



## DEBATE PACK

CDP 110 (2020) | 15 October 2020

# Progress on the Bishop of Truro's independent review of persecution of Christians and freedom of religion or belief

**Westminster Hall**

**Wednesday 21 October 2020**

**9.30am to 11.00am**

**Debate initiated by Rehman Chishti MP**

The proceedings of this debate can be viewed on [Parliamentlive.tv](https://www.parliamentlive.tv)

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# 1. Background

## UK Government Policy

In the UK, the Foreign and Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) monitors the international situation in respect of religious freedom. [In its 2019 Human Rights and Democracy report](#), the FCO stated that Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) was a priority for the UK in 2019. The report mentioned terrorist attacks on people of faith, such as in New Zealand and Sri Lanka, the treatment of Uyghurs and others Muslims in China, Jehovah's witnesses in Russia and Christians in Pakistan, and followers of Baha'i faith in Iran

The report also drew attention to DFID's £12 million Freedom of Religion or Belief programme, the 'Coalition for Religious Inequality and Development' (CREID), which works "with local partners to address stigma, social exclusion, and economic exclusion".

In February 2020 the US Government launched the [Religious Freedom Alliance](#). The UK and many other countries joined the alliance

In September 2019 the Government [appointed Rehman Chishti MP](#) as his special envoy for religious freedom.

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 but the Committee took evidence on the following 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?

## **Bishop of Truro's Review: FCO Support for Persecuted Christians**

The then Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, set up a review by the Bishop of Truro into Government support for persecuted Christians in January 2019. He asked the review to map “levels of persecution and other discrimination against Christians in key countries around the world” and make an “objective assessment of the impact and levels of FCO support”. The review would then 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”.

Shortly after publication, at the second Ministerial Conference to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington DC, [Lord Ahmad announced](#) that the Government would implement all of the recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's review.

The [2019 Democracy and Human Rights report](#) listed some steps already taken in the light of the Bishop of Truro's recommendations:

- we created a new John Bunyan Fund to support FoRB projects;
- led cross-Whitehall efforts to mark Red Wednesday (a day dedicated to drawing attention to persecuted Christians around the world);
- lobbied other countries to appoint FoRB special envoys;
- and wrote to the British Council, Wilton Park, and Westminster Foundation for Democracy to encourage them to expand their work on FoRB

In June 2020 Nigel Adams, Minister at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [set out details of the John Bunyan Fund](#) and other freedom of religion activities undertaken by the FCO:

Since 2018, the FCO has allocated more than £1 million for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) projects through the Magna Carta Fund for human rights. This included projects to combat intolerance and encourage respect among individuals of different faiths, beliefs and those of no belief. Following the Bishop of Truro's independent Review of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians, we also launched the John Bunyan Fund for FoRB, through which we funded 15 research projects that looked at the challenges facing different communities, including Christians, Yazidis and Humanists. John Bunyan Fund projects also looked at cross-cutting issues such as migration and the double vulnerability experienced by women from minority faith backgrounds. Programme funding allocations for financial year 2020-2021 are yet to be confirmed.

### **Truro update, September 2020**

On 17 September the Government answered a [PQ from Jim Shannon MP](#) on the implementations of the Bishop of Truro's recommendations. Nigel Adams said that half of the recommendations are implemented or in progress:

Defending the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all is a priority for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The UK Government has committed to implement the Bishop of Truro's 22 recommendations in full, in a way that will bring real improvements in the lives of those persecuted because of their faith or belief. Over half of the recommendations have either been implemented, or are in progress, and work is continuing to implement the remainder.

