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A Scandal at Lambeth

By Michael Bourdeaux (*)

The Times (20.11.2010) / HRWF (01.12.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The rot set in with Archbishop Michael Ramsey! That was the unequivocal message which Metropolitan Hilarion, chairman of the Department for External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, delivered at a dinner in his honour at Lambeth Palace on 9 September. On the watch of this saintly man, Bishop John Robinson published *Honest to God*, for which there was "no sanction" from on high and which, according to Ilarion, inaugurated the downward slide of the Anglican Church towards liberalism.

Actually the above needs modification. It is there in detail in the official Russian text, but this passage seems to have been expurgated by Metropolitan Hilarion, possibly in the last few minutes before he delivered it. There are, in fact, at least three versions of his speech in existence: what he planned to say (eight packed pages which would have taken at least 45 minutes to deliver); what he did say (a pre-dinner speech of twenty minutes) and a sanitised version subsequently posted on the website of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Whatever emerges from this confusion, one fact is ineradicable: Metropolitan Hilarion, while an honoured guest, caused grave offence by criticising his host, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and his church for alleged "liberalism". Apparently, the Metropolitan promised to excise a passage falsely criticising the Anglican Church for supporting abortion and euthanasia, but this crept in anyway.

Whether the Archbishop's desire to visit the Russian Orthodox Church formally has suffered a setback, only time will tell. One positive outcome, though, is that the Anglican authorities plan formally and regularly to inform the Metropolitan of key developments in the communion. It is perhaps surprising that this does not already happen. It will not be easy for Hilarion to atone for his offence, though some of his entourage were deeply apologetic for what had happened.

Hilarion is a post-Soviet man. Born Grigori Alfeyev in July 1966, originally studying music, he was ordained in Lithuania during the last days of communism. Following a lengthy stay in Oxford, achieving a doctorate, he was appointed assistant bishop in London in 2002, where he came into conflict with the aged and deeply respected Metropolitan Antony Bloom, leading to a rapid recall. But this did not prevent his

meteoric rise: Brussels, Vienna, Bishop of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations, Archbishop (2009), elevated to Metropolitan a year later. He has somehow found time also to develop his musical activity. His St Matthew Passion received a standing ovation at the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory in 2007. How could a man of such outstanding intellect cause such offence – more than once – in his capacity as a church diplomat?

With his breadth of education, Metropolitan Hilarion knows his own church history, yet he throws stones in a glasshouse, taking it on himself to attack the liberalism of the Anglican Communion while remaining silent on the past and present ills of his own church. In dialogue with Metropolitan Hilarion, one might ask why his church has continued to bless the Russian military, which inflicted genocidal attacks against the Muslim Chechens seeking independence from Moscow. Not one word of criticism has ever come from the Moscow Patriarchate. The London Russian parish, so well known to the Metropolitan, has used strong-arm tactics to acquire full rights over the various church properties, the cathedral and several dwelling houses, imposing a strong Moscow-backed regime over those following the spiritual teaching of the late Metropolitan Antony.

Perhaps most seriously, there are unresolved questions related to the undoubted collaboration of at least some clergy and members of the episcopate with the Soviet regime. Some individuals repented of their sins, but there has never been an all-embracing enquiry into what happened behind the scenes (or, indeed, sometimes on public platforms). The Moscow priest, Fr Gleb Yakunin, while an elected deputy to the Duma twenty years ago, had access for a short time to the KGB archives and made known the horrors he found. A former political prisoner, he was then suppressed by his own church and has never been reinstated.

Not much better is the case of Fr Pavel Adelheim, another former prisoner of conscience who lost a leg in an attempt on his life in a labour camp. In post-Soviet times he served in three parishes in the diocese of Pskov, but his authoritarian bishop, Yevsevi, could not abide independent initiatives such as starting new parishes and establishing a children's home. Known even in the UK as an outstanding pastor, Fr Pavel has been expelled from all this work and the Moscow Patriarchate has not rectified the injustice.

