



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) » [Releases](#) » [International Religious Freedom](#) » [July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report](#) » [Europe and Eurasia](#) » [United Kingdom](#)

## United Kingdom

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report**

Report

**September 13, 2011**

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Laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

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. A number of anti-Muslim incidents occurred, and public debate continued over the role of Islam in society. Representatives of other religious groups reported few negative religiously motivated acts.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom 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 62.3 million. Christians make up 72 percent of the population, including the Church of England, Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches, and many unaffiliated Christian groups. In 2003 the Office of National Statistics estimated 29 percent of the population identified with Anglicanism, 10 percent with the Catholic Church, and 14 percent with Protestant churches. A 2007 survey reported that the number of Catholics attending Sunday services had overtaken the number of Anglicans doing so. A 2006 English church census reported Methodists were decreasing as a percentage of the population, while members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Pentecostal churches, many churches from Africa, and the Eastern Orthodox Church were increasing.

Muslims constitute 3 percent of the population. The Muslim community is predominantly individuals of South Asian origin, but other groups from the Arabian Peninsula, Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Levant are represented. In addition there is a growing number of indigenous converts. Groups composing each 1 percent or less of the population include Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Buddhists. Individuals of Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh backgrounds are concentrated in London and other large urban areas, primarily in England.

Attendance at religious services was significantly different from the number of adherents. According to Christian Research's "Religious Trends" report released in 2008, four million Christians attend services on a regular basis (defined as at least once a month). These figures do not include Northern Ireland, where higher percentages reportedly attend both Catholic (more than 60 percent), and Protestant (more than 35 percent) services. The report stated more than 50 percent of Muslims regularly worship at mosques. Figures for Jews and other religious groups were unavailable.

Religious affiliation among ethnicities varied. According to the 2001 census, approximately 70 percent of the Caucasian population described themselves as Christians. Nearly 75 percent of persons of Caribbean descent stated they were Christian, as did 70 percent of persons of African descent. Among Indians 45 percent are Hindus and 29 percent Sikhs. Approximately 92 percent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are Muslims.

In Northern Ireland, where divisions between nationalists and unionists evolved largely along religious lines, the 2001 census showed that 53.1 percent were Protestant and 43.8 percent were Catholic. Many Catholics and Protestants continue to live in religiously homogenous communities in Northern Ireland, although numerous middle class neighborhoods are religiously mixed. The government continued to promote religious tolerance.

In Bermuda nearly 20 different religious groups composed 125 congregations. Anglicans are 23 percent of the population, while Roman Catholics and African Methodist Episcopalians represented 15 and 11 percent, respectively.

## Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

### Legal/Policy Framework

Please Refer to Appendix C in Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

Laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. The 1998 Human Rights Act provides for freedom of religion, and the 2006 and 2010 Equality Acts ban discrimination based on religion.

In Bermuda the constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There are two established (that is, state) churches--the Church of England (Anglican) and the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian)--but 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.

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 monarch becomes a subject of the Church of Scotland when she crosses the border into Scotland. The Church in Wales, the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the Church of Ireland are members of the Anglican Communion.

The 1689 Bill of Rights and the 1701 Act of Settlement forbid any Catholic, or person married to a Catholic, from becoming monarch. The monarch is the "Supreme Governor" of the Church of England and must always be a member of and promise to uphold the church. The previous government stated that the ban needs to be reconsidered; however, the coalition government has yet to make its position on the issue known.

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The government helps fund the 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 disused Church of England buildings of architectural or historic significance.

A 2001 Home Office study suggested that the establishment status of the Church of England causes "religious disadvantage" to other religious communities. Twenty-six senior bishops of the Anglican Church are given places in the House of Lords as representatives of the official church. Besides this instance, however, membership in a religious group does not confer a political or economic advantage on individual adherents, except perhaps in the case of nonresidents of the country who wish to marry in the country. The Home Office requires nonresidents wishing to marry in the country to apply for a Certificate of Approval (COA) if they are not going to marry in the Church of England. At least one lawsuit has been brought claiming Church of England members' exemption from the COA requirement (and the substantial accompanying fee) is discriminatory. As a result, COA fees were suspended in April 2009 and the exemption for nonresidents marrying in the Church of England was declared unlawful by the High Court. At the end of the reporting period, the time frame for the government to come into compliance with the court ruling had not been determined.

