

Debate Pack

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The UK-hosted International Conference on the Freedom of Religion or Belief

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1 Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on the work of the UK-hosted International Conference on the Freedom of Religion or Belief is scheduled for Tuesday 28 June 2022, from 9:30-11:00am. The debate will be led by Fiona Bruce MP.

2 Background

On 5 and 6 July 2022 the Government will host a human rights conference to urge increased global action on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all.

Conference objectives

The [themes of the conference](#) are preventing FoRB violations and abuses, and protecting and promoting freedom of religion or belief.

The conference has five objectives:

1. raise awareness of:
 - the current challenges to FoRB across the world
 - the relevance of FoRB to other human rights
 - best practice in preventing violations and abuses and protecting and promoting FoRB
2. use UK leadership and experience in addressing human rights issues and our convening power to improve FoRB for all
3. galvanise partner countries and stakeholders to work more closely together to promote and protect FoRB, including by working together to address FoRB violations and abuses
4. encourage collective action by governments, human rights experts, civil society, academia and faith and belief actors to address FoRB challenges, exchange best practice, and build shared commitments
5. to strengthen the voices of and build the capacity of defenders of FoRB, including religion and belief groups, inspiring future leaders and young people, and building and reinforcing global coalitions for collective action.

UN declaration on the elimination of religious intolerance

On 25 November 1981, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 36/55, by which it proclaimed the [Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief](#). The draft resolution was adopted earlier, on [9 November 1981](#), without a vote, having been the subject of extensive consultation with Member States. The core principles of the Declaration are set out in Article 1(1):

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

And Article 2(1):

No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons, or person on the grounds of religion or belief.

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion is one of the United Nations' fundamental rights. The above principles are reflected in other UN instruments, notably Article 18 of the 1948 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), the text of which is broadly the same as Article 1(1) of the 1981 Declaration. Additionally, under Article 18 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the right to manifest it. This also requires that State Parties respect the rights of parents to ensure the education of their children in accordance with their own convictions.

[UN declarations are not international treaties](#); rather, they are statements of agreed standards of action and moral obligation. The website of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights provides a useful [overview of international standards on freedom of religion or belief](#).

UK Government approach

The FCDO publishes an [annual report on human rights and democracy](#). The most recent report was published in July 2021.

The Report says that defending freedom of religion or belief and promoting respect between different religious communities are key priorities for the Government. It points out that concerns about the denial of FoRB grew in 2020, which some religious minorities attributed to restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion of Belief is Fiona Bruce MP. The Minister for Human Rights is Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon.

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Government statement on the Conference

International collaboration

Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is one of the UK's long-standing human rights priorities. The UK government remains deeply concerned about the severity and scale of violations and abuses of FoRB in many parts of the world. Persecuting people, or discriminating against them, because of their religion or belief is often closely linked to other foreign and development policy challenges.

To strengthen international efforts to ensure freedom of religion or belief the UK government will host an International Ministerial Conference in central London on 5 and 6 July. As [announced in November 2021](#), it will bring together international governments, parliamentarians, faith and belief representatives and civil society. It will urge increased global action on freedom of religion or belief for all, under the themes of:

- preventing violations and abuses
- protecting and promoting freedom of religion or belief

It will be the first in-person International Ministerial Conference on this issue since 2019. The event will build on the [previous Ministerial-level conferences held by the United States in 2018 and 2019](#), and in virtual format by [Poland in 2020](#).

In 2021 during the UK's Presidency of the G7 the UK secured [inclusion of FoRB concerns in a G7 communique](#) for the first time.

This 2022 conference is another important step forward in ensuring that everyone is able to enjoy the right of freedom of religion or belief. As well as discussing challenges, the conference will:

- identify what is working in different countries
- explore where and how we can apply new lessons and approaches
- inspire the next generation to champion and defend freedom of religion or belief across the world

International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance

The Conference will also bring together members of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA). This year the [UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Fiona Bruce MP](#) is chairing the IRFBA.

The Alliance brings together like-minded countries to agree co-ordinated actions to promote FoRB and protect people worldwide who are persecuted

or discriminated against on account of their religion or belief. Members commit to advance Article 18 of the [Universal Declaration for Human Rights](#), which states that ‘everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion’.

Founded in 2020, the Alliance has grown from 27 to 36 member countries.

Fringe events

Whilst you can only attend the ministerial conference if you have been invited, a series of civil society events will enable more people to get involved in discussions about freedom of religion or belief.

The conference fringe events are being coordinated by the UK Freedom of Religion or Belief Forum. This group of over 70 civil society groups, faith or belief organisations and human rights Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) is committed to advancing the common cause of freedom of religion or belief worldwide.

The [UK Freedom of Religion or Belief Forum](#) website provides further information on the Fringe, including details of events.

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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.

[Global trends and challenges to protecting and promoting freedom of religion or belief](#)

United States Institute of Peace
Jason Klocek and Scott Bledsoe
21 June 2022

[2021 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)

US Department of State
2 June 2022

[How Liz Truss can champion religious freedom at UK ministerial conference](#)

Newsweek
Miles P.J. Windsor
27 May 2022

[Support for “Strasbourg Principles” in inter-religious dialogue on religion and peace, religion and human rights](#)

Council of Europe
2 May 2022

[UK Special Envoy: ‘Freedom of religion is a foundation of a democratic society’](#)

The Christian Institute
28 April 2022

[UK to host global freedom of religion summit in Summer 2022](#)

Politics.co.uk
Georgia Gilholy
24 November 2021

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Press releases

Prime Minister's Special Envoy: importance of the international Freedom of Religion or Belief conference in London

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

20 June 2022

Greetings from the UK Parliament. I'm delighted to be speaking to you as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. And I'm equally delighted to be able to talk to you about an international ministerial conference which the UK is hosting on 5 and 6 July this year. It's a conference about freedom of religion or belief or 'FoRB' for short.

