

GENERAL SYNOD**The Church - An Advocate for Freedom of Religion or Belief****Summary**

1. The world is an increasingly hostile place for freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). In 2012 the Pew Forum reported that 83% of the global population lives in countries where the free practice of faith is restricted.¹ Little has changed in the preceding years with Pew reporting in November 2020 that government restrictions on religion reached the highest level globally in more than a decade.²
2. This Report documents the Church's response to this challenge from a public affairs (paras 9—19) and a programmatic perspective (paras 20—22). An important element of this work is the Freedom of Religion or Belief Leadership Network (FoRBLN): a 3-year project involving MPA which is funded (£5.6m) by the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Another very significant recent development was the Independent Review commissioned by the then Foreign Secretary and Chaired by the Bishop of Truro, of which more is said below and in the Appendices to this paper.
3. The current paper goes on to suggest ways in which the Church's work might develop in the future (paras 23—27) including amongst other things advocating for the full implementation of the Truro Report's recommendations and collaborating with others in marking the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief (22 August) as well as UN Human Rights Day (10 December).
4. This paper is supported by a series of Appendixes: Appendix 1 - Provides an overview of what FoRB entails as a human right; Appendix 2 - Documents abuses and infringements to FoRB in recent years; Appendix 3 – Sets out future challenges facing the government's FoRB strategy; Appendix 4 - Provides a copy of the Church's submission to the Truro Review; Appendix 5 – Reproduces the Truro Report's Final Recommendations.

The Motion before Synod

5. The motion, and this supporting paper, focus on the Church's role in supporting freedom of religion or belief in the parts of the world where FoRB is most at risk. This is not to deny that there are concerns about the current discourse on religious freedoms in the UK. However, the abuses of FoRB experienced by a large proportion of the world's population are of a different order of magnitude and, in the context of the UK's changing foreign policies, the Church of England has particular opportunities to make a difference

¹ Pew Research Centre, 2012. <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>.

² <https://www.pewforum.org/2020/11/10/in-2018-government-restrictions-on-religion-reach-highest-level-globally-in-more-than-a-decade/>

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internationally. Addressing concerns about domestic freedom of religion and belief could be the topic for a different debate on a different occasion if the Business Committee so desired.

6. Two specific opportunities are highlighted in the motion. First, at the end of 2020, MPA learned that the bid for substantial government funding for a Freedom of Religion or Belief Learning Network, in which MPA is a partner, had been successful. This constitutes a step change in the Church's ability to use its international links to work for religious freedom globally and is a welcome indication of the government's confidence in the Church in this field. The motion and this paper give Synod an opportunity to consider how this work, which is now up and running, can inform and support other church initiatives through, for example, existing world mission links.
7. Secondly, the motion draws attention to the *Independent Review for the UK Foreign Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians* which was Chaired by the Bishop of Truro. This review was commissioned by government, not by the Church, so has not previously been considered by Synod. It is, however, a very important contribution to the Church's overall work in this area and it is right that Synod should have the opportunity to endorse it and encourage the government to implement its recommendations.

The Church as an advocate for FoRB

8. The Church's understanding of human dignity is such that it is concerned whenever and wherever this human right is infringed. Christians hold that *everyone everywhere* is made in the image in the God. As such, the Church has always argued that governments should prioritise the most serious violations of FoRB rather than any specific community. The suffering of Christians worldwide is one of deep, heartfelt and immediate concern to the Church, but such concern does not overshadow or take precedence over other FoRB violations. In the parable of the 'Good Samaritan', nothing is known of the traveller who is stripped of clothing, beaten, and left half dead alongside the road, although the strong implication is that he is Jewish, hence the force of the scandal of the good neighbour being a Samaritan.³

Public Affairs

9. In a series of submissions to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee since 2011, the Church though MPA has welcomed the government's commitment, but it has repeatedly stressed the need to strengthen Whitehall's capacity to promote and protect FoRB. Amongst other proposals, MPA has pressed for the appointment of an ambassador at large for freedom of religion, improved training of civil servants to enhance their

³ Further theological reflections on freedom of religion or belief are set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

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understanding of FoRB as a human right and a more equitable allocation of public funding for FoRB projects overseas. These recommendations featured in MPA's submission to the *Independent Review for the UK Foreign Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians* (Appendix 4) many of which were carried forward into the Review's Recommendations (Appendix 5).

10. This Independent Review, often called the Truro Review, after its Chair the Bishop of Truro, the Rt Revd Philip Mounstephen, was tasked with mapping the extent and nature of the global persecution of Christians; to assess the quality of the response of the FCO, and to make recommendations for changes in both policy and practice. The decision to appoint a Bishop to Chair this Independent Review is testament to the Church's long-standing work in the field of FoRB.
11. In the broadest terms the Review found that the FCO's approach to the issue was inconsistent, with significant local variations in approach, and tended to underestimate issues of faith as an issue in the discriminatory treatment of minorities.
12. Whilst the Review was tasked with examining the phenomenon of Christian persecution, its recommendations (see Appendix 5) were clearly framed in terms of FoRB for all, as a matter of principle, and argued that FoRB should be central to the FCO's culture, policies and international operations.
13. Following the Review the UK FoRB Forum has been established, chaired by the Bishop of Truro. A broad range of nearly 80 stakeholder groups such as Amnesty, Humanists UK, Open Doors, along with representatives of all the main faiths, meet regularly with a view to taking collaborative action on a range of FoRB related issues.
14. The government (and not just the FCO) has accepted the Review's recommendations in full, although the weight which the government is likely to give to each remains in doubt. According to the PM's then Special Envoy for Religious Freedom, as of August 2020, 11 of the 22 Recommendations had been taken forward.⁴ Pressing for the implementation of these recommendations remains a priority for the Church. MPA will work with others through bodies such as the UK FoRB Forum and the APPG for International Religious Freedom to advocate for their implementation while being alert to new challenges requiring fresh thinking and innovative responses.
15. In the House of Lords, the Lords Spiritual hold the government accountable both for its overall handling of this issue, and the effectiveness of any response to instances where FoRB is impaired. They have contributed to debates and initiated their own country-specific debates on FoRB. They have maintained a steady flow of oral and written questions which have kept this matter firmly on Parliament's agenda. FoRB is the most frequently recurring

⁴ House of Commons, Hansard, Column 193WH, 12 March 2020.

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subject for episcopal written parliamentary questions. They have also pressed FoRB related amendments to government legislation such as the Genocide Amendment to the 2020 Trade Bill.

16. Lords Spiritual also make a positive contribution to the APPG for International Religious Freedom. Seven Lords Spiritual are currently members of this body, while two bishops, +Leeds and +Coventry, are involved with its sister body the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB) – a network set up in 2015, with the assistance and support from MPA, to assist parliamentarians from around the world to work together to advocate for FoRB.⁵ These networks help to connect the Lords Spiritual with a wider caucus of parliamentarians and to engage in coordinated advocacy initiatives both at home and abroad. They also provide a magnet for wider civil society and international collaboration such as with the growing network of civil society roundtables or the International Alliance on Freedom of Religion or Belief.
17. MPA also organises solidarity and advocacy visits for bishops to better understand the situation in countries of particular concern. These visits are usually done in partnership with expert organisations and local partners. In 2015, MPA worked with Christian Aid for the bishops of Leeds, Coventry and Southwark, to visit Iraqi Kurdistan to meet with those violently displaced from the Nineveh Plains by ISIS.
18. Through their companion links, bishops, dioceses and parishes engage with the global Church. This contributes to an in-depth understanding of the situation in their companion link diocese or province of the challenges to FoRB and an understanding as to how the Church locally can provide support through, prayer, giving and advocacy. Based on relationships established and knowledge learnt, bishops regularly raise matters of importance with relevant FCO ministers, as well as officials both in Whitehall and in-country. In January 2019, the Bishop of Leeds, following an earlier companion link visit to Sudan, engaged in a roundtable event on FoRB organised by the British Embassy in Khartoum. Efforts such as these can contribute to positive change as illustrated by the government of Sudan's decision in July 2020 to abolish the crime of apostasy.⁶ The PWM agencies also enable vital links with churches in vulnerable minority situations, fostering a significant sense of solidarity with them.
19. FoRB has also been a recurring theme in the Archbishop of Canterbury public affairs work. As noted by the Archbishop in a House of Lords debate in 2015: "If we want to defend religious freedom around the world – and again, I say,

⁵ Episcopal membership of the APPG on International Religious Freedom include the Lord bishops of Derby, Leeds, Peterborough, St Albans, Winchester and Worcester.

