

Government Watchlist for Faith Leaders 'Deeply Troubling'

Pastors, rabbis and other religious leaders will be subject to government training and security checks and will have to enroll in a "national register of faith leaders," according to leaked British government legislation.

The proposal, which appears in a draft version of the government's new counter-extremism strategy seen by *The Sunday Telegraph*, would affect Christian ministers and other religious leaders who wish to work with the public sector.

The Christian Institute has warned that it represents an attack on freedom of religion, not seen since the 17th century.

'Deeply concerning'

Spokesman for The Institute, Ciarán Kelly, said: "If the reports are accurate, what the government is proposing turns the clock back on religious freedom more than 300 years.

"Not since the days of the notorious Test and Corporation Acts have we seen such a concerted attempt by a British Government to restrict religious practice.

"We don't want to go back to those darker days of religious intolerance.

'Sinister'

"They mean that Christian leaders invited to speak to a university Christian Union would be required to go on a government approved training scheme before being allowed to

speak to students.

“This is a truly sinister proposal more in keeping with China or North Korea than a democracy built on the freedoms of Magna Carta.

“We would ask the Government to think again and drop these dangerous plans immediately.”

Compulsory

According to *The Telegraph*, the leaked draft says that all faiths will have to “maintain a national register of faith leaders” and that the government will set a “minimum level of training and checks”.

It will be compulsory for all faith leaders to join the register if they want to work with the public sector, including universities.

The document also defines extremism, as the “vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs”.

‘State intervention’

Faith leaders have already criticised the proposals as an unwarranted intrusion into religious affairs by the state. Rabbi Neil Janes, from West London Synagogue, said: “This sounds unworkable and reads like too strong state intervention.”

The government’s counter-extremism strategy was meant to be published earlier this year but has been delayed amid serious concerns over Extremism Disruption Orders (EDOs).

EDOs have been widely criticised for raising the prospect of people falling foul of the law for merely stating unpopular,

traditional or challenging views.

The measures would target people whose behaviour falls below the threshold of counter-terrorism legislation but is thought to undermine 'British values.'