

Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief: UK statement to the OSCE

Thank you Mr Chair,

The UK was honoured to host the [International Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief \(FoRB\)](#) in London this week.

100 media representations attended; 47 pledges were signed by countries, international organisations and entities; 31 countries signed up to 8 statements and we ran 17 thematic sessions at the event.

Over 800 faith, belief, government and civil society leaders from over 100 countries from every continent shared practical lessons on how to protect freedom of religion or belief around the world.

This fundamental right is covered in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also, of course, well covered by our shared OSCE commitments and work. This includes commitments reaffirmed in Copenhagen in 1990 on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and through the practical work of ODHIR.

Russia, despite freely signing up to OSCE commitments on freedom of religion or belief has, through its war of aggression in Ukraine had an impact on people's ability to practice their faith or belief. We have seen innocent civilians having to shelter from Russia's indiscriminate bombardment in places of worship. Churches, synagogues, and mosques have been reduced to rubble. Religion and belief is proving to be collateral damage from Putin's aggression.

This conference is therefore very timely. It provided an important opportunity to share best practice and strengthen international alliances, such as the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance. We welcome that a number of states here today made national pledges to work together to promote FoRB.

The UK also announced £500,000 of funding to support everyone's "fundamental freedom" to follow a religion or belief. This includes £200,000 for the protection and promotion of FoRB and £300,000 to provide British legal expertise to countries where FoRB is under pressure.

Mr Chair, we need greater collective action to ensure the right to freedom of religion or belief is protected for everyone, everywhere. Ensuring that we meet our OSCE commitments is an excellent way to start. Thank you.