



PRESS RELEASE

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Are ASBOs racist?

The Runnymede Trust launches its new report on ASBOs and race equality at the House of Lords on Thursday 2 November 2006. Whilst the use of ASBOs is one of the Government's main responses to introducing "respect" in our neighbourhoods, it is unable to answer the simple question of whether ASBOs are of any use to deal with racial harassment. It is also unable to demonstrate that local authorities and Courts do not discriminate against ethnic minorities when serving ASBOs in their local community.

A new report by the Runnymede Trust found that the Home Office does not record the ethnic background of recipients of ASBOs. Given the recognition by Government of the levels of institutional racism in different parts of the criminal justice system, following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry in 1999, these findings will no doubt raise concerns amongst ethnic minorities, in particular in areas where ASBOs seem to be increasingly used to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Lord Dholakia, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Peers says: "This report highlights that many local authorities might be in breach of their duties under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, as they are unable to demonstrate that they do not discriminate in carrying out their anti-social behaviour policy. Ethnic monitoring is carried out in an inconsistent and inappropriate manner locally and is not centrally collected by the Home Office. This is an unacceptable situation that the Government must address with urgency."

Michelynn Lafèche, Director of Runnymede says: "It is extremely alarming that seven years after the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, there are no mechanisms in place to assess whether ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by ASBOs. There is an urgent need for public figures on the breakdown of ASBO recipients by ethnicity; failure to do so can only lead to further distrust amongst ethnic minorities in the criminal justice system."

Ethnic minorities will not be able to take comfort in the fact that ASBOs might be useful in tackling racial harassment, as the Home Office is unable to say how many ASBOs have been served to deal with cases of racist behaviour.

Paul Cavadino, Chief Executive of Nacro, the crime reduction charity says: "The wide and loose definition of anti-social behaviour which can result in ASBOs has created enormous potential for discrimination. This is true not just of racial discrimination but also of the use of ASBOs against other minority groups such as people with mental health problems. The indefensible failure to carry out ethnic monitoring of ASBOs is part of a wider issue of ensuring that the use of ASBOs does not disregard human rights."

END

Notes for Editors

1. The Runnymede report “Equal Respect – ASBOs and Race Equality” will be published on 2 November 2006. A PDF of the full report is available on request.
2. The report will be launched at the House of Lords on Thursday 2 November 2006 from 18.00 to 20.00. The launch will be hosted by Lord Dholakia and will include a short panel discussion with Shami Chakrabarti, Director of LIBERTY, and John Hedge, representing the Positive Approaches Alliance.
3. Runnymede is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society. Founded as a Charitable Education Trust, Runnymede has a long track record in policy research, working in collaboration with eminent thinkers and policymakers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Since 1968, the date of Runnymede’s foundation, we have worked to establish and maintain a positive image of what it means to live affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Runnymede continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today. For further information visit www.runnymedetrust.org
4. The Runnymede Trust is part of the Positive Approaches Alliance, which includes organisations such as the Thames Valley Partnership, Mediation UK, the National Community Safety Network and National Association of Probation Officers. The Positive Approaches Alliance calls for a range of responses to be developed to tackle anti-social behaviour, including preventative strategies.
5. Michelynn Lafèche, Director of Runnymede and Sarah Isal, author of the report, are available for interviews. To arrange an interview, please contact Sarah Isal on 020 7377 9222 (office hours) and 07958 987 920 (out of office hours)