⁶ <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article69578>

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the freedom to have no religion – don't sell people guns who oppress religious freedom. Don't launder their money. Restrict trade to them and confine the way we deal with them – and above all speak frankly and openly, naming them for what they are."⁷ The Archbishop has spoken out when atrocities have occurred such as with an article for the *Financial Times* in April 2016 addressing the attacks in Lahore, Pakistan, on Easter Sunday and the plight of Christians and other religious minorities around the world.⁸ The Archbishop has convened several high level dialogues on FoRB such as a Roundtable on FoRB in the Commonwealth in 2018 involving 40 senior religious leaders, parliamentarians and academics from 11 Commonwealth countries which took place in the margins of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.⁹ This work has been framed as part of the generational struggle to address the growth of radicalisation which fuels religiously motivated violence.¹⁰

Programmatic Activity

20. FoRB has been an important ingredient in the Archbishop of Canterbury's international reconciliation ministry. The Archbishop has "witnessed such persecution in its rawest forms" during his visits to the 37 other provinces of the Anglican Communion, almost half of which are living under persecution.¹¹ In response, the Archbishop's International Reconciliation Team have developed resources and programmes to engage religious leaders in challenging the theological justifications for religiously motivated violence. This work aims to transform relationships that have become damaged or destructive into relationships of trust that bring new life. A key element of this work has been engaging religious leaders in developing a theological challenge to violence justified on religious grounds and in encouraging mutual accountability between religious leaders on "how we treat minorities, particularly minorities within our own religious or ethnic groups."¹² Such work has found expression in initiatives like the Emerging Peacemakers Forum, which in July 2018 brought together 50 young Christians and Muslims from around the world to learn about peacebuilding, reconciliation and leadership.¹³

⁷ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/archbishop-speaks-lords-religious-freedom>

⁸ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/articles/beyond-condemnation-archbishop-writes-financial-times-protecting>

⁹ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/latest-news/archbishop-convenes-forum-freedom-religion-or-belief-commonwealth>

¹⁰ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/lecture-generational-struggle-ending-religiously-justified-violence>

¹¹ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/archbishop-speaks-lords-religious-freedom>

¹² <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/articles/beyond-condemnation-archbishop-writes-financial-times-protecting>

¹³ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/latest-news/grand-imam-visits-archbishop-canterbury-emerging-peacemakers-forum>

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21. This reconciliation work complements projects undertaken by the Church through MPA. In 2019, MPA received funding from the FCO's John Bunyan Fund – a fund created as a result of the Truro Review - to scope the feasibility of setting up Civil Society Roundtables on FoRB in Malaysia and Indonesia. In both countries FoRB is under pressure from both state discrimination and societal hostility. Working with local partners in both countries MPA organised two 48-hour workshops in November 2019 involving civil society and faith-based actors to explore the roundtable methodology and issues that might be addressed by such a collaborative approach.
22. More long term, the Church through MPA is part of an international consortium that has received funding (£5.6m over 3 years) from the FCDO's Aid Connect Fund to set up a Freedom of Religion or Belief Leadership Network (FoRBLN) involving parliamentarians and belief leaders across eight countries (Bangladesh, The Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Uganda) to address the legislative barriers to FoRB and the social mores that support societal hostility towards minority groups on account of their religion or belief.¹⁴ The project is creating parliamentary caucuses on FoRB and associated stakeholder groups of belief leaders that will identify the challenges to FoRB and develop locally owned responses. These activities, and the external funding they attract, reflect the Church of England's reputation as a FoRB champion and its ability to mobilise and deliver a variety of overlapping networks in support of specific projects that engage and support local communities to strengthen their capacity in this area.

Future Work

23. With British foreign and development policy in a state of transition, the Church has a continuing role to play, working with others, to ensure that FoRB as a human right is not lost from the government's understanding of 'Global Britain' (See Appendix 3). The Church can help strengthen FoRB protection in countries of concern by using its networks to engage constructively with government officials, religious and belief leaders and other relevant stakeholders.
24. Our advocacy, with MPA working through the FoRBLN consortium as well as through the Church's own structures, will seek to include:
- (i) Advocating the rights of FoRB for all individuals and groups everywhere;
 - (ii) Advocating the implementation of the Truro Review's recommendations and monitoring and evaluating progress;
 - (iii) Supporting the FCDO to produce strategies for advancing FoRB in countries of particular concern;

¹⁴ For more information about the FoRBLN project visit <http://forbln.net/>

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- (iv) Liaising with the Office of the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Religious Freedom and pressing for that post to be strengthened;
- (v) Arguing that human rights and FoRB concerns are respected when negotiating new trade deals;
- (vi) Advocating for the freedom of individuals imprisoned because of their religion or belief;
- (vii) Speaking out frankly and openly when FoRB is abused, naming those responsible and where appropriate advocating for the application of sanctions;
- (viii) Adopting an inclusive discourse on FoRB that enables connections to be made with other policy areas such as democratisation, peacebuilding and development.
- (ix) Engaging with government when it approves export licenses for arm sales to countries where there is clear and compelling evidence of FoRB abuses;
- (x) Building on the current work of the Ethical Investment Advisory Group to use the Church's investment portfolio to engage with technology companies to ensure their platforms are not used to promote hate speech and their products are not contributing to repressive surveillance regimes;
- (xi) Participating in initiatives, such as *Faith for Rights*, that engage faith and belief leaders in initiatives that seek to change political and societal norms around FoRB.
- (xii) Working constructively with other FoRB advocates through bodies such as the UK FoRB Forum and the APPG for International Religious Freedom
- (xiii) Encouraging churches to mark recognised days such as International Religious Freedom Day and the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief.

25. There will be opportunities here for local churches and dioceses to be involved, and to involve in turn, youth groups, students, and others with concerns about international freedoms. These are issues on which ecumenical, interfaith and broader human rights groups can be well equipped to work together.

26. Whilst the church's resources at national level are limited, the Mission and Public Affairs team has long experience of engaging with others to support FoRB concerns. The development in 2021 of the FoRBLN consortium is the main current vehicle for MPA's work, and spin-off activities to further enhance the church's engagement with FoRB are likely to include, over the next 2—3 years:

- (i) Creating digital resources and a FoRB platform for concerned parties to engage with the issue. This could involve a FoRB primer, theological resources and prayer/advocacy material to help target audiences in advocating for the rights of those imprisoned for their religion or faith.

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- (ii) Producing a FoRB toolkit to assist dioceses and parishes engage with the issue through their companion link - this could provide amongst other things: a simple introduction to the issue; an analytical matrix to help identify problems in link provinces; advice on how to engage the companion link in the issue in a sensitive way; recommendations on how to take forward with parliament, government and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief any concerns arising; some general responses to frequently raised issues and resources for those who wish to explore further.
- (iii) Joining, as a partner, the FoRB Learning Platform to ensure that the Church is part of a broader coalition and that insights and learning from others can be easily transferred to the UK domestic scene. This Platform is an initiative of the Nordic Ecumenical Network on Freedom of Religion or Belief (NORFORB), in partnership with a wide range of secular and faith-based organisations, that seek to promote to FoRB for all.¹⁵

27. Raising awareness of FoRB across the Church – what it is and the challenges that it is facing - and providing opportunities for the Church to live out that learning with others in ways that helps to change the behaviour of governments and non-state actors alike, both at home and abroad, is a long-term strategy the overall aim of which is to improve the protection of FoRB for all and decrease the number of violations.

