

# UNITED KINGDOM 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

In the absence of a written constitution, the law establishes the Church of England as England's state church and the Church of Scotland as Scotland's national church. The law prohibits "incitement to religious hatred" as well as discrimination on the grounds of religion. Prime Minister David Cameron said he planned to register and inspect madrassas; he also committed to create a separate category of anti-Muslim hate crimes. The government allowed religious accommodations for public servants and in schools.

Governmental organizations reported an increase in religious hate crimes and incidents in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and a decrease in Scotland. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported a spike in anti-Semitic incidents; Muslims experienced physical and online abuse. In September attackers targeted four Jewish men in Manchester, hospitalizing one. Two men also attacked a Pakistani man who had converted to Christianity. A mob broke into a London synagogue at the end of a Shabbat service and assaulted at least one person, shouting, "Kill the Jews." There were reports of vandals targeting Muslim graves, synagogues, and Jewish schools.

The Ambassador and the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom discussed religious intolerance, protection of minorities and blasphemy laws with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Minister for Human Rights Baroness Anelay, and NGOs. The Ambassador and the U.S. Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs met the Archbishop of Canterbury to discuss the persecution of Christians. This was followed by an ongoing dialogue between the embassy, the Church of England, and other religious organizations about efforts worldwide to combat religious persecution.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 64.1 million (July 2015 estimate). Census figures from 2011, the most recent census, indicate 59.3 percent of the population in England and Wales is Christian, comprising the Church of England (Anglican), the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian), the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches, and unaffiliated Christian groups. Of the remaining population, 4.8 percent identified themselves as Muslim; 1.5 percent as Hindu, 0.8 percent as Sikh, 0.5 percent as Jewish and 0.4 Buddhist. Roughly 25 percent of the

## UNITED KINGDOM

population consists of nonbelievers. There are approximately 137,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in the UK.

The Muslim community in England and Wales is predominantly of South Asian origin, but also includes individuals from the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant, Africa, and Southeast Asia, as well as a growing number of converts of European descent. Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Buddhists are concentrated in London and other large urban areas, primarily in England.

Census figures from Scotland in 2011 indicate 54 percent of the population is Christian, comprising the Church of Scotland (32 percent), Roman Catholic Church (16 percent), and unaffiliated Christian groups (6 percent). The Muslim community comprises 1.4 percent of the population. Other religious groups, which make up less than 1 percent of the population, include Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Buddhists. More than 36 percent of the population consists of nonbelievers, with the remainder not providing any information.

Census figures from Northern Ireland in 2011 indicate 41 percent of the population is Catholic, 41.5 percent Protestant, and less than 1 percent various non-Christian religious groups. Approximately 17 percent of respondents did not indicate a religious affiliation.

In Bermuda, Anglicans are 16 percent of the population, Catholics 15 percent, and African Methodist Episcopalians 9 percent. Approximately 20 religious groups are present, nearly all of which are Christian. The Muslim community numbers just more than 600 individuals, and there are approximately 130 Jews. Approximately 20 percent of the population claimed no religious affiliation in 2010 compared to 14 percent in 2000.

## Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

### Legal Framework

In the absence of a written constitution, the law establishes the Church of England as England's state church. Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland do not have state religions. Legislation establishes the Church of Scotland as Scotland's national church, but it is not dependent on any government body or the queen for spiritual matters or leadership.

## UNITED KINGDOM

As the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, the monarch must always be a member of and promise to uphold that Church. 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. Aside from these appointments, the state is not involved in the church's administration. The General Convention of the Church of Scotland appoints that Church's office holders. The monarch becomes a subject of the Church of Scotland when she/he crosses the border into Scotland.

In England and Wales the law prohibits inciting hatred against a person on the grounds of his or her religion. The law prohibits religiously motivated hate language, and any acts intended to incite religious hatred through the use of words or the publication or distribution of written material. The law defines religious hatred as hatred of a group because of its religious belief or lack thereof, as determined by the courts. The maximum penalty for inciting religious hatred is seven years in prison. If there is evidence of religious hostility in connection with any crime, it is a "religiously aggravated offense" and carries a higher maximum penalty than the underlying crime alone. In Scotland the law requires courts consider the impact of religious bias when sentencing.

In Northern Ireland, the law bans employment discrimination on the grounds of religious belief. In the rest of the UK, the law prohibits any discrimination, including employment discrimination, based on religious belief, unless a genuine requirement for a particular religion can be shown.

