

Debate Pack

28 March 2025

CDP-0076 (2025)

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Persecution of Christians

1	Summary	2
2	Background	2
3	Press and media articles	5
4	Press releases	7
5	PQs	8
6	Debates	27
7	Statements	28
8	Early Day Motions	31

1 Summary

At 9.30am on Tuesday 8 April 2025 there will be a debate in Westminster Hall on the persecution of Christians. It will be led by Ruth Jones MP. The subject for debate was chosen by the Backbench Business Committee.

2 Background

2.1 The World Watch list 2025

The [World Watch list](#) is an annual report published by Open Doors, an NGO which supports Christians worldwide, and lists the 50 countries in which Christians face the “most extreme persecution”. A [parliamentary launch](#) for the [latest report, which covers 2024](#), was held in January 2025.

There is no internationally agreed definition of persecution. [Open Doors’ methodology](#) defines persecution as:

Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians.¹

This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalisation, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.²

The report also assesses incidents of violence and acts affecting private, family, community, national and church life, and ranks each country based on the number and nature of reported incidents. The [report for 2024](#) estimated:

- More than 380 million Christians live in situations subject to “high levels of persecution and discrimination”. This [compared to 340 million in 2021](#) (PDF).
- 1 in 7 Christians worldwide live in situations with at least “high” levels of persecution and discrimination, including 1 in 5 in Africa and 1 in 7 in Asia. This compared to [1 in 8 worldwide in 2021](#) (PDF).
- 4,476 Christians were killed for faith-related reasons in 2024. [70% of those killed were in Nigeria](#), where attacks on Christians have become

¹ Open Doors, [How does Open Doors define “persecution”?](#)

² As above

more common since 2020 as [part of a wider rise in political violence against civilians](#). Open Doors estimates the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons worldwide was 4,998 in 2024, 5,621 in 2023, 5,898 in 2022, and 4,761 in 2021.

- 7,679 churches and Christian properties were attacked in 2024, around half the 14,766 in 2023.
- North Korea, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and Sudan had the highest rates of reported persecution against Christians.³

North Korea has been consistently ranked as having one of the highest rates of persecution [since the World Watch List was first conducted in 1983](#). The number of countries ranked as conducting “extreme” or “very high” persecution has risen from 23 in 2015 to 60 in 2024.

2.2

Government actions on FoRB

The UK Government says promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is a priority in its human rights work internationally.

Open Doors UK also published an [Advocacy report](#) (PDF) in 2025, which makes several recommendations on UK Government action, including:

- Prioritising freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and making it central to engagement with other countries and in international organisations.
- Ensuring the Special Envoy for FoRB has sufficient resources and to “consider establishing the role permanently in statute” (see below).
- Introducing measures to ensure minority religious communities are not denied access to aid because of their religion or belief.
- Targeting programmes to address gender-specific persecution.
- Ensuring Artificial Intelligence and other emerging technologies are not used to persecute religious groups, and to establish global standards to this end.⁴

The Commons Library research briefing, [The UK and global Freedom of Religion or Belief](#), March 2025, sets out UK Government efforts and policy to promote and protect FoRB. This includes:

³ Open Doors, [World Watch List 2025: Compilation of all main documents](#) (PDF), January 2025, pp4, 5, 16, 20

⁴ Open Doors, [World Watch List: advocacy report 2025](#) (PDF), January 2025, p36

- The prioritisation of FoRB in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's work (section 4.1).
- The role of the Special Envoy for FoRB (section 4.2).
- UK aid spending on FoRB (section 4.3).
- UK diplomatic activity, including through the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (section 4.4).
- Sanctions against those who abuse human rights (section 4.5).
- Analysis and reports on the effectiveness of UK work on FoRB, including by the [government-commissioned Bishop of Truro report on Christian persecution in 2020](#) and the [Independent Commission for Aid Impact on UK aid and human rights overseas in 2023](#) (section 4.6).

In the 2019-24 parliament, the then Special Envoy for FoRB, Fiona Bruce MP, introduced a Private Member's Bill, [International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill 2022-23](#) (Bill 373), which would have placed the role of Special Envoy for FoRB onto a statutory footing. The bill would have required the government to provide staffing and other facilities to support the office.

While [the Conservative Government supported the bill](#) and [it passed all its Commons stages](#), proceedings in the Lords were not completed by the time the 2024 election was called and the bill did not become law.⁵

In the 2024-25 parliamentary session, [Jim Shannon MP has introduced a bill to put the role on a statutory footing](#). The Labour Government says [it has no plans to legislate](#) in the current session.⁶

⁵ See the Commons Library briefing, [Special envoy for FoRB bill 2023-24](#), May 2024

⁶ PQ 8437 [[Special envoy on FoRB](#)], 18 October 2024

3

Press and media articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[Young Christian in Pakistan brutally attacked for refusing to convert to Islam](#)

Catholic News Agency
Andrés Henríquez
26 March 2025

[Russia accused of persecuting Christians in Ukraine](#)

Newsweek
Isabel van Brugen
25 March 2025

[Misleading reports about ‘slaughter of Christians’ could endanger Syrians, says Open Doors expert](#)