## 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.

### [Claims of persecution by the Christian majority can be dangerous for minorities](#)

Washington Post  
Sarah Ifft Decker  
14 October 2020

### [Religion central to Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict](#)

Catholic News Agency  
Matt Hadro  
12 October 2020

### [Rehman Chishti and Knox Thames: Freedom of religion is under threat. Trans-Atlantic efforts can combat that](#)

Conservative Home  
Rehman Chishti and Knox Thames  
12 October 2020

### [Chinese Christian Bookseller Sentenced to Seven Years in Prison](#)

Persecution.org  
1 October 2020

### [Christian persecution increased globally after Covid-19](#)

UCA News  
18 August 2020

### [Nigeria's Christians are in a perilous position](#)

The Spectator  
Hardeep Singh  
23 June 2020

### [Islamists attack Benedictine community in Mozambique](#)

The Tablet  
Filipe Avillez  
18 May 2020

### [A year after Easter bombings in Sri Lanka, recovery still a work in progress](#)

Crux  
Elise Ann Allen  
22 April 2020

### [Mubarak's lasting legacy on Egypt's Coptic Christians](#)

The Conversation  
Ramazan Kılınç  
17 March 2020

**[Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalism gives rise to vigilante attacks on Christians](#)**

Daily Telegraph  
Joe Wallen  
16 February 2020

**[Persecuted Christians Are Not Given Much Hope In 2020](#)**

Forbes  
Ewelina U. Ochab  
18 February 2020

**[A New Ranking of Nations Where Christians Are Persecuted Most](#)**

National Review  
Doug Bandow  
28 January 2020

### 3. Gov.uk

#### [New sanctions regime among push to boost protection for persecuted religious groups](#)

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

**8 July 2020**

The review, published in July 2019, made 22 recommendations to improve the lives of persecuted members of all faiths, beliefs, and those of no belief. Implementation has already begun on half the recommendations, while work is ongoing to deliver the rest.

Rehman Chishti MP, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, leads on the implementation of the Truro review and championing freedom of religion or belief for the Government internationally.

One of the main recommendations of the Truro review was in relation to sanctions, with the report suggesting the Government needed to be prepared to impose sanctions against perpetrators of freedom of religion or belief abuses.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab announced on Monday that the first wave of designations under the UK's new, ground-breaking Global Human Rights sanctions regime will sanction those involved in religious persecution, including two Myanmar generals, Min Aung Hlaing and Soe Win.

The pair were designated for their involvement in the systematic killing, rape, sexual violence and enforced labour against the Rohingya people in Myanmar.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

Everyone, no matter their faith or belief, deserves to be able to live a free and safe life, wherever they are in the world.

Our new global human rights regime will allow the UK to protect people of all religions, faiths and no belief against serious human rights violations and abuses, and ensure the perpetrators are sent a clear message that the UK will not tolerate their atrocious actions.

Rehman Chishti MP, who was appointed the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief in September 2019 as a result of the recommendations, this week reinforced the Foreign Office's commitment to implementing all of the recommendations of the Truro review.

Mr Chishti said:

This Government aspires to be the global champion for freedom of religion or belief for all. I want every citizen around the world to enjoy this basic right. The freedom to practice faith or belief without discrimination is one of the foundations of a free society.

During my time in office, I have taken forward 11 of the 22 Truro review recommendations, including overseeing the UK joining the International Religious Freedom Alliance, which allows like-minded member states to work together to promote freedom of religion or belief internationally, reinforcing the UK's commitment to be a global leader in championing freedom of religion or belief.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for Human Rights at the FCO and DFID, added:

There is a critical intersection of religious rights with broader security issues like gender-based violence, including trafficking and forced marriage.

We know that free societies are more stable, more prosperous and more resilient against violent extremism, and our work on freedom of religion or belief, alongside our ongoing human rights work, is key to improving the livelihoods of millions across the world.

Last year, the Bishop of Truro, Rt. Rev. Philip Mounstephen published his final report of his independent review of the Foreign Office's support to persecuted Christians around the world, incorporating 22 recommendations for the FCO's consideration.

In line with the Foreign Office's longstanding policy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the vast majority of recommendations supported members of all faiths, beliefs, and no belief, not just Christians.

Since the review, the Foreign Office has continued to work with international partners, including through the International Religious Freedom Alliance, to reduce religious persecution worldwide. As well as the implementation of freedom of religion or belief-related sanctions, the Foreign Office last year launched the John Bunyan Fund for Freedom of Religion or Belief. The £200,000 fund was made 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.

## 4. PQs

### [Pakistan: Christianity](#)

06 Oct 2020 | 96758

**Asked by: Gareth Thomas**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle the persecution of Christians in Pakistan.

**Answering member: Nigel Adams | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

We urge the Government of Pakistan to guarantee the fundamental rights of all its citizens. We engage at a senior level with the Government of Pakistan on the mistreatment of religious and ethnic groups, including from the Ahmadiyya, Christian, Hazara and Shia communities. Most recently, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister for South Asia, raised our concerns regarding Freedom of Religion or Belief with Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights, Dr Shireen Mazari, on 27 August. Lord Ahmad also raised these concerns with the Governor of Punjab, Chaudhry Muhammad Sarwar, on 8 September.

