

**Sir Paul Stevenson,  
Commissioner For The Metropolis,  
New Scotland Yard,  
London SW1.**

**93c Venner Road,  
Sydenham,  
London SE26 5HU.  
0208 659 7713**

**May 10, 2010**

**Dear Sir,**

**I write with reference to the enclosed photograph of a notice which it appears is currently being displayed in the window of at least one Internet Café in Central London.**

**I am sure you will agree that while it is desirable to prevent the Internet and commercial Internet premises from being used for unlawful purposes, such as fraud – the Nigerian 419 scam, etc – and while the police should of course take an active role in such crime prevention, the sweeping nature of the claims made in this notice require considerable clarification. In particular the terms: “pornographic”, “violent”, “extremist”, “otherwise offensive” and “inappropriate nature” can be interpreted in such a wide ranging fashion that almost any but the most banal of communications could be deemed by some criteria to fall within one or more of these categories.**

**If I may take the last part of this notice first, “Downloading or accessing certain material could constitute a criminal offence”; if the authorities in Britain and elsewhere were to police the Internet effectively there would be little or no such material available on publicly accessible websites. Clearly the owners or controllers of such should be targeted in the first instance. I am referring here specifically to websites that are said to trade credit card details and the like.**

**Now I would like to ask for some more specific clarification, partly as someone who has on occasion used Internet Cafés in Central London, partly in my capacity as a journalist, and partly for the benefit of members of the general public.**

**What does “violent” mean in this connection? And “extremist”?**

**I will allude to specific examples of this. A suicide video produced by Mohammad Sidique Khan, one of the men who bombed London on July 7, 2005, is widely available on the Internet. It has appeared in various edits in probably hundreds if not thousands of local, regional, national and international news programmes and documentaries since it was released. Clearly this is an extremist video; it contains a political statement and statement of intent – the latter of which was fulfilled – by a man who plotted the indiscriminate mass murder of British citizens and others on British soil.**

**Does this video fall within the guidelines outlined in the aforementioned poster? If I, or someone else, is watching an archived BBC news report of this video, will that result in the plug being pulled on our machines, or to an arrest?**

**Some time after this video was made public, another suicide video by a member of the same extremist cell was released through what might be termed an anti-Western**

website. This video is now also widely available on the Internet. Again, what is the position if I or anyone else deigns to watch this video in the above Internet Café?

There are also videos available not simply of terrorists boasting about their intentions to commit mass murder but of their actually committing it. If I or another user watch a video of the September 11 atrocities, of the planes crashing into the buildings, or of people jumping from the Twin Towers, will the plug be pulled on our machines? Will we be arrested?

Regarding videos that may simply be deemed violent, will this include the following, all of which are available freely on the Internet:

the assault on Nicola Fisher by a police officer at the G20 demonstration last year,  
the assault on Ian Tomlinson by a police officer at the G20 demonstration last year,  
which may have led to his death,  
the March 1991 assault by five Los Angeles police officers on the motorist Rodney King  
- who was struck 56 times in 81 seconds,  
the assassination of President Kennedy by Lee Harvey Oswald,  
the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby,

and the countless other videos showing footage of gratuitous violence, including murder,  
which are freely available on the web?

Will this prohibition/censorship be extended to simulated acts of violence such as the murder of Dennis Watts in the TV series *Eastenders*, or the rape scenes from the following films, all of which are freely available on-line:

*A Clockwork Orange* – a particularly violent and degrading rape scene,  
*Demon Seed* – in which the actress Julie Christie is raped by a computer,  
*High Plains Drifter* – in which the victim appears to enjoy it,  
*Inseminoid* – in which the victim is raped by something not human,  
*The Accused* – which features a gang rape, and which won an Academy Award for Jodie Foster?

All the above can be considered violent, and a case could be made by a jurist of reason that some of them are also pornographic. Many people would consider them offensive – some because they degrade women, others because they stereotype men, yet others because of their perceived effects on the young or on persons who might be considered vulnerable or easily influenced.

A case could also be made out for their being deemed to be of an “inappropriate nature”, though for something to be deemed inappropriate there is at least a rudimentary need for it to be placed in context. A photograph of a naked five year old girl might not be deemed inappropriate in a specialist medical journal, but would most certainly be deemed so in a tabloid newspaper.

I could give many more examples but would for now be grateful if you could respond to the specific examples given so as enable myself and others to avoid arrest when using commercial Internet premises in Central London.

**As this is – I am sure you will agree – a matter of some importance – I will be posting your detailed reply to an appropriate forum or two, in particular Usenet Groups uk.legal, uk.local.london and one or two others so that we can all comply with these guidelines and thus save precious police time and resources for matters that are of real importance to all Londoners, like tackling gun and knife crime, domestic burglaries, and keeping the streets safe for all of us to walk.**

**Yours Sincerely,  
A Baron**