



United Kingdom

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were some societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Violence declined in Northern Ireland. There was a significant increase in the number of reported cases of anti-Semitism, especially following the Israeli conflict with Hezbollah last summer. A notable increase in reports of "Islamophobic" behavior occurred, often following terrorist incidents or public discussion of aspects of the Muslim community's practice, such as the wearing of the veil.

On August 10, 2006, officials arrested 24 Muslim suspects involved in plotting terrorist attacks on passenger airplanes, who claimed they were carrying out the attacks based on their Islamic religious beliefs. The suspected 2006 plots have sparked considerable concern about how to insure religious tolerance and full integration of all religious communities, while ensuring the Government can thwart future attacks and combat the spread of violent extremism.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 94,525 square miles and a population of 60.2 million.

Christians make up 72 percent of the population, including the Church of England, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and many unaffiliated Christian groups. In 2003 the Office of National Statistics indicated approximately 29 percent of the population identified with Anglicanism, 10 percent with the Catholic Church, and 14 percent with Protestant churches. A September 2006 English-Church Census reported that Methodists were decreasing as a percentage of the population, and Pentecostals, many from Africa, were increasing.

Individuals with no religious belief comprise 15 percent of the population. Muslims comprise 3 percent of the population. The Muslim community is predominantly South Asian in origin. Groups comprising 1 percent or less of the population included Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Buddhists. Individuals from Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Sikh backgrounds were concentrated in London and other large urban areas, primarily in England.

Religious affiliation was not evenly distributed among ethnicities. According to 2001 census data, approximately 70 percent of the white population described themselves as Christians. Nearly 75 percent of black Caribbean respondents stated that they were Christians, as did 70 percent of black Africans. Meanwhile, 45 percent of Indians were Hindus, and 29 percent were Sikhs. Approximately 92 percent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were Muslims.

In Northern Ireland, where divisions between nationalists and unionists have evolved largely along religious lines, the 2001 census showed that 53.1 percent were Protestants and 43.8 percent were Catholics. The policy of the Government remained one of promotion of religious tolerance.

Most Catholics and Protestants continued to live in segregated communities in Northern Ireland, although many middle class neighborhoods were mixed communities.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The 1998 Human Rights Act guarantees freedom of religion and bans discrimination based on religion.

The Racial and Religious Hatred Act defines "religious hatred" as hatred against a group of persons which may be determined by reference to religious belief or lack of religious belief. The act does not define religion or what constitutes a religious belief but leaves that determination to the courts. Offenses under the act must be threatening and intended to stir up religious hatred based on the following criteria: The use of words, behavior, or display of written material; publishing or distributing written material; the public performance of a play; distributing, showing, or playing a recording; broadcasting or including a program in a program service; or the possession of written materials or recordings with a view to display, publication, distribution, or inclusion in a program service. The act does not apply where words or behavior are used or displayed inside a private dwelling and does not apply to criticism or dislike of a religious belief. The maximum penalty for stirring up religious hatred is seven years in prison. This act gives only constables the power to arrest persons in the context of these offenses, rather than allowing "citizens' arrests."

The Equality Act makes it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of "religion or belief" or the "lack of religion or belief" in the provision of goods, facilities and services, education, the use and disposal of property, and the exercise of public functions. The Equality Act established the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR), which is responsible for promoting an awareness of the act's provisions, promoting equality and diversity, and working towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination and harassment. The CEHR has powers to investigate unlawful acts of discrimination and can bring legal proceedings against violators of the Equality Act's provisions. In Scotland, the CEHR's remit covers only human rights matters reserved for Westminster. Human rights matters "devolved" to the Scottish Parliament are covered by the Scottish Commission for Human Rights. The Equality Act allows the CEHR to cover devolved matters if it has the agreement of the proposed Scottish Commission.

Religious discrimination in employment and vocational training is illegal under the 2003 Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations. The 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act covers "religiously aggravated offenses," based on existing assault, harassment, criminal damage, and public order offenses. Those convicted of "religiously aggravated offenses" (where there is evidence of religious hostility in connection with a crime) face higher maximum penalties.

Under the 1990 Broadcasting Act and the 2003 Communications Act, religious bodies can hold local and national digital radio and digital terrestrial television licenses.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) reported an increase in prosecutions over the previous year for both racist and religiously motivated incidents. There were a total of 43 cases classified as religiously aggravated cases, of which the CPS prosecuted 41 defendants. Of the 22 cases in which the religion of the victim was known, 18 were Muslims, 3 were Christians, and 1 was a Sikh. The CPS brought a total of 58 charges against the defendants; 51 charges were adjudicated and the remaining 7 were dropped due to witnesses failing to appear, witnesses refusing to testify, or in the public interest.

