

## **Scope Hate Crime Summit, South Bank, London, 20 January 2009**

### **JONATHAN SHAW:**

Well good morning. I am very pleased to be able to come along and take part in what is a very, very important conference this morning. When I took on the role of Minister for Disabled People it became very clear to me that tackling disability hate crime would be a priority.

I have heard, as we have this morning, the numerous accounts of hate crime - but one incident is too many. I heard as well the reports of the young woman in London and the appalling crime against her. Now, if we're to achieve independent living, we cannot achieve that unless disabled people are feeling safe and secure in their homes and their communities.

So I very much welcome the report 'Getting Away with Murder'. Thank you to SCOPE, Disability Now and the UK Disabled Peoples' Council for publishing it - you have done all of society a service. It highlights importantly what needs to be done, it puts disability hate crime in the spotlight, and it sets out what is a compelling argument for all the agencies involved to take a long hard look at all aspects of hate crime.

It's clear there is a debate to be had, so I am pleased to be here this morning to take part in those discussions. In my contribution today, I have been asked to set out where, as Minister for Disabled

People, I intend to focus my efforts over the coming year around hate crime.

As we have heard from Paul [Giannasi – Race for Justice Task Force], there's a huge amount of work taking place across Government, from the Home Office's work on reporting and recording of crime, and the Department for Communities and Local Government's work on community cohesion. I take what you said, Ruth [Bashall – Co-Chair MPS Disability Independent Advisory Group], about the Safeguarding Adults Consultation - I know you will be hearing from others later on in the day.

Paul referred to the Stephen Laurence inquiry, that crime that took place in 1993. I think it reasonable to remind the audience it took 4 years in order to have that public inquiry. There was a consensus when that report was published, then that consensus drifted away somewhat. Some of the issues we have to tackle become difficult. There is additional reporting. There is a bureaucracy in order for those systems to work.

So what I would ask you to do, as we see developments and improvements, is to support those proposals in order that they achieve the things we want to. So that people can have proper access when they are victims of hate crime and so that they do get services that they need.

That does require resources and that does require effort at a local level. That's sometimes when you will have detractors saying 'this is a waste of time'. Stand ready to challenge those that say that.

What became clear to me is that we do need to join up better in Government. Hate crime is not just an issue for one department or one agency - it's for the criminal justice system, local councils, housing providers, schools. They all need to take an active role in combating negative attitudes towards disabled people. In my role as Minister for Disabled People it's my job to act as champion on the rights of disabled people, to ensure that there is greater coherence across Government on policies which impact upon the lives of disabled people.

I have asked the Office for Disability Issues to work with the Home Office to set up a Disability Hate Crime Strategy Group, which will bring together other Government departments to better co-ordinate between different agencies, to share good practice about what works, and to develop realistic co-ordinated solutions to tackling hate crime. The work of the group is in its early stage, but there are some obvious questions that I want to focus on.

What are the underlying reasons for hostility and prejudice towards disabled people? How do we prevent that before it turns into harassment and violence?

An important point about escalation that some of the other panellists have spoken about.

How can we move institutions and professional people to using the social model in their dealings with disabled people, rather than the medical model which, of course, is still too prevalent?

Changing attitudes has to be, and will be, the focus of our work over the coming year. We know that hate crime is part of the bigger discrimination picture, that hostility and prejudice can be a common occurrence for many disabled people - Ruth referred to some of those in her own borough. And we know that even the way disabled people are spoken to can perpetuate prejudice.

Offenders often begin with hostility and prejudice and build to the particularly well-known crimes that we have read and heard about all too often.

We need to tackle prejudice at an early stage and improve attitudes so that society recognises and, more importantly, values difference and diversity. Not easy - hate crime is not a simple problem. Prevailing social attitudes towards disabled people are often more ingrained than direct, overt prejudice. And attitudes don't change overnight.

But some of the greatest challenges for us in society are the ones that are the most difficult. If one thinks of yesterday, Martin Luther King's birthday, and then today, when we'll see President Barack Obama become the next President of the United States.

So when 40 odd years ago, when people were suffering horrendous injustice and horrendous racial hate crime in America, all of that didn't lead Martin Luther King to begin that famous speech by saying: 'I have a nightmare'. Despite all that was happening, he had a dream. And I think that we should have a dream, even though many people's lives that experience this crime

are a nightmare. And we have to have hope, and we have to have determination that we work together as a community and be positive and overcome those who peddle prejudice.

As I say, this report is very welcome, but it cannot be one of the many documents that come into all of our offices and gather dust. I think it has to be a working document. It has to be a document that we refer to. Not just today, but for months and years to come.

We're still referring to the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, because that influences the way that we run our public services and the anti-discrimination legislation that we have introduced since then. So as I say, it's not easy, but that does not mean that we should be pessimistic about the change that we want to, and that we can bring about.

So moving forward, I think that the report's recommendations, the policies and initiatives, need to be co-produced by disabled people - absolutely nothing at all without involving disabled people. Absolutely essential if we are to have faith that these policies that come forward are going to be realistic and are going to do what they say they do on the tin.

I want to make clear to you today that I say I don't consider the conference to be in anyway the end of the discussion. It is the beginning of that discussion to bring about a far better system than we have - one that is accessible but where the state takes seriously the crimes against disabled people. So congratulations to all of you involved and I look forward to working on what is a

priority for me, in this great job that I've been given. Thank you,  
ladies and gentlemen.