

DEBATE PACK

CDP 2020-056 (2020) | 12 March 2020

Freedom of religion or belief

Westminster Hall

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1.30pm to 3.00pm

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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.

1. Background

UK Government Policy

In the UK, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) monitors the international situation in respect of religious freedom. [In its 2018 Human Rights and Democracy report](#), the FCO stated that denial of the right to freedom of religion or belief was a “matter of increasing international concern”. It continued:

Violations in 2018 ranged from inhibiting the freedom to worship, for example in the Maldives and Russia, to discrimination or targeted attacks against members of minority groups because of their religious identity, such as in Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Burma.

The report set out that the UK Government has increased financial support for efforts to defend these rights over the past year. This included allocating £12 million for a programme to “find innovative solutions to promote and defend freedom of religion and belief”. There was also £1 million for religious freedom-related projects in Iraq, Malaysia, Burma and Sudan.

The report also drew attention to the estimated 215 million Christians worldwide who had faced religious persecution in 2018. It noted that Christian women and children are “particularly vulnerable and are often subjected to sexual violence as a result of their beliefs”. In response to this issue, on Boxing Day 2018, Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt asked the Bishop of Truro to lead an independent review of the support provided by the FCO to persecuted Christians worldwide.

Prime Minister’s Special Envoy

In September 2019 the Government [appointed Rehman Chishti MP](#) as his special envoy for religious freedom. His predecessor, Lord Ahmad, would continue to advocate religious freedom in his ministerial capacity.

Independent Review: FCO Support for Persecuted Christians

Speaking at the formal launch of the review in January 2019, the then Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt cited evidence that “80 percent of all the people who are suffering religious persecution are Christian”. The Government asked the review to map “levels of persecution and other discrimination against Christians in key countries around the world”. This would provide an “objective assessment of the impact and levels of FCO support”. The review will also make recommendations to the Foreign Secretary.

[The report was published on 8 July 2019](#). It outlines the seriousness of the problem and makes recommendations to the FCO on steps to tackle it. The report calls for action at the United Nations, including a Resolution to allow UN observers to monitor the problem.

The report states that the “level and nature” of the persecution of Christians in some regions was “arguably coming close to meeting the international definition of genocide according to that adopted by the UN”. The report also said that workable solutions must be found:

My conclusions and recommendations may be uncomfortable to hear: the challenge for ministers and FCO civil servants will be to turn these into workable solutions that can be implemented. The challenge for the rest of our community will be to partner with some of the finest diplomats in the world to ensure that the freedoms that Britain was at the forefront of creating become a reality not only for Christians but for all.

In August 2019 Prime Minister Boris Johnson pledged to work to implement the report’s recommendations:

In light of mounting evidence that Christians suffer the most widespread persecution, we asked the Anglican Bishop of Truro to carry out an independent review to ensure that our work in this area matched the scale of the problem. We have accepted, and will implement, all of the Review’s challenging recommendations. We will use the UK’s global reach and programme funding to improve the lives of persecuted people. Today we are opening a call for bids on how to take this forward.

2019 Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry

In 2019 the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee started an [inquiry into religious freedom](#) and human rights defenders. The inquiry was closed due to the December General Election. The Committee took evidence on the following religious Freedom questions:

- How effective is the FCO's support for FORB, and is this sufficiently prioritised within its human rights work?
- How satisfactory was the recent independent review into the persecution of Christians overseas, in its scope and its execution; what has the FCO done to follow up on its conclusions and recommendations; and what are its implications for the FCO's work on FORB?
- What has been the impact of the Prime Minister's Special Representative on FORB?
- What role does the FCO play in shaping work by DfID, the Home Office, and other departments around FORB?

Religious Freedom Alliance

In February 2020 the US Government launched the Religious Freedom Alliance. The UK and many other countries joined the alliance.

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 the accuracy of external content.

[After mass exodus, Morocco celebrates its Jewish heritage](#)

Jewish News of North California

Sue Barnett

6 March 2020

[Violence in India Threatens Its Global Ambitions](#)

New York Times

Maria Abi-Habib

5 March 2020

[Israel: The One Middle East Country with True Religious Freedom](#)

The Algemeiner

Rami Dabbas

2 March 2020

[Use of religious beliefs to justify rights violations must be outlawed says UN expert](#)

UN News

2 March 2020

[Belgian city of Aalst says anti-Semitic parade 'just fun'](#)

BBC News

24 February 2020

[Three graves of minority Ahmadis desecrated in Pakistan](#)

The Telegraph (India)