Why is this conference so important? Well, it's important because all around the world today, even in the 21st century, millions of people are being deprived an education or a job or a home or access to justice or liberty, even to life itself, simply on account of what they believe. And so we're hosting this conference here in the UK so that we can bring together people from around the world to look at how we can address this situation.

We're inviting government ministers. We're inviting faith leaders and representatives. We're inviting civil society activists from around 50 countries from across the globe to come together and not only to discuss the issue of freedom of religion or belief, but also to look at how we can agree some practical solutions to address it.

And I'm pleased to say, too, that we've not just got an official government organised conference with about 500 delegates and will be based in the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre in the QEII in Parliament Square, but we're also involving civil society grassroots organisations, charities and NGOs concerned about freedom of religion or belief, and they'll be given their own space in the conference centre where they'll be able to host exhibitions and hold their own meetings and sessions.

And so what will the conference involve? Well, we've got sessions across the 2 days looking at, for example, freedom of religion and belief and education. How can we introduce it into education syllabi? So that young people can begin to understand what freedom of religion or belief is and how important it is? We've seen how, for example, they've got hold of the importance of climate change and addressing that. Can we do that in the same way for freedom of religion or belief to help the millions of people around the world who are suffering. Can we see young ambassadors develop so that young people will use social media to champion freedom of religion or belief?

And then we'll have another session on looking at women and girls and how they have a double jeopardy. Often they they are abused because they are

women and girls, but also on account of what their beliefs are, and they're vulnerable. How can we better help them in countries where this is happening?

And then we're going to look at early warning signs. There are early warning signs that happen often when that's the beginning of tension in communities because of differences in views and beliefs, which can then lead to friction, violence, even at worst case. Well, how can countries how can communities start to recognise these early warning signs and address them? And of course, we're bringing people here from across the world because we recognise that no one country, not least the UK, has all the answers.

Only by working together, by collaborating will we be able to begin to start to solve this this growing issue. We're looking at not just governments working together either, but governments working with civil society with organisations going forward, taking forward some really practical suggestions, which we hope will be brought out during those 2 days, and which we can then build on over the months, weeks, years to come.

And in addition to the official 2-day conference there's a lot else going on here in the UK around 5 and 6 July, so that anyone who's not invited to the conference will still be able to join in. We've got dozens and dozens of events focusing on freedom of religion or belief organised by charities, by non-government organisations (NGOs), by civil society activists, not just in London, but around the country.

And to the ministerial conference itself will be livestreamed so that anyone from anywhere in the world will be able to join in and watch and will actually be able to interact, because that will be an opportunity not just for delegates in the conference centre to interact with the sessions and make their contributions and their suggestions known, but also for people to comment virtually from right around the world.

So do join us on 5 and 6 July here in London, the lots of information on the website and by a lot more information coming on over the next few days. And I'm particularly delighted that the UK is hosting this conference this year in 2022 because this year to the UK is the Chair of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance.

What is that Alliance, you may ask? Well, it's an alliance of countries committed to promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief and to preventing its abuses, to working together to do so. It was founded not long ago, in February 2020 with just a handful of countries. It's now grown to 36 countries and more are coming on board.

And I'm pleased that the ministerial is proving a springboard for more interest in the Alliance day by day. And so we hope to see the Alliance grow so that

they'll really will be a strong collective global voice of countries who together can have more impact than our individual voices alone.

So I'm looking forward to greeting many of my Alliance contacts from around the world who up to date because of the pandemic I've only ever met virtually. This will be an exciting conference. It's exciting for everyone and there'll be something for everyone. Please do join us on 5 and 6 of July here in London.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon looks ahead to the UK-hosted conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

20 May 2022

I'm sincerely looking forward to welcoming our partners and friends from around the world to London in early July for the United Kingdom-hosted Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

This will be the first international ministerial conference on this theme since 2020 and the first to take place in person since 2019.

Together with our international partners we share a collective commitment to freedom of religion or belief for everyone, everywhere.

This is an issue that we all should care about. Although the right to freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it is regrettable, indeed tragic, that too many people around the world continue to live in fear of persecution on the basis of what they choose to believe or not to believe, or indeed how they choose to practice those beliefs.

Being denied the fundamental human right of freedom of religion or belief can be devastating for individuals and communities.

At the conference we'll therefore hear from survivors directly on the impact that persecution has had upon them, on their lives, on their communities.

As individuals suffer from being denied this human right, societies, countries where survivors live suffer too. They become smaller, diminished culturally and spiritually by this lack of freedom. Therefore, let us strengthen all of our communities by driving forward the collective importance of not just promoting this important issue, but strengthening freedom of religion or belief for all.

This conference in London will bring together ministers, but also importantly other representatives from government, from faith and belief group leaders, and indeed importantly from civil society as well.

Alongside the official ministerial conference, an associated conference fringe will see a series of events organized directly by civil society.

These will be taking place around the United Kingdom and provide further opportunities for all to join this important debate and discussion and learn from each other about this important issue.

I therefore hope that you will take this opportunity to really get involved and share our collective commitment to promoting and protecting, and indeed strengthening freedom of religion or belief for everyone across the world.

Freedom of religion or belief: understanding this human right

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

12 May 2022

Freedom of religion or belief: why it matters

The right to adopt a religion or belief, to practise it without hindrance, to share your faith and to change your religion or beliefs are all key freedoms that everyone should be able to enjoy. The UK government is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities.

