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Religious hate crime in Scotland

Scottish Government (18.11.2011) / HRWF (12.12.2011) – www.hrwf.net - Statistics published by the Scottish Government today provide new details on the scale of religious hate crimes across Scotland.

The information has been made available following a pledge made by the First Minister that a more comprehensive analysis of data relating to Section 74 of the Criminal Justice Scotland Act 2003 would be undertaken and published.

The data shows that in 2010-11:

- There were 693 charges aggravated by religious prejudice - up nearly 10 per cent in a year and the highest level in four years
- 58 per cent of charges related to offences which were derogatory towards Roman Catholicism and 37 per cent of charges related to offences which were derogatory to Protestantism. 2.3 per cent related to Judaism, and 2.1 per cent related to Islam
- There were charges with a religious aggravation in 27 out of Scotland's 32 Local Authority areas
- 79 per cent of all offences took place in the Strathclyde police force area
- A third of the total charges were related directly to football
- In just over 60 per cent of cases, the accused had consumed alcohol prior to the offence
- Fewer than 5 per cent of incidents were related to marches and parades

Minister for Community Safety, Roseanna Cunningham said:

"These statistics show the shameful reality of religious hate crime in Scotland. Like racism, this kind of behaviour simply shouldn't be happening in a modern Scotland but sadly, it seems there are still those who think hatred on the basis of religion is acceptable.

"We need a wholesale change of attitudes, and this new report provides a valuable insight into the nature and scale of religious hate crime across Scotland. It shows that charges for religious hatred are up ten per cent on last year, to the highest level in four years, and it also shows that a disproportionate number of religious hate crimes are directly linked to football, both in stadiums, on public transport and in bars.

"That is why we have made clear that we will be looking at further wide ranging actions across society, such as in schools and communities, in addition to legislation to send out a clear message that this behaviour will not be tolerated any longer.

"This report supports the direction of travel we are taking. We need to eradicate sectarianism once and for all by cracking down on all forms and expressions of sectarian hatred, through a combination of education and tough enforcement.

"We must deal with sectarianism in the same way as with racism, and drink-driving. This Bill will not be the conclusive answer or the only solution, but it is the beginning of the end.

"You can either do nothing and allow the status quo which allows the mindless bigot to thrive or we can take the strong action needed now and send out a message loud and clear that this behaviour is not going to be tolerated any longer."

The report does not present any information about the religious beliefs or affiliations of the people targeted by the offensive conduct. Current legislation defines a religiously aggravated offence as an incident where the offender evinces towards the victim "malice and ill-will based on the victim's membership (or perceived membership) of a religious group or a social or cultural group with a perceived religious affiliation", or, the offence is motivated by the same. There is no data held by Police or COPFS on victims' membership of religious or cultural groups with a perceived religious affiliation as this is not relevant to the definition of the crime in law.

The proposed new laws seek to create two new distinct offences:

- The first offence targets any sectarian and threatening behaviour expressed at and around football matches which is likely to cause public disorder
- The second offence relates to the communication of threats of serious harm or which are intended to stir up religious hatred on the internet or other communications

They will give the police and the courts vital additional powers to deal with the minority of people who tarnish the image of Scotland through their expressions of hatred and bigotry at and around football. And those who peddle threats and hatred on the internet. See:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2011/11/18120149> and
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/11/17154035/3>

Draft bill on the criminalisation of the purchase and sale of sex: Consultation

Compass Direct (10.02.2011) / HRWF Int. (10.02.2011) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net>
– Further to my previous correspondence I am writing to remind you that my consultation on the Criminalisation of the Purchase and Sale of Sex (Scotland) Bill is due to close on 18 February. This means you now have about a week in which to feed your views back to the consultation.

The response to the consultation so far has been encouraging. However, prostitution and those involved are rarely the subject of political debate or public scrutiny so I am looking for as wide a range of views as possible. I hope that you will be able to respond before the deadline.

Should you find it difficult to meet the deadline please do not hesitate to contact my constituency office. A copy of the consultation is attached, it can also be obtained by logging on to:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/MembersBills/documents/20101122CriminalisationofPurchaseofSex.pdf>

I look forward to hearing from you. I apologise if you have already sent in a submission by the time this reminder reaches you. If you have applied for an extension to the deadline already please ignore this e mail.

Yours sincerely
Trish Godman MSP

Foreword to the draft bill

“The principal aim of my Bill is to outlaw the act of purchasing sex. I readily acknowledge that criminalising the purchaser of sexual services is a radical objective. However, for too long most people in society have viewed prostitution and the role of male clients with tolerance, complacency and even indifference. Demand has remained invisible and without scrutiny.

Prostitution and those involved in this so called industry are rarely the subject of political debate or public scrutiny except when prostitutes are murdered by their clients.

People who buy sex do so of their own free will, whereas the majority of prostitutes are unwilling participants in this exchange of cash for sex. It is time to place the purchaser in an entirely different role, namely as one who commits a criminal offence when seeking to buy sexual services. My Bill aims to challenge the whole acceptance of buying sex.

This is a formidable legislative task with numerous opponents. Nevertheless, I believe that we should seek to protect the so called sexual service providers by legislating against those who pay for their services. Prostitution should be regarded in Scotland as an abuse and exploitation that will not be tolerated.

I look forward to receiving your views on this important subject. Contact information is available at the end of this document.”

Trish Godman MSP