Open Doors
13 March 2025

[How Christians are suffering extreme persecution around the world](#)

Newsweek
Jordan King
2 March 2025

[70 Christians found beheaded in church in DRC](#)

Open Doors
25 February 2025

[Persecution of Iranian Christians ‘on the rise’](#)

Church Times
Simon Walsh
7 February 2025

[Christians around the world facing rising levels of persecution, according to World Watch List](#)

The Tablet
Ellen Teague and Ngala Killian Chimtom
21 January 2025

[Almost 400 million Christians are persecuted. Why aren't more people talking about this?](#)

Premier Christianity

Henrietta Blyth

17 January 2025

[The 10 most dangerous places to be a Christian](#)

Open Doors

15 January 2025

[Anti-Christian persecution is an international problem: Britain should use its diplomatic influence to help](#)

The Critic

Michael Nazir-Ali

31 October 2024

[Why Nigeria is the most dangerous country in the world for Christians](#)

ADF International

Sean Nelson

18 June 2024

4

Press releases

[Independent assessment of FCDO support for persecuted Christians around the world: FCDO's response to the findings](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

4 July 2022

In response to recommendations from an independent assessment of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) support for persecuted Christians around the world, Lord Ahmad (FCDO Minister for South Asia, North Africa, the United Nations and the Commonwealth) said:

Freedom of religion or belief is a human right and should be a free choice for all, no matter where in the world you are.

In 2019, the [Bishop of Truro published a report](#) setting out recommendations for a strengthened UK government response to the horrifying abuses and persecution of Christians and other faiths around the world.

Three years on, I am pleased to welcome a [report on the findings of an independent review](#) carried out by Professor Nazila Ghanea, Sir Malcolm Evans KCMG OBE, Professor Ahmed Shaheed, Dr Gehan Gunatilleke and Dr Caroline K Roberts on the FCDO's implementation of the Bishop's review recommendations.

I welcome the review, and I am encouraged by what has been achieved so far in the face of many global challenges.

Standing up for freedom of faith or belief is a right which we will always stand up for. The UK is committed to promoting and strengthening the freedom of religion or belief as a fundamental human right for all – including through [hosting an international conference](#) this week bringing together governments, civil society, faith and belief groups.

5

PQs

Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda: Christianity

25 Mar 2025 | 38345

Asked by: Sir John Hayes

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to protect Christians from persecution in (a) Rwanda and (b) the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Answering member: Hamish Falconer | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Protection of civilians, promotion of respect between different religious and non-religious groups, and human rights are priorities for the UK. The UK continues to work through UN bodies and other multilateral fora to promote and protect these rights. Recent attacks by IS-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) on Christian communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are alarming and we are deeply saddened by the loss of life. Ministers and senior officials including our Ambassador in Kinshasa regularly raise the importance of civilian protection with the Government of DRC. The UK continues to remind all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law and make clear that all those who have committed human rights violations and abuses must be held accountable.

Syria: Christianity

19 Mar 2025 | 38133

Asked by: Lee Anderson

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help protect persecuted Christians in Syria.

Answering member: Hamish Falconer | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We are closely monitoring the treatment of all civilians in Syria, including those from the Christian community. In my Statement in Parliament on 10 March, and in the Foreign Secretary's public statement on 9 March, we made clear that the interim authorities must ensure the protection of all Syrians. I raised this with the Syrian Interim Foreign Minister, Asaad al-Shaibani, on 17 March, we consistently emphasise the need for a Syrian-led political transition that leads to an inclusive, non-sectarian and representative government.

EU Countries: Christianity

17 Mar 2025 | 37271

Asked by: Ruth Jones

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking with his European counterparts to help tackle anti-Christian hate crimes in Europe.

Answering member: Stephen Doughty | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

There is no space for religious intolerance in pluralistic, modern societies. We are championing the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and promoting tolerance and mutual respect through our engagement in multilateral fora, our bilateral work, and our programme funding. The Special Envoy for FoRB met with European and US counterparts in the margins of the 58th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in March. We actively participate in the Article 18 Alliance - bringing together 38 Member States, 26 of whom are European, to discuss actions our nations can take so that together we can promote respect for FoRB worldwide. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office officials attended the Article 18 Alliance and International Contact Group meetings in Geneva in March. We will continue to recognise the issue of persecution of Christians globally on account of their faith, alongside the persecution of other groups.

China: Religious Freedom

17 Mar 2025 | 36840

Asked by: Blair McDougall

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of China's treatment of (a) Falun Gong, (b) The Church of Almighty God and (c) Christian practitioners.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The environment for freedom of religion or belief in China is restrictive, which includes the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners and Christians. This Government stands firm on human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief. We raise our concerns at the highest levels: the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Chancellor have all raised human rights recently with their Chinese counterparts.

More broadly, this Government champions freedom of religion or belief for all abroad. We work to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief through our position at the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora.

Nigeria: Religious Freedom

14 Mar 2025 | HL5392

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports of escalating violence and targeted attacks by armed groups against Christian and Muslim minorities in Nigeria and what steps they are taking to address the religious persecution of these minorities, particularly in the northern and central regions of Nigeria.