The former Foreign Secretary [Jeremy Hunt MP] asked the Bishop of Truro to review what the former FCO could do to better support the plight of Christians globally. The Bishop responded with a report setting out the gravity of the issue, as well as practical recommendations for an enhanced response to the plight of Christians and people persecuted for holding other religions or beliefs. The UK Government has committed to implementing the Bishop's 22 recommendations in full, and work is continuing in the FCDO to implement them in a way that will bring real improvements in the lives of those persecuted because of their faith or belief. More than half of the recommendations have already been implemented or are in the process of being implemented.

### [China: Christianity](#)

05 Oct 2020 | 97474

**Asked by: Gregory Campbell**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make representations to the Chinese authorities on the reports of persecution and monitoring of Christian groups and churches in that country.

**Answering member: Nigel Adams | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

We remain deeply concerned about the persecution of Christians and other religious groups 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. We regularly raise our concerns about freedom of religion or belief in China, including at the most recent session of the UN

Human Rights Council on 25 September. We will continue to raise this important issue.

**[Persecution of Christians across the Globe Independent Review](#)**  
**17 Sep 2020 | 87551**

**Asked by: Jim Shannon**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether it remains his Department's policy to implement the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's Review of the FCO's work to support persecuted Christians.

**Answering member: Nigel Adams | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

Defending the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all is a priority for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The UK Government has committed to implement the Bishop of Truro's 22 recommendations in full, in a way that will bring real improvements in the lives of those persecuted because of their faith or belief. Over half of the recommendations have either been implemented, or are in progress, and work is continuing to implement the remainder.

**[Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Religious Freedom](#)**

**17 Sep 2020 | 87546**

**Asked by: Jim Shannon**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make protecting freedom of religion or belief a priority for his Department.

**Answering member: Nigel Adams | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

Defending the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all is a priority for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The UK Government has committed to implement the Bishop of Truro's 22 recommendations in full, in a way that will bring real improvements in the lives of those persecuted because of their faith or belief. Over half of the recommendations have either been implemented, or are in progress, and work is continuing to implement the remainder.

**[Business of the House](#)**

**10 Sep 2020 | 679 c160**

**Asked by: Jim Shannon**

I pass my best wishes to the Deputy Leader of the House, who is in the Chamber today.

I get regular contact from Pakistan about issues that are very, very important. Bishop Nadeem contacted me with media reports outlining how, on 7 June 2020, a mob reportedly attacked Christians in the village of Mazang Nowabad Sharaqpur, in the Punjab province in

Pakistan. The mob were said to have come with assault rifles and clubs. They damaged houses, desecrated the local church and snatched goods and livestock. A total of 88 Christians, including women and children, were forcibly displaced from the village in which they had been living for generations. Will the Deputy Leader of the House agree to a statement or a debate on this very important matter?

**Answered by: Stuart Andrew | Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household**

The hon. Gentleman, as ever, raises a very important point. The events that he describes are extremely distressing to hear. We are deeply concerned to hear about the scale and severity of violations, not just in the example that he gives but in other places around the world. I know that the Prime Minister's special envoy for freedom of religion or belief will be overseeing the implementation of the recommendations from the Bishop of Truro and will be making sure that all Ministers are aware of them.

**[Nigeria: Christianity](#)**

**06 Aug 2020 | HL7425**

**Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of (1) the statement by the Rt Rev Abiodun Ogunyemi, the Anglican Bishop of Zaria, on 24 July, that the campaign against Christians in Nigeria is a "genocide", and (2) the responsibilities of (a) the government of Kaduna State, (b) the government of Nigeria, and (c) the international community, under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention of Genocide; what plans they have to reassess the causes of the attacks against Christians in Nigeria; and whether any such plans will discount climate change as the major cause of such attacks.

**Answering member: Baroness Sugg | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We are aware of the statement made by the Right Reverend Abiodun Ogunyemion on 24 July. The UK Government condemns all incidents of intercommunal violence in Nigeria, including the recently reported attacks in Kaduna State referred to in the Bishop's statement. Intercommunal violence in Kaduna State and Nigeria more widely affects communities of all faiths. We have made clear to the Nigerian authorities, at the highest levels, the importance of protecting civilians and human rights for all.

It is UK Government policy not to unilaterally determine whether genocide has occurred, in line with the Genocide Convention. This is a matter for competent courts and tribunals, including the International Criminal Court, after consideration of all the evidence, rather than governments or non-judicial bodies.

