

# UNITED KINGDOM 2014 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. At an Easter reception, Prime Minister Cameron declared the United Kingdom a "Christian country." He appointed a new faith minister who received criticism for reported bias against people who were not religious. Northern Ireland First Minister Peter Robinson apologized for remarks he made defending anti-Islamic comments by an evangelical pastor following two attacks on Pakistani men.

Governmental organizations reported an increase in religious hate crimes and incidents in England, a slight increase in Northern Ireland, and a decrease in Scotland. The government attributed most of the increase in England to the killing of a British serviceman in 2013. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported a spike in anti-Semitic incidents during the conflict in Gaza. Muslims experienced physical and online abuse.

U.S. embassy officials met with religious leaders, student groups, interfaith groups, and elected officials to promote religious diversity and acceptance, and conducted public outreach programs with the Muslim community to promote religious tolerance and acceptance. Embassy officers met with Jewish community leaders to respond to an increase in anti-Semitic incidents and promoted dialogue between the Protestant and Catholic communities.

## Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 63.7 million (July 2014 estimate). Census figures from 2011 for England and Wales 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, with no further breakdown available. Roughly 25 percent of the population consists of nonbelievers.

The Muslim community in England and Wales, comprising 4.8 percent of the population, is predominantly of South Asian origin, but also includes individuals

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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 Scotland in 2011 indicate that 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 0.8 percent of the population, include Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Buddhists. More than 36 percent of the population has no religious affiliation, with the remainder not providing any information.

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-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. Approximately 20 religious groups are present, nearly all of which are Christian. The Muslim community numbers just over 600 individuals, and there are approximately 130 Jews. Apart from Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, and nondenominational groups, membership in religious groups declined between the 2000 and 2010 censuses. 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 "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.

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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.

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. Under the law, offenses must be considered 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.

In Scotland the law requires that courts consider the impact of religious bias when sentencing.

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 United Kingdom, the law prohibits

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employment discrimination based on religious belief, except where there is a “genuine occupational requirement” of a religious nature.

Throughout the United Kingdom, the law requires religious education for all children between the ages of three and 19 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.

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 Scotland, daily collective prayer or worship is only practiced in denominational 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 “denominational schools” in Scotland (373 Roman Catholic, three Episcopalian, and one Jewish). 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.

In Northern Ireland, religious education (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 grant-aided schools, and “the school

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day shall include collective worship whether in one or more than one assembly.” While RE is required in all grant-aided schools, only “controlled schools,” state-funded schools attended mainly by Protestant children with Protestant church representation on the board of governors, must be nondenominational. The law requires the RE syllabus in controlled schools to include studying Christianity from the Roman Catholic tradition and at least one Protestant tradition.

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,” according to the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

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

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

### **Government Practices**

In July police charged four teenagers in connection with an assault on a rabbi in Gateshead. The victim, in his 40s, was attacked as he left a Jewish study center in northeast England’s largest Orthodox Jewish community.

At an Easter reception at Number 10 Downing Street, Prime Minister Cameron declared the United Kingdom remained at its heart a “Christian country” and that followers of the faith should be “unashamedly evangelical” about their beliefs. In August Cameron appointed Communities Secretary Eric Pickles as the new faith minister, following the resignation of Foreign Office Minister Baroness Warsi over government policy towards Gaza. The National Secular Society called for the position to be abolished, and criticized Pickles for reported bias against people who

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were not religious, following comments he made that “militant atheists” needed to “get over it” and accept Britain as a Christian country. “Don’t impose your politically correct intolerance on others,” he said. In October the Liberal Democrats called for the role of minister for faith and communities to be redefined as “minister for faith, belief and communities.” The changed job title and description would extend the existing role to cover nonreligious beliefs, such as humanism, as well as faith-based beliefs. The task of “promoting faith” would be removed from the job specification, but the role of promoting religious tolerance would remain.

Sharia was managed by sharia councils that operated parallel to the national legal system. The councils dealt only with civil cases, had no legal powers, and could only rule in areas such as dispute mediation, marriage, and finance, and in ways that did not contradict the law, and with the consent of both parties. Sharia was rarely used in either Northern Ireland or Scotland. Women’s rights activists accused the professional body representing lawyers in England and Wales, the Law Society, of endorsing discrimination against women by refusing to withdraw its guidance on sharia wills. The guidance informed lawyers that in general, under sharia, male heirs inherited twice the amount a female heir would receive and that illegitimate children were not heirs. Critics said this effectively enshrined Islamic law in the British legal system for the first time.

