



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-0231, 23 October 2018

International freedom of religion or belief day 2018

Summary

A general debate on international freedom of religion or belief day 2018 will take place in Westminster Hall on Thursday 25 October 2018.

The subject of the debate was determined by the backbench Business Committee following an [application from Jim Shannon MP](#). The motion for the debate is: That this House has considered international freedom of religion or belief day 2018.

International freedom of religion or belief day is 27 October 2018.

The proceedings of this debate can be viewed on [Parliamentlive.tv](#)

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

Compiled by:
Sarah Priddy

Subject specialists:
David Torrance
Stefano Fella

Contents

1. Background	2
1.1 Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights	2
1.2 United Nations Human Rights Council	3
2. Press and blog articles	4
3. Press notices	7
4. Parliamentary material	10
4.1 Debates	10
4.2 Oral Questions	11
4.3 Written Questions	15
4.4 Early Day Motions	29
5. Further reading and useful links	30
5.1 Commons and Lords Library briefings	30
5.2 All Party Parliamentary Group	30
5.3 Government websites	31
5.4 European Commission	31
5.5 Equality and Human Rights Commission	31
5.6 Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe	32
5.7 Liberty	32
5.8 ADF International	32
5.9 ILGA- Europe	33
5.10 IPPFoRB	33

1. Background

Jim Shannon MP is the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief. The Group's purpose is:

Raising awareness and profile of international freedom of religion or belief as a human right among parliamentarians, government, media and the general public.

In representations to the Backbench Business Committee for a debate on international freedom of religion or belief day 2018, Mr Shannon raised concerns about freedom of religion or belief in countries such as Iraq and Myanmar. He also highlighted the appointment of Lord Ahmad to the new position of Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

In a debate to mark International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day in October 2017, Mr Shannon outlined article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights and stated that the Group:

stand(s) up for the rights of those of a Christian belief, those of other beliefs and those with no belief.¹

1.1 Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The freedom of religion or belief is stated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)² and 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:

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.

No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

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.

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.

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.

1.2 United Nations Human Rights Council

[Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#)

The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief is an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council. The mandate holder has been invited to identify existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and present recommendations on ways and means to overcome such obstacles.

2. Press and blog articles

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

[China's hidden camps](#)

BBC News, John Sudworth

23 October 2018

The BBC has evidence of China building a network of hidden camps for its Muslim population.

[Infringements on religious freedom indicate early sign of violent conflict](#)

Scottish Legal News, Kelsey Zorzi

23 October 2018

Ahmed Shadeed, UN special rapporteur, spoke at an event in New York on the importance of the freedom of religion acting as an overall indicator of human rights protections.

[Amnesty and ICCL call for Yes vote in blasphemy referendum](#)

The Irish Times, Patsy McGarry

22 October 2018

Gina Menzies said the blasphemy clause in the Constitution 'doesn't protect freedom of religion and belief, in fact it undermines it'

[Pope Francis open to North Korea visit; Kim Jong-un's overtures could pave way for first papal visit to country accused of persecuting Christians](#)

The Guardian, Harriet Sherwood

18 October 2018

North Korea has topped a list of 50 countries ranked for the persecution of Christians for 16 years in a row. The list, compiled by the Christian watchdog Open Doors, highlighted the imprisonment in labour camps of Christians and Christian missionaries in the state.

[Chinese authorities launch 'anti-halal' crackdown in Xinjiang: Party officials also urged government officers to speak Mandarin at work and in public](#)

The Guardian, Lily Kuo in Beijing

10 October 2018

Party officials in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, which is home to about 12 million people from Muslim minorities, on Monday called on government officers to strengthen the "ideological struggle" and fight "halalification" or the "pan-halal tendency," a post on the Urumqi People's Procuratorate Wechat account said.

[The Guardian view on the Vatican and China: an ideological struggle; Since the death of Mao, religion has revived immensely in China. But who is to be the master of the growing churches?](#)

The Guardian, Editorial

1 October 2018

Every power in the world must now come to terms with China's rise to superpower status; last week it was the turn of the Vatican, a global soft superpower. An opaque and ambiguous agreement seems to have resolved decades of diplomatic stalemate over the appointment of bishops for China's 12 million Catholics, although that figure, too, is shrouded in uncertainty.

[Enough talk. Let's have action on Rohingya massacres; Inquiries were held on the mass killings in Rakhine state and some visa bans imposed; here's what must happen next](#)

The Observer, Jan Figel & Benedict Rogers

26 August 2018

In 2012, violence broke out between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims, leaving thousands displaced and parts of the state smouldering. Rohingya were held in dire conditions in camps that observers compare to internment centres. A new campaign by the Myanmar military broke out in October 2016, a prelude to last year's dramatic escalation.

[China denies detaining millions of Uighurs; UN allegation ; Beijing rejects panel claims and stresses commitment to religious freedom](#)

Financial Times, Emily Feng (subscription required)

14 August 2018

A UN panel on racial discrimination said on Friday that it was "deeply concerned" by reports that China "has turned the [Xinjiang] Uighur Autonomous Region into something that resembles a massive internment camp that is shrouded in secrecy".

[Jeff Sessions announces new 'Religious Liberty Task Force' at Department of Justice; Attorney general warns US has become 'less hospitable to people of faith'](#)

The Independent, Emily Shugerman

31 July 2018

The US Department of Justice has created a "religious liberty task force" to help implement the Trump administration's new religious guidance. Attorney General Jeff Sessions warned that the country had become "hospitable to people of faith" as he announced its formation at a Justice Department Religious Liberty Summit. "A dangerous movement, undetected by many, is now challenging and eroding our great tradition of religious freedom," he said. "There can be no doubt. This is no little matter. It must be confronted and defeated."

[After condemning the Yazidi genocide, how can the government then deny its victims asylum?; It is not enough to criticise the actions of Isis. The Home Office must actively support those who have been left in their wake - particularly those claiming asylum on UK soil](#)

The Independent, Katy Fallon

30 July 2018

This Friday, 3 August, will mark the fourth anniversary of the Yazidi genocide, when Isis descended upon the Sinjar region of Iraq, home to hundreds of thousands of Yazidis, and systematically slaughtered and captured nearly all in their path. Thousands sought sanctuary in the mountains but those not lucky enough to escape were either murdered in their homes or taken captive.

