



## DEBATE PACK

CDP 2017-0197 | 23 October 2017

# International Freedom of Religion or Belief

**Westminster Hall**  
**Thursday 26 October 2017**  
**1.30pm**  
**Debate initiated by Jim Shannon**

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# 1. Summary

The International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day, 27 October, began as a commemoration of a US statute, the Religious Freedom Act 1998, which sought to bolster the monitoring and promotion of religious freedom abroad. However, the commemoration relates in content to much older international human rights instruments.

The freedom of religion or belief is stated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and also in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The UK was a signatory of the UDHR and is a party to the ICCPR. The right is also contained in Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), to which the UK is also a party, and is entrenched in the Human Rights Act 1998.

Article 18 of the UDHR is as follows:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

The ICCPR and ECHR add some additional text after this.

Article 18 of the ICCPR is as follows:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.
4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

Article 9 of the ECHR is as follows:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

There is an [All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief](#).

On 27 October 2016 the APPG co-hosted a [roundtable event](#) in Parliament with the Commonwealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion or Belief ([CIFoRB](#)).

One of the bodies founded by the US Religious Freedom Act, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has an extensive website, [with annual reports, more focused reports on particular countries or minorities, factsheets](#) and so on.

The [2017 Annual Report is available](#), covering 2016 and the first two months of 2017, along with recommendations as to the designation of various states and non-state actors as being of particular concern.

In a [press release](#) marking the day in 2016, FCO Minister Baroness Anelay said,

The right to choose your religion, to practice it, share it, change it or live without a religion at all is something that everyone should enjoy. In a world where over 80% of the population identifies as religious, this is fundamental to the lives and identity of the vast majority of the world's citizens.

## 2. Press Articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

### **The persecution of Christians around the world is worse than at any time in history**

The Spectator  
21 October 2017  
Charles Moore

### **Christian magistrate fined for saying it was better for children to be brought up by a mother and father rather than a gay couple loses battle to win back his job**

Mail Online  
21 October 2017

### **Commemorating International Religious Freedom Day**

World Affairs  
20 October 2017  
Ewelina U. Ochab

### **Hindu Today, Muslim Tomorrow**

The Atlantic  
14 August 2017  
Saba Imtiaz

### **Anti-Semitic attacks hit record high in UK amid warnings over rise of 'hatred and anger'**

The Independent  
26 July 2017  
Lizzie Dearden

### **Globalisation has contributed to declining levels of religious freedom across the world**

LSE: Religion and the Public Sphere blog  
5 July 2017  
Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom and Gizem Arikan

### **Christian church DESTROYED as Chinese police drag worshippers into street and beat them**

Daily Express  
11 June 2017  
Katie Mansfield

### **Model and Leeds United footballer win fight for humanist wedding**

The Guardian  
9 June 2017  
Harriet Sherwood

**Protests in Jakarta after Christian governor convicted of blasphemy**

The Guardian  
10 May 2017  
Kate Lamb

**Ahmadi Muslims 'facing discrimination' in Cardiff**

BBC News  
23 April 2017  
Nicola Bryan

**Iran's Guardian Council Tries to Exclude Non-Muslims from Running**

Human Rights Watch  
19 April 2017  
Tara Sepehri Far

**People of faith are being driven from public life**

The Spectator  
5 March 2017  
Stephen Daisley

**The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities**

Al Jazeera  
1 January 2017  
Ruchi Kumar

**Time To Put The Christian Persecution Myth To Bed**

HuffPost  
12 December 2016  
Stephen Evans

**8 Countries Where Religious Freedom Is Actually Under Attack**

HuffPost  
23 August 2016 (Updated 15 January, 2017)  
Carol Kuruvilla

**How Indonesia's 'Religious Harmony' Law Has Closed 1,000 Churches**

Christianity Today  
10 November 2015  
Morgan Lee

### 3. PQs

#### **Iran: Baha'i Faith**

**19 Oct 2017 | 107176**

**Asked by: Tom Brake**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will ensure that the UK Mission to the UN in New York makes representations on the situation of the Baha'i community in Iran during its statement at the Third Committee meetings of the UN General Assembly.

**Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

I recently met representatives of the Baha'i faith to discuss the issue. The human rights situation in Iran remains deeply worrying and this includes Iran's approach to freedom of religion and belief. The treatment of the Baha'i community is of particular concern. The latest report of the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran sets out the repression and harassment that Baha'is suffer in Iran. This includes restrictions on the types of businesses and jobs Baha'is can have, unequal treatment of Baha'i employees, and seizures of Baha'i businesses and property. We hope to highlight the situation of the Baha'i with the UN General Assembly Third Committee in New York.

#### **Topical Questions**

**17 Oct 2017 | 629 cc712-3**

**Asked by: Chris Evans**

Members of the Coptic Church come from all over south Wales to Risca, to worship at St Mary's and St Abu Saifain. The congregation have looked on in horror at the terrorist attacks on fellow Coptics in Egypt. Just this weekend, an archbishop was assassinated outside Cairo by an Islamic extremist group. What assurance can the Minister give the congregation at St Mary's and St Abu Saifain that the Government are doing everything they can to protect brethren who are simply following their religion?

