



June 2021

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about the persecution of Christians in India. The UK champions freedom of religion or belief for everyone. As a country that is a beacon for freedom and tolerance, I passionately believe the UK should not shirk its responsibilities.

The Independent Review of Foreign and Commonwealth Office support for persecuted Christians, conducted by the Anglican Bishop of Truro, the Right Reverend Philip Mounstephen, was published and the Government has committed to implementing the Bishop's 22 recommendations in full, and work continues to implement them in a way that will bring real improvements in the lives of those persecuted because of their faith or belief. Of the 22 recommendations, the UK has fully delivered 10, made good progress on a further 8, and Ministers are confident that all 22 will be delivered by the time of the independent review in 2022.

I also welcome the appointment of Fiona Bruce MP as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. Some of the recommendations will take longer to implement and will require an ongoing effort to embed into the working practice of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

Christian women are more likely than men to be victims of discrimination and persecution. I am assured that the UK's human rights policy work considers the intersectionality of human rights, including the importance of addressing the specific vulnerabilities experienced by women and girls from religious minority communities.

More broadly, the UK is recognised as a global leader in tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) in all its forms, by pioneering approaches around the world that have shown that VAWG is preventable. Through UK Aid Connect, for instance, FCDO has supported the Creid programme (managed by the Institute of Development Studies) to work with women from religious minorities in five countries in Africa and Asia to understand the problems they face and identify effective approaches to tackle these issues. I am assured that preventing responding to conflict-related sexual violence remains a top priority for the FCDO.

The UK engages with India on the full range of human rights matters, working with Union and State Governments, and with non-governmental organisations, to build capacity and share expertise to promote human rights for all. The British High Commission in New Delhi, and our Deputy High Commissions across India, also run projects promoting minority rights and regularly meet with religious representatives, as well as official figures such as the Chair of the National Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Minorities.

I know there are concerns about the increased vulnerability of Christians during the coronavirus outbreak, including access to PPE. It is of course vital that we do all we can to ensure aid gets through to those that need it most. I know that the UK Government works to ensure that all aid reaches the most vulnerable including those from religious minorities and the FCDO is using its



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international partnerships to support the delivery of the medical supplies and PPE. Covid-19 is likely to reinforce Christians' marginalised position in society, their experience of discrimination, violence and stigma, and further limit their access to essential support and services. I welcome that, for this reason, guidance was circulated across the FCDO highlighting that inclusion must be central to the UK's response and the specific contexts and needs of all religious minorities should be taken into account when developing practical programmes to tackle Covid-19. The Government is continuing to assess the impact of Covid-19 on members of all minority religious and belief communities, including Christians.

The FCDO regularly engages with Open Doors UK and has taken note of the 2021 World Watch List report and its findings. I am glad that the report has praised the UK Government for the many positive advances it has made in the past year.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

**CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP  
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY**