

UNITED KINGDOM

Executive Summary

Laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom. Government and societal leaders spoke out frequently about the need to protect religious freedom and actively worked to improve understanding about religious differences and promote tolerance.

There were some reports of abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. The BBC, among other local media, reported that there were some 2,000 hate crimes recorded against different faiths in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Community Security Trust (CST), a nonprofit group that monitors anti-Semitism, reported that there were 586 anti-Semitic crimes during the year.

The U.S. government routinely discussed religious freedom issues with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Various sections of the U.S. embassy conducted regular outreach events with members of different faith groups and engaged in ongoing discussion and communication with members of civil society representing a range of faiths.

Section I. Religious Demography

Christians make up about 70 percent of the population, including the Church of England, Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches, and many unaffiliated Christian groups. According to the Citizenship Survey, a local government poll, the percentage of citizens in England and Wales identifying themselves as Christian declined from about 77 percent in 2005 to 70 percent in 2010. The percentage of those calling themselves non-believers rose from 15 percent to 21 percent in that time.

According to the most recent Citizenship Survey, Muslims constitute approximately 4 percent of the population. The Muslim community consists predominantly of individuals of South Asian origin, but other groups from the Arabian Peninsula, Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Levant also are represented. In

addition, there is a growing number of indigenous converts. Minority religious groups, which make up less than 2 percent of the population each, include Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Buddhists. Individuals from these backgrounds are concentrated in London and other large urban areas, primarily in England.

In Bermuda nearly 20 different religious groups made up 125 congregations. Anglicans represent 16 percent of the population, while Roman Catholics and African Methodist Episcopalians represent 15 and 9 percent, respectively.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution protects religious freedom, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. There are two established state churches, the Church of England (Anglican) and the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian). Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland do not have “official” religions. The 1921 Church of Scotland Act reorganized the church as Scotland’s national church based on a Presbyterian system, but it is not dependent on any government body or the queen for spiritual matters or leadership.

The monarch appoints Church of England officials on the advice of the prime minister and the Crown Appointments Commission, which includes lay and clergy representatives. The General Convention of the Church of Scotland appoints its own office bearers, and its affairs are not subject to any civil authority. The monarch becomes a subject of the Church of Scotland when she crosses the border into Scotland. The Church in Wales, the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the Church of Ireland are members of the Anglican Communion.

In October the leaders of 16 Commonwealth countries agreed to change the 1689 Bill of Rights and the 1701 Act of Settlement, which forbade any Catholic, or person married to a Catholic, from becoming monarch. However, the monarch remains the “Supreme Governor” of the Church of England and must always be a member of and promise to uphold the church.

Sharia (Islamic law) is managed by Sharia councils that have operated parallel to the national legal system since 1982. The councils deal only with civil cases, have no legal powers, and may only rule in areas such as dispute mediation, marriage, and finance in ways that do not contradict the law and with the consent of both parties. However, critics, including the Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Rights

Organization and the Muslim Women's Network-UK, claim the male-dominated councils discriminated against women in their judgments. Baroness Caroline Cox, a member of the House of Lords, introduced a bill during the year to regulate Sharia organizations. The legislation was pending at year's end. Sharia law rarely is used in Northern Ireland, and in Scotland it has been employed solely in private mediation upon the agreement of both parties.

The Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006 (legislation that covers England and Wales) prohibits "incitement to religious hatred" and defines "religious hatred" as hatred of a group that may be determined by reference to religious belief or lack of religious belief. The law does not define religion or what constitutes a religious belief but leaves that determination to the courts. Offenses under the law must be threatening and intended to stir up religious hatred based on the following criteria: the use of words, behavior, or display of written material; publishing or distributing written material; the public performance of a play; distributing, showing, or playing a recording; broadcasting or including a program in a program service; or the possession of written materials or recordings with a view to display, publish, distribute, or include them in a program service. The law does not apply to words or behaviors expressed inside a private dwelling or to criticism or dislike of a religious belief. The maximum penalty for inciting religious hatred is seven years in prison. Those convicted of "religiously aggravated offenses" (where there is evidence of religious hostility in connection with a crime) face higher maximum penalties.