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is a human right which has been guaranteed under international law within the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) since 1966. Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, states that ‘everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion’.

What FoRB is

FoRB is not just the freedom to hold personal thoughts and convictions, but also being able to express them individually or with others, publicly or in private. It includes the freedom to:

- subscribe to different schools of thought within a religion
- change one’s religion or beliefs, including to leave or abandon religions
- hold non-religious beliefs

No-one should experience discrimination for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. This right prohibits the use of coercion to make someone hold or change their religion or belief. It also protects a person from being required to state an affiliation with any particular religion or belief.

As with all human rights, FoRB belongs to people, whether alone or as members of a group, and not to the religion or belief itself. This means that it does not protect religions, or religious figures, from criticism.

The link to other human rights

Where FoRB is under attack, often other basic rights are threatened too.

This can involve denials of freedom of expression, detention without trial, impunity for attacks on property and people, banning religious assemblies and unlawful killing.

Many conflicts have their roots in, or are made worse by, religious differences. Respect between religious groups can make it harder for extremism to take root.

Discrimination on the basis of religion or belief damages societies and holds back economies. Countries cannot fully develop while they oppress members of minority groups. Communities are stronger when they are fully inclusive.

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PQs

Nigeria: Religious Freedom

22 Jun 2022 | HL748

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government, whether they have shared any evidence of atrocities in Nigeria with the International Criminal Court; what assessment they have made of whether religious discrimination is the cause of attacks on Nigerian churches and communities; and whether they have shared any evidence of religious discrimination in any evidence submitted to the International Criminal Court.

Answering member: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We have not shared any evidence of atrocities or of religious discrimination in Nigeria with the International Criminal Court.

We are aware that places of worship have been targeted in incidents of intercommunal violence in Nigeria, and condemn all such attacks; the motives behind these attacks vary, and are not always clear. In a country with a highly religious population, we recognise that religious identity can be a factor in incidents of violence, but the root causes are often complex and frequently relate to over resources, historical grievances, and criminality. The UK will continue to play a constructive role in calming these tensions and supporting solutions which meet the needs of all affected communities.

Qatar: Baha'i Faith

21 Jun 2022 | 17936

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if she will take steps to raise protection of the freedom of religion or belief of the Baha'i people with her Qatari counterpart.

Answering member: Amanda Milling | 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. Promoting the right to FoRB is one of the UK's longstanding human rights priorities.

The Foreign Secretary last visited Qatar in October 2021 where she had a number of discussions with key interlocutors, including His Highness the Amir.

Human rights, including women and girls' issues were discussed, but the Baha'i community was not discussed. FCDO Officials, both in the UK and in Doha, have and will continue to engage with members of the Baha'i community in Qatar. Earlier this year, officials in Doha raised the challenges faced by some members of the Baha'i community with the Director for Human Rights from the Qatari Ministry of Interior and Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The UK Ambassador to Qatar has also raised the issue with Qatari Ministers, who agreed to look into the issue. We will continue to raise these issues with the Qatari Government, including in light of the Special Rapporteur's for Freedom of Religion or Belief's report 'Rights of persons belonging to religious or belief minorities in situations of conflict or insecurity' published in March 2022.

[Persecution of Christians across the Globe Independent Review](#)

13 Jun 2022 | 11789

Asked by: Derek Thomas

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps her Department has taken on implementing recommendation 21B of the [Bishop of Truro's Review into Christian persecution](#) catalyst for action.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The Bishop of Truro's review provided recommendations for a Government response to support members of all faiths, beliefs, and those of no religious belief. We have taken forward the 22 recommendations in a way that makes a real change for everyone persecuted for their religion or belief.

Recommendation 21 focuses on sharing lessons across Government from implementing the recommendations of the Truro Review, and proposes agenda items for a Cabinet discussion. Proposed agenda item b focuses on championing the prosecution of ISIS perpetrators of sex crimes against Yazidi and Christian women, not only as terrorists. The UK was the driving force behind the establishment of the UN Investigative Team for Accountability of Daesh (UNITAD), providing £2 million to support investigations into violence against minority communities and developing a platform for witnesses and survivors to submit information securely in relation to Daesh crimes. In May 2022, the Minister of State responsible for human rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, sent an update note to his ministerial counterparts in Government outlining the UK's support for Yazidi and other minority communities in Iraq to rebuild their lives after Daesh, secure justice, and exercise the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Ukraine: Religious Freedom

13 Jun 2022 | 11788

Asked by: Derek Thomas

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the arrest of Pastor Glushko of the Mariupol Evangelical Church by Russian forces, what recent assessment she had made of freedom of (a) religion and (b) belief violations in Ukraine.

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

The FCDO is aware of reports of violations and abuses of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in Ukraine as a result of Russian aggression. We call on Russia to end its violations of human rights. We use our public communications and position in multilateral fora to raise abuses and violations of human rights in Ukraine. The UK is committed to defending FoRB for all, and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities.

Jerusalem: Religious Freedom

01 Jun 2022 | HL423

Asked by: Baroness Janke

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of religious freedom for (1) Christians, and (2) Muslims, in Jerusalem, especially during Jewish festivals.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | 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. The UK condemns all attacks on the right to freedom of religion or belief. Israel is a thriving democracy, and has made clear its commitment to freedom of religion. We encourage the Israeli Government to do all it can to uphold the values of equality for all enshrined in its laws.

International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief

23 May 2022 | 4680

Asked by: Afzal Khan

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what her Department's objectives are for the upcoming Ministerial Conference on International Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK-hosted International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in July 2022 will drive forward international efforts to defend FoRB for all. Our objectives are: to raise awareness of FoRB issues; to use UK human rights experience and leadership to improve FoRB for all; to galvanise partner countries and stakeholders to work more closely together; to encourage collective action by partner countries and FoRB stakeholders; and to strengthen the voices and capacity of defenders of FoRB.

