

# Speech: International Religious Freedom Day

**Video message from Human Rights Minister, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**

[International Religious Freedom Day](#)

## **Introduction**

Thank you Jim, and my thanks to you and your APPG colleagues for organising today's event. I want to take this opportunity to pay special tribute to you all for your tireless work in raising awareness of violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief around the world. This awareness is vital in galvanising support for collective action.

I am delighted to be here for the launch of your extremely comprehensive report. The analysis and recommendations it contains will further enrich the Government's understanding and help to inform our approach.

Your invitation recalled the so-called Father of Religious Freedom, Thomas Helwys – a Protestant dissenter in England at the turn of the 17th century. Unlike other reformers, Helwys did not just defend his own religious group. Uniquely for his time, he also defended the rights of others to practice their religion. Indeed he was the first person to write a defence of universal religious freedom in the English language. His experience is a reminder that religious persecution in its different forms has a long history and that this country is no exception. We all know that it continues to this day. It could be dispiriting to dwell on the fact that we are still fighting the same battles 400 years later. However, it is my personal view that this knowledge should in fact galvanise us to be even more determined and activist in defending and protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief in the 21st century. That is what the Government, through the FCO and our posts around the world, is committed to do. I would like to give you a flavour of our work today.

## **HMG Action**

International law and the rules-based international system are fundamental to all our work, and on this issue they could not be clearer.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights sets out the right to choose a religion or belief – or indeed, to have no belief at all – and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights enshrines this right into law, along with guarantees on non-discrimination, equal access to justice and the protection of the law.

Yet despite this clear legal position, people around the world continue to be denied their rights. They suffer prejudice, persecution and physical harm for their faith or belief. We are working hard to tackle this injustice, both

through international institutions and with individual countries.

## **Multilateral Work**

Multilaterally, we work with likeminded partners to build and maintain consensus on the issue of freedom of religion or belief through lobbying other countries and supporting relevant UN resolutions.

Our work on Daesh is a good example of this approach. Daesh is responsible for the appalling persecution of Yezidi, Christian and Mandeian minorities, as well as the majority Muslim population, in Syria and Iraq.

We have been at the forefront of the international campaign to defeat Daesh, joining with others at the UN General Assembly last year to launch a campaign to bring Daesh to Justice. More recently, we drafted a ground-breaking UN resolution that will ensure Daesh's crimes do not go unpunished. The resolution will send a UN-led investigative team to Iraq to assist with the vital work of gathering evidence of Daesh atrocities and help Iraq to bring Daesh to justice. The UK has contributed one million pounds to get this team up and running.

We will continue to work with the Iraqi Government, the UN and the international community to deliver justice; to promote the rights of all minorities; and to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those in greatest need.

## **Bilateral Work**

We also use our extensive diplomatic network to engage with countries individually. In Bangladesh, where the Ahmadi community faces significant persecution, I visited their Mosque in Dhaka and made a call for religious tolerance.

In Russia, following the Supreme Court's ban on Jehovah's Witnesses as 'extremists', we continue to call on the state to uphold religious freedom.

In Eritrea, we have called on the Government to release all prisoners detained without due process, including the Orthodox Patriarch, Abune Antonios, and others detained for their religious beliefs.

We remain deeply concerned by violence against Christians and Muslims in Burma, and particularly the Rohingya in Rakhine State. We have been active on this issue for some time. Successive Ministers, including my predecessor Baroness Anelay last year, the Foreign Secretary in January, and my Rt Hon Friend the Minister for Asia Mark Field last month – have met Burmese community leaders to listen to their views and encourage greater tolerance.

We also continue to press for religious freedoms in Iran. Members of the Baha'i community recently expressed their thanks for our lobbying work which they said had played a significant role in the release of Mahvash Sabet. I am pleased to be addressing a Parliamentary seminar organised by the UK Baha'I community next month.

