

The Rt Hon Mr. David Lammy  
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office  
King Charles Street, London  
SW1A 2AH

Dear Foreign Secretary,

**We, the undersigned, are writing to urge you to make persecuted religious communities priority recipients of UK Overseas Development Aid (ODA).**

All around the world today, people are persecuted for no other reason than because of their peacefully held religious beliefs. They urgently need the UK's help.

There are currently 61 countries throughout the world, with combined populations of over 4.9 billion people, in which severe violations of religious freedom take place, according to analysis by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).<sup>i</sup>

Not only is persecution widespread, but it's also becoming more cruel. ACN research consistently shows that oppression has intensified, and impunity against perpetrators has grown.<sup>ii</sup> This persecution included extreme violations of Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

The plight of Christians deserves to be highlighted in particular, as a plethora of sources show that their situation continues to worsen around the globe. Evidence reveals that a) Christians suffer harassment in more countries than any other faith group<sup>iii</sup> and b) more Christians are oppressed than other faith groups – with hundreds of millions currently under threat.<sup>iv</sup>

In May 2022, the previous Government published its 10-year strategy for international development, which sets four priorities for UK aid: reliable investment; empowering women and girls; humanitarian assistance; climate change, biodiversity and global health. Nowhere in these priorities – or indeed in the strategy itself – were religious minorities mentioned.

And yet religious communities suffer all manner of human rights violations, including the very worst: sexual violence, abduction, forced marriage and conversion, displacement, destruction of property, discrimination in schools and the workplace, physical and mental torture.

This new Government has an opportunity to alleviate significant injustices around the world by refocusing UK aid. Doing so will not only improve the lives of countless religious minorities suffering for their faith, but will also help deliver on the broader aims of the UK's international development strategy. Many of these aims – such as the empowerment of women and girls, and humanitarian assistance – have religious freedom dimensions to them.

In light of all of the above, we call for:

- I. The addition of a fifth priority to the UK’s international development plan, centring around religious minorities;**
- II. The publication of a standalone religious freedom strategy to outline the most effective means of aid deployment to victims of religious discrimination and persecution.**

Thank you for considering this vitally important matter.

Yours Sincerely,

*Caroline Hull*

Dr Caroline Hull  
National Director,  
Aid to the Church in Need (UK)

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<sup>i</sup> “Religious Freedom in the World Report 2023”, Aid to the Church in Need (Intl), June 2023;  
<https://acninternational.org/religiousfreedomreport/> [accessed 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023]

<sup>ii</sup> “Persecuted and Forgotten? A Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2020-22”, Aid to the Church in Need (UK), November 2022; [https://acnuk.org/resource/persecuted-forgotten-2022/?srsltid=AfmBOopXdhkmreMWOZ8C1bn\\_1jBCLfuV5Dwb8F9FFxfwiP3crpO3iTo7](https://acnuk.org/resource/persecuted-forgotten-2022/?srsltid=AfmBOopXdhkmreMWOZ8C1bn_1jBCLfuV5Dwb8F9FFxfwiP3crpO3iTo7) [accessed 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024]

<sup>iii</sup> “Harassment of religious groups returned to peak level in 2021”, PEW Research Centre, March 2024;  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/2024/03/05/harassment-of-religious-groups-returned-to-peak-level-in-2021/#:~:text=In%202021,%20religious%20groups%20faced%20harassment> [accessed 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024]

<sup>iv</sup> “Why don’t more people care about Christian persecution?”, The Spectator, September 2024;  
<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/why-dont-more-people-care-about-christian-persecution/> [accessed 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024]