

# 75TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION OF THE UDHR

All Party Parliamentary  
Group for International  
Freedom of Religion or Belief



APPG ForB

## **Report: The UDHR at 75 Years**

### **Introduction:**

In commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the APPG for the International Freedom of Religion or Belief is pleased to publish this report on the past and future of FoRB as enshrined in international human rights law. Published in conjunction with a series of events celebrating the anniversary, this report will focus on various aspects of international human rights law and the freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). The road of international human rights is uncertain and will certainly be difficult to navigate, but must be trod to ensure that one day, everyone, regardless of their background and identity, will be free of the weight of oppression.

In 1948, after the horrific tragedy of the Second World War, the UN General Assembly adopted the UDHR as a first measure to ensure that such events would never repeat themselves. The Declaration was drafted in a spirit of international cooperation, goodwill, and resolute determination to prevent suffering and promote wellbeing. These values have formed the foundation of the human rights movement from the Second World War to the present moment. Thousands of human rights defenders have embodied such values in courageous fashion over the past 75 years. In their honor, we hope to embolden the next generation of human rights defenders, those who hold the opportunity in their hands--thanks to ever-increasing technological and human capital resources--to confront evil and save lives.

Focusing on the aim to confront evil and save lives, it seems to be of little surprise that the UDHR was promulgated within 24 hours of the UN Genocide Convention. Time and time again, we are shown that persecution and disregard for human rights, including FoRB, is a precursor and cause of genocide and crimes against humanity. The struggle for human rights is an effort focused on both preserving and upholding human dignity and welfare and on preventing atrocities of the worst kind. Human rights advocacy is a cornerstone in these efforts, to which the APPG dedicates its work.

In doing so, the APPG recognizes the support of its officers, members, and stakeholders, without whom its work would be impossible. We also thank the distinguished speakers and panelists of the coming events, as well as all attendees.

### **International Law:**

The UDHR is the touchstone document in today's [corpus](#) of international human rights law. It and the subsequent International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights make up the International Bill of Human Rights, which functions as the guide and theoretical background for all human rights law. While the Bill of Human Rights does not provide for legal mechanisms or enforcement, it provides the basis for enforceable documents.

Compliance with international human rights law varies across members of the UN General Assembly. Unfortunately, most human rights violations occur in total disregard of international agreements, showcasing the need for stronger implementation strategies from the global

community. The UN, national bodies, and NGO organizations all work to raise the standard for human rights compliance globally.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights leads this effort through its oversight role at the UN. In national governments, implementation and oversight varies greatly, but in the UK, international human rights concerns are generally monitored by the FCDO, with parliament acting as an accountability mechanism. The APPG FoRB helps this accountability mechanism to function effectively through research and lobbying on behalf of stakeholders and members of Parliament, specifically focused on Article 18 of the UDHR, which outlines the freedom of religion or belief.

International advocacy and local advocacy are essential in creating change. The report will now address several areas of concern for FoRB going forward, 75 years on from the UDHR's ratification. While these are by no means comprehensive of FoRB conflicts and violations, they represent areas in which the UK has the potential to create real impact through the implementation of the UDHR's ideals.

### **Concern 1:**

A second area of concern for the APPG focuses on the dangers posed to members of belief communities in religious and religious-adjacent conflicts. These dangers are often connected to violations of human rights against women and girls. The persecution of Christians in Nigeria is an example of religious and religious-adjacent conflict. Religious and ethnic tensions, including the activity of terrorist groups in the region, has led to Nigeria being ranked 6<sup>th</sup> on the Open

Doors World Watch List, which tracks the persecution of Christians throughout the world.

[According](#) to Open Doors, “more Christians are killed for their faith in Nigeria each year than in the rest of the world combined.” Deaths in Nigeria amount to 89% of Christians killed each year worldwide. Due to a variety of factors, local and national governments have done little to effectively curb the violence.

In 2022, the APPG released a report titled “Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide? Three Years On.”

Following up on a previous delegation to Nigeria, the report incorporates the results of a survey analysing contributing factors in the region. These include religious extremist ideology, poverty, tribal/ethnic tensions, politics, climate change, and criminality and corruption, among others.

Those surveyed overwhelmingly identified religious extremist ideology as the leading contributing factor to the conflict. The [report](#) states, “current violent attacks in Nigeria have been interpreted through the lens of historical conflicts between Muslim and Christian groups. Several respondents to the current call for evidence emphasised how Nigeria is a deeply religious country, with many conflicts, therefore, being framed in religious terms.” To frame conflict religiously is to legitimize violence in direct opposition to Article 18 of the UDHR, which the UK government and states throughout the world have a duty to defend.