**Answered by: Alistair Burt | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that matter of real seriousness in Egypt. I met leaders of the Coptic Church just last week with the support of His Grace Bishop Angaelos, and I am going to the Coptic service later today to express further solidarity. We raise these matters directly with the Egyptian Government, who view these terrorist attacks with the same degree of horror as we do, and who are doing all in their power to stop them. We will continue to urge just that.

**Nepal: Religious Freedom**

**16 Oct 2017 | 105561**

**Asked by: Stephen Lloyd**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to the Government of Nepal to amend Article 26(3) of the Nepalese constitution to uphold freedom of religion or belief in line with Nepal's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

**Answering member: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The Constitution of Nepal guarantees freedom of religion and belief under article 26 (1) as a fundamental right. However sub-article 3 and the new 2017 Penal Code include provisions which could limit that right. I raised the importance of ensuring freedom of religion and belief in line with international obligations and standards when I met the Nepali Ambassador on 9 October. The British Embassy in Kathmandu has also urged the Nepali Government to ensure the final wording and implementation of the new Penal Code is consistent with the rights enshrined in the international laws that Nepal has ratified.

**Malaysia: Religious Freedom**

**13 Oct 2017 | 105105**

**Asked by: Deidre Brock**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to the Government of Malaysia on that government's treatment of atheists and apostates.

**Answering member: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The UK remains committed to standing up for the freedom of all individuals, both religious and non-religious, so that they may practice their beliefs free from fear. We are aware of, and concerned by, the recent response to a meeting of the Atheist Republic in Malaysia, which included death threats being made on social media. We regularly discuss human rights with the Malaysian government, including at Ministerial level. Officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London meet periodically with representatives of Malaysian Civil Society to hear their concerns. We will continue to monitor human rights issues and internal developments in Malaysia, working with the EU and other foreign missions in Kuala Lumpur, raising our concerns as appropriate. We actively promote Freedom of Religion or Belief at the UN Human Rights Council, where we support resolutions designed to foster greater tolerance.

**India: Christianity**

**13 Oct 2017 | 105045**

**Asked by: Martyn Day**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Indian counterpart on the treatment of Christians in India.

**Answering member: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The British Government condemns all instances of discrimination and violence against individuals or groups because of their religion, regardless of the country or faith concerns. The UK engages with India on human rights issues, including religious freedom and minority rights, both bilaterally and through the EU. Our High Commission in New Delhi monitors the human rights situation in India and maintains a dialogue with the Indian National Commission for Minorities often via our Consulate General in the country.

FCO officials in New Delhi also regularly meet senior faith leaders to discuss issues such as religious tolerance, including most recently with a representative from a Christian organisation in India in June. The British Government also runs an array of projects in India to help promote minority rights and combat discrimination.

**Nigeria: Religious Freedom**

**12 Oct 2017 | 106460**

**Asked by: Simon Clarke**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to ensure that the Nigerian Government protects (a) religious minorities and (b) the rights of the Igbo people in that country.

**Answering member: Rory Stewart | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

This Government is firmly committed to promoting and protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief around the world. Religious freedom is protected by the Nigerian Constitution and we regularly discuss with the Nigerian government, at the highest levels, our concern about threats to this right in Nigeria.

The UK fully supports the territorial integrity of Nigeria and we are committed to working with Nigeria to help tackle threats to national security. We are concerned about violent clashes in Nigeria but we do not assess that there is institutionalised persecution of the Igbo or any other peoples by the Nigerian authorities. We will continue to underline the importance of freedom of expression and the rule of law with all parties, including the Nigerian government.

## **Saudi Arabia: Politics and Government**

**12 Oct 2017 | 105015**

### **Asked by: Tom Brake**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he (a) has made and (b) plans to make to the Government of Saudi Arabia on discrimination against Shiite citizens of that country, including in the town of Awamiya.

### **Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Our Ambassador to Saudi Arabia raised the operation in Awamiyah with the Government of Saudi Arabia on 26 July, including measures to guard against civilian casualties. The Saudi authorities underlined the seriousness it placed on fulfilling its responsibilities to all its citizens, including the Shia. We continue to monitor the situation in Awamiyah closely and we will continue to raise legitimate concerns at every appropriate opportunity. The British Government strongly supports the right to freedom of religion or belief, which is restricted in Saudi Arabia; and thus it remains a Foreign and Commonwealth Office human rights priority country.

## **Business of the House**

**12 Oct 2017 | 629 c468**

### **Asked by: Jim Shannon**

Andrew Brunson, a Protestant pastor, who led a small church congregation in the western Turkish city of Izmir, was arrested in October 2016. He has faced unsubstantiated accusations in the Turkish media. Erdogan's offer of a prisoner swap for Andrew Brunson is an unfortunate confession by the Turkish president that the pastor is a pawn held hostage by Ankara. May we have a statement or debate on the suppression of human rights in Turkey, in particular for those of a Christian faith?

