

Debate Pack

CDP-0200 (2022)

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Christian persecution: Freedom of religion or belief

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1

Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on **Christian persecution: Freedom of religion or belief** will take place on Thursday 17 November 2022, from 3.00pm. The debate was scheduled by the Backbench Business Committee and will be led by Jim Shannon MP and Fiona Bruce MP.

2

Background

2.1

The global Christian population

The US-based Pew Research Center estimated that Christians of all denominations [constituted the largest religious group in the world in 2015](#), at 2.3 billion, or 31% of the global population.

Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Europe [each have around 25% of the global Christian population](#), with 13% of Christians living in the Asia-Pacific region and 1% in North Africa and the Middle East.

An earlier report by Pew, published in 2011, [estimated that 90% of Christians live in countries where they are in a majority](#).

2.2

Persecution against Christians

Christians are far from the only faith and belief group subject to persecution, and establishing the degree of violence, discrimination, coercion, and intimidation is necessarily based on estimates. A short selection of reports providing a global overview is provided below.

Open Doors report, 2022

In 2022, advocacy group Open Doors [said that at least 360 million Christians](#) experienced “high levels of persecution and discrimination.” This was 20 million higher than 2021.

The group also estimated that the number of Christians killed for their faith rose to 5,898 in 2022, up from 4,761 in 2021. Afghanistan, North Korea, Somalia, Libya, and Yemen saw the highest rates of persecution globally.

[Persecution included](#) instances of intimidation, disinformation, stereotyping, legal threats, and attacks on places of worship.

Pew report, 2021

In 2021, Pew assessed that 190 of 198 countries and territories analysed in 2019 [saw religious groups experience at least one form of harassment](#) (eg forced displacement, derogatory statements). The number of countries in which Christians had been harassed rose every year bar one from 2013 to 2019, increasing from 102 to 153 (77% of the 198 analysed countries).

The Middle East-North Africa region had the highest share of countries in which Christians were harassed (19 of 20), followed by the Asia-Pacific.

Gender and persecution

Vulnerability to persecution and discrimination based on belief and religion can [also be influenced by factors including a person's economic status, gender, age, and ethnicity](#).

The Bishop of Truro's 2019 [report on the persecution of Christians](#) notes women face a "double marginalisation:"

In the last 10 years anecdotal evidence has begun to emerge from persecuted Christians that women were suffering violent attacks, targeted abuses and restrictions in the face of 'double marginalisation'. They were marginalised and abused because of being both a woman and Christian.

Open Doors published a [report on gender-specific persecution in 2021](#). For the 50 countries analysed, it found Christian women were often at higher risk than men from persecution. Physical violence, economic harassment and imprisonment were reported against men, while forced marriage, sexual and physical violence, and forced divorce were reported against women.

The issue of gender-specific religious persecution was [debated by the House of Commons in March 2022](#).

2.3

Country-specific issues

Jim Shannon MP, who proposed the debate topic to the Backbench Business Committee, said he hoped the debate would [highlight the persecution of Christians in the Middle East, Africa, and the Far East](#), including in countries such as Iraq, Nigeria, and North Korea.

Sections 4 to 7 of this briefing provide links to information on the situation in specific countries, including recent events and the role of both state and non-state actors in persecution.

Section 7.2 provide a list of organisations and NGOs who have published material on religious persecution worldwide. The US Office of International Religious Freedom [2021 Report on International Religious Freedom](#) provides a profile of religious freedom in most countries.

Iraq

Iraq's constitution [protects the right to freedom of religion or belief](#). However, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) have [cited concern for the high number of Christians who are displaced within Iraq](#) due to conflict and the fear of persecution from armed groups.

The number of Christians in Iraq has fallen from an estimated 1.4 million in 2003 to around 250,000, according to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, who have published a [report on religious freedom in Iraq in 2021](#) (PDF, March 2022).

