harmed by extremism. In our experience, those more likely to be harmed by extremism (either those recruited into extremist ideologies or those whose human rights are violated due to the imposition of extremist ideas) are those in insular communities.

Q9: Does extremism cause harm to society and its institutions more widely e.g. to democracy?

Yes. Extremists who seek to impose their ideology on others can undermine human rights and the concept of one law for all. Sometimes, they win sympathy from the state by claiming victimhood status if their ideology is not condoned or facilitated. For example, religious schools who want to ignore their duty to teach British values and non-discriminatory attitudes towards LGBT+ people frequently claim that they are the victims of intolerance from Ofsted. No religious group should have exemptions from laws and regulations that everyone else is expected to follow.

Q10: Do you think more should be done to counter extremism?

It is essential for community cohesion, public safety and effective democracy that extremist ideologies be robustly challenged and not facilitated by the state.

Q13: Are there particular institutions or groups that you see as having a role in improving our current efforts to counter extremism?

The national government must lead in challenging extremism by promoting greater community cohesion and ensuring everyone's basic human rights are upheld, regardless of their religion or cultural background. Religious exemptions to generally applicable laws and regulations should be resisted. The state also has a role to play in ensuring free debate and dialogue is possible by upholding freedom of speech, and standing firm

against the return of de facto 'blasphemy laws' by allowing people to criticise and ridicule religion without fear.

We think that the overlapping factors of education and integration are the best means of challenging extremism without having an adverse impact on freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. More steps need to be taken to ensure no-one is left unaware of their rights or responsibilities as a UK citizen or resident, and to ensure all children regardless of their background have the same access to a broad and balanced education that emphasises the values of democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of others.

We are however concerned that any efforts to challenge extremism by 'policing' the media can result in self-censorship and a curtailment of free speech. Similarly, counter terrorism efforts must not undermine basic human rights such as freedom of expression.

Civil society and regulators must also shoulder much of the responsibility for opposing extremism. We are alarmed that a number of religious organisations are taking advantage of their charitable status to promote hateful activities and ideology.

Faith groups play a valuable role in the charitable sector, but some religious charities promote extremist political ideology. This is in spite of the fact that a registered charity is not supposed to cause more harm than good, and cannot exist for a political purpose. In these cases, charity abuses are frequently cloaked in the guise of 'the advancement of religion'.

By way of example, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, also known as HSS is registered in the UK with the number 267309, HSS is associated with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an Indian right-wing, nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organisation that is widely regarded as the parent organisation of the ruling party of India, the Bharatiya Janata Party.

HSS has conducted activities that support RSS's ideology of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism). In 2015, an undercover investigation by ITV's *Exposure* found that HSS had run a training camp for teenage boys which included lectures on Hindutva. One speaker gave a lecture accusing other religious groups of conspiring to oppress Hindus. He told the boys, "If it comes to Islam, they are the world's worst religion".[4]

Following the documentary's release, the Charity Commission launched an inquiry into HSS and found that the comments were "wholly inappropriate and unacceptable at an

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[4] *Exposure: Charities Behaving Badly*, ITV. Broadcast Wed 18 Feb 2015

event run by a charity"[5]. But despite the fact that the organisation has a clear political purpose that is demonstrated through its activities, HSS still remains on their register.

HSS is one of a number of religious charities that have raised concerns over their political activities and links with extremism. These also include those linked with Islamism, or politicised fundamental Islam.

In 2018, the Henry Jackson Society published Wolves in Sheep's Clothing: How Islamist Extremists Exploit the UK Charitable Sector. This report uncovered the extent to which Islamists use charities to further their cause of spreading extremist propaganda.[6]

Only bodies that genuinely serve the public interest, rather than simply their own interests, should enjoy charitable status.

While we acknowledge that there are certainly steps faith groups can take to challenge extremism, we are cautious of any counter-extremism strategy that centres on faith groups and 'faith leaders'. Faith groups and faith leaders are not always motivated to challenge extremist ideas; many are more concerned with their own reputation and image. This can undermine counter-extremism efforts.