On January 13, the Home Office granted asylum to an atheist Afghan man based on assertions he would suffer religious persecution in his home country. The man was born a Muslim but left the Islamic faith and his lawyers based his application for asylum on the assertion that apostasy was punishable by death in Afghanistan. *The Guardian* newspaper reported the case was the first time the Home Office had made a decision of this kind.

In August the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council criticized the decision of the Glasgow city council to raise the Palestinian flag over Glasgow city chambers in support of the people of Gaza. A number of other local authorities in Scotland, including Edinburgh, also raised the Palestinian flag over their headquarters.

In June the Sinn Fein Mayor of Newry, Daire Hughes, wrote to businesses in the border areas instructing them to stop buying and selling Israeli products and to send him an inventory of any products currently sold. The small Jewish community in Newry accused Hughes of being “belligerent and sinister.”

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Following assaults on two Pakistani men in their North Belfast home on June 1, Northern Ireland First Minister Peter Robinson apologized on June 3 for remarks he made defending anti-Islamic statements made earlier in May by an evangelical pastor. One of the victims had publicly accused Robinson of stoking tensions by defending the anti-Islamic comments made by the pastor. The victims required medical attention after the beating.

Citing a limited broadcast spectrum, the government prohibited 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.

It was government policy to provide religious accommodation 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.

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.

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

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

Governmental organizations reported an increase in religious hate crimes and incidents in England, a slight increase in Northern Ireland, and a decrease in Scotland.

According to 2013-2014 Home Office official figures on hate crimes in England and Wales, 2,273 of the 44,480 hate crimes recorded were religious in nature, representing 5 percent of the total. The Home Office stated, “Much of the increase in race and religious hate crime is likely to be due to a rise in offenses in the months immediately following the murder of serviceman Lee Rigby in May 2013.”

The Police Service of Northern Ireland stated in its annual report, published on July 3, that between 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 the number of faith/religion crimes decreased from 14 to 13, of which three were classified as “violence against the

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person” offenses and 10 were criminal damage offenses. Over the same period, the number of faith/religion incidents (less severe offenses where the public asks for police assistance, but which are not reported to the Home Office as notifiable crimes) increased from 22 to 24.

In 2013-2014, there were 587 charges reported in Scotland with “religious aggravation,” a 15 percent reduction compared to 2012-2013. The number of sectarian incidents at Scottish soccer matches, recorded under legislation which criminalizes religious hatred connected to soccer, dropped from 267 in 2012-2013 to 203 in 2013-2014.

According to Crown Office figures, in 2013-2014 the proportion of charges in Scotland related to Catholicism increased from 57 percent in 2012-2013 to 63 percent in 2013-2014, although the number of offenses fell. Offenses relating to Protestantism remained unchanged at 29 percent.

In its 2014 report the Community Security Trust (CST), a UK organization that monitors anti-Semitism, stated there was a record number of anti-Semitic hate incidents during the year. The CST recorded 1,168 incidents, more than double the 535 incidents in 2013. Part of the increase occurred from January to June, before the conflict in Gaza. In July the CST reported there was “no clear explanation for the sharp rise in recorded incidents in the first half of 2014, which may reflect both a rise in the number of incidents taking place and better reporting of incidents to CST and the police.”

The 1,168 anti-Semitic incidents included 81 violent assaults, an increase of 17 percent from the 69 violent assaults recorded in 2013, and the highest annual total since 2011. One incident was classified as “extreme violence,” involving grievous bodily harm. Prior to the conflict in Gaza, the number of violent anti-Semitic assaults had been on a downward trend. Included in the 1,168 incidents were also 884 cases of abusive behavior, which included verbal abuse, anti-Semitic graffiti, anti-Semitic abuse via social media and single cases of hate mail; 92 direct anti-Semitic threats; 32 cases of mass-mailed anti-Semitic leaflets or emails, and 81 incidents of damage and desecration of Jewish property.

In September retailer Sports Direct apologized after a security guard reportedly barred two schoolboys wearing the school uniforms of Yavneh College, a Jewish secondary school, from its store in Borehamwood in Hertfordshire, telling them “no Jews, no Jews.” Sports Direct removed the worker, who was later fired by the

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security firm that employed him, and apologized for the guard's behavior, calling it "deeply offensive and disrespectful."

In August the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (ScoJeC) reported a large spike in anti-Semitic incidents in Scotland, linking it to the conflict in Gaza. ScoJeC stated that in one week in August, it received 25 reports relating to 12 anti-Semitic incidents, almost as many as in the whole of 2013. Incidents included threatening phone calls, e-mails, and graffiti on synagogues.

