

Debate Pack

CDP-0155 (2021)

By Louisa Brooke-Holland,
Nigel Walker

21 September 2021

Violence against Christians in central African countries

1	Background	2
2	Press and media articles	4
3	PQs	5
4	Debates	12

1

Background

A Westminster Hall debate on 'Violence against Christians in central African countries' has been scheduled for Thursday 23 September 2021 from 1.30-4:30pm. The debate has been initiated by Jim Shannon MP.

[Bishop of Truro's Review: FCO Support for Persecuted Christians](#)

In July 2019 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office published a review of [Government support for persecuted Christians](#) led by the Bishop of Truro. The report outlined 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. Shortly after publication [Lord Ahmad announced](#) that the Government would implement all of the recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's review. The Government has said it will commission an independent review into the recommendations at the end of the three-year implementation period.

In July 2021 the government said it had [fully implemented ten of the 22 recommendations](#), made good progress on a further eight, and "are confident" that all 22 will be delivered by the time of the independent review in 2022.

In December 2020 the Prime Minister [appointed Fiona Bruce](#) as his special envoy for freedom of religion or belief. News about her work is available on twitter: [@UK_FoRBEvnyoy](#).

[Identifying central African countries](#)

The debate focuses on central African countries. The number of countries to be covered can vary depending on the definition used.

As one guide, the UN regional office for central Africa covers the eleven Member States of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS): Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe.

[Sources of information on violence against Christians in central African countries](#)

There are a number of sources of information on religious persecution in these countries.

The Foreign and Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) monitors the international situation in respect of religious freedom. In its [2020 Human Rights and Democracy report](#), reaffirmed that defending Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is a priority for the Prime Minister. The report says monitoring

developments around the world and raising issues of concern continued to be central to the government's work on FoRB in 2020. Some steps taken in 2020 including joining the new Group of Friends of Victims of Acts of Violence based on Religion or Belief at the UN, and becoming a founding member of the [International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance](#).

The US State department reports annually to Congress on the status of religious freedom in every country. The [2020 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), published in May 2021, provides information on religious demography and the status of government respect and societal respect for religious freedom. The report is searchable by country.

Open Doors, a Christian charity, has identified 50 countries "[where Christians face the most extreme persecution](#)." Three of the countries on its [World Watch List report 2021](#) are in central Africa: Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR). The charity finds that globally, the persecution of Christians "continues to worsen" and that the Covid-19 pandemic "has exacerbated existing social, economic and structural vulnerabilities."

[Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#) monitors violence against Christians' arounds the world. In a recent post the Chief Executive of CSW Nigeria, Reverend Yunusa Nmadu, discussed ways to [remove the obstacles to freedom of religion or belief in Africa](#). Noting that religion-related terrorist groups thrive in ungoverned areas, or where the structures of governance are weak or have been weakened, Nmadu argues that, as well as addressing the immediate security challenges they present, initiatives that improve community relations, strengthen state institutions and encourage social cohesion, unity and respect for diversity are needed. Nmadu recommends adding freedom of religion or belief training to peacebuilding and interfaith work undertaken by regional bodies such as the AU, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The APPG for International Freedom of Religion and Belief also provides information on specified countries, including [Central African Republic](#). The APPG published a report in February 2021 on the [current state of Freedom of Religion and Belief](#).

2

Press and media articles

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

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

[Allied Democratic Forces: The Ugandan rebels working with IS in DR Congo](#)

BBC News Online

Linnete Bahati and Driss El-Bay

14 June 2021

[Includes a section on “Fears of religious conflict”]

[Attackers shoot Italian bishop-elect in his home in South Sudan](#)

Religion News Service

Claire Giangravé and Fredrick Nzwili

27 April 2021

[The Central African Republic’s faith leaders are the country’s best hope for peace](#)

Religion News Service

Christine Luby

8 March 2021

[At least 14 killed at religious site in CAR: Amnesty](#)

Al Jazeera

25 February 2021

[Mass killings of Christians in the DRC a “neglected tragedy”](#)

Catholic Herald

Ferdie Rous

30 January 2021

[Christians and Muslims in Central African Republic share shelter as renewed fighting displaces thousands](#)

Religion News Service

Fredrick Nzwili

27 January 2021

[Attacks on Religious Leaders in West and Central Africa Must Be Addressed](#)

The Globe Post

Tony Perkins and Fred Davie

29 September 2020

3

PQs

Christianity: International Assistance

07 Sep 2021 | 40759

Asked by: Dame Diana Johnson

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy and effectiveness of the distribution of aid to persecuted Christians.