Mr Mark Sheard

Chair of the Mission and Public Affairs Council. April 2021

¹⁵ <https://www.forb-learning.org/about.html>

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Appendix 1

Freedom of Religion or Belief as a Human Right

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1. Even if the Church has had a complicated relationship with FoRB, the bloody history of the reformation and counter-reformation is evidence enough of that, the Bible holds that humans are made in the image of God as described in the creation story of Genesis. This holds to the inherent dignity of every human person which serves as the basis for freedom and the human capacities of reason. In similar vein, Jesus ministry centred on persuasion rather than coercion, his renunciation of armed protection and his acceptance in death over retaliation established an enduring ideal of communication between Christian and non-Christian alike. As Archbishop Justin Welby noted in an article in the *Times*, 15 July 2015:

As a Christian, I believe that religious freedom — the choice of how we follow God and, indeed, whether we choose to follow God at all — is given in creation, and in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus gave those he encountered absolute freedom of choice as to whether to follow him or not: the thieves on either side of Jesus, as he hung on the cross, were given a choice whether to believe in him: one turned to him, the other cursed him. That is freedom. It is a freedom that should apply to people whatever their faith, or those who are atheists.¹⁶

2. Despite the Biblical groundings for FoRB, it was not until the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) - a document drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world – that the freedom to choose and change one’s religion or belief found international legal aspiration. While the UDHR embodied the values of mid-20th-century Western humanism and Christian democracy, they are values that may be regarded as universal, and have found expression in other religious and belief traditions. The UDHR was ‘proclaimed’ by the UN General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations.¹⁷ The Declaration set out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected.
3. The Declaration’s preamble starts with the “recognition of the inherent dignity of the equal and inalienable rights of all people of all members of the human family” before articulating that “the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and *belief* and freedom from fear and want ... as the highest aspiration of the common people.” The right to FoRB was

¹⁶ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/articles/archbishop-canterbury-religious-freedom>

¹⁷ General Assembly resolution 217 A

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expounded in Article 18 and the right to non-discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in Articles 2 and 7.¹⁸

4. This aspiration was transformed into legal obligation some 20 years later with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adding the rights of individuals belonging to religious minorities to profess and practice their own religion.¹⁹ Subsequently, in 1981, UN Member States agreed a non-binding Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.²⁰ In 1993, the UN Human Rights Committee issued General Comment 22, explaining the meaning of Article 18 of the ICCPR.²¹
5. These international documents refer to FoRB as the right of every individual to have, adopt, or change a religion or belief; to manifest and practice this religion or belief; to be free from coercion and discrimination on the grounds of this religion or belief and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children 'in conformity with their own convictions'.
6. The freedom to have, choose and change a religion or belief is often called the inner freedom and can never be legitimately limited at any time, by anyone, by any means whatsoever. However, the outer freedom, (i.e. the right to manifest, practice and express a religion or belief) can under certain, well defined and narrow circumstances be limited or suspended. Limitations to the outer freedom should never be applied in a discriminatory way and needs to meet certain requirements including being legal, necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory and can only be applied for a limited number of reasons, i.e. 'to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others'.
7. From the outset, FoRB as a human right has been contested with a few governments pressing for an exclusive understanding of FoRB. Some governments saw the right to change ones' religion or belief as problematic. Others adhered to the secularisation thesis that religion would fade with modernisation and as such saw FoRB infringements more usefully addressed within other frameworks such as minority rights, women's right or freedom of expression. This contestation is reflected in the absence of a legally binding Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination on the Grounds of Freedom or Religion or Belief as had been recommended by the UN General Assembly in 1962.

¹⁸ Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: *Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*

¹⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/ccpr.pdf>, article 27.

²⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/religion.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fb22.html>

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8. This alienation from FoRB has been strengthened by the move from some conservative religious actors to see FoRB as a means to protect patriarchal and discriminatory traditions. Such actors have used the universal language of human rights to promote a very narrow agenda where the focus is on specific religious group whether that be persecuted Christian minorities in the Middle East or discriminated Muslim minorities in Europe and North America.
9. From a human rights perspective this contestation and the subsequent rise of the 'phobias' is problematic. The focus on specific minorities is difficult to align with the principles of universality and non-discrimination - it appears to prioritise intra-group religious solidarity over ideas of shared humanity which can feed arguments for reciprocity. The emphasis on religious groups and individuals can sometimes result in a very narrow understanding of what constitutes 'authentic' or 'true religion'. 'Religionising FoRB' shifts the understanding of FoRB to a right that protects religious groups and individuals rather than religious and non-religious individuals.
10. In recent years, there has been a counter shift to re-centre FoRB within a human rights framework and to reiterate that FoRB is about the protection of all individuals' right to believe and practice their religion or belief (or not). The move to a more inclusive discourse has been encouraged by international human rights organisations, governments appointing dedicated FoRB Envoys and the growth of inclusive networks such as the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief.
11. Faith and belief communities have belatedly contributed to this process as illustrated by the 2016 *Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities, in Predominantly Muslim Majority Countries* which, while not without its shortcomings, is a step in the right direction. In another vein, there is *Faith for Rights* (2017), a declaration drawn up by a range of different religious actors in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which places the promotion of FoRB more explicitly within a human rights framework.
12. Sadly though, the number of faith and belief communities and religious organisations willing to stand up for FoRB for all rather than focusing on the rights and protections deemed necessary for their own community remain depressingly low. As the human rights lawyer and academic Sir Malcom Evans noted in a lecture at Lambeth Palace in 2011 until such time as they are able to overcome this barrier the ability of the wider international community to engage effectively with FoRB as a human right will be diminished.²²

²² http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1580

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Appendix 2

A Universal Right under Global Duress

1. The re-discovery of FoRB as a human right and the re-engagement with an inclusive FoRB agenda has been shaped in part by the prevailing consensus that violations on FoRB are increasing and intensifying involving not just intolerance and exclusion, but active discrimination and severe violations marked by the systemic, organised violence aimed at driving away or subjugating particular religious or belief communities and individuals. The ultimate form of these violations is genocide – a phenomenon that many claim has sadly been seen with increasing frequency, whether that be Christians and Yazidis at the hands of ISIS in Iraq, Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and arguably most recently with the Uighurs in China.
2. Attempts to systematically quantify and qualify FoRB violations in different countries is not straightforward, but empirical evidence provided by research bodies like the US-based Pew Research Centre have all helped to paint a more detailed picture.²³ In 2019 the Pew Research Centre published its 10th annual report analysing restrictions on religion or belief (by governments and individual or groups in society) around the world. This report was informed by its previous nine annual reports and provides a clearer picture of the specific types of restrictions that individuals and communities face – and how they are changing and have changed over time.
3. Amongst its findings the Pew Research Centre found:
 - (i) Government restrictions on religion increased globally between 2007 and 2017 in all four categories studied (favouritism of religious groups, general laws and policies restricting religious freedom, harassment of religious groups, and limits on religious activity). The latest data shows that 52 governments – including some in very populous countries like China, Indonesia and Russia – imposes either “high” or “very high” levels of restrictions on religion, up from 40 in 2007.
 - (ii) Social hostilities involving religion increased in a few categories, but levels of interreligious tension and violence, also known as sectarian or communal violence, have declined globally. The number of countries

²³ Other examples of actors engaged in monitoring, documenting and reporting on FoRB for all include: the US State Department, the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, the US Helsinki Commission, Freedom House, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Minority Rights Group International and Forum 18. There are other organisations that do this but with a focus on specific groups. These include: Humanists International (humanists, atheists and other non-believers); International Human Rights Committee (Ahmadis); Jehovah’s Witnesses International (Jehovah Witnesses); Middle East Concern (Christians); Shia Rights Watch (Shia Muslims); Open Doors (Christians) and the World Evangelical Alliance (Christians).

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- where people are experiencing the highest levels of social hostilities involving religion has risen from 39 to 56 over the course of the study.
- (iii) The level of religious restrictions is highest in the Middle East and North Africa region in all categories measured by the study. The gap between the Middle East and all other regions is particularly large when it comes to government favouritism of religious groups, but the levels of religious violence by organized groups (such as terrorist groups) have also spiked in the region.
 - (iv) In certain categories, some of the biggest increases in religious restrictions over the past decade have occurred in Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. In Europe, government limits on religious activity has doubled and government harassment of religious groups category has gone up by about 70%. In sub-Saharan Africa, government favouritism of religious groups has increased by more than 50%, and in both regions, there has been a marked rise in social hostilities related to religious norms.
4. From a public policy perspective, even research provided by bodies such as Pew needs to be treated with caution. The process of collating, analysing and publishing the data means there is invariably at least a year's time lag from start to finish.²⁴ This does not negate the value of such reports in terms of tracking trends or signally whether categories of abuse are rising or falling, but it does mean that for the most part policy makers lack a clear, reliable and real time picture of FoRB restrictions and dynamics around the world which impacts their ability to develop suitable policy responses. Some NGOs have tried to remedy this gap by using their networks to produce their own annual reports or surveys. These reports help to keep the issue of FoRB in front of parliamentarians and governments, but despite their best efforts these reports are piecemeal and at best only provide a snapshot in time of violations.
 5. Focusing too heavily on headline messages risks oversimplifying situations and leading to conclusions detached from wider contextual analysis. The situation of religious minorities in Iraq is a case in point. While the mass-killings and destruction of towns in the Nineveh Plains has drawn considerable international attention in recent years, this came against a long backdrop of religious minorities being inadequately protected by the constitution, marginalised in society, and subjected to regular violence (which was also exacerbated by the prevailing absence of security following the 2003 invasion and lack of adequate planning about the aftermath).²⁵ Likewise, while the most serious individual cases of persecution in Pakistan receive extensive global attention, these are generally underpinned by less visible systemic

²⁴ The 2014 Pew Research Centre's Report helpfully showed that more than 5.3 billion people – equivalent to 76% of the world's population live in countries with a high or very high level of restrictions on religion - up from 74% in 2011 and 68% as of mid-2007.