3. Press notices

[USCIRF Concerned About UNESCO Resolutions](#)

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

23 October 2018

Commissioner Gary Bauer cautioned, “The idea that there’s a question about the Jewish historical presence in the Holy Land and specifically at these sites is unacceptable and diminishes the religious rights of the Jewish people. UNESCO has no business pronouncing on territorial sovereignty or arbitrating territorial disputes.”

[Fight against terrorism no excuse to ignore freedom of religion or belief, says UN rights expert](#)

United Nations Human Rights

22 October 2018

The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, said national security measures introduced to advance the global war on terrorism have resulted in “countless violations and abuses of fundamental human rights”, including the right to freedom of religion or belief.

In a report presented to the UN General Assembly, Shaheed highlighted discriminatory practices that target particular faiths perceived to be linked to violence and terrorism. He asserted that freedom of religion or belief (and other human rights) and national security are not competing or mutually exclusive values that need to be “balanced” against one another, but that a “complementary, interdependent and mutually reinforcing relationship exists between these imperatives for human dignity and safety.”

“Terrorism and violent extremism pose direct threats to the enjoyment of human rights, and States have an obligation to protect all individuals from violence located within their territories and that are subject to their jurisdictions. However, States must also uphold human rights obligations while pursuing these measures if they are to make sustainable inroads in challenging the narratives of violent extremists and if they are to effectively prevent these atrocities.”

“In this context, I further urge States to use the various tools developed by the United Nations system in the context of freedom of religion or belief and the prevention of mass atrocities, and which are grounded in the human rights framework, to build societal resilience against violent extremism.”

The Special Rapporteur said “any distinction, exclusion or preference that, by design or in its application, nullifies or impairs the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms is unlawful unless distinctions are based on objective and reasonable criteria”.

He stressed the importance of the Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18, outlining measures to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatisation, incitement to violence and violence based on a person's faith.

Shaheed's report also highlighted the Rabat Plan of Action adopted in 2012 on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence. The Special Rapporteur also included reference to 2015's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, urging States to embrace the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

"I also welcome, by way of example, the Faith for Rights framework, which was launched in March 2017 through the Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights and its 18 commitments. Developing collaborative networks of faith-based actors to promote human rights is clearly a worthy goal, especially with regard to fostering respect for pluralism," the Special Rapporteur said.

[UK condemns Houthi Persecution of the Baha'i Community in Yemen](#)

Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

24 September 2018

The UK is deeply concerned by reports that the Houthi authorities in Sana'a, Yemen, have held a mass trial of members of Yemen's Baha'i community. 24 people – including eight women and a child – are facing charges that could result in death sentences.

[Lord Ahmad appointed as PM's Special Envoy to promote religious freedom](#)

Prime Minister's Office, Foreign & Commonwealth Office

4 July 2018

Lord Ahmad has today been appointed as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The role, which supports the Prime Minister's commitment to religious tolerance in the UK, will allow Lord Ahmad to demonstrate the country's commitment to religious freedom by promoting inter-faith respect and dialogue internationally.

Lord Ahmad, who is also Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, will promote the UK's firm stance on religious tolerance abroad, helping to tackle religious discrimination in countries where minority faith groups face persecution.

The appointment underscores the Prime Minister's commitment to tackling religious prejudice in all its forms and follows the government's recent announcement of a further £1 million funding for places of worship that have been subjected to hate crime attacks.

Prime Minister Theresa May said: “Religious discrimination blights the lives of millions of people across the globe and leads to conflict and instability. Both here and abroad, individuals are being denied the basic right of being able to practise their faith free of fear.

“Tolerance for those of different faiths is fundamental to our values, and is an issue I know is already of great importance to Lord Ahmad, who is constantly looking for fresh ways to promote religious liberty in his role as Minister for Human Rights at the Foreign Office.

“I look forward to supporting him in this new role as he works with faith groups and governments across the world to raise understanding of religious persecution and what we can do to eliminate it.”

The PM’s Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

“In too many parts of the world, religious minorities are persecuted, discriminated against and treated as second class citizens. As a man of faith, I feel this very keenly.

“Freedom of Religion or Belief is a human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It must be respected. People from all faiths or none should be free to practise as they wish. This respect is key to global stability, and is in all our interests.

“I am delighted to have been appointed as the PM’s Special Envoy. I shall use the UK Government’s global network to reach across religious divides, seek the elimination of discrimination on the basis of religion or belief and bring different communities together.”

4. Parliamentary material

4.1 Debates

[Religious Intolerance and Prejudice](#)

Lords motion to take note of the challenges posed by religious intolerance and prejudice in the United Kingdom.

17 Oct 2018 | Debates | House of Lords | 793 cc497-558

[International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day](#)

Motion that this House has considered International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day.

26 Oct 2017 | Backbench debates | House of Commons | 630 c236WH

[Nigeria](#)

Lords question for short debate on what assessment they have made of the continuing violence between communities and armed groups in Nigeria.

28 Jun 2018 | Questions for short debate | House of Lords | 792 cc283-297

[Ahmadiyya Muslim Community](#)

Unallotted backbench debate.

24 May 2018 | Backbench debates | House of Commons | 641 cc1040-1080

[Christians Overseas](#)

Adjournment debate on the persecution of Christians overseas.

22 May 2018 | Debates | House of Commons | 641 cc338-356WH

[Syria](#)

Lords motion to take note of the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

29 Mar 2018 | Debates | House of Lords | 790 cc948-978

[Freedom of Religion or Belief](#)

Motion that this House has considered freedom of religion or belief. Agreed to on question. Sitting

01 Mar 2018 | Backbench debates | House of Commons | 636 c460WH

4.2 Oral Questions

Religious freedom

HC Deb 18 Oct 2018 cc280-282

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps the Church of England is taking to promote religious freedom. [907123]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman): The Church of England welcomes the appointment of Lord Ahmad as the Prime Minister's special envoy to promote religious freedom; the Church called for this and it fulfils a long-standing request from faith communities in this country. I look forward to working closely with him. Next month, the Church of England plans to convene a reference group between its bishops and staff, the legal profession, theologians, ethicists and academics to explore the issues of religious freedom.

