

**Response of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
to the call by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief for
submissions for his Report on Anti-Muslim hatred/ “Islamophobia” and the
right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief for the 46th
Human Rights Council Session**

**Muslims within the State; Equality and Non-Discrimination; and the Right to Freedom
of Thought, Conscience, and Religion or Belief.**

The United Kingdom has a long history of promoting freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and proudly has legal provisions to protect this fundamental human right. A 2015 survey¹ showed 94% of Muslims feel able to practise their religion freely in Britain, and most believe that Islam is compatible with the British way of life. The United Kingdom is also a home to the thriving Muslims traditions of philanthropy, entrepreneurship, education, respect and tolerance.

The United Kingdom is one of the most tolerant countries in the world. There are over 3 million Muslims in the UK - 5.1% of the overall population². We are clear that discrimination and intolerance of any kind has no place in society, and we treat all forms of intolerance with equal seriousness. In the UK, it is against the law to discriminate against someone because of their protected characteristics (as set out in the Equalities Act 2010), which include race, religion, belief, age, disability, and gender³. It is therefore unlawful to discriminate against someone on the basis of them identifying as Muslim, or because of any intersecting characteristic such as gender.

We also have a strong legal framework for tackling crimes that discriminate against individuals with protected characteristics. There are criminal penalties for offences such as incitement to racial or religious hatred; racially or religiously aggravated offences, including intentionally causing harassment, alarm or distress; as well as increased sentences for offences motivated by hostility or prejudice, based on a

¹ https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2018-03/a-review-of-survey-research-on-muslims-in-great-britain-ipsos-mori_0.pdf

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/muslimpopulationintheuk/>

³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/4>

person's real or perceived race, religion, transgender identity, sexual orientation, or disability.

Representation and Participation in Public Life

The UK has a positive trajectory of representation of Muslims within public life including in sport, philanthropy, entertainment and politics. In sport, practising Muslim and four times Olympic Games gold medallist Sir Mohamed 'Mo' Muktar Jama Farah is widely regarded as the most successful British track athlete; in philanthropy, 100 year old Mr Dabirul Islam Choudhury was recognised on the Queen's Birthday Honours list for raising more than £420 000 for Covid-19 relief by walking laps around his garden during Ramadan, and in media, Mishal Husain is an award winning news anchor for BBC Television and BBC Radio. Primetime Emmy Award winning actor, musician and activist, Riz Ahmed, has also contributed to the representation and visibility of Muslims in British public life.

There has also been an upward trend in participation in British politics. Muslim candidates won a record 18 Parliamentary seats at the 2019 general election - over half are women⁴, including Nus Ghani MP who was the first Muslim woman to speak at the dispatch box. In 2016, Sadiq Khan was elected as the first Muslim Mayor of London, further demonstrating a greater and improved representation of Muslims in public life.

Muslims are also present in the House of Lords, most notably, Ahmadi Muslim, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth and the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. Lord Ahmad is also the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Minister responsible for Human Rights. In total, there have been at least 17 known Muslim members of the House of Lords, over half of them women, including Baroness Warsi who was the first female Muslim to attend Cabinet.

The United Kingdom's firm ambition is that no community should feel excluded and everyone should embrace the opportunities of a diverse society. We are committed to doing more to boost Muslim representation and visibility. Key to doing so is tackling

⁴ <http://muslimnews.co.uk/newspaper/top-stories/record-18-muslim-mps-elected-majority-women/>

language barriers. The United Kingdom has an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Integration Fund supporting 30 Local Authorities across 2020 to 2022 to empower those who speak little or no English by boosting language skills and building confidence to maximise potential, reduce isolation and increase participation in local communities. The community-based English language provisions are targeted at the most isolated individuals, including Muslim women. The United Kingdom has also recently funded two programmes which enable mosques (amongst other faith institutions) to be better able support their members to access the wide range of opportunities, including in the workforce, that Britain offers.

Online Hate Speech: Plans to Tackle Online Hate Crime

We have robust legislation in place to deal with internet trolls, cyber-stalking and harassment, and perpetrators of grossly offensive, obscene, or menacing behaviour, including anti-Muslim hatred. We have published the Online Harms White Paper, which includes specific measures to work with private companies and ensure that they are held to account for tackling illegal activity and content, such as hate crime, harassment, and cyber-stalking, as well as activity and content which may not be illegal but is nonetheless highly damaging to individuals and society. We are also supporting the European Commission Code of Conduct for Countering Illegal Hate Speech – a voluntary code has been signed by companies including Facebook, YouTube, Microsoft, Twitter, and Instagram. One main aim of the Code is to ensure that requests to remove content are reviewed in less than 24 hours, and content is removed if necessary.

The Online Harms White Paper sets out the Government's plans for world-leading legislation to make the UK the safest place to be online. We intend to establish in law a new duty of care on the part of companies towards their users, which will be overseen by an independent regulator. This regulator will set clear safety standards, backed up by mandatory reporting requirements and strong enforcement powers to deal with non-compliance.

The Government published its Initial Consultation Response to the Online Harms White Paper in February 2020, which set out our direction of travel in a number of areas. We are aiming to publish a full Government response to the consultation in December 2020, with legislation ready by early 2021.