### **Answered by: Andrea Leadsom**

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that case. The Government are firmly committed to protecting the right to freedom of religion and belief around the world and to being a strong voice in defence of that fundamental right. The persecution of Christians and those of any other faith is of profound concern to us and we are active in condemning any such persecutions.

## **Nepal: Religious Freedom**

**09 Oct 2017 | 10382**

### **Asked by: Jim Shannon**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of Article 26(3) of the Nepalese Constitution on freedom of religion or belief in Nepal.

**Answering member: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The Constitution of Nepal, 2015 under article 26 (1) guarantees freedom of religion as a fundamental right. Sub-article 3 states that in exercise of the right conferred by this article, one cannot do, or cause to be done, any act which may be contrary to public health, decency and morality, breach public peace, convert another person from one religion to another or any other act or conduct that may jeopardize another's religion. These subsequent provisions may be interpreted in a way that would limit people's rights to express their religion and, potentially, their right to choose their religion.

Our Embassy in Kathmandu has consistently encouraged the Government of Nepal and members of Nepal's parliament to ensure Nepal meets its international human rights obligations. This includes ensuring freedom of religion or belief. I raised these issues with the Nepalese Ambassador to London at a meeting on 9 October.

**Nepal: Freedom of Expression  
09 Oct 2017 | 10379**

**Asked by: Jim Shannon**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to the Government of Nepal on the state of freedom of expression in that country following the arrest of eight Christians in Charikot in June 2016.

**Answering member: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Our Embassy in Kathmandu has consistently encouraged the Government of Nepal and members of Nepal's parliament to ensure Nepal meets its international human rights obligations, including freedom of religion or belief. I raised these issues with the Nepalese Ambassador to London at a meeting on 9 October 2017.

**China: Christianity  
09 Oct 2017 | 10352**

**Asked by: Gregory Campbell**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to his Chinese counterpart on the harassment and surveillance faced by the growing Chinese Protestant population in that country.

**Answering member: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We remain concerned about restrictions on freedom of religion or belief in China and have raised this issue regularly, including at the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue which took place on 27-28 June 2017.

**Pakistan: Religious Freedom**  
**27 Sep 2017 | HL1569**

**Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool**

To ask Her Majesty's Government when they last raised with the government of Pakistan (1) the anti-Ahmadiyya laws set out in Penal Code Article 298, and (2) that government's obligations to protect freedom of religion or belief; and whether they intend to encourage the government of Pakistan to invite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to make a country visit to Pakistan.

**Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The UK Government remains firmly committed to the promotion and protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief. We regularly raise concerns about the protection and persecution of minority communities, including Ahmadiyya Muslims, the blasphemy laws and the protection of freedom of religion or belief to the Government of Pakistan at a senior level. The Foreign Secretary raised the importance we attach to religious tolerance and safeguarding the rights of all Pakistan's citizens during his visit to Pakistan in November 2016. The former Minister for Asia and the Pacific, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Mr Sharma), discussed the protection of religious minorities with Kamran Michael, former Minister for Human Rights, and Barrister Zafarullah Khan, Prime Minister's Special Assistant for Human Rights, during a visit to Pakistan in January 2017.

We continue to urge Pakistan to take the steps necessary to comply in full with its human rights obligations, including engaging with the UN and other international bodies, and to ensure that the rights of minorities are respected.

**Saudi Arabia: Religious Freedom**  
**27 Sep 2017 | HL1540**

**Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Leeds**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they made to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, Abdel al-Jubeir, when he visited London on 4 September, concerning religious freedom, eliminating discriminatory enforcement of laws against religious minorities, and promoting respect and tolerance for minority Muslim and non-Muslim religious practices and beliefs.

**Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Saudi Arabia remains a Foreign and Commonwealth Office human rights priority country, particularly because of the restrictions on freedom of religion or belief. Although not discussed on 5 September, we regularly raise our concern with the Government of Saudi Arabia.

### **Sudan: Churches**

**20 Sep 2017 | HL1465**

#### **Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Leeds**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Sudan regarding the demolition of churches built on land that has since been designated for buildings other than places of worship.

#### **Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The British Government continues to be deeply concerned by reports of the demolition of churches in Sudan. Through the UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue, and our policy of phased engagement, we continue to raise human rights issues with the government of Sudan and make regular representations on freedom of religion or belief, including in relation to reported church demolitions, most recently during the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to Sudan in July.

### **Sudan: Human Rights**

**20 Sep 2017 | HL1461**

#### **Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Leeds**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the human rights situation and current levels of humanitarian access in Sudan.

#### **Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We continue to be concerned by the human rights situation in Sudan. This includes restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief, and sexual and gender based violence, especially in the conflict areas of Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile.

Whilst the release and pardon of six human rights activists by the government of Sudan, including Dr Mudawi Ibrahim Adam, an issue on which the UK actively lobbied the government of Sudan, was a positive development, considerable human rights challenges remain. Sudan is a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Human Rights Priority Country and improving human rights is a key objective in our engagement.