Other recent conflicts which have been framed in religious terms include the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno Karabakh, ethnic and tribal conflict in the Manipur region of India, and the ongoing genocide of the Rohingya Muslim and other religious minority groups in Myanmar. Religious terminology and dimensions of such conflicts must be addressed in order to create lasting change in the affected regions.

**Concern 2:**

The first area of concern is the abuse of blasphemy laws against minority religious communities. While such abuse occurs in many nation-states, much of the APPG's work has been focused on violations against minority religious communities in Pakistan. A significant portion of the APPG's recent report on Pakistan addresses Ahmadiyya Muslim persecution, noting the findings of the delegation from its January trip. Subsequent work, much owing to the tireless stakeholder organisations, has focused on abuse of blasphemy laws and persecution against Christian and Hindu communities.

Those interviewed during the trip noted persecution including educational restrictions and discrimination, forced abductions and marriage, limits on the freedom of speech and the press, abuse of blasphemy laws, limits on voting rights, hate and threatening speech, vigilante violence, and vandalism. Such violence has only increased since the delegation, with a recent string of attacks against churches and Christian communities. These attacks have tragically been linked to an uptick in forced abductions and marriages in affected Christian communities. The violence has been pinned on supposed violations of blasphemy laws, seemingly used as justification by community members and local law enforcement to allow mobs to form.

Human rights like FoRB are often intertwined and interdependent. Restrictions like these stem from and further intensify violations of FoRB against minority religious communities. To increase the danger of even greater human rights abuses, it is important to note that much of the persecution is fomented by extremist political parties including Tehreek-e-Labbaik (TLP). With

religious and government leaders openly encouraging hate speech and violence towards Ahmadi and other communities, persecution grows in scope and severity. To address these and other FoRB violations in Pakistan, delegation members developed an extensive list of recommendations. These included recommendations that Pakistan review blasphemy laws amendments and educational materials, as well as proposals for police FoRB training, ensuring access to basic services, and a review of the justice system.

### **Concern 3:**

A third area of concern is governmental persecution of religious minorities. One country of particular concern is the People's Republic of China, which is under pressure from the international community for its human rights abuses in Tibet and Xinjiang, as well as for its alliance with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), among other concerns. Each of these areas are influenced by religion or belief. The Uyghur ethnic group, which is predominantly Muslim, has been systematically imprisoned, amounting to a horrific abuse of human rights. While the international community has responded, little has been done to address the crisis. Such inaction must be eliminated. Meanwhile, Buddhist residents of Tibet, along with religious authorities, are subject to surveillance, control of information, political control, linguistic and cultural oppression, and physical threat.

Alongside these human rights abuses, China consistently aids the DPRK, another country with a long record of human rights abuses, including against FoRB. China maintains large detention facilities for those who have escaped the DPRK, who after enduring abuse in these camps, are forcibly repatriated. Repatriated citizens face many dangers, including execution, upon their

return. FoRB is virtually non-existent for citizens of the DPRK, which punishes even the possession of any religious material. Chinese repatriation to the DPRK runs in direct violation of the non-refoulement principle of international law. Cooperation and abetting such crimes must not go unnoticed. More must be done in the UK government and at the international level to hold China, and all countries which conduct systematic human rights abuses, to account.

### **UK Action:**

With a focus on FoRB, the APPG has identified areas of particular concern throughout the world. Through the successes of delegations to several countries, the APPG has produced reports on FoRB from a UK foreign policy perspective, including an upcoming report on Pakistan and two recently published reports on Nepal and Nigeria.

The Religious Freedom Act in the United States demonstrated effective national implementation of international standards, one which the UK and other states have sought to emulate. To continue to promote such implementation, it is vital that the UK government maintains its position as a global leader on FoRB. States such as Nepal follow the UK's lead in establishing FoRB in their governing documents and local enforcement systems. As FoRB implementation consistently ranks as a key priority on the FCDO's agenda, the UK will further cement itself as a leading defender of human rights on the global stage.

### **Conclusion:**

75 years on from the UDHR, it is abundantly clear that more must be done to uphold the noble ideals it lays out. Tragically, hundreds of millions suffer at this moment under FoRB restrictions.



Impunity to violations of all human rights should not be tolerated. The cause of human rights is one which will likely never be completed or fulfilled, as the last 75 years have shown. Rather, it is a daily choice to choose compassion in the face of evil. International human rights law is a key tool in this pursuit which owes itself in large part to the UDHR.

Thanks to the efforts of heroes from all walks of life and backgrounds, the UDHR has capable champions. The APPG applauds them, in parliament, among its stakeholders and friends, and those working throughout the world, for their tireless efforts, pledging its continued lobby and support.