

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day: Simon Collis' message

Tomorrow is International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day.

Over the last 5 years, I have had the honour to serve as HM's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, a country which is the home to two of the holiest sites of pilgrimage in Islam.

Every year Saudi Arabia welcomes millions of pilgrims who visit the Kingdom to perform Hajj and Umrah. Of these, over 125,000 are British nationals.

Islam, together with other religions, is part of what defines the fabric of modern Britain, and its rich tapestry of faiths and beliefs. In the UK, there are 73 denominations of Islam, and over 3000 mosques. Diversity is a strength, and part of our national identity.

Lord Ahmad, the FC0 Minister for Human Rights, recently visited Saudi Arabia and talked about Freedom of Religion and Belief with his counterparts from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the MFA, and the Human Rights Commission.

Islam is a religion that teaches harmony, tolerance and diversity. Peace and tolerance are values that King Salman, The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques highlighted in his speech at the end of Ramadan. From my 5 years here, I can say that Eid in Saudi Arabia is a great occasion for harmony, solidarity, tolerance and happiness.

The Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has also emphasised the values of coexistence, moderation and tolerance. During his visit to the UK last year the Crown Prince met with the Archbishop of Canterbury and emphasised his commitment to promote the flourishing of different faith traditions and interfaith dialogue in Saudi Arabia.

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day is a reminder to all of us to promote coexistence and respect between people of different cultures and religions. International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day is a reminder to all of us to promote coexistence and respect between people of different cultures and religions. We make this effort not just because the right to freedom of religion or belief is a principle worth defending but also because we believe that societies in which people are free to practice their faith or belief are, by their very nature, more stable and more prosperous.