

UK BID TO SHUT EXTREMIST WEBSITES

By David Barrett, PA Home Affairs Correspondent

17 January 2008

17:00

Press Association National Newswire

English

(c)2008, The Press Association, All Rights Reserved

The Government is to launch a new bid to close down websites which promote violent Muslim extremism, Home Secretary Jacqui Smith said today.

In her first major speech on the subject, she revealed that she will meet members of the online industry in the next few weeks to decide how to crack down on al Qaida-inspired sites. Illegal material will be tracked down and removed, using tactics already deployed against online paedophiles, she said.

"If we are ready and willing to take action to stop the grooming of vulnerable young people on social networking sites, then I believe we should also take action against those who groom vulnerable people for the purposes of violent extremism," Ms Smith said. "In the next few weeks, I will be talking to industry and critically to those in the community about how best to do this, how best to identify material that is drawing vulnerable young people into violent extremism.

"Where there is illegal material on the net, I want it removed." She added: "The internet is not a no-go area for government. We are already working closely with the communications industry to take action against paedophiles and, together, we have improved the way that instances of possible abuse can be reported by internet users."

For example, an organisation called the Internet Watch Foundation, which is funded by the electronic industry, runs a website which allows web users to report suspicious sites if they believe they have paedophilic content.

It was unclear what the Home Secretary was proposing to discuss in the forthcoming meetings, but it could follow a similar route, possibly setting up new ways for radical Muslim sites to be reported.

Speaking at the launch of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, Ms Smith also said:

"Counterterrorist policing is not just about the sharp end - the disruption of those who seek to attack us - crucial though that is. It must also be about stopping people becoming or supporting terrorists. We can't after all simply arrest our way out of this problem."

Shadow security minister Baroness Neville-Jones said: "We welcome the Home Secretary's comments, which are a positive step in the fight against extremism.

"However, the announcement has come much too late." The Government started talking about tackling radicalisation as far back as 2003.

"Why has it taken so long for the Government to organise its response to this serious issue?"

She added: "The Government should also have kept its promise to ban Hizb ut-Tahrir.

"Gateway organisations draw the young and vulnerable into extremism.
"It is no use just targeting websites when such groups are free to undermine British society and values.

"The Government should also realise that the only thing they have been pre-occupied with - extending pre-charge detention - actually risks radicalising young Muslims and serving as a recruiting sergeant for terrorists."

Mohammed Shafiq, director of UK Muslim youth organisation the Ramadhan Foundation, said: "I welcome aspects of Jacqui Smith's speech today on tackling terrorism. We have for quite some time been calling for a change in language used by Government.

"I am concerned that action is not being taken on far-right and fascist websites that also promote violence and hatred.

"The Government is typically not willing to discuss the issues of double standards of UK foreign policy. Unless you deal with the root causes, we will not get rid of terrorism.

"This is a threat and challenge for the whole country. We will only eradicate terrorism as one people and one nation."