## **Programme Work**

Projects that directly support freedom of religion or belief remain an important element of our Magna Carta Fund human rights programme. One project that we are particularly proud of is helping secondary school teachers in the Middle East and North Africa to create lesson plans that promote tolerance and freedom of religion or belief.

## **Report Recommendations**

Before I finish I would like to address one of the recommendations of the report that relates directly to our work: That UK government staff should have an extensive knowledge and understanding of religion and Freedom of Religion or Belief.

I agree and indeed we have for several years been running religious literacy training to enhance the expertise of our staff. We recently launched our re-designed 'Religion and Diplomacy' course in association with LSE Faith Centre. We strongly encourage FCO staff to participate, and we also open it up to those in other government departments who are working on similar issues. Feedback from recent participants has been overwhelmingly positive. We will continue to review the course to ensure it is as effective as possible.

We have also developed detailed guidance for our staff – a 'toolkit' in Whitehall jargon – something that we regularly promote to ensure that staff are making the most of it. There is always room for improvement, and in this as in other areas we continually strive to enhance our corporate expertise.

## **Working with Civil Society**

We agree, that engagement with government and non-governmental actors working on country-specific issues is important for advancing freedom of religion or belief. That is why Ministers and officials regularly meet with faith actors and civil society to discuss areas of concern and identify ways to address them.

I want to take this further. That is why we are developing a new strategy to increase this engagement across our network. Just a few days ago, I held the first in a series of roundtables with faith representatives. We had useful discussions on Burma, on freedom of religion or belief more generally, and on how we can work together in the future. This new initiative provides a powerful platform for an exchange of views from faith perspectives, an opportunity to champion the rights and causes of others, as Thomas Helwys did. There is no greater example of the positive power of faith than when we speak out with one voice in defence of our common humanity. If I as a Muslim speak out for a Hindu. If Elizabeth as a Christian speaks out Sikh. As we look across this great and diverse city of London, we see churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other buildings of religious worship. The modern tapestry that defines the UK today rests on the values of humanity that all faiths share.

## Conclusion

I am going to hand over to Baroness Berridge in a moment. I will conclude by thanking the APPG once again for their report. We will consider its recommendations carefully and look forward to continuing to strengthen our collaboration and partnership with you in this regard.

As Minister for Human Rights, and as a man of faith, I give my personal commitment to work tirelessly to promote and defend freedom of religion or belief for everyone, everywhere.

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## [Notice: PE28 3BS, Envar Composting Limited: environmental permit application advertisement \(EPR/GP3930DF/V003\)](#)

The Environment Agency consults the public on certain applications for waste operations, mining waste operations, installations, water discharge and groundwater activities. The arrangements are explained in its [Public Participation Statement](#)

These notices explain:

- what the application is about
- how you can view the application documents
- when you need to comment by

The Environment Agency will decide:

- whether to grant or refuse the application
  - what conditions to include in the permit (if granted)
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## [Press release: Chemical disposal update – Friday 27 October 2017](#)

Work to safely dispose of chemicals at Sellafield has continued this week and will continue over the weekend.

The disposals will take place during daylight hours and may be audible off-site. We have provided updates directly to staff and stakeholders in the immediate vicinity of the site.

The process that experts from the Army's Explosive Ordnance Disposal team is using to safely dispose of the chemicals is in line with best practice and chemical disposal regulations.

With the exception of the laboratory where the chemicals are being retrieved from, the site will continue to operate as normal over the weekend.

#### Key facts

- The chemicals are in sealed glass bottles of good condition.
- The chemicals are being disposed of appropriately.
- The materials involved are solvents which are widely used in industry.
- The Explosive Ordnance Disposal team deal with hundreds of these issues every year, recovering chemicals from science laboratories in places like schools, universities and hospitals.
- Because this is happening on the Sellafield site we exercise extreme caution and leave nothing to chance.

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## [News story: Help us reduce insider fraud in charities](#)

One of the most damaging types of fraud is insider fraud. This is fraud committed by someone involved with the charity, whether a trustee, an employee or volunteer.