Answering member: Lord Collins of Highbury | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Ongoing security challenges in Nigeria, including violent extremism and intercommunal violence, continue to impinge on the rights of Nigerians to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). In the North East, terrorist groups including Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa target all those who do not subscribe to their extremist views, including both Christians and Muslims. These incidents are distinct from the ongoing intercommunal violence elsewhere in Nigeria. The UK supports programmes working to address the complex root causes of intercommunal violence in Nigeria through locally led peace-building efforts. This support aims to reduce intercommunal tensions by improving access to security and justice, and natural resource management in specific areas across northern Nigeria. In addition, the UK-Nigeria Security and Defence Partnership (SDP) works with Nigeria's security forces to tackle violence against all civilian communities, including those of different religious backgrounds and belief systems.

Development Aid: Christianity

07 Mar 2025 | 34388

Asked by: Tom Morrison

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the recommendations in the Rt. Rev. Philip Mounstephen's report entitled Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians, Final Report and Recommendations, published in 2019, what steps his Department has taken to incorporate the protection of Christian communities into its international development strategy.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

An independent review of the FCDO's implementation of the Truro recommendations in 2022 was largely positive. This has now been concluded, and we are focused on the looking to the future, as we continue to champion the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and promoting tolerance and mutual respect through our engagement in multilateral fora, our bilateral

work and our programme funding, including the FCDO John Bunyan Fund, a designated programme for FoRB-focused overseas projects. We will continue to monitor and respond to the issue of persecution of Christians globally on account of their faith, alongside the persecution of other groups.

The appointment of David Smith MP as the Special Envoy for FoRB is a clear signal of the UK's ongoing commitment to these efforts.

Development Aid: Christianity

07 Mar 2025 | 34387

Asked by: Tom Morrison

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of UK aid in supporting Christian communities facing persecution.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We are championing the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and promoting tolerance and mutual respect through our engagement in multilateral fora, our bilateral work and our programme funding. Including the FCDO John Bunyan Fund, a designated programme for FoRB-focused overseas projects.

The FCDO works to ensure that Official Development Assistance (ODA) is allocated to those who are most vulnerable and most in need of this assistance irrespective of race, religion, or ethnicity. This includes minority religious or belief communities, including Christians, who are assessed by our partners when determining those most in need of protection and assistance.

Embassies: Religious Freedom

07 Mar 2025 | 34386

Asked by: Tom Morrison

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has taken steps to ensure that UK (a) embassies and (b) high commissions report on violations of freedom of religion or belief.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK remains strongly committed to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all abroad. It is our firm opinion that no one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in.

We continue to monitor human rights, including FoRB, across the globe through our overseas network of embassies and high commissions, who report on developments. We draw on a range of resources to support our monitoring, including the annual Open Doors report on Christian persecution.

Christianity: Oppression

07 Mar 2025 | 34385

Asked by: Tom Morrison

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to (a) monitor and (b) respond to Christian persecution globally.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK remains strongly committed to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all abroad. It is our firm opinion that no one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in.

We continue to monitor human rights, including FoRB, across the globe through our overseas network. We draw on a range of resources to support our monitoring, including the annual Open Doors report on Christian persecution.

We are championing the right to FoRB and promoting tolerance and mutual respect through our engagement in multilateral fora, our bilateral work, and our programme funding, including the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) John Bunyan Fund, a designated programme for FoRB-focused overseas projects. The appointment of David Smith MP as the Special Envoy for FoRB is a clear signal of the UK's ongoing commitment to these efforts. We will continue to monitor and respond to the issue of persecution of Christians globally on account of their faith, alongside the persecution of other groups.

Development Aid: Christianity

07 Mar 2025 | 34383

Asked by: Tom Morrison

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of reductions in the international development budget on his Department's programmes supporting persecuted Christians overseas.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) works to ensure that Official Development Assistance (ODA) is allocated to those who are most vulnerable and most in need of this assistance irrespective of race, religion, or ethnicity. This includes minority religious or belief communities, including Christians, who are assessed by our partners when determining those most in need of protection and assistance.

The reduced ODA settlement is for 2026/27 onwards and we will be taking a rigorous approach to ensuring all ODA delivers value for money. The impact on specific programmes will be informed by the ongoing Spending Review and departmental resource allocation processes.

Nigeria: Christianity

07 Mar 2025 | 34381

Asked by: Tom Morrison

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what support his Department is providing to help protect Christians facing persecution in Nigeria.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government is committed to upholding the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). This includes advocating for the protections of all vulnerable communities including religious minorities through our position at the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora as well as raising FoRB bilaterally with the Government of Nigeria and other influential parties. The UK also supports programmes working to address the complex root causes of intercommunal violence in Nigeria through locally led peace-building efforts. This support aims to reduce intercommunal tensions by improving access to security and justice, and natural resource management in specific areas across northern Nigeria. In addition, the UK-Nigeria Security and Defence Partnership (SDP) works with Nigeria's security forces to tackle violence against all civilian communities, including those of different religious backgrounds and belief systems.