The law prohibits discrimination on the grounds of "religion or belief" or the "lack of religion or belief." The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) was established in 2006 and is responsible for promoting equality, diversity, and the elimination of unlawful discrimination and harassment. The EHRC received public funds but is independent of the government. From October 2007, when the commission's legal enforcement team began work, until 2010 (the most recent statistics available), the enforcement team has intervened in approximately 592 cases. About half of those were concluded through arbitration or by other means. Some of the remaining cases were pending hearing dates or judgments from the courts at year's end.

The EHRC has powers to investigate unlawful acts of discrimination and can bring legal proceedings against violators of the law. In October the new Equality Act came into force, combining 116 separate pieces of legislation into one act and preserving the EHRC. In Scotland the EHRC covers only human rights matters reserved for parliament and major government ministries. Human rights for

matters “devolved” to the Scottish parliament are covered by the Scottish Human Rights Commission. The Equality Act allows the EHRC to cover devolved matters if it has the agreement of the Scottish commission.

In Northern Ireland religious discrimination in employment has been illegal since 1976 and discrimination in provision of goods and services since 1998. This, and all other equality legislation, is supervised by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, which has powers similar to those of the EHRC.

In Northern Ireland the Fair Employment Act bans employment discrimination on the grounds of religious or political opinion. A broad network of laws, regulations, and oversight bodies serves to ensure there is equal opportunity for employees of all religious groups. All public sector employers and all private firms with more than 10 employees must report annually to the Equality Commission on the religious composition of their workforces and must review their employment practices every three years. Noncompliance may result in criminal penalties and the loss of government contracts. Victims of employment discrimination may sue for damages. The law stipulates that all public authorities must show due regard for the need to promote equality of opportunity, including on the basis of religious belief. Each public authority must report its plans to promote equality to the Equality Commission, which is to review such plans every five years. In the rest of the country, the law prohibits employment discrimination based on religious belief, except where there is a “genuine occupational requirement” of a religious nature.

Religiously motivated hate language is prosecuted under the Public Order Act and the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act, which the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) applies to demonstrations where insulting and abusive language is used about religion.

Citing a limited broadcast spectrum, the government continued to prohibit religious groups from holding a national sound broadcasting license, a public teletext license, more than one television service license, and radio and television multiplex licenses.

In Scotland the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998 and the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act of 2003 cover bias based on race or religion as aggravating factors in criminal prosecutions. The laws require courts to consider the impact these factors had on the crime in the sentencing process. The Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act of 2010 also has been used in prosecuting criminals who

have been deemed to have shown sectarian behavior. The Scottish government also brought the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill before the Scottish Parliament to attempt to regulate the prevalent sectarian, religiously aggravated violence that drew significant media attention. The Scottish Parliament passed the bill on December 14, and it was awaiting royal assent at year's end.

The law requires religious education for all children between the ages of three and nineteen in publicly maintained schools; however, the shape and content of religious instruction throughout the country is decided on a local basis. Locally agreed-upon syllabi are required to reflect the predominant place of Christianity while taking into account the teachings and practices of other principal religious groups in the country. Syllabi must be nondenominational and refrain from attempting to convert pupils. Schools with a religious designation follow a syllabus drawn up by the school governors according to the trust deed of the school. All parents have the legal right to request that their children not participate in religious education.

The government does not mandate uniforms for students. Instead, each school determines its own uniform policy. The government's guidance on school uniforms notes that schools are required to consider the needs of different cultures, races, and religions in their uniform policy and must not discriminate on the grounds of gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, or belief.

Daily collective prayer or worship of "a wholly or mainly...Christian character" is practiced in schools in England and Wales, a requirement that may be waived for students who obtain permission of the school authorities. The law permits sixth form students (generally 16-to-19-year-olds in the final two years of secondary school) to withdraw themselves from worship without their parents' permission or action. This law does not exempt sixth form students from religious education classes. Non-Christian worship is permitted with the approval of the authorities. Teachers have the right not to participate in collective worship, without prejudice, unless they work for a faith-based school.

In Bermuda the law allows collective worship by students but prohibits collective worship at public schools from being "distinctive of any particular religious group." The law also provides for exceptions to the requirement that pupils in public schools engage in collective worship at least once a week. It gives parents the right to request that their children be excused from such worship and authorizes such pupils to worship elsewhere at the beginning or end of the school day.

