



UK Mission  
Geneva

**RESPONSE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND TO THE CALL BY THE UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF FOR HIS REPORT TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON ELIMINATING INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 16 (SDG 16)**

The UK is clear that discrimination and intolerance of any kind has no place in society, and we treat all forms of intolerance with equal seriousness. In the UK, it is against the law to discriminate against someone because of their protected characteristics (as set out in the Equalities Act 2010), which include race, religion, belief, age, disability and gender<sup>1</sup>.

We have a strong legal framework for tackling crimes that target individuals with protected characteristics. There are criminal penalties for offences such as incitement to racial or religious hatred; racially or religiously aggravated offences including intentionally causing harassment, alarm or distress; as well as increased sentences for offences motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person's real or perceived race, religion, transgender identity, sexual orientation, or disability<sup>2</sup>.

The UK's Hate Crime Action Plan (for England and Wales) sets out how the UK government tackles hate crimes<sup>3</sup>. Some achievements to date include providing over 80 grants to fund security measures at places of worship; requiring police forces to disaggregate hate crime data by faith; and commissioning the police inspectorate to undertake a thematic report into police effectiveness in responding to hate crime. In the most recently published data on hate crime in England and Wales, which covered the period from April 2018 to March 2019, just under half (47%) of religious hate crime offences were targeted against Muslims (3,530 offences), a similar proportion to last year (2017/18); and a further 18% of religious hate crime offences were targeted against Jewish people (1,326 offences)<sup>4</sup>. In 2018/19, there were 103,379 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales, an increase of 10% compared with 2017/18 (94,121 offences). This continues the upward trend in recent years with the number of hate crimes recorded by the police having more than doubled since

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/4>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/44/contents>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hate-crime-action-plan-2016>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2018-to-2019>

2012/13. While increases in hate crime over the last five years have been mainly driven by improvements in crime recording by the police, there have been spikes in hate crime following certain events such as the EU Referendum and the terrorist attacks in 2017.

The current Hate Crime Action Plan is due to run until July 2020. The UK is currently considering a range of options for work post-July 2020, including engagement with a range of Government Departments and civil society partners to explore possible approaches. Many of the actions outlined in the plan will continue beyond July 2020.

In the UK, an important tool in challenging intolerance is through education. The UK is committed to ensuring that all students leave school prepared for life in a diverse, modern Britain. All schools are required to actively promote the fundamental values of: individual liberty; the rule of law; democracy; and mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths or beliefs<sup>5</sup>. To support schools on a national level to promote tolerance and respect, the Department for Education runs the 'Educate Against Hate' website, which provides a range of resources and advice to help teachers build young people's resilience to extremist narratives<sup>6</sup>.

The UK has funded a number of projects that work with young people to tackle issues of prejudice and intolerance. For example, young people who participated in the 'Anne Frank Trust'<sup>7</sup> programme rated their understanding of the Holocaust, hatred, discrimination, inequality and injustice as 5 out of 10 at the start of the programme, increasing to 9 out of 10 after the programme. We have also supported 'True Vision'<sup>8</sup>, the police online hate crime reporting portal to facilitate and encourage the reporting of hate crime, as well as 'Stand Up'<sup>9</sup> to support work to address anti-Muslim and antisemitic bullying in schools. Other initiatives include the School Linking Network, which provides sustained opportunities for meaningful social mixing between children from different backgrounds, through the linking of classes across demographically diverse primary and secondary schools<sup>10</sup>. This enables children and young people to build new relationships and understanding of those from different religions, cultures and communities.

We continue to work with the Cross-Government Working Group to Tackle Antisemitism, which ensures that we remain alive to concerns of Jewish communities,

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guidance-on-promoting-british-values-in-schools-published>

<sup>6</sup> <https://educateagainsthate.com/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://annefrank.org.uk/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.report-it.org.uk/home>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.standupfoundation-uk.org/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/>

and respond quickly to incidents and concerns. The Working Group brings together officials from across Whitehall, with representatives from the Community Security Trust, Board of Deputies of British Jews, Jewish Leadership Council, and Antisemitism Policy Trust. We have committed a further £100,000 for the Antisemitism Policy Trust to support their work to tackle online antisemitism, and we acknowledge this is a growing area of concern<sup>11</sup>. We are also providing £14m this year, and have provided over £65m to date, for the Protective Security Grant to protect Jewish schools and community buildings<sup>12</sup>. The Communities Secretary also wrote to universities and local authorities to urge them to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of Antisemitism<sup>13</sup>.

We have supported Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) with more than £2.5m between 2016 and 2020 to monitor and combat anti-Muslim hatred<sup>14</sup>. We have also committed just over £1.5m in new funding for hate crime projects including those tackling anti-Muslim hatred in schools<sup>15</sup>. We continue to work closely with all communities, including Muslim communities, to tackle anti-Muslim hatred, including working to understand issues and trends. This includes working with the police in reassuring communities, as well as supporting the work of the cross-Government Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, which provides valuable advice to Government on challenges faced by Britain's Muslim communities.

The UK Government will continue to work towards the full realisation of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief for every individual. Domestically, we will continue to support faith communities and interfaith dialogue as a means of breaking down barriers between communities, removing the conditions which can allow intolerance and unequal treatment to flourish.