India: Religious Freedom

19 May 2022 | 2642

Asked by: Afzal Khan

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representation she has made to her Indian counterpart on the protection of religious minorities.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government is committed to defending Freedom of Religion or Belief for all and promoting respect and tolerance between different religious and non-religious communities. We engage with India on a range of human rights matters and where we have concerns, we raise them directly with the Government of India, including at Ministerial level. The Foreign Secretary engages regularly with her Indian counterpart, Minister for External Affairs Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, to discuss important global issues, including most recently during her March 2022 visit to Delhi. Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for South Asia, also regularly speaks to the High Commissioner of India, and Freedom of Religion or Belief forms part of that dialogue.

The British High Commission in New Delhi and our network of Deputy High Commissions across India regularly meet religious representatives and have run projects supporting minority rights. We work with the UN, G7, and other multilateral fora to promote Freedom of Religion or Belief. On 5-6 July 2022, we will host an international Ministerial conference in London, driving forward international efforts on Freedom of Religion or Belief and demonstrating our leading role in supporting freedom and openness.

Freedom of Religion and Belief

28 Apr 2022 | 712 c865

Asked by: Jim Shannon

Has discussion been raised with the global bishops to ascertain how the thriving Anglican Church in Africa can further be instrumental in promoting the treasured freedom of religious belief?

Answered by: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners

The hon. Gentleman is quite right to raise the issue. Unfortunately, there are serious abuses of freedom of religion and belief across large parts of Africa. The subject will be a major issue for discussion at the Lambeth conference, and we are working with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to make improvements in the area.

Cuba: Religious Freedom

26 Apr 2022 | 154503

Asked by: Carla Lockhart

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if the Government will take steps to tackle religious persecution in Cuba.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK is committed to defending Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all. We actively promote the right to FoRB through our diplomatic activity both directly with countries, and through multilateral fora including the UN where we call out countries that violate this human right.

The reports of the continued maltreatment of those religious leaders arrested by the Government of Cuba are concerning. We have raised the ongoing detentions of protestors directly with the Cuban Government, both in London and Havana. We are clear that human rights must be respected in Cuba: all Cubans should have the right to protest peacefully and detention must not be used as a tool to restrict freedom of expression, assembly, or religion or belief.

Religious Freedom: Commonwealth

26 Apr 2022 | 154052

Asked by: Kirsten Oswald

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the recent imprisonment of Mubarak Bala in Nigeria, if she will (a) invite and (b) support the Commonwealth Human

Rights Initiative to undertake an inquiry into the extent to which Commonwealth member states respect the right of their citizens to freedom of religion and belief.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | 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. Promoting the right to FoRB is one of the UK's longstanding human rights priorities. Bilaterally, Ministers and officials regularly raise specific cases of concern, and do not shy away from challenging those we believe are not meeting their obligations, whether publicly or in private. For instance, since Mr Bala's sentence, the British High Commissioner has engaged with the Kano State Government and the President's Chief of Staff, to make clear the importance of Mr Bala being treated in full accordance with his human rights, the rule of law, and the Nigerian constitutional right to freedom of religion or belief.

As an independent international non-governmental organisation, it is for the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative to determine what work they undertake in line with their own strategic priorities.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

26 Apr 2022 | 712 c576

Asked by: Fiona Bruce

I thank the Foreign Secretary for her strong support for the international conference on freedom of religion or belief, which the UK Government will host in July. Do Ministers agree that that would be an excellent opportunity to showcase how FORB is a priority for the UK Government to many Government Ministers from across the world, whom we hope to welcome to that event, which we expect will be the largest UK-hosted international event of 2022?

Answered by: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

I thank my hon. Friend for her outstanding work across the world on the Prime Minister's behalf as his envoy on freedom of religion or belief. She is right to be really concerned about the increasing attacks and the increased severity of attacks on freedom of religion or belief. The conference that the UK is going to lead in July will be enormously important; we will welcome partner countries and stakeholders from all across the world. The Foreign Secretary is very much looking forward to attending it and taking part.

Religious Freedom

19 Apr 2022 | 151159

Asked by: Kirsten Oswald

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether arrangements have been made for delegates to the global summit to promote freedom of religion or belief to hear directly from minority groups experiencing violence and oppression in countries across the globe.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK-hosted International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in July 2022 will drive forward international efforts on this agenda and demonstrate the UK's leading role in supporting freedom and openness. This conference will allow us to use our global influence to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief for all internationally. Preparations for the conference are ongoing, including planning for participants to hear directly from those suffering restrictions to freedom of religion or belief.

Hong Kong: Religious Freedom

28 Mar 2022 | 143604

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment she has made of freedom of religious beliefs in Hong Kong.

Answering member: Amanda Milling | 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. Promoting the right to FoRB is one of the UK's longstanding human rights priorities.

The Sino-British Joint Declaration is a legally binding treaty between the UK and China, and under this China committed to uphold Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and protect the rights and freedoms of its people. This explicitly includes freedom of expression and FoRB. It is imperative that all the rights and freedoms promised to the people of Hong Kong in the Joint Declaration are fully respected.

Middle East: Christianity

24 Mar 2022 | 143591

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether her Department is taking steps to support Christians in the Middle East.

Answering member: Amanda Milling | 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. Bilaterally, Ministers and officials regularly raise specific cases of concern, and do not shy away from challenging those we believe are not meeting their obligations. Multilaterally, we work with the UN, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Council of Europe, G7 and other fora to promote FoRB.