The UN states that there has been an improvement in levels of humanitarian access in Sudan, including to previously inaccessible parts of Darfur. We welcome this and encourage the government of Sudan to make further progress on full humanitarian access.

### **Turkey: Antisemitism**

**13 Sep 2017 | 8842**

#### **Asked by: Graham Brady**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with Turkish counterparts on antisemitism.

**Answering member: Sir Alan Duncan | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

There have been a number of recent protests targeting synagogues in Turkey, reportedly in response to the situation at the Al Aqsa mosque in East Jerusalem in July. These were condemned by both President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Yıldırım, who emphasised the importance of freedom of religion. As a friend and ally of Turkey, the UK has a frank and honest dialogue with the Turkish authorities on a range of issues, including freedom of religion and non-discrimination.

**Religious Freedom  
13 Sep 2017 | 8795****Asked by: Justin Tomlinson**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent steps he has taken to tackle religious persecution abroad.

**Answering member: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Her Majesty's Government promotes Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in many countries through diplomatic channels, public statements and support for projects to promote tolerance. A small selection of examples of steps Her Majesty's Government has taken recently to tackle and condemn religious persecution is provided below. It would place a disproportionate burden on resources to produce an exhaustive list of all recent actions taken by Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials abroad in this area.

During his recent visit to Bangladesh, Lord Ahmad visited an Ahmadiyya mosque where he spoke publicly of the importance of religious tolerance. In the wake of recent attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt, the Foreign Secretary made a statement condemning religious intolerance and violence against religious minorities. We have issued a number of statements in response to Russia's Supreme Court ruling banning Jehovah's Witnesses as 'extremists'. Officials from our Embassy in Moscow have attended court hearings and continue to monitor this case closely. In Eritrea, we have continued to call on the Government to release all prisoners detained without due process, including those detained for their religious beliefs. And in Sudan, we lobbied consistently on behalf of four imprisoned Christian pastors (now released – partly, we judge, as a result of our efforts).

At the United Nations Human Rights Council we continue to work to sustain consensus on the adoption and implementation of the European Union sponsored Resolution on 'Freedom of Religion or Belief' and the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation sponsored Resolution on 'Combating Religious Intolerance'. We also continue to support a number of projects to promote tolerance through the FCO's Magna Carta Fund, including a project to promote legal and social protection of FoRB in secondary school curricula across the Middle East and North Africa.

**Burma: Rohingya**

**12 Sep 2017 | 8605**

**Asked by: Catherine West**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of (a) the security situation, (b) human rights and (c) religious freedom in the state of Rohingya, Burma.

**Answering member: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The British Government continues to discuss the situation in Rakhine with the Government of Burma. On 7 September, the Foreign Secretary called State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to raise our strong concerns about Rakhine. They agreed any human rights abuses or violations must be investigated urgently. Our Ambassador continues to engage with officials from the Burmese Foreign Ministry on the full range of challenges facing Rakhine State.

On 30 August the UK convened a discussion on Burma at the UN Security Council. The UK urged the security forces in Rakhine to show restraint and called for all parties to de-escalate tensions. The Foreign Secretary released a statement on 2 September calling for an end to the violence. Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon made a statement at the 36th session of the Human Rights Council on 11 September which made clear that the UK strongly condemned the violence, and called on all parties to de-escalate tensions and address the humanitarian crisis

**Egypt: Baha'i Faith**

**12 Sep 2017 | 8461**

**Asked by: Diana Johnson**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations (a) the British Ambassador to Egypt, (b) Ministers and (c) British consular officials have made to their Egyptian counterparts on the human rights situation of people of the Baha'i faith in Egypt.

**Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The UK Government is clear that Freedom of Religion or Belief needs to be protected and the ability to worship in peace is a vital component of a democratic society. We deplore all discrimination against religious minorities and constraints on their freedom to practise their faith. We recognise the challenges faced by the Baha'i community in Egypt.

The Government of Egypt has stated its commitment to protecting the rights of minorities and the need for freedom of worship, and the Egyptian constitution contains protection for Freedom of Religion or Belief. Senior Foreign and Commonwealth officials regularly raise Freedom of Religion or Belief with the Government of Egypt. We continue to call on governments across the region, including Egypt, to

ensure that Freedom of Religion or Belief is respected for all, including members of the Baha'i faith.

### **Iran: Religious Freedom**

**12 Sep 2017 | 7412**

**Asked by: Layla Moran**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had over the summer recess with the Iranian authorities about the persecution of religious minorities in that country.

**Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

I raised concerns about the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi during my visit to Tehran on 5 August.

### **Iran: Religious Freedom**

**12 Sep 2017 | 7404**

**Asked by: Paul Blomfield**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to his Iranian counterpart on the persecution of Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities in that country.

**Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

I raised concerns about the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, including the detention and treatment of Christians, with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi during my visit to Tehran on 5 August.

### **Algeria: Ahmadiyya**

**11 Sep 2017 | 6488**

**Asked by: Siobhain McDonagh**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to his counterparts in Algeria on the arrest and detention of Ahmadi Muslims across Algeria since June 2016 on grounds of practising their faith.

**Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We are aware of a number of reports of Ahmadiyya being arrested in Algeria. We have raised this with the Algerian government, who said that the arrests relate to breaches of laws which apply to all religions in Algeria. The Algerian constitution provides freedom of religion and we encourage them to make domestic law fully compatible with that. The promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief for all individuals internationally remains a high priority for the UK.

## **China: Ethnic Groups and Religious Freedom**

**05 Sep 2017 | 5926**

### **Asked by: Kerry McCarthy**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what progress has been made on the issue of restrictions on religious freedoms and discrimination against ethnic minorities in China since the Government raised the matter at the UN Human Rights Council in March 2017.

### **Answering member: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We remain concerned about restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, and on the rights of ethnic minorities in China. We issued a further item IV statement at the 35th UN Human Rights Council in June reiterating these concerns. We also raised these matters directly with the Chinese authorities at the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue in Beijing on 27 June.

## **Syria: Refugees**

**27 Jul 2017 | HL1054**

### **Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool**

Her Majesty's Government what assessment they made of (1) the written evidence submitted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief to the International Development Committee on 20 October 2015 that local workers employed by UNHCR were giving preferential access to aid and food resources to Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey who shared the religious beliefs of those workers, and (2) the extent to which such practices are continuing.

### **Answering member: Lord Bates | Department for International Development**

The Government takes extremely seriously any allegations that UN staff are giving preferential access to aid on the basis of the religious affiliation of beneficiaries. This would contravene international humanitarian principles and the UN's own guidelines. Lord Bates and Minister Burt have arranged a joint meeting with Lord Alton and interested parties to discuss this important issue.

## **Iraq: Minority Groups**

**25 Jul 2017 | HL707**

### **Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Southwark**

Her Majesty's Government, further to the remarks by Mark Field MP, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on 4 July (HC Deb. Cols 21–23WH) concerning the "special responsibility for protecting and upholding the rights of Christian communities across the globe" and the ring-fencing of humanitarian assistance to help protect displaced minorities, whether they will institute a programme for the secure restoration of Christian communities and other minorities in Iraq.

**Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Iraqi Christians have deep and ancient ties to the region. It is a tragedy that so many have been forced to flee their homes and been subjected to such appalling human rights abuses. We want to see Christians and other minorities continuing to live, worship and prosper in Iraq and across the Middle East.

To this end, we are providing £209.5 million in humanitarian aid to all those who have been affected by conflict in Iraq. The funding provides clean water, sanitation, essential medicines and other life-saving assistance. We are also providing over £15 million towards UN efforts to stabilise areas liberated from Daesh. In addition, through the UK's Conflict, Security and Stability Fund we are supporting community cohesion, encouraging reconciliation and promoting acceptance and tolerance between communities. We also continue to encourage political and religious leaders in Iraq to speak out publicly to condemn violence and we are working to build international consensus on upholding freedom of religion or belief.

UK funded aid is provided on the basis of need to ensure civilians are not discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, or ethnicity.

Ultimately, the best way of safeguarding Christian and other minority communities in Iraq is to establish lasting peace. That means defeating Daesh and helping the Government of Iraq to deliver political reform and reconciliation.

**Russia: Jehovah's Witnesses****19 Jul 2017 | HL427****Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Coventry**

Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the decision by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation to ban the Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds that the group is considered to be an extremist organisation.

**Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The UK is deeply concerned by the dismissal of an appeal against the decision of Russia's Supreme Court to categorise the Jehovah's Witnesses as extremists. This ruling effectively criminalises the peaceful worship of some 175,000 Russian citizens and is at odds with the right to religious freedom which is enshrined in the Russian Constitution.

I issued a statement on 18 July expressing our concerns. We have raised this issue with the Russian Government and continue to call on them to uphold their commitment to this basic freedom in international fora, including in the Council of Europe.

### **Tajikistan: Religious Freedom**

**18 Jul 2017 | HL430**

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Coventry

Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the government of Tajikistan's commitment to freedom of religion of belief following the decision by the State Committee for Religious Affairs to ban anyone under the age of 40 from participating in the August Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

#### **Answering member: Baroness Goldie | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The restrictions on freedom of religion in Tajikistan are a growing concern and indicative of Tajikistan's heavy-handed approach to countering extremism. Our Embassy in Dushanbe raises concerns over human rights issues both bilaterally and in collaboration with the EU and like-minded partners.

### **Commonwealth: Religious Freedom**

**17 Jul 2017 | HL431**

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Coventry

Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to include freedom of religion or belief on the agenda of the 2018 Commonwealth Summit.

#### **Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The Government believes that the Commonwealth is a force for good around the world, through its promotion of freedom, democracy, human rights, development and prosperity.

The UK-hosted 2018 Commonwealth Summit will encourage all Commonwealth members to uphold the values set out in the Commonwealth Charter, and this includes freedom of religion and belief. We are currently working on finalising the key themes and agenda for the summit which will include a focus on shared values and the human rights agenda.