Nigeria

Christians constitute around half Nigeria's population, and as part of wider political violence in the country Christians have been subject to increased risk of violence. According to Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), there have been a [rising number of attacks on Christian churches in Nigeria](#), rising from 18 in 2019, to 31 in 2020, to [23 in the first six months of 2022](#).

Terrorist groups such as Islamic State and Boko Haram have been blamed on this [undermining of the country's constitutional protections of FoRB](#).

North Korea

In 2021, the Korea Future Initiative's report, [Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea](#), said that North Korean Christians are among the faith groups subject to "systematic and arbitrary attacks." Its report examines 167 cases of human rights abuse against 91 Christians from 1997 to 2018.

The UN's High Commissioner on Human Rights published their most recent report on North Korea in 2021. This stated North Korea's Government is ["engaged in a systematic and widespread attack"](#) on the groups that it considers to be a threat to the regime. This includes faith and belief groups.

2.4

UK policy on Freedom of Religion or Belief

International law provides for the protection of FoRB:

- The [1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights](#) provides for the right to freedom of religion or belief, in both public and private.
- The [1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) also underlines that all have the freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief, and to manifest this through worship, observance, practice and teaching.

In 2020, Fiona Bruce MP was [appointed the UK Special Envoy for FoRB](#) by the UK Government. The Envoy supports the implementation of the Bishop of

Truro's recommendations on protecting Christians from persecution (see below) and UK international efforts to raise cases of concern.

In July 2022, the Special Envoy and UK Government [hosted an international conference on FoRB](#). 35 countries, primarily from Europe and North America but also including Brazil and Kenya, signed up to one or more set of statements on FoRB.

To mark the 2022 conference, the UK [announced £500,000 of funding to provide legal support to areas where FoRB is under pressure](#). Previous Government funding has included the [John Bunyan Fund](#) and [Magna Carta Fund](#).

Bishop of Truro report, 2019, and response

In 2019, the Bishop of Truro [published his report into Foreign & Commonwealth support for persecuted Christians](#), commissioned by the Department. This made several recommendations, including:

- To seek a UN Security Council Resolution urging governments in the Middle East and North Africa to protect Christians, and other minorities.
- Foreign Office staff to have mandatory training on religious literacy.
- British embassies and high commissions to deliver tailored responses to any violations of freedom of religion or belief.

In January 2020, the Government confirmed that it had accepted the report's recommendations in full, and that work was ongoing to implement them. The House of Commons [held a debate on progress in October 2020](#).

In July 2022, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office [published an assessment of its implementation of the review](#).

While noting progress, including the use of sanctions against some preparators of FoRB abuse including in Myanmar and China, the report [cited concerns](#) such as whether the Special Envoy on FoRB has sufficient resources and authority to work with government departments to advance FoRB.

Press release

[Freedom of religion or belief: understanding this human right](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth & 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.

4

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.

[Archbishop tells G20 event Christianity 'on the very edge of extinction' in Iraq](#)

The Christian Post
Michael Gryboski
7 November 2022

[A new age of Christian persecution](#)

Anglican.ink
Joel Agius
11 October 2022

[Nigeria: Bishop backs petition demanding justice for persecuted Christians](#)

Aid to the Church in Need
John Pontifex
28 October 2022

[ACN's #RedWeek highlights religious freedom and persecution of Christians](#)

Aid to the Church in Need
27 October 2022

[Persecution of Christians 'Intense' in up to 60 countries across globe, faith leader says](#)

The Daily Signal
Virginia Allen
6 September 2022

[Persecution of Christians in Nigeria is driven by Islamism, not climate change](#)

Premier Christianity
Dr David Landrum
2 August 2022

[Christians in Nigeria feel under attack: why it's a complicated story](#)

The Conversation
Jideofor Adibe
2 August 2022

[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

[**The persecution of Christians can no longer be ignored**](#)

Spiked
Paul Coleman
10 June 2022

[**Islamic militants release video showing execution of 20 Nigerian Christians**](#)