Homeschooling is an approved alternative for religious or other reasons. Some Jewish representatives in Bermuda claimed that bringing up children in a country where Christian prayers are said in both public and most private schools is a challenge.

As of year's end, there were approximately 7,000 state-funded "faith schools" in England. These schools teach religious education or have formal links with religious organizations, but they also must follow the national curriculum and are inspected by the Office for Standards in Children's Services and Skills, the national schools inspection body commonly referred to as Ofsted. Of these faith schools, 4,606 are associated with the Church of England, 1,985 are Roman Catholic, 138 are "other Christian," and 26 are Methodist. There are also 42 Jewish schools, 12 Muslim schools, three Sikh schools, and one each for Greek Orthodox, Hindu, Quaker, and United Reformed Church students. There are also 218 registered "faith academies," which are primarily schools for religious education. All are Christian academies except for five Jewish schools, one Muslim school, and one Sikh school. In the independent sector (the equivalent of private schools in the United States), there are 2,400 schools that do not receive state funding, and about half of them have a faith element. Of these, 842 are Christian, 139 are Muslim, 46 are Jewish, two are Hindu, one is Buddhist, and one is Sikh. According to the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board, there are approximately 2,000 official madrassahs in the country.

According to the Scottish government, Scotland has 377 state-funded faith schools: 373 Catholic, one Jewish, and three Episcopalian.

Almost all schools in Northern Ireland receive state support, with 93.5 percent of the students attending schools that were either predominantly state-run Protestant or Catholic. Religiously balanced integrated schools, which serve an estimated 7 percent of school-age children whose families voluntarily choose this option, have to demonstrate sustainability for three years before government funding begins. Demand for placement in integrated schools outweighed the limited number available. There were more than 60 integrated schools, and the government permits existing schools to petition to change from state-run or Catholic to integrated status; however, more schools petition for that status than are granted it.

Immigration regulations require visa applicants who wish to enter the country as "ministers of religion" (a legal term used for visas) to demonstrate a level-four competence in spoken English on the International English Language Testing System. When applying for visas, ministers of religion must have worked for at

least one year out of the last five as a minister and have one year of full-time experience or two years of part-time training following their ordination for religious groups where ordination is the sole means of entering the ministry. To obtain an entry visa, a missionary must be trained as such or have worked previously as a missionary.

It is government policy to ensure that public servants are not discriminated against on the basis of religious beliefs and to accommodate religious practices by government employees whenever possible. For example, the Prison Service permits Muslim employees to take time off during their shifts to pray. It also provides prisoners with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim chaplains. The military generally provides adherents of minority religious groups with chaplains of their faith. The Chaplaincy Council monitors policy and practice relating to such matters.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom. Prominent government leaders, including Prime Minister David Cameron, Education Secretary Michael Gove, and London Mayor Boris Johnson, spoke about the importance of tolerance and promoting religious freedom.

Twenty-six senior bishops of the Anglican Church are given places in the House of Lords as representatives of the official church. Besides this instance, membership in a religious group does not confer a political or economic advantage on individual adherents.

In December Conservative Member of Parliament Aidan Burley was removed from his post as the parliamentary private secretary to the Transport Minister after attending a party where one guest wore a Nazi uniform and some guests toasted Third Reich figures.

Following government-provided guidance on accommodating religious dress at schools, some Muslim groups, including the Islamic Human Rights Commission, stated that it was inappropriate for the government to provide guidance that regulated Muslim communities in matters concerning the expression of their religious beliefs. Concerns were focused on guidance that school uniform policies

could “restrict the freedom of pupils to manifest their religion” on the grounds of health and safety and the “protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The media reported incidents in which the ability of Christians to express their faith in the workplace was restricted. For example, in April an electrician in West Yorkshire was threatened with losing his job after displaying a small palm cross in his van.