On the other hand, members of faith groups (who often aren't considered 'leaders') who do call for reform to make their lifestyles more compatible with secular democracy should be supported. They are frequently victims of intimidation from conservative members of their own community who attempt to silence them. A secular democracy should ensure the voices of 'dissenters' and reformers are heard.

Fundamentally, we all have a shared responsibility to defend universal human rights, pluralism, the rule of law, and the values that underpin liberal secular democracies.

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[5] Charity Commission For England And Wales, "Inquiry Report: Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (UK)." GOV.UK,

[6] Webb, Emma. "Wolves in Sheep's Clothing: How Islamist Extremists Exploit the UK Charitable Sector." The Henry Jackson Society, 2018. http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/HJS-Islamist-Charity-Report.pdf Accessed 18 December 2018

Section two – Evidence on extremism

Q3: What is the most significant driver of extremism and what evidence supports this?

Isolation appears to be a key factor in driving extremism. The rise of identity politics which can lead to the fragmentation of society risks undermining cohesion and creating further isolation and insularity.

When individuals (particularly children) are not exposed to a variety of different ideas, perspectives, opinions and people of different lifestyles, this makes them more vulnerable to indoctrination in extremist ideology.

Authority figures in certain communities deliberately deprive their members of access to information and exposure to people from other communities in order to maintain their control. Examples of this can be found in independent faith schools.

In 2017, the NSS found that independent faith schools judged below 'good' are around three times more likely than non-faith schools in the same position to not meet requirements for British values through their "written policies" or the "spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils".[7]

Particularly egregious examples demonstrating the link between social isolation and extremism can be found at Darul-'Uloom academies. Darul-'Ulooms are a 19th-century style of religious academy. The many Darul-'Uloom academies in the UK are direct imports from Pakistan and north India. We understand that they are of Deobandi orientation, meaning that they are likely to adhere to fundamentalist theology, notably in their attitudes to non-Muslims and life in non-Muslim societies.

One Ofsted report on a Birmingham Darul-'Uloom stated that: 'A large number of copies of a leaflet containing highly concerning and extremist views, such as "Music, dancing and singing are acts of devil and prohibited", were discovered during the inspection.' The school responded by calling the inspection 'racist'.

It should also be noted that all Darul-'Ulooms registered in England appear to be single-sex (male), meaning that women are currently unable to access this form of education.

In July 2018, the Charity Commission launched a statutory inquiry into Darul Uloom School London, a school with a history of negative Ofsted inspections, after the school's safeguarding lead and headteacher were arrested related to firearms offences.[8]

[7] https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2017/11/half-independent-faith-schools-failing
[8] https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2018/07/investigation-launched-after-weapons-seized-at-independent-faith-school

Although some of the most extreme examples of isolation and fundamentalist indoctrination of children can be found in the independent sector (as well as in unregistered schools that operate illegally), depriving children of knowledge and exposure to different views can also be found at state-funded faith schools. Last year NSS research found that 77% of state-funded secondary faith schools distort relationships and sex education by teaching it in accordance with religious scripture. Many faith schools explicitly teach that same-sex relationships are wrong (if they are taught about at all) and criticise sex outside of marriage. Some condemn contraceptives and abortion and teach taboos around menstruation.[9]

In 2017 the NSS also found that Beis Yaakov Primary School, a state-funded Charedi (ultraorthodox Jewish) school, stated on its website that "all references to TV programmes and the internet should be avoided" because the pupils "do not watch television and many do not have access to national newspapers or libraries" and that their "exposure to other religious experiences very limited." This school also stated that "men and women may not shake hands nor touch in any other manner", that evolution is not taught, and that discussions about personal relationships are forbidden.[10]

Finally, we are aware that the lack of regulation of elective home education can leave children more vulnerable to extremist indoctrination[11]. That is why we support mandatory registration of all home educated children with the local authority so the education and wellbeing of these children can be monitored as they would in a school.