The UK Government's assessment remains that climate change is one of the drivers of intercommunal violence in Nigeria because of the resulting competition for natural resources. The Bishop of Truro also considered the effects of climate change on intercommunal violence in Nigeria in his independent report on the global persecution of Christians.

**Mozambique: Christianity**

**23 Jul 2020 | HL6823**

**Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians, published in June 2019, what assessment they have made of reports (1) of churches being burned down, and (2) of Christians being attacked, in northern Mozambique; and what discussions they have had, if any, with the Bishop of Pemba in northern Mozambique about such reports.

**Answering member: Baroness Sugg | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We remain deeply concerned at the scale of Freedom of Religion or Belief violations in many parts of the world. We recognise that people's religion and gender can increase their vulnerabilities, particularly those from minority groups. The Government has committed to implementing the Bishop of Truro's 22 recommendations in full. This work is being overseen by the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Rehman Chishti MP. 11 of the recommendations have already been implemented, or are in the process of being implemented. Work is ongoing to implement all the recommendations in a way that will bring real improvements to the lives of those persecuted because of their faith, belief, or because they have no religious belief.

We are aware that homes and commercial buildings have been targeted by groups with links to Islamic extremism in certain areas of northern Mozambique, particularly in the coastal town of Mocimboa da Praia on 23 March. The insurgents have attacked and terrorised all the peoples of Cabo Delgado, irrespective of their beliefs. The UK strongly condemns any targeting of civilians by insurgent groups, regardless of their religion.

The British High Commission hopes to reinstate a planned visit to Cabo Delgado to meet all faith leaders including the Bishop of Pemba as soon as possible once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and it is safe to do so.

**Nigeria: Religion**

**29 Jun 2020 | HL5837**

**Asked by: Baroness Cox | Party: Crossbench**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to introduce mandatory training for (1) Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and (2) Department for International Development, staff, in Nigeria on (a) patterns of discrimination and conflict with religious characteristics, and (b) how religion and religious actors interact with the societal context.

**Answering member: Baroness Sugg | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Our staff are encouraged to develop an understanding of religion and its role within society, including in conflict situations and in countries like Nigeria where religion is important to most people's identity.

Specific training on religion is available to all staff through the FCO's Diplomatic Academy. In addition, our Nigerian local staff provide first-hand insight into the role of religion and religious actors within Nigerian society, including conflicts affecting the country. We also use expertise from the FCO's Africa Research Group and conflict-prevention experts.

We are now working on an enhanced training offer related to religion as part of our commitment to implement the recommendations made in the Bishop of Truro's independent review. This work is being led by the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Rehman Chishti MP.

### **Religious Freedom**

**22 Jun 2020 | 59261**

#### **Asked by: Zarah Sultana**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what support his Department provides to projects (a) with and (b) for religious communities facing discrimination throughout the world.

#### **Answering member: Nigel Adams | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Since 2018, the FCO has allocated more than £1 million for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) projects through the Magna Carta Fund for human rights. This included projects to combat intolerance and encourage respect among individuals of different faiths, beliefs and those of no belief. Following the Bishop of Truro's independent Review of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians, we also launched the John Bunyan Fund for FoRB, through which we funded 15 research projects that looked at the challenges facing different communities, including Christians, Yazidis and Humanists. John Bunyan Fund projects also looked at cross-cutting issues such as migration and the double vulnerability experienced by women from minority faith backgrounds. Programme funding allocations for financial year 2020-2021 are yet to be confirmed.

### **Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief**

**19 May 2020 | HL4380**

#### **Asked by: Baroness Anelay of St Johns**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they plan to make the position of UK Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief a permanent position; and, if so, whether the role will always be filled by a member of the House of Commons or House of Lords.

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

The Bishop of Truro's independent Review of Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Support for Persecuted Christians recommended that the FCO "establish[es] permanently, and in perpetuity, the role of Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief". The choice of Special Envoy is a decision for the Prime Minister. I was honoured to be appointed in 2018 as the UK's first ever envoy, an

appointment reconfirmed by the current Prime Minister in July 2019. Rehman Chishti MP succeeded me as Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in September 2019, but I continue to champion FoRB as Minister of State with responsibility for Human Rights.

### **Persecution of Christians**

**19 Mar 2020 | 673 cc1133-4**

#### **Asked by: Caroline Ansell**

To ask the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what recent assessment the Commissioners have made of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's progress on implementing the recommendations in the Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians.