The government includes other religious groups in national events; for example, under the auspices of the Church of England, the queen supported invitations to representatives of a broad range of religious groups to participate in the national Remembrance Day Service. The government made efforts to address specific needs of different religious communities.

Sharia (Islamic law) may be used in areas such as dispute mediation, marriage, and finance insofar as it does not contradict the law; however, there are no known instances of Sharia law being used in Northern Ireland, and in Scotland it has been employed solely in private mediation upon the agreement of both parties.

The 1998 Human Rights Act includes article 9 of the Council of Europe's Convention on Human Rights, providing the right to choose, to change, to practice, and to discuss one's religion or belief.

Those who believe their freedom of religion has been infringed have the right to appeal to the courts for relief.

Most religious institutions are classified as charities, since 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 the charity uses the income or gains for charitable purposes. Charities 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. However, the government granted its request to obtain tax-exempt status, confirming it was a not-for-profit entity and exempt from the value added tax.

The law 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 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, publish, distribute, or include in a program service. The law does not apply to words or behaviors expressed inside a

private dwelling or to criticism or dislike of a religious belief. The maximum penalty for stirring up religious hatred is seven years in prison.

Those convicted of "religiously aggravated offenses" (where there is evidence of religious hostility in connection with a crime) face higher maximum penalties. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) reported that in 2008-09 it prosecuted 11,624 racially and religiously motivated crimes, of which 10,690 led to convictions. The statistics do not differentiate between religiously and racially motivated crimes. These rates represented a decrease in prosecutions from the previous period but an increase in convictions.

In Northern Ireland religious discrimination in employment has been illegal since 1976 and discrimination in provision of goods and services since 1998. This, and all other equality legislation, is supervised by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, which has similar powers to those of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

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 there is equal opportunity for employees of all religious groups. 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. The law 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. In the rest of the country, the law prohibits employment discrimination based on religious belief, except where there is a "genuine occupational requirement" of a religious nature.

Religiously motivated hate language is prosecuted under the Public Order Act and the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act, which the CPS applies to demonstrations where insulting and abusive language is used about religion.

Citing a limited broadcast spectrum, the government continued to prohibit religious groups from holding a national sound broadcasting license, a public teletext license, more than one television service license, and radio and television multiplex licenses.

Following government-provided guidance on accommodating religious dress at schools, some Muslim groups, including the Islamic Human Rights Commission, stated it was inappropriate for the government to provide guidance that regulated Muslim communities in matters concerning the expression of their religious beliefs. Concerns were focused on guidance that school uniform policies could "restrict 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 law requires religious education for all children between the ages of three and 19 in publicly maintained schools. 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 religious groups 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. 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 of 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 themselves from worship without their parents' permission or action. This law does not exempt sixth form students from religious education

classes. Non-Christian worship is permitted with approval of the authorities. Teachers have the right not to participate in collective worship, without prejudice, unless they work for a faith based school. In 2009 the National Union of Teachers called on the government to end the requirement for a collective act of worship, but easing of the requirement had not occurred by the end of the reporting period.

In Bermuda the law allows collective worship by the students but prohibits collective worship at public schools from being "distinctive of any particular religious group." The law also provides for exceptions to the requirement that pupils in public schools engage in collective worship at least once a week. It gives parents the right to request that their children be excused from such worship and authorizes such pupils to worship elsewhere at the beginning or end of the school day. Home schooling is an approved alternative for religious or other reasons. Jewish representatives claimed that bringing up children as Jews in a country where Christian prayers are said in both public and most private schools is a challenge.

