

The background of the entire page is a photograph of several lit candles. The candles are lit, with bright yellow and orange flames. The background is dark, making the light from the candles stand out. The text is overlaid on this image.

# **The Freedom to Believe: *Protecting and Promoting* *Article 18***

**A report on international religious freedom**

**June, 2011**

**Conservative Party Human Rights Commission**

[www.conservativehumanrights.com](http://www.conservativehumanrights.com)

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## 1. Executive Summary

Violations of religious freedom affect people of all religions and none. Freedom of religion and belief is a fundamental human right, as set out in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Amnesty International notes in their written evidence to the Commission that:

*“the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental component of the universal and indivisible human rights framework that applies to all people everywhere, as laid out in international law.”<sup>1</sup>*

However, in too many countries around the world freedom of religion and belief is not respected, and religious believers and minorities face discrimination, restrictions and persecution. In Iraq, it is reported that before the Iraq War there were at least one million Christians, but today the Christian population has declined to 200,000, as a result of violence, persecution and harassment. According to Tina Lambert, then Advocacy Director at Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), in her oral evidence to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, 70% of the world’s population live in countries with restrictions on religious freedom.

“Religious freedom is key to human rights, because religion is so intrinsic to our humanity,” said Tina Lambert. “Religious freedom is a litmus test of other fundamental freedoms.” It is tied up with other freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of movement, and other violations of human rights, such as arbitrary arrests, imprisonment, torture, slavery and execution are often as a result of religious persecution. Amnesty International notes that “restrictions on religious freedoms, as well as other freedoms including social, cultural and linguistic freedoms, can often lead to other human rights violations such as the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience or even death.”<sup>2</sup>

This report is the result of an inquiry conducted by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission from May-July, 2010. The Commission held two hearings in the House of Commons, chaired by Nicola Blackwood MP, in which oral evidence was presented by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and CSW, as well as by representatives of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, the Rohingya Muslims of Burma, the Baha’is, Falun Gong and Free Tibet. Written evidence was also submitted by these organisations, as well as by Open Doors and the International Campaign for Tibet. Their written submissions are available in full, as appendices to this report and on the Commission’s website.

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International UK, *Evidence to the Conservative Human Rights Commission – Freedom to Believe: Protecting and Promoting Article 18*, p.3

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*,

## 2. Recommendations

Drawing on recommendations made by experts in their evidence to the Commission, the Commission urges the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government to place human rights at the heart of foreign policy, and within that the promotion and protection of freedom of religion and belief as a priority for human rights and foreign policy. The Commission makes the following recommendations to Her Majesty's Government for promoting religious freedom worldwide, and then specifically in relation to the persecution of Christians worldwide, the treatment of Tibetan Buddhists and Falun Gong in China, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malaysia, the plight of the Rohingyas in Burma, developments regarding religious apparel in Europe. Further recommendations can be found in the written evidence submitted to the Commission.

### Promoting religious freedom worldwide:

- a) To appoint a special envoy for international freedom of religion and belief, to report to the Minister of State for Human Rights in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), and to co-ordinate the UK's diplomatic efforts in this field in partnership with the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion and Belief, the US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, and other governments' envoys on human rights and religious freedom;
- b) To re-establish an FCO Freedom of Religion Panel, to bring together on a regular basis human rights and religious freedom organisations, and representatives of religious communities, to inform and advise the FCO on violations of religious freedom and methods of promoting religious freedom;
- c) To publish an FCO Annual Report on International Religious Freedom;
- d) To continue the FCO Annual Report on Human Rights and the requirement that a full debate be held on the floor of the House of Commons once a year, on international human rights;
- e) To encourage embassies and High Commissions to fully utilise the FCO Toolkit on Freedom of Religion and Belief;
- f) To establish a cross-departmental strategy, to include the FCO, the Department for International Development (DFID), the Home Office, the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, and the Ministry of Defence, to promote the right to freedom of religion and belief around the world;

- g) To ensure that freedom of religion and belief is part of bilateral and multilateral discussions with relevant governments on a regular basis, and is a priority in bilateral human rights dialogues;
- h) To support peace and reconciliation initiatives designed to counter religious hatred and promote understanding;
- i) To provide financial and technical support to governments to enable them to better protect equality and diversity generally, including promoting freedom of religion and belief through enacting legislation and putting in place effective enforcement mechanisms in line with international standards;
- j) To continue to exert diplomatic pressure on governments of nations where religious freedom is violated, and to consider imposing targeted sanctions on key individuals or governments responsible for serious, widespread and systematic religious freedom violations;
- k) To continue to robustly oppose efforts at the UN to introduce religious defamation measures, and to work to build a coalition of support for the campaign to reject religious defamation laws and promote religious freedom.