There are two established (or state) churches: The Church of England (Anglican) and the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian). The Act of Settlement, enacted in 1688, states that no Roman Catholic, or person married to a Roman Catholic, may ascend the throne. The monarch is the "Supreme Governor" of the Church of England, must always be a member, and promise to uphold the Church. The monarch's connection with the Church of England is the subject of ongoing public debate.

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 bearers, and its affairs are not subject to any civil authority. The Church in Wales, the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the Church of Ireland are members of the Anglican Communion. There are no established churches in Wales or Northern Ireland.

Those who believe that their freedom of religion has been infringed upon have the right to appeal to the courts for relief. The Government includes other faiths in national events; for example, under the auspices of the Church of England, the Queen supported invitations to representatives of a broad range of faiths to participate in the national Remembrance Day Service. The Government made efforts to address specific needs of different faith communities, such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's provision of a special Hajj delegation to provide consular and medical assistance to the country's Muslims on pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia.

Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland do not have "official" religions. The 1921 Church of Scotland Act reorganized the Church as Scotland's national church based on a Presbyterian system but not dependent on any government body or the Queen for spiritual matters or leadership.

Immigration regulations require visa applicants who wish to enter the country as ministers of religion to obtain level four competence in spoken English on the International English Language Testing System. Visa adjudicators are permitted to waive the testing requirement at their discretion and where other evidence of English competency is provided for applicants educated in an English-speaking country. Ministers of religion are also required to have worked for at least one year in the last five as a minister. Ministers of religion applying for visas must also have one year of full-time experience or two years of part-time training following their ordination for faiths where ordination is the sole means of entering the ministry. To obtain an entry visa a missionary must be trained as such or have worked previously as a missionary.

While not usually enforced and essentially a legal anachronism, blasphemy against Anglican doctrine remains technically illegal in England and Wales.

Holy days that are considered national holidays include Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government. No church or religious organization--established or otherwise--receives direct funding from the state. The Government provides financial support--up to 90 percent of the total capital costs of the buildings and 100 percent of running costs, including teachers' salaries--to sectarian educational institutions that are commonly referred to as "faith schools" (see the Societal section).

The Government also helps to fund repair and maintenance of all listed places of worship for religious groups nationwide and contributes to the budget of the Church Conservation Trust, which preserves "redundant" Church of England buildings of architectural or historic significance.

Most religious institutions are classified as charities, as the advancement of religion is considered to be a charitable purpose. Charities are exempt from taxes on most types of income and capital gains, provided that the charity uses the income or gains for charitable purposes. They also are exempt from the value-added tax. The Government has not classified the Church of Scientology as a religious institution and therefore has not granted the organization recognition for charitable status.

As of the end of the reporting period, over 30 percent of state schools in England had a religious character. Nearly all of the 6,848 "faith schools" are associated with Christian denominations; there are 37 Jewish, 8 Muslim, and 2 Sikh schools. An additional two Jewish, three Muslim and two Sikh schools have also been tentatively approved by the Government to open. On October 26, 2006, Education Secretary Alan Johnson announced an agreement with the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England in which their "faith schools" would voluntarily accept up to 25 percent of places for pupils from another faith or no religious faith. In 2005 Chief Inspector of Schools for England David Bell and then-Schools Minister for England Stephen Twig, urged tolerance, inclusiveness, and collaboration in "faith schools."

Almost all schools in Northern Ireland receive state support. More than 90 percent of students attended schools that were either predominantly Catholic or Protestant. Integrated schools served approximately 5 percent of school-age children whose families voluntarily chose this option, often after overcoming significant obstacles to provide the resources to start a new school and demonstrate its sustainability for three years before government funding begins. Demand for places in integrated schools outweighed the limited number of places available. On May 8, 2007, devolution, or granting of power, was restored, beating the May 10, 2007, deadline of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2007 amended legislation, thereby authorizing the Northern Ireland Assembly to decide on academic selection.