Open Doors
19 May 2022

[**Chinese Christians face growing persecution, says charity**](#)

Church Times
Rebecca Paveley
18 March 2022

[**One in seven Christian minorities under threat in 2022**](#)

Forbes
Dr. Ewelina U. Ochab
20 January 2022

[**The 50 countries where it's hardest to follow Jesus in 2022**](#)

Christianity Today
Jayson Casper
19 January 2022

Business of the House**03 Nov 2022 | 721 c1046****Asked by: Jim Shannon**

Last month, Chanda Maharaj, a Hindu girl from Hyderabad in Pakistan was kidnapped and forcibly married to an older man. She is one of an estimated 1,000 under-age girls kidnapped from Christian and Hindu minorities in the last year in Pakistan. She was rescued from her abductor but is still in legal limbo. Will the Leader of the House join me in expressing concern for her and the many hundreds of girls in similar situations? Will His Majesty's Government work with Pakistan to help to tackle that abusive issue?

Answered by: Penny Mordaunt | Leader of the House of Commons

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that appalling case. I understand that the initial trauma and tragedy of what Chanda Maharaj has been through will be exacerbated by the legal wranglings that he points to. In such cases, where hon. Members are unable to support their constituents, they should raise them with the FCDO, which will clearly be speaking to the high commission. We must do everything we can to ensure that people can start to rebuild their lives and to reduce the number of times that such appalling things happen to young women and girls.

India: Freedom of Religion**31 Oct 2022 | HL2644****Asked by: Lord Hylton**

To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they will make to (1) the government of India, and (2) its High Commission in London, concerning the approval of the Karnataka Right to Freedom of Religion Act; and in particular about that Act's compatibility with the protections for freedom of religion in the constitution of India.

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

We raise human rights issues directly with the Indian government, where we have them. The UK Government is committed to defending Freedom of Religion or Belief for all and promoting respect and understanding between different religious and non-religious communities. We condemn any instances of discrimination because of religion or belief, regardless of the country or faith involved. Any reports of discrimination against religious minorities are a matter for the Indian police and legal system. The British High Commission in New Delhi and our Deputy High Commissions across India regularly meet with religious representatives and official figures.

Iran: Christianity

31 Oct 2022 | HL2655

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of St Albans | Party: Bishop

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the recent treatment of Christian minorities in Iran.

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

Promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief for all is one of the UK's longstanding human rights priorities. In July of this year, the UK hosted the International Freedom of Religion or Belief Conference, which provided an important platform for discussion of religious rights in Iran. We continue to assess that Christians in Iran, particularly recent converts, face arrest, harassment and unfair detention. We raise our concerns with the Iranian authorities on these and other human rights issues at all appropriate opportunities. We continue to work closely with our international partners to hold Iran to account for its poor human rights record, including through the Human Rights Council in Geneva and the UN General Assembly in New York.

[Christianity: Females](#)

28 Sep 2022 | 49147

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the report by Aid to the Church in Need entitled Hear Her Cries; and what progress his Department has made on studying its contents.

Answering member: Leo Docherty | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We have taken note of Aid to the Church in Need's report entitled "Hear Her Cries"; and we recognise that women and girls from religious or belief minority communities can suffer disproportionately because of both their gender and faith. Our human rights policy work considers the multiple ways in which human rights interact, for example the importance of addressing issues such as child, early and forced marriage and forced conversion experienced by some women and girls from religious or belief minority communities.

[Persecuted Christians: 2019 Report](#)

08 Sep 2022 | 719 cc369-370

Asked by: Theresa Villiers

To ask the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps the Church is taking to help implement the

recommendations of the report of the Bishop of Truro on support for persecuted Christians published in 2019.

Answered by: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners

I thank my right hon. Friend for her sustained and long-term interest in freedom of religion and belief for Christians and people of all faiths around the world. At the Lambeth conference, the Bishop of Chelmsford, herself a Christian refugee from Iran, spoke about the need to challenge some of the darker elements of faith leaders who condone persecution.