20 February 2020

[A militant group you may not know kills hundreds of Christians every year](#)

The Hill

Vernon Brewer

16 February 2020

[Iran's Baha'is lose 'other religion' ID card bracket: A global story ripe for local coverage](#)

Get Religion

Ira Rifkin

11 February 2020

[A Global Catastrophe: "260 Million Christians Experience High Levels of Persecution"](#)

Gatestone Institute

Raymond Ibrahim

2 February 2020

[Huawei Faces New Backlash Over 'Mass Ethnic Persecution' In China](#)

Forbes
Zak Doffman
23 December 2019

[The Guardian view on religious liberty: the freedom to be wrong](#)

The Guardian
8 July 2019

[With Israel Folau the church demands a kind of free speech that keeps gays in the firing line](#)

The Guardian
David Marr
26 June 2019

[Why Christians are dismayed by Modi's landslide victory](#)

Catholic Herald
Andreas Thonhauser
30 May 2019

[Persecution of Christians 'coming close to genocide' in Middle East – report](#)

Guardian
Patrick Wintour
2 May 2019

3. APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief

[APPG publishes Commentary on the current state of FoRB](#)

5 November 2019

The APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief have published their 2019 [Commentary on the current state of Freedom of Religion or Belief](#). It is the second time this report has been provided, alongside other publicly available information, to support both Posts and country desks in the Foreign Office to assess actual and potential FoRB violations and to formulate, implement and evaluate appropriate responses.

The [Introduction](#) states that reliable, detailed, evidence-based monitoring and analysis of FoRB violations is essential for formulating, implementing and evaluating realistic policies and actions to address FoRB and interlinked human rights violations. Expertise in both FoRB and country contexts is necessary to accurately monitor and analyse FoRB violations. Expertise is also required to navigate some actors' minimisation or denial of FoRB violations. With limited resources, the FCO can struggle to internally find the expertise essential for accurate assessments. The FCO FoRB Toolkit requires internal assessments to use non-FCO sources including 'the reports of civil society and other organisations,' which includes this APPG.

The APPG and its stakeholder organisations would strongly welcome a partnership in the accurate monitoring and analysis of FoRB violations that the Toolkit requires of posts. Such a partnership could enhance HMG and Parliament's knowledge about vulnerable groups who are at risk or who may require urgent assistance. It could also warn when these groups might be harmed by public comment on their situation.

The [Foreword](#), written by Dr Ahmed Shaheed, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Dr Nazila Ghanea, Associate Professor of International Human Rights Law at the University of Oxford and Sir Malcolm Evans, Professor of International Law at Bristol University, states that violations of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) are a truly global and growing phenomenon. Indeed, data suggests that 83% of the world's population live in countries with severe Governmental and/or societal restrictions on the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief. Studies that have monitored global trends over the past decade note that the number of countries that violate FoRB rights has been rising significantly.

It continues all of humanity has to face the challenge of increasing violations of FoRB, there is not one type of victim or perpetrator, and the scale and frequency of these attacks highlight the terrible danger that intolerance towards others and their beliefs poses to societies everywhere. The attacks suffered by victims in these contexts go far beyond violations to FoRB and stretch to violations of a wide range of human rights including the rights to life, liberty and security of person.

Despite the scale and severity of the problem, thus far political responses have been muted. There have, however, recently been

positive moves which indicate that Governments are starting to take this issue more seriously, such as the US Ministerial on Religious Freedom, the growth in the number of dedicated ambassadors or special envoys for FoRB, the observance of 27 October as international FoRB day, and the designation by the United Nations General Assembly of 22 August as the international day to commemorate the victims of acts of violence based on their religion or belief.

The authors quote their joint letter to the Sunday Telegraph on 10 February 2019:

“Seeking to protect some from persecution necessarily requires seeking to protect all from persecution. Upholding full enjoyment of freedom of religion or belief (which includes the freedom of worship) would enhance its enjoyment by all, whether believer, non-believer or ambivalent. Britain can rightly draw attention to the inclusive nature of its diplomacy in advancing this freedom over many years. This is an opportunity for redoubling and reinforcing these efforts in the light of increasingly abhorrent violations.”

They conclude As reliable, detailed information is vital to developing and implementing effective policies to promote FoRB, we encourage the UK Government to make use of this report. We also encourage the UK to adopt the recommendations the report outlines regarding making more use of the FCO’s own excellent FoRB toolkit, as there is a significant lack of engagement with the toolkit across the FCO network. Making use of the toolkit and this excellent report will significantly support the UK Government’s efforts to promote FoRB. We commend this report to all those who serve in the UK government and elsewhere in defence of human rights.