The law requires religious education for all children, aged 3 to 19, in publicly maintained schools. In England and Wales it forms part of the core curriculum in accordance with the Education Reform Act of 1988. In Scotland, religious education of some sort is mandated by the Education Act of 1980. However, the shape and content of religious instruction throughout the country is decided on a local basis. Locally agreed syllabi are required to reflect the predominant place of Christianity while taking into account the teachings and practices of other principal religions in the country. Syllabi must be nondenominational and refrain from attempting to convert pupils. Schools with a religious designation follow a syllabus drawn up by the school governors according to the trust deed of the school.

Daily collective prayer or worship of a de facto Christian nature is practiced in schools in England and Wales, a requirement that may be waived for students who obtain permission of the school authorities; a waiver may also be granted if parents wish to remove a child from religion classes. Non-Christian worship is permitted with approval of the authorities.

On March 19, 2007, the Department of Education provided guidance that permits schools to prohibit full-face veils in school, further stating that schools "should act reasonably in accommodating religious requirements," under human rights legislation. But it is also legally possible under the act to have a school uniform policy that "restricts the freedom of pupils to manifest their religion" on the grounds of health and safety and the "protection of the rights and freedoms of others." The Government's guidance is meant to remind head--teachers to act with a degree of sensitivity when considering decisions

that will impact the cultural complexion of their communities.

In Northern Ireland, the Fair Employment Act bans employment discrimination on the grounds of religious or political opinion. A broad network of laws, regulations, and oversight bodies work to ensure that there is equal opportunity for employees of all religious faiths. All public sector employers and all private firms with more than 10 employees must report annually to the Equality Commission on the religious composition of their workforces and must review their employment practices every three years. Noncompliance may result in criminal penalties and the loss of government contracts. Victims of employment discrimination may sue for damages. In addition, the 1998 Northern Ireland Act stipulates that all public authorities must show due regard for the need to promote equality of opportunity, including on the basis of religious belief. Each public authority must report its plans to promote equality to the Equality Commission, which is to review such plans every five years.

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations prohibit employment discrimination based on religious belief, except where there is a "genuine occupational requirement" of a religious nature. The regulations do not apply in Northern Ireland.

It is government policy to ensure that public servants are not discriminated against on the basis of religion and to accommodate religious practices by government employees whenever possible. For example, the Prison Service permits Muslim employees to take time off during their shifts to pray. It also provides prisoners with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim chaplains. The Advisory Group on Religion in Prisons monitors policy and practice on issues relating to religious provision. The military generally provides military personnel who are adherents of minority religions with chaplains of their faith.

The Race, Cohesion and Faiths Directorate formed in May 2006 is responsible for tackling racism, extremism, and hate, and for promoting interfaith activity in England and Wales. According to this directorate, the Government asserts the right to exclude individuals, such as international religious leaders of minority religious groups, from the country on the grounds that their presence is not conducive to the public good, even where the public expression of religious or other beliefs by that individual is part of the reason for exclusion. The term "public good" is not defined in this context by the Government.

As a result of terrorist bombings in 2005, the Home Office launched a "Preventing Extremism Together" project and joint "task forces" with the Muslim community. Reports on the usefulness of these efforts were mixed. One part of the effort was the "theological road show," a series of seminars given by prominent Muslims advocating moderate, nonviolent interpretations of Islam. Though elements of the Government's action were praised, including more than 50 proposals dealing with education, the role of women, mosques, and extremism, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was disappointed that few of the proposals developed by the "task forces" were pursued or enacted.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Various studies and surveys across the country found that many schools did not meet the intent and requirements of the collective worship directive. Parents and students in favor of the law say that it helps students understand the religious orientation of the country and the society in which they are living. There are some students and parents opposed to the policy and some teachers' organizations take exception to the requirement for collective worship and have asked the Government to review the current policy.

In reaction to the March 19, 2007, Department of Education guidance on full-face veils in school, some Muslim groups, including the Islamic Human Rights Commission, said it was inappropriate for the Government to provide guidance that regulated Muslim communities in matters concerning the expression of their faith.

In reaction to the terrorist attacks, the Government has sought to engage with "task forces" (see the Legal/Policy Framework section) and with other Muslim associations. However, prominent Muslims point out that the country's Muslim community is extremely diverse and that no one leader or group speaks for them all.

