

UNITED KINGDOM 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

Laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year. Government leaders spoke out frequently about the need to protect religious freedom and worked to improve understanding about religious differences and promote tolerance. Authorities in Scotland used a new law to target religiously motivated offensive behavior and threatening communications.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There were reports of 640 anti-Semitic incidents, representing a 5 percent increase from the previous year. Of the 631 anti-Muslim incidents reported during the year, more than half targeted females.

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom issues with the government. The U.S. embassy and consulates conducted outreach with religious groups, including Muslims, Christians, Bahais, and Sikhs.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the Office of National Statistics, the population of the United Kingdom is 62.3 million. Census figures from 2011 indicate that 59.3 percent of the population is Christian, comprising the Church of England (Anglican), the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian), the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches, and unaffiliated Christian groups. Roughly 25 percent of the population consists of nonbelievers.

The Muslim community, comprising 4.8 percent of the population, 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 local converts. Other religious groups, which each make up less than 2 percent of the population, include Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Buddhists. Individuals from these religious groups are concentrated in London and other large urban areas, primarily in England.

Census figures from Northern Ireland in 2011 indicate that 41 percent of the population is Catholic, 41.5 percent Protestant, and less than 1 percent various non-

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Christian religious groups. Approximately 17 percent of respondents did not indicate a religious affiliation.

In Bermuda, Anglicans are 16 percent of the population, while Roman Catholics and African Methodist Episcopalians are 15 and 9 percent, respectively. Muslims represent up to 1.5 percent of the population. Nearly 20 religious groups are present.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The laws and other policies protect religious freedom and contribute to the generally free practice of religion. There is one state church, the Church of England, and one national church, the Church of Scotland. Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland do not have “official” 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.

As the “Supreme Governor” of the Church of England, the monarch must always be a member of and promise to uphold the 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. The General Convention of the Church of Scotland appoints its own office holders. The monarch becomes a subject of the Church of Scotland when she crosses the border into Scotland. In February Queen Elizabeth II stated, “The church’s role is not to defend Anglicanism to the exclusion of all other religions. Instead the church has a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths in this country.”

Sharia (Islamic law) is managed by Sharia councils that operate parallel to the national legal system. 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. Sharia law is rarely used in either Northern Ireland or Scotland.

The law prohibits religiously motivated hate language, including demonstrations where insulting and abusive language is used. The law also 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 considered

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threatening and intended to incite religious hatred. The maximum penalty for inciting religious hatred is seven years in prison, while 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) is responsible for promoting equality, diversity, and the elimination of unlawful discrimination and harassment. The EHRC receives public funds, but operates independently of the government.

The EHRC can investigate unlawful acts of religious discrimination and bring legal proceedings against violators of the law. In Scotland the EHRC covers only human rights matters reserved for parliament and major government ministries. The Scottish Human Rights Commission covers human rights matters for issues devolved to the Scottish parliament. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland functions in a similar manner to the EHRC. In Northern Ireland, the law bans employment discrimination on the grounds of religious opinion.

In the rest of the UK, outside of Northern Ireland, the law prohibits employment discrimination based on religious belief, except where there is a “genuine occupational requirement” of a religious nature.

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

In Scotland the law requires that courts consider the impact of religious bias when sentencing. On March 1, due to the ongoing problem of sectarian violence at soccer matches in Scotland, the Scottish Parliament passed a law targeting religiously aggravated violence at soccer matches; the new law also targets religiously motivated threatening communications.

Throughout the United Kingdom, the law requires religious education for all children between the ages of three and nineteen in state schools, with the content decided at the local level. The curriculum must reflect Christian values, be nondenominational, and refrain from attempts to convert students. The teachings and practices of other principal religious groups in the country must also be taken into account. All parents have the legal right to request that their children not participate in religious education.

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

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 from 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 from worship without parental permission or action, but does not exempt them from religious education classes. Non-Christian worship is permitted with the approval of the authorities. Teachers have the right to decline participation in collective worship, without prejudice, unless they are employed by faith-based schools.

