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Fiona Bruce MP appointed Prime Minister's Special Envoy for FoRB

APPG (20.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2KWZqEc> - Fiona Bruce, Conservative MP for Congleton and Vice-Chair of the All-Party Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, has been appointed by Prime Minister Boris Johnson MP as his Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Speaking on her appointment Fiona Bruce said

"I am honoured to be given this opportunity to serve as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. There is much to do, and my post will be placed at the service of some of the most vulnerable people across the world.

This appointment comes in the light of continuing large scale horrors taking place – such as those against Uighur Muslims in China, Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and Yazidis in Iraq and at a time when, as the late and much respected former Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks stated "the persecution of Christians throughout much of the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, and elsewhere, is one of the crimes against humanity of our time." These are some of the most deeply concerning issues of our generation, on which it will be a privilege to engage as Special Envoy, both nationally and internationally, with others similarly concerned."

Fiona Bruce continued,

"Having travelled to countries such as Burma, Nigeria and Nepal and heard first hand accounts of atrocities and persecution being meted out there, I know how much those who are suffering from this appreciate advocacy on their behalf, even from afar.

The role of Special Envoy for FoRB is based upon Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a founder member of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and a signatory to that APPG's first report of 2013 – which described Article 18 as an "orphaned right," – I believe it is time to bring the orphan out of the orphanage.

As the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, I look forward to continuing to work alongside colleagues in the All Party Parliamentary Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief, and pay tribute to their dedicated work, and that of others, on behalf of some of the most persecuted, vulnerable and afflicted on earth. I hope to build on this work to further raise the profile of FoRB as a human right. For as Boris Johnson MP the Prime Minister said recently in the House of Commons "We all know that wherever freedom of belief is under attack, other human rights are under attack as well."

In 2010 Fiona became Member of Parliament for Congleton. Prior to 2010 Fiona practised as a solicitor, setting up her own business, the law firm Fiona Bruce & Co LLP, based in Cheshire.

Throughout her time in Parliament Fiona has focused on championing individual freedoms and human rights, both in this country and abroad, including the right of religious freedom or belief.

Fiona served on the International Development Select Committee for four years and chaired the Parliamentary sub-committee overseeing the Independent Commission on Aid Inspections. She currently sits on the Parliamentary Joint-Committee on Human Rights and is also Chair of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, an appointment made by the then-Prime Minister.

Fiona is also a Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for North Korea and Vice-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said "*Fiona Bruce is a champion for freedoms here & abroad. I look forward to working with her as the UK's Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief to make sure everyone, everywhere is free to have & practice a faith, belief, or not, in accordance with their conscience.*"

Lord Ahmad tweeted "*As the UK Minister for human rights, freedom of religion is a key priority; I'm delighted by the appointment of Fiona Bruce MP as the PM's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief. She's a powerful & passionate advocate for FoRB & I look forward to working closely with her.*"

In UK religion rather than race is cause of more prejudice, study shows

By Peter Kenny

Ecumenical News (16.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3m5JMEd> - Prejudice around religion, rather than on race or xenophobia, is the "final frontier" for diversity, where individuals are prepared to express negative attitudes, a new study in England and Wales has found.

"How We Get Along: The Diversity Study of England and Wales 2020," was published Nov. 16 by the UK-based [Woolf Institute](https://www.woolfinstitute.org/).

The institute says it combines teaching, scholarship, and outreach, focusing on Jews, Christians, and Muslims, to encourage tolerance and foster understanding between people of all beliefs.

"Attitudes between faith groups are more negative than between ethnic and national groups," the study found.

"The strongest negative attitudes towards marrying someone from another background are observed when we group the survey respondents by religion."

Attitudes between faith groups are more harmful than between ethnic and national groups, the study found.

And the most assertive negative attitudes towards marrying someone from another background are observed when we group the survey respondents by religion.

Religious prejudice trumps racism

"Religious prejudice, rather than racism or xenophobia, is the 'final frontier' for diversity, a place where individuals are willing to express negative attitudes," said the study.

About 75 percent of people in England and Wales are comfortable with a close relative marrying an Asian or Black person (70 percent and 74 percent).

At the same time, fewer than half (44 percent) are comfortable with the idea of a close relative marrying a Muslim.

"The word 'Muslim' appears to trigger more negative sentiment than the word 'Pakistani'" the report found.

The great majority of British Pakistani people are Muslim, so the researchers would expect feelings towards both groups to be broadly similar.

"However, feelings towards a close relative marrying a Muslim person appear to be more negative than those towards a Pakistani person," it said.

The survey sought to find out what people think of their neighbors.

It sought to find out what they think of others.

It looked at race, religion, and immigration, what divides people and

what brings them together.

It examined if they share the same experiences of the diverse everyday world around them.

