

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad address to the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom

Thank you. Good afternoon. It's an honour to be amongst such a distinguished group of world leaders all committed to the freedom of religion or belief. And may I say I'm grateful to the United States for bringing us together but particularly to Secretary Pompeo and to you Ambassador Brownback.

Sam, if I may. Your partnership, your friendship is of incredible value and we look forward to strengthening that further. Your Excellencies it is said in the innocence of a child we find our most profound answers. My little boy Mansoor who is studying at a Jesuit Catholic school asked me recently, "Daddy, what kind of Muslim am I?"

I, being a politician, turned it around and asked Mansoor, "What kind of Muslim do you think you are?"

He paused for a moment and with a great poignancy, he said "Daddy, a Christian Muslim?"

Freedom of religion or belief has long been at the heart of UK foreign policy and diplomacy. That innocent remark of my own son demonstrates the strength of the country that I am proud to represent, the strength of building relationships between communities of all faiths.

In Sudan this year, we hosted a Religious Freedom Conference in January. I am grateful to both our colleagues and friends from the United States and Canada which ensured that we saw the Hatoun term government drop restrictions on the opening of Christian schools.

We have also seen progress in Algeria over the past year. Our ambassador has hosted meetings between Christians and Muslim leaders and the space, the religious space for Christians and indeed Ahmadi Muslims has become slightly better, but more needs to be done.

Whilst we take pride in our achievements there is so much more that needs to be done, if real change is to be affected and that is why our foreign secretary commissioned an independent review of the situation of persecuted Christians and I am pleased to announce today that we have fully accepted the review's ambitious recommendations in full.

These include making religious literacy compulsory for all our relevant diplomats a personal priority for me. We will also work with parties to agree a Security Council resolution calling on governments in the Middle East and North Africa to ensure the protection and security of Christians and all faith minorities.

In conclusion, your Excellencies, as champions of freedom of religion or

belief, all of us here recognise that it is a right that should be enjoyed by everyone everywhere.

Now is the time to be the voice to the voiceless millions of persecuted religious minority. Now is the moment, right here, right now, for our collective commitment to build that world free of religious bigotry and hate.

Now is the time to act. For our biggest challenge, your Excellencies is not when we stand up for our own rights and beliefs. The real test is when we stand up for the rights and beliefs of others.

Thank you.