Citing a limited broadcast spectrum, the law prohibits religious groups from holding national sound broadcasting licenses, public teletext licenses, more than one television service license, and/or radio and television multiplex licenses.

Throughout the country, the law requires religious education and worship for children between the ages of three and 13 in state-run schools, with the content decided at the local level. At age 13, students may choose to stop Religious Education (RE) or continue and study two religions rather than one. The nonreligious state schools require the curriculum reflect "Christian values," be nondenominational, and refrain from attempts to convert students. The curriculum must also teach the practices of other principal religions in the country. Teachers have the right to decline participation in collective worship, without prejudice, unless they are employed by faith-based schools.

## UNITED KINGDOM

Nonreligious state schools in England and Wales are required to practice daily collective prayer or worship of “a wholly or mainly...Christian character.” All parents have the legal right to request that their children not participate in religious education. Nonreligious state schools are free to hold religious ceremonies as they choose. The law permits sixth form students (generally 16- to 19-year-olds in the final two years of secondary school) to withdraw from worship without parental permission or action.

Only denominational schools in Scotland practice daily collective prayer or worship.

In Bermuda, the law requires students attending public (state) schools to participate in collective worship, but prohibits worship “distinctive of any particular religious group.” The law allows parents to withdraw their children from participation. Homeschooling is an approved alternative for religious or other reasons.

The government funds 6,848 “faith schools” in England (34.1 percent of all schools). Of these, 4,609 (23 percent) are Church of England, 1,985 (9.9 percent) Catholic, 26 Methodist, 145 “other” Christian, 48 Jewish, 18 Muslim, eight Sikh, four Hindu, two Greek Orthodox, one Quaker, one Seventh-day Adventist, and one United Reformed Church. There are 377 “denominational schools” in Scotland, 373 Catholic, three Episcopalian, and one Jewish. If the school is not oversubscribed then the school must offer a place to any child, but if the school is oversubscribed it may use faith as a criterion for acceptance.

Almost all schools in Northern Ireland receive state support, with approximately 90 percent of the students attending predominantly Protestant or Catholic schools. Approximately 7 percent of school-age children attend religiously integrated schools with admissions criteria designed to voluntarily enroll equal numbers of Catholic and Protestant children, as well as children from other religious and cultural backgrounds. These integrated schools are not secular, but are “essentially Christian in character and welcome all faiths and none.” RE – a core syllabus designed by the Department of Education, the Church of Ireland, and the Catholic, Presbyterian, and Methodist Churches – is compulsory in all government-funded schools, and “the school day shall include collective worship whether in one or more than one assembly.” All schools receive government funding and all require RE; however Catholic-managed schools draw uniquely on the Roman Catholic tradition for their RE.

## UNITED KINGDOM

An estimated 30 sharia councils operate parallel to the national legal system. They adjudicate religious matters without the legal status of courts, although they have legal status as mediation and arbitration bodies.

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) is responsible for enforcing the Equality Act 2010, which prevents religious discrimination. The EHRC researches and conducts inquiries into religious and other discrimination in England, Scotland, and Wales. If the Commission finds a violation of the Equality Act it can issue a notice to the violator and seek a court order to enforce it. The EHRC receives public funds, but operates independently of the government. The Northern Ireland equivalent to the EHRC is the Equality Commission.

Twenty-six senior bishops of the Anglican Church sit in the House of Lords as representatives of the state church. Known as the Lords Spiritual, they read prayers at the start of each daily meeting and play a full and active role in the life and work of the upper house.

The law requires visa applicants wishing to enter the country as “ministers of religion” have worked for at least one out of the last five years as a minister and have one year of full-time experience or, if their religion requires ordination, two years of part-time training following their ordination. A missionary must also be trained as such or have worked previously in this role.

### **Government Practices**

In July the government announced the creation of a national database of school governors in England, responding to the results of an official independent inquiry. The government had commissioned the inquiry following allegations from parents and teachers that some Birmingham schools were being infiltrated by fundamentalist Muslims through school board elections, who had replaced moderate staff, driven out staff, undermined head teachers, and interfered in the running of the schools. The official inquiry concluded there had been “coordinated, deliberate and sustained action” by a number of individuals to introduce an “intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos” into a few schools in the city, and “that there were those who either espoused, sympathized with, or failed to challenge extremist views.” The Department of Education was criticized for

## UNITED KINGDOM

failing to keep any register to check who was serving on those school governing bodies.

