Written evidence submitted by Race on the Agenda (ROTA)

Introduction

1. Race on the Agenda (ROTA) is a social policy research organisation that focuses on issues impacting on Black, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BME&R) communities. ROTA aims to strengthen the voice of BME&R communities at policy and practice level through increasing the capacity of BME&R organisations to influence decisions that impact on the communities they serve.

2. In 2015 / 16 ROTA delivered a European Commission funded project, PRISM (Preventing, Redressing, and Inhibiting Hate Speech in New Media). This project was aimed at tackling online hate speech through work with young people, journalists and bloggers, and law enforcement authorities. ROTA also sits on the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) National Scrutiny Panel on Racially and Religiously Aggravated Hate Crime; the Anti Bullying Alliance Race and Faith Steering Group; and the HEAR Hate Crime Network.

The effectiveness of current legislation and law enforcement policies for preventing and prosecuting hate crime and its associated violence.

3. We welcome the Government’s Action Plan on Hate Crime\(^1\), but regret its failure to consider the Equality Act 2010, and the Public Sector Equality Duty, one of the most important legislative provisions for tackling prejudicial attitudes that underpin hate crime as well as being a practical frame work for public authorities tackling hate crime.

4. Through ROTA’s work on the PRISM project and the Equality Law Project we have found that schools are failing to tackle racist bullying and failing to record and publish data on racist bullying as required under the PSED. This is of particular concern given that schools no longer have a duty to report racist bullying to local authorities, and even when it does get reported it is unclear how local authorities will address the issue since much of the expertise that existed within the local authorities to tackle racist bullying in schools no longer exist due to cuts in funding. Within this context it is of the utmost importance that schools are supported to comply with the PSED.

5. Furthermore, through our work on the PRISM project we have found that in order to tackle racist bullying in schools and improve reporting, a more

holistic approach must be taken to tackle institutional discrimination. For example, in our work with a group of young people from deprived socio-economic backgrounds we found that some young people who are targets of bullying or online hate speech lack the confidence to report it to their teachers as they are generally seen as the ‘trouble makers’. Therefore, they either resort to other means of dealing with racist bullying and online hate speech (which are not reported) or are completely unable to take any action to deal with their situation.

6. With regards to tackling online hate speech we urge the government to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime, concerning the criminalisation of acts of racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems.

The barriers that prevent individuals from reporting hate crime, and measures to improve reporting rates.

7. Through the PRISM project it has been brought to our attention by frontline organisations that there is some hesitance by their community members to report hate crime through the True Vision portal due to the mechanisms for reporting hate crime being seen as the same as the mechanism for reporting extremism. This must be looked in to further, if only to allay any concerns victims of hate crime may have about using these mechanisms for reporting, and to encourage reporting of hate crime.

The role of the voluntary sector, community representatives, and other frontline organisations in challenging attitudes that underpin hate crime.

8. There are many frontline organisations carrying out valuable work on challenging prejudicial attitudes that underpin hate crime, but are under resourced. These organisations must be identified and resourced in order to harness the valuable work they carry out and the learning from such work. One such organisation is Aik Saath that supported ROTA to deliver the workshops for young people through the PRISM project. A toolkit was developed through the PRISM project to work with young people to challenge prejudicial attitudes and counter online hate speech (http://www.rota.org.uk/webfm_send/278).

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2 https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168008160f
9. The Government’s Hate Crime Action Plan refers to working with groups such as local Race Equality Councils to strengthen the voice of victims and advocates against hate crime. However, most of the local Race Equality Councils and similar organisations no longer exist due to cuts in funding and even those that still exist receive little or no support to carry out their advocacy and case work.

**Statistical trends in hate crime and how the recording, measurement and analysis of hate crime can be improved.**

10. The Hate Crime Report 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 states that the separate reporting of racially and religiously aggravated hate crime began in 2010/11, yet “The number of religiously aggravated hate crime cases remains small, therefore it is more difficult to identify meaningful trends in case volume fluctuations and prosecution performance characteristics.”

Due to the racialised nature of religiously aggravated hate crime it is essential to record the race and ethnicity as well as the religion or belief of the victims in order to identify trends in religiously aggravated hate crime. For example, South Asian Women wearing a hijab may be more likely to be targets for statements such as ‘Go back home’, than South Asian women not wearing a hijab. This data is essential for identifying trends and challenging the prejudicial attitudes that underpin hate crimes of this nature.

11. In compliance with the public sector equality duty to publish equalities information, the race and ethnicity, and religion or belief of victims of hate crime must be recorded and published. This is essential for the measurement and analysis of racially and religiously aggravated hate crime. To address any difficulties in gathering this data the police and CPS must work in collaboration with voluntary and community sector organisations. There should be increased support and funding provided for third party reporting centres that may be better placed to gather this data from victims.

**Final Remarks**

12. The weeks preceding and following the Brexit referendum saw a marked increase in hate crime. If hate crime and the prejudicial attitudes underpinning it are to be prevented it is essential to challenge the current political discourse on asylum and immigration. The UN CERD Committee

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report expressed deep concern that “the referendum campaign was marked by divisive, anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric, and that many politicians and prominent political figures not only failed to condemn it, but also created entrenched prejudices, thereby emboldening individuals to carry out acts of intimidation and hate towards ethnic or ethno-religious minority communities and people who are visibly different.” The committee went on to express concern about underreporting of hate crime; the gap between reported cases and successful prosecution; and the negative portrayal of ethnic or ethno-religious minority communities, immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees by the media in the State party. This cannot be ignored if hate crime is to be addressed and prejudicial attitudes are to be challenged.