Asked by: Theresa Villiers

In the light of the conclusions of the independent review assessing the implementation of the Bishop of Truro's report on supporting persecuted Christians around the world, what improvements would the Church like to see in relation to the envoy for freedom of religion or belief? My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) has done a wonderful job, but we want to see the post established on a permanent basis, with greater capacity to engage across Government and resources to match.

Answered by: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising an extremely important point. Our hon. Friend the faith envoy, who is in the Chamber, does a fantastic job. I can assure my right hon. Friend that the Church remains completely committed to the full implementation of the Truro review, especially recommendation 6, which is to make the envoy a permanent position with "appropriate resources and authority" to work across Government.

Asked by: Fiona Bruce

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) for her question and my hon. Friend the Second Church Estates Commissioner for his answer. The recent independent review of progress on Truro has confirmed that there is more to be done before FORB becomes firmly embedded in the work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. One area that was highlighted is the need for better engagement with stakeholders, among which the Church is key. Would the Second Church Estates Commissioner be willing to join me to discuss the matter at a meeting with an FCDO Minister, which has been agreed?

Answered by: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners

I should be delighted, and I would like to bring our bishops who lead in the area and senior officials from Church House to that important meeting.

[Christianity: Oppression](#)

04 Jul 2022 | 27615

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what discussions the Church Commissioners have had with Christians Against Poverty on protecting Christians from persecution.

Answering member: Andrew Selous | Church Commissioners

Christians Against Poverty (CAP) is a UK-based debt advice charity independent of the Church of England. Staff of the National Church Institutions have held discussions with CAP but these have not been on the protection of Christians from persecution.

[Commonwealth](#)

28 Jun 2022 | 823 c539

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Guildford

My Lords, as the Minister knows extremely well, this week marks a brief lull between the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Rwanda last week and the International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in London next week. Given the overlap between those two conferences, what progress has been made on this basic human right, not least given that three of the Commonwealth nations—India, Pakistan and Nigeria—are among the worst when it comes to protecting the rights, and even the lives, of Christians and those of other faiths and beliefs?

Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

The right reverend Prelate raises an important issue. It seems to be a continuum. As someone who is overseeing the FoRB conference as well, I was wondering whether the “Minister for Conferences” is being added to my portfolio. Nevertheless, it is an important area which is of focus to Her Majesty’s Government. I am working very closely with Fiona Bruce on the delivery of next week’s conference, at which over 30 countries will be in attendance. On the countries the right reverend Prelate referred to, I would also note that there are many where there are distinct constitutional protections for all communities and faiths. It is important that all countries of the Commonwealth stand up for the rights of the faiths and beliefs of all.

[Iraq: Religious Freedom](#)

27 Jun 2022 | HL910

Asked by: Lord Patten

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the safety of, and freedom of religion for, Christians in Iraq.

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

Promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is one of the UK’s longstanding human rights priorities in Iraq. The UK is committed to defending FoRB for all, and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. We continue to monitor the situation of Christians and other minority groups in Iraq, regularly engaging with Christian leaders and civil society, as well as other minority groups. Our Embassy in Baghdad and our Consulate in Erbil will continue to highlight to the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government the need to protect ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians.

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

27 Jun 2022 | HL879

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Guildford

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they intend to implement any of the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the UK Foreign Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians, published on 4 July 2019, after 4 July this year.

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 Prime Minister reaffirmed his commitment to FoRB by appointing Fiona Bruce, MP, as his Special Envoy for FoRB. On 5-6 July 2022, the UK Government will host an international Ministerial conference in London to drive forward international efforts on FoRB, demonstrating our leading role in supporting freedom and openness.

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. In line with recommendation 22, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office commissioned an independent review to assess the implementation of the Bishop of Truro's recommendations. The independent report will be published in due course.