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

There are approximately 7,000 state-funded “faith schools” in England and 377 in Scotland. These schools include religious education and/or have formal links with religious organizations, but must follow the national curriculum and are inspected by the Office for Standards in Children’s Services and Skills.

Almost all schools in Northern Ireland receive state support, with 93.5 percent of the students attending predominantly Protestant or Catholic schools that are state-run. Religiously integrated schools educate approximately 7 percent of school-age children, with admissions criteria designed to enroll voluntarily 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,” according to the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

The government requires that visa applicants wishing to enter the country as “ministers of religion” must have worked for at least one out of the last five years 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

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means of entering the ministry. A missionary must also be trained as such or have worked previously as a missionary.

It is government policy to provide religious accommodation for public servants whenever possible. For example, the Prison Service permits Muslim employees to take time off during their shifts to pray. 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.

Twenty-five senior bishops of the Anglican Church are given places in the House of Lords as representatives of the official church.

The government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

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.

In September four Christian workers argued before the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) that British law failed to protect their right to religious freedom at the workplace after their cases were dismissed in British courts. One of the cases stemmed from 2006, when British Airways, as part of its uniform policy, directed a Christian employee to stop wearing a visible cross at work. The ECHR had not ruled by the end of the year.

Between March, when a new law on religiously motivated offensive behavior and threatening communications went into effect, and September, the Crown office of the Procurator Fiscal in Scotland received 203 reports of charges under the legislation, with 34 convictions.

On December 18, the High Court ruled that the Church of Scientology could not legally hold marriage ceremonies because it was not “a place of meeting for religious worship.” Citing a 1970 Court of Appeal ruling that Scientology services “did not involve acts of worship,” the High Court judge stated he was bound by that decision, dismissing a Scientologist’s case alleging religious discrimination. The judge also stated that the Supreme Court--the highest court in the country--

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should consider the question of whether Scientologists worshipped and decide whether it wanted to rule separately on the issue.

Speaking to Christian leaders during a Downing Street reception to celebrate Easter, Prime Minister Cameron emphasized his similar receptions for Diwali, Eid, and Jewish New Year and said that “the values of the Bible, the values of Christianity are the values that we need--values of compassion, of respect, of responsibility, of tolerance.” He added that “faith has a huge amount to bring not just to our national life in terms of values; it has a huge amount to bring in terms of strengthening our institutions.” In February Minister of State for Faith and Communities Baroness Warsi spoke out against what she termed “militant secularization” and the marginalization of religion in the country and Europe. During a February visit to the Vatican, Baroness Warsi spoke of the importance of interfaith dialogue and commented, “In order to encourage social harmony, people need to feel stronger in their religious identities, more confident in their beliefs.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. However, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom and tolerance.

According to the 2011-2012 Home Office report on hate crimes in England and Wales, 1,621 of the 43,748 hate crimes recorded were religious in nature, representing 4 percent of the total. Of these, 75 percent were categorized as “violence against the person,” 19 percent as “criminal damage,” and 6 percent as “other.”

The Community Security Trust (CST), a nongovernmental organization, reported that anti-Semitic incidents rose by 5 percent, to the third highest annual level recorded. The CST reported 640 attacks against Jews, up from 608 the previous year. It considered 60 incidents to be “violent anti-Semitic assaults,” of which two were classified as “extreme violence.” Assailants kicked a Jewish schoolboy in Northern Ireland unconscious following a lesson about the Holocaust and punched two Jewish individuals in Glasgow who were walking down the street. The majority of incidents were in the “abusive behavior” category, including verbal attacks, anti-Semitic graffiti, and hate mail. In May vandals spray-painted swastikas on a Jewish woman’s car in Brighton and flattened three of its tires. Police investigated, but identified no suspects. In July four assailants were convicted of “using religiously aggravated and insulting words likely to cause alarm or distress” in an attack involving egg throwing and anti-Semitic verbal taunts against a group of Jews walking along a London street. The culprits were

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fined 397 pounds (\$642) each. In November the CST called on the Football Association to take urgent action following anti-Semitic chanting at matches in Rome and London.