At the same time, there are some optimistic signs. Sergei Filatov, a respected lay commentator on church affairs in Moscow, has just stated in a lengthy article on the current policies of the Patriarchate: "New life is invading the Department of Charitable Works and Social Service [of the Moscow Patriarchate], under Bishop Pantileimon of Orekhovo-Zuyevsky." Such longstanding scandals as the treatment of Fr Kochetkov, rusticated for trying to introduce modern Russian into the Church Slavonic liturgy, have been resolved. The distinguished artist, Fr Zinon, also a victim of the Bishop of Pskov, has been reinstated to become virtually the Patriarchate's official iconographer. The spiritual heritage of the outstanding theologian, Fr Alexander Men', murdered in 1990, is finally beginning to be valued in official circles.

Patriarch Kirill, elected in January 2009, is a stronger character than even Metropolitan Hilarion and also had a spell of British education learning English. He has it in his power to rectify the ills arising from Hilarion's ill-starred conduct and an invitation to Archbishop Rowan Williams to visit Moscow would be an excellent beginning.

(*) Michael Bourdeaux, founder of Keston College in England, worked to examine and explain the systematic destruction of religion in Iron Curtain nations during the Cold War and to defend the rights of faiths in these countries to worship as they chose. When the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc regimes collapsed, Bourdeaux's efforts for universal religious freedom were widely embraced. He received the Templeton Prize in 1984.

Saudi school lessons in UK concern government

BBC (22.11.2010) / HRWF (23.11.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.org> - The government says it will not tolerate anti-Semitic and homophobic lessons being taught to Muslim children in the UK.

BBC Panorama found that more than 40 Saudi Students' Schools and Clubs are teaching the official Saudi national curriculum to about 5,000 pupils.

One text book shows how the hands and feet of thieves are chopped off.

The Saudi government said it had no official ties to the part-time schools and clubs and did not endorse them.

However, a building in west London where Panorama obtained one of the text books is owned by the Saudi government.

The director of education for the Saudi Students' Schools and Clubs said the Saudi Cultural Bureau, which is part of the embassy, had authority over the network.

'Hellfire'

Education Secretary Michael Gove said there was no place for the Saudi teachings with regard to Jews or homosexuals in Britain: "To my mind it doesn't seem to me that this is the sort of material that should be used in English schools."

He said in light of the BBC's findings, the school inspectorate Ofsted was looking into the possible regulation and inspection of out-of-hours schools and clubs. At present, part-time schools do not fall within Ofsted's mandate.

"Ofsted are doing some work in this area, they'll be reporting to me shortly about how we can ensure that part-time provision is better registered and better inspected in the future," Mr Gove said.

One of the text books asks children to list the "reprehensible" qualities of Jewish people. A text for younger children asks what happens to someone who dies who is not a believer in Islam - the answer given in the text book is "hellfire".

Another text describes the punishment for gay sex as death and states a difference of opinion about whether it should be carried out by stoning, burning with fire or throwing the person over a cliff.

In a book for 14-year-olds, Sharia law and its punishment for theft are explained, including detailed diagrams about how hands and feet of thieves are amputated.

'Out of context'

In a written response, the Saudi embassy said such materials were often taken out of context and often referred to historical descriptions.

But Neal Robinson, an expert in the Koran, said the context in which the materials are presented comes with risks.

"To present it cold, as it seems to be here, just part of the teaching of Islam, no it's not wise. In the wrong hands I think it is... ammunition for anti-Semitism."

The use of these materials in Britain comes three years after a BBC investigation found a Saudi-funded school in west London was using texts that referred to Jewish people and Christians in derogatory terms. That prompted assurances at the highest diplomatic levels that the materials would be removed.

Panorama has also found evidence of extreme views on some private, full-time Muslim school websites, including messages that state: "Our children are exposed to a culture that is in opposition to almost everything Islam stands for" and "We need to defend our children from the forces of evil".

MP Barry Sheerman, former Labour chairman of the Children, Schools and Families parliamentary committee, said politicians had avoided the issue of controversial teachings in some Muslim schools.

"There are some very good Muslim schools but there are some Muslim schools that give me great cause for concern that is often around the ethos of the schools, the focus of the school and the kind of ideology that is concerning."

Dr Usama Hasan, an Islamic scholar and part-time imam in east London, warned of the dangers of segregating young Muslims in Britain, particularly the seminaries where the next generation of imams are being educated.

"They don't interact with people who are not Muslim... they don't learn the ingredients of the western world, so it's very easy for them to read the medieval texts which were written at a time when Islam was under attack and say non-believers are our enemies and we have to fight them."