#### **Answered by: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners**

The Church of England is pleased that the Government have repeatedly said they will implement in full the recommendations of the Truro review. The Church is in regular contact with the review implementation team. Promoting faith literacy among our diplomats remains work in progress, but we are reassured by continuing work on that aspect of the review.

### **Nigeria: Christianity**

**16 Mar 2020 | HL2049**

#### **Asked by: Baroness Cox**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of The Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians, published on 16 July 2019, which found that "religion plays a key part" in targeted violence by Fulani militia against Christian communities in Nigeria; whether they intend to publish a response to that report; and if so, when.

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

The UK Government has accepted the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's report and is working on implementing them. On Nigeria, the report considered intercommunal violence in the Middle Belt and terrorism in the North East. Given religion forms a fundamental part of the identity of most Nigerians, our assessment is that religion inevitably plays a part in incidences of violence affecting all faith communities, including some which involve Fulani herdsman. As the report highlights, other factors also play a role. As part of HMG's response to issues flagged by the report, the FCO and Wilton Park co-hosted a conference on 'Fostering Social Cohesion in Nigeria' in February, exploring the complex causes of conflict and solutions to help ease tensions and reduce violence. Discussion also highlighted the importance of countering inaccurate narratives misrepresenting disparate incidents across multiple states as a homogenous religious conflict, and of

inflammatory terminology as 'militia' to describe diverse ethnic groups. A full report from the event will issue this month.

### **International Development: Freedom of Religion or Belief**

**06 Feb 2020 | 801 c1878**

#### **Asked by: Lord Anderson of Swansea**

My Lords, apart from the grants, which the Minister mentioned, are there any circumstances in which our aid will be reduced or postponed as a result of gross religious persecution, which, as the recent Open Doors report shows, is increasing throughout the world? Can she give specific examples of this? If not, it is clearly inconsistent with the Government's acceptance of the Bishop of Truro's report and the declared policy on human rights generally.

#### **Answered by: Baroness Sugg**

My Lords, withdrawal of our overseas aid will obviously affect the persecuted minorities and the very poor, whom we are aiming to help. The noble Lord refers to the Bishop of Truro's report, which was commissioned by the previous Foreign Secretary. That sets out a number of challenges to us to implement new programmes and procedures. We have accepted those recommendations in full and are implementing them.

### **Christians in Nigeria**

**6 Feb | 671 cc451-452**

#### **Asked by: Sir Desmond Swayne**

What steps the Church is taking to assist persecuted Christians in Nigeria

#### **Answering member: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners**

The Archbishop of Canterbury knows Nigeria well and has visited it on a number of occasions. He is extremely aware of the local tensions and context of this issue. The recent attacks in northern Nigeria by Boko Haram and Islamist militia are a source of profound concern to him and the Church.

#### **Asked by: Sir Desmond Swayne**

Is my hon. Friend satisfied with the progress in implementing the Bishop of Truro's findings?

#### **Answering member: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners**

I know my right hon. Friend takes a very close interest in these matters. Ten of the recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's review have been, or are being implemented, and the others are being worked on. Our diplomats are using the review to engage their host Governments wherever there are abuses of freedom of religion or belief.

#### **Asked by: Janet Daby**

The UK hosts Christians from all over the world, from Lebanon to Sri Lanka, and in Lewisham East we have a vibrant Nigerian Christian

community. It would be a shame if the Foreign and Commonwealth Office did not tap into the knowledge and culture available at home in the UK better to serve persecuted communities abroad.

**Answering member: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners**

I thank the hon. Lady very much for that excellent suggestion. I will certainly feed back to Church House and Lambeth Palace the point she helpfully makes.

## 5. Other Parliamentary material

### 5.1 Debates

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

**12 Mar 2020 | 673 cc177-200WH**

Motion that this House has considered freedom of religion or belief.

#### [Persecution of Christians](#)

**06 Feb 2020 | 671 cc507-550**

Motion that this House has considered the matter of the persecution of Christians. Agreed to on question.

#### [Persecution of Christians Overseas](#)

**18 Jul 2019 | 663 cc1018-1049**

Motion that this House deplores the persecution of Christians overseas; supports freedom of religion or belief in all countries throughout the world; welcomes the work undertaken by the Bishop of Truro in this area; and calls on the Government to do more with the diplomatic and other tools at its disposal to prevail on the governments of countries in which persecution of Christians is tolerated or encouraged to end that persecution and to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief. Agreed to on question.

#### [Religious Persecution](#)

**11 July 2020 | 798 cc1933-1974**

That this House takes note of the extent of persecution of people of faith in this century.