[Garry Pang](#)

23 Jun 2022 | 21078

Asked by: Sir Stephen Timms

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the arrest and denial of bail to the Hong Kong Christian pastor Garry Pang Moon-yuen; and is she will make a statement.

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

The right to peaceful protest is one of the rights China promised to protect, as guaranteed in both the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law. However, the Chinese Government has failed to uphold freedom of speech and assembly, including through Chinese and Hong Kong authorities' continuing use of the National Security Law to target dissenting voices.

As a co-signatory to the Joint Declaration, we will continue to stand up for the people of Hong Kong, to call out the violations of their rights and freedoms, and to urge China to uphold the rights set out in the Joint Declaration and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

[Nigeria: Christianity](#)

10 Jun 2022 | HL512

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment, if any, they have made of the findings of Professor Obiora Ike, Executive Director of Globethics.net, that over 30,000 Nigerians from Christian backgrounds have been killed over the last decade, and others kidnapped, brutalised or driven from their homes.

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

We are aware of the report in question and a number of other recent reports concerning the drivers of violence in Nigeria. The UK Government continues to follow increasing insecurity across Nigeria with concern, which has a devastating impact on affected communities, including both Christian and Muslim communities. The principal causes of violence across Nigeria are complex, and include criminality and competition over resources. We continue to urge and support the Nigerian Government to take action to implement long-term solutions that address the root causes of violence and ensure the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief for all.

The Minister for Africa visited Nigeria in February 2022 and raised rising insecurity and its impact on the Nigerian people in meetings with the Vice President, Foreign Minister and several State Governors. The Minister was pleased to be able to meet with a range of interlocutors, including faith and NGO leaders, and held detailed discussions about the causes of violence. At the first dialogue of our Security and Defence Partnership in February, the UK and Nigerian Governments committed to work together to respond to rising insecurity and promote human rights. We continue to encourage the Nigerian Government to take urgent action to implement long-term solutions that address the root causes of violence.

[Amnesty International Report 2021/22](#)

27 Apr 2022 | 821 c264

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Chelmsford

My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister for referencing freedom of religion and belief. Amnesty International's latest annual report sets out the parliament of Iran's introduction of two articles to the country's penal code that further undermine the right to freedom of religion and belief. These articles prescribe up to five years' imprisonment and/or a fine for insulting Iranian ethnicities, divine religions or Islamic denominations, or for engaging in

“deviant educational or proselytising activity that contradicts ... Islam.”

On this basis, three Christians were sentenced to lengthy imprisonments, just last July. I declare an interest in that I am originally from Iran. Could the Minister outline what representations are being made to the Iranian authorities on the matter of freedom of religion and belief?

Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

My Lords, I was present when the right reverend Prelate delivered her maiden speech and reflected on her experiences. She is of great value on the Benches she represents, and on this important issue. Yes, we raise the issue of human rights, and we raise quite candidly and specifically the issues of consular cases which are ongoing in Iran around the broader issue of freedom of religion or belief. I speak as a person of faith: the strongest test of your faith is when you have the ability to stand up and defend the rights and obligations of another belief or faith. That is something we pride ourselves on here in the United Kingdom. Speaking on the broad issue of human rights, it is a proud tradition we carry around the world, and long may it live on.

[North Korea: Human Rights](#)

22 Apr 2022 | HL7671

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made, if any, of the findings in the report by Korea Future The North Korean Prison Database, published on 28 March; and what steps they are taking to hold accountable those who oversee the persecution of religious minorities, including Christians, in North Korea.

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

The UK is deeply concerned by reports, including from Korea Future Initiative, which tell of serious human rights violations in DPRK, including the specific persecution of those who are caught practising religion. We are reviewing the Report's findings and recommendations and considering how the UK Government can continue to address the appalling human rights situation in the DPRK.

The UK co-sponsored the resolution adopted at the Human Rights Council on 1 April 2022 which seeks to shine a spotlight on the DPRK's human rights record.