The report also highlights a number of recommendations:

1. That FCO posts further implement the FCO FoRB toolkit as a normal part of their work.
2. That the FCO in London continues to encourage, support and monitor posts’ implementation of the FCO FoRB toolkit’s recommendations.
3. That, building on the welcome appointment of a Prime Minister’s Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief by two successive Prime Ministers, this post be made a permanent role.
4. That the commitment that the International Roving Ambassador for Human Rights will work with the Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief is expressed in visible public activity at the United Nations, including the Human Rights Council, as well as elsewhere including with FCO posts worldwide.
5. That FCO posts actively engage with the Prime Minister’s Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief by proactively seeking ways that they can concretely advance freedom of religion and belief in country, as well as monitoring the Special Envoy’s work on social media.

**See the further reading section of this Debate Pack for the full report.*

4. Gov.uk

[UK appoints new Prime Minister's Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief](#)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

12 September 2019

The Prime Minister has today appointed Rehman Chishti MP as his new Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. In his new position, Rehman Chishti will bring together efforts across the UK Government, with faith actors and civil society to promote the UK's firm stance on religious tolerance abroad. The Special Envoy will continue to lead the implementation of the recommendations from the recent independent review into FCO support for persecuted Christians led by the Bishop of Truro. He will also advocate for the rights of all individuals here in the UK and around the world who are being discriminated against and persecuted for their faith or belief.

Rehman Chishti's appointment means that the Government will now have a dedicated person on the issue of religious freedom. The Envoy role was previously held by FCO Minister Lord (Tariq) Ahmad who will continue to champion human rights in his Ministerial capacity. This appointment will therefore increase the number of people working on the issue of religious freedom across government. Rehman has a strong track record for engaging and interacting with individuals, faith leaders and organisations here in the UK and abroad, and in promoting religious freedom and championing the cause of those being persecuted for their faith. Rehman was previously the Vice Chairman of the Conservative party covering faith and communities.

The Prime Minister has proclaimed the UK a champion of religious and other freedoms, and committed the UK to working with partners and friends around the world to ensure that everyone, everywhere is able to enjoy these freedoms.

The Prime Minister said:

People across the world deserve the chance to practise their beliefs freely. I'm delighted to appoint Rehman as my new Special Envoy and look forward to him building on the important work we have already done on this issue. The UK will always be a passionate advocate for greater tolerance, respect and understanding internationally.

Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, said:

A staggering 83% of the world's population live in nations where religious freedom is threatened or banned. It is an area where the UK can and must make a difference. I'm delighted to be working with Rehman to enhance the UK's support for those suffering persecution based on their faith, and standing up for this essential freedom.

Rehman Chishti MP said:

I am delighted to have been appointed as the PM's Special Envoy. I have championed freedom of religion and beliefs for much of my life. I shall

use the UK Government's global network to take real action to support those persecuted for their faith or belief, and promote greater understanding and respect between faiths.

As someone whose family came to the UK when I was six years old, and my father had taken up a role as an Imam, my family and I have always been able to openly and freely practise our faith. I want to ensure every citizen around the world is able to enjoy this basic right. Freedom of Religion, practice and belief is one of the foundations of a free society.

I pay tribute to Lord Ahmad for all his work on this area over recent years

PM underlines UK's commitment to freedom of religion or belief
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
22 August 2019

Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, has proclaimed the UK a champion of religious and other freedoms, and committed the UK to working with partners and friends around the world to ensure that "everyone, everywhere is able to enjoy these freedoms"

The statement was read out by Lord Ahmad, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, during discussion on safeguarding religious minority groups with his international counterparts at the UN in New York today.

The meeting takes place on the first-ever International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, which was established by a resolution of the General Assembly following a resolution led by the Polish government.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office today also announced that research into measures that will help those persecuted for their religion or beliefs will be boosted by more than £200,000 of new funding. The funding is available to those with an interest in exploring the best ways that the UK Government can tackle the problem of persecution as it affects particular countries or groups.

The UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson in a statement read out at the meeting said:

Freedom of religion or belief is at the heart of what the UK stands for. We will do everything possible to champion these freedoms and protect civilians in armed conflict, including religious, ethnic or other minorities. We are determined to use the tools of British diplomacy in this cause, including our permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

In light of mounting evidence that Christians suffer the most widespread persecution, we asked the Anglican Bishop of Truro to carry out an independent review to ensure that our work in this area matched the scale of the problem. We have accepted, and will implement, all of the Review's challenging recommendations. We will use the UK's global reach and programme funding to improve the lives of persecuted people. Today we are opening a call for bids on how to take this forward.