At the end of the previous reporting period, more than 30 percent of state schools had a religious character. Nearly all of the approximately 7,000 "faith schools" in England (numbers are not available for Scotland and Wales) are associated with Christian denominations, although there are Jewish, Islamic, Sikh, and one Hindu school. No church or religious organization receives direct funding from the government, with the exception of "faith schools." The government provides financial support--up to 90 percent of capital costs and 100 percent of running costs, including salaries--to sectarian schools. In addition several hundred independent schools of a religious nature receive no state support but must meet government quality standards. Controversy arose in 2006 regarding more than 100 Islamic schools when an Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) evaluation of these schools showed many were "little more than places where the Qur'an was recited." The schools were given time to correct their deficiencies. The Daily Telegraph reported that the reviews of a number of the schools carried out this year were positive, despite having curricula that may not be "broad and balanced." In November BBC Panorama determined that about 5,000 pupils were being taught the official Saudi national curriculum in United Kingdom schools. Education Secretary Michael Gove said that there was no place for anti-Semitic or homophobic lessons in British schools. As of October 2009, reports from the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) indicated there were approximately 2,000 official madrassas.

Almost all schools in Northern Ireland receive state support. More than 90 percent of students attended schools that were either predominantly Protestant (state-run) or Catholic. Integrated schools served an estimated 7 percent of school-age children whose families voluntarily chose this option, often after overcoming significant obstacles to provide the resources to start a school and demonstrate its sustainability for three years before government funding begins. Demand for places in integrated schools outweighed the limited number available. There were more than 60 integrated schools, and the government permits existing schools to petition to change from state-run or Catholic to integrated status. However, more schools petition for that status than are granted it.

Immigration regulations require visa applicants who wish to enter the country as "ministers of religion" (a legal term used for visas) to demonstrate a 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" and when applying for visas must also 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. To obtain an entry visa, a missionary must be trained as such or have worked previously as a missionary.

In 2008 the home secretary issued revised rules allowing exclusion of foreign preachers who espouse hatred. The government can exclude individuals on the grounds that they have engaged in unacceptable behavior, defined by the government as using any means to express views that foster extremism or hatred.

Ministers of the Church of Scientology and the Unification Church are not issued visas as ministers, since their organizations are not accepted as religious groups. Adherents and those wishing to learn about either group may apply for visas as visitors or students, respectively. There were no reports of specific visa denials during the reporting period.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office annually provided a special hajj delegation to provide consular and medical assistance to the country's Muslims on pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia.

The law prohibits discrimination 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 EHRC was established in 2006 and is responsible for promoting equality, diversity, and working towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination and harassment. The EHRC receives public funds but is independent of the government. The EHRC has powers to investigate unlawful acts of discrimination and can bring legal proceedings against violators of the law. In October the new Equality Act came into force, combining 116 separate pieces of legislation into one act and preserving the EHRC. In Scotland the EHRC covers only human rights matters reserved for parliament and major government ministries. Human rights for matters "devolved" to the Scottish parliament are covered by the Scottish Human Rights Commission. The Equality Act allows the EHRC to cover devolved matters if it has the agreement of the Scottish commission.

It is government policy to assure that public servants are not discriminated against on the basis of religious beliefs 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 Chaplaincy Council monitors policy and practice relating to religious provision. The military generally provides adherents of minority religious groups with chaplains of their faith.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

As in previous years, Christian groups stated they had been subjected to more stringent application of rules restricting religion in the public sphere. There was continued public concern over the ability of Christians to express their faith in the workplace.

Members of the Muslim community complained that police targeted them disproportionately for suspicion, arrest, and "stop-and-search." The home secretary scrapped the "stop and search" police powers as originally defined in the antiterror legislation in July. The Muslim community and human rights activists also criticized the 28-day detention powers for terrorism suspects, which in June the government extended for six months while it reviewed counter-terrorism legislation.

The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) continued to work closely with Muslim groups to address concerns about the way police treated Muslims. The IPCC publicized its services through advertisements, community meetings, and media articles.