On June 22, 2007, the High Court heard the case of a 16-year-old Christian girl, Lydia Playfoot, who brought legal action against her school after it banned her from wearing a chastity ring which she claimed was an important symbol of her Christian faith. The student argued that because the school allowed Muslim and Sikh pupils to wear headscarves, trousers, and Kara bracelets, the ban on her ring breached her human rights. The school banned the ring, engraved with a Biblical verse, because it was considered to be jewelry. The school also forbade the wearing of crosses and crucifixes on the grounds that they were jewelry and wearing them was not an intrinsic component of the Christian faith. School officials punished Lydia and other students by isolating them from their classmates or by putting them in detention halls. Many observers speculated in the press that the school's actions were Christianophobic or exhibited prejudice toward evangelical Christians. Croydon council explained that "it is not compulsory to wear a cross... it is a personal preference and can be taken off," whereas although the taweez (written verses from the Qur'an) was "not a compulsory item in all branches of Islam, some branches feel that it is, which is why it appears in the guidance." At the end of the reporting period

a review of dress code policies presented to the education committee was not complete.

On March 22, 2006, the Law Lords, the national court of last resort, ruled in favor of a high school in Buckinghamshire that expelled a Muslim teenager for contravening its dress code. In 2002 the school expelled Shabina Begum for wearing a jilbab, a traditional dress that leaves only the face and hands exposed, which violated the school's dress code. After her expulsion, Begum filed suit in the High Court, which ruled in the school's favor. In 2005 the Court of Appeal overturned this decision. The House of Lords unanimously reversed the Court of Appeal ruling upholding the High Court's decision. Begum decided not to take her case to the European Court of Human Rights.

Members of the Muslim community complained that police targeted them for suspicion, arrest, and "stop-and-search" disproportionately more than any other group, under powers granted by anti-terrorism laws. Several studies have shown that Muslims suffer serious discrimination from both authorities and societal actors.

On October 19, 2006, an employment tribunal ruled that the October 13, 2006, firing of Muslim teaching assistant Aishah Azmi for wearing a niqab was not discriminatory either directly or indirectly. The school had monitored her performance before concluding that the niqab (full face veil) was affecting some pupils' ability to understand her. The tribunal awarded Azmi \$2,145 (1,100 British Pounds Sterling) for "hurt feelings" because the Kirklees Council, where Azmi's school was located, failed to follow grievance procedures correctly. On October 17, 2006, then-Prime Minister Tony Blair said he could understand why Azmi was fired, but he affirmed Muslim women's right to cover their heads/faces in public, while noting that the veil sets up a separation that raises valid concerns about integration. Mr. Blair's comments closely followed the October 6, 2006, comments of the former Foreign Secretary and then-leader of the House of Commons Jack Straw who stated publicly that he preferred that Muslim women not wear a niqab in his office as it makes social relations more difficult.

Citing a limited broadcast spectrum, the Government continued to prohibit religious groups from holding a national sound broadcasting license, a public teletext license, an additional television service license, and radio and television multiplex licenses.

According to a 1999 decision of the Charity Commission for England and Wales, a quasi-judicial, independent body established by law as the regulator and registrar for charities, the Church of Scientology does not fall within the charity law definition of a religion. The Church of Scientology has not exercised its right of appeal. As a result, Scientology chapels do not qualify as places of worship and Scientology ministers are not considered ministers of religion, which affects their legal rights regarding visas and immigration. The Prison Service does not recognize Scientology as a religion for the purpose of facilitating prison visits by ministers, although prisoners who are registered as Scientologists may practice their religion and have access to a representative of the Church of Scientology if they wish to receive its ministry. Ministers of the Church of Scientology and the Unification Church of Reverend Moon are not issued visas as ministers since their organizations are not accepted as religions. Adherents and those wishing to learn about either group may apply for visas as visitors or students, respectively.

Roman Catholic religious and political leaders urged repeal of the Act of Settlement, which does not allow the monarch and spouse to be Catholic. A 2001 Home Office study suggested that the establishment status of the Church of England causes "religious disadvantage" to other religious communities and while some Anglican bishops' are included in the House of Lords, membership in a given religious group does not confer a political or economic advantage on individual adherents, beyond this instance.

In relation to their percentage of the Northern Ireland population (44 percent), Catholics were underrepresented in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), currently comprising 20 percent. Since 1999 ongoing government-mandated measures to increase Catholic representation in the PSNI have increased this proportion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Anti-Semitism

For calendar year 2006, the Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 594 anti-Semitic incidents in the country, a 31 percent increase from 2005. A majority of the incidents coincided with the fighting in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah in July and August. CST recorded 112 violent assaults, 365 instances of abusive behavior, 70 incidents of damage and desecration to Jewish property, and 82 incidents targeting synagogues, including 27 involving damage to

synagogue buildings. A further 50 incidents targeted congregants on their way to or from prayer. There were 59 incidents targeting Jewish schools or schoolchildren, and a further 9 desecrations of Jewish cemeteries. There was an anonymous report of attackers stabbing an identifiably Jewish man on the street in London, but no more information was released.