### **Religious freedom for Christians worldwide:**

- l) To recognise the scale and gravity of discrimination, restrictions and persecution against Christians worldwide, at the hands of authoritarian regimes, extremists from other religions, other denominations within Christianity and militant secularists;
- m) To actively promote religious freedom for all, including with reference to the persecution of Christians in many countries, and to develop appropriate responses to sensitive issues related to proselytisation, apostasy, conversion and blasphemy;

### **Religious freedom in China:**

- n) To adopt a more robust approach to human rights in China, including freedom of religion, and ensure that the Coalition Manifesto commitment to “seek closer engagement with China, while standing firm on human rights” is established as a guiding principle;
- o) To ensure that human rights and religious freedom are raised consistently, as an integral component of UK-China relations;
- p) To establish a more consistent approach to the UK-China human rights dialogue, maintaining the same focus for several years so that measurable progress can be achieved, and to ensure

that UK-China human rights dialogues are measured against an agreed set of specific, measurable benchmarks with timeframes to monitor progress. Human rights organisations with relevant expertise and experience should be consulted in the identification and monitoring of agreed benchmarks;

- q) To ensure that public statements on human rights, including on religious freedom, in China and Tibet made by Ministers and senior officials are consistent, and that concerns about human rights, including religious freedom, in China and Tibet are expressed in public statements, speeches and press conferences during visits to China and not just for a UK domestic audience;
- r) To urge China to recognise the freedom to choose to believe in and follow any religion, including those outside the official organisations and the five recognised religions, and to amend the Constitution, which currently only protects officially recognised religious activities, defined as 'normal', a term arbitrarily defined by the State and designed to exclude any activities deemed by the State to threaten its supremacy and security;
- s) To urge China to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and amend legislation and practice to conform to the rights laid out therein;
- t) To urge China to end violations of religious freedom in Tibet, particularly patriotic re-education campaigns, state-intervention in the identification and education of Tibetan *tulkus*, and restrictions on the admission of monks and nuns to monastic institutions;
- u) To urge China to allow independent human rights observers to meet Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the 11<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama, and his family to confirm his whereabouts and well-being;
- v) To urge China to permit the worship, observance, practice and teaching that relates to the Dalai Lama, as an integral aspect of Tibetan Buddhism, and to end the vilification of the Dalai Lama;
- w) To urge China to immediately release all those detained for their religious belief, including Christians Alimujiang Yimiti and Shi Weihang, and provide information regarding the welfare and whereabouts of human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, a Christian lawyer who has defended religious freedom cases;
- x) To follow the example of the US and Australian governments by specifically calling for an end to the persecution of Falun Gong;
- y) To urge China to offer an open invitation to all UN thematic and treaty bodies, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief;

## Religious freedom for Ahmadi Muslims:

- z) To draw attention to the plight of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community worldwide, and in particular:
- To urge the Government of Pakistan to repeal its anti-Ahmadiyya laws, take action to prevent violence and discrimination against Ahmadi Muslims, and to bring the perpetrators of violence to justice;
  - To urge the Government of Indonesia to repeal the decree restricting Ahmadiyya Muslim religious activities, take action to prevent violence and discrimination against Ahmadi Muslims, and to bring the perpetrators of violence to justice;

## Religious freedom for the Rohingya Muslim people in Burma:

The United Kingdom Government has taken a leading role in advocating for human rights in Burma, but the plight of the Rohingya people has not received the attention it needs and deserves. The Commission recommends that:

- The Government increase pressure on the military regime to recognise the Rohingyas as full citizens of Burma, end the restrictions on movement, marriage and education, and end its policies of religious discrimination and persecution:
- Furthermore, the Commission reiterates its recommendation for the establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry, to investigate crimes against humanity in Burma, including violations against the Rohingya people. For further details and recommendations, see the section in 'Summary of evidence' below and the submission by the Burmese Rohingya Organisation (UK) in the appendices.

## Religious freedom in Europe:

While the situation in Europe cannot and must not be compared with the severe, widespread and systematic violations of religious freedom in other parts of the world, recent developments in some European countries are a cause for concern. The decision by the people of Switzerland to vote in a referendum in November 2009 to forbid the construction of minarets, and the parliamentary support in Belgium, Spain and France for banning the veil, are, in the Commission's view, unnecessary restrictions on religious freedom which will hinder the promotion of inter-religious harmony in Europe, be counter-productive for efforts to combat Islamism and Islamic extremism, and undermine the ability of Europeans to advocate for religious freedom in other parts of the world. The Commission therefore urges the UK Government:

- To use its influence with European partners to urge them not to implement such legislation;
- To urge European countries to take measures to ensure that women are able to exercise their rights free from coercion, harassment and discrimination