In addition to our bilateral and multilateral action, we will host an international Ministerial conference on 5-6 July 2022, in London. The UK-hosted International Ministerial Conference on FoRB will drive forward international efforts on this agenda and demonstrate the UK's leading role in supporting freedom and openness. This conference will allow us to use our global influence to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief for all internationally.

Mozambique: Religious Freedom

15 Mar 2022 | 135676

Asked by: Marco Longhi

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps her Department is taking in response to reports that in Mozambique girls are being forced to convert to Islam or become slaves.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We are deeply concerned by the threat from extremist groups in north-eastern Mozambique, including the impact of the conflict on women and girls who are very vulnerable in this region. The UK is committed to working with the Government of Mozambique to tackle the insurgency and its underlying drivers. We work in partnership with key stakeholders, including local civil society organisations working in the North of Mozambique, ensuring that their work draws on recent analyses and assessments, including a report by the Observatory for Rural Environment from 2021 on the impact of the conflict on women and girls. The UK is also supporting implementation of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights in Mozambique, working with

government, civil society, security actors and the private sector, in order to reduce the risk of abuses and promote respect for human rights.

In addition to promoting girls' access to education in Mozambique through the UK's contribution to the Global Partnership for Education, the UK is addressing the challenges around child marriage in Mozambique through our support to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-Unicef Global Programme to End Child Marriage, which includes work to promote child protection in Cabo Delgado.

Religious Freedom

15 Mar 2022 | 135673

Asked by: Marco Longhi

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to tackle religious forced (a) marriages and (b) conversions around the world.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | 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 work with international partners including the UN, G7, and other multilateral fora to promote FoRB. In May 2021, we ensured that FoRB was included in the G7 communiqué for the first time. This year, our Special Envoy for FoRB, Fiona Bruce MP, will Chair the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance to bolster joint international action on FoRB and on 5-6 July 2022, we will host an international Ministerial conference on FoRB. In 2020 and 2021, we continued to protect language on tackling the harmful practice of Child, Early and Forced Marriage by helping secure the adoption by consensus of relevant resolutions at the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

Global Summit: Freedom of Religion or Belief

10 Mar 2022 | 710 c460

Asked by: Jim Shannon

At the summit coming up this year, it will be really important to have individual stories from the countries where persecution is rife, whether that is China, India, Pakistan, Iran or other parts of the world. Will that be part of the conference?

Answered by: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who takes a very serious interest in these matters. He is absolutely right. The Archbishop of Canterbury has just been in

Pakistan, including Peshawar, where Pastor William Siraj was horrendously murdered on 30 January this year. Those stories must be heard, and he is absolutely right.

International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief

10 Mar 2022 | 133128

Asked by: Sir Edward Leigh

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what her Department's budget is for the international conference to promote freedom of religion or belief due to take place in London in July 2022.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK-hosted International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in July 2022 will drive forward international efforts on this agenda and demonstrate the UK's leading role in supporting freedom and openness. This conference will allow us to use our global influence to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief for all internationally. Preparations for the conference are ongoing, including working with delivery partners to develop a comprehensive budget.

International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief

02 Mar 2022 | 127303

Asked by: Barry Sheerman

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps she is taking with the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief to ensure the success of the Freedom of Religion or Belief Summit in July 2022.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK-hosted International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in July 2022 will drive international efforts in defending FoRB for all and look at ways different religious or belief communities around the world can work together, and with governments and civil society. This conference will allow us to use our global influence and convening power to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief for all internationally.

Preparations for the conference are underway, including consultations with our international and domestic partners to consider possible themes and outcomes. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is working

closely with the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for FoRB, Fiona Bruce MP, on this and wider conference planning.

North Korea: Religious Freedom

01 Mar 2022 | 129124

Asked by: Steve Baker

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to Korea Future's 2021 report, *Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea, Volume 2*, what steps he is taking to help prevent the persecution of (a) Christians and (b) followers of other faiths in North Korea.

Answering member: Amanda Milling | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We regularly raise our concerns about human rights violations directly with the North Korean authorities and at the UN, and recently discussed the human rights situation in the DPRK during a closed session of the UN Security Council on 15 December 2021.

The UK co-sponsored (alongside 59 other countries) the resolution on DPRK human rights adopted at the UN General Assembly on 16 December 2021. The resolution sends an unequivocal message to the DPRK Government and reiterates long-held demands of the international community for the DPRK regime to take concrete action to end the systemic and widespread human rights violations in the country, and to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief. We will work with partners at the Human Rights Council in March 2022 to secure a strong and clear resolution on DPRK human rights.

India: Muslims

01 Mar 2022 | 127499

Asked by: Dr Rupa Huq

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of alleged reports of (a) violence and (b) discrimination targeted at Muslim women in India; and what representations he has made to his Indian counterpart on this.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We condemn any instances of discrimination because of religion or belief, regardless of the country or faith involved. We look to India to uphold all freedoms and rights guaranteed in its strong constitution and by the international instruments to which India is a party. Where we have concerns, we raise them directly with the Government of India, including at ministerial

level. Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for South Asia and Human Rights, last discussed human rights in India during his visit in July 2021.

We engage with India on a range of human rights matters, working with Union and State Governments and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to build capacity and promote human rights for all. The British High Commission (BHC) in Delhi regularly assesses human rights across India. Our officials in India work closely with Indian civil society and non-governmental organisations to promote gender equality and tackle gender-based violence. We have worked with the Madhya Pradesh Police's Gender Resource Centre to train a core group of officers on tackling crimes against women. We also regularly meet religious representatives and have run projects supporting minority rights. The BHC supports a UK-India Interfaith Leadership Programme for emerging Indian faith leaders, including Muslims, to build expertise on leading modern inclusive communities and promote values of tolerance and multi-culturalism. The UK will host an international Ministerial conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2022 to energise collective efforts on this agenda. We also work with the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, G7 and other multilateral fora to promote our objectives.