Q4: What is the ideology or worldview of extremists and what are they trying to achieve?

Religious extremists are usually fundamentalists (i.e. they take a literalist and uncompromising approach to religious teachings) who reject secular democracy and the concepts of basic human rights and equality in favour of theocratic religious ideology, usually based on religious texts.

Religious extremists do not always follow the same goal. Some extremists take an isolationist approach. They aim to create something resembling a 'state' within the state, with its own rules, leaders, schools, and other establishments, based on theological law. However, they frequently do not seek to recruit members or impose their ideology on those perceived as outside their community, although those born within the community usually have their opportunities and freedoms severely restricted. In order to maintain their communities, they may demand exemptions from laws or even ignore laws that are incompatible with their beliefs. They may encourage members to hold a deep distrust or even hatred towards 'outsiders', and discourage or forbid involvement with the wider community or politics (although the 'leaders' in these communities themselves may be

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[9] https://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/report-unsafe-sex-education---the-risk-of-letting-religious-schools-teach-within-the-tenets-of-their-faith.pdf
[10] https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2017/10/nss-urges-clampdown-on-creationist-faith-school
[11] https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2018/03/lax-home-schooling-laws-being-exploited-by-extremists

considerably politically active). Groups that could be considered as examples of this type of extremism include fundamentalist Christian sects such as the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren and ultraorthodox Jewish communities.

Other extremists are more outward-looking; they actively recruit converts to their cause and aim to impose their religious teachings on others. Some are very active in politics and will try to use non-violent political activism and proselytising to achieve their ends. But the most extreme examples may employ violence, coercing desired behaviour through threats of physical harm or even death. They may also persecute groups considered to be enemies, including apostates, LGBT people, or people from different religious or cultural backgrounds. Islamists may fall into this category.

Both forms of extremism can be harmful to society. Even isolationist forms of extremism can be harmful to community cohesion, and to the individuals raised within the communities who may grow up with very little practical knowledge about life in the UK and their rights as a British citizen. Too often, the rights of children and vulnerable people in isolated religious communities are overlooked, either out of a misguided attempt to 'tolerate' different customs (even when those customs threaten individual rights), or a view that problems within communities should be solved by the communities themselves.

Q5: What tactics do extremists and their leaders use to achieve their objectives

Religious extremists often attempt to mainstream their views by using the language of human rights and social justice. They may claim to be oppressed or persecuted by those who criticise them, and frame their demands as a struggle for 'religious freedom'. In reality, many of those 'freedoms' curtail the human rights of others.

Extremists can silence opposition by accusing their detractors of 'intolerance', 'bigotry', 'ignorance', 'religious illiteracy', 'hate speech', 'Islamophobia' or indeed 'extremism'. Sometimes these accusations can be coordinated into a campaign of intimidation.

We have seen examples of these tactics this from hardline Islamists who aim to normalise conservative forms of Islamic dress for women, including face coverings and hijab for prepubescent girls.

In January 2018 St Stephen's Primary School, a top rated primary school in Newham, was forced to back down on its policies of banning headscarves for children under 8 and advising parents that children should not fast for Ramadan. After these policies came to light, the school was sent up to 500 emails a day, many allegedly abusive or threatening violence against staff. Police were called in as a result of the emails. Muslim women who

expressed their opposition to the hijab being worn by young girls also faced threats and abuse.[12]

This campaign not only forced the school to back down on its policies. It had the additional effect of portraying the school as 'intolerant' or 'Islamophobic' for putting what it considered the best interests of the children above demands from religious groups. The hardliners even won support from left-leaning MPs and members of the public who have been convinced that opposition to child hijabs stems from bigotry and ignorance, rather than human rights and gender equality concerns over imposing religious modesty norms on young girls.

Likewise, the Government and school regulator Ofsted has been accused by religious fundamentalists and their apologists of discrimination[13] and of conducting a 'war on religion'[14] for simply holding all schools to consistent standards by ensuring they do not undermine fundamental British values.