²⁵ See speech by Archbishop Warda: catholicbishops.ie/2011/03/16/christians-iraq-address-archbishop-bashar-warda-erbil-northern-iraq

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factors including discriminatory legislation, hate speech, and bias in educational curriculums.²⁶

6. It follows from this, that responses to specific FoRB violations should not be treated in their own right - rather they need to be integrated into wider strategies for democratisation, development and peacebuilding as FoRB violations are most likely to occur in contexts of conflict, authoritarianism and states where there is religious dominance. In situations like North Korea or Kachin state in Burma, framing human rights as simply as 'Christian persecution', isn't always helpful and does little to address the driving factors affecting Christian communities there. In the case of North Korea, the regime is suppressing all civil society, while in Myanmar, the government is targeting the Kachin as an ethnic group in the context of a massive resource/land grab.
7. The emphasis on context underlines the importance of ensuring that, where possible and where the circumstances allow, any intervention is locally owned and relevant, involving credible actors through tailored made capacity building, training and networking. This requires being reflexive to local understandings of need when framing interventions. Achieving the necessary behavioural change invariably takes time and persistence. All of this invariably challenges governments and civil society actors alike – there are no simple solutions and the success of any intervention is unlikely to be seen across the span of one election or funding cycle.

²⁶ See *Human Rights Monitor 2018: a report on the religious minorities in Pakistan* (National Commission for Justice and Peace, Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference)

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Appendix 3

FoRB and UK foreign and development policy

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1. In recent years there has been a renaissance of FoRB in UK foreign and development policy. There has been evidence of the government working with the United Nations and other global organisations to create an international consensus to support FoRB. At country level Ministers and officials have often raised individual cases with their hosts and lobby on behalf of the UK against practices and laws that discriminate on the basis of FoRB. They have been helped in this by the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) FoRB Toolkit that was drawn up in 2009 and then re-issued in 2016.²⁷ The FCDO now supports through Aid Connect, the Magna Carta Fund and the John Bunyan Fund (created as a recommendation of the Truro Review) - projects that promote respect for all people of faith and those of no faith.
 2. Notwithstanding the progress that has been made, and the energy and commitment of individual champions within the FCDO, the impression remains that the dominant culture within the FCDO is one that sees FoRB as a problematic right - either at odds with other rights, such as women's rights, or as a 'Western Christian' right best promoted through an array of associated rights, such as the right to assembly. At times the FCDO has displayed an institutional reticence to FoRB that reflects at best a lack of understanding of what FoRB entails and at worst a deep-seated queasiness that suggests that doing FoRB means doing 'God' or 'Belief' rather than doing human rights. Either way, Ministers and officials have tended to self-censor whenever this human right is impinged, while official publications such as the FCDO's Annual Human Rights Report only pay scant regard to this right.

Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians

3. It is against this uneven background that the then Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, announced on the 26 December 2018 he was commissioning the Bishop of Truro, the Rt Revd Philip Mounstephen, to undertake an independent review into the "levels of persecution and other discrimination against Christians in key countries around the world" with a view to providing an "objective assessment of the impact and levels of FCO support". The Review's core tasks, as set out in its Terms of Reference (ToR), were to map the extent and nature of the global persecution of Christians; to assess the quality of the response of the FCO, and to make recommendations for changes in both policy and practice.

²⁷https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/561516/Freedom_of_Religion_or_Belief_Toolkit_-_2016.pdf

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4. Working against a tight deadline, the Bishop of Truro released an interim report in early May 2019 and the final report in mid-July 2019.²⁸ The final Report, published on 8 July 2019, consisted of 22 Recommendations to the FCDO which are reproduced as Appendix 5.
5. The Review identified significant intersections between FoRB and other issues that are certainly of concern to the FCO: issues such as gender inequality, modern slavery, forced marriage, people trafficking, poverty reduction and security concerns. Where FoRB is compromised these issues are significantly exacerbated. It also identified key drivers behind the denial of FoRB: major organised crime; authoritarian regimes; militant nationalism and religious fundamentalism (often in combination). Again, such issues ought to be of core concern to FCDO. A key argument was that taking FoRB seriously would enable the FCDO to improve its performance and delivery more broadly.
6. The Review found that the FCO's approach to the issue was at best varied, with *inter alia* significant regional variations in approach; a lack of informed religious literacy and understanding of faith as a key component in individual and communal identity; inconsistent use of the FoRB Toolkit and even ignorance of its existence; a local approach that was too dependent on the preferences of individual diplomats; and a tendency to underestimate issues of faith as an issue in the discriminatory treatment of minorities.
7. 22 recommendations were made under the three headings. The first '**Strategy and Structures**' argued that FoRB should be central to the FCO's culture, policies and international operations, including setting up in perpetuity of the office of the PM's Special Envoy for FoRB. The second, '**Education and Engagement**' called for the FCO to invest in religious literacy and to use that understanding to develop religiously literate local operational approaches that take context seriously. Under the third heading, '**Consistency and Co-ordination**' the Review called for a consistent approach across government including using the UK's seat on Security Council to seek a resolution calling for the protection of faith minorities in MENA region.
8. The recommendations were subsequently accepted in full not just by the FCO but by government as a whole, a fact confirmed in the Conservative manifesto of December 2019 and subsequently by the PM. While the weight given to each recommendation remains in doubt, according to the then PM's Special Envoy for Religious Freedom, as of August 2020, 11 of the 22 Recommendations had been taken forward.²⁹

²⁸ The Bishop of Truro's Interim Report and Final Report, alongside supporting documentation, can be accessed at <https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/> The Final Report's Recommendations are set out in Appendix 2.

²⁹ House of Commons, Hansard, Column 193WH, 12 March 2020.

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FoRB, COVID-19 and the future of British foreign and development policy

9. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, British foreign and development policy, and the assumptions that underpinned it for over 40 years, faced upheaval as a result of Brexit. It remains unclear how the pandemic will play out, but it is already impacting significantly on the future shape of British foreign policy: it changes Britain's foreign and development policy priorities; it adds new priorities and accelerates and exacerbates existing challenges facing Britain.
10. It's hard to understand at this stage the scale of economic dislocation that the government will be facing in the international economy, but it will spill over into international diplomacy and foreign and development policy. The crisis will impact not only the resources available for Britain's foreign, development, defence and security policy, but how those resources will be distributed. The government's decision to seek to temporarily reduce the international development budget from 0.7% GNI to 0.5% GNI and to use that funding to support more broadly configured foreign policy objectives is one such example of this trend.
11. Looking forward, the government will be dealing with the health implications of the crisis, nationally and internationally for some time to come. The government will be doing this against a significant global economic downturn, high levels of debt, unemployment and fiscal challenges which will change the government's priorities and the public mood. This will increase the priority on trade and investment. Covid-19 is also fuelling a crisis in the developing world which will require very high levels of aid to respond to humanitarian emergencies and increased migration flows. Alongside these new challenges the government is navigating a new relationship with the European Union (EU). Covid-19 is already exacerbating tensions between the US and China which will impact on wider geo-politics and geo-economics and in turn the UK's relationship with China, the US and the EU. All in all, Britain's future room for manoeuvre and its ability to affect change is likely to be limited.
12. Within this mix, it is possible that some existing priorities will be downplayed. First amongst these is the whole values agenda - the hallmark of British foreign and development policy since New Labour. The government's preoccupation with economic recovery risks eclipsing human rights concerns as Britain seeks to attract foreign investment and secure new trade deals.³⁰ It is disappointing that the government rejected a cross-party amendment, the so-called Genocide Amendment (also known as the Alton Amendment) that aimed to equip the High Court to make a determination of genocide, a determination that could then be subsequently used to revoke international bilateral trade agreements with the state standing accused of committing genocide.
13. While new opportunities will emerge for international cooperation, the post-1945 multilateral system is likely to remain under pressure from the re-

³⁰ As of 2019, the Department for International Trade had established offices in fifteen countries about which the FCO explicitly raised concerns regarding FoRB in its most recent Human Rights and Democracy Report.

