

Item 3: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression Agenda Item 3, Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

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Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) is a not-for-profit campaign, research and advocacy organisation founded and based in the United Kingdom. It was set up in 1997 and works for redress of human rights violations and a better understanding of rights and norms across confessional, ethnic, national, political and other boundaries.

IHRC has consultative status with the UN – ECOSOC.

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Freedom of expression

We are deeply concerned with the trend of extending state powers that curtail freedom of expression under the pretexts of security, public order and fighting anti-Semitism.

Britain has or is in the process of enacting legislation that proscribes hitherto lawful activities with the aim of advancing state policies.

The Police, Crime and Sentencing Act which came into force in 2022 expands state powers to ban or curtail protests on very elastically defined grounds of disruption or nuisance to the public and causing excessive noise. Since protests are by their very nature designed to be disruptive to draw attention to issues, this is a draconian impingement on the right to peacefully protest.

We are also worried about the expanding concept of non-violent extremism, used ostensibly to advance security, but which is routinely abused to engineer a compliant public opinion by defining certain views and beliefs as illegitimate. Primarily pushed by the Prevent anti-extremism programme, these ideas,

defined in some cases but deliberately left undefined in others, seek to advance government policy by restricting the scope of acceptable opinion.

The most recent manifestation of this totalitarian tendency is the tabling of a legislation that seeks to ban the democratic right of public bodies to choose not to invest or procure products and services from states whose actions they disapprove of. The Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill is effectively targeted at local and national authorities that boycott, divest from or sanction Israel for its continuing occupation of Palestine. Again, this a gross violation of the democratic right to free expression.