In October Home Secretary Theresa May announced an official investigation into the application of sharia in the activities of faith-based “supplementary schools,” which were voluntary, community-run organizations that offered instruction outside of school hours. The inquiry focused also on instances where sharia was applied in a way incompatible with the law, such as cases in which women were pressured to reconcile with violent husbands despite legal injunctions in place to protect them from violence.

In March Secretary May stated sharia was being used to “discriminate against women” by leaving them in penury or forcing them to remain in abusive relationships. London Mayor Boris Johnson said, “The idea of a parallel system of law, a parallel system of judicature, [with] people making the laws according to a different system is absolutely unacceptable.”

Sharia was rarely used in either Northern Ireland or Scotland.

In a speech at his party’s annual conference in October, Prime Minister Cameron introduced a counter-extremism strategy featuring a wide range of measures, including banning extremist organizations, restricting activities of those deemed dangerous, banning anyone who expresses the conviction to commit terrorism from working with children, clamping down on extremist messages on social media, restricting access to places associated with extremism, and allowing parents to request the government seize passports of 16- and 17-year-old youths they believe are at risk of trying to join extremist groups. He outlined plans to register and inspect madrassahs, closing down those that preach extremism. Islamic groups expressed concerns that the measures were anti-Islamic and could cause backlash in Muslim communities.

In October Prime Minister Cameron announced the government would require police forces in England and Wales to create a separate category of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the same way anti-Semitic crimes are specially classified. Cameron announced an increase in security at faith establishments, including mosques, if required.

## UNITED KINGDOM

The prime minister used his Easter message to declare Britain was still a Christian country and urged people to “speak out” about the persecution of Christians around the world.

In August Prime Minister Cameron delegated responsibility for faith and integration to Baroness Williams of Trafford, a junior minister at the Department for Communities and Local Government, in addition to her other ministerial duties. Responsibility for religious and interfaith issues had previously been a cabinet-level position, but the prime minister denied he had downgraded the position.

In August Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon participated in a town hall with members of the Jewish community in Scotland. Sturgeon pledged to increase engagement with the Jewish community. Scottish Justice Secretary Michael Matheson met Jewish community leaders in the aftermath of the November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris to discuss government assistance to the Jewish Community. He pledged to visit a synagogue and discussed how the Scottish government could assist the upcoming bicentenary celebrations of the Edinburgh Jewish Community.

On January 26, Baroness Jenny Tonge submitted a written question in the House of Lords asking whether the government would “plan to encourage Jewish faith leaders in the United Kingdom publicly to condemn settlement building by Israel and to make clear their support for universal human rights.” She said British Jews must condemn Israel if they want to avoid increased expressions of anti-Semitism. In September the prime minister pledged to continue fighting anti-Semitism in a Rosh Hashanah video message.

An October hearing determined that evangelical pastor James McConnell would be tried at the end of the year for a sermon broadcast in 2014 in which he described Islam as “satanic” and “heathen.” The charges were “improper use of a public electronic communications network” and “causing a grossly offensive message.”

The government stated it provided religious accommodations for public servants whenever possible. For example, the prison service permitted Muslim employees to take time off during their shifts to pray. The military generally provided adherents of minority religious groups with chaplains of their faith. The Chaplaincy Council monitored policy and practice relating to such matters.

## UNITED KINGDOM

The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life published a report on December 7 urging mandatory Christian assemblies in schools be abandoned as Britain becomes increasingly secular. Studies have also shown many schools ignored the law that they practice daily collective Christian prayer or worship. In practice, most collective worship in schools in Bermuda was Christian in nature.

The government did not mandate uniforms for students, but required schools to consider the needs of different cultures, races, and religions when setting dress code policy.

In December MP John Mann stated he had filed an official complaint against MP Gerald Kaufman for saying “Jewish money” influenced the Conservative Party. Kaufman reportedly also said Israeli authorities were fabricating reports of stabbings.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

In September a gang in Manchester attacked four young Jewish men, beating one until he was unconscious. He remained in a coma for several days. Police arrested two teens in connection with the attack.

In November two men attacked Nissar Hussein, a Pakistani immigrant who converted to Christianity. Hussein reported others in the community assaulted and harassed his family and attacked their house since his conversion. He reported police had failed to respond. The attack left him with a fractured forearm, a broken kneecap, and a concussion. Police investigated the crime as a hate crime.