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emergence of nationalism, protectionism and the drive towards self-sufficiency. Geopolitical tensions arising from the move to a multi-polar world and the risk of a new Cold War, this time between China and the West is likely to see the values underpinning the ‘world order’ being contested.

14. Faced with a far from benign environment, both at home and abroad, the Government’s bandwidth for championing FoRB could become strained. The appointment of a standalone Prime Minister’s Envoy for Religious Freedom is a positive development, but Covid-19 has already seen a redeployment of human resources away from this office which could impact the delivery of the Review’s recommendations. While the FCO’s overall FoRB team has been strengthened, it is vital that the momentum created by the Truro Review be maintained, and Government held to its commitment to implementation.
15. This at a time when new opportunities for international cooperation on FoRB are emerging. In February 2002, the US Secretary of State launched the International Religious Freedom Alliance – a network of likeminded countries committed to advancing freedom of religion or belief around the world.³¹ The UK, through the Prime Minister’s former Special Envoy, is an energetic and enthusiastic member of the Alliance, which now comprises some 40 plus countries.
16. And yet, without the proper resourcing and a transformation in the FCDO’s understanding of FoRB the UK’s involvement in such forums will provide nothing more than media friendly opportunities to be seen to be doing something to respond to the evident international evil. The government’s commitment to FoRB shouldn’t be measured against whether it hosts a large Ministerial Conference on FoRB in 2022, as it is expected to do COVID-19 depending, but rather whether such an initiative is allied with a realistic and credible plan and appropriate funding to have a noticeable impact on the ground.³²
17. On the domestic front, the government has introduced a Magnitsky-style sanctions regime “to tackle human rights abusers head on” and has shown a willingness in placing visa bans and asset freezes on those individuals deemed responsible for serious human rights abuses. This is a major development – one that could pay significant dividends if targeted against those responsible for systematically abusing people’s rights to FoRB, And yet, without focused attention and robust engagement with the State in question it risks being reduced to nothing more than virtue signalling with little to no impact on those that suffer because of their faith or belief.

³¹ <https://www.state.gov/declaration-of-principles-for-the-international-religious-freedom-alliance/>

³² To date there have been 2 Ministerial conferences to Advance Religious Freedom (2018 and 2019) that have been hosted by the US State Department. <https://www.state.gov/ministerial-to-advance-religious-freedom/> The Polish Government announced in February 2020 it would host the 3rd such Ministerial in Warsaw in July 2020. <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/poland-us-joint-statement-on-ministerial-to-advance-religious-freedom> The aim is to bring together leaders from around the world to discuss the challenges facing religious freedom, identify means to address religious persecution and discrimination worldwide, and promote greater respect and preservation of religious liberty for all. Due to Covid-19, the 3rd Ministerial has been postponed till September 2020.

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18. Targeted sanctions against named individuals cannot be an easy way to signal UK disapproval about human rights abuses without impacting on core strategic or economic relationship. The Government's decision to resume arms sales with Saudi Arabia a day after targeting 20 of the Kingdom's nationals with sanctions for their involvement in the killing of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 and a week after negotiating a UN Security Council Resolution supporting a Covid-19 global ceasefire, is a case in point and suggests that Britain's foreign and development policy going forward is likely to be selectively ethical.
19. The Government shouldn't shy away from using targeted sanctions when there is clear and compelling evidence of mass atrocities. In this sense it is disappointing that the government has yet to apply sanctions against named individuals in China for their well-documented complicity in perpetuating gross human rights abuses against the Uyghurs..
20. At the moment the Brexit aspiration of 'Global Britain', described by Dominic Raab, the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Secretary as "expanding our global horizons" and reinforcing "our national mission as a force for good in the world", remains a campaign slogan. Britain's policy towards China is riddled with contradictions. Securing the values dimension in 'Global Britain' and in any future narrative about British foreign policy should not be taken for granted given the immense challenges facing the government.
21. Securing this agenda will require the persistent engagement by civil society, faith leaders, parliamentarians and others to ensure that both the public and the government recognise that championing the human rights agenda in general and FoRB in particular is not only the right thing to do but the smart one. This will require greater collaboration between actors than exists now.
22. There are moves to meet this need. The UK FoRB Forum was set up in late 2020 to bring together nearly 80 interested and concerned parties to share information from the field with the overall objective of developing effective advocacy coalitions and platforms. Modelled in part on the International Religious Freedom Roundtable in the US, this Forum is part of an emerging global network of civil society spaces holding governments, organisations and individuals to account for FoRB abuses.
23. While it remains too soon to know what impact this Forum will have long term, it has already enabled collaborative action between e.g. CSW and Humanists UK, and its existence gives encouragement that civil society actors recognise the importance of collaboration. Similarly, it remains too early to say whether the new US Administration will have the same appetite for this issue and if not whether the architecture which the Trump administration spawned – International Religious Freedom Alliance and the global network of Roundtables (alongside the existing statutory architecture of the post Ambassador for International Religious Freedom and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom) - will have resonance and traction going forward.

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Appendix 4

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and Church of England Submission to Independent Review of FCO support for persecuted Christians

1. The Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales and the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council welcomes the decision by the Foreign Secretary to launch an independent Review of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) support for persecuted Christians.
2. The focus of this submission is on an assessment of FCO support for persecuted Christians with particular attention given to those factors that impede the FCO's ability to provide such support. It is informed by our understanding that we are all part of the body of Christ and that when one part suffers, every part suffers with it (1 Corinthians 12: 24-27). Wherever this happens we seek to stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers through physical presence, material assistance, prayer and by making their voices heard in the UK.
3. The focus of this Review is therefore not of passing academic interest, but rather one that recognises that while we have a responsibility to stand up for freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) wherever it is under threat and whoever the victims are, the suffering of Christians worldwide is one of deep, heartfelt and immediate concern to the Church here in the UK.
4. This submission does not provide a comprehensive assessment and analysis of existing evidence of the contemporary persecution of and other discrimination against Christians. We welcome and recognise the specific expertise that specialised agencies bring to this debate and we very much hope that the Review will engage seriously with the detailed geographical submissions made by these agencies on this point.
5. Given the significance of this Review, we have also encouraged other Church based agencies that might not necessarily see themselves as being expert in the field of human rights and religious freedom, but who nonetheless have considerable experience of working with Christian communities overseas - often in the most hostile of locations - to reflect on their own experiences and if appropriate make their own submissions to the Review.

Summary of Recommendations

- The government should focus on promoting FoRB as a fundamental human right, rather than limiting its attention to specific religious communities.
- The government should take a joined-up approach to FoRB in foreign, aid, security, trade, resettlement and asylum policy, rather than treating it as an isolated diplomatic activity.

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- Human rights should be at the heart of trade negotiations. Future *Human Rights and Democracy Reports* should include a summary of trade agreements with human rights priority countries and human rights standards incorporated in them – including those relating to FoRB.
- Sanctuary should be offered on the basis of need not background, but measures should be taken to ensure that religious minorities have access to resettlement programmes (taking account of religion or belief as a vulnerability criterion where appropriate).
- In addition to reviewing the training provided to staff on human rights, further attention needs to be given to improving the religious literacy of ministers, ambassadors and diplomats.
- The Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief should be a dedicated post, not combined with other roles.
- Diplomatic posts should provide mandatory reports about the FoRB situation in their respective countries.
- Promoting women's right to religious freedom should be recognised as an important part of work on gender equality.
- Training about local faith communities should be given to diplomats in advance of postings.
- Training on FoRB should be included as one of the Faculties provided by the Diplomatic Academy and linked to career progression.
- Heads of Mission (or other appropriately senior staff) should routinely meet with local faith communities and these meetings should be centrally logged.
- Heads of Mission in parts of the world where FoRB is under threat should also be encouraged to meet representatives of respective faith communities when they are in the UK.
- A session on FoRB, involving academics and expert practitioners, should be included as a matter of routine in the annual Leaders Conference for ambassadors.
- The FCO's Freedom of Religion or Belief Toolkit should be actively used by all diplomatic posts and this use should be routinely monitored.
- A target should be set to increase the amount spent on FoRB initiatives through funding streams such as the Magna Carta Fund.
- The Foreign Affairs Select Committee should annually scrutinise the government's work promoting FoRB.
- The government's approach to FoRB should not only focus on the most egregious manifestations of persecution (e.g. mass killings) but also address less visible systemic issues (e.g. discriminatory legislation) including in democratic states.