Lord Ahmad, who is also Minister of State for the Commonwealth UN and South Asia at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said:

Those belonging to religious minorities face a number of challenges, from armed conflicts, mass murders and violent assaults to everyday discrimination.

The heinous attacks this year on places of worship from the Philippines to Burkino Faso, New Zealand to Sri Lanka, have reminded us all that the fundamental human right of freedom of religion or belief is increasingly under threat.

Today, as we commemorate the victims of such acts of violence, we demonstrate our commitment to supporting research to change people's lives and help build a world free of religious intolerance and hatred.

The funding announcement builds on the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's recent review into the persecution of Christians. The total amount of new funding for the 2019-20 financial year is a little over £200,000. Applicants can find further information on how to submit bids [here](#).

The New York meeting, hosted by Polish foreign minister Jacek Czaputowicz, will also be attended by Sam Brownback, US ambassador for religious freedom, Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Naveed Walter, President of Human Rights Focus Pakistan.

5. PQs

[Persecution of Christians across the Globe Independent Review](#) 23 Jan 2020 | 3702

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, when the Cabinet plans to consider the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians.

Answering member: Heather Wheeler | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The persecution of Christians, and indeed individuals of all faiths or beliefs, remains of profound concern to us. The scale of this persecution prompted the former Foreign Secretary to ask the Bishop of Truro to examine how the British Government could better respond to the plight of persecuted Christians around the world. The Bishop of Truro published a hard-hitting report with 22 ambitious recommendations. We have accepted the recommendations in full and work is ongoing to implement them in a way that will bring real improvements in the lives of those persecuted because of their faith or belief, Mr Rehman Chishti MP. This work is being overseen by the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

[Christianity: Oppression](#) 10 Jan 2020 | 299

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the hon. Member representing the Church Commissioners, what steps the Church of England is taking to provide support to (a) Kurdish Christians and (b) other persecuted Christian groups.

Answering member: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners

(a) The Church of England is working closely to support Christian development and aid agencies to meet the humanitarian need of those who are displaced from the conflict in Syria.

The Church is continuing to encourage the Department for International Development and the wider international community to bolster the capacity of local civil society groups operating in the region. These groups, many of them faith-based, will be on the frontline of the humanitarian response in the months and years to come.

(b) The Church of England welcomes the decision by the Government to accept and implement the recommendations of the Truro Report to strengthen Foreign and Commonwealth Office support for persecuted Christians. Church of England officials are providing advice and support to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as it takes forward the implementation of these recommendations. The Church welcomes the Prime Minister's commitment made in his Christmas message to stand in solidarity with Christians everywhere and to defend their right to practice their faith.

Human Rights**05 Nov 2019 | 667 c635****Asked by: Rehman Chishti**

Mr Speaker, may I join all colleagues around the House in congratulating you on your elevation to Speaker of the House?

The key human right is article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights and people being able to practise their religion openly and freely. May I pay a huge tribute to the former Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), for commissioning the Truro review on the persecution of Christians and the current Foreign Secretary for all the work that he and his team are doing in taking forward that review? Recommendation 10 requested the Foreign Secretary to write to key organisations such as the British Council, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and Wilton Park, so may I thank him for writing that within 24 hours? Will he review this in 12 months to see how they are doing in taking forward freedom of religion and belief as part of that?

Answering member: Andrew Stephenson | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

May I start by paying tribute to my hon. Friend for all the work he does and his recent appointment as the Prime Minister's envoy for freedom of religion or belief? As he says, huge numbers of Christians around the world are being persecuted—it is currently estimated that 125 million Christians experience high or extreme levels of persecution. The Government have accepted all the recommendations from the bishop's report, but my hon. Friend's suggestion of a review is a good idea.

Yemen: Baha'i Faith**05 Nov 2019 | HL579****Asked by: Lord Dholakia**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports of the repression of members of the Bahá'í community in north Yemen; and what representations they have made to representatives of the Houthis about freedom of religion or belief in those areas under their de facto governance.

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

The UK strongly condemns the mistreatment of Baha'is who are being persecuted for their religious beliefs in areas under the control of the Houthis. We are working closely with our partners to raise these concerns directly with the Houthi authorities and urge the release of detained individuals. We continue to call on the parties to the conflict for the human rights of all Yemenis to be respected.