Complaint: Mr Richard Biddlecombe v. Radio Times

HRWF (02.07.2010) / HRWF (05.06.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Mr Richard Biddlecombe, Media Consultant to the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, complained to the Press Complaints Commission that the magazine's synopsis of a radio programme about the Unification Church had referred to the Church as a "cult". He said that this was inaccurate and misleading, as the Church actually appeared on the Register of Charities as a bone fide religion, charitable in law, and that the radio broadcast summarised was being investigated by the BBC's Editorial Standards Unit. He expressed particular concerns regarding the synopsis' inclusion of claims that the subject of the radio programme - a Unification Church event in 1973 - was organised "in the hope of swelling the Moonies' numbers (and coffers)", and said that the estate on which the event took place was not a 'virtual prison', as the synopsis had suggested.

The complainant also said that the use of the term "moonie" was derogatory and discriminated against Unificationists.

Resolution: The magazine explained that the synopsis was a summary of the content of the radio broadcast in question. The complaint was resolved when the editor wrote personally to the complainant, apologising for upset caused, and noting the points raised in the complaint for future reference.

Libel court 'is not the right place for faith disputes'

Jerome Taylor

The Independent (18.05.2010) / HRWF (19.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - One of Britain's most senior judges said yesterday that libel courts must not become places where religious and doctrinal differences are hammered out.

Mr Justice Eady made his comments while summing up his reasons for suspending a defamation case brought by an Indian "holy man" against a British journalist.

The dispute centred around an article published by Hardeep Singh in the Sikh Times in August 2007 entitled: "Cult divides Sikh congregation in High Wycombe". Mr Singh, a freelance journalist and a practicing Sikh, was investigating the links between a North Indian religious organisation and three gurdwaras (Sikh temples) in Britain.

At the time the article was published, followers of the Nirmala Kutia Johal, a Sikh sect based in the Punjab, were divided over the accession of Sant Baba Jeet Singh, who had become their leader in 2002 following the death of the group's previous guru.

Mr Singh's article described Nirmala Kutia Johal as a "cult" and said that disagreements over the accession of the group's new guru had spilled out into the open among supporters in High Wycombe. Baba Jeet Singh, an Indian national who has never travelled to the UK, issued libel proceedings in the British courts against both Mr Singh and the Sikh Times, which later went bust.

Baba Jeet Singh claimed that Hardeep Singh's article defamed his character by describing him as a leader of a cult and an impostor who had disturbed the peace in the Sikh community of High Wycombe, and had promoted blasphemy and the sexual exploitation and abuse of women.

Mr Singh, who lives in Slough, Berkshire, denied libel, pleading justification, fair comment and qualified privilege. His counsel, Mark Hill QC, asked Mr Justice Eady to suspend – or "stay" – the case because the allegations centred around the "doctrine, tradition and practice of the Sikh religion" which were a subject, he argued, that Britain's secular courts could not rule with authority on.

Mr Justice Eady agreed and decided to stay the case with no right of appeal. His decision is significant because it reinforces the notion that Britain's courts are primarily secular and therefore cannot get involved in complicated theological or doctrinal libel arguments which rely on faith – rather than fact.

Citing an example of where the libel courts could intervene, Mr Justice Eady said that if someone accused a religious leader of having "their hands in a till", judges could decide whether that accusation was correct and whether defamation had taken place. But, in this case, he said "The issue of whether this claimant is fairly described as an impostor cannot be decided without examining the doctrines of the Sikh faith."

Dan Tench, a litigation partner at the firm Olswang, said the judgement revealed how libel courts try to avoid certain issues. "Courts are not always fearful of treading on issues surrounding doctrinal or religious belief," Mr Tench said. "But libel courts often act differently. When it comes to accusations of defamation, the courts have become increasingly reluctant to get involved in matters of legitimate and expert debate."

Speaking outside the High Court yesterday, Hardeep Singh said he was "delighted and relieved" with the verdict. But he also called for a reform of Britain's libel laws. "This exhausting battle to clear my name has cost me in excess of £90,000 and yet it took Justice Eady only three hours to throw out the case," he said.

"It seems [Baba] Jeet Singh hoped I would be forced to back out of the case as the costs mounted, which begs the question: should freedom of speech in this country only be

available to the rich who have means to defend themselves in court? Ultimately, our libel laws need urgent reform, not only to protect British journalists but also to prevent our laws being abused by foreign nationals."