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

#### Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In September Pope Benedict XVI visited at the invitation of the queen. On his first official papal visit to the UK, the pope discussed religious freedom and the country's record of tolerance.

In October druidry was recognized as a religion and was given charitable status by the Charity Commission of England and Wales.

During the reporting period, the government announced strong support for protecting religious freedom. On a visit to Pakistan in October, Home Secretary Theresa May said she would uphold religious freedom and women's rights by not imposing a ban on the burqa or niqab, according to the Home Office Web site.

In December The Daily Telegraph reported the Prison Service will allow pagan prisoners to take four days off from work duties per year to observe pagan holidays.

### Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The Muslim Arbitration Tribunal, established in 2007 to give Muslims an alternative for settling disputes, reported that as of June, 30 Islamic law councils operated in the country. Civitas, a British think tank, argued that these councils often contradict the country's law, but media reports indicated that non-Muslims were increasingly turning to Islamic law courts for settling disputes.

Community Security Trust (CST) reported a small spike in anti-Semitic incidents immediately after the Gaza flotilla incident. CST recorded 74 anti-Semitic incidents that month. The incidents included property damage, threats, abusive behavior, and mass-produced or mass-mailed anti-Semitic literature.

In October anti-Semitic graffiti, including swastikas, were spray painted at the Holocaust Center in Newark and the ruins of Saint Mary's Church in Eastwell.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center has reported calls for violence against Jews on at least one popular social media site.

The Independent reported in July that a Conservative member of parliament refused to hold meetings with women wearing full Islamic dress, citing that "it is not a necessity" or religious requirement to wear the burqa or niqab. The Islamic Human Rights Commission reportedly called his decision a "worrying sign" and stressed the need for "nondiscrimination and equality."

In November a report on "Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime" in the UK was published. The authors concluded there was a lack of public "recognition of the problem of anti-Muslim violence, intimidation, and discrimination in the UK." The authors further noted that Muslims have experienced more intimidation and violence in the country post-9/11.

MINAB, a body launched by four large Muslim nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to professionalize mosques and imams and to combat extremism, continued to work on reaching out to encourage moderate, nonviolent interpretations of Islam. Twenty percent of its board members are Shia Muslims and 20 percent are women; both requirements are minimums set by MINAB's bylaws.

Each year Muslim and Jewish students gather with help from the Coexistence Trust, an organization that aims at promoting good relations between Muslims and Jews. In November the group held a faith summit entitled FaithHub 2010 to bring youths of all religious groups together to discuss key problems centered around faith, identity, and community.

On November 22, The Daily Telegraph reported that 50 Anglican priests and 600 Church of England members would convert to Catholicism in protest of liberal reforms scheduled to be implemented in the Anglican Church in January 2011. The Vatican has called the group the Personal Ordinariate in England and Wales and plans to provide £250,000 (\$385,000) in start-up funding.

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

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

The U.S. embassy and consulates encouraged interfaith dialogue to promote religious tolerance. Representatives from various ecumenical groups, such as the Three Faiths Forum and other groups promoting religious tolerance, were routinely included in embassy events. Embassy and consulate officers regularly held events and contacted religious leaders of various groups to discuss religious freedom. Embassy and consulate officials actively engaged in outreach presentations to the public, with a particular emphasis on Muslim communities. The consulate general in Edinburgh held several outreach events at mosques in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Embassy officers discussed the need for religious tolerance and the role of religious diversity in American life. The embassy supported the Three Faiths Forum's high school-level outreach program which included talks to young persons about different religious groups and tried to dispel related myths and misconceptions. The embassy also supported programs with the Chicago-based Interfaith Youth Core and other NGOs focusing on reducing the risk of radicalization and promoting understanding among religious groups.

As an active supporter of the peace process in Northern Ireland, the U.S. government encouraged efforts to diminish sectarian tension and promote dialogue between the Protestant and Catholic communities.

[Back to Top](#)