In July 2020, the UK designated two DPRK entities through the Global Human Rights (GHR) sanctions regime, including the Ministry of State Security Bureau 7 and Ministry of People's Security Correctional Bureau, which together are responsible for the country's notorious prison camp system.

The UK continues to urge improvements in the DPRK human rights situation, and regularly raises these concerns, including on prison camps, in international fora and directly with the DPRK authorities.

[Egypt: Copts](#)

29 Mar 2022 | 143595

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what support is being provided to Coptic Christian women in Egypt who are the victims of abduction, forced conversion and forced marriage.

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

The Government of Egypt has stated its commitment to protecting the rights of Coptic Christians and freedom of worship. We are encouraged by positive steps in recent years, including President Sisi's public commitments, to uphold the rights of minorities and freedom of worship. The UK Government is providing support to an Egyptian Government initiative to raise awareness of a number of social issues, including religious diversity and forced marriage. The Prime Minister and President Sisi have discussed the importance of protecting freedom of religion and belief, most recently during their meeting in Glasgow on 1 November. Lord Ahmad discussed freedom of religion and belief with Egypt's Ambassador to the UK in March 2022 and we will continue to raise these important issues.

[Nepal: Religious Freedom](#)

27 Jan 2022 | 107687

Asked by: Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions she has had with her counterpart in Nepal on protecting freedom of religion in that country.

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

We lobby the Government of Nepal on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) at the highest level. The Minister of State for South Asia met with Nepali Prime Minister Deuba at COP on 1 November, where he raised the importance the UK attaches to human rights and FoRB. The Embassy also regularly engages civil society to discuss policy priorities, including human rights and FoRB. Finally, the Embassy is also the Chair of the Human Rights Core Group, a network of like-minded diplomatic missions, which discusses concerns related to freedom of religion or belief to drive collective action.

The UK's assessment of the trends on religious and belief tolerance is that there have not been significant recent shifts in intra-community persecution or closure of civil society space. This is due to Nepal's Constitution and legal framework forming part of the peace settlement to bring marginalised communities into Nepal's institutions, related laws being largely upheld by the courts and relevant human rights commissions, and COVID-19 related lockdowns not discriminating between different faiths or beliefs.

6 Other Parliamentary material

6.1 Debates

[Blasphemy Laws and Allegations: Commonwealth Countries](#)

11 Oct 2022 | 720 cc1-20WH

Motion that this House has considered blasphemy laws and allegations in Commonwealth countries.

[Nigeria: Security Situation](#)

19 Jul 2022 | 718 cc284-298WH

Motion that this House has considered the security situation in Nigeria.

[Freedom of Religion or Belief: International Conference](#)

28 Jun 2022 | 717 cc17-40WH

Motion that this House has considered the UK-hosted International Conference on the Freedom of Religion or Belief.

[Digital Persecution](#)

21 Apr 2022 | 712 cc429-438

[Christians and Religious Minorities: India](#)

24 Feb 2022 | 709 cc223-246WH

Motion that this House has considered the matter of the persecution of Christians and religious minorities in India.

[Freedom of Religion or Belief: 40th Anniversary of UN Declaration](#)

25 Nov 2021 | Vol 704 cc518-546

That this House has considered freedom of religion or belief and the 40th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the elimination of religious intolerance.

6.2 Urgent Questions

[Violence against Religious Groups: Nigeria](#)

06 Jun 2022 | 715 cc557-567

Urgent question on the killing of church worshippers in Ondo state, Nigeria yesterday, and on wider issues of violence against religious groups in Nigeria.

6.3

Statements

International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief: London 2022

15 Jul 2022 | HCWS205

Statement made by Vicky Ford | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

My noble Friend the Minister for South and Central Asia, North Africa, United Nations and the Commonwealth (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon), has made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

On 5 and 6 July 2022, Fiona Bruce MP, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and I (Lord Ahmad) hosted the fourth International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London.

