OCHCR Input Request – Dr Anthony Richards

The first and foremost priority for any strategy that seeks to prevent and counter violent extremism is to counter those who are inclined to use the method of violence or terrorism to pursue their goal. There is, however, in the United Kingdom also a counter-terrorism focus on *non-violent* extremism that is said to be 'conducive' to terrorism (Prevent, 2011). The idea of a non-violent ideology that is conducive to terrorism, I would suggest, however, would be something of a paradox for most terrorism studies scholars, for in the academic literature of the past 50 years terrorism has primarily been understood as ineluctably about violence or the threat of violence. Hence, if an ideology is non-violent it cannot itself be culpable for terrorism. If an ideology *is* culpable for terrorism in some way then it cannot be non-violent.

This broader counter-terrorism concern in the UK with 'the way people think' ideologically as well as 'what they do' (ie. violence) has manifested itself in two ways that can potentially, in my view, undermine the response to violent extremism, and that I'd like to draw attention to:

i)   The UK's Contest strategy (2011) states that 'intervention providers' tasked with preventing individuals becoming terrorists are not permitted to share the same ideological outlook as them: 'intervention providers must not have extremist beliefs' and yet 'they must have credibility' and be 'able to reach and relate to' them. While there is no evidence on this available to me it does prompt the question as to how effective 'non-extremist' interveners are in comparison to 'extremist' ones, and to what extent, if at all, this exclusion of non-violent extremist interveners helps or hinders what should surely be the primary goal of countering violent extremism – preventing acts of violence and terrorism. It is, I would suggest, a far more formidable challenge to change someone's belief system than to change their methods to pursue that belief system. It is arguably those who share the same ideological beliefs, but who disagree with the methods of terrorism and violence to pursue them, that are best placed to convince those inclined towards the use of violence to change their methods.

ii)   For those who hold such non-violent but extremist beliefs, but who also deplore the violent methods of Al Qaeda and Isis, then they may paradoxically be deemed to be part of the 'terrorist problem'. The impact of this is that a potentially vital constituency is excluded from cooperation against violent extremism and terrorism. Such cooperation need not in any way imply endorsement of or sympathy with ideologies that one finds unpalatable.

I would further suggest consulting the Terrorism and Political Violence double issue (2005, Volume 17, Issue 1-2) which places heavy emphasis on the issue of Terrorism and Human Rights, available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ftpv20/17/1-2 .