

OUR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

#FoRB



Bring in a new law to protect religious freedoms

In the light of the British tradition of fair play, tolerance, diversity and equality, and in line with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), we call upon the British government to introduce a new law to enshrine fully and permanently the hard-fought-for religious freedoms we have gained over the last five centuries in the UK.

Over the last 500 years the UK has led the world in establishing freedom of religion and spreading it to other countries. Yet today freedom of religion is being significantly eroded in the UK.

For example, recently we have seen:

- **In 2017** a Crown Prosecution Service lawyer claimed that publicly quoting parts of the King James Bible in modern Britain should “be considered to be abusive and is a criminal matter.”
- **In 2016** a student who had fled persecution in Africa was thrown off a university social work course in the UK because of a Facebook post affirming a traditional Christian view of marriage.
- **In 2015** the government proposed imposing government registration and inspection of Sunday schools, something the UK abolished more than two centuries ago.
- **In 2015** a prominent Northern Ireland pastor was prosecuted for a sermon, also published online, in which he strongly rejected the Islamic doctrine that Jesus was a Muslim.
- **In 2013** Nadia Eweida, a Christian working for British Airways had to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights to win a 6-year legal battle after being placed on unpaid leave for wearing a small cross round her neck at work.

Freedom of religion and other historic freedoms such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press and academic freedom are increasingly under threat in the UK. Centuries of progress in achieving full freedom of religion is now being put into reverse. There are seven important aspects of freedom of religion which have become central to our national identity and values, but they need to be protected by a specific law:

1. **Freedom of worship (achieved 1689)**
2. **Freedom to read Scriptures in public (achieved 1547)**
3. **Freedom to interpret Scriptures without government interference (achieved 1559)**
4. **Freedom to choose or change your faith or belief (achieved 1689)**
5. **Freedom to preach and try to convince others of the truth of your beliefs (achieved 1812)**
6. **Freedom to build places of worship (achieved 1812)**
7. **Freedom from being required to affirm a particular worldview or set of beliefs in order to attend university, hold a public sector job or stand for election (except where there is a genuine occupational requirement such as chaplaincy posts) (achieved 1888)**