Nigeria: Christianity

07 Mar 2025 | 34380

Asked by: Tom Morrison

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Nigerian counterpart on

the protection of Christian communities in Nigeria in light of reports of ongoing violence and persecution.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government is committed to upholding the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). The UK Government regularly advocates for the protections of all vulnerable communities including religious minorities through our position at the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora as well as raising FoRB bilaterally with the Government of Nigeria and other influential parties. In his meeting with the Deputy Speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives on 22 January, the Minister for Africa raised the importance of FoRB and resolving intercommunal conflict and tensions.

South East Asia: Christianity

24 Feb 2025 | 31447

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help stop the persecution of Christians in South East Asia; and if he will have discussions with his ASEAN counterparts on protecting (a) Christians and (b) churches.

Answering member: Anneliese Dodds | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government champions, and remains strongly committed to, freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all abroad. It is our firm opinion that no one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. We are championing the right to FoRB and promoting tolerance and mutual respect through our engagement in multilateral organisations including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), our bilateral work, and our programme funding. The UK continues to hold countries to account on their FoRB commitments and obligations, including South East Asian nations, through our engagement with the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and at the UN Human Rights Council. This work is mutually reinforcing of our wider human rights efforts, underpinning our belief that human rights are universal.

Religious Freedom

04 Feb 2025 | 26668

Asked by: Alex Easton

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the findings of the Open Doors 2025 World Watch List on levels of religious persecution.

Answering member: Anneliese Dodds | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government notes the launch of the Open Doors World Watch List 2025 report. The UK strongly believes that no one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. We continue to champion the right to freedom of religion or belief, whilst promoting tolerance and mutual respect, through our engagement in multilateral fora, including through our position at the UN and Article 18 Alliance. We also use our global diplomatic network to engage directly with governments. In November last year, we lit up FCDO buildings to commemorate 'Red Wednesday', in solidarity with Christians, and all people across the world facing discrimination due to their religion or belief.

Iran: Christianity

03 Feb 2025 | 26460

Asked by: Sammy Wilson

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of recent alleged instances of persecution against Christians in Iran.

Answering member: Hamish Falconer | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We condemn Iran's restrictions against Freedom of Religion or Belief. Christians, particularly converts from Islam, and other minority religions, continue to face severe repression in Iran. We were proud to help deliver the Iran Human Rights resolution, adopted by the UN Third Committee in November 2024, which called on Iran to cease monitoring individuals on account of their religious identity and to ensure rights are upheld. We will continue to hold Iran accountable for its repression of religious minorities.

North Korea: Christianity

28 Jan 2025 | 24853

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of trends in the level of persecution of Christians in North Korea.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK is deeply concerned by reports from North Korean escapees, which tell of serious human rights offences and persecution of those who are caught practising religion. It is unacceptable that citizens face surveillance, imprisonment or even death because of their religion or belief. We will

continue to raise human rights issues in all relevant meetings with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) officials through multilateral and bilateral channels. Following the DPRK's Universal Period review in November 2024 in which the UK raised the issue of freedom of religion, we remain committed to engaging with the DPRK on their approach to human rights.

Myanmar: Religious Freedom

27 Jan 2025 | 25319

Asked by: Ruth Jones

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of reports that Christians are being forced to convert to Buddhism in the Naga self-administered zone of Myanmar; and what steps his Department is taking to help tackle religious persecution in Myanmar.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government is committed to defending freedom of religion for all in Myanmar, including in the Naga self-administered zone. We remain concerned by the Race and Religion Laws in Myanmar, which are used to discriminate against non-Buddhists, including Christians. We are deeply troubled by the increasing reports of religiously motivated violence, including the destruction of places of worship and the forced conversions of Christians to Buddhism. We provide funding to the UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and have established the Myanmar Witness programme to collect and preserve evidence of violations and abuses, including atrocities against religious minority groups.

Southeast Asia: Christianity

23 Jan 2025 | 24469

Asked by: Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential implications for his policies of the reported persecution of Christians in Southeast Asia, particularly in (a) Brunei, (b) Laos, (c) the Maldives, (d) Malaysia, (e) Myanmar, and (f) Indonesia.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK champions and remains strongly committed to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all abroad. It is our firm opinion that no one should live in

fear because of what they do or do not believe in. We continue to highlight FoRB violations and abuses globally including in Southeast Asia.

We also use our skilled global diplomatic network to engage directly with governments. Ministers and FCDO officials regularly raise specific cases of concern, such as limitations on freedom of expression and other human rights issues, including freedom of religion or belief, both publicly and in private.

Christianity: Oppression

21 Jan 2025 | 23299

Asked by: Sammy Wilson

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much and what proportion of the Government's allocated funding for the promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief has been directed towards supporting persecuted Christian communities globally in the last three financial years.

Answering member: Anneliese Dodds | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK remains strongly committed to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all abroad. It is our firm opinion that no one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. The FCDO John Bunyan Fund (JBF), the designated programme for FoRB-focused overseas projects has a budget allocation of £460,720 in FY24/25. In FY 23/24 the JBF spent £170,000 and in FY22/23, £70,000. The FCDO works to ensure that Official Development Assistance (ODA) is allocated to those who are most vulnerable and most in need of this assistance irrespective of race, religion, or ethnicity. This includes minority religious or belief communities, including Christians, who are assessed by our partners when determining those most in need of protection and assistance.