### 5.2 Written Statements

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

**08 Jul 2019 | HCWS1698**

I have today deposited in the libraries of both Houses of Parliament the Independent Review of Foreign and Commonwealth Office support for persecuted Christians, conducted by the Anglican Bishop of Truro, the Right Reverend Philip Mounstephen.

The Review is the conclusion of a project that began in December 2018, when I asked Bishop Mounstephen to carry out this important research with the full support of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

The UK has always been a leading champion of human rights. In recent years, the FCO has stepped up its work on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). In response to new evidence and as a sign of the UK's commitment, the Prime Minister appointed Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon in 2018 as the UK's first Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

In that role, Lord Ahmad has championed FoRB across government, through the FCO's diplomatic network, and in his travel overseas. The

UK has raised the rights of religious minorities at the highest levels, including in Nigeria, Iraq and Pakistan. Lord Ahmad has also worked with British diplomatic missions - including at the United Nations in Geneva and New York - to defend FoRB. Furthermore, he has overseen the provision of significant funding through various projects and programmes, including over £250 million to support people who were driven from their homes by Daesh's persecution.

Today, about 245 million Christians worldwide are believed to face persecution for their faith. The evidence suggests the problem is getting worse. The number of countries where Christians face religiously-motivated harassment rose from 128 in 2015 to 144 a year later, according to the Pew Research Centre.

The Review builds on the Bishop's Interim Report published in May 2019, which examined the scale and character of religious persecution. It includes further findings and recommendations about how the FCO might improve its response.

The Review draws on information from: non-governmental organisations; Church leaders; reporting from the FCO's diplomatic missions; interviews with FCO staff and analysts; FCO written sources (including reporting from the network, research papers and policy notes); interviews with retired members of the FCO and with those who have suffered directly from discrimination or persecution. I offer my particular thanks to those who bravely shared their harrowing experiences.

I welcome Bishop Mounstephen's report and its recommendations. We are working across government to agree a formal collective response.

The Review will also be available on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website, and further information is available on the Review's website at <https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/interim-report/>.

## 5.3 Early Day Motions

### [UK aid, covid-19 and the additional vulnerability of religious minorities](#)

**EDM 765 (session 2019-21)**

**Jim Shannon**

**21 July 2020**

That this House expresses deep concern about the increased vulnerability of Christians, and all citizens belonging to religious minority groups, to discrimination and persecution as a result of the covid-19 pandemic; particularly notes the incidents of Christians and members of other religious minority groups facing discrimination in the distribution of aid during the covid-19 pandemic; welcomes the reassurances given by Ministers that guidance has been circulated across the Department for International Development highlighting that inclusion must be central to the UK response and that the specific contexts and needs of vulnerable religious communities and other vulnerable groups should be taken into account when developing practical programmes to tackle

COVID-19; further welcomes the statement that the Department for International Development is working closely with its partners to ensure that they are rigorously assessing vulnerability and needs (including those linked with religious identity) ahead of allocating assistance as well as conducting robust monitoring to ensure that aid is reaching those most in need; urges the Department for International Development to confirm processes are in place to ensure that that monitoring is in itself impartial and does not reflect the prevalent societal views of the religious majority and fully recognises the vulnerability of religious minorities; and further urges the Department for International Development to also confirm that local faith leaders, particularly those from religious minority communities, have been consulted about how best the additional vulnerabilities faced by those minority communities can be addressed during the covid-19 pandemic.

### **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.

### **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.

## 6. Further reading

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

[\*\*The Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the UK Foreign Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians\*\*](#) (Review website)

[\*\*Nigeria: Unfolding genocide?\*\*](#) An Inquiry by the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, 15 June 2020

[\*\*World Watch List\*\*](#) (Open Doors UK webpage)

[\*\*The UK Freedom of Religion or Belief Forum\*\*](#) (webpage)

[\*\*All-Party Parliamentary Group on freedom of religion or belief\*\*](#) (webpage)

[\*\*Freedom of religion or belief\*\*](#)  
Commons Library Debate Pack  
11 March 2020

[\*\*Persecution of Christians\*\*](#)  
Commons Library Debate Pack  
3 February 2020

[\*\*Bishop of Truro's Review on Persecution of Christians Overseas\*\*](#)  
Commons Library Debate Pack  
16 July 2019

[\*\*People of Faith: Persecution in the 21st Century\*\*](#)  
Lords Library Note  
4 July 2019

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