Court battles

Daily Mail v The Unification Church

The Moonies' took the paper to court in 1981 over a two-page spread the paper ran under the headline: "The Church That Breaks Up Families". The paper interviewed two former members of the Unification Church who accused it of brainwashing them. The case continued for five months. The Unification Church were eventually ordered to pay £1m in costs and the Inland Revenue was advised to investigate its tax free status.

Daily Mail v Jonathan Blakely

A self-styled bishop who runs his own church, Blakely took the Mail to court in 2003 over a comment piece following his appearance on the TV show This Morning, where he presided over the wedding of a gay couple. The Mail attacked the ceremony and questioned Rev Blakeley's right to call himself a bishop. The case was stayed for the same reason as yesterday's case.

Anti-Semitic attacks against Jews 'rise in the UK'

Dominic Casciani

BBC (05.02.2010) / HRWF (08.02.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Attacks on Jews in the UK reached record levels in 2009, according to figures compiled within the community.

The Community Security Trust (CST) said it had recorded 924 incidents over the year, 55% more than the previous high of 598 incidents in 2006.

The organisation, which monitors incidents against Jewish people and organisations, said the rise was linked to last year's Gaza conflict.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown described the figures as "deeply troubling".

The CST is a Jewish community organisation which collects figures on attacks and advises organisations such as synagogues on security.

It works closely with the police and government on combating racial and religious hatred. The organisation says the record rise follows two years of falling figures, with the majority of the incidents occurring during or immediately after the conflict in Gaza between Israel and Hamas.

The two-month Gaza conflict began in December 2008 and the CST said acts of anti-Semitism shot up in January and eventually levelled in April.

The vast majority of incidents were abusive behaviour, but 124 of the reports were acts of violence. Some 37 incidents were targeted at children on their way to school, the organisation said.

'Stand firm'

In a statement issued through the CST, Gordon Brown said: "The increase in anti-Semitic incidents recorded by CST in the early part of last year is deeply troubling and I want to be unequivocal today.

"I am a proud friend of Israel and welcome a robust debate about how we ensure both a secure Israel and a viable Palestinian state existing side by side.

"The debate is welcome, but no strength of feeling can ever justify violent extremism or attacks and we will stand firm against all those who would use anti-Israeli feeling as an excuse or disguise for anti-Semitism and attacks on the Jewish community."

One incident included strips of bacon being placed on the door handles of a Leeds synagogue. On another occasion, a 12-year-old girl, the only Jew at her school, was surrounded by other pupils who chanted "death to Jews".

Shadow schools secretary Michael Gove said: "Every one in public life - politicians, media figures, academics and community leaders - has to recognise that this growth in anti-Semitism is a stain on our society.

"History tells us that whenever Jewish individuals feel less safe, society as a whole is becoming less free. We must learn the lessons of the past."

And the Liberal Democrat's home affairs spokesman Chris Huhne said: "We must do everything we can to prevent foreign conflicts from spilling over on to British streets and campuses."

The police and government agencies do not use the CST's figures and instead rely on statistics for recorded offences and convictions in courts.

The most up-to-date figures on hate crimes suggest there was a fall in racial and religiously aggravated incidents between 2007 and 2008.

Some police forces calculate local trends for religiously motivated incidents, but there are no national figures for hate crimes against any specific group, such as Jews or Muslims.

Last month, researchers at Exeter University called on Muslims to start counting their own figures in a similar fashion to the CST, saying there was evidence of an under-reporting of anti-Muslim hatred.

Should the UK ban the Muslim face veil?

Vanessa Barford

BBC (27.01.2010) / HRWF (29.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A French parliamentary committee has recommended a partial ban on women wearing Islamic face veils. So should there be a similar ban in the UK - and would it work?

Just across the English Channel, allowing a woman to veil her face in public places such as hospitals, government offices and on public transport could soon be called into question.

In a country where the separation of state and religion is enshrined in law, a parliamentary committee report ruled the veil was "contrary to the values of the republic"

and called on parliament to adopt a formal resolution proclaiming "all of France is saying 'no' to the full veil".

France - which is home to five million Muslims - has a history of debating the full veil, with President Nicolas Sarkozy declaring it "not welcome" in 2010.

The country banned Muslim headscarves and other "conspicuous" religious symbols at state schools in 2004.