The Conference and its associated fringe brought together government delegations, faith and belief group leaders and civil society from over 100 countries for rich discussions to address challenges to the right to FoRB.

The Conference explored the many facets of FoRB through seventeen themed panel sessions and gave a platform to those persecuted for their religion or belief. Forty-seven governments, international organisations and other entities made pledges to take action in support of FoRB. Thirty-four countries joined the UK in signing up to one or more of a set of [statements](#) protecting and promoting FoRB. We hope more countries will join these statements over the coming weeks.

The opening plenary session received contributions from: His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales; the Prime Minister; Secretary General of the Muslim World League, His Excellency Sheikh Al-Issa; Head of the Worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad; the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby; Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis; President of Humanists International, Mr Andrew Copson; Spiritual Leader and Chairman of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jutha, Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, and President of the Hindu Forum of Britain, Mrs Trupti Patel.

In her opening speech, My Right Honourable Friend, the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Elizabeth Truss) outlined FCDO progress in implementing recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's 2019 report and noted the breadth of religion and belief groups that suffer from persecution.

I (Lord Ahmad) announced new UK funding for support for defenders of FoRB, including those persecuted because of their activism, as well as funding and expertise for countries prepared to make legislative changes to protect FoRB.

The Conference was an important human rights milestone which galvanised international efforts to do more to protect and promote the right to FoRB. The challenge now is to turn words into action. We will do this through building coalitions of government and civil society actors focussed on key themes from the Conference, drawing on the convening power of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance Working alongside the Special Envoy, the FCDO will continue to work on this important human rights issue and build on momentum from the Conference to champion global efforts on FoRB.

[Independent Report on the implementation of the Bishop of Truro's recommendations](#)

04 Jul 2022 | HCWS174

Statement made by Elizabeth Truss | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

At the beginning of 2019, former Foreign Secretary The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, asked the Bishop of Truro to review what more the then FCO could do to address the persecution of Christians. The Bishop published a report in July 2019 setting out the gravity of the issue, as well as practical recommendations for an enhanced FCO response to the plight of persecuted Christians and people persecuted for holding other religions, beliefs, or no religious belief at all.

Recognising that the persecution of people for their religion or belief is unacceptable and a significant international problem, the Government committed to implementing the recommendations of the Bishop's review. His final recommendation was that an independent assessment of our progress in doing so should be carried out three years after the original report. I am pleased to publish that assessment today. We welcome and accept this expert review on progress and in line with the findings, accept their assessment for the need to continue to work to promote and strengthen Freedom of Religion or Belief as a fundamental human right for all. We thank the reviewers for their important work. A copy of the report will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

I have seen first-hand how much work has gone in across the organisation to delivering the review recommendations. Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon has worked closely with the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Fiona Bruce MP, to promote freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) internationally and to oversee progress on implementing the review recommendations. The independent assessment concludes that the majority of the recommendations are either at an advanced stage of delivery or in the process of being delivered, whilst noting that there is still more to do. The reviewers have also recognised where there have been constraints to delivery or an alternative approach has been taken.

I am encouraged by what has been achieved in recent years, in the face of many global challenges. We have led international efforts to increase collaboration to support those who are persecuted for what they believe. In March 2021, Lord Ahmad hosted a meeting at the UN Security Council to raise

awareness of persecution of religious minorities in conflict zones. We used our G7 Presidency to secure language on FoRB in the G7 communique for the first time, galvanising support for those suffering discrimination and persecution. The FoRB Special Envoy holds the Chair of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance this year, demonstrating UK global leadership on FoRB. We have sent a clear message that the international community will not turn a blind eye to serious and systematic violations of human rights through our Global Human Rights sanctions regime. Religion for International Engagement training is now available to all civil servants to enhance their understanding of the role of religion and belief in a wide variety of contexts, in order to deliver the UK's international objectives more effectively.