On September 7, 2006, the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry concluded that anti-Semitism was on the rise and noted that the Jewish community "has had to provide security guards for synagogues, Jewish schools, buildings and events... costing the community millions of pounds annually." The report also noted that police forces usually do not record anti-Semitic incidents as such and expressed concern that only 1 in 10 incidents reported to the police resulted in any proceedings against the perpetrator.

The report also noted concern over anti-Semitism on university campuses. A lecturer at a public London university told a Jewish student who sought to explain his absence on religious festivals that he should choose between his religion or his degree. University officials told another Jewish student that since the university is a secular institution it does not need to take account of a student's religion and that since she refused to take exams on the Jewish Sabbath, the university would seriously debate enrolling anyone with a Jewish name in the future.

In addition the report condemned the call for boycotts by the two national teachers' groups of all Israeli academics and of Israel's Haifa and Bar Ilan universities in May 2006 and in 2005. The report noted that the debate contained anti-Semitic demonizing of Israel, such as Nazi analogies and suggestions that Israel was "a fascist state," described a Jewish group as a Zionist operation, and asserted that "campus Jews" who turned out to block the boycott were not "proper trade unionists."

On October 19, 2006, the high court upheld an appeal by the Mayor of London to overturn a month-long suspension he received when he likened a Jewish reporter to a Nazi concentration camp guard. The Court noted that the Mayor should have apologized and realized his comments not only offended the journalist but were "likely to be regarded as entirely inappropriate observations by Jews in general... ." The Anti-Defamation League and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) noted that the Mayor had a history of making anti-Semitic remarks.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On May 8, 2007, the establishment of a power-sharing government brought Northern Ireland new hope for the end of centuries-old sectarian divisions between the Protestant and Catholic communities. Democratic Unionist Party leader Ian Paisley was sworn in as the Northern Ireland Assembly First Minister while Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness took the oath of office as Deputy First Minister.

The Scottish Executive undertook significant steps to address religious intolerance and bigotry. In 2006 the Executive provided approximately \$187,000 (100,000 pounds sterling) to support antisectarian projects in schools; \$18,700 (10,000 pounds sterling) to support an antisectarian campaign run by the National Union of Students; and \$25,245 (13,500 pounds sterling) to support antisectarian resources in youth work. It also added an antisectarian award for the Scottish Education Awards.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were some societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

There was a significant increase in anti-Semitic incidents. (See Anti-Semitism section.)

Violence declined in Northern Ireland. There was little intimidation by paramilitary gangs, and while bigotry and violence continued, levels decreased significantly. During 2006-07, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) found 1,695 sectarian incidents and 136 faith/religion motivated incidents (nearly doubling the number from last year). However, the "marching season"--two large parades in July and August during which violent rioting has often taken place--occurred without incident in 2006 and was the most peaceful parading season in many decades. Negotiations involving parade organizers, leaders in nationalist and loyalist areas, NGOs, and government and police officials helped ensure public order relating to other parades.

There were reports of "Islamophobic" behavior, often following terrorist incidents or public discussion of aspects of the Muslim community's practice, such as the wearing of the veil. During the second half of 2006, there was a notable increase in anti-Muslim incidents in the form of verbal and physical assaults, vandalism, arson, anti-Muslim literature, and Internet postings. This rise in societal abuses and discrimination followed the August 10, 2006, arrest of 24 UK-born Muslims allegedly plotting an air terrorist attack against airplanes between the U.S. and the UK, and also coincided with the July-August 2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. Hindus and Sikhs, misidentified as Muslims, were also targets of such

incidents. Government and religious leaders of all faiths cautioned the public not to engage in such hate crimes and reiterated that the majority of the country's Muslims were peaceful and law-abiding citizens.

On October 23, 2006, someone shot at a Muslim family, including a woman wearing a niqab, in their car, but no one was injured. A few days earlier on October 21, a man attacked an imam and three worshippers inside a mosque in Manchester; one worshiper was briefly hospitalized. Police arrested two men on suspicion of racial assault. The mosque stated that a week earlier, vandals smashed the windows of 20 cars belonging to worshippers. Police stepped up their patrols in the area and called for calm as the end of Ramadan approached.

