

A GLOBAL RESPONSE TO GLOBAL TERRORISM

- Jack Straw's Speech

Those elections, I am told, had a higher turnout than we achieved here in this country for our general election. There are challenges ahead – above all security and the threat of terrorism and inter-communal violence. No-one underestimates these. But for Iraq to have met the United Nations timetable is a remarkable achievement and offers hope for the future.

For the same reason, we offer robust and consistent support for political and socio-economic development and human rights across the Islamic world. We are doing so bilaterally – through programme funds specifically designed to foster the rule of law, economic reform and growth, democratic participation and good governance – and multilaterally through the European Union's EuroMed partnership programme and the G8 Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative.

We hope that all this will improve stability and security in the region. Terrorists find it more difficult to operate in countries with democratic and accountable governments. People with clear opportunities, a greater say in running their own affairs and more hope for the future, are less likely to be fooled by the terrorist propaganda.

But this is not just a Western agenda – it is the same one which the mostly Muslim authors of the Arab Human Development Reports have advocated so powerfully and persuasively. Transparent and clean government, a free press and an independent judiciary offer the chance for the young populations of the Middle East to realise their potential. The main beneficiaries of good government are the people themselves.

But it is an agenda which we in the West need to approach with some humility – not only because our still imperfect Western democracies took centuries to evolve, but also because the recent attacks in London show that we still have work to do in our own communities. This is why after the July 7th bombings the Government and Britain's Muslim communities launched the Preventing Extremism Together initiative.

I often continuously talk to representatives of British Muslims about their specific concerns and how we can root them better into society. Although we may disagree – sometimes very strongly – on aspects of foreign policy, we share an equally

passionate belief that the way to resolve those differences is through dialogue and democracy, not through violence. Equally, overseas we must be prepared to engage with those groups which are ready to align themselves to political processes and peaceful means to achieve their objectives, even though we may not feel comfortable with their aims.

But there is a further point I want to make. If we want to be seen to deliver justice and offer a stronger and better worldview than that of the terrorist, we have to be seen to stand by our values and our strengths. We have to show that when it comes to counter-terrorism we practice what we preach.

So, I want to set this out as plainly as possible. This Government is committed absolutely to our obligations under United Kingdom and international law.

In this context, I want to underline the enormous importance to us – in fact, the indispensability – of our alliance with the United States in the struggle against international terrorism. It is a partnership which has saved many lives of many nationalities. Condoleezza Rice set out in her statement last month the principles and values governing US policy and practice on counter-terrorism, including the rejection of torture. And when President Bush signed into law the Detainee Treatment Act on 30 December, he made clear that it codified what was already US government policy: the prohibition of the cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of any detainee in US custody anywhere.

Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen, these days you often hear the accusation made that the scales have tipped away from human rights and towards counter-terrorism. It is a false dichotomy. There need be no zero sum equation between human rights and counter-terrorism. Counter-terrorism measures are there to help us preserve a democratic and free society. At the most basic level, measures which protect innocent civilians from an attack are supporting one of the most basic human rights of all – the right to be alive – and they protect people's ability to enjoy fully their other rights. Equally, we respect and promote human rights not only because it is the correct thing to do but because that is one of the most effective ways to undermine the terrorists.