Religious Freedom

28 Feb 2022 | 125498

Asked by: Stuart Anderson

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to tackle persecution of religious minorities.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | 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. Promoting the right to FoRB is one of the UK's longstanding human rights priorities.

Bilaterally, Ministers and officials regularly raise specific cases of concern, and do not shy away from challenging those we believe are not meeting their obligations. We raise our concerns both in public and in private. Multilaterally, we work with UN, G7, and other multilateral fora to promote FoRB. In May 2021, we ensured that FoRB was included in the G7 communiqué for the first time, demonstrating our leadership in this field. This year, our Special Envoy for FoRB, Fiona Bruce MP, will Chair the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance to bolster joint international action on FoRB.

In addition to our bilateral and multilateral work, we will host an international Ministerial conference on 5-6 July 2022, in London. The UK-hosted International Ministerial Conference on FoRB will drive forward international efforts on this agenda and demonstrate the UK's leading role in supporting freedom and openness. This conference will allow us to use our global influence to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief for all internationally.

Pakistan: Christianity

14 Feb 2022 | HL5779

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the killing of a Christian priest and the wounding of another in an attack in Peshawar on 30 January; and what recent discussions they have had with the government of Pakistan about the protection of religious minorities.

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

The shocking murder of a Christian priest, and wounding of another, last weekend in Peshawar was a disturbing indication of the violence faced by minorities in Pakistan. I (Lord Ahmad) and the British High Commissioner in Islamabad have publicly condemned the attack, and British officials in Islamabad have also privately expressed their condolences to Pakistan's Christian community.

The UK regularly raises our concerns about freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and women and girls' rights at a senior level with the Government of Pakistan. During my visit to Pakistan on 23 and 24 June 2021, I [Lord Ahmad] met Prime Minister Khan, as well as other senior government ministers, and discussed our concerns. I met interfaith leaders to understand the situation of Pakistani minorities, including the issue of forced conversion and marriage. Most recently, I discussed the need to promote respect for all religions with Governor of Punjab, Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar, on 28 November 2021. In July the UK will host an international Ministerial Conference to advance FoRB. Under the Government's Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy, the UK has supported projects in Pakistan to promote tolerance and religious freedom. The FCDO also funds programmes in Pakistan that directly address early and forced marriages and gender-based violence.

Armenia: Churches

02 Feb 2022 | 111576

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the destruction of churches in Armenia on freedom of religion or belief in that country.

Answering member: Chris Heaton-Harris | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government remains deeply concerned over the alleged destruction and desecration of religious and historically important cultural heritage sites in and around Nagorno-Karabakh before and after the 2020 conflict. In a meeting with the Armenian Ambassador on 20 January, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief underlined these concerns. We continue to urge both Azerbaijan and Armenia to provide UNESCO with unrestricted access to the region and, more widely, to engage with the OSCE Minsk Group to secure a sustainable, peaceful resolution to ongoing regional tensions.

International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief

01 Feb 2022 | 110362

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government plans to take to help ensure that the UK-hosted conference on freedom of religion or belief in July 2022 results in tangible outcomes.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK-hosted International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in July 2022 will drive forward international efforts on this agenda and demonstrate the UK's leading role in supporting freedom and openness. This conference will allow us to use our global influence to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief for all internationally. Preparations for the conference are underway, including consultations with our international and domestic partners to consider a wide range of possible outcomes.

Slovakia: Human Rights and Religious Freedom

24 Nov 2021 | 76857

Asked by: Sam Tarry

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps she is taking with international partners to ensure that religious liberties and human rights are upheld in Slovakia.

Answering member: Wendy Morton | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Promoting freedom of religion and human rights is an important part of our work in Slovakia. We continue to promote women's and minority rights, and have regular dialogue with inter-religious groups, local human rights organisations and activists, and international partners. We welcomed Slovakia's appointment of an Ambassador for Human Rights and the convening of a conference on human rights by the Slovak Foreign Ministry in Bratislava on 26 October which was attended by the UK Human Rights Ambassador.

Christianity

23 Nov 2021 | 74940

Asked by: Rosie Cooper

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to prevent sexual violence towards Christian women and girls around the world.

Answering member: Amanda Milling | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The Foreign Secretary has put ending violence against women and girls, including the use of sexual violence in war, at the heart of UK foreign and development policy. The UK is building a new consensus with our partners to condemn sexual violence in conflict as a "red line". We are committed to exploring all options for further international action, including the possibility of a new international convention. Through our investments of up to £67.5 million in the What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale programme, we are also scaling up proven violence prevention approaches globally, including sexual violence, for the most at-risk groups of women and girls.

In 2020, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon launched the Declaration of Humanity, which unites multiple faiths and beliefs in a common front to challenge damaging societal norms and calls for support for survivors of sexual violence internationally. Bilaterally, Ministers and officials regularly raise specific cases of concern, and discuss practices and laws that discriminate on the basis of religion or belief. Multilaterally, we also work with the UN, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Council of

Europe, G7 and other multilateral fora to promote Freedom of Religion or Belief. In 2022, the UK will host an international Ministerial conference on freedom of religion or belief to energise collective efforts on this agenda as well as a major global summit to unite world leaders around action to prevent sexual violence in conflict.

Persecution of Christians across the Globe Independent Review

22 Nov 2021 | HL3842

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Southwark

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they plan to take to independently review the implementation of 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.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | 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. Promoting the right to FoRB is one of the UK's longstanding human rights priorities.

