

The Bishop of Leeds, Nick Baines, has told General Synod that “human dignity and flourishing is diminished” when religious believers and atheists are persecuted.



He also warned the Church of England’s decision-making body that it would be an “act of self-harm” only to speak up for persecuted Christians.

Speaking in a debate on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), Bishop Nick addressed many abuses including against Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, China, atheists in Saudi Arabia, and Christians in Pakistan.

“If human rights mean anything, then the freedom to choose our religion or belief, the freedom to change our religion or belief and the freedom to have no religion or stated belief at all is a right we all have by virtue of being human,” Bishop Nick said.

He continued: “Violations are increasing and intensifying involving not just intolerance and exclusion but active discrimination.

“In its ultimate form this can culminate in genocide, a phenomenon that has sadly been seen with increasing frequency, whether that of Christians and Yazidis at the hands of Isis in Iraq, Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar or Uighurs in China.

“In today’s interconnected age it is no longer possible to claim ignorance of these terrible events. To quote William Wilberforce: ‘You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know.’”

Bishop Nick also highlighted recommendations being made to the Government, including providing training on FoRB for diplomats.

Last year, the Mission and Public Affairs department of the Church of England, alongside other partners, was awarded a “substantial” Government grant to develop a FoRB Learning Network.

The Bishop of Truro, Philip Mounstephen, led an independent review on the persecution of Christians for the then-Foreign Secretary in July 2019.

Bishop Nick praised Bishop Philip’s report and highlighted that all 22 recommendations have not yet been implemented by the Government, although accepted in full.

Archbishop Angaelos, the General Bishop in the United Kingdom of the Coptic Orthodox Church, told Synod of the recent killing by the so-called Islamic State of Nabil Habashi Salama, a Coptic Christian, and two other people, in North Sinai.

He said ecumenical partners would welcome the motion.

He said: "We ask you to recognise [this] and we commend this to you, so that in this time, at this moment, when we are called we stand for those less fortunate than ourselves, and we place ourselves at their service."

The motion was passed.

More information:

- The General Synod motion and papers are [available online](#).
- The Truro Report is available on a [dedicated website](#)
- The motion was: 'That this Synod, believing that freedom of religion or belief is of importance to everyone, everywhere, and that Christians who enjoy this freedom should be active in advocating the same freedom for others: (a) note with concern that 83% of the global population live in countries where violations to freedom of religion or belief occur; 5 (b) affirm that freedom of religion or belief, as set out in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a necessary condition for human and societal flourishing; (c) call upon the Mission and Public Affairs Council to use the resources produced by its involvement in the Freedom of Religion and Belief Leadership Network to assist parishes and dioceses to advocate for freedom of religion or belief internationally (d) call upon Her Majesty's Government to (i) implement the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the UK Foreign Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians (2019) and (ii) to strengthen its commitment to upholding and protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief for all in its foreign, international development, defence and trade policy.'

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/news-releases/bishop-tells-general-synod-speak-out-against-persecution-religious>