Fiona Bruce: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the recent landmark unanimous judgment of the Supreme Court in the case of *Lee v. Ashers Baking Company Ltd* and others and the religious freedom it has confirmed for Christians here in the UK not to be coerced into expressing views contrary to their sincerely held biblical beliefs?

Dame Caroline Spelman: Whatever one's views on marriage, everyone should be equal before the law and, of course, I would argue, equal in God's sight. The Church of England agrees that no one should suffer discrimination in the provision of goods and services on the grounds of age, race, gender, sexuality or any other personal characteristic. I think that it is striking that the Supreme Court found that there was no discrimination in this case, but instead found that the key issue was the right to freedom of expression.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): What additional measures does the Church intend to try to put in place to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to visit a place of worship on their preferred day?

Dame Caroline Spelman: It may be of interest to the hon. Gentleman to know that yesterday the Archbishop of Canterbury made a speech in the House of Lords about religious tolerance. The Church has consistently made the case that people should be able to worship unimpeded in this country according to their faith. The Archbishop said something very telling; he said that society needs to learn how to disagree well and that we need a society where rich beliefs and traditions can rub up against each other and against secular ideology in mutual challenge and respect.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): What work is the Church of England doing with other Christian Churches and other faiths—with Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and so on—to stand united on behalf of religious freedom around the world and against the persecution of religious minorities in every country, whatever the majority faith? I have to say with great sadness that Christians are the most persecuted minorities around the world.

Dame Caroline Spelman: As hon. Members will know from this Question Time, the Anglican Church around the world regularly speaks up on behalf of persecuted Christians. I regularly take questions from hon. Members about countries in which persecution is an issue. Last Saturday, the Archbishop of Canterbury was invited to speak in Nigeria ahead of the elections there to call for peace. He never misses an opportunity to make the case

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): As the right hon. Lady knows, people of all faiths and none across the world are subject to persecution for their religion or beliefs. Can she share with the House what the Church of England is doing to support the welfare of non-Christian communities around the world and to advocate for their right to freedom of religion or belief?

Dame Caroline Spelman: I think that particularly in the middle east, where Christians are often a persecuted minority, we speak up regularly about their plight. The Anglican Church also speaks out on the persecution of other denominations. The campaign that Christians have supported for the better protection of the Yazidi minority is just one example in that region of how we must be prepared to speak up for others.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The recently published commission on religious education set out a framework for updating RE and teaching the importance of religious freedoms. What steps is the Church of England taking to implement its findings?

Dame Caroline Spelman: The Church is very supportive of improved religious literacy in our schools. If ever there was a time to understand better the world we live in, it is now. This is the time when we need to equip our children, whatever their faith or background, to better understand what sometimes underpins the conflicts that exist around the world. So this is a timely intervention and I am pleased we have moved away from a now rather old-fashioned view that, if we just stamped out the teaching of religion, everything would be fine—nothing could be further from the truth.

[Asylum Applications](#)

HC Deb 15 Oct 2018 cc281-283

Baroness Berridge: To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to improve the assessment by the Home Office of asylum applications made on the grounds of religious or belief based persecution.

Baroness Berridge (Con): My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper and draw attention to my interests as outlined in the register.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, all asylum decision-makers undertake a

bespoke training package on how to assess religious and belief-based persecution claims. UK Visas and Immigration is currently working with the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief to develop a specialist considering religion or belief in the asylum claim training course. This will be introduced in the new year and will enhance asylum decision-makers' religious literacy in dealing with these complex issues.

Baroness Berridge: I thank the Minister for the work done by her and her officials since the publication of a report co-authored by the All-Party Parliamentary Group drawing attention to the problems with assessing these claims and, in particular, to policy and practice being somewhat different. Will the Minister outline what plans the department has to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of that training so that in a few years' time we are not facing the same difference between training and the decisions being made?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I thank my noble friend for her Question, her follow-up question and the tenacity and commitment she has shown on this issue. The new specialist course will form part of a continuous training package for asylum decision-makers, technical specialists and senior caseworkers. UKVI expects to roll it out in early 2019. UKVI has an internal audit process to assess the quality of decisions and interviews and the application of policy. Allowed appeals are also regularly analysed. In addition, independent audits are carried out by the operational assurance and security unit.

Baroness Bakewell (Lab): My Lords, there was considerable publicity around the case of the Pakistani humanist Hamza bin Walayat who failed his asylum application in part, it is thought, because he failed to identify Plato and Aristotle as humanists. What steps will the Home Office take to ensure that asylum assessors are better educated about the beliefs of non-religious people, including humanists?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: The noble Baroness outlines precisely why training in religious literacy and, indeed about those who have no beliefs or are humanists, which is a belief in and of itself, is required in order to make proper decisions.

Baroness Hussein-Ece (LD): My Lords, the Minister will be aware of the report *Still Falling Short*, which was produced recently by the UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration group highlighting that LGBT+ asylum seekers were routinely disbelieved by Home Office decision-makers, and were falling short of the legal standard required in asylum applications. For example, one applicant was told that LGBT+ people cannot possibly follow a religion and that their application was rejected. What is being done to address this failure?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I think I outlined the process to my noble friend, but the noble Baroness is right to point out that you can be LGBT and have a religion. The care with which asylum case decision-makers make their judgments is very important, as are the sensitivities around interviewing LGBT people and those who are persecuted for their faith.

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, having visited Pakistan earlier this month and seen first-hand the abject, festering conditions in which many of the country's religious minorities live, and having heard accounts of abduction, rape, the forced marriage of a nine year-old, forced conversion, death sentences for so-called blasphemy—the Minister may have heard the interview on the “Today” programme on Saturday morning with a young woman whose mother has spent eight years on death row for so-called blasphemy with a death sentence hanging over her—and in one case, children being forced to watch as their parents were burned alive, I ask the Minister: how can the Home Office in all those circumstances continue to say that what is happening in Pakistan to religious believers and humanists is merely discrimination, not persecution?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I do not think I or the House would disagree with the noble Lord in the examples that he cites, particularly those in Pakistan of certain religious groups being persecuted under blasphemy laws. Sadly, the laws in Pakistan are quite different from the laws here; unpalatable though we might find them, they are the laws there. Nevertheless, each application to our asylum system should be dealt with in terms of the persecution that people might face.