### **Turkey: Christianity**

**17 Jul 2017 | HL327**

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

Her Majesty's Government whether the UK embassy in Ankara has made any contacts with the Mor Gabriel Monastery Foundation in relation to the government of Turkey's seizure of Christian properties.

#### **Answering member: Baroness Goldie | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Our Embassy in Ankara has not been in contact with the Mor Gabriel Monastery Foundation. Legal changes to local government structures in Mardin, where many important Assyrian religious sites are found, resulted in 2012 in the transfer of the title deeds to some religious sites from local bodies to central government. They were eventually transferred to the Government's Directorate for Religious Affairs.

Assyrian organisations are making legal appeals against these decisions. The British Embassy in Ankara regularly raises human rights issues with the Turkish authorities and will be closely following this legal process.

### Religious Freedom

29 Jun 2017 | 168

#### Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what the Government's policy is on protecting the right of (a) Christians and (b) people of other religious beliefs to wear or carry religious symbols in public.

#### Answering member: Nick Gibb | Women and Equalities

The Government believes that both Christians and people of other religious beliefs should be able to wear or carry religious symbols in public so long as they act within the boundaries of the law while doing so.

### Engagements

28 Jun 2017 | 626 c594

#### Asked by: Anne Main

Today is the festival saint's day of St Alban, and his pilgrimage was celebrated on Saturday. What more can be done to protect all persons of faith who are being persecuted for their faith, particularly our students on campuses who are suffering large amounts of anti-Semitism?

#### Answered by: Theresa May | Prime Minister

I am happy to recognise St Alban's day, as my hon. Friend has. She is absolutely right that this is important. Sometimes we talk a lot about people who are being persecuted for their faith in countries abroad, but actually we need to be very clear that, sadly, we do see people here suffering attacks, particularly anti-Semitic ones, on campuses. The Community Security Trust does a lot of work with students to provide support, and I am happy that the Government are supporting them. We are also supporting Muslim communities that are suffering from Islamophobia. There is no place for such hate in our society, and we must all work to stamp it out.

### Middle East: Religious Freedom

27 Jun 2017 | 271

#### Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with governments in the Middle East to encourage a better understanding of human rights provision relating to inter-faith marriages.

**Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

As far as we are aware there have been no such discussions in recent times. The British Government is clear, however, that discrimination on the basis of faith is a violation of universal human rights. The right not to be discriminated against by the state extends to the provision of marriage.

**Egypt: Christianity**  
**27 Apr 2017 | HL6814**

**Asked by: Baroness Berridge**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Egypt regarding the bombings of the Coptic churches in Alexandria and Tanta in April.

**Answering member: Baroness Anelay of St Johns | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We strongly condemn the recent attacks in Egypt against the Coptic Christian community, claimed by Daesh. The Government of Egypt has reaffirmed its commitment to protecting the rights of minorities and to the need to promote religious tolerance. We welcome President Sisi's calls for peaceful coexistence and the Government of Egypt's expression of support for the rights of Christians and for religious tolerance.

The UK Government continues to work closely with the Egyptian authorities on security and counter-terrorism.

**Diplomatic Service: Religious Freedom**  
**27 Apr 2017 | 71720**

**Asked by: Jim Shannon**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to implement its revised toolkit on freedom of religion or belief by embassies overseas.

**Answering member: Alok Sharma | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

In October 2016, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) made available to staff a revised Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) toolkit to assist all officials working on human rights both in London and at overseas posts. The revised toolkit provides posts with ideas on how to promote freedom of religion or belief in their local context. To support implementation, we provide training to staff to increase religious literacy, including courses on religion and diplomacy. Building on the FCO's conference in October 2016, posts have been encouraged to make FoRB and countering violent extremism themes of their diplomatic and project work.

## 4. Other Parliamentary material

### 4.1 Debates

#### **The Rohingya and the Myanmar Government**

17 October 2017 | 629 cc764-812

#### **Iran: Human Rights**

11 October 2017 | 629 cc81-104WH

#### **Persecution of Christians: Role of UK Embassies**

04 July 2017 | 626 1-25WH

#### **International Human Rights Day**

13 December 2016 | 618 cc

#### **Iran: Human Rights**

08 December 2016 | 777 cc943-956

#### **Anti-Semitism**

27 October 2016 | 776 cc17-32GC

#### **Persecution of Religious Minorities: Middle East**

19 July 2016 | 613 cc267-290WH

### 4.2 Early Day Motions

#### **Rohingya Muslims**

**EDM 346 (session 2017-19)**

**Date tabled: 09.10.2017**

**Chris Law**

That this House expresses deep concern at the ongoing widespread horrific violence against the minority Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, which has resulted in more than 500,000 Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh since August 2017, making it the world's fastest-developing refugee emergency; notes that survivors in Bangladesh have recounted horrific stories of rape, mass murder and infanticide; further notes that the attacks on the Rohingya, at the hands of the Myanmar police and military, have been systematic and widespread, leading to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, to describe them as a textbook example of ethnic cleansing; notes that the Rohingya people have faced years of mistreatment at the hands of the Burmese Government and need urgent action; notes that most are living in refugee camps, denied citizenship, basic health care and employment; calls on Myanmar's state counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi, to speak out against these shocking human rights violations and allow access into the region immediately; and urges the Government to put sustained pressure on the Myanmar Government to end the violence and to allow unhindered access for humanitarian aid to all of the Rakhine State.

