

UNITED KINGDOM 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

Laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. Government leaders frequently spoke about the need to protect religious freedom and worked to improve understanding about religious differences and promote tolerance, in particular after the May 22 murder of British soldier Lee Rigby in a suspected Islamist extremist attack. Political and religious leaders condemned the killing, and the government established a task force to address ways to stem the growth of violent extremism, focusing on the radicalization of worshippers in mosques, university students, and prisoners.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. As of May 27, 193 anti-Muslim incidents were reported, including one religiously-motivated murder and 10 attacks on mosques. During the year, 529 anti-Semitic incidents were reported, compared to 649 incidents in the previous year, the lowest number of incidents since 2003.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 63.4 million (July 2013 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. 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.

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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 in Scotland. 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. 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 generally protect religious freedom. 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 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. 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.

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

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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 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 UK, 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.

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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.

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 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.

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

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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 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 International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, formerly the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

Government Practices

On May 22, British soldier Lee Rigby was killed in a suspected Islamist extremist attack in Woolwich, London. Queen Elizabeth II, political leaders and religious leaders condemned the killing. Prime Minister Cameron told parliament, “This action was a betrayal of Islam and the Muslim communities that give so much to our country.” Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, co-chair of the Christian Muslim Forum, and Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, issued a joint statement echoing his words. The Muslim Council of Britain said the attack “has no basis in Islam and we condemn this unreservedly.” The Ramadhan Foundation likewise condemned the attack.

Following Rigby’s murder, the government established a task force chaired by David Cameron to consider ways to stem the growth of violent extremism in

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Britain, focusing on the radicalization of worshippers in mosques, university students, and prisoners. The task force held its inaugural meeting at 10 Downing Street in June and included Cabinet Ministers and representatives from the police and intelligence services. The trial of the two suspects began November 18.

The government held its first Srebrenica Memorial Day on July 11, the 18th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. The Department for Communities and Local Government announced funding to commemorate and honor more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys who lost their lives and help ensure that this crime is never forgotten through community-led programs, and by leading educational visits.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled on January 15, that British Airways employee Nadia Eweida had suffered discrimination at work over her Christian beliefs when the airline had required her to stop wearing a visible cross.

On December 11, the UK Supreme Court decided Scientology is a religion, qualifying it for charitable status. Scientologists Louisa Hodkin and Alessandro Calcioli took legal action after the Registrar General of Births, Deaths and Marriages refused to register Scientology's London Church Chapel for the solemnization of marriages under the 1855 Places of Worship Registration Act because it was not a place for "religious worship." Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Brandon Lewis stated that the UK government would seek legal advice about the decision, saying "hard-pressed taxpayers will wonder why Scientology premises should now be given tax cuts when local firms have to pay their fair share."

In July the Glasgow City Council prevented the Scottish Defense League (SDL) from marching through Scotland's largest Asian community. Police and politicians had objected to the march by SDL, which opposes what it considers to be a spread of Islamism in Scotland.

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.

On October 21, Pavlo Lapshyn, a student from the Ukraine, received a life sentence for murdering Mohammed Saleem, a Birmingham grandfather walking

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home from prayers at his mosque in May. Lapshyn, who had been in the country for five days, also planted three bombs near three mosques as part of a campaign he said was motivated by racial hatred.

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 Police Service of Northern Ireland reported in its annual report, published on July 5, that the number of faith/religion incidents had increased by 14 incidents between 2011-12 and 2012-13, to 22 faith/religion incidents. Over the same time period the number of faith/religion crimes rose from eight crimes to 14, of which six were classified as “violence against the person” offenses and eight were criminal damage offenses.

In 2012-13, there were 687 charges reported in Scotland with a “religious aggravation,” a 24 percent reduction compared to 2011-12. The reduction may be due to the introduction of the Offensive Behavior at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill on March 1, 2012, which criminalized religious hatred connected to soccer matches and required it to be reported separately. When charges under the 2012 bill were added, there were 762 charges relating to religious prejudice in Scotland in 2012-13.

The 2013 report of anti-Semitic incidents produced by the Community Security Trust (CST), a UK organization that monitors anti-Semitism, counted 529 anti-Semitic incidents across the UK, an 18 percent decrease from the 649 incidents reported in 2012. Of the 529 incidents recorded, 69 were classified as “violent anti-Semitic assaults,” the same number as was recorded in 2012. This is the lowest number of violent anti-Semitic assaults reported since 2003 when 54 assaults were recorded. None of the assaults recorded were life-threatening. CST recorded 49 incidents of damage and desecration of Jewish property, 38 direct anti-Semitic threats, and 368 incidents categorized as abusive behavior. Over three-quarters of all the incidents reported occurred in the largest Jewish communities of the Greater London and Greater Manchester areas.