Lord Elton (Con): My Lords, how long will it take from rollout for the whole of the relevant force of people to receive the training? What oversight will there be to make sure that it has been understood and implemented?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I think I outlined that process just now to my noble friend Lady Berridge. We are expecting to roll it out in 2019. With regard to quality assurance, the audits are going to be carried out by an operational security unit for both the quality of the decision and the application of the policy.

Lord Rosser (Lab): My Lords, there have been media reports that a further problem is that staff considering asylum applications are rushed because there is a backlog to deal with, and that in addition staff have targets to meet in respect of the number of decisions they have to make each week on whether to grant or refuse asylum seekers. Is there still a backlog of people waiting for an asylum decision or for an appeal to be heard? If so, how big is that backlog? What targets in reality are staff making asylum decisions expected to meet each day, week or month?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, it is important that the decisions made are the right ones. I could not comment on decisions being rushed, but I can go back to the department to ask that question. There are certainly a lot of decisions to be made, because people want to come to this country and I can try to ascertain a figure for the backlog.

The Lord Bishop of Leeds: My Lords, before training is rolled out, will some religious leaders in this country be consulted on what sort of training might be appropriate, and the sort of questions that may be asked of asylum seekers? At the moment, I should be hard-pressed to answer some of them.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I would struggle with the questions proposed by the noble Baroness, Lady Bakewell, and might also struggle with questions on my religion. Religious leaders have been engaged. What is to be established is the reason for persecution, therefore religious literacy is needed for the assessors—it is not a test of religious facts.

4.3 Written Questions

Religious Freedom

Asked by: Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government in what ways, if any, they plan to mark the International Day for Freedom of Religion or Belief on 27 October; and whether they will issue guidance to all embassies and overseas missions on the UK policy on such freedom.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: The Prime Minister demonstrated the British Government's commitment to promoting freedom of religion or belief when in July this year she appointed me as her special envoy. The British Government sees International Religious Freedom Day on 27 October as an opportunity to reflect on the persecution suffered around the world by people due to their religion or beliefs; and to promote respect between communities. The British Government will mark the day on social media, and through an event jointly hosted by myself and Lord Bates on 7 November to mark the occasion. We will also use the occasion to re-issue the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's toolkit on Freedom of Religion or Belief to all of our overseas embassies and missions across our global network, and encourage them to promote and defend this important human right. Finally we are pleased that almost £1 million of funding has been allocated to pursue our freedom of religion or belief policy objectives through the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy.

23 Oct 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL10613

Iran: Christianity

Asked by: Drew, Dr David: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the level of freedom of religion or belief of Christians in Iran; and what recent assessment he has made of the level of freedom of religion or belief of people in Iran who have converted to Christianity (a) in the UK before and (b) after having been returned to Iran from the UK.

Answering member: Alistair Burt | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: The treatment of Christians and other religious minorities in Iran is concerning. The latest report from the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran published in September 2018 describes discrimination faced by religious minorities, such as the denial of access to university and to employment opportunities, discriminatory access to basic services including health care, and

underrepresentation in public affairs. We regularly raise human rights with the Iranian Government, including the treatment of Christians in that country, and we continue to take action with the international community to press Iran to improve its poor record on all human rights issues.

18 Oct 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 179083

Immigrants: Christianity

Asked by: Drew, Dr David: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions has he had with the House of Bishops on the criteria used by the immigration authorities to assess whether a person has satisfactory grounds for using conversion to Christianity as a reason to be granted leave to remain.

Answering member: Caroline Nokes | Department: Home Office: Home Office policy is clear that when considering asylum claims based on religious belief or lack of belief, caseworkers must ask appropriate and sensitive questions based on an understanding of religious concepts, philosophical viewpoints and forms of persecution a person may be subjected to in their country. Where caseworkers need to establish credibility of a conversion to any faith, the approach taken is to explore with that individual their personal experiences and journey to their new faith, both in their country and in the UK, rather than test their knowledge of religious facts.

Home Office officials regularly discuss religious-based claims with a broad range of faith groups to ensure we are considering such claims appropriately. This includes working closely with the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on International Freedom of Religion or Belief and engaging with a range of groups in order to improve our policy guidance and develop specialist training for caseworkers to drive further improvement in this important and complex area. The Home Office has not engaged directly with the House of Bishops on this matter.

18 Oct 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 179080

Burma: Islam

Asked by: Thornberry, Emily: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of efforts by (a) Facebook and (b) other social media websites to combat the proliferation of hate speech directed against Muslim minorities in Myanmar.

Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: The Government continues to be deeply concerned by hate speech against minorities in Burma, including Muslims, Christians, and particularly the Rohingya. The Government

welcomes Facebook's decision to remove accounts and ban individuals and organisations following publication of the report of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Burma. Our Embassy works with local partners in Burma to tackle hate speech and misinformation online. Our Ambassador discussed the impact of social media on intercommunal relations, and the necessity of interfaith dialogues in his meeting with the Minister for Religious Affairs on 9 August.

18 Oct 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 177658

Pakistan: Blasphemy

Asked by: Godsiff, Mr Roger: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to the Government of Pakistan on (a) the case of Asia Bibi and (b) concerns about blasphemy laws.

Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We remain deeply concerned by the misuse of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan, and the fact that religious minorities are disproportionately affected. The harsh penalties for blasphemy, including the death penalty, add to these concerns.

We regularly raise our human rights concerns with the Government of Pakistan at a senior level; and we have urged them to take steps to prevent the misuse of the blasphemy laws. The Minister for the Commonwealth and the UN discussed our concerns about Freedom of Religion or Belief and the protection of minority religious communities with Pakistan's Human Rights Minister, Dr Shireen Mazari, in September 2018. I raised discrimination against religious minorities with the Ministry of Human Rights during my visit to Pakistan in November 2017. We will continue to press the new Government of Pakistan to adhere to its international obligations and uphold the rule of law.