"Or is diversity something other people do? These are some of the questions that motivated the Woolf Institute to produce *How We Get Along: The Diversity Study of England and Wales 2020*," the institute said.

It surveyed 11,701 people across England and Wales and asked questions concerning their attitudes towards ethnic, national, and religious diversity and their experiences,

The study is the largest known study of diversity undertaken in the United Kingdom said the institute.

It says that despite public concern and media narratives that the country is increasingly polarised, there is an emerging national consensus that diversity is good for Britain, but that the pace of change has been too fast for many.

The survey's findings suggest that 'prodiversity' and 'pro-immigration control' positions are neither contradictory nor irreconcilable.

"The existence of an emerging consensus on both diversity and change offers policymakers opportunities for coalitions and broader appeal. They should seek to build on this finding when considering issues such as equality and immigration," says the Woolf Institute.

Government to increase protections for persecuted Christians abroad, following Bishop's review

Prime Minister Boris Johnson used his Christmas message to express sympathy for Christians "who are facing persecution" around the world

The Telegraph (11.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2FS8DYS> - Persecuted Christians abroad will have their protection bolstered by the British government, following a landmark pledge to adopt a new definition of anti-Christian discrimination and persecution.

Last year the former foreign secretary, Jeremy Hunt, commissioned Philip Mounstephen, the bishop of Truro, to spend six months examining the extent and nature of Christian persecution as well as assessing the UK government's response.

Among the recommendations proposed by the Bishop included: establishing a UN security council resolution urging Middle East and northern African countries to do more to protect Christians, send UN observers to monitor the effectiveness of security measures, impose sanctions on regimes found to have committed "serious human rights abuses" against religious minorities, and create a Magna Carta Fund dedicated to their protection.

Other recommendations included rolling out mandatory training to help staff at home and abroad better identify persecution in all its forms as well as adopting a definition of anti-Christian discrimination and persecution, similar to those applied to Islamophobia and antisemitism.

Now it has emerged that the government plans to implement all the recommendations "in full".

Speaking last week during a foreign affairs debate in the House of Lords, Baroness Goldie, Minister of State at the Ministry of Defence, was referring to "the important matter of the Truro review and its recommendations".

She added: "The Government intend to implement the recommendations in full."

In his report the Bishop of Truro said that the UK government should "name the phenomenon of Christian discrimination and persecution and undertake work to identify its particular character alongside similar definitions for other religions".

Baroness Goldie also revealed that the government will also "show global leadership" by imposing Magnitsky-style sanctions on nations which violate human rights.

"Secondary legislation will be laid under the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 once we leave the EU," she said. "This will allow the UK to impose Magnitsky-style sanctions in response to serious human rights violations or abuses."

The Magnitsky Act was enacted by the Obama Administration, authorizing the U.S. Government to sanction human rights offenders.

In his report the Bishop of Truro said that the UK government should "name the phenomenon of Christian discrimination and persecution and undertake work to identify its particular character alongside similar definitions for other religions".

This would be with the aim of developing tailored policies within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to address such issues.

The announcement comes after Prime Minister Boris Johnson used his Christmas message to express sympathy for Christians "who are facing persecution" around the world.

He used his message to vow to “defend” their right to religious expression, saying he will aim to “change” the dire predicament of those punished for their faith.

Ayo Adedoyin, Executive Director of PSJ UK (The international Organisation for Peace Building and Social Justice) welcomed the announcement.

He said: “It is great news that the new Boris Johnson Government is taking seriously at long last the appalling suffering of Nigerian Christians, who are being brutally targeted by Islamist Fulani militants and Islamic State terrorists.

The Bishop of Truro has produced 22 detailed recommendations all designed to give greater prominence to the carnage against Christians worldwide and in Nigeria in particular. Crucially, they include the imposition of sanctions against governments such as the Buhari regime, who turn a blind eye or worse to the suffering of innocent villagers singled out solely because of their faith.

“The death toll is running at 1,000 a year and in addition many more are being maimed and terrorised and driven from their homes. Britain gives Nigeria £300 million a year in aid and it is time to link that to a genuine attempt by Abuja to protect Christians. It is time to stop the silent slaughter of the innocents.”

Recommended reading

Bishop of Truro’s independent review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO support for persecuted Christians: Final report and recommendations
<https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/storage/2019/07/final-report-and-recommendations.pdf>

The West owes Iraq’s persecuted minorities a lot more than just talk
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/07/08/west-owes-iraqs-persecuted-minorities-lot-just-talk/>

Jeremy Hunt: We must not allow a misguided political correctness to stop us from helping persecuted Christians
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/12/26/must-not-allow-misguided-political-correctness-stop-us-helping/>

Boris Johnson will highlight plight of persecuted Christians across the world in his Christmas message
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/12/23/boris-johnson-will-highlight-plight-persecuted-christians-across/>