Despite calls from some groups for a full or partial ban on veils, there is currently no ban on Islamic dress in the UK - although schools were allowed to set out their own dress code in 2007 after several high-profile court cases.

'Not British'

But could a ban by Britain's nearest continental neighbours influence policy back home?

In January 2010, Schools Secretary Ed Balls said it was "not British" to tell people what to wear in the street.

But writing in the Independent, journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, who chairs the group British Muslims for Secular Democracy, said she supported restrictions on wearing the face veil in key public spaces.

"This covering makes women invisible, invalidates their participatory rights and confirms them as evil temptresses.

"I feel the same fury when I see Orthodox Jewish women in wigs, with their many children, living tightly proscribed lives," she writes.

She said progressive Muslims came out "daily" against the burka, which was an "un-Islamic custom".

"During the Hajj pilgrimage no woman covers her face. The burka makes women more, not less, conspicuous, and communication is unequal because one party hides all expression," she claimed.

'Mutual respect'

However, Yvonne Ridley, a British journalist who converted to Islam after she was captured by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, said the French decision was "driven by Islamophobia - not the freedom or liberties of women".

She said she did not know anyone who had been forced to wear the niqab (which covers the face apart from the eyes) or the body-covering burka.

Some Muslims chose to wear the niqab for religious reasons - because they believed it brought them closer to their faith - she said.

She said the UK "would not tolerate" a move like the one in France.

"Muslim women in Britain are more empowered than their sisters on the continent, largely because of the amazing anti-war movement which brought secular women alongside Muslim women."

She said she understood why some people found the veil "unnerving", but insisted "everyone should have a choice".

Only a "tiny minority" of Muslims - a couple of thousand - wore the niqab in the UK, and "most of them were white Western converts who you could not say were quiet, suppressed women," she said.

"We can't allow legislation against the niqab. If we let it go the hijab will be next. Everyone should have choice. Where would it stop, hair dye, face piercing?", she said.

'Election tool'

Shaista Gohir, executive director at Muslim Women's Network UK, agreed the face veil should not be banned in the UK, but said there needed to be a "internal debate amongst the Muslim community".

"There needs to be more research on why some women choose to wear the veil and how they think they are perceived. Muslim communities need to instigate, be proactive, rather than wait for politicians like Jack Straw to say something and respond," she said.

In 2006, Jack Straw angered Muslim groups after he said face veils were a "visible statement of separation and of difference" and suggested they could make community relations harder.

Ms Gohir said she could understand people might have reservations about the impact the veil had on integration - and it might prevent women from gaining employment - but a minority of Muslims felt the interpretation of Islam meant wearing a veil was part of their religion.

She said veils needed to be looked at "properly" in a "non-racist way".

But she expressed concern that politicians might use "issues like this" in the lead-up to the elections.

Last week ex-UKIP leader Nigel Farage, who leads UKIP's 13 MEPs in Brussels, said the veils were a symbol of an "increasingly divided Britain", that they "oppressed" women, and were a potential security threat - and called for a total ban.

The BNP has already called for the veil to be banned in schools.

"Muslims are obviously in the spotlight. The BNP and UKIP are playing on an anti-Muslim sentiment; there is a real concern the face veil and issues like it will be used as an election tool", said Ms Gohir.

"Just because France are doing something, Britain does not have to follow suit."

UK to ban controversial Islamist group

CNN (10.01.2010) / HRWF (12.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Britain is set to ban a Muslim group that recently caused outrage by proposing a demonstration in the town that receives the bodies of British war dead killed abroad, the Home Office said Sunday.

The ban would prevent Al-Muhajiroun, also known as Islam4UK, from having meetings or raising money. Attending a meeting or being a member of Al-Muhajiroun or Islam4UK would be a criminal offense, a Home Office spokesman said. The spokesman declined to be named, in line with government policy.

"Proscription is a tough but necessary power to tackle terrorism," said the Home Office, which is responsible for domestic security in the United Kingdom.

Two offshoots of Al-Muhajiroun, Al-Ghurabaa and Saviour Sect Group, were banned in July 2006.

The ban should come into force in a matter of "days, not weeks," the spokesman said. It would require approval from both houses of Parliament.

The group's leader, controversial British Muslim cleric Anjem Choudary, has been threatening to stage a march as a protest against the war in Afghanistan.

Choudary -- informed of the government's plans by CNN -- said the Home Office could not shut him down.