We remain deeply concerned about Ms Bibi's case. The British High Commission in Islamabad monitor developments in her case closely, including the decision of the Supreme Court to reserve its 8 October 2018 judgement.

The UK supported the EU statement of October 2014 expressing strong concern at the decision of the Lahore High Court to uphold the conviction against Ms Bibi. We will continue to work with our international partners to ensure our views are made clear to the Pakistani authorities.

15 Oct 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 177171

Nigeria: Christianity

Asked by: Girvan, Paul: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations (a) his Department and (b) agencies of his Department have made to the Government of Nigeria on the ongoing systematic violence against Christians in that country.

Answering member: Harriett Baldwin | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The British Government is taking every opportunity to raise our concerns over intercommunal violence between farming and herding communities at senior levels. The Prime Minister raised the issue with President Buhari during her recent visit to Nigeria and the Foreign Secretary raised the subject when he wrote to the Foreign Minister in August. The British High Commission in Abuja has also raised the issue with the Vice President and with the governors of affected states.

Our assessment is that the root causes of violence are disputes over land, farming rights, grazing routes and access to water, and it is important that efforts to address the violence focus on these challenges.

15 Oct 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 176596

Sudan: Human Rights

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what reports from Sudan they have received over the past 12 months about (1) the arrest of opposition politicians, (2) violations of religious freedom, (3) the arrest of journalists and bloggers, (4) the suppression of publications, (5) the lashing of women for failing to wear acceptable clothing, and (6) statements by Field Marshal Bashir calling for the reintroduction of amputations and executions.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Human rights remain a key priority for our engagement with the Government of Sudan, and we will continue to pursue our human rights objectives through the UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue. During our recent visits to Sudan, the Minister for Africa, Harriett Baldwin MP, and I discussed the need for the Government of Sudan to make concerted efforts to improve the human rights situation.

We have received a number of reports of restrictions on freedom of expression and the media, including the detention of opposition figures, the arrest of journalists, and the suppression of publications. We regularly raise these at a senior level with the Government of Sudan. Freedom of expression is a basic human right and we continue to make clear to the Government of Sudan that the Sudanese people must be allowed to exercise their rights freely.

While there is generally freedom of worship in Sudan, our Embassy in Khartoum has had reports of a number of restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, including limitations to Christian school opening days,

the demolition of churches, and the lashing of women. I held a roundtable with religious leaders during my recent visit, and raised these issues with the Government. The promotion of freedom of religion or belief as a means of enhancing tolerance and inclusion remains a key part of our engagement with Sudan.

The UK continues to make clear our strong opposition to the use of the death penalty, and of mutilation as a punishment, in all circumstances.

25 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL10297

Sudan: Christianity

Asked by: Baroness Cox: To ask Her Majesty's Government when they last raised issues of freedom of religion for Christians in Sudan with their Sudanese counterparts.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Sudan remains a Human Rights Priority Country for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I visited Sudan between 3-5 September and raised religious freedoms, including for Christians, with senior members of the government. I also met a number of Christian and Muslim religious leaders to hear directly from them about their experiences. Freedom of religion or belief is a core part of the human rights element of the UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue, and will be discussed at the sixth round in October this year, as it was at the fifth round in April. The UK is aware of the Annual Report on the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, published in May, and works closely with US colleagues on our shared priorities in this area.

19 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL10064

China: Religious Freedom

Asked by: Campbell, Mr Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to the Chinese Government on reports that the freedom and rights of religious citizens are being restricted.

Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We remain deeply concerned about the persecution of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners and others on the grounds of their religion or belief in China. The freedom to practice, change or share ones faith or belief without discrimination or violent opposition is a human right that all people should enjoy. We believe that societies which aim to guarantee freedom of religion or belief are more stable, prosperous and more resilient against violent extremism.

We regularly raise these concerns with the Chinese Government. I raised the situation in Xinjiang, where amongst other things we have serious concerns about restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, during my

visit to China in late July. The Foreign Secretary also raised our concerns about Xinjiang during his visit to China on 30 July.

More broadly, we raised restrictions on freedom of religion or belief with the Chinese authorities at the UK/China Human Rights Dialogue which took place in Beijing in June 2017, and in our statement at the UN Human Rights Council on 27 June 2018.

19 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 173537

Palestinians: Christianity

Asked by: Lord Patten: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the religious and civic freedoms of Maronites in Palestine.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Our Consulate General in Jerusalem regularly meets a variety of religious leaders in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and has stressed to the Palestinian Authority the importance of protecting freedom of religion and belief. Freedom of religion and belief remains a human rights priority for this Government. It is a fundamental freedom which underpins many other human rights.

17 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL9998

Israel: Druze

Asked by: Lord Patten: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the religious and civic freedoms of the Druze minority in Israel.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Freedom of religion and belief continues to be a priority for this Government. We are pleased that the Israeli Government, including Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Rivlin, have publicly highlighted their commitment to ensuring freedom of religion and belief in Israel.

17 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL9997

North Korea: Christianity

Asked by: Campbell, Mr Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to help tackle the persecution of Christians in North Korea.

Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We continue to urge the DPRK to uphold its human rights obligations and engage substantively with the international community on freedom of religion in North Korea. We work with partners in international fora, such as the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council, to highlight this and other human

rights concerns. We raise our concerns directly with the North Korean Embassy in London and through our Embassy in Pyongyang. We also regularly engage with NGOs on human rights issues in the DPRK.

10 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 170717

China: Religious Freedom

Asked by: Jardine, Christine: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to the Chinese Government on reports of political re-education camps housing up to one million Uighur Muslims in that country.

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

We remain deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Xinjiang. We are aware of credible reports of thousands of Uighurs being held in political re-education camps. UK officials recently visited Xinjiang to see the latest situation at first-hand, and found a heavy security presence on the ground.