Bangladesh: Religious Freedom

20 Jan 2025 | 23302

Asked by: Bob Blackman

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to his Bangladeshi counterpart on (a) violence and (b) persecution against religious minorities since August 2024.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK has a long-standing commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB).

Following the student-led protests in July and August 2024, we have been closely monitoring the situation for minorities, including Hindus and Christians in Bangladesh. In November 2024, I visited Bangladesh and discussed the importance of the protection of religious minorities with Chief Adviser Yunus. We are providing up to £27 million under the Bangladesh Collaborative, Accountable and Peaceful Politics programme for protecting civic and political space, fostering collaboration, reducing corruption, and mitigating tensions that lead to violence. We will continue to engage with the Interim Government of Bangladesh on the importance of FoRB.

Syria: Religious Minorities

14 Jan 2025 | 760 c153

Asked by: David Smith

I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming me and for his commitment and that of the Department to work with the nascent Syrian Government as they seek to protect and respect religious minorities. However, I am sure that he is aware that over Christmas there were attacks by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham fighters on the Christian-majority town of Maaloula, and some reports of attacks on Alawite communities. What more can he and his Department do to work with the Syrian Government as they seek to build a society in which all religious communities can take part without fear of religious persecution?

Answered by: Hamish Falconer | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

As the House would expect, we follow reports of such incidents in Syria very closely. I was discussing some of those incidents with members of Syrian civil society just last night, and the Foreign Secretary has raised those questions directly with the interim Foreign Minister of the Syrian authorities. We will continue to call for all parties in Syria, in this moment of transition, to do the utmost to respect the rights of all religious minorities across the country.

Nigeria: Christianity

02 Jan 2025 | HL3636

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Winchester

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to provide aid to Christian communities in Nigeria facing persecution and violence.

Answering member: Lord Collins of Highbury | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK is committed to supporting Nigeria to address ongoing security challenges, including intercommunal violence and violent extremism. It is

important to remember that the perpetrators of this violence do not come from any one ethnic or religious group, and the devastating effects are felt by communities of different faiths and ethnicities. The UK is providing £38 million in programming to Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria supporting locally led solutions in Northern Nigeria to tackle the root causes of intercommunal violence.

Nigeria: Religious Freedom

02 Jan 2025 | HL3532

Asked by: Lord Dodds of Duncairn

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the ongoing violence against Christians in Nigeria, including the actions of Fulani militant groups; and what assessment they have made of the effectiveness of the government of Nigeria's efforts to protect religious minorities from persecution.

Answering member: Lord Collins of Highbury | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Terrorist groups like Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa have sought to undermine the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) by attacking those who do not subscribe to their extremist views, including both Christians and Muslims. These incidents are distinct from the ongoing intercommunal violence across Nigeria. The root causes of this intercommunal violence are complex, and whilst religious identity can play a role, so can loss of economic opportunity, competition over land and natural resources. The UK is providing £38 million in programming to Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria supporting locally led solutions in Northern Nigeria to tackle the root causes of this violence.

Iran: Christianity

19 Dec 2024 | 19075

Asked by: Dr Neil Hudson

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the persecution of Christians in Iran; and what diplomatic steps he is taking to help tackle that issue.

Answering member: Hamish Falconer | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We condemn Iran's restrictions against Freedom of Religion or Belief. Christians, particularly converts from Islam, and other minority religions, continue to face severe repression in Iran. We were proud to help deliver the Iran Human Rights resolution, adopted by the UN Third Committee in

November, which called on Iran to cease monitoring individuals on account of their religious identity and to ensure rights are upheld. We will continue to raise the issue directly with the Iranian government, including through our Ambassador in Tehran.

China: Religious Freedom

12 Dec 2024 | HL2867

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of China regarding the police raid of a worship meeting by 300 members of the Grace Light Church in Hunan Province on 3 November.

Answering member: Baroness Chapman of Darlington | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The environment for freedom of religion or belief in China is restrictive, which includes the persecution of Christians. This Government stands firm on human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief. We raise our concerns at the highest levels: the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary both raised human rights recently with their counterparts President Xi and Foreign Minister Wang respectively. More broadly, this Government will champion freedom of religion or belief for all abroad. We will work to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief through our position at the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora, and through bilateral engagement.

Europe: Religious Freedom

10 Dec 2024 | 17101

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of changes in the level of anti-Christian (a) discrimination and (b) hate crimes in Europe.

Answering member: Anneliese Dodds | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

There is no space for religious intolerance in pluralistic, modern societies. This Government is committed to using the strength of our global network to protect and promote Freedom of Religion or Belief for all. This work is mutually reinforcing of our wider human rights efforts, underpinning our belief that human rights are universal, and without prejudice. We lit up the FCDO estate on 20 November to mark Red Wednesday in solidarity with Christians and others facing persecution. We will continue to recognise the issue of persecution of Christians globally on account of their faith, alongside the persecution of other groups.