Similar tactics have been used to silence those who object to the slaughtering of animals without pre-stunning and the ritual (non-therapeutic) cutting of infants' genitals.

Q8: What works in counter extremism, what doesn't work and what evidence supports this?

Promoting secularism, and policies based on democracy and universal human rights, is the best means of challenging extremist ideas, and protecting citizens from harm from those who hold extremist views.

Secular democracies, where there is no official or favoured religion, promote individual freedom, including freedom of religion or belief, better than less secular countries which do have an official or preferred religion. Research[15] from the Pew Research Center found that countries with an official or preferred religion are more likely to place a high level of government restrictions on other religious groups. In addition to being more likely to ban certain religious groups, countries with a state religion or preferred religion are also more prone to interfere with worship or other religious practices. Seventy-eight per cent of these countries interfered with the worship of religious groups in 2015, compared to only 46% of countries with neither an official or preferred religion.

Catering to demands of special treatment by religious groups does not work to counter extremism. Making special accommodations for religious demands in education and law has led to increased segregation and division in our communities, and in doing so can fuel extremism.

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[12] https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2018/01/school-intimidated-into-lifting-restrictions-on-hijab-and-fasting
[13] https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2018/11/government-threatens-jewish-schools-purity-rabbi-claims
[14] https://www.spiked-online.com/2015/06/09/the-british-states-silent-war-on-religion/
[15] http://www.pewforum.org/2017/10/03/many-countries-favor-specific-religions-officially-or-unofficially/

Restricting free speech is also counterproductive in tackling extremism. We note, for example, that using the term "Islamophobia" to describe both criticism of Islam or Islamic practices in addition to anti-Muslim prejudice, bigotry and hatred has aided Islamist extremists in silencing their critics. Secularists opposing religious and gender segregation in schools, forced hijab wearing and the non-stun slaughter of animals have all been condemned as 'Islamophobic'.

Furthermore, far from combatting prejudice and bigotry, erroneous claims of 'Islamophobia' have become a cover for it. LGBT rights campaigners have been called 'Islamophobes' for criticising the views of Muslim clerics on homosexuality. Meanwhile, ex-Muslims and feminist activists have been called 'Islamophobes' for criticising certain Islamic views and practices relating to women. Even liberal and secular Muslims have been branded 'Islamophobes'. It has become impossible to fight for any internal change in Muslim communities without encountering the slur.

This is why the NSS cautions against the use of the term 'Islamophobia', and opposes calls for the government to make it policy to define Islamophobia as "a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness". "Expressions of Muslimness" can effectively be translated to mean Islamic practices. In a society which is free and open, such practices must remain open to scrutiny and debate.

Q9: If your work involves countering extremism, what are the challenges you face in doing so and how could you be better supported?

Perhaps the biggest challenge we face in this area is public perception of our motives. In the UK, the concepts of secularism and secular democracy are poorly understood and sometimes willfully misunderstood. Secularism and those that advocate for it are sometimes regarded as 'anti religious' or as having an 'atheist agenda'. Secularism is neither of these things; it provides a model for people of all religions and none to coexist peacefully as equals.

The perception of secularism as 'anti-religious' is fuelled by its opponents, which include religious extremists. Among extremists of minority religions (and their left-leaning supporters), the promotion of secularism is regularly framed as 'Western imperialism'.

Challenges also emerge from the far-right. Far-right groups are often keen to support any campaign that they see as restricting the influence of minority religions, especially Islam and Judaism. By vocally backing campaigns that challenge issues such as non-stun slaughter and the hijab, far-right groups provide the fuel that religious extremists need to propagate their narrative of oppression.

In reality, far-right groups are not secularist. They do not seek equality for all but supremacy for their own groups. When secularists challenge established Christian institutions, the far-right are quick to defend those institutions and denounce secularists.