I raised the religious persecution of the Baha'í community in my statement of 22 October on human rights. We continue to follow the treatment of the Baha'is in Yemen closely, including through meeting their representatives in the UK and lobbying the relevant authorities.

Yemen: Religious Freedom

05 Nov 2019 | HL578

Asked by: Lord Dholakia

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the treatment of religious minority communities in Yemen; what information they have about the appeal against a death sentence in the case of Hamid bin Haydara; and whether they will release that information.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We stressed our concerns about Mr bin Haydara's case with the Houthis directly on 6 October. We strongly condemn Mr bin Haydara's death sentence and the continued persecution of Baha'is in Yemen for their religious beliefs. We continue to follow the treatment of the Baha'is in Yemen closely, including through meeting their representatives in the UK and lobbying the relevant authorities. We continue to call on the parties to the conflict to respect the human rights of all Yemenis.

Persecution of Christians across the Globe Independent Review

31 Oct 2019 | 6339

Asked by: Fiona Bruce

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what funding has been allocated to the implementation of the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's Review into the Persecution of Christians Worldwide in each of the next five years; and if he will publish his strategic plan for delivering those recommendations.

Answering member: Heather Wheeler | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

For financial year 19/20, a programme fund of £201,401 has been allocated for implementing the Bishop of Truro's recommendations. Separately, the office of the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief has been allocated £73,453 this financial year to cover admin and travel costs. Funding for future years, both for the implementation of the recommendations and for the Special Envoy's office, will be decided at a later stage. We have accepted and are working to deliver all the recommendations contained in the Bishop of Truro's report. We do not intend to publish a strategic plan for delivering the recommendations, given the sensitivities around some of them.

Iran: Religious Freedom

31 Oct 2019 | 6183

Asked by: Dr David Drew

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what monitoring his Department has undertaken of prison sentences imposed on Christian ministers and other religious figures by the Government of Iran on the basis of that people in those positions present a risk to national security.

Answering member: Dr Andrew Murrison | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We are aware of reports about the continued harassment and mistreatment that the Christian and other minority groups face. The continued restrictions on freedoms of expression, religion and belief are deeply worrying. While some religious minorities are formally protected in the constitution, the reality is that many non-Muslims face discrimination. Despite constitutional recognition, the persecution of Christians has been continuous, systemic, and institutionalised.

We support the assessment of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights that discrimination against the Christians in Iran is sanctioned by a lack of constitutional recognition and the absence of other legal protections for adherents of this faith. We regularly call upon Iran to cease harassment of all religious minorities and to fulfil its international and domestic obligations to protect freedom of religion or belief. Work has begun to implement the recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's Review in a way that will bring real improvements in the lives of those persecuted because of their faith or belief.

**[Religious Freedom](#)
30 Oct 2019 | HL235****Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to include modules on freedom of religion or belief in all existing and future Department for International Development capacity building programmes.

Answering member: Baroness Sugg | Department for International Development

DFID's increasing use of country context analysis has improved the way in which religious dynamics and religious groups are factored into country programmes. Through this process, DFID identifies the most significant problems that hinder development and the main entry points and opportunities to create change. This includes the role of religion and freedom of religion or belief.

Through UK Aid Connect, DFID is funding a consortium led by the Institute of Development Studies to address the challenges in building tolerance and freedom of religion or belief. In November 2018, Lord Ahmad and Lord Bates launched this £12 million initiative which will contribute to making poverty reduction programmes more inclusive, by highlighting and redressing religious inequalities, with a focus on highly volatile contexts.

[Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief: Finance](#)

29 Oct 2019 | HL270

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what budget has been allocated to the office of the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion and Belief for each of the next three years.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We have agreed that funding for the office of the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief should adequately cover travel and administrative costs. For this financial year we expect this to be £73,453. Future funding will be decided at a later stage.

[Algeria: Churches](#)

28 Oct 2019 | HL38

Asked by: Lord Hylton

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Algeria following the closure of a Christian church at Boghni, the eighth such closure since 2017.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We are concerned by reports of church closures in Algeria, including the recent closure in Boghni. We continue to engage with the Algerian authorities on this issue, including raising the importance of freedom of religion or belief as set out in Algeria's Constitution, and the need to ensure that Algeria's laws and processes allow the freedom to practise one's religion or belief. We also remain in close contact with faith groups, including churches, in Algeria. We will continue to monitor the situation, as the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief around the world remains a high priority for the UK.