Christianity: Oppression

27 Nov 2024 | HL2533

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Winchester

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to implement the 22 recommendations set out in the Bishop of Truro's independent review of Foreign and Commonwealth Office support for persecuted Christians, published in July 2019; and what is their timescale for doing so.

Answering member: Lord Collins of Highbury | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

This Government is committed to championing human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all abroad. An independent review of the FCDO's implementation of the Truro recommendations in 2022 was largely positive. This has concluded, and we are focused on the present while also looking to the future. We stand up for FoRB bilaterally through our diplomatic network, and multilaterally including through the UN and the Article 18 Alliance. For example, in October we engaged with the Special Rapporteur for FoRB during the UN General Assembly's Third Committee and raised FoRB during November's Universal Periodic Reviews on Nicaragua and Qatar.

Laos: Christianity

27 Nov 2024 | 14920

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support persecuted Christians in Laos.

Answering member: Catherine West | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK is committed to promoting and defending Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). The UK Embassy in Laos raises concerns about limitations on freedom of expression and other human rights issues, including freedom of religion, on a regular basis, both publicly and in private. We also work through the UN to promote and protect these rights, including raising country specific issues at the UN Human Rights Council.

Pakistan: Christianity

06 Nov 2024 | HL1886

Asked by: Lord Marlesford

To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Pakistan with a view to preventing the persecution of Christians in that country.

Answering member: Lord Collins of Highbury | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK condemns the persecution of religious minorities, including Christians, in Pakistan. Minister Falconer underlined the importance of promoting religious tolerance and harmony when he met with Pakistan's Human Rights Minister Azam Tarar on 4 September. Officials at BHC Islamabad regularly raise our concerns surrounding the mistreatment of minorities with the Pakistani authorities, including law enforcement officials. We continue to support projects promoting the rights of religious minorities in Pakistan, including facilitating interfaith dialogue and protecting marginalised communities from hate speech online.

Ghana: Christianity

22 Oct 2024 | 8768

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help protect Christians from persecution in Ghana.

Answering member: Anneliese Dodds | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK champions freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all abroad; no one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. We work to uphold the right to FoRB through our position at the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora and in our important bilateral work. Religious beliefs and practices permeate all aspects of Ghanaian life and Ghana's Constitution provides a framework which guarantees the liberty for all citizens to be free to believe and manifest any religious faith. FCDO is not aware of any cases of Christian persecution in Ghana.

Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief

30 Jul 2024 | 863

Asked by: Sir Iain Duncan Smith

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to recommendation 6 of the Bishop of Truro's Independent Review of FCDO support for persecuted Christians, published in 2019, whether he plans to appoint a Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Answering member: Stephen Doughty | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

This Government will champion freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all abroad. No one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. Envoy roles will be decided upon in due course. In the meantime, we will use the strength of our global diplomatic network, including dedicated staff within the FCDO, to promote and protect FoRB around the world.

Israel and Occupied Territories: Christianity

21 May 2024 | 25231

Asked by: Andrew Bridgen

To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what steps the Government is taking to help support persecuted Christians in (a) Israel and (b) the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Answering member: Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK is committed to defending Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. The UK condemns all attacks on the right to freedom of religion or belief.

We encourage the Israeli Government to do all it can to uphold the values of equality for all enshrined in its laws. Our Embassy in Tel Aviv and Consulate General in Jerusalem regularly raise religious freedom with both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority.

The Gambia: Religious Freedom

08 May 2024 | 24060

Asked by: Dr Lisa Cameron

To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, if he will take steps to help tackle discrimination and persecution faced by Christians in the Gambia; and if he

will make an assessment of the potential impact of the level of discrimination and persecution face by Christians on religious freedom in the country.

Answering member: Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. We do not judge there to be an infringement on the ability for Christians to live and practice in The Gambia at this time. In 2023, the British High Commission in Banjul supported a project funded by the Church of England which promoted religious tolerance by strengthening the linkages between the Gambian Parliamentary Caucus on Freedom of Religion or Belief and key civic organisations including the Christian community.

More broadly, the UK remains deeply concerned about the severity and scale of violations and abuses of FoRB in many parts of the world. Where FoRB is under attack, other human rights are often threatened too. The UK continues to recognise the issue of persecution of Christians globally on account of their faith, alongside recognising the persecution of other groups.

Persecution of Christians

30 Apr 2024 | 749 cc132-3

Asked by: Kevin Foster

If he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the Open Doors report entitled World Watch List 2024.

Answered by: Nusrat Ghani | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The report provides a sobering account of the extreme difficulties faced by many Christians around the world, noting that more than 365 million Christians face persecution each year. As my hon. Friend knows, freedom of religion or belief is a priority for the UK, and we will continue to recognise and seek to address issues of persecution of Christians globally.

Asked by: Kevin Foster

The “World Watch List 2024” laid bare the significant persecution that Christians face across the world and the increasing pressure on churches in China. During recent ministerial visits, what representations were made on this issue to the Chinese Government, alongside highlighting other aspects of their dreadful human rights record?