On October 14, 2006, the country's Muslim NGOs accused organizers of the London 2012 Olympic games of prejudice because the games are scheduled during Ramadan, which falls in July and August that year, while Muslim athletes will be fasting. Also on October 14, 2006, a man attacked a Glasgow imam in his mosque; police believe the attack was racially motivated. On October 7, 2006, an assailant tore a woman's veil from her face in Liverpool.

On August 13, 2006, an arsonist set fire to the Al-Birr mosque in Basingstoke.

On February 3, 2006, a court acquitted the leader of the British National Party (BNP) and a party activist of several charges of incitement to racial hatred. However, the Crown Prosecution Services announced they would proceed with retrials of other charges of incitement to racial hatred against both men resulting from hung juries. Their arrests followed a 2005 BBC broadcast, in which the BNP leader was covertly recorded calling Islam a "vicious, wicked faith." On November 10, 2006, in a retrial at Leeds Crown Court, the court cleared the BNP of the charges for inciting racial hatred by the unanimous decision of a 12-person jury.

On January 22, 2007, after a review of company dress code policy and following considerable public pressure British Airline (BA) officials announced the reversal of the company's previous policy and decided employees could wear visible religious symbols, including crosses. Public pressure came from the Government, including over 100 members of Parliament and the Prime Minister, as well as from various Christian organizations and church leaders. On October 16, 2006, the media reported that BA refused to allow a female employee to openly wear a small Christian cross necklace, while permitting Sikh and Muslim employees to wear turbans and veils. BA uniform dress code policy was that employees could not wear visible jewelry or other "adornments" while on duty without permission from BA management.

On December 20, 2006, the country's press reported a second airline, bmi [sic], imposed restrictive religious rules on a flight attendant who wished to carry a Bible with her on her flights to Saudi Arabia. The airline was reported to have offered her shorter routes to other places where she could take a Bible but would not change its rules for flights to Saudi Arabia. At the end of the reporting period, the attendant was taking bmi [sic] to the employment tribunal.

A June 30, 2006, government report addressed abuse by African evangelical churches of African children branded as witches, following a series of widely publicized incidents involving the death and abuse of young African children over the past six years. The report described "exorcism," consisting of severe beatings and other premeditated cruelties such as starving, burning, and isolating the child. The perpetrators are usually caretakers, often not the natural parents, and the abuse usually occurs in the household where the child lives. The common features of the cases are a child scapegoat, an incomplete family structure, and disability. The report suggests that by recognizing these patterns it may be possible to identify children at risk early and prevent cases from escalating. The report recommended gathering better information about cases, drawing up guidance about handling cases, monitoring the movement of children, and protecting children in places of worship. The African evangelical community is divided in its views about the benefits and risks of such exorcisms and is working with NGOs and government social services to develop child protection guidelines.

Government funding of "faith schools," institutions funded by the state but administratively controlled by religious organizations, has become an increasingly sensitive subject within the country. One group, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), has been particularly critical of government policies on funding "faith schools." The ATL argues that the role of religion in society has declined, the population has become more secular, and that "faith schools" tend to marginalize their students from society and have a polarizing effect instead of acting as tools to promote integration and social cohesion.

The Council of Christians and Jews worked to advance better relations between the two religions and to combat anti-Semitism. The Interfaith Network linked a wide range of religious and educational organizations with an interest in interfaith relations, including the national representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian communities. The Network had a consultative relationship with the Home Office, from which it received financial support. The Inner Cities Religious Council encouraged interfaith activity through regional conferences and support for local initiatives. The NGO Respect continued to encourage voluntary time-sharing and mutual understanding among adherents of different religions.

The Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland served as the main forum for ecumenical Christian cooperation. For example, Anglican parishes shared their churches with Roman Catholic congregations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Embassy encouraged interfaith dialogue to promote religious tolerance. Embassy representatives attended regular meetings of the Three Faiths Forum, an interfaith dialogue organization. Embassy and consulate officers were in regular contact with religious leaders of various faiths to discuss religious freedom issues. Embassy officials were actively engaged in "outreach" presentations to the public, with a particular focus on Muslim communities. Embassy officers discussed the need for religious tolerance, especially towards immigrants from the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America.

In Northern Ireland, long-standing issues related to national identity have been part of political and economic friction between Protestant and Catholic communities. As an active supporter of the peace process, the U.S. Government encouraged efforts to diminish sectarian tension and promote dialogue between these two communities.

Released on September 14, 2007

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