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## **Lord Ahmad appointed as PM's Special Envoy to promote religious freedom**

### ***Lord Ahmad given role as Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief.***

UK Prime Minister's Office (04.07.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2z6Orli> - Lord Ahmad has today been appointed as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The role, which supports the Prime Minister's commitment to religious tolerance in the UK, will allow Lord Ahmad to demonstrate the country's commitment to religious freedom by promoting inter-faith respect and dialogue internationally.

Lord Ahmad, who is also Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, will promote the UK's firm stance on religious tolerance abroad, helping to tackle religious discrimination in countries where minority faith groups face persecution.

The appointment underscores the Prime Minister's commitment to tackling religious prejudice in all its forms and follows the government's recent announcement of a further £1 million funding for places of worship that have been subjected to hate crime attacks.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

"Religious discrimination blights the lives of millions of people across the globe and leads to conflict and instability. Both here and abroad, individuals are being denied the basic right of being able to practise their faith free of fear.

"Tolerance for those of different faiths is fundamental to our values, and is an issue I know is already of great importance to Lord Ahmad, who is constantly looking for fresh ways to promote religious liberty in his role as Minister for Human Rights at the Foreign Office.

"I look forward to supporting him in this new role as he works with faith groups and governments across the world to raise understanding of religious persecution and what we can do to eliminate it."

The PM's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

"In too many parts of the world, religious minorities are persecuted, discriminated against and treated as second class citizens. As a man of faith, I feel this very keenly.

"Freedom of Religion or Belief is a human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It must be respected. People from all faiths

or none should be free to practise as they wish. This respect is key to global stability, and is in all our interests.

"I am delighted to have been appointed as the PM's Special Envoy. I shall use the UK Government's global network to reach across religious divides, seek the elimination of discrimination on the basis of religion or belief and bring different communities together."

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## Church bells protected from noise complaints under new planning laws

Harry Farley

Christian Today (21.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2EgeW76> - Church bells will be protected from noise complaints under new planning laws to be introduced.

Ministers are changing planning guidance in England for new houses after parishes whose bells have chimed for centuries were forced to comply with noise abatement orders by disgruntled neighbours who had recently moved to the area.



**St Peter's Church, Sandwich. The village church has been ringing its bells for 900 years through the day and night.**

The updated guidance shows the government is 'standing up for churches', ministers said, and it means vicars will not have to put up with 'unreasonable restrictions put on them because of changes in nearby land uses since they were established' because new houses are built near them.

Becky Clark, the Church of England's director of Churches and Cathedrals, said: 'We welcome these planned changes, which will help ensure that the distinctive sound of church bells continues to ring out well into the future.'

'The Church Buildings Council – the body which helps dioceses maintain church buildings - supports the continued use of church buildings as places of worship, including proclaiming their presence through the ringing of bells.

'We maintain a register of historic bells, some of which date back to the 13th century, and provide grants to help with their care and conservation. Bell ringing has been part of Christian worship for a thousand years.'

National planning policy already stops unreasonable restrictions being placed on businesses but ministers will change the National Planning Policy Framework to emphasise the point. The changes will not just apply to churches but also music venues.

Housing Secretary Sajid Javid said it was 'wrong' that churches and entertainment sites were having to make expensive changes to their business arising from developments outside their control.

'I have always thought it unfair that the burden is on long-standing music venues to solve noise issues when property developers choose to build nearby,' he said.

'I am pleased to finally have an opportunity to right this wrong and also give more peace of mind to new residents moving into local projects.'

It comes after St Peter's Church, Sandwich, was forced to silence its bells after a handful of complaints from new neighbours. A Save Our Chimes campaign started, and a local survey organised indicated that 85 per cent of residents wanted the chimes to continue.

Local MP Craig MacKinlay told The Daily Telegraph: 'Church bells have tolled for centuries across the country and it is vital that they can continue to be heard.

'This started off as a local issue in Sandwich and I am delighted that ministers have listened and are now going to act nationally.

'The bell has tolled for local meddlers who want to silence the chimes and local councils who too frequently put commonsense and centuries of tradition aside to come to decisions that are held in respect by local people.'