Answered by: Nusrat Ghani | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

My hon. Friend has always been a staunch advocate not only for the churches but for all faith groups in his constituency. It is unacceptable that Christians

are persecuted simply for practising their religion. He highlights China in particular, and we remain deeply concerned about the persecution there of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Falun Gong practitioners. He knows that I was sanctioned by China for raising the issue of the persecution of the Uyghur Muslims. The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), who is the Asia Minister, visited China last week, where she made clear our concerns about its human rights violations.

Asked by: Jim Shannon

I thank the Minister for that answer. Open Doors produces the World Watch List reports and we are deeply indebted to it for what it does. Pakistan continues to cause concern for me and many others; there are Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Christians who cannot have the freedom of human rights and are persecuted across all of Pakistan. How can we exert greater influence to effect change in Pakistan and make it better for people when it comes to worshipping their God as they so wish to do?

Answered by: Nusrat Ghani | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The hon. Gentleman is already applying a lot of pressure through his chairmanship of the all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief, which took forward a Bill just last week. My co-Minister Lord Ahmad met Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Ishaq Dar, in March to discuss the issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised, and the former Foreign Secretary has raised the issue of the persecution of religious communities, including recent attacks against the Christian community in the Punjab. Those conversations will continue, and the fact that we have committed to continuing the role of the freedom of religion or belief envoy will provide us with the authority to do that.

Azerbaijan: Christianity

29 Apr 2024 | 22953

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether he has had recent discussions with his Azerbaijani counterpart on (a) the preservation of Christian religious sites in Nagorno-Karabakh, (b) regulations on religious practice and (c) other protections for Christians from repression and intimidation in that country.

Answering member: Nusrat Ghani | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We are clear that the preservation of religious and cultural sites in the region is an important issue and we take seriously reports of the destruction of churches and other sites of religious significance in both Armenia and Azerbaijan as a result of their long-running conflict. The UK is committed to

standing up for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) globally. British Embassies in Yerevan and Baku have raised the need to protect such sites with the Armenian and Azerbaijani Governments consistently and at the most senior levels.

South Sudan: Christianity

15 Apr 2024 | 20206

Asked by: Andrew Rosindell

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department has taken to help support persecuted Christians in South Sudan.

Answering member: Andrew Mitchell | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief for all. We condemn the persecution of any individual or group based on their religion or belief. South Sudan is an FCDO Human Rights priority country, and we continue to call on the Government of South Sudan - including through the UN Human Rights Council - to end impunity for human rights violations and abuses, and establish the necessary justice and accountability mechanisms.

Diplomatic Service: Training

15 Feb 2024 | HL2046

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of St Albans

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to put in place mandatory training for diplomats on Freedom of Religion and Belief.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

In July 2021, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB), Fiona Bruce, MP, and I, launched the FCDO International Academy's training module "Religion for International Engagement," delivering recommendation 11 of the Bishop of Truro's review of FCDO support for persecuted Christians. The training is essential for FCDO diplomats, and highly recommended for all FCDO staff. The training is also available to all civil servants.

6

Debates

Christians: Persecution

25 Mar 2024 | House of Lords | 837 cc541-566

Lords question for short debate on what steps they are taking to support persecuted Christians around the world.

Religious persecution and the World Watch List

25 January 2024 | House of Commons | 744 c188WH

That this House has considered religious persecution and the World Watch List 2024.

Persecution of Christians

17 Nov 2022 | House of Commons | 722 c380WH

Motion that this House has considered persecution of Christians and freedom of religion or belief. Agreed to on question.

Christians and Religious Minorities: India

24 Feb 2022 | House of Commons | 709 cc223-246WH

Motion that this House has considered the matter of the persecution of Christians and religious minorities in India. Sitting adjourned without Question put.

Violence against Christians: Central African Countries

23 Sep 2021 | House of Commons | 701 c216WH

Motion that this House has considered the matter of violence against Christians in central African countries. Agreed to on question.

Persecution of Christians and Freedom of Religion or Belief

21 Oct 2020 | House of Commons | 682 cc381-145WH

Motion that this House has considered progress on the Bishop of Truro's independent review on persecution of Christians and freedom of religion or belief. Motion lapsed. Sitting suspended.

Persecution of Christians

06 Feb 2020 | House of Commons | 671 cc507-550

Motion, That this House has considered the matter of the persecution of Christians. Agreed to on question.

7

Statements

International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief: London 2022

15 Jul 2022 | HLWS204

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office): On 5 and 6 July 2022, Fiona Bruce MP, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and I hosted the fourth International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London.

The Conference and its associated fringe brought together government delegations, faith and belief group leaders and civil society from over 100 countries for rich discussions to address challenges to the right to FoRB.

The Conference explored the many facets of FoRB through seventeen themed panel sessions and gave a platform to those persecuted for their religion or belief. Forty-seven governments, international organisations and other entities made pledges to take action in support of FoRB. Thirty-four countries joined the UK in signing up to one or more of a set of [statements](#) protecting and promoting FoRB. We hope more countries will join these statements over the coming weeks.

The opening plenary session received contributions from: His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales; the Prime Minister; Secretary General of the Muslim World League, His Excellency Sheikh Al-Issa; Head of the Worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad; the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby; Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis; President of Humanists International, Mr Andrew Copson; Spiritual Leader and Chairman of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jutha, Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, and President of the Hindu Forum of Britain, Mrs Trupti Patel.