Broadening the Review's Terms of Reference

6. While we welcome this Review, we are disappointed that the Terms of Reference are limited to the FCO rather than including other Whitehall departments and bodies, not least the Department for International

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Development and the Department for International Trade (but also the Cabinet Office, National Security Council and the Home Office). The Government's work promoting FoRB should not be seen as an isolated strand of diplomatic activity, but incorporated into aid, trade, resettlement, asylum and security policy.³³ For example:

- a. Some of the critical long-term challenges to Christian communities and other religious minorities experiencing persecution are linked to poverty or economic hardship. Daesh's destruction of Christian towns in Northern Iraq has meant that even after the immediate physical threat subsided, whole communities have been left without homes, basic facilities or livelihoods, threatening their future in the country.³⁴ The UK's response to this predicament should therefore include aid for reconstruction and job creation, working through local churches who are often the most effective partners on the ground.
- b. Trade negotiations should have human rights at their centre and provide an important opportunity for addressing the persecution of minorities in countries we have an economic relationship with. The Department for International Trade (which has established offices in twelve 'human rights priority countries' where the FCO has raised concerns about FoRB violations) should make human rights including FoRB an intrinsic part of its mission.³⁵
- c. The FCO's *Human Rights and Democracy Reports* should include a summary of trade agreements with human rights priority countries and details of any human rights standards incorporated in these, including those relating to FoRB.
- d. Sanctuary should be offered on the basis of people's need and not their background. However, it is important to ensure that the structure of resettlement programmes does not inadvertently exclude particular groups, especially religious minorities who are often the most severely affected by conflict. The Government's 2017 decision to expand its Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) to non-Syrian nationals was a very welcome step, opening up the possibility of resettlement for more refugees from minority groups including Christians and Yazidis with Iraqi citizenship.³⁶ As the Government develops successor programmes to the VPRS, it should consider further measures to ensure religious minorities are protected, including taking account of religion or belief as a

³³ The Fusion Doctrine could provide a model for this.

³⁴ Listen to Bishop Paul McAleenan reflect on his recent visit to Northern Iraq and the challenges facing Christian communities there: catholicnews.org.uk/Home/News/2018/Northern-Iraq

³⁵ The Department for International Trade has established offices in Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka and Turkmenistan – all of which were identified as human rights priority countries with explicitly-referenced FoRB concerns in the *Human Rights and Democracy Report (2017)*.

³⁶ See response from Cardinal Vincent Nichols: catholicnews.org.uk/Home/News/2017/Non-Syrian-Refugees

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vulnerability criterion when there is clear evidence that people are being targeted on this basis.

7. We recognise that these fall outside the scope of this Review. However, especially given the many concerns that have been raised about issues such as aid, trade and resettlement in relation to FoRB it is disappointing that the Government did not use the opportunity for a broader review of its policies and practices.

Freedom of religion or belief - a universal right

8. Our understanding on these issues is framed by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

9. In 1993 the United Nations Human Rights Committee made a 'general comment' on Article 18, highlighting Article 18's protective remit beyond traditional faith systems:

Article 18 protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. The terms belief and religion are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions.

10. This is a position that both of our churches share, recognising that FoRB is a fundamental component of people's human dignity and should never be compromised.³⁷
11. Despite the non-binding nature of the Declaration it has inspired more than 80 international human rights treaties and declarations, a great number of regional human rights conventions, domestic human rights bills, and constitutional provisions, which together constitute a comprehensive legally binding system for the promotion and protection of human rights. This system is widely considered to reflect customary international law binding on all states.
12. We are aware that despite this human rights framework, FoRB is under duress in many parts of the world and that many are being denied this right in

³⁷ See for example: Church of England Synod debate on *Violence against Religious Minorities in Iraq and Syria* 2014 (churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/General%20Synod%2017-18%20November%202014%20FULL%20FINAL.pdf); and Bishop Declan Lang, *Stand up against the persecution of Atheists around the world* 2016 (catholicnews.org.uk/Home/News/2016/January-March/Persecution-of-Atheists)

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the most gross and systemic way possible, including in some instances the attempted extermination of religious minorities.

13. We hope that this Review will lead to recommendations that, while specifically focused on the situation of Christians, will strengthen the FCO's overall commitment to defending FoRB for all as set out in Article 18 UDHR.
14. Without a broader reconfiguration of how the FCO understands religious freedom as a key human right rather than an optional extra; it is difficult to see how the Government's support for persecuted and discriminated-against religious minorities, Christian or otherwise, can be anything but piecemeal.

Why freedom of religion of belief matters

15. All too often the impression is given by officials that Article 18 UDHR is a secondary human right and that limited departmental resources should be directed elsewhere. This situation is unlikely to change until such time as officials understand why FoRB matters and the benefits that are to be accrued from a more public defence of this right.
16. At an individual level FoRB enables individuals to follow what their conscience dictates. People are entitled to FoRB by virtue of their humanity. They are entitled to live their lives with authenticity and integrity in line with their best judgments of conscience. This authenticity and integrity is compromised when there is coercion or compulsion in these matters. We recognise that while this freedom is absolute, the capacity to follow the dictates of conscience can be subject to a range of carefully circumscribed limitations.
17. For the vast majority of people around the world religion matters. Some 84% of the world's population identify with a specific religious group. For billions of people it is therefore an inescapable part of identity and meaning. It follows that they want the freedom to practice their religion or belief system without coercion or to be forced to practice one they do not adhere to.³⁸ When this freedom is impaired human flourishing is impaired.
18. FoRB, including the freedom to change one's religion or belief, is an important barometer of human rights more broadly. Abuses of this specific right are often an early indication that all is not well politically and that established democratic checks and balances have been corrupted. Restrictions on religious freedom are often accompanied by other human rights infringement such as the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

³⁸ The right to manifest, practice and express one's belief in private or public, alone or in community with others is a key characteristic of FoRB and set out in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. ICCPR's General Comment 22 sets out the broad scope of this right while Article 18.3 ICCPR makes clear that the freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

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19. In some countries and in some instances, restrictions to FoRB have been justified on religious grounds. Invariably these are distortions and perversions of religion which should be opposed.
20. Research shows that religious freedom is a key ingredient to peace and stability.³⁹ When governments enforce laws that restrict religious freedom, they embolden extremists to commit violence against perceived transgressors. When governments fail to protect religious freedom, this can drive those affected into the embracing arms of radical groups and movements which can in turn give rise to conflicts which have religious overtones.
21. When governments attempt to crack down on everyone's liberty in the name of fighting extremists, it can strengthen the hands of extremists by weakening more liberal opposition. As President Obama put it in his Cairo speech of 2009, "freedom of religion is central to the ability of people to live together."
22. An important tool to help defeat terrorism is the ability to persuade people to reject the extremist ideologies that support it. In the struggle for global safety and security, FoRB is a powerful and effective means of countering violent religious extremists. Seen from this perspective, defending this right and protecting those most at risk from abuse is an important counter-terrorism strategy.
23. Matters of FoRB are woven throughout many of the greatest foreign policy challenges facing us so it is self-evident that we must have an effective, religiously informed, philosophically sound strategy to guide how our Government will protect and promote it abroad.
24. A study undertaken by Georgetown University suggests that FoRB is a key ingredient in a country's economic growth.⁴⁰ Religious persecution can destabilise communities and marginalise whole groups of people causing their creative talents and gifts to go unrealised. This impoverishes individuals, communities and wider society.
25. At a civic level, when FoRB is denied, countries surrender the tangible benefit that religious belief may yield through the process of empowering individuals to exercise positive and responsible citizenship. Religious hostilities and restrictions also create climates that can drive away local and foreign investment, undermine sustainable development, and disrupt huge sectors of economies.
26. It follows that FoRB is not only a basic human right, but it is also important for the democratic and economic situation of a state, the wellbeing of its citizens and the stability and peace among its inhabitants. Neglecting this freedom can

³⁹ Brian Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom*, Cambridge, 2011

⁴⁰ The full report *Is Religious Freedom Good for Business?: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis* is available on the website of the Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion (IJRR).

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have far-reaching and serious consequences both nationally and internationally.

27. Above all, we must recognise that FoRB is of great importance to everyone – whether religious, agnostic or atheist. Defending this right is not a sign of a state’s religiosity, but rather an indicator of good statecraft and the marker of a civilised state. Advocating FoRB and defending this right when it is threatened is now more than ever about advocating peace.