Incitement to Hatred or Violence: Protection, Reporting, Documenting and Remedy

The UK's Hate Crime Action Plan (for England and Wales) sets out how the UK Government tackles hate crimes⁵. Some achievements to date include providing over 80 grants to fund security measures at places of worship; requiring police forces to disaggregate hate crime data by faith; and commissioning the police inspectorate to undertake a thematic report into police effectiveness in responding to hate crime. In the most recently published data on hate crime in England and Wales, which covered the period from April 2019 to March 2020, religious hate crimes fell by 5% to 6,822 offences, of which 50% were targeted against Muslims, a similar proportion to the previous year (2018/19)⁶.

The Government is considering a range of options to tackle hate crime beyond the current Action Plan. This includes supporting 'True Vision'⁷, the police online hate crime reporting portal, to facilitate and encourage the reporting of hate crime, as well as 'Stand Up'⁸ to support work to address anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic bullying in schools

A key responsibility for Government and the police is to protect individuals and the communities in which they live, including schools and places of worship. The police regularly review events and potential threats to ensure that everything is being done to protect all our communities from terrorism, hate crime, and the impact of public protest. The Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme was a key commitment of the 2016 Hate Crime Action Plan to provide protective security measures to places of worship. The scheme provides security measures such as CCTV cameras, perimeter fencing and access control systems. Over the last four years of the Places of Worship scheme, the United Kingdom has awarded 183 grants worth approximately £3 million to places of worship across England and Wales, with 75 of the grants provided to mosques. Funding for the Places of Worship scheme was doubled to £3.2 million for 2020/21.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hate-crime-action-plan-2016>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2019-to-2020/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2019-to-2020>

⁷ <http://www.report-it.org.uk/home>

⁸ <http://www.standupfoundation-uk.org/>

Training/Dedicated Initiatives to Combat Anti-Muslim Hatred

We continue to work closely with all communities, including Muslim communities, to tackle anti-Muslim hatred, including working to understand issues and trends, and work with the police in reassuring communities.

We have supported Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) with more than £2.8m between 2016 and 2020 to monitor and combat anti-Muslim hatred⁹. We have also committed just over £1.5m in new funding for hate crime-related projects including those tackling anti-Muslim hatred in schools¹⁰. Tell MAMA provides a third-party reporting service which enables Muslim communities to report anti-Muslim hate crimes easily, and encourages better awareness and understanding for up to 10,000 people a year on how to combat anti-Muslim hate crimes. The service also guides more than 1,500 Muslim victims per year through the criminal justice process, and provides tailored support and advice for victims. Finally, the service works with all police forces across the country to increase police awareness of hate crime understanding, as well as provide a data-sharing agreement which enables more accurate gathering of statistics.

In the UK, education is an important tool in challenging intolerance. The UK is committed to ensuring that all students leave school prepared for life in a diverse, modern Britain. All schools are required actively to promote the fundamental values of individual liberty; the rule of law; democracy; and mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths or beliefs¹¹. To support schools on a national level to promote tolerance and respect, the Department for Education runs the 'Educate Against Hate' website, which provides a range of resources and advice to help teachers build young people's resilience in the face of extremist narratives¹².

The UK has funded a number of projects that work with young people to tackle issues of prejudice and intolerance. For example, young people who participated in the 'Anne Frank Trust'¹³ programme rated their understanding of the Holocaust, hatred,

⁹ <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/10/15/government-response-to-publication-of-hate-crime-statistics/>

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guidance-on-promoting-british-values-in-schools-published>

¹² <https://educateagainsthate.com/>

¹³ <https://annefrank.org.uk/>

discrimination, inequality, and injustice as 5 out of 10 at the start of the programme, increasing to 9 out of 10 after the programme. Other initiatives include the School Linking Network, which provides sustained opportunities for meaningful social mixing between children from different backgrounds, through the linking of classes across demographically diverse primary and secondary schools¹⁴. This enables children and young people to build new relationships and understanding of those from different religions, cultures, and communities.

The police response remains under regular review, and all appropriate measures will be put in place to combat threats to any of our communities.

Multilateral and Bilateral UK International Work on FoRB, Including Anti-Muslim Hatred

As well as strong domestic measures, the UK works internationally to defend FoRB, and promote respect and understanding between different faith and belief communities. On a multilateral level, the UK works within the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, and other multilateral fora to promote and protect FoRB for all. This work is led by the previously mentioned Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister of State responsible for Human Rights for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. In November 2020, Lord Ahmad underlined the UK's commitment to FoRB for all in a number of international meetings, speaking at the Ministerial to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Ministers' Forum of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance.

We also work with like-minded international partners to advance FoRB. In 2019, the UK Government was represented at the seventh meeting of the Istanbul Process in The Hague on combatting religiously-motivated intolerance, and we stressed the importance of defending the right to FoRB globally.

Bilaterally, Ministers and officials regularly raise specific cases of concern, and discuss practices and laws that discriminate on the basis of religion or belief, including where these affect different Muslim communities. We do not shy away from challenging those whom we believe are not meeting their obligations, whether publicly or in private.

¹⁴ <https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/>

The United Kingdom will continue to promote respect and understanding between different faiths and beliefs, and will continue to defend the right to freedom of religion or belief for all.