The Bishop of Truro's review provided recommendations for an enhanced Government response to support members of all faiths, beliefs, and those of no religious belief. We are making good progress on implementing all the recommendations, including on the recommendation to review the recommendations independently three years from publication of the report.

Hosting an international Ministerial conference on FoRB in July 2022 will build on this ongoing commitment to promoting FoRB for all. Work to deliver this conference is underway, including early engagement with a range of stakeholders. Civil society, faith and belief actors have a key role to play in championing the right to FoRB - as plans progress, we will widen consultation further with FoRB stakeholders.

7

Debates

Christians and Religious Minorities: India

24 Feb 2022 | House of Commons | 709 cc223-246WH

Motion that this House has considered the matter of the persecution of Christians and religious minorities in India. Sitting adjourned without Question put.

Freedom of Religion or Belief: 40th Anniversary of UN Declaration

25 Nov 2021 | House of Commons | 704 cc518-547

Motion that this House has considered freedom of religion or belief and the 40th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the elimination of religious intolerance. Agreed to on question.

Violence against Christians: Central African Countries

23 Sep 2021 | House of Commons | 701 c216WH

Motion that this House has considered the matter of violence against Christians in central African countries. Agreed to on question.

Religious Minorities: Land Rights

22 Apr 2021 | House of Commons | 692 cc378-353WH

Motion that this House has considered land rights for religious minorities including Baha'is in Iran. Agreed to on question.

Covid-19: Freedom of Religion or Belief

26 Nov 2020 | House of Commons | 684 cc503-490WH

Motion that this House has considered the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on freedom of religion or belief. Motion lapsed.

Persecution of Christians and Freedom of Religion or Belief

21 Oct 2020 | House of Commons | 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. Motion lapsed. Sitting suspended.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

12 Mar 2020 | House of Commons | 673 cc177-200WH

Unallotted backbench debate on a motion that this House has considered freedom of religion of belief. Motion lapsed.

8

Urgent Questions

Violence against Religious Groups: Nigeria

06 Jun 2022 | House of Commons | 715 cc557-567

Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if she will make a statement on the killing of church worshippers in Ondo state, Nigeria yesterday, and on wider issues of violence against religious groups in Nigeria.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Vicky Ford): I am horrified by the attack that took place against a church in Ondo state, south-west Nigeria yesterday. I publicly express the UK Government's condemnation of this heinous act and stress the importance of those responsible being brought to justice in accordance with the law. The high commission in Nigeria has also expressed our condolences to the governor of Ondo state and offered our support. I know that the House will join me in sending our condolences to the families and communities of those killed.

Rising conflict and insecurity across Nigeria are having a devastating impact on affected communities. I have raised this issue with the Nigerian authorities on several occasions, including in conversations with Nigeria's vice-president and Foreign Minister during my visit in February. During that visit, I also met regional governors, religious leaders and non-governmental organisations to discuss intercommunal violence and freedom of religion or belief.

It is clear that religious identity can be a factor in incidents of violence in Nigeria and that Christian communities have been victims, but the root causes are often complex and frequently also relate to competition over resources, historical grievances and criminality, so the UK Government are committed to working with Nigeria to respond to insecurity. At our security and defence dialogue with Nigeria in February, we committed to work together to respond to the conflict. We are supporting local and national peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria, including through the Nigeria Governors' Forum and National Peace Committee. We provide mentoring and capacity building to support Nigerian police force units, to improve their anti-kidnap capacity, and we support efforts to address the drivers and enablers of serious and organised crime in Nigeria. At our security and defence dialogue, we reiterated our shared understanding and commitment to protecting human rights for all.

We are committed to defending freedom of religion or belief for all, and to promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. I discussed FoRB with the Nigerian Foreign Minister only last

month, and we look forward to hosting an international conference on FoRB in July. We will continue to encourage the Nigerian Government to take urgent action to implement long-term solutions that address the root causes of such violence.

9

Early Day Motions

[Killing of Christian worshippers at St Francis Catholic Church in Owo town, Ondo State, Nigeria](#)

EDM 130 (session 2022-23)

6 June 2022

Jim Shannon

That this House condemns the killing of Christian worshippers by terrorist gunmen at St Francis Catholic Church in Owo town, Ondo State, Nigeria on Sunday 5 June 2022; offers condolences and sympathies to the friends and family of the 40 worshippers killed during the attack; urges the Buhari Government to take effective action against the Jihadist ideology destroying lives in Nigeria; and calls on the Government to raise security concerns and threats to freedom of religion or belief with its Nigerian counterparts.

[Baha'i community in Qatar](#)

EDM 94 (session 2022-23)

23 May 2022

Jim Shannon

That this House notes the increasingly precarious situation of the Baha'i community in Qatar; expresses concern over reports that several Baha'is have been subject to administrative deportation and blacklisting from employment; notes the annex to the March 2022 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief and the alarming findings of the report as regards the treatment of the Baha'i community in Qatar; recalls the strong ties between the UK and Qatar, and the recent visit to this country of His Excellency, the Emir of Qatar; and calls on the Government to encourage the Qatari authorities to review Section D of the Special Rapporteur's Annex, containing recommendations, and urge the Qataris to resolve the legal status of both Baha'i citizens and residents living in the Emirate.

