

PM underlines UK's commitment to freedom of religion or belief

Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, has proclaimed the UK a champion of religious and other freedoms, and committed the UK to working with partners and friends around the world to ensure that "everyone, everywhere is able to enjoy these freedoms"

The statement was read out by Lord Ahmad, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, during discussion on safeguarding religious minority groups with his international counterparts at the UN in New York today.

The meeting takes place on the first-ever International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, which was established by a resolution of the General Assembly following a resolution led by the Polish government.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office today also announced that research into measures that will help those persecuted for their religion or beliefs will be boosted by more than £200,000 of new funding. The funding is available to those with an interest in exploring the best ways that the UK Government can tackle the problem of persecution as it affects particular countries or groups.

The UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson in a statement read out at the meeting said:

Freedom of religion or belief is at the heart of what the UK stands for. We will do everything possible to champion these freedoms and protect civilians in armed conflict, including religious, ethnic or other minorities. We are determined to use the tools of British diplomacy in this cause, including our permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

In light of mounting evidence that Christians suffer the most widespread persecution, we asked the Anglican Bishop of Truro to carry out an independent review to ensure that our work in this area matched the scale of the problem. We have accepted, and will implement, all of the Review's challenging recommendations. We will use the UK's global reach and programme funding to improve the lives of persecuted people. Today we are opening a call for bids on how to take this forward.

Lord Ahmad, who is also Minister of State for the Commonwealth UN and South Asia at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said:

Those belonging to religious minorities face a number of challenges, from armed conflicts, mass murders and violent assaults to everyday discrimination.

The heinous attacks this year on places of worship from the Philippines to Burkino Faso, New Zealand to Sri Lanka, have reminded us all that the fundamental human right of freedom of religion or belief is increasingly under threat.

Today, as we commemorate the victims of such acts of violence, we demonstrate our commitment to supporting research to change people's lives and help build a world free of religious intolerance and hatred.

The funding announcement builds on the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's recent review into the persecution of Christians.

The total amount of new funding for the 2019-20 financial year is a little over £200,000. Applicants can find further information on how to submit bids [here](#).

The New York meeting, hosted by Polish foreign minister Jacek Czaputowicz, will also be attended by Sam Brownback, US ambassador for religious freedom, Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Naveed Walter, President of Human Rights Focus Pakistan.

Notes to editors:

- The new John Bunyan funding stream is named in honour of the author of The Pilgrim's Progress and sits within the wider Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy, the FCO's dedicated strategic fund supporting our global human rights and democracy work. It is open to applicants worldwide.
- The International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief was established following the unanimous adoption by the UN General Assembly of a resolution which was tabled in May by Poland and co-sponsored by the UK and 87 other states.