In March a mob broke into the Ahavas Torah synagogue in London, at the end of a Shabbat service, shouting “Kill the Jews,” assaulting at least one man, smashing windows, and vandalizing the building. Scotland Yard arrested six individuals in connection with the attack.

Governmental organizations reported an increase in religious hate crimes and incidents in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and a decrease in Scotland. According to Home Office figures published in October, from March 2014 to



## UNITED KINGDOM

March 2015 there were 3,254 religious hate crimes, a 43 percent rise compared to the previous year.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland stated in its annual report, published on November 26, that the number of crimes motivated by faith or religion decreased from 23 between October 2013 and September 2014, to 21 between October 2014 and September 2015. Between April 2014 and March 2015, there were 13 offenses classified as “violence against the person” and 12 criminal damage offenses motivated by faith or religion. From October 2014 to September 2015, the number of incidents – less severe offenses where the public asked for police assistance, but which were not reported to the government as notifiable crimes – based on faith or religion decreased from 46 to 40 compared to the previous year.

During 2014–2015, there were 569 charges reported in Scotland with “religious aggravation,” a 3 percent reduction compared to 2013–2014. This was the lowest level reported since 2007–2008. The number of sectarian incidents at Scottish soccer matches in 2014–2015, recorded under legislation that criminalized religious hatred connected to soccer, was 48, the same number as during 2013–2014. In total, 193 charges were reported under this legislation in 2014–2015 compared to 203 in 2013–2014.

According to Crown Office figures, in 2013–2014 the proportion of charges in Scotland related to anti-Catholic sentiment increased from 57 percent in 2012–2013 to 63 percent, although the number of actual offenses fell from 388 charges in 2012–2013 to 367 charges in 2013–2014. Offenses relating to anti-Protestant sentiment remained unchanged at 29 percent although the number of actual offences also fell from 199 charges in 2012–2013 to 169 charges in 2013–2014.

In its annual report, the Community Security Trust (CST), a UK organization that monitors anti-Semitism, recorded 924 anti-Semitic incidents, a 22 percent decrease compared to the same period in the previous year. The incidents included 86 violent anti-Semitic assaults, an increase of 6 percent from 2014 and the highest number of violent incidents since 2011. There were 65 incidents of damage and desecration of Jewish property; 685 incidents of abusive behavior, including verbal abuse, anti-Semitic graffiti, anti-Semitic abuse via social media, and single incidents of hate mail; 76 direct anti-Semitic threats; and 12 cases of mass-mailed anti-Semitic leaflets or e-mails. All of these were decreases from the previous year. Three-quarters of the 924 anti-Semitic incidents were recorded in greater London and greater Manchester, the two largest Jewish communities in the UK.

## UNITED KINGDOM

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities commissioned a report in March, with funding from the Scottish government, on increasing levels of anti-Semitic incidents in Scotland. The report revealed a large proportion of respondents agreed their experiences of living in Scotland became more uncomfortable as a direct result of attitudes to the changing situation in the Middle East.

According to a February survey by ScotCen Social Research, almost nine in 10 Scots believed sectarianism was a problem for Scotland. The figures also showed 69 percent of respondents thought sectarianism was only a problem for specific areas of Scotland, with Glasgow and the West of Scotland most commonly mentioned.

The NGO Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) reported 1,632 cases of anti-Muslim hate incidents and crimes during the nine month period from January 1 to August 31. Of these, 608 involved individuals who reported directly to the organization; 1,024 were cases shared by the police. Police also reported a 70 percent increase in attacks on Muslims in London from July 2014 to July 2015 compared to the previous period. A report indicated that in the ten days after the November Paris terrorist attacks, 115 Muslims reported religiously-motivated hate crimes.

In October research by the University of Strathclyde showed 42 percent of black and minority respondents felt they had been discriminated against because of their religion. This was the first survey conducted that focused exclusively on black and minority ethnic experiences in Scotland.

In October an independent prison monitoring group published a report on Whitemoor prison in Cambridgeshire, where approximately half the prisoners were Muslim. The report stated other inmates were pressured to convert to Islam and reported abuse if they cooked pork in a communal kitchen. The report warned the prison could be a recruiting ground for extremists.