[Developing Countries: Religious Freedom](#)

25 Oct 2019 | 1914

Asked by: Marie Rimmer

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if he will include modules on freedom of religion or belief in his Department's capacity building programmes in Pakistan and other countries with reported violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Answering member: Dr Andrew Murrison |

Department: Department for International Development

DFID already includes elements in our capacity building programmes which benefit religious minorities in Pakistan. Our new Aawaz II Accountability, Inclusion and Reducing Modern Slavery Programme builds on the Aawaz Voice and accountability programme. It will continue to work with communities to promote rights of children, women, youth and religious minorities, protect them from exploitation, and prevent discrimination.

Through our Skills Development Programme, we fund the Punjab Skills Development Fund to provide technical and vocational skills training to the poor and vulnerable, including those from minority communities. An exclusive skills scheme has recently been launched by this Fund for religious minorities. Under this scheme, 5,000 people from religious minorities (40% women) who are unemployed will be trained in a variety of trades.

More widely, through UK Aid Connect, DFID is funding a consortium led by the Institute of Development Studies to address challenges in building tolerance and freedom of religion and belief. In November 2018, Lord Ahmad and Lord Bates launched a £12 million UK Aid Connect programme to promote and defend freedom of religion or belief. This will make poverty reduction programmes more inclusive by highlighting and redressing religious inequalities, with a focus on highly volatile contexts.

Pakistan: Religious Freedom

24 Oct 2019 | 1670

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make it his policy for all Government staff working (a) on or (b) in Pakistan undergo (i) religious and (ii) freedom of religious belief literacy training.

Answering member: Heather Wheeler | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We are exploring how best to expand our existing training package on religion and diplomacy to have the greatest reach and impact across the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) global network, including in Pakistan. We have also piloted a new workshop on the use of the FCO Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) Toolkit. The Bishop of Truro's Independent Review of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians recommended that general and contextual training in religious literacy and belief dynamics, including the FCO FoRB toolkit, is undertaken in all roles where this understanding is important. It also recommended rolling out mandatory religious diversity and literacy e-training to all FCO staff, subject to cost and value for money considerations. We have agreed to implement these recommendations.

Pakistan: Religious Freedom

24 Oct 2019 | 1666

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to his counterpart in the Pakistan Government to encourage the invitation of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to visit Pakistan.

Answering member: Heather Wheeler | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We regularly discuss freedom of religion or belief with the Pakistani Government and will continue to raise this matter at a senior level. The previous Foreign Secretary discussed the treatment of minority religious communities with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Qureshi during his visit to the UK in June 2019. In September, the Prime Minister appointed Rehman Chishti MP as the new Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief to build on the work of the former Envoy Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon and further the government's work promoting the UK's firm stance on religious freedom and tolerance abroad.

Mexico: Religious Freedom

22 Oct 2019 | 1776

Asked by: David Linden

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Mexican counterpart on religious freedom in Mexico; and what assessment he has made of the attitude in that country towards repeat perpetrators of violence against religious freedom in the communities of (a) Cuamontax del Huazalingo and (b) Mesa Limuntitla in the state of Hidalgo and (c) other parts of Mexico.

Answering member: Christopher Pincher | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Officials in the British Embassy in Mexico City have regular contact with the Government of Mexico and civil society groups, including Christian Solidarity Worldwide, to help inform our understanding of the human rights situation on the ground, including in matters of Freedom of Religion or Relief (FoRB). We work closely with the Government of Mexico to support a broad human rights agenda. The Foreign Secretary's visit to Mexico in August 2019 offered the opportunity to discuss human rights with his Mexican counterpart and we welcomed their commitment to address the challenges. Baroness Williams raised FoRB with Mexican Interior Minister in September 2019. I have also spoken to my counterpart, Deputy Foreign Minister Ventura. The Mexican Government, the local UN Human Rights office and local civil society organisations assess that FORB violations are not widespread or endemic, although they do accept there are local incidences of people being affected because of their religious belief.

Eritrea: Religious Freedom

08 Oct 2019 | HL17913

Asked by: Lord Hylton

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have, if any, to recommend an independent person to mediate between the government of Eritrea and the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Muslim authorities, whose health centres and schools there have recently been seized.

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

The British Government has no plans to recommend a mediator. Our Ambassador to Eritrea has raised the closure of the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Muslim health centres and schools with the Government of Eritrea, most recently with the Minister for Information on 26 September. We remain concerned at restrictions on religious freedoms and at the 41st Human Rights Council (24 June to 12 July), the UK reiterated calls for Eritrea to respect freedom of religion or belief.