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

The UK remains deeply concerned about the severity and scale of violations and abuses of freedom of religion or belief, (FoRB) in many parts of the world. We remain committed to the global effort to support the most vulnerable members of society, irrespective of race, religion and ethnicity.

Based on OECD data for 2020, the UK will be the third largest donor within the G7 as a percentage of GNI. We will spend more than £10 billion in aid this year. Posts across the FCDO network regularly report on the local human rights situation, including in relation to the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Islamic State: Africa

23 Jul 2021 | 32559

Asked by: Alexander Stafford

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to his speech at the Global Coalition against Daesh ministerial meeting in Rome on 28 June 2021, what assessment he has made of the threat of Islamic State in Africa for African Christians and members of other religious minorities.

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

The UK is committed to defending FoRB for all, and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. Promoting the right to FoRB is one of the UK's longstanding human rights priorities.

The UK Government condemns attacks by Daesh-affiliated terrorist groups across sub-Saharan Africa. Terrorist groups such as Daesh's affiliate group in West Africa continue to cause immense suffering to both Muslim and Christian communities. They seek to undermine the right to freedom of religion or belief by indiscriminately attacking those of all faiths who do not subscribe to their

extremist views. The UK remains absolutely committed to the lasting defeat of Daesh.

Persecution of Christians Across the Globe Independent Review

22 Jul 2021 | HL1846

Asked by: Lord Farmer

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to ensure the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief is being adequately resourced and supported in relation (1) to her role in implementing the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians, published on 8 July 2019, and (2) to enabling the planning and delivery of the international ministerial conference on freedom of religion or belief in 2022.

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

The Government has committed to implementing in full the recommendations in the Bishop of Truro's review, and work continues to implement them in a way that will bring real improvement to the lives of those persecuted due to their faith or belief. Of the 22 recommendations we have fully delivered ten, made good progress on a further eight, and are confident that all 22 will be delivered by the time of the independent review in 2022.

I [Lord Ahmad] meet monthly with the Envoy to discuss freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) activity. The Envoy also works closely with FCDO Ministers in promoting FoRB in their respective geographic areas, and through her Private Secretary in the FCDO, with support from the FCDO FoRB team and other officials on specific aspects of her role, as well as the FCDO media office and Special Advisers. Geographic and thematic policy desks have the opportunity to feed in to policy recommendations and offer advice on activities. We have committed to holding a Ministerial conference on FoRB, which will bring countries together to make global progress on this important issue.

Christianity: Females

23 Apr 2021 | 181250

Asked by: Chris Evans

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he has taken to help tackle religious persecution and gender based violence of Christian women in countries around the world.

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

The UK is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief for all. We recognise that women and girls from religious minorities can often suffer because of both their gender and their faith. That is why we ensure our human rights policy work considers the intersectionality of human rights, including the importance of addressing the specific vulnerabilities experienced by women and girls from religious minority communities.

The UK is recognised as a global leader in tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) in all its forms, by pioneering approaches around the world that have shown that VAWG is preventable. In the DRC, a project with faith leaders and community action groups halved women's experience of intimate partner violence from 69% to 29%. Preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence remains a top priority for the FCDO. In November, the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, launched the Declaration of Humanity by faith and belief leaders which calls for the prevention of sexual violence in conflict and denounces the stigma faced by survivors, including by children born of rape. Through UK Aid Connect, FCDO has supported the Creid programme (managed by the Institute of Development Studies) to work with women from religious minorities in five countries in Africa and Asia to understand the problems they face and identify effective approaches to tackle these issues.