[Protecting Hindus and minorities, Indian legislation on genocide and atrocities prevention and commemoration of the 32nd anniversary of genocide of Hindu Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu and Kashmir](#)

EDM 861 (session 2021-22)

18 January 2022

Bob Blackman

That this House commemorates the 32nd anniversary of the attack in January 1990 by cross-border Islamic militants on the population of Jammu and Kashmir; expresses its condolences to the families of all those who were killed and injured in this massacre; condemns the desecration of the holiest sites in

Jammu and Kashmir; is concerned that the Kashmiris who fled persecution have still not seen justice for the atrocities committed against them; commends the resilience and courage shown by the members of Kashmiri Pandit community who survived this gruesome ethnic genocide and who did not resort to taking up arms but instead pursued education and aspiration; deplores those sponsoring such cross-border terrorist attacks and demands that such attacks cease immediately; further notes that the international principle of the responsibility to protect obliges individual states and the international community to take effective measures to prevent the commission of genocide and crimes against humanity as suffered by the Kashmiri Hindu community; and urges the Government of India to fulfil its long-standing international commitment to recognise and acknowledge the worst form of genocide of Hindus in Jammu and Kashmir and enact the proposed Panun Kashmir Genocide Crime Punishment and Atrocities Prevention Bill, therefore delivering the long awaited justice for the Kashmiri Pandits in exile; and further urges the UK Government to extend the UK's long standing commitment to protect the victims of genocide to the Kashmiri Pandits.

Protection of religious minorities in Bangladesh

EDM 552 (session 2021-22)

20 October 2021

Bob Blackman

That this House condemns the recent attacks on religious minorities in Bangladesh; urges the Government of Bangladesh to take strong steps to tackle the increasing levels of violence against minority Hindu communities in that region and ensure their safety and security; and further urges the Government to encourage the Government of Bangladesh to put perpetrators of violence against religious minorities in that region on trial as soon as possible.

Blasphemy laws in Pakistan

EDM 106 (session 2021-22)

25 May 2021

Jim Shannon

That this House notes with concern the Pakistani Government's recent public commitment to maintaining the country's blasphemy laws; expresses disappointment at the Pakistani Government's dismissal of evidence of the misuse of these laws against religious minorities; notes that false accusations of blasphemy are made with impunity and that Pakistan's own Supreme Court has observed the majority of blasphemy cases are based on false accusations stemming from personal or family vendettas; acknowledges that Pakistan's religious and belief minorities are disproportionately affected, with Pakistan's

Christian's making up just 1.6 per cent of the country's population but representing more than 15 per cent of those charged with blasphemy; is concerned by Amnesty International's reports of an alarming uptick in blasphemy accusations across Pakistan; denounces the vigilante violence that blasphemy accusations often incite; calls on the Governments of Pakistan, and the seven other countries in which blasphemy convictions carry death sentences, to stop the misuse of these laws; urges the Pakistani Government to release those languishing in prison held on unsubstantiated charges, including Christians Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel held since 2014 for allegedly sending blasphemous text messages; and further calls on the UK Government to follow the European Parliament's lead in re-examining trade relations with Pakistan due to that country's human rights record.

[Aid to the Church in Need's Religious Freedom in the World Report 2021](#)

EDM 1780 (session 2019-21)

27 April 2021

Brendan O'Hara

That this Houses welcomes the release of Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN)'s Religious Freedom in the World Report 2021 which unfortunately shows that persecution and discrimination against people of faith is commonplace in 62 countries worldwide, often in the most populated nations such as China, India and Pakistan; notes with deep regret that report's revelation that attacks on people of faith has increased in 95 per cent of the world's worst-offending countries since the previous report in that series was published in 2018, and that many oppressive regimes have been using the coronavirus pandemic in order to discriminate against minority faith groups when distributing vital medical aid and food supplies; calls on the UK Government to take religious persecution more into account when considering asylum claims, such as in the case of Maira Shahbaz, who was abducted at the age of 14, forced to convert to Islam and marry her abductor, and who is now facing death threats following her escape in Pakistan; acknowledges the immense amount of work that has gone into compiling the extremely detailed and wide ranging Religious Freedom in the World Report 2021; commends all of those contributors from around the world who contributed to that report, often while working in dangerous and hostile environments; and sincerely thanks Aid to the Church in Need for its invaluable contribution and continued commitment to highlighting human rights violations against members of all faith communities wherever they occur in the world.

Killing of Coptic Christian Nabil Habashy Salama by Daesh in Egypt's northern Sinai

EDM 1776 (session 2019-21)

27 April 2021

Jim Shannon

That this House strongly condemns the killing of Coptic Christian, Nabil Habashy Salama by Daesh in Egypt's northern Sinai; deplores the threats issued by Daesh to the Christians of Egypt; expresses alarm at the violence and intimidation faced by the largest Christian community in the Arab world for peacefully practising their religion; calls on the UK Government to urgently engage with its Egyptian counterparts to discuss how the UK can support the protection of religious and belief minorities in Egypt; and also calls on the Egyptian Government to continue protecting all its citizens' and their rights to freedom of religion or belief, particularly during this holy week ahead of the Christian Orthodox Easter celebrations on Sunday 2 May 2021.

International Women's Day and freedom of religion or belief (No. 2)

EDM 1575 (session 2019-21)

3 March 2021

Dr Lisa Cameron

That this House celebrates International Women's Day on 8 March 2021; recognises that women from marginalised religious or belief communities encounter unique persecution and challenges due to their gender; expresses deep concern that these women have become much more vulnerable since the outbreak of covid-19 resulting in increased cases of domestic violence, kidnapping and forced marriage, as seen in the case of 14 year old Maira Shahbaz and 13 year old Arzoo Raja in Pakistan; notes the launch of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief's new report entitled, Commentary on the Current State of Freedom of Religion or Belief (2020) which draws attention to the intersection between gender inequality and freedom of religion or belief violations with many specific examples; and urges the UK Government and the international community to act to mitigate the impact that the covid-19 pandemic has had on freedom of religion or belief globally and, in particular, on women and girls who are doubly discriminated against because of their gender and their beliefs.

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