[Christianity: Oppression](#)

08 Oct 2019 | 294747

Asked by: Laura Smith

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will have discussions with his counterparts in (a) the G20 and (b) the G7 on tackling persecution of Christians overseas.

Answering member: Heather Wheeler | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Over recent months, the UK has raised Freedom of Religion or Belief concerns, including the worldwide persecution of Christians, bilaterally and through multilateral institutions such as the UN, EU and OSCE. At the G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting in April, we discussed our concerns on the resurgent forms of racism, and discrimination that includes the targeting of Christian minorities. We reaffirmed our dedication to uphold the rights of all to hold and manifest their religion or belief, both privately and in public. We will consider whether to raise our concerns in subsequent G7 and G20 Foreign Ministers' meetings.

[Burma: Religious Freedom](#)

08 Oct 2019 | 292866

Asked by: Emily Thornberry

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make it his policy to submit a resolution to the UN Security Council requiring members of the Myanmar military responsible for the persecution of Christians and Muslims to be investigated by the International Criminal Court.

Answering member: Dominic Raab | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We are clear that there should be accountability for the atrocities set out in the reports of the UN Fact Finding Mission on human rights abuses in Myanmar. We assess, however, that there is insufficient support amongst Security Council members for a referral to the International Criminal Court at this time. The UK has nonetheless taken steps to maintain the international spotlight on the atrocities committed. In October 2018 the UK organised for the UN Fact Finding Mission to brief the UN Security Council on its findings. The UK was also instrumental in securing a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council to set up an independent UN mechanism to collect and preserve evidence

on the atrocities. This will help to ensure future prosecutions are possible through domestic or international mechanisms.

China: Religious Freedom

04 Oct 2019 | 291327

Asked by: Emily Thornberry

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his Chinese counterpart on the persecution of Christians in that country.

Answering member: Dominic Raab | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

On 26 September during an Urgent Question on Hong Kong, I set out the UK's position on the persecution of groups in China on the grounds of religion or belief. As I stated in the House, we are concerned that Chinese Government guidelines on unapproved religious activity, education and travel may restrict the peaceful observation of those rights. We take a proactive approach to influencing on freedom of religion or belief; in July 2019, the UK attended a US-led Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom. The UK also signed a declaration to address religious persecution and discrimination worldwide, and to promote freedom of religion or belief for all.

Furthermore, at the 41st session of the UN Human Rights Council in July 2019, we raised our concerns about freedom of religion or belief in our 'Item 4' national statement. At the 40th session of the UN HRC in March, the Prime Minister's former Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad, highlighted our concerns about restrictions on FoRB in China – including on Muslims in Xinjiang and Christians. Lord Ahmad also set out the Government's position when answering an Oral Question in the House of Lords on 4 April.

West Africa: Religious Freedom

30 Sep 2019 | 291144

Asked by: Eddie Hughes

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle religious oppression against (a) Christians and (b) other religious groups in (i) Burkina Faso and (ii) other parts of West Africa.

Answering member: Andrew Stephenson | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK is deeply concerned about the security deterioration in Burkina Faso and the Sahel, including attacks in recent months against religious minorities. We are committed to working with all partners, including Burkina Faso and other countries in West Africa, to protect freedom of religion and belief for all. As the UK increases its work to encourage stability and prosperity in the Sahel, we will continue being vocal champions for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.

6. Other Parliamentary material

6.1 Debates

[China's Policy on its Uighur Population](#)

11 March 2020 | 673 cc130-152WH

[Persecution of Christians](#)

06 Feb 2020 | 671 cc507-550

[Persecution of Christians Overseas](#)

18 Jul 2019 | 663 cc1018-1049

[Religious Persecution](#)

11 July 2019 | 798 cc1933-1974

[Human Rights: Xinjiang](#)

29 Jan 2019 | 653 cc324-347WH

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

25 Oct 2018 | 648 cc191-234WH

[Persecution of Christians Overseas](#)

18 Jul 2019 | 663 cc1018-1049

[Christians Overseas](#)

22 May 2018 | 641 cc338-356WH

[Freedom of Religion or Belief](#)

01 Mar 2018 | 636 c460WH

6.2 Statement

[Independent Review of Foreign and Commonwealth Office support for persecuted Christians](#)

08 July 2019 | HCWS1698

6.3 Early Day Motions

[International Women's Day and freedom of religion or belief](#)

EDM 273 (session 2019-21)