The UK’s response

28. The promotion of FoRB needs to be clearly articulated in a strategy paper and subsequent operational plans and resource allocation. We welcome the Prime Minister’s decision to create the post of a Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and we hope that this position will be maintained under future governments. But, while recognising the need for efficiency across Government we do not believe that the responsibilities associated with this post can be adequately fulfilled when the incumbent is also the PM’s Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN. Combining these roles is too much for any one individual.
29. Responsibility for safeguarding FoRB rests not only at ministerial level but also with diplomatic posts, which should provide mandatory reports about the FoRB situation in their respective countries.
30. Notwithstanding the FCO’s Freedom of Religion or Belief Toolkit, the impression is given that FCO officials see Article 18 as a problematic right and one that is either at odds with other rights, such as women’s rights, or it is seen as a ‘Western Christian’ right and one that is best promoted through an array of associated rights, such as the right to assembly. Either way Article 18 is downgraded with the result, as noted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Religious Freedom, that this most basic of rights becomes orphaned with Ministers and officials apparently self-censoring whenever its impinged. The FCO needs to show greater self-confidence when defending core human rights, of which this is one.
31. So long as this situation remains unchecked, the FCO is unlikely to be able to provide appropriate and proportionate support for Christians, or indeed for other religious minorities and discriminated-against groups. We recommend that further attention be given to how the FCO undertakes training on human rights issues.
32. The ways that FoRB and women’s rights depend on each other and strengthen each other are often overlooked and underexplored.⁴¹ Important human rights conventions uphold religious freedom as a right for each individual, including women. Promoting women’s right to religious freedom

⁴¹ Professor Nazila Ghanea, *Women and Religious Freedom: Synergies and Opportunities*, US Commission for International Religious Freedom 2017

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should be seen as an important and integrated part in the work of gender equality.

33. In addition to reviewing the training provided to staff on human rights, we recommend that further attention be given to improving the religious literacy of ministers, ambassadors and diplomats. Any decisions or advocacy affecting faith communities must be informed by a strong comprehension of different traditions, sensitivities and historical contexts. Training about local faith communities should be given in advance of postings (possibly alongside language training).
34. While some staff receive specific training on FoRB, the effectiveness, content and application is currently unclear and should form part of the focus of this Review. So long as the existing training module is voluntary rather than mandatory then it is doubtful that the training will reach those who need it most. If the FCO is serious in its commitment, then training should not be provided as an optional course, but rather included as one of the Faculties provided by the Diplomatic Academy and linked to career progression.
35. Diplomatic posts must also be informed by regular engagement at an ambassadorial or appropriately senior level with local faith communities. There is currently no centralised recording of such engagement, which could help to identify limitations in communication with or understanding of different faiths. The US *International Religious Freedom Report* lists representatives of faith groups that each diplomatic post has met over the preceding year, with varying degrees of detail to account for sensitivity and security. Adopting a similar system may facilitate better scrutiny of country-level activity and strengthen the UK's work in this area.
36. Ambassadors in parts of the world where FoRB is at risk should be encouraged to engage with the respective faith communities here in the UK. We are aware that some ambassadors do this on their own initiative, but it is a practice that could be encouraged more widely. Similarly, we suggest including within the annual Heads of Mission Leadership Conference a session on FoRB involving experts in the field.
37. We hope that these steps might help to nurture a more receptive environment for the FCO's Freedom of Religion or Belief Toolkit. This is a valuable resource, and the Government should be congratulated for commissioning it, but it is evident from our interactions with embassy staff that there is either a lack of awareness that this resource exists or a reluctance to operationalise it with the net result that for the most part it remains a well-intentioned document gathering dust on embassy bookshelves.
38. We were encouraged that when we shared our concerns with the Head of the Human Rights and Democracy Department in 2017 that steps were taken leading to the FCO Minister for Human Rights writing to all embassies commending the resource. This was a welcome step and underlines that relevant ministers are receptive to change, but the incident underlines the lack

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of systematic monitoring and evaluation of how core guidelines produced in London are taken up by diplomatic posts around the world. Sadly, our interactions with embassy staff since this communication suggests that little has changed.

39. Further attention also needs to be given to funding of FoRB projects. It is welcome that FoRB has been included as a thematic area of interest in the invitation of bids for the Magna Carta fund; however, it is notable that in 2017/18 just 7.2% of the fund was spent on projects in this area. While the allocation of funds will always be determined to a great extent by applications received, proactively aiming to increase the amount spent on FoRB initiatives would give weight to the FCO's commitments and have a very practical impact in supporting those facing persecution.
40. Critically, the government's work to promote FoRB will require continuous and rigorous accountability – which could be provided through annual scrutiny by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee.

A universal right under duress

41. While the focus of this Review is on the persecution of Christians, we recommend that the Review contextualises its work within a wider understanding that FoRB is under duress across the world. This is not to downplay the suffering experienced by Christians, indeed Christians probably suffer by far the most harassment and persecution, but focusing on the persecution of individuals from one religion without due regard to an understanding of broader dynamics is likely to skew the Review's analysis and recommendations.
42. We are aware that attempting to systematically quantify FoRB in different countries around the world – and therefore the extent to which Article 18 is complied with – is not straightforward. As the UDHR is not in itself legally enforceable, instances where Article 18 has not been adhered to are not always clearly identifiable or necessarily formally documented.
43. We are also aware that there is no international consensus on how to define or measure persecution. This is a problem that the Review will need to grapple with. However, one aspect of persecution seems to be constant, namely violence or the threat of violence towards individuals because of their religion or belief either by a state or non-state actors.
44. Notwithstanding difficulties in measuring FoRB, the insights and experiences of our communities across the world reflect that this a right under serious and sustained pressure. That is also consistent with the understanding of organisations responsible for monitoring and analysing violations.⁴²

⁴² The 2014 Pew Research Centre's Report which finds that restrictions on religion – whether resulting from government policies or from social hostilities – are high or very high in 43% of countries, a six-year high. Because some of these countries are very populous, it is calculated that more than 5.3 billion people –

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45. Different types of religious hostilities singled out by the Pew Research Centre's 2014 Report include: abuse of religious minorities by private individuals or groups in society for acts perceived as offensive or threatening to the majority faith; violence or the threat of violence used to compel people to adhere to religious norms; mob violence related to religion; religion-related terrorist violence and sectarian violence. This is a useful matrix that the Review could usefully adopt when framing its own analysis.
46. While FoRB violations are often an aspect of some larger conflict with complex roots, the fact that minority groups are so often identified as the proxies for other resentments shows that religion or belief continues to be a mark of vulnerability to violence and coercion.
47. Knowing about a problem is the first step towards its solution. While the FCO's engagement in freedom of religion or belief issues is highlighted through the annual *Human Rights and Democracy Reports*, this approach often lacks consistency and depth. Adopting a process modelled on the US State Department *International Religious Freedom Report* would create a sharper focus, allowing trends, gaps and opportunities to be identified. It would also facilitate greater scrutiny of the FCO's work in this area.
48. It is important to not only focus on the most egregious manifestations of persecution or discrimination. Even in democratic states, unjust policy or legislation may impact upon religious minorities. Following their recent visit to the Christian community in Israel, an international delegation of Catholic and Anglican Bishops reflected that *"along with other Palestinian Arab citizens and migrants living in Israel, many Christians find themselves systematically discriminated against and marginalised."*⁴³
49. The suffering of Christians in other countries such as Iraq is unambiguously of a completely different magnitude, but their experience also highlights the importance of addressing less visible systematic persecution. While the mass-killings and destruction of towns in the Nineveh Plains has drawn considerable international attention in recent years, this came against a long backdrop of religious minorities being inadequately protected by the constitution, marginalised in society, and subjected to regular violence (which was also exacerbated by the prevailing absence of security following the 2003 invasion and lack of adequate planning about the aftermath).⁴⁴ Likewise, while the most serious individual cases of persecution in Pakistan receive extensive global attention, these are generally

equivalent to 76% of the world's population live in countries with a high or very high level of restrictions on religion. This is up from 74% in 2011 and 68% as of mid-2007.

⁴³ *Holy Land Coordination 2019 - Final Communiqué* (catholicnews.org.uk/Home/News/HLC19-Final-Communique)

⁴⁴ See speech by Archbishop Warda: catholicbishops.ie/2011/03/16/christians-iraq-address-archbishop-bashar-warda-erbil-northern-iraq

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underpinned by less visible systemic factors including discriminatory legislation, hate speech, and bias in educational curriculums.⁴⁵

Conclusion

50. Every day people across the world are facing discrimination, persecution or even death because of their beliefs. This is a grotesque violation of the human dignity innate to all people. The UK government has consistently spoken up for freedom of religion or belief but has so much more potential to make a real and lasting difference on the ground.
51. We hope that our submission and recommendations can contribute towards forming a bold strategy for defending this right. It is only through measurable actions, honest scrutiny and a lasting commitment to freedom of religion or belief for all, that the UK can meet its moral responsibility to protect those suffering persecution.