### **Flight of Rohingya refugees from Burma**

**EDM 255 (session 2017-19)**

**5 September 2017**

**Ann Clwyd**

That this House notes with concern the increasing number of Rohingya refugees crossing from Burma into Bangladesh, with over 100,000 having fled violence, allegedly triggered by an attack by Rohingya militants on police posts, since the end of August; is very concerned about reports from many of those who have fled describing troops and Rakhine Buddhist mobs razing their villages and attacking and killing civilians in a campaign to drive them out; notes that a million Muslim Rohingya people in Burma have faced years of mistreatment at the hands of the Burmese Government, which does not recognise them as citizens; calls on the de facto Burmese leader Aung San Sui Kyi to condemn the military campaign and allow independent observers access into the region immediately; and calls on the Government to continue urging the Burmese Government to end the violence and take robust action against hate speech, discrimination and incitement, as well as to continue assisting with the humanitarian response to displaced populations.

### **Persecution of Rohingyas**

**EDM 240 (session 2017-19)**

**5 September 2017**

**John Grogan**

This House expresses its deep concern at recent developments in Myanmar; condemns the murderous attacks by militants against Burmese border posts but also the completely disproportionate response of the Burmese military against the Rohingyas who the UN consider are the most persecuted minority group in the world; further condemns the brutal assaults from the Burmese state and military over many years burning down Rohingya villages and carrying out multiple murders and rapes; calls on the de facto Burmese leader Aung San Suu Kyi as a holder of the UN Peace Prize to speak out for the human rights of the Rohingyas and to allow access for aid agencies and journalists to the affected areas; and further calls on the international community to condemn Myanmar's army chief General Min Aung Hlaing, gather evidence for possible war crimes charges against him and his generals, and to impose strong sanctions against them.

### **Condemning the attack on Amarnath pilgrims in Kashmir**

**EDM 184 (session 2017-19)**

**13 July 2017**

**Bob Blackman**

That this House condemns the recent killings of innocent Hindu pilgrims in Anantnag, Jammu and Kashmir in India; recognises it as a gruesome attack on innocent pilgrims by Lashkar-e-Toiba, an internationally recognised terrorist group, led by Abu Ismail; urges the Government to condemn strongly the attack and stand with India in the fight against terrorism; calls on the Government to investigate if there are any direct

or indirect links to organisations or individuals in the UK that may be involved in such cross-border atrocities in India; and further calls on the Government to reject all forms of terrorism and support to organisations and individuals propagating such ideology and to take strong action against such organisations and individuals in the UK to ensure peace in the UK as well as India.

### **Attacks on Coptic Christians**

**EDM 1144 (session 2016-17)**

**18 April 2017**

**Jim Shannon**

That this House expresses concern and sorrow regarding the attack on the Coptic Christian churches in Egypt during which 44 people were killed and 126 were wounded; calls on the Government to stand in solidarity with the Egyptian Government and people, and in particular with the Christian churches in that country which wish to be free to worship God in peace and with full security; and urges the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to liaise closely with its Egyptian counterparts to offer any support and help that it is possible to give at this time.

### **Protection of Christians in Egypt**

**EDM 799 (session 2016-17)**

**12 December 2016**

**Jim Shannon**

That this House condemns the attack on the Christian Coptic Church in Cairo, Egypt by Islamic extremists; sends its support to the Christians in Egypt and calls for more protection for Christians; and further calls on the Government to offer assistance to President el-Sisi on his efforts to combat violent ISIS terrorism and to fully encourage Christians in their places of worship.

## 5. Press releases

### **Freedom of religion or belief under threat in Southeast Asia** **International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion** **or Belief and the Asia Centre** **8 October 2017**

Looking at all the ASEAN countries, new research shows that religious freedom appears to be regressing in Southeast Asia. Serious challenges have arisen in recent years across the region, such as in Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia, according to the reports.

The challenges are at least four-fold: rise of religious-based intolerance, discrimination against minorities and indigenous peoples, the securitization of freedom of religion or belief in the context of fighting terrorism and the dire need to uphold international human rights standards in this overall context, says Dr. Robin Ramcharan of Asia Centre who coordinated the research on behalf of IPPFoRB.

The reports are results of collaboration between the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB) and the Asia Centre that examined today's state of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in Southeast Asia.

These reports provide a valuable resource for parliamentarians and civil society organisations across South East Asia. It gives them the tools to hold their Governments to account on their obligations and commitments to freedom of religion or belief, says David Anderson, member of the IPPFoRB Steering Group.

Each of the 11 country reports clearly sets out the progress that has been made as well as the challenges still remaining. They are essential reading for all those wanting to engage in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process and more specifically in religious freedom monitoring and advocacy in South East Asia.