"We're not going to stop because the government bans an organization," he told CNN by phone. "If that means setting up another platform under another label, then so be it."

A ban "will just make the use of those names ... illegal, but Muslims everywhere are obliged to work collectively to establish the Islamic State and Sharia law in the UK or wherever they are -- those things can't change," he added.

Asked if he was surprised or disappointed by the decision, Choudary said "No, not at all, we expect this and much more than that."

His Web site appeared to have been shut down as of Sunday, apparently by Islam4UK itself.

In place of a full Web site, Islam4UK.com now contains only a new, relatively conciliatory letter posted Saturday and labeled "An Appeal to Families of British Soldiers to have an Honest Dialogue," and a note saying "Islam4UK Back Soon."

It was not clear when the Web site was scaled back.

Choudary drew headlines last week by proposing a march through the English town of Wootton Bassett.

The bodies of British war dead are traditionally brought to the town, near a Royal Air Force base, when they are returned to the country.

As hearses carry the flag-draped British remains, relatives and friends, along with local residents, line the streets of the town in scenes of public mourning widely reported by British media.

Choudary's proposal to march empty coffins through the streets drew fury and outrage.

The march would be illegal if the group is banned, the Home Office said.

Choudary himself "would have to renounce membership to avoid breaking the law," the spokesman said. "His group should cease to exist."

The decision to ban the group was made not only because of the plan to march in Wootton Bassett, the Home Office said.

Choudary has never announced a date for his planned march, and local police said he had not contacted them about it, as people planning marches are required to do before staging a demonstration.

But he published an open letter, "To the Families of British Soldiers who have died or who are currently in Afghanistan," on the Web site of Islam4UK on January 4. The group had earlier used a short statement on its Web site to announce its intention to stage the protest.

In the letter, Choudary accuses soldiers of "murderous crimes," and says the United States and United Kingdom are seeking to "establish their own military, economic, strategic and ideological interests in the region."

British and American troops are suffering "depression" as they realize "there is no real moral or ethic (sic) reason for them to murder innocent men, women and children to fulfill their politicians (sic) agenda," the preacher says.

The threat of the march prompted more than 725,000 people to join a Facebook group opposing it as of Sunday, a week after Choudary posted a letter online justifying it.

"The highway for heroes and wonderful people of WB do not deserve this march to happen," the group's home page says, in reference to Wootton Bassett. "This group can march anywhere it wishes in the country but have chosen WB to cause outrage & offense. Islam4UK is an extremists (sic) Islamic group and does not represent the Muslim community in this country."

Choudary signs his open letter "UK Head of Al-Muhajiroun," describing it as a British group which supports al Qaeda. Choudary spoke positively of Osama Bin Laden in the letter and in interviews with British media last week.

The new letter makes no reference to Bin Laden or his group.

"Many people in Britain are grieving for their loved ones who have died or who are injured, just as we too grieve the loss of the innocent men, women and children in Afghanistan at the hands of the US led alliance," the new letter says.

"In addition many people of Britain do not agree with the war and the oppression and injustice which is being perpetrated under the guise of fighting for freedom and democracy, just as we too want the British to withdraw their troops from Muslim land. With this common ground we must all demand that the British regime pull out from Afghanistan."

In the new letter, Choudary denies planning to march empty coffins through Wootton Bassett.

The Terrorism Act of 2000 gives the home secretary the power to ban groups if the punishment is "proportionate and based on evidence that a group is concerned in terrorism as defined in the Terrorism Act 2000," according to the Home Office.

According to the law, groups can be banned if they commit or participate in acts of terrorism; prepare for terrorism; or promote or encourage terrorism. The Home Secretary can also take into account factors such as specific threats posed to the United Kingdom or British nationals overseas and the extent of the group's presence in the UK.

The London branch of the moderate Islamic group Minhaj-ul-Quran International welcomed the Home Office announcement Sunday.

"We have always supported the idea of banning extreme individuals and extremist groups from working in this country and have for a very long time been frustrated that they have been allowed to infiltrate universities and mosques to promote a message of hatred with their anti-West agendas," said spokesman Shahid Mursaleen.

Founded nearly 30 years ago, and present in 90 countries, the group aims to promote religious moderation and a modern interpretation of the Quran.

"For too long a small group of extremists are trying to hijack Islam and British Muslims," Mursaleen said.
