



UK Mission to the
United Nations
in Geneva

United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland

Statement

UN Forum on Minority Issues: Beyond freedom of religion or belief

26 November 2013

The freedom of religion or belief is one of the United Kingdom's most important human rights priorities. Therefore the UK supports this forum's focus on the plight of religious minorities.

Threats to the right to freedom of religion or belief, including the right to change one's religion, or to have no belief, continue to have a disproportionate effect on religious minorities. Even where minorities are deeply rooted in their societies and have adopted local customs, there have been incidents of religious minorities being ostracised and discriminated against on the grounds of their different religion or belief. In an increasingly globally connected world, minorities are sometimes subjected to group punishment for the alleged crimes, connections or connotations of their coreligionists in other countries.

We firmly believe that the more tolerant a country is towards different religious groups, the more stable, fair and confident it is likely to be.

Last year the UK, together with Canada, hosted an international conference focused on combating religious intolerance, protecting the human rights of minorities and promoting pluralism in society. We believe that States have the primary responsibility to address any violations of religious freedom and to ensure non-discrimination before the law. We also believe that other actors, such as religious leaders, can play a significant role in promoting the rights of minorities, especially in cases where leaders from the majority faith speak out on behalf of religious minorities in that same country.



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Interfaith dialogue, consultation and exchange can play an important role in promoting respect and good relationships between faith groups. Often this co-operation works best when it is practical and action-orientated. I would like to share an example from the UK to illustrate this. On 24 September, during an OSCE meeting, the UK hosted an event to share best practice from a case study of co-operation between faith communities and the government, in combating hate crime in the UK. The partnership of two UK NGOs, the Community Security Trust and Faith Matters, who work primarily with Jewish and Muslim communities, provided a positive example of civil society working with government to monitor and combat hate crime.

Discrimination, which affects religious minorities, is rarely only restricted to one specific faith community. Often where one group suffers, others are not normally far behind.

This means that any response by governments should be holistic. The UK believes that states should promote freedom of religion of belief as a universal human right, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.