In her opening speech, My Right Honourable Friend, the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Elizabeth Truss) outlined FCDO progress in implementing recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's 2019 report and noted the breadth of religion and belief groups that suffer from persecution.

I announced new UK funding for support for defenders of FoRB, including those persecuted because of their activism, as well as funding and expertise for countries prepared to make legislative changes to protect FoRB.

The Conference was an important human rights milestone which galvanised international efforts to do more to protect and promote the right to FoRB. The

challenge now is to turn words into action. We will do this through building coalitions of government and civil society actors focussed on key themes from the Conference, drawing on the convening power of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance

Working alongside the Special Envoy, the FCDO will continue to work on this important human rights issue and build on momentum from the Conference to champion global efforts on FoRB.

Independent Report on the implementation of the Bishop of Truro's recommendations

04 Jul 2022 | HCWS174

Elizabeth Truss (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office): At the beginning of 2019, former Foreign Secretary The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, asked the Bishop of Truro to review what more the then FCO could do to address the persecution of Christians. The Bishop published a report in July 2019 setting out the gravity of the issue, as well as practical recommendations for an enhanced FCO response to the plight of persecuted Christians and people persecuted for holding other religions, beliefs, or no religious belief at all.

Recognising that the persecution of people for their religion or belief is unacceptable and a significant international problem, the Government committed to implementing the recommendations of the Bishop's review. His final recommendation was that an independent assessment of our progress in doing so should be carried out three years after the original report. I am pleased to publish that assessment today. We welcome and accept this expert review on progress and in line with the findings, accept their assessment for the need to continue to work to promote and strengthen Freedom of Religion or Belief as a fundamental human right for all. We thank the reviewers for their important work. A copy of the report will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

I have seen first-hand how much work has gone in across the organisation to delivering the review recommendations. Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon has worked closely with the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Fiona Bruce MP, to promote freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) internationally and to oversee progress on implementing the review recommendations. The independent assessment concludes that the majority of the recommendations are either at an advanced stage of delivery or in the process of being delivered, whilst noting that there is still more to do. The reviewers have also recognised where there have been constraints to delivery or an alternative approach has been taken.

I am encouraged by what has been achieved in recent years, in the face of many global challenges. We have led international efforts to increase collaboration to support those who are persecuted for what they believe. In March 2021, Lord Ahmad hosted a meeting at the UN Security Council to raise awareness of persecution of religious minorities in conflict zones. We used our G7 Presidency to secure language on FoRB in the G7 communique for the first time, galvanising support for those suffering discrimination and persecution. The FoRB Special Envoy holds the Chair of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance this year, demonstrating UK global leadership on FoRB. We have sent a clear message that the international community will not turn a blind eye to serious and systematic violations of human rights through our Global Human Rights sanctions regime. Religion for International Engagement training is now available to all civil servants to enhance their understanding of the role of religion and belief in a wide variety of contexts, in order to deliver the UK's international objectives more effectively.

Building on this work, we will continue to ensure that the changes we have made are embedded and to look for opportunities to make FoRB central to the FCDO's wider human rights work. We will do this, working alongside others, to deliver real change for the good, protecting and promoting everyone's right to freedom of religion or belief.

Our work on this important human rights issue will never be complete, and we will continue to champion global efforts on FoRB. As part of that, on 5-6 July this year, the UK will host an international ministerial conference on freedom of religion or belief. We look forward to welcoming partner countries and stakeholders from around the world to London.

8

Early Day Motions

Open Doors 2025

EDM 641 (session 2024-25)

15 January 2025

Gregory Campbell

That this House notes the launch of the Open Doors World Watch List 2025 on Wednesday 15 January 2025, which assists in helping to highlight areas worldwide where Christians continue to be persecuted and where many face the most extreme oppression, threats and on many occasions death; and calls on the Government to increase support to all those working to end such persecution across the world.

Red Wednesday campaign

EDM 506 (session 2024-25)

6 December 2024

Seamus Logan

That this House notes with concern the absence of religious minorities as priorities within the UK's international development plan; commends the work of Aid to the Church in Need in drawing attention to the spiralling issue of religious persecution and discrimination worldwide through its annual #RedWednesday initiative; further notes with dismay Aid to the Church in Need's research which finds that in 61 countries throughout the world, with combined populations of over 4.9 billion people, severe violations of religious freedom take place; calls on the Government to publish a standalone religious freedom strategy, outlining the most effective means of aid deployment to victims of religious discrimination and persecution; also calls on the Government to make religious minorities a fifth priority in the UK's overseas development strategy; and further calls for the appointment of a UK Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion by Christmas.

Persecution of Christians

EDM 352 (session 2023-24)

1 February 2024

Gregory Campbell

That this House notes reports of continuing and increasing instances of intimidation, persecution and murder of Christians in many countries across the world; and expresses the demand that the UK takes the lead in highlighting these cases, continuing to raise with the relevant nation states and international bodies the need to act to prevent such attacks and where they occur to take robust action against the perpetrators.

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