The Foreign Secretary raised our concerns about Xinjiang, and specifically so called 're-education camps', with Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi during his visit to China in July 2018. I also raised our concerns about Xinjiang with Vice Minister Guo Yezhou during my visit to China on 22 July 2018. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials will continue to monitor the situation in Xinjiang closely.

10 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 170428

Yemen: Baha'i Faith

Asked by: West, Catherine: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what information his Department holds on reports of the Government of Iran encouraging the Houthi to persecute the Baha'i community in Sana'a, Yemen.

Answering member: Alistair Burt | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We are aware of allegations of the involvement of Iran in the persecution of Baha'i individuals in Houthi-controlled Yemen, however it is impossible to verify these under the current conflict conditions. We continue to raise our concerns about the treatment of the Baha'i with those who have access to the Houthis, and the Iranians.

07 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 168149

Pakistan: Blasphemy

Asked by: Shannon, Jim: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the submissions on proposed procedural amendments to check the misuse of blasphemy law in Pakistan authored by the Pakistani National Commission for Human Rights.

Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We remain deeply concerned at the misuse of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan. The blasphemy laws are used against Pakistanis belonging to all faiths although religious minorities are disproportionately affected. This is particularly concerning given the harsh penalties for blasphemy, including the death penalty.

We have regularly raised our human rights concerns with the previous Government of Pakistan at a senior level, and have urged them to take steps to prevent the misuse of the blasphemy laws. My colleague, the Minister of State for Commonwealth and the UN, discussed the issue of freedom of religion or belief with the former Minister of Interior in February 2018. During my most recent visit to Pakistan in November 2017, I raised discrimination against religious minorities with the Ministry of Human Rights, and shall do again in my visit later this year.

We will continue to press the new Government of Pakistan to adhere to its international obligations and uphold the rule of law.

07 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 168067

Nepal: Religious Freedom

Asked by: Shannon, Jim: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether British Embassy staff in Nepal receive training on local religions, patterns of discrimination and conflict between religious groups and the interaction of religion with society.

Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: British Embassy staff in Nepal covering human rights receive training on international human rights issues, including freedom of religion and belief. We have also arranged multi faith breakfast meetings with religious leaders to allow staff to explore religious themes with faith leaders. This is further supported by engagement, by our staff, with NGOs, civil society and academics working on religious freedom issues, both in Nepal and London.

Online learning on Religion and Diplomacy is available to all Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) staff.

06 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 168070

Pakistan: Blasphemy

Asked by: Shannon, Jim: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether he has had discussions with his Pakistani counterpart on strengthening the legal procedures relating to religious blasphemy charges in that country to protect against frivolous accusations.

Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We remain deeply concerned by the misuse of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan. The blasphemy laws are used against Pakistanis belonging to all faiths although religious minorities are disproportionately affected. This is particularly concerning given the harsh penalties for blasphemy, including the death penalty.

We have regularly raised our human rights concerns with the previous Government of Pakistan at a senior level, and have urged them to take steps to prevent the misuse of the blasphemy laws. My colleague, the Minister of State for Commonwealth and the UN, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, discussed the issue of freedom of religion or belief with the former Minister of Interior in February 2018. During my visit to Pakistan in November 2017, I raised discrimination against religious minorities with the Ministry of Human Rights.

We will continue to press the new Government of Pakistan to adhere to its international obligations and uphold the rule of law.

06 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 168066

Ukraine: Religious Freedom

Asked by: Shannon, Jim: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps the international community is taking to ensure that the freedom of religion or belief is protected in the Lugansk region of eastern Ukraine.

Answering member: Sir Alan Duncan | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We continue to stress the need for all parties to fully implement the UN General Assembly resolutions on Ukraine and recommendations contained in the reports of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), including the protection of freedom of religion and belief in non-government controlled eastern Ukraine. At the Human Rights Council in June, the UK and EU raised serious concerns about ongoing human rights violations in non-government controlled eastern Ukraine and Crimea. It is essential that independent investigations take place to deliver accountability for all such allegations. The UK also provides funding to the OHCHR in support of their work monitoring Human Rights violations.

06 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 168065

Ukraine: Religious Freedom

Asked by: Shannon, Jim: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the Lugansk People's Republic law #211-II on the freedom of conscience and religious association.

Answering member: Sir Alan Duncan | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We are deeply concerned by reports on the human rights situation in the self-proclaimed "Luhansk People's Republic" in non-government controlled eastern Ukraine, including infringements of freedom of religion and belief. It is essential that unhindered access is granted for international humanitarian organisations to the non-government controlled areas of eastern Ukraine. We continue to call on Russia to use its considerable influence over the separatists to ensure respect of international human rights and humanitarian law. The UK also continues to raise within multilateral forums the need for UN General Assembly resolutions on Ukraine and recommendations contained in the reports of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), including the protection of freedom of religion and belief in Non-Government controlled eastern Ukraine, to be fully implemented.

06 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 168064

Laos: Religious Freedom

Asked by: Dodds, Nigel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to his Laos counterpart on potential legislative changes which threaten freedom of religion and belief in that country.

Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We raise human rights concerns on a regular basis with the Lao government both bilaterally and through multilateral fora. I visited Laos on 24 and 25 August and raised human rights as part of a UK-Laos Political Dialogue.

Regarding specific concerns over restrictions on the right to freedom of religion or belief, we raised these as part of Laos' most recent Universal Periodic Review in 2015. This issue was also on the agenda at the annual EU-Laos Human Rights Dialogue in March 2018, where individual cases of concern were included in the discussion.

06 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 167922

Nicaragua: Religious Freedom

Asked by: Dodds, Nigel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations the Government has made to the Government of Nicaragua on respect for religious freedom in that country.

Answering member: Sir Alan Duncan | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We do not consider freedom of religion an issue in Nicaragua at this time. The UK has made representations to the Nicaraguan government welcoming the mediation role of the Nicaraguan Episcopal Conference in political dialogue, and condemned the violence in the country, particularly the excessive use of force by the authorities and pro-government armed groups.

