

Policing in a Time of Coronavirus by Dr Rob Faure Walker (14th April 2020)

It is clear that in some forces some Police are acting outside of the law in their efforts to police the coronavirus pandemic. Accusing the Police of acting on ministerial dictate rather than in line with emergency legislation, former supreme court judge Lord Sumption suggested that **these actions are “disgraceful” and effectively placed us in a “police state”**. Sumption may be exaggerating but the police are clearly understaffed, ill prepared and under pressure to control the virus, when it can be argued that an intensive, nationwide programme of testing is what is really needed. Government communications that focus on individuals escaping cramped urban housing, even when most appear to be observing social distancing, are fomenting a moral panic that has the effect of focusing media and police attention away from the Government’s failure to control the virus. The Public are scared and the Government has the choice to support them or to add to their fears. **By creating suspicion and division between neighbours, the Government is adding to their fears.**

Reports of overzealous Policing of the coronavirus have been documented by [Policing the Corona State](#) and include:

- **Journalists illegally intimidated** for carrying out their work, even when the National Police Chiefs Council has issued guidelines that journalists are key workers
- **A 13 year-old boy being illegally detained** for refusing to give his home address
- **Countless fines issued due to an apparent misapplication of the law**
- **Police supporting evictions**, despite the Government declaring a complete ban on them
- **People being arrested for operating businesses**, even when the law does not forbid this
- **Closing parks and open spaces**, even when this has the effect of forcing people closer together on surrounding pavements
- **Police forces launching online tools for people to denounce their neighbours**

In many of these cases, it has been observed that the police were not following social distancing measures between themselves or in their interactions with the public, so were putting the wider public at risk. **The observed misapplication of the regulations and illegal actions by the Police appear to be being used disproportionately against BAME communities, Gracie Mae Bradley observing that “if communities of colour are left to bear the brunt of arbitrary policing, the damage done will last even when this crisis is over”.**

As the latest pretext for rights violations that disproportionately impact BAME communities, policing the coronavirus bears more than a passing resemblance to the counter-terrorism industry. Like counter-terrorism, there is a risk that measures taken during these “extraordinary times” may become normalised once the threat has passed. For this reason, it is especially alarming that acting Prime Minister, Dominic Raab, appears not to be aware that the **“The Secretary of State must review the need for restrictions and requirements imposed by these Regulations at least once every 21 days, with the first review being carried out by 16th April 2020”, as set out in *The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020***. Parliament must ensure that these regulations are reviewed as set out in the statute. It is also **Parliament’s duty to ensure that the provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020 cease beyond 25th Sept 2020, unless they pass the motion written into the act “That the temporary provisions of the *Coronavirus Act 2020* should not yet expire”**. This motion must be passed every six months thereafter for the provisions to continue.

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