In December government inspectors discovered 15 unregistered schools and reported squalid conditions and apparent segregation of genders on religious grounds. The majority of the schools were either Islamic or Jewish. In some schools with a “narrow Islamic-focused curriculum,” government officials reported evidence of misogynistic, homophobic, and anti-Semitic teaching material. The staff were not properly cleared to work with children. The discovery was a result

## UNITED KINGDOM

of the Office for Standards on Education's investigation of unregistered schools due to what the head of the office called a "serious and growing threat" to the welfare of hundreds of children. The schools were reportedly set up to avoid regulation by using loopholes for home schooling. In November a Muslim school in London failed an inspection due to books in the library promoting inequality of women and illegal punishments, including stoning.

In January the chief rabbi recommended teaching Islam in schools so students could better understand it and build interfaith relationships.

In October research by the University of St. Andrews and the University of Edinburgh showed a majority of Muslim students from schools in Scotland experienced discrimination on the basis of their religion. The survey also found similar discrimination was directed at other groups, including refugees from Somalia and Sikhs. Jewish students at Scottish universities reported they felt they needed to hide their faith to avoid discrimination. The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities said university officials criticized students' work on Israel if they did not agree with the students' point of view, forced students to attend lectures and take exams on the Sabbath, and did not take allegations of abuse seriously.

Two separate incidents, filmed and made public in October, showed aggressive anti-Muslim sentiment on London buses. In the first video a woman verbally abused a pregnant Muslim woman. In the second video a man harassed and threatened an elderly Turkish male and threw his walker off the bus. Both offenders were later arrested and charged by the police.

In July a neo-Nazi group planned a protest against "Jewish privilege" in central London. Police moved the protest from the neighborhood of Golders Green, home to a large Jewish community, so that residents could peacefully observe the Sabbath. Approximately two dozen individuals participated and an anti-Nazi counter-protest attracted approximately 200. One man was charged with inciting racial hatred in connection with the rally. Later that month the media reported Nazi sympathizers held a secret meeting in London at which several prominent Holocaust deniers spoke.

In August an unnamed individual filed a complaint against a performer at the Edinburgh Festival after she posted a photo of herself making an anti-Semitic gesture. She had previously written blog posts and made statements on social media questioning the Holocaust.

## UNITED KINGDOM

In September a Scottish man sent a photo of himself holding a Nazi flag to a Jewish woman. He was sentenced to six months in prison.

In March St. John's Church in London held a full Muslim prayer service. Evangelical clerics protested, saying the service violated Church of England doctrine and was offensive to Christians.

In November a Muslim scholar who posted a video condemning extremism and the November Paris terrorist attacks reported he received death threats from British children who supported Da'esh (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant).

In October vandals left two pigs' heads with anti-Islamic slogans on the doorstep of a former church in Belfast. The church was for sale and empty since 2006. At the time of the incident it was being used by a community group.

Several days before the July neo-Nazi protest in London vandals wrote an anti-Semitic statement on the entrance to a Jewish elementary school, and a man attacked a car with an axe outside a synagogue. Police stated they did not believe the incidents and protest were connected. There were reports of additional anti-Semitic graffiti in Orthodox neighborhoods and on Jewish schools in July and August.

In June vandals desecrated Muslim graves in Nottingham. Police investigated the attack as a hate crime.

On November 17, vandals firebombed a Muslim cultural center in Bishopbriggs. No one was injured. Some sources believed it was a reaction to the November Paris terrorist attacks. On the same day, vandals firebombed a Muslim couple's home in Northern Ireland.

In December the BBC radio service allowed a caller to speak for 13 minutes on air about conspiracies of Jewish "rule" and Jewish attempts to "control" society.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The Ambassador and the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom discussed religious intolerance, protection of minorities and blasphemy laws with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Minister for Human Rights Baroness

## UNITED KINGDOM

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Embassy and consulates general officials engaged Muslim audiences, including student and youth groups, in a series of talks and discussions, including the portrayal of Muslims and anti-Muslim sentiment in the media, and underscoring the importance of religious tolerance. The Ambassador hosted a meeting with young Muslim teens to discuss Muslim integration in the UK. Separately, the embassy hosted a viewing of the film *My Son, the Jihadi*. More than 100 people attended the film and the audience included a mix of Muslim civil society members, journalists, and other contacts.

The Consulate General in Edinburgh continued its engagement with religious minority groups in Scotland. In March the Principal Officer spoke at an interfaith reception hosted by the Shia Muslim organization, the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society, at the Scottish Parliament to highlight the efforts of the U.S. to promote religious freedom.