

## **Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists**

### **UK response to Media Freedom Alert - Ofcom Revocation of Iman FM Licence**

On 4 July 2017, drawing on the new powers introduced in the Digital Economy Act (2017) allowing the rapid suspension of radio licences, Ofcom suspended the licence of Iman FM - a small community radio station in Sheffield. This followed a listener complaint on 15 June which, when investigated by Ofcom, uncovered that the station had committed serious breaches of the Broadcasting Code. Ofcom found that the station had aired 25 hours of material likely to incite or encourage the commission of crime or lead to disorder.

On 27 July Ofcom published its sanction decision in this case. Given the serious nature of these breaches, which included condoning, promoting and encouraging violent behaviour towards non-Muslim people, Ofcom took the decision to revoke Iman FM's broadcasting licence.

Ofcom has a general statutory duty under the Communications Act (2003) to secure the application, in the case of all television and radio services, of standards that provide adequate protection to members of the public from the inclusion of offensive and harmful material in such services, and a duty to set standards to secure that material likely to encourage or to incite the commission of crime or to lead to disorder is not included in TV or radio services.

Ofcom, as the independent communications regulator, is responsible for setting and enforcing the Broadcasting Code; the set of rules which apply to TV and radio licensees through which Ofcom meets its statutory obligation to protect audiences. Ofcom's Broadcasting Code contains a clear prohibition of content on television or radio services that is likely to incite crime or lead to disorder. Ofcom also updated its Broadcasting Code in May last year to make clear that content which includes hate speech or material containing abusive or derogatory treatment of individuals, groups, religions or communities must not be included in TV or radio broadcasts except where justified by the context.

Ofcom independently enforces the Broadcasting Code - balancing the protection of audiences from harm against the need to ensure that freedom of expression is upheld. It is right that Ofcom, drawing on its extensive expertise, is able to do so without undue interference. It is therefore not appropriate for government to comment on such decisions.

The United Kingdom is built on values such as democracy, respect and tolerance. These unite us and help our society to thrive. But they are increasingly challenged by those who seek to spread hatred and division. Countering such extremism is a government priority. The government also has a broader aim to ensure that the UK has a strong, plural media, underpinned by freedom of expression, and which operates free from government

interference. Within this, however, must be a robust regulatory framework - meaning that action is taken if harmful content is broadcast.