The combination of attacks by religious extremists with the highly selective adoption of some secularist causes by the far-right means that even some who claim to campaign for equality and social progression may support anti-secularist stances.

An example is the Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI), which says it is "dedicated to creating places of worship marginalised communities, spiritual practice and the promotion of inclusive Islamic principles" and aims to "create a family-friendly place of worship that welcomes people regardless of their religious belief, their race, gender, impairments, sexuality or immigration status."[16]

In December 2018, IMI organised an event called "Beyond the Promise of Secularism", which claimed to "look at the ways in which Islam is pitted against 'secularism' in the name of women's rights, equality and democracy, and how these are utilised and weaponised by the State against Muslim communities and other minorities to promote nationalist narratives."[17]

The event was organised in response to a pro-secularism event, "Sharia, Segregation and Secularism" in November, at which 38 speakers from 24 countries (mostly from Muslim backgrounds) spoke of how human rights are being violated through the imposition of Islamic and other religious ideology. Maryam Namazie, one of the organisers of "Sharia, Segregation and Secularism," responded to IMI here.

That individuals supporting causes that are historically tied to secularism – gender equality, LGBT+ rights, democracy and social justice – are absorbing and promoting the narratives of anti-secularist religious extremists, is one of the newest and perhaps most worrying challenges to counter-extremists today.

There also needs to be a much better understanding of the concept of religious freedom that recognises that whilst freedom of belief is absolute, the right to manifest religion or belief can and should sometimes be restricted in order to protect public order, health or morals, and the rights and freedoms of other people.

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[16] http://inclusivemosque.org/about/
[17] https://www.facebook.com/events/575903869490356/?active_tab=about

Q10: What could a positive vision for our country look like?

Our vision is outlined by our secular charter. We campaign for a secular state, where:

• There is no established state religion.

• Everyone is equal before the law, regardless of religion, belief or nonbelief.

• The judicial process is not hindered or replaced by religious codes or processes.

• Freedom of expression is not restricted by religious considerations.

• Religion plays no role in state-funded education, whether through religious affiliation of schools, curriculum setting, organised worship, religious instruction, pupil selection or employment practices.

• The state does not express religious beliefs or preferences and does not intervene in the setting of religious doctrine.

• The state does not engage in, fund or promote religious activities or practices.

• There is freedom of belief, non-belief and to renounce or change religion.

• Public and publicly-funded service provision does not discriminate on grounds of religion, belief or non-belief.

• Individuals and groups are neither accorded privilege nor disadvantaged because of their religion, belief or non-belief.

The religion and belief landscape in Britain is rapidly changing. Polling and academic research consistently show that a majority of Britons do not belong to any religion. As the majority drift away from Christianity, minority faiths and particularly Islam have seen significant growth. Growing irreligiosity and the emergence of other faiths in the UK demands that we urgently rethink the role of religion in public life. We need a long-term, sustainable settlement on the relationship between religion and the state.

This should be based on the principles of secularism. Secularism seeks to guarantee fairness for all, irrespective of religion or belief. It is especially necessary when there is an established or dominant state religion. It also plays an essential role in governing religiously plural societies. Paradoxically, the UK falls into both of these categories. Increasing secularity and the fragmentation of religious belief means the need to treat people as individual citizens rather than as members of a religion has become even more apparent. No faith-based approach from the state will ever encompass every strand of

belief that exists in the UK today, and a human rights, individual-centred approach – rather than the failed multicultural or multi-faithist model – is vital for every citizen to be treated and valued equally. We advocate a national identity based on fundamental values of democracy, separation of religion and state, the rule of law, individual liberty, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

Religious conflict and sectarian grievances have the potential to tear our society apart. The adoption of consistently applied secularist principles will enable citizens to live in peace with other citizens whose creed is different from their own. They should be embraced.

For more details on our vision for a secular democracy in the UK, please see our report Rethinking religion and belief in public life: a manifesto for change.[18]

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[18] https://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/rethinking-religion-and-belief-in-public-life-a-manifesto-for-change.pdf