Jim Shannon

9 March 2020

That this House celebrates International Women's Day which took place on Sunday March 8; recognises the importance of marking the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women; reaffirms its commitment to promoting gender equality; notes with sadness that the

subjugation and persecution of women and girls remains a global phenomenon; laments the fact that many women in the world are persecuted for both their gender and their faith, such as Yazidi women in Iraq or Hindu and Christian girls forcibly converted and married in Pakistan; believes that the UK government can play an important role in addressing the specific vulnerabilities experienced by women from religious minority communities around the world; calls on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development to recognise these specific vulnerabilities; and urges the UK Government to include targeted programming and aid for women who face double vulnerabilities as members of minority faith communities, include religion as a factor of vulnerability in any assessment made in planning and programming and ensure that sensitivity relating to the international right to freedom of religion or belief is integrated into gender-related and anti-discrimination programmes.

Freedom of religious belief in Iran

EDM 209 (session 2019-21)

Mary Glendon

24 February 2020

That this House notes the increasing importance of defence of freedom of religion of belief in UK foreign policy; further notes the arrest of 24 members of the Baha'i faith in Iran in October and November 2019; and calls on the Government to press Iranian authorities to cease its targeting of Baha'is and other religious minorities on account of their beliefs.

Persecution of Christians

EDM 55 (session 2019-19)

Jeremy Hunt

23 October 2019

That this House notes the 2019 report of Aid to the Church in Need entitled *Persecuted and Forgotten?* which shows that the Christian population of Iraq has declined by 90 per cent within a generation from 1.5 million before 2003 to less than 150,000 today; recognises that any Daesh resurgence in Syria or Iraq could pose an existential threat to Christians in the region; and calls on the Government in line with its commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's review of Foreign and Commonwealth Office support for persecuted Christians to take urgent and immediate steps to safeguard the presence of Christians and other minorities in Iraq and Syria.

Persecution of Christians**EDM 2748 (session 2017-19)****Jim Cunningham****30 September 2019**

That this House condemns the persecution of Christians and other religious groups; is extremely concerned about the rising levels of Christian persecution; is deeply concerned by reports that persecution of Christians in some parts of the world is at near genocide levels; understands that Christians are the most persecuted group, with 80 per cent of religious persecution globally against Christians; notes that genuine action to tackle the persecution of Christians is long overdue; welcomes the Government's initiatives to bring attention to the persecution of Christians; calls on the Government to show its commitment to protecting religious minorities; and further calls on the Government to use all diplomatic means available to ensure that Christians across the world can freely pursue their beliefs.

UN International Day commemorating the victims of acts of violence based on religion or belief**EDM 2453 (session 2017-19)****Fiona Bruce****5 June 2019**

That this House welcomes the establishment by the UN General Assembly of the UN International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief on 22 August each year; is deeply concerned that acts of violence based on religion or belief are increasing all over the world and often flourish with impunity; notes the concerning findings of the interim report of the Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians; recognises the dire situation of religious minorities in many parts of the world; calls on the Government to mark the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief and use the initiative to develop and implement a comprehensive action plan, across Departments to address religious persecution whenever and wherever it occurs; and further calls on the Government to use all its diplomatic powers to combat religious persecution around the world and bring impunity for such atrocities to an end.

7. Further reading

[China's policy on its Uighur population](#), House of Commons Library Debate Pack, CDP 047, 6 March 2020

[The Commonwealth in 2020](#), House of Commons Library Debate Pack, CDP 052, 6 March 2020

[India's Citizenship \(Amendment\) Act 2019](#), Lords Library Note, LLN 058, 12 February 2020

[Persecution of Christians](#), House of Commons Library Debate Pack, CDP 019, 3 February 2020

[Commentary on the current state of Freedom of Religion or Belief 2019](#), All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, 5 November 2019

[Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians: Final Report and Recommendations](#), July 2019

[Bishop of Truro's Review on Persecution of Christians Overseas](#), House of Commons Library Debate Pack, CDP 198, 16 July 2019

[People of Faith: Persecution in the 21st Century](#), Lords Research Briefing LLN 087, 4 July 2019

[Incidence of Antisemitism Worldwide](#), Lords Library Note, LLN 075, 13 June 2019

[Human Rights and Democracy Report 2018](#), Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 5 June 2019

[International freedom of religion or belief day 2018](#), Commons Debate Pack, CDP 0231, 24 October 2018

[Open Doors USA](#) (Website)

[Release International](#) (Website)

[Barnabas Fund](#) (Website)

[Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#) (Website)

[International Christian Concern](#) (Website)

[All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief](#) (Website)

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