I encourage ASEAN parliamentarians to use these expert reports to press their respective governments for the legislative and policy changes necessary to secure religious freedom for all, Andersons adds.

The reports were launched in Bangkok October 7th, during a workshop with some 25 Members of Parliament from the ASEAN-countries, hosted by IPPFoRB and ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR).

### **Baroness Anelay marks International Religious Freedom Day** **Foreign and Commonwealth Office** **27 October 2016**

One week on from a ground-breaking conference on freedom of religion or belief, Human Rights Minister Baroness Anelay reiterates the

importance the government attaches to promoting this fundamental right.

Human Rights Minister Baroness Anelay said:

“On International Religious Freedom Day, I would like to take the opportunity to emphasise the importance that the UK government attaches to promoting and protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief around the world.

“The right to choose your religion, to practise it, share it, change it or live without a religion at all is something that everyone should enjoy. In a world where over 80% of the population identifies as religious, this is fundamental to the lives and identity of the vast majority of the world’s citizens.

“Freedom of religion or belief is also one of our most powerful tools in the fight against extremism. One week ago, I hosted a major international conference to explore with experts from around the globe how we step up international action to promote inclusive societies where religious diversity is celebrated.

“This is not something that governments alone can do. So on this international day, I call on faith leaders, academics, teachers, media and civil society to join us as we fight for a world where no one suffers discrimination or persecution simply on the grounds of what they believe.”

**CIFoRB Celebrates International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day - Thursday 27 October 2016**  
**Commonwealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion and Belief 19 October 2016**

In celebration of International Freedom of Religion or Belief - FORB – Day, the CIFoRB team and the All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief hosted a roundtable event in Parliament exploring the current state of freedom of religion or belief around the world, with the aim that it should become an annual event to mark the day.

CIFoRB and the APPG drew together parliamentarians, Commonwealth organisations, academics, NGOs, journalists and faith groups to discuss how best to advance freedom of religion or belief and work together, engaging in new ideas, new programmes to support FORB. As one participant noted, freedom of religion or belief is an absolute right and it is morally and politically imperative that we should all defend and promote it, no matter what our individual faith or beliefs.

We were delighted to hear contributions from the UN, the EU Special Envoy for FoRB outside the European Union as well as from the Commonwealth Deputy Secretary General, Josephine Ojiambo and parliamentarians from both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Academics from the University of Birmingham and Sussex

University provided refreshing insights and there was strong agreement within the room that while the global environment of freedom of religion or belief at times looks very bleak, action is being taken and working together will bring about change.

**FCO leads global action on freedom of religion  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
19 October 2016**

The Foreign Office is hosting a 2-day summit to bring together experts to explore how freedom of religion or belief can help prevent violent extremism.

On 19 to 20 October the FCO is hosting a ground-breaking event which will explore how building inclusive societies, in which people have freedom to practise their own religion and belief, can help prevent extremism.

The conference will bring together more than 50 expert speakers and over 170 participants from 38 countries who will share ideas to extend and defend the right to freedom of religion or belief, discuss ways to build resilience against extremism and identify opportunities to work together.

Extremism is the biggest security challenge of our age and is a significant barrier to global prosperity, development, peace and stability.

The conference will explore the degree to which freedom of religion or belief can serve as part of the answer to this challenge because freedom and respect for human rights help to create the conditions under which societies can grow more stable and prosperous.

No country can tackle this alone so the conference is an important step in bringing together experts on freedom of religion and extremism to focus on practical solutions.

FCO Minister for Human Rights, Baroness Anelay said:

“Freedom of religion or belief is one of our most powerful tools in the fight against extremism.

“We need to value others, no matter what religion they follow. And if we teach our children to do the same we are equipping them to reject the hatred peddled by extremists.

“All parts of society must join us in this effort and I’m delighted that so many are attending the conference, showing the level of commitment and ambition for this cause.

“If we lay the foundations for open, equal and plural societies, then we are building communities that are more likely to reject extremism.”

The government is taking a number of practical steps to support the expression of freedom of religion or belief overseas:

- We launched and signed up to a statement of principles for UN Global Leadership on Preventing Violent Extremism, and urged other UN Member States to join us
- We have increased our funding to the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund to support initiatives to prevent violent extremism
- We support projects throughout the world through the Magna Carta Fund: for example in Iraq we supported a series of grassroots meetings between religious leaders to promote religious tolerance and freedom of religion or belief
- On 19 September at the United Nations General Assembly, the Foreign Secretary, alongside the Foreign Ministers from Belgium and Iraq, launched a campaign to ensure that once they are defeated, Daesh are held to account for their awful crimes

## 6. Further reading

**All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief** (website)

**International Religious Freedom Report for 2016**, US State Department, 2017

**Persecuted and Forgotten? 2015-17**, Aid to the Church in Need, 12 October 2017

**Religious Freedom**: Human Rights Watch website

**Restrictions on Religion**: Pew Research Centre website

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