06 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 167921

Israel: Palestinians

Asked by: Baroness Tonge: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about (1) the closure of two universities in East Jerusalem, and (2) the banning of an academic conference due to be held to discuss the status of Muslim endowment and property, and the protection of Islamic status and Christian heritage in Jerusalem.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: While we have not raised these issues, we will continue to press the Israelis and Palestinians strongly on the need to refrain from taking actions which make peace more difficult.

31 Jul 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL9625

China: Religious Freedom

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they intend to support the complaint recently filed by Alessandro Amicarelli to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention against China for its use of arbitrary detention against unregistered religious believers.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We remain deeply concerned about the persecution of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners and others on the grounds of their religion or belief in China. The freedom to practise, change or share ones faith or belief without discrimination or violent opposition is a human right that all people should enjoy. Her Majesty's Government remains committed to promoting and defending the right to freedom of religion or belief for all individuals.

The UK has a close working relationship with UN bodies and is committed to upholding the rule of law and rules-based international system. My officials continue to monitor the progress of the complaint filed by Alessandro Amicarelli and await the outcome.

25 Jul 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL9466

Colombia: Human Rights and Religious Freedom

Asked by: Dodds, Nigel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his Colombian counterpart on freedom of religion and upholding human rights in that country.

Answering member: Sir Alan Duncan | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: I am concerned by levels of violence against human rights defenders and community leaders, which includes some religious leaders. We believe religious leaders have been targeted for their role as community leaders, and not primarily because of their faith. Colombia is designated a Human Rights Priority Country by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Our concerns about human rights were published in the FCO's annual human rights report on 16 July which can be viewed on the .Gov website. I have discussed the situation of human rights in Colombia with visiting Ministers and with the Colombian Ambassador. The UK also raised concerns about violence against human rights defenders and conflict related sexual violence during Colombia's Universal Periodic Review at Geneva in May.

25 Jul 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 164903

Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Asked by: Dodds, Nigel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what the work programme is of the UK Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: The precise work programme for the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), whose appointment was announced on 4 July, is still under discussion. At a high level, it will include working with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's overseas network and international partners to achieve a step-change in our diplomatic efforts to defend the right to FoRB and proactively working for change in selected countries. Because of the sensitivities of some of this work, it would not be appropriate to give the details of the work programme at this page.

25 Jul 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 164902

China: Human Rights

Asked by: Linden, David: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will raise restrictions on freedom of religion or belief in (a) Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and (b) other parts of China at the next UK-China Human Rights Dialogue; and whether a date for that next dialogue has been confirmed.

Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We remain deeply concerned about restrictions on freedom of religion or belief in China, particularly in Xinjiang. We raised our concerns with the Chinese authorities at the last UK/China Human Rights Dialogue which took place in June 2017 and will do so again at the next Dialogue: we are currently seeking to agree dates with the Chinese authorities. In the meantime, my officials will continue to monitor the situation in Xinjiang closely.

23 Jul 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 165154

Muhammed Shoban

Asked by: Godsiff, Mr Roger: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 13 July 2018 to Question 161195, whether the Government has made representations to the Government of Pakistan on the murder of Mr Muhammed Shoban on the 25 June 2018; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We regularly raise the importance of religious tolerance with the government of Pakistan. We raise few individual cases. We focus on urging the government of Pakistan to fulfil its duty to uphold the rights of all Pakistan's citizens irrespective of religious identity. This includes raising concerns about discrimination and violence against Ahmadiyya Muslims in Pakistan. I raised the treatment of religious minorities, including the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, with the Ministry of Human Rights during my visit to Pakistan in November 2017. Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon discussed the issue of freedom of religion or belief, and the protection of religious minorities with Pakistan's Interior Minister in February 2018.

At the UN Periodic Review of Pakistan's human rights record in 2017, the UK urged Pakistan to strengthen protection of minorities, including by establishing an independent National Commission for Minorities. The UK Government is supporting projects in Pakistan to promote greater tolerance and religious freedom through our Magna Carta Fund.

The appointment of Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief affirms our commitment to stand up for this key global freedom.

23 Jul 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 164848

Iran: Religious Freedom

Asked by: West, Catherine: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Iranian counterpart on the protection of (a) religious minorities and (b) the Baha'i religious community in that country.

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

The human rights situation in Iran is of serious concern. This includes the treatment of the Baha'i community and other religious minorities. We call on Iran to respect the rights and freedoms of all its citizens no matter what their religion or belief. I raised my human rights concerns with my Iranian counterpart during his visit to London in February.

23 Jul 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 164509

Religious Freedom

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they intend to propose the establishment of an international day commemorating the victims and survivors of religious persecution to be held annually on 3 August.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: The British Government believes that the custom of commemorating the International Day of Religious Freedom on 27 October is becoming increasingly well established, and provides a suitable focus for marking this universal human right. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office actively encourages its diplomatic network to mark this day where local conditions allow. The Government therefore has no plans to support moves to establish an official United Nations Day on this theme.

19 Jul 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL9365

China: Ethnic Groups

Asked by: Baroness Anelay of St Johns: To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent discussions they have had with the government of the People's Republic of China about the continued restrictions on Ughur people living in the Xinjian Uyghur Autonomous Region and that government's building and use of re-education camps there.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: We are aware of reports of significant numbers of individuals being detained by the Chinese authorities in re-education camps in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and that Uyghurs are subject to increasing security surveillance.

We remain deeply concerned about restrictions on freedom of religion or belief in China, particularly in Xinjiang. We raised our concerns about the situation in Xinjiang directly with the Chinese authorities at the UK/China Human Rights Dialogue, which last took place in Beijing in June 2017. In addition we issued an item IV statement at the 38th UN Human Rights Council on 27 June 2018 which reiterated our concerns about re-education camps in Xinjiang . We also supported the EU item IV statement at the same session, which expressed a similar concern.