According to Community Security Trust, there were 586 anti-Semitic crimes, including street attacks, threats, vandalism, and desecration of Jewish property. Of these instances, one involving “extreme violence” occurred in Manchester, when a member of a Jewish family at a gas station was hit by a car driven by two women, called anti-Semitic names, and spat at while lying on the ground. The CST also reported that a Jewish man in Manchester had his yarmulke torn off his head and was punched in the face; eggs were thrown at men leaving a Saturday synagogue service; and Jewish children were verbally abused and had a lit firecracker thrown at them. In September, Paul Donnachie, a student at St. Andrew’s University in Scotland, was convicted of religiously aggravated assault after an attack on a Jewish student in which Donnachie called the Jewish student a terrorist and defaced the Israeli flag. Donnachie was expelled from the university, ordered to pay compensation to his victim, and sentenced to 150 hours of community service.

The London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research reported that between October 2010 and March 2011 more than 40 percent of Jewish university students witnessed or experienced an incident of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitic language continued to be found in recent editions of textbooks supplied by the Saudi Arabian government and used to teach 5,000 pupils in private weekend schools outside of the country’s public school system.

The Home Office reported that in 2010-11 there were 188 instances of gross bodily harm (serious assault resulting in injury) with racial or religious aggravation, down from 224 such instances in 2009-10. There were 2,982 cases of racial or religiously aggravated actual bodily harm (less serious assault) in 2010-11, down from 3,521 in 2009-10. The statistics do not differentiate between religiously and racially motivated crimes.

During the year, there were several incidents of football fans chanting anti-Semitic slogans during matches. In response the Football Association launched an initiative to tackle faith-based discrimination, including anti-Semitism and anti-Islam bias. Kick it Out, an antiracism organization, sponsored a short film starring several soccer players to address racist abuse by fans. The Scottish Parliament passed the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill in December, and it awaited royal assent at year's end.

During the riots that broke out in August in neighborhoods around the country, a car drove into a crowd of men protecting a mosque in Birmingham, killing three British men of Asian descent in what police called a racially motivated attack. The Muslim nongovernmental organization (NGO) Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks (MAMA) reported that the members of a Muslim family in Leicester was forced to move after their car was vandalized, bricks were thrown in their window, and snowballs with rocks in them were thrown at their children. Three persons were convicted of racial offenses in the case, and sentenced to pay fines and do over 100 hours of community service. Islamophobia Watch, another NGO, reported that some victims were called "terrorist," pushed, and spat on. One female Muslim student in Middlesbrough stopped wearing her hijab (headscarf) after someone tried to pull it off her head.

Members of the Muslim community complained that police targeted them disproportionately for suspicion, arrest, and "stop-and-search." The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) continued to work closely with Muslim groups to address concerns about the way police treated Muslims. The IPCC publicized its services through advertisements, community meetings, and media coverage. Working with the NGO Faith Matters, the Metropolitan Police Service set up a helpline for victims of anti-Islam crime. Advocates, including Fiyaz Mughal, director of Faith Matters and founder of MAMA, said that it was important to record faith-based abuse and vandalism against members of the Muslim community to prove that it happens and to secure more attention from the government. Other groups, including Islamophobia Watch, Engage, and the Islamic Human Rights Commission, also monitored anti-Muslim incidents.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy and consulates encouraged interfaith dialogue to promote religious tolerance. Representatives from various ecumenical groups, such as the Community Security Trust, Three Faiths Forum, and other groups promoting

religious tolerance were included routinely in embassy events. Embassy and consulate officers regularly held events and contacted religious leaders of various groups to discuss religious freedom. Embassy and consulate officials actively engaged in outreach presentations to the public, with a particular emphasis on Muslim communities. The public affairs section regularly included Muslim community members in programming on a wide array of topics, as well as programs that specifically addressed religious tolerance and social cohesion. The ambassador hosted an annual celebration for at least 100 guests to mark Eid al-Fitr. The consulate general in Edinburgh held several outreach events at mosques and with the Muslim communities in Glasgow and Edinburgh and hosted a Ramadan iftar dinner with imams, activists, and Muslim youth. Mission officers discussed the need for religious tolerance and the role of religious diversity in American life.

As an active supporter of the peace process in Northern Ireland, the U.S. government encouraged efforts to diminish sectarian tension and promote dialogue between the Protestant and Catholic communities. Officers at the Belfast consulate facilitated interfaith dialogue dinners and participated in other interfaith programs.