The CST reported that Greater Manchester, home to one of the two largest Jewish communities in the country, recorded a 34 percent reduction in anti-Semitic incidents from the previous year, dropping from 256 incidents in 2011 to 169. Since 2011, CST and the Greater Manchester police have operated an exchange program to share reports of anti-Semitic incidents. Greater Manchester Police Chief Superintendent Caroline Ball stated the reduction “demonstrates the huge benefit of police officers and the CST working together with our communities to get a better understanding of the problem at hand.” During the year the CST began a similar information-sharing relationship with the Metropolitan Police Service in London.

In October prosecutors accused three men of plotting bomb attacks intended to cause mass casualties and stated the men were “radicalized” by al-Qaeda affiliated cleric Anwar al Awlaki.

Established in February, the Muslim nongovernmental organization Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) reported 631 anti-Muslim incidents from March through December. Forty-seven percent of the incidents involved abusive behavior; 34 percent, anti-Muslim literature; 11 percent, threats; 3 percent, damage and desecration; 3 percent, assault; and 2 percent, extreme violence.

In October Ahmadi Muslims called for action against certain media and mosques expressing religious hatred against their community. In May the Office of Communications (Ofcom), the government media regulator, censured the UK-based television outlet DM Digital for airing material “likely to encourage or incite the commission of a crime or lead to disorder.” The move came in response to a statement by an Islamic scholar on an October 2011 DM Digital program that the late founder of the Ahmadiyya community was “an apostate and one who deserves to be killed.”

In December a man left a severed pig’s head outside a Newbury mosque. He was subsequently arrested and charged with intent to cause harassment, alarm, or distress.

During Northern Ireland’s summer “marching season,” Protestant “loyalists” took part in approximately 3,000 parades, including one in which a loyalist band played

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sectarian songs outside a Catholic church. The Protestant Orange Order often considered rulings of the official Parades Commission that placed restrictions on parades as a breach of its civil or religious liberties.

During preparations for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Reverend Canon Duncan Green, head of faith services for the London Organizing Committee, formed a faith reference group with the aim of ensuring that “everyone, whatever their religion or ethnic background, should feel they can play a part in the world’s greatest sporting events.” In December the Archbishop of Canterbury hosted a reception for Christian and Jewish groups, emphasizing “an unrelenting opposition to any resurgence of anti-Semitism” and the importance of creating “a society in which we know we can trust one another.”

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. ambassador, visiting officials, and embassy and consulate officials met with religious leaders, student groups, interfaith groups, and elected officials to promote religious diversity and acceptance. Embassy and consulate officials conducted public outreach programs with the Muslim community, including student and youth groups, to promote religious tolerance and acceptance. The ambassador hosted an annual celebration to mark Eid al-Fitr. Embassy officers hosted groups of local Sikh leaders following the Wisconsin shootings. The consulate general in Edinburgh held outreach events with the Muslim communities in Glasgow and Edinburgh that emphasized the importance of religious acceptance and diversity.

The U.S. consulate general in Northern Ireland continued to encourage efforts to diminish sectarian tension and promote dialogue between the Protestant and Catholic communities. The consul general met with religious leaders from both communities in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry to discuss religious issues and their impact on the peace process. Officers from the Belfast consulate facilitated interfaith dialogue events and participated in other interfaith programs. The consulate worked closely with faith-based groups that serve as conduits between polarized neighborhoods and community leaders.

As an outcome of talks between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and local religious leaders on how to put aside religious bias and work toward community cohesion, the U.S. embassy implemented a program in Derry/Londonderry that brought together young people from differing religious backgrounds. In July, through a U.S. small grants program, the consulate general in Belfast coordinated

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with area Protestant and Catholic churches to encourage youth from both groups to work together on a volunteer project in Castlederg. The consulate general introduced a visiting U.S. director of teen services for a nongovernment organization to local religious leaders to discuss possible collaboration.