18 Jul 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL9208

4.4 Early Day Motions

[ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL DAY COMMEMORATING THE VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION](#)

03 Jul 2018 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 1478
(session 2017-19)

Primary sponsor: Bruce, Fiona

[FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF](#)

14 Jun 2018 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 1399
(session 2017-19)

Primary sponsor: Spelman, Caroline

[COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING 2018 - FREEDOM OF WORSHIP](#)

28 Mar 2018 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 1141
(session 2017-19)

Primary sponsor: Gibson, Patricia

5. Further reading and useful links

5.1 Commons and Lords Library briefings

[Westminster Hall debate: Freedom of religion or belief](#)

28 Feb 2018 | Commons Debate packs | CDP-2018-0047

[Religious and Ethnic Minorities in Iraq](#)

21 Dec 2017 | Lords Briefing packs - Debates | LBP-2017-0122

[Sudan: December 2017 update](#)

15 Dec 2017 | Commons Briefing papers | CBP-8180

[Egypt since the mosque attack](#)

12 Dec 2017 | Commons Briefing papers | CBP-8178

[Ethnicity and religion: Social Indicators page](#)

27 Nov 2017 | Social indicators | SN02655

[Westminster Hall debate: International Freedom of Religion or Belief](#)

23 Oct 2017 | Commons Debate packs | CDP-2017-0197

[The persecution of the Rohingya by the Burmese \(Myanmar\) Government](#)

16 Oct 2017 | Commons Debate packs | CDP-2017-0185

[Human rights in Iran](#)

05 Oct 2017 | Commons Debate packs | CDP-2017-0175

5.2 All Party Parliamentary Group

[APPF for International Freedom of Religion or Belief](#)

Raising awareness and profile of international freedom of religion or belief as a human right among Parliamentarians, media, government and the general public in the UK, and to increase the effectiveness of the UK's contribution to international institutions charged with enforcing this human right.

5.3 Government websites

[Discrimination: your rights](#)

Types of discrimination ('protected characteristics'; How you can be discriminated against; Discrimination at work; What you can do

[Freedom of religion or belief: how the FCO can help promote respect for this human right](#)

Guidance on how freedom of religion or belief relates to the UK's strategic priorities, and how the FCO can help its promotion. FCO, Oct 2016

[Guidance: Religion or belief core script.](#)

Religion or belief in one form or another plays a part in the lives of most of the world's population. DFID celebrates and values the diversity brought to its workforce through individuals and aims to create an environment where the cultural, spiritual, religious beliefs and non-religious beliefs of all its employees are respected. DfID, Apr 2013

5.4 European Commission

International Cooperation and Development

[Freedom of religion or belief](#)

The right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, more commonly referred to as the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is a fundamental right of every human being. Freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in Articles 18 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)(link is external) and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)(link is external), which should be read in the light of the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No 22.

5.5 Equality and Human Rights Commission

[Article 9: Freedom of thought, belief and religion](#)

It includes the right to change your religion or beliefs at any time.

You also have the right to put your thoughts and beliefs into action. This could include your right to wear religious clothing, the right to talk about your beliefs or take part in religious worship. Public authorities cannot stop you practising your religion, without very good reason – see the section on restrictions below.

Importantly, this right protects a wide range of non-religious beliefs including atheism, agnosticism, veganism and pacifism. For a belief to be protected under this article, it must be serious, concern important aspects of human life or behaviour, be sincerely held, and be worthy of respect in a democratic society.

5.6 Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Freedom of religion or belief

ODIHR's work in the area of freedom of religion or belief focuses on assisting participating States, religious or belief communities, and civil society in protecting and promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief. ODIHR also works on preventing and responding to intolerance and discrimination based on religious grounds.

ODIHR is assisted in its work by the 12-member Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief, which consists of independent experts from across the OSCE region. Members serve in their personal capacities as experts and do not represent any organization or confession. ODIHR makes the Panel's expertise available to participating States, OSCE field operations and non-governmental organizations.

5.7 Liberty

Article 9 Freedom of religion

The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion includes:

- the freedom to change religion or belief;
- the freedom to exercise religion or belief publicly or privately, alone or with others;
- the freedom to exercise religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance; and
- the right to have no religion (e.g. to be atheist or agnostic) or to have non-religious beliefs protected (e.g. philosophical beliefs such as pacifism or veganism).

Freedom of religion does not prevent there being a state church, but no one can be forced to join a church, be involved in its activities or pay taxes to a church.

The role of the State is to encourage tolerance and all religions or non-religions, if regulated, must be regulated with complete neutrality.

5.8 ADF International

ADF International is an alliance-building human rights organization that advocates for the right of people to freely live out their faith. We are at the forefront of defending religious freedom, the sanctity of life, and marriage and family around the world.

ADF International White Paper

Meghan Grizzle Fischer (legal counsel at the UN), [*The UN's Failure to Promote and Protect Religious Freedom*](#), Meghan Grizzle Fischer, October 2018

5.9 ILGA- Europe

Dr Alice Donald and Dr Erica Howard, Middlesex university, [*The right to freedom of religion or belief and its intersection with other rights*](#), A research paper for ILGA-Europe, January 2015

5.10 IPPFoRB

International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief

The International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB) is an informal network of parliamentarians and legislators from around the world committed to combatting religious persecution and advancing freedom of religion or belief, as defined by Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration for Human Rights.

IPPFoRB calls for an International Day Commemorating Victims And Survivors Of Religious Persecution.

One of the best examples of how well such a UN annual day could work comes from the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women which is marked on November 25. The day has evolved into a global, widespread initiative that now incorporates 16 Days of Activism and the UNiTE campaigns. The activism surrounding the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women is proof as to why such UN annual commemorations are important. They go beyond the designation of simply an annual day and inspire other initiatives, which in turn can expedite progress on addressing the issue in question.

One recent cause which requires some attention is that of the victims and survivors of religious persecution. A new initiative to establish an International Day Commemorating Victims and Survivors Of Religious Persecution has been launched. The proposal is that it would be commemorated on August 3. The commemoration and the precise date are important for several reasons.

Why do we need a day specifically to commemorate victims and survivors of religious persecution?

While several states around the world mark October 27 as the International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day, this is not a universally recognized annual day and it has no equivalent within the UN system. The proposed International Day Commemorating Victims and Survivors of Religious Persecution has a narrower scope than that of national commemorations of the International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day as it does not focus on all aspects of freedom of religion or belief but has a targeted focus on the issue of religiously motivated persecution.

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publically available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcinfo@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).