April 2019

⁴⁵ See *Human Rights Monitor 2018: a report on the religious minorities in Pakistan* (National Commission for Justice and Peace, Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference)

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Appendix 5

The Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO support for Persecuted Christians**Recommendations to the Foreign Secretary**

Strategy and Structures: Make Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) central to the FCO's culture, policies and international operations

1. Ensure FoRB, based on UDHR Article 18, and Article 18 of ICCPR and Article 27 of ICCPR where applicable, alongside other human rights and values, is central to FCO operation and culture by developing a clear framework of core values that will underlie its operations, to include a specific commitment to the upholding of rights of members of minorities. Investigate the feasibility of establishing a Diplomatic Code to reflect these values and enshrine them in strategic and operational guidelines.
2. Articulate an aspiration to be the global leader in championing FoRB, ensuring it is given due priority in the UK's engagement in multilateral institutions, focusing particularly on those most likely to have impact on religious persecution such as the UN Human Rights Council, OSCE and the Council of Europe. Engagement to include *inter alia*
 - i. An emphasis on FoRB based on Article 18 and 27 (UDHR, ICCPR), advocating this in the HRC Universal Periodic Review process as appropriate.
 - ii. Advocate that member states introduce a Special Envoy position for FoRB with a particular emphasis on members of religious minorities.
3. Name the phenomenon of Christian discrimination and persecution and undertake work to identify its particular character alongside similar definitions for other religions, to better inform and develop tailored FCO policies to address these.
4. Encourage the development of appropriate mechanisms, with international partners, using external sources as required, to gather reliable information and data on FoRB to better inform the development of international policy.
5. Bolster research into the critical intersection of FoRB and minority rights with both broader human rights issues (such as people trafficking, gender equality, gender based violence especially kidnapping, forced conversion and forced marriage) and other critical concerns for FCO such as security, economic activity, etc. recognising the potential for religious identity to be a key marker of vulnerability. Use such research to articulate FoRB-focussed policies to address these issues.
6. Establish suitable instruments / roles to monitor and implement such an approach, taking into consideration other international approaches, and specifically establishing permanently, and in perpetuity, the role of Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief with appropriate resources and

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authority to work across FCO departments supported by a Director General-level champion for FoRB.

7. Ensure that there are mechanisms in place to facilitate an immediate response to atrocity crimes, including genocide through activities such as setting up early warning mechanisms to identify countries at risk of atrocities, diplomacy to help de-escalate tensions and resolve disputes, and developing support to help with upstream prevention work. Recognising that the ultimate determination of genocide must be legal not political and respecting the UK's long held policy in this area, the FCO should nonetheless determine its policy in accordance with the legal framework and should be willing to make public statements condemning such atrocities.
8. Be prepared to impose sanctions against perpetrators of FoRB abuses.
9. Establish a 'John Bunyan' FoRB stream within the FCO Magna Carta Fund.⁴⁶
10. The Foreign Secretary to write to FCO funded 'arm's length' bodies to encourage them to consider developing an appropriate approach to FoRB.

Education and Engagement: Develop a religiously-literate local operational approach

11. Ensure that both general and contextual training in religious literacy and belief dynamics, including the FCO FoRB Tool Kit, is undertaken in all roles where this understanding is important (i.e. with other key FoRB players and contexts where FoRB is under threat), and to be undertaken before or at the start of each such deployment. Subject to cost and value for money considerations, roll out to all staff mandatory religious diversity and literacy e-training.
12. Establish a clear framework for reporting by Posts to include engagement with majority and minority religious leaders, local civil society and NGOs, plus engagement where appropriate with representatives of such diaspora communities in the UK with the articulation of consequent recommendations for action to be taken to support FoRB and counter abuses.
13. Develop and deliver tailored responses to FoRB violations at Post level2, in discussion with host governments as appropriate, in the broader context of developing strategies for democratisation, development, and peace building, to include inter alia:
 - i. Advocacy for religious protection
 - ii. Promotion of inclusive high-quality education for all, including members of religious minorities
 - iii. Addressing of socio-economic issues
 - iv. Encouraging high-level acts of unity

⁴⁶ In honour of the writer of Pilgrim's Progress; himself an advocate for religious freedom for which he was himself imprisoned.

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- v. Preserving Christian and other cultural heritage in Armed Conflict (Hague Convention)
 - vi. Fostering social cohesion
 - vii. Ensure that such approaches are collaborative and locally owned by members of religious majorities and minorities and leaders of civil society so as *inter alia* to avoid 'othering' and unintentional victimisation.
 - viii. Invest in local FoRB capacity building to that end (cf. FoRB role in Columbo).
14. Ensure FCO human rights reporting includes Christian persecution, where this is relevant. This will include the FCO Human Rights and Democracy Annual Report, and reporting from posts on human rights taking due account of evidence from civil society.
15. Continue to ensure diversity and inclusion principles are part of all in-country recruitment campaigns including for members of minorities. In countries where there is a need to recruit local staff to undertake face-to-face work with survivors of conflict, hiring managers should duly consider how to manage or reduce sensitivities of this work during the recruitment process.

Consistency and Co-ordination: Strengthen joined up thinking

16. The FCO to establish a Board chaired by the Director General champion for FoRB and supported by the FoRB team to advise cross-governmentally – in line with the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on FoRB's existing cross-governmental responsibilities – on the state of FoRB and rights for members of religious minorities globally and offer advice to other government departments as to how best to respond to the challenges presented.
17. The FCO to convene a working group for government departments and civil society actors to engage on the issue.
18. The Foreign Secretary, in close co-operation with the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on FoRB, to convene ministers across government to agree a consistent international approach to FoRB ultimately to establish a standard FoRB Scale of Persecution (to include discrimination through to extreme violence) for use across government departments.
19. The FCO to lead on, and invite, cross-government action in support of the UN International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief annually on the 22nd August and initiatives such as Red Wednesday in support of Persecuted Christians.
20. The FCO to use the United Kingdom's position, as a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council, to seek a Security Council Resolution to call on all governments in the MENA Region to:
- i. ensure the protection and security of Christians, and other faith minorities, in their respective countries;
 - ii. facilitate the establishment of security and protection arrangements for Christians, and other faith minorities, within the legal and governance structure of their respective countries;

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- iii. permit United Nations observers to monitor the protection and security arrangements for Christians and other faith minorities in their respective countries.

FCO also to consider taking a similar approach for other regions as appropriate.

21. Noting the wording of the Terms of Reference of the Independent Review that, 'other public authorities may wish to take note of the points of learning', the Foreign Secretary should write to ministerial counterparts in those authorities to encourage them to take note of the following areas. The Foreign Secretary should request a FoRB-focussed discussion at a future full Cabinet meeting to consider, inter alia, the following:
- i. Where UK actions are delegated to international institutions/agencies (such as UNHCR) minority visibility among beneficiaries should be a priority. Humanitarian law mandating no '*adverse distinction*' must not be used as a cover for making no distinctions at all and letting the majority community benefit disproportionately. The FCO, in its international engagement must resist any temptation to 'outsource' its obligations in this regard.
 - ii. FCO to champion the prosecution of ISIS perpetrators of sex crimes against Yazidi and Christian women, not only as terrorists.
 - iii. FCO to lead a cross-departmental evaluation and discussion of regional policy (for departments with an international focus) to recognise religious affiliation as a key vulnerability marker for members of religious minorities. In the light of the international observations identified in the course of this Independent Review regarding the negative consequences of the mantra of 'need not creed', active and urgent cross-governmental consideration must be given to rejecting this approach. The Foreign Secretary should reject the mantra in FCO foreign policy contexts entirely.
 - iv. Encourage government departments (with an international focus) to self-evaluate their policies on FoRB to ensure that they are continually advancing it.
 - v. Explore how social media strategies can promote FoRB and counter religious hate.
 - vi. Request both the World Service and the British Council to consider developing clear editorial / policy lines on this issue.

Organisational Feedback

22. All of these foreign policy recommendations to the Foreign Secretary should be reviewed independently in three years' time.

Philip Mounstephen
Bishop of Truro
4th July 2019