

# Britain: Labour government bans 21 organisations under new anti-terror laws

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British Home Secretary Jack Straw has published a list of 21 groups from around the world who will be banned from Britain under anti-terrorist legislation that came into effect on February 19.

Of the organisations named, 16 are Islamic organisations from the Middle East, Turkey or Kashmir. Responding to charges of targeting Muslims, Home Office minister Charles Clarke told a Westminster news conference, "We deeply respect the contribution which the Muslim community makes to the life of this country. We are concerned on the other hand to isolate and attack international terrorist organisations, and that is why we have named the organisations we have.

"We make no presumption that Muslim organisations are more or less likely to be terrorist organisations. I am aware that there are some people who may argue within the Muslim community that this is an attack on Muslims—that would be an entirely wrong understanding of the decisions we are publicising today."

Media coverage has largely centred on the banning of Muslim groups and little notice was given to the more sinister denial issued by the minister. Clarke said that governments with whom Britain has friendly relations, such as India, Turkey or Saudi Arabia, had not had any influence regarding which groups were selected for proscription. However, he admitted that some countries had "made representations" about organisations which they thought should be banned, but insisted that "they did no more than that".

Moreover, Clarke claimed that the composition of the list was "not driven by foreign policy considerations".

Any objective scrutiny of the list of banned organisations makes a mockery of this last assertion. Over half of the list is made up of groups from the

Middle East, most notably the al Qaeda network led by Osama bin Laden. This organisation was blamed for the bomb attacks on the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, which resulted in the retaliatory bombing of the Sudan and Afghanistan by the US, with the support of Britain. One suspected member of the organisation is presently fighting an extradition request by the United States government for his alleged involvement in the 1998 bombings.

Also on the list is the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has conducted a guerrilla struggle against Turkey aimed at establishing an independent Kurdish state. PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan was abducted from Kenya in February 1999 and flown to Turkey, where a show trial condemned him to death by hanging. Reports in the *Sunday Times* in August 1999 revealed that a mercenary outfit with close links to the Special Air Service (SAS) and British Intelligence had offered to assassinate Ocalan. The *Times* reports that Aims Ltd. proposed a fee to the Turkish government of £5.75 million for carrying out the assassination, after being asked by Ankara in 1995 to advise on how best to neutralise Ocalan.

The list includes only two European groups: the Basque separatist ETA and the Greek 17 November Revolutionary Organisation, said to be responsible for last June's killing of Brigadier Stephen Saunders, British military attaché in Athens. Also listed are two Sikh separatist groups, three Kashmiri separatist organisations and four Palestinian organisations.

The new legislation marks a significant deepening of the attack by the British government upon democratic rights. As well as introducing measures to include actions taken or "incited" abroad, for the first time the definition of terrorism has been widened to include threats against property, which would previously have

come under the charge of "criminal damage." The wording of the Act is itself of political significance. Clause one defines terrorism as "the use or threat for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause, of action which: Involves serious violence against person or property: Endangers the life of any person or; Creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public."

What all the groups listed have in common is the advocacy of "political, religious or ideological" causes regarded as hostile to the interests of the British government and the ruling elite it represents.

Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than by the inclusion of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) upon the list. The "Tamil Tigers" are fighting for a Tamil state in the north and east of the island, where they have been engaged in a bitter war against the occupation of the Sri Lankan army.

In recent months discussions have been held aimed at pushing through a British-backed settlement. In the course of these talks, threats were made that Britain may proscribe the LTTE, shutting down its European headquarters in London, and cutting off one of its biggest sources of funding.

The list will be presented to Parliament in a draft order that must be debated and approved by both the Commons and the House of Lords, and it could grow longer.

In the past so-called anti-terrorist legislation was mainly reserved for pursuing the reactionary aims of British imperialism in Ireland. The new Act will be a central weapon of British foreign policy around the globe. Furthermore, it gives the government unprecedented powers in relation to domestic politics: It can be used against anyone advocating direct action, and the Act also prohibits strikes by workers in essential services.

The Act has been condemned by UK-based civil rights groups, who believed it could well be in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, which was incorporated into British law last year.



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