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Press Release

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ICC WARNING AS NEW ILLEGAL MEAT CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

The UK Government's new initiative is to tackle illegal meat imports 'If in doubt, leave it out' campaign was launched today by DEFRA Minister Lord Whitty.

He said 'that people returning to the UK from countries outside the EU would be left in no doubt about the risks and controls that are in force'

He warned that anyone caught carrying illegal products or illegal quantities would have the food seized and destroyed. They also risked of prosecution and fines.

The UK Government initiative is to tackle illegal meat imports and which was today welcomed by the London Central Mosque Trust & the Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC) Director General with a warning that it would do little to discourage professional smugglers.

"This campaign seems to be aimed at ordinary tourists who may be unaware of the rules and regulations that govern personal food imports," said ICC Director General Dr Ahmed Al Dubayan

"While such an initiative is to be welcomed, it will do nothing to prevent the professional smuggling gangs who import tons of illegal meat products into this country every week." Dr Al Dubayan expressed the ICC's concern over the level of resources dedicated to tackling the crime at ports of entry.

"The Government is spending £25 million over a three year period to improve detection of illegal food products at our ports, a figure that on face value appears to be extremely generous." But when you consider that Australia is investing £246 million in 2004-05 to strengthen its border controls on top of a further £116 million invested in their quarantine and inspection service, the UK's £25 million between 2003-06 seems like a very little sum.

At the moment, 4 anti-smuggling teams and 6 sniffer dogs are solely responsible for policing all air and seaports across the country for illegal meat import, "stated Dr Yunes Teinaz practicing Chartered Environmental Health Practitioner, and Health & Management advisor to the ICC Director General.

Dr Teinaz argued that far more resources must be invested in security at ports of entry to prevent illegal meat products entering the human and animal food chain in the UK and local authorities should be encouraged to take enforcement actions to control the illicit trade.

"The foot and mouth outbreak of 2001 was caused when the virus spread rapidly through this country livestock population after being imported via illegal meat products." The outbreak cost the British economy more than eight billion pounds.

Investing more money into front line security to prevent a repeat of the 2001 disaster.

According to experts, another AIDS-like epidemic looms if the Government does not invest in stopping the twelve thousand tons of illegal bushmeat that make it into the UK each year from West Central Africa.

Scientists testing the blood of over a thousand pygmies in Cameroon have already identified the Simian foamy virus, of the same family as HIV, which the hunters contracted by eating contaminated meat.

Roger Williams, Liberal Democrat MP for Brecon and Radnorshire said: "It is clear that with only 0.6 percent of the estimated total of illegal meats entering this country being seized each year, the government is not doing enough to protect the UK against a potential large scale epidemic. Environment Minister Elliot Morley is incredibly complacent about the issue and we need a minister who takes this seriously.

"We already know that the HIV virus originated from West African monkeys that a new strain of retroviruses has crossed the animal-human divide and that Foot and Mouth was caused by illegal meat imports. With the Welsh economy depending heavily on agriculture, we cannot afford another decimating epidemic as many Welsh farmers are still recovering from the Foot and Mouth outbreak three years ago.

The £25m package earmarked by the government to curb the illegal trade is welcome, but should not be wasted on an advertising campaign that targets tourists rather than the main perpetrators of this organised crime."

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