Christianity: Oppression

10 Feb 2021 | 147111

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that Christians receive equal access to vaccines and healthcare in countries or regions where they face persecution.

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

The UK is committed to rapid equitable access to safe and effective vaccines. The UK has committed £548 million to the COVAX Advanced Market Commitment (AMC) - the international initiative to support global equitable access to vaccines. Through match funding, the commitment encouraged other donors to commit \$1 billion. Our commitment will contribute to the supply of at least 1.3 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines in 2021 for 92 developing countries. First COVAX deliveries are anticipated to begin at the end of February.

Gavi and its alliance partners plan to work with faith-based organisations and religious leaders to provide accurate and transparent information on, and encourage the distribution and uptake of, COVID-19 vaccines. We continue to assess the impact of Covid-19 on human rights globally, including Christians and members of minority religious and belief communities facing persecution.

On 16 November 2020, the Minister of State responsible for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, virtually attended the Ministerial to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in Warsaw and reaffirmed the UK's commitment to promoting FoRB, particularly during the pandemic. We will continue working with our partners to support global efforts to combat the outbreak of Covid-19 and its effects on the most vulnerable, including those from religious minorities.

Democratic Republic of Congo: Christianity

02 Feb 2021 | 144948

Asked by: Gregory Campbell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will hold discussions with his counterpart in the Democratic Republic of Congo to determine the steps that country is taking to tackle the killings of Christians and others by Islamic extremist groups in January 2021.

Answering member: James Duddridge | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK is concerned about violence against all communities, whatever their religion or belief, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The violence is symptomatic of a broader picture of instability in eastern DRC. We continue to urge the DRC Government and the UN to work together to protect civilians from ongoing violence and address the root causes of conflict. During my visit [Minister Duddridge] to DRC in November 2020, I discussed the importance of addressing these issues with President Tshisekedi.

We are committed to ensuring the UN peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) has a mandate focused on the protection of civilians and that vulnerable communities remain central to the UN's work in DRC. We are providing approximately £52 million of financial support in 2020/21 and three military staff officers to support the mission. Our six-year, £70 million, peace and stability programme is also helping communities secure land access, construct critical infrastructure and access income-generation opportunities in DRC.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Christianity

26 Jan 2021 | 139091

Asked by: Preet Kaur Gill

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the 2021 Open Doors World Watch List, what steps he is taking to address the rise in violence against Christians in sub-Saharan Africa.

Answering member: James Duddridge | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK is committed to defending Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all, and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. We remain deeply concerned about violations and abuses of FoRB in many parts of the world, including in sub-Saharan Africa. Where we have concerns, we raise them directly with governments, including at ministerial level. The Minister responsible for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, underlined the UK's commitment to FoRB for all in a number of international meetings in November 2020, speaking at the Ministerial to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Ministers' Forum of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance. We have also reviewed and taken note of the 2021 Open Doors World Watch List.

On 20 December 2020, the Prime Minister reaffirmed his commitment to FoRB by appointing Fiona Bruce, MP for Congleton, as his Special Envoy for FoRB. Mrs Bruce will work with ministers, officials and others to deliver the Government's goal of seeing everyone, everywhere able to have and practise a faith, belief, or no religious belief, in accordance with their conscience. Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon will also be working alongside her to drive forward the implementation of the Bishop of Truro's recommendations on FCDO support for persecuted Christians in a way that improves the lives of those persecuted for their faith, belief, or for not holding a religion.

Christianity: Oppression

11 Jan 2021 | 130764

Asked by: Dr Lisa Cameron

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to reports of attacks on Christian communities in Nigeria and increasing Islamic terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso, Congo, Kenya, Uganda and other countries in West and Central Africa, what support his Department has provided to multi-national responses to (a) resist extremism and (b) protect vulnerable minority Christian communities.