Building on this work, we will continue to ensure that the changes we have made are embedded and to look for opportunities to make FoRB central to the FCDO's wider human rights work. We will do this, working alongside others, to deliver real change for the good, protecting and promoting everyone's right to freedom of religion or belief.

Our work on this important human rights issue will never be complete, and we will continue to champion global efforts on FoRB. As part of that, on 5-6 July this year, the UK will host an international ministerial conference on freedom of religion or belief. We look forward to welcoming partner countries and stakeholders from around the world to London.

6.4 Early Day Motions

[2022 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief](#) EDM 426 (session 2022-23)

Jim Shannon

11 October 2022

That this House notes the 2022 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief; and further notes the Annex to this report which details reports of increasing insecurity facing members of the Baha'i religion in Iran, Yemen and Qatar; observes that Members of this House are receiving increasing expressions of concern by their Baha'i constituents on the growing repression of members of this peaceful faith; and urges the UK government to make specific mention of the plight of Baha'is in written and oral statements wherever possible across the human rights machinery of the United Nations and other international organisations.

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

EDM 130 (session 2022-23)

Jim Shannon

06 June 2022

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.

Persecution of Christians in Northern Nigeria

EDM 403 (session 2021-22)

Jim Shannon

07 September 2021

That this House notes the escalation in persecution of Christians in Northern Nigeria, highlighting that more Christians are killed in Nigeria than in any other world nation; further notes Open Doors' assessment that men and boys are particularly vulnerable to being killed, with the intention of lowering the birth rate of Christian communities and removing their sources of income, and that Christian women are often abducted and raped by militant groups and sometimes forced to marry Muslims; calls on the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs to liaise with NGOs on the ground in Nigeria to ascertain where best funding and support streams could be used; and further affirms this House's commitment to promoting freedom of religion and belief by all diplomatic measures available.

7

Further reading

7.1

House of Commons papers

[Use of blasphemy laws and allegations in Commonwealth countries](#), Commons Library Debate Pack, 3 October 2022

[The UK-hosted International Conference on the Freedom of Religion or Belief](#), Commons Library Debate Pack, 23 June 2022

[Gender-specific religious persecution](#), Commons Library Debate Pack, 14 March 2022

[Persecution of Christians and religious minorities in India](#), Commons Library Debate Pack, 22 February 2022

[General Debate: Freedom of religion or belief: 40th anniversary of the declaration on the elimination of religious intolerance](#), Commons Library Research Briefing, 24 November 2021

[Effect of the covid-19 pandemic on religious and ethnic minority communities throughout the world](#), Commons Library Debate Pack, 17 June 2021

[Persecution of Muslims, Christians and minority groups in India](#), Commons Library Debate Pack, 11 January 2021

[Effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on Freedom of Religion or Belief](#), Commons Library Debate Pack, 23 November 2020

[Progress on the Bishop of Truro's independent review on persecution of Christians and freedom of religion or belief](#), Commons Library Debate Pack, 15 October 2020

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

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

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

[Westminster Hall debate: Freedom of religion or belief](#), Commons Library Debate Pack, 28 February 2018

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

[International Freedom of Religion or Belief](#), Commons Library Debate Pack, 23 October 2017

7.2 Other publications

[Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief](#), Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Adopted 25 November 1981

[2021 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), Office of International Religious Freedom, US Department of State, 2 June 2022

[Freedom of Religion or Belief in Nepal: Mapping report 2022](#), All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, February 2022

[Persecution Trends 2022](#), Release International, 2022

[World Watch List 2022](#), Open Doors, 2022

7.3 Websites

[Aid to the Church in Need](#) (Website)

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

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

[Barnabas Fund](#) (Website)

[Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#) (Website)

[For The Martyrs](#) (Website)

[Open Doors UK](#) (Website)

[Open Doors USA](#) (Website)

[Persecution.org](#) (Website)

[Release International](#) (Website)

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