The European Union’s Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) survey of anti-Semitism, released in November, found 40 percent of 1,468 British respondents (out of a “core Jewish population” of 291,000) had experienced or observed anti-Semitic verbal or physical attacks and 71 percent had not reported these incidents

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to the police; 66 percent believed anti-Semitism had gotten worse over the past five years and 18 percent had considered emigrating because of anti-Semitism.

In January MP David Ward accused Israel of inflicting atrocities on Palestinians on a daily basis in the West Bank and Gaza. After a complaint from the Holocaust Educational Trust, Ward refused to apologize. On July 18, the Liberal Democrat Party temporarily suspended Ward from the party for tweeting, “Am I wrong or are am I right? At long last the Zionists are losing the battle – how long can the apartheid State of Israel last?” On November 4, at a parliamentary meeting, Ward commented, “I didn’t say Israel shouldn’t exist but that it should never have been created. I said it was an apartheid state.”

In March the Labour Party suspended Lord Nazir Ahmed for saying that his 2009 prison conviction for dangerous driving was the result of pressure applied on the court by Jews “who own newspapers and television channels.” In May Ahmed formally resigned from the Labour Party but continued to sit in the House of Lords.

On January 27, the *Sunday Times* ran a cartoon by Gerald Scarfe that depicted the Israeli prime minister building a wall using what appeared to be the blood of Palestinians. The caption read, “Will cementing peace continue?” Jon Benjamin, chief executive of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, described it as “shockingly reminiscent of the blood libel imagery more usually found in parts of the virulently anti-Semitic Arab press.” Benjamin said the cartoon was “all the more disgusting” because it had been published on Holocaust Memorial Day. On January 28, *Sunday Times* owner Rupert Murdoch wrote on a social media site, “Gerald Scarfe has never reflected the opinions of the Sunday Times. Nevertheless, we owe major apology for grotesque, offensive cartoon.”

In January the Queens Park Rangers F.C. responded to anti-Semitic statements on its Facebook page against Israeli player Tal Ben Haim, saying it would ban anyone who “posts anti-Semitic comments.”

Jewish groups, including the Simon Wiesenthal Center, sharply criticized British rock musician Roger Waters for using a pig-shaped balloon painted with a Star of David as a prop during a July 20 concert. In December, the Anti-Defamation League denounced Waters for making comments derived from “classic anti-Semitic conspiracy theories” during his December 7 interview with *Counterpunch* magazine, when he called the Jewish lobby “extraordinarily powerful” and compared Israeli government policy to that of the Nazis.

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In April the *Righteous Muslim Exhibition* opened in London, highlighting the role Muslims played in saving Jewish lives during the Holocaust. Photographs of 70 Muslims who had sheltered Jews during World War II were displayed alongside stories detailing their acts of heroism.

Hope not Hate reported 193 anti-Muslim incidents, including attacks on 10 mosques as of May 27. On June 1, Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) reported 212 anti-Muslim incidents, many occurring in Woolwich following the killing of Lee Rigby there and including 125 online incidents, 17 incidents involving physical attacks, and 11 attacks on mosques. After Tell MAMA issued its report, UK media reported the government had defunded the organization following concerns raised by the police and civil services regarding its methodology. Government sources indicated, however, the decision had been taken earlier, and that Tell MAMA was never intended to receive ongoing funding but the UK government would continue to work closely with it.

In the five days after Lee Rigby's death, the government's National Community Tension Team reported a spike of 72 anti-Muslim incidents nationwide. On June 5, the Al-Rahma Islamic Centre mosque in London was burned down in a suspected arson attack. According to eye witness accounts, the letters "EDL" were written on the side of the building. EDL is the acronym of the English Defence League, an anti-Muslim group. The group denied any involvement. On June 9, police arrested four youth on suspicion of arson in connection with a fire at the Darul Uloom Islamic School in Chislehurst. Following these incidents, police temporarily increased patrols around Islamic sites and, on June 12, Thames Valley Police warned that hate crimes would not be tolerated.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador, visiting officials, and embassy and consulate general 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. The Consulate General in Edinburgh invited a cross-section of religious leaders in Scotland to attend an August 27 event commemorating the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and the March on Washington. The event promoted respect for civil rights and tolerance towards all races, religions, and disadvantaged groups. In November, the consulate general, together with

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embassy staff, held a series of discussions with the Muslim community in Glasgow.

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. Officers from the Belfast consulate attended interfaith programs. The consulate general held discussions with faith-based groups that serve as conduits between polarized neighborhoods and community leaders, particularly in advance of the summer parading by religious communities.