As well as taking money away from the charity that could be spent on beneficiaries and the end cause, it's an abuse of the relationship and position of trust between the individual and the charity.

Insider fraud can have a damaging impact on a charity's reputation and the morale of other staff and volunteers. It can also dent donors' and beneficiaries' confidence in the charity and its work.

As part of Charity Fraud Awareness Week 2017 we want to find out more about insider fraud in charities. We want to work with, and listen to charities about their experiences of dealing with insider fraud to:

- identify common themes
- highlight good practice in charities
- help other charities learn lessons and share their experience
- improve our guidance to help other charities in the future

If you are or were involved in a charity that experienced insider fraud, we

would like to hear from you. How did you spot it? With hindsight, did you miss the signals? If you did not report it at the time, why not?

If you believe your charity prevented insider fraud by counter fraud actions, what good practice or advice would you like to share with other charities?

We are also interested in hearing from those who have knowledge and experience of investigating fraud, or implementing fraud prevention in charities including:

- professional advisers
- professional membership bodies
- charity insurers

If you think you can help, complete the relevant survey by Friday 8 December 2017.

[Insider fraud survey for charities](#)

[Insider fraud survey for advisers, charity umbrella groups, professional bodies and others](#)

If possible, please provide your name and full contact details with the email so we can get in touch to find out more if needed. We will accept anonymous submissions too.

Don't use the surveys to formally report a recent fraud as a serious incident at your charity. If you need to do this, read and follow our guidance about [reporting serious incidents](#).

We are not collecting or recording information about individual charities through the survey for regulatory compliance purposes. But, if we are concerned about what you have told us we will request that you submit a whistleblowing or serious incident report. We will then respond in line with our usual procedures.

After the closing date, we will analyse the findings and publish a report of the review on our website. It will summarise the themes and common issues, and share good examples of counter fraud and detection practices.

No individual responses or names will be published, unless you specifically state in your response you are happy to be named or quoted.

If you are a member of the public and have a complaint about a charity, find out what to do if you need to [complain about a charity](#).

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# **News story: The UK's first Hyperloop prototype to exhibit at Innovate 2017**

From automating our homes to the way we travel, next month's [Innovate 2017](#) event will showcase up-and-coming innovations that are new to market or already in production.

## **The UK's first Hyperloop prototype pod**

As part of the [Hello World Showcase](#) we will have [HypED](#), the constructors of the UK's first prototype pod and a winner of the [Hyperloop One Global Challenge](#). The team of students from the University of Edinburgh's engineering, informatics, economic and business schools are rethinking the future of transportation.

Hyperloop is Elon Musk's idea for the future of mass transportation. A hyperloop is a sealed tube or system of tubes where a pod can travel free of air resistance or friction. It will provide a new way of transporting people and goods quickly, safely, efficiently and sustainably.

The HypED team was one of 10 across the world to have been named a winner of the Hyperloop One Global Challenge, which called for proposals to build Hyperloop networks connecting cities and regions. [HypED's proposed route](#) would run from Edinburgh to London, through Manchester and Birmingham.

## **The Hello World Showcase**

The exhibits in the Hello World Showcase will each highlight the impact of innovation on the UK economy. Other exhibitors include:

- [OpenTRV](#) – developers of Radbot, a smart thermostatic radiator valve
- [Prodrive](#) – a motorsport and technology company
- [Robopod](#) – advanced cost-effective plug-and-play robotics

## **About Innovate 2017**

Innovate UK's annual event will explore themes such as robotics and urban planning and what this means for the individual, business and government. Other topics include artificial intelligence, smart cities, alternative food sources and space exploration.

It provides a chance to hear from pioneering thinkers, network with investors and find out about the type of expertise and government support that's available to help you innovate and grow your business.

Innovate 2017 takes place from 8 to 9 November 2017 at the [National Exhibition Centre](#) (NEC) in Birmingham. A ticket costs £150 for one day or £199 for both days.