Answering member: James Duddridge | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We condemn all criminal and terrorist attacks on civilians, whatever their religion or belief. Attacks have caused immense suffering to local communities. The UK supports multi-national responses to tackle the threats from different terrorist groups in North East Nigeria, the Lake Chad Basin and East Africa. For example, we support Nigeria and its neighbours in the fight against Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa in North East Nigeria and the wider Lake Chad Basin by helping fund the Lake Chad Basin Regional Stabilisation Facility to strengthen community security, provide basic services and support livelihoods. We have provided funding and operational support for the Multinational Joint Task Force, a regional force coordinating military efforts for regional security. In the Sahel, we are providing logistical support to the French-led counter-terrorism Operation Barkhane. We are increasing focus on the protection of civilians through our deployment to the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and as one of the largest humanitarian donors. Additionally, the UK supports regional security and efforts to counter the threat posed by Al-Shabaab in East Africa, including through UK military training to forces from troop contributing countries to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali National Army. We are delivering a three year programme to strengthen regional, national and community level efforts to prevent radicalisation and recruitment across East Africa, including Kenya and Uganda. Across the continent, the UK continues to be a committed contributor to and supporter of UN peacekeeping operations.

The UK is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief for all (FoRB) globally, and promoting respect between communities. Where we have concerns, we raise them directly with governments, including at Ministerial level. Defending FoRB was a core pledge in our successful campaign to be re-elected to the UN Human Rights Council, and we will continue to use our position to stand up for individuals who are persecuted for their faith, belief, or because they have no religious belief. We work within the UN, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Council of Europe and other multilateral fora to promote and protect FoRB for all where it is threatened. In November 2020, the Minister responsible for human rights, Lord Ahmad (Tariq) of Wimbledon, underlined the UK's commitment to FoRB, speaking at the Ministerial to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Ministers' Forum of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance.

Christianity: South Sudan

14 Sep 2020 | 86666

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what support the Church of England is providing to the

church in South Sudan following the shootings of 32 people and the death of the Dean at the cathedral of Saint Luke's in South Sudan.

Answering member: Andrew Selous | Department: Church Commissioners

The deaths of the Dean and members of the congregation of St Luke's Cathedral South Sudan are both tragic and appalling.

In response to the recent attack the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa has called on "all peace-loving institutions to raise their voice and call for peace negotiations in South Sudan and dialogue to address the inter-communal violence."

The Church of England and the Vatican have been working together closely on initiatives to bring peace to South Sudan. The Church of England will continue to support reconciliation efforts and work with its international partners to end the protracted tribal conflict.

South Sudan and Sudan: Christianity

11 Feb 2020 | 11480

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the level of security of Christians in (a) Sudan and (b) South Sudan.

Answering member: Andrew Stephenson | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Sudan and South Sudan are priority countries in the UK Annual Human Rights Report. Improvements in human rights is an important part of our engagement in both countries. There are wide ranging security and human rights concerns in South Sudan, but these are not specific to Christianity which is the most widely practiced religion in the country. On Sudan the UK welcomes signs of progress on Freedom of Religion or Belief under the civilian-led government, including institutions observing Christian holidays and Christians being able to attend church services on Sundays. However, we remain concerned by ongoing issues and abuses. The Minister of State responsible for Human Rights, Lord Ahmad, registered the importance of increasing Freedom of Religion of Belief with the Sudanese Ambassador on 28 January. He raised concern at recent cases of churches being attacked.

4

Debates

[Persecution of Christians and Freedom of Religion or Belief](#)

21 Oct 2020 | House of Commons | Westminster Hall | 682 cc381-145WH

Motion that this House has considered progress on the Bishop of Truro's independent review on persecution of Christians and freedom of religion or belief.

[Persecution of Christians](#)

06 Feb 2020 | House of Commons | House of Commons chamber | 671 cc507-550

Motion, That this House has considered the matter of the persecution of Christians.

[Persecution of Christians Overseas](#)

18 Jul 2019 | House of Commons | House of Commons chamber | 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.

Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing '[Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#)' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

Feedback

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

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at commonslibrary.parliament.uk. If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe or scan the code below:



 commonslibrary.parliament.uk

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)