As well as strong domestic measures, the UK works internationally to defend Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), and promote respect and understanding between different faith and belief communities. This work is led by Rehman Chishti MP, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, who was appointed in September 2019. In August 2019, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for Human Rights, delivered a statement on behalf of Prime Minister Boris Johnson during a UN Arria meeting, which said: "Freedom of Religion or Belief is at the heart of what the UK stands for. We are determined to use the tools of British diplomacy in this cause, including our permanent seat on the UN Security Council."

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/communities-secretary-commits-funding-to-tackle-online-hate>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-office-grants-14-million-funding-for-security-at-jewish-institutions>

<sup>13</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-11-05/debates/191105112000026/WorkOfTheDepartment>

<sup>14</sup> <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/10/15/government-response-to-publication-of-hate-crime-statistics/>

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

Internationally, we believe there has been positive progress on FoRB in some places. For example, following the 2019 revolution in Sudan, the civilian-led government has allowed institutions to observe Christian holidays and Christians to attend church services on Sundays. However, there are still significant challenges, including legislative hurdles for the operation of non-Muslim religious buildings, and the destruction of churches in Blue Nile State at the end of 2019.

Each year, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) publishes an Annual Human Rights and Democracy Report (AHRDR) that contains detailed information on the UK's activities to promote human rights abroad for the previous year, including FoRB<sup>16</sup>. These annual reports also highlight legislation, policies, and discriminatory practices that the UK was particularly concerned about during the 12-month period.

In the 2018 AHRDR (the latest published to date) the UK drew attention to:

- discrimination in **Pakistan**, including the allegations of discrimination and violence against religious minorities, including constitutional discrimination against Ahmadi Muslims, and the misuse of blasphemy legislation against Christians and other minorities, as well as Muslims.
- the situation in **Myanmar**, where there were worrying levels of violence in Kachin and Shan states that targeted members of minority groups, in particular the Rohingya, who are not even recognised as a Community by name.
- the human rights situation in Xinjiang, including the extra-judicial detention of over a million Uyghur Muslims and other minorities in “political re-education camps”. The UK has strongly condemned China’s systematic restrictions on Uyghur culture and the practice of Islam in Xinjiang, including through statements delivered by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon at the UN Human Rights Council sessions in March 2019 and 2020 as well as reading a joint statement on behalf of 22 others at the UN Third Committee in October 2019. We remain concerned about the human rights situation in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and restrictions on freedom of religion or belief more broadly in China.
- **Iraq**, where we highlighted that the lack of security, access to services and jobs, and marginalisation in general were the principal concerns for Iraq’s religious and ethnic minority communities, which in turn accelerated the emigration of members of minority groups.

---

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/human-rights-and-democracy-reports>

The UK has also raised concerns through statements in multilateral fora, as well as during Universal Periodic Reviews. During the 34<sup>th</sup> UPR session, the UK expressed concern about discrimination of members of religious minorities in **Iran**<sup>17</sup>, particularly Christians and Baha'is. At the OSCE, the UK recently made a statement on discrimination against Jehovah's Witnesses in **Russia**<sup>18</sup>.

We fully acknowledge the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, religion, and gender. That is why we ensure that our human rights policy work considers the intersectionality of human rights, for example the importance of addressing the specific vulnerabilities experienced by women from religious minority communities around the world. In the FCO's 2018 AHRDR, we expressed concern about reports of forced conversions to Islam and forced marriages to Muslim men of Hindu and Christian women in **Pakistan**.

In 2018, the former Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt MP, commissioned an independent review of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians<sup>19</sup>. While the Review looked at the phenomenon of the persecution of Christians, the former Foreign Secretary was clear that any recommendations stemming from the review should support all faiths and beliefs, in line with our policy on FoRB for all. Moreover, the Bishop of Truro (who led the Review) made clear that we must seek FoRB for all, without fear or favour. To date, 11 out of 22 recommendations have either been implemented in full, or are in the process of being implemented. Work on international FoRB matters, including the implementation of the recommendations from this Review, is led by the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Mr Rehman Chishti MP.

Working with like-minded partners to advance FoRB has remained a priority for the UK. In 2019, Mr Chishti represented the UK at the seventh meeting of the Istanbul Process in The Hague on combatting religiously-motivated intolerance, where he stressed the importance of defending the right to FoRB globally. The United Kingdom also joined the International Religious Freedom Alliance as a founding member in February 2020, with Rehman Chishti MP leading on this work for the UK.

An important part of the UK's work on combatting intolerance includes commemorating past atrocities, to ensure they can never be repeated. In January 2020, Lord Ahmad represented the UK at an International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)

---

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/34th-universal-periodic-review-uk-statement-on-islamic-republic-of-iran>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/uk-statement-on-the-situation-of-jehovahs-witnesses-in-the-russian-federation>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-announces-global-review-into-persecution-of-christians>

meeting. During this meeting, Lord Ahmad reaffirmed the UK's unwavering commitment to eliminating all forms of hate and bigotry, both at home and abroad<sup>20</sup>.

We are concerned by reports of religious and belief minorities being targeted and attacked in connection with the outbreak of COVID-19. The UK will continue to promote respect and understanding between different faiths and beliefs, and will defend the right to FoRB for all.

5 June 2020

---

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lord-ahmad-sets-out-uk-commitment-to-declaration-of-the-stockholm-international-forum>