

Politicians from around the world have been urged to “keep up the momentum” on tackling abuses of freedom of religion or belief, by the Church of England bishop who led a key review of Foreign Office support for persecuted Christians.



The Bishop of Truro, Philip Mounstephen, told a global summit on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) hosted by the UK Government, that there had been some good progress in some areas made since the publication of the review in 2019, but “much” still needed to be done. “

“The challenge going forward is to keep up the corporate momentum that has developed around this issue because this is a really, really significant global issue,” he told a panel session of the Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in London today.

“We must not let it sink back into the place that it was before, largely ignored and overlooked.”

Asked what his advice would be to Parliamentarians, Bishop Philip said: “My key message to Parliamentarians would be: understand what the main drivers behind freedom of religion or belief abuses are – we are looking at totalitarian regimes, religious fundamentalism, militant nationalism - these are really serious issues that must be addressed. So please Parliamentarians, make this a bipartisan issue, espouse it across the political spectrum.”

In his remarks during the panel session Bishop Philip welcomed the creation of the UK Freedom of Religion or Belief Public Forum made since the publication of the 2019 report. “

The group brings together a “huge variety” of civil society groups in coalition, he said, including Humanists UK and faith groups. “I think that is very effective to have that number of groups working together and making common cause,” he said.

“There is a huge variety, from Humanists UK through to avowedly faith groups at the other end of the spectrum – those people working together - I think that has been really, really effective.”

He told the conference that the recommendations of the 2019 report were “intentionally framed” in the broad understanding of the need to guarantee freedom of religion or belief for everyone. “The best way to protect any one minority is to protect all minorities,” he said.

Bishop Philip was speaking in a panel discussion Inspiring Parliamentarians at the Ministerial Conference hosted by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

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