The NGO Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) reported 734 cases of abuse between May 1, 2013, and February 28, 2014, the most recent period for which figures were available. Of these, 599 were incidents of online abuse and 135 were "offline" incidents, including assaults, verbal harassment, circulation of anti-Muslim literature, and desecration of mosques. Of the offline anti-Muslim attacks recorded by Tell MAMA, 23 cases involved assault, 13 involved extreme violence; and the other 99 cases included verbal harassment and attacks on property. Forty percent of all anti-Muslim incidents recorded by Tell MAMA were linked to far-right groups.

Tell MAMA commissioned Teeside University's Center for Fascist, Anti-fascist, and Post-fascist Studies (CFAPS) to analyze the anti-Muslim incidents recorded by Tell MAMA and to produce an independent report. CFAPS found that underreporting remained a problem in collecting data on hate crimes. According to Tell MAMA's data, approximately 83 percent of the victims of all anti-Muslim incidents did not report them to the police. Only 3 percent of victims of an offline attack reported them both to Tell MAMA and the police. A majority of the victims reporting offline incidents to Tell MAMA were females who were wearing items of clothing associated with Islam at the time the incidents occurred.

Following a ruling in 2013 that "Scientology comes within the meaning of a religion," the first ever wedding in a Scientology chapel took place in February.

In June the Muslim Council of Scotland, along with several imams, called on young Scottish Muslims to reject extreme fundamentalism after three men, including one from Aberdeen, were seen in a recruitment video for Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant calling on others of their faith to take up arms and join them abroad.

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In November the police arrested 10 neo-Nazis who had planned an anti-Semitic demonstration outside the office of Jewish Member of Parliament Luciana Berger. The arrests followed the arrest of a 21-year-old Nazi sympathizer who tweeted a picture of Berger with a yellow star on her forehead and the words “Hitler was right.”

In October the Board of Deputies of British Jews criticized Sir Alan Duncan, a former UK government minister, for a series of anti-Semitic remarks and his reported criticism of the Jewish community for defending Israel.

The leading soccer anti-discrimination organization, Kick It Out, filed a complaint with police after anti-Semitic abuse was posted on social media in response to a goodwill message to its Jewish fans from Liverpool Football Club.

Wigan Football Club manager Malky Mackay remained under investigation by the British Football Association for alleged racism and anti-Semitism committed during his tenure as manager of the Cardiff City Football Club. After Mackay was fired from Cardiff in 2013, a series of his texts was made public including statements such as, “Nothing like a Jew that sees money slipping through his fingers.” The owner of the Wigan Football Club, Dave Whelan, who appointed Mackay as manager of Wigan on November 19, was also under investigation for anti-Semitism. Following his appointment of Mackay, Whelan said “Jewish people chase money more than everybody else.” Whelan later said that if anyone had been offended by his comments “to please accept my sincere apology.” He added, “I would never insult a Jewish person. I have got hundreds and hundreds of Jewish friends.” Following Whelan’s comments, one of Wigan’s major sponsors announced it was ending its agreement with the club, describing its relationship with the club as “untenable.”

On July 22-23, vandals threw bricks through the windows of Belfast’s main Orthodox synagogue on two consecutive nights, and the rabbi, David Singer, reported he had received abusive phone calls. In July and August there was repeated vandalism of a plaque marking the birthplace of the late Israeli president Chaim Herzog.

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

The Ambassador and embassy officers discussed religious diversity issues with elected officials. The Ambassador, visiting officials, and embassy and consulates

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general staff also met with religious leaders, student groups, and interfaith groups to promote religious diversity and acceptance.

Embassy and consulates general officials conducted public outreach programs with the Muslim community, including student and youth groups, to promote religious tolerance and acceptance.

Following the spike of anti-Semitism during the Gaza conflict, embassy officials met with Jewish community leaders to discuss the problem.

The Consulate General in Edinburgh invited a cross section of religious leaders in Scotland to attend a September 30 event to promote religious freedom and diversity in Scotland. The consulate general worked in partnership with the Scottish Police Muslim Association on the event, which featured a contribution from a young Scottish Muslim. In March the consulate general, together with embassy staff, held a series of meetings with the Muslim community in Glasgow to discuss issues of religious freedom.

The Consulate General in Northern Ireland encouraged efforts to diminish sectarian tensions and promote dialogue between the Protestant and Catholic communities. The Consul General met with religious leaders from both communities in Belfast and discussed the role of religious groups in reducing conflict and building reconciliation, particularly within marginalized, segregated communities. Consulate general officers supported interfaith programs run by NGOs, including those of the Faith and Politics Institute; Journey Towards Healing, a faith-based resource for trauma victims; and the East Belfast Mission.