Furthermore, the Commission notes the recent Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly resolution 1743 (2010), on Islam, Islamism and Islamophobia in Europe. The Commission identifies strongly with the following extracts from the resolution:

*“The Assembly is deeply concerned about Islamic extremism as well as about extremism against Muslim communities in Europe. Both phenomena reinforce each other ....*

*In this respect, the veiling of women, especially full veiling through the burqa or the niqab, is often perceived as a symbol of the subjugation of women to men, restricting the role of women within the society, limiting their professional life and impeding their social and economic activities. Neither the full veiling of women, nor even the headscarf, is recognised by all Muslims as a religious obligation of Islam, but they are seen by many as a social and cultural tradition. The Assembly considers that this tradition could be a threat to women’s dignity and freedom. No woman should be compelled to wear religious apparel by her community or family. Any act of oppression, sequestration or violence constitutes a crime that must be punished by law. Women victims of these crimes must be protected by member states whatever their status, and benefit from support and rehabilitation measures.*

*For this reason, the possibility to prohibit the wearing of the burqa and the niqab is being considered by legislatures in several European countries. Article 9 of the ECHR includes the right of individuals to choose freely to wear or not to wear religious clothing in private or in public. Legal restrictions to this freedom may be justified where necessary in a democratic society, in particular for security purposes or where public or professional functions of individuals require their religious neutrality or that their face can be seen. **However, a general prohibition of wearing the burqa and the niqab would deny women, who freely desire to do so, their right to cover their face.***

***In addition, a general prohibition might have the adverse effect of generating family and community pressure on Muslim women to stay at home and confine themselves to contacts with other women. Muslim women could be further excluded if they were to leave educational institutions, stay away from public places and abandon work outside their communities, in order not to break with their family tradition. Therefore, the Assembly calls on member states to develop targeted policies intended to raise awareness of the rights of Muslim women, help them to take part in public life and offer them equal opportunities to pursue a professional life and gain social and economic independence. In this respect, the education of young Muslim women as well as of their parents and families is crucial. It is especially necessary to remove all forms of discrimination against girls and to develop education on gender equality, without stereotypes and at all levels of the education system.***

*Female genital mutilation under the pretext of Islamic or other customs should be considered as a crime as it violates the right to physical and moral integrity of individuals and especially girls. Member states must do their utmost to put an end to this crime and provide practical help to children and their parents, including in particular through education. The Assembly recalls in this context its [Resolution 1247](#) (2001) on female genital mutilation. The Assembly*



*accordingly urges member states to take every step to prevent and combat all forms of oppression or violence undergone by women.*<sup>3</sup>

### **3. Summary of evidence**

Violations of freedom of religion and belief occur in various ways in a wide range of countries, including Burma, China, Cuba, Egypt, Eritrea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Laos, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. Evidence was presented to the Commission in oral and written form, and is available in full as an appendix to this report.

The Commission is particularly grateful to the following individuals and organisations who presented oral evidence at two hearings in the House of Commons, in addition to written evidence:

- Tom Porteous, Director, Human Rights Watch
- Tina Lambert, Advocacy Director, Christian Solidarity Worldwide
- Allan Hogarth, Senior Advocacy Officer, Amnesty International UK
- John Dalhuison, Researcher on Discrimination in Europe, Amnesty International UK
- Kishan Manocha, Secretary, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahai's (UK)
- Daniel Wheatley, Government Relations Officer, Baha'i Community (UK)
- Qudsi Rasheed, External & Foreign Affairs Team, Ahmadiyya Muslim Association (UK)
- Maung Tun Khin, President, Burmese Rohingya Organisation (UK)
- Stephanie Brigden, Director, Free Tibet
- Caroline Brossi Yates, Falun Gong
- Annie Yeng, Falun Gong

Written evidence was submitted by Open Doors and the International Campaign for Tibet.

### **Overview of religious persecution worldwide:**

Religious freedom is under threat from a variety of quarters around the world: authoritarian governments, religious extremism, and militant secularism.

Authoritarian governments of all political ideologies wish to maintain tight control of society and sometimes view religions as a potential challenge to their rule. This is the case, for example, in China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Eritrea and Burma. Extremists from other religions are often the key perpetrators of persecution and discrimination. Militant Islamists are intolerant of religious minorities and expressions of Islam which deviate from their particular interpretation, and as a result are driving the persecution of Christians, Ahmadi Muslims and Baha'is. In India, a militant form of Hindu nationalism has led to outbreaks of violence against Christians and Muslims, in Sri Lanka,

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<sup>3</sup> For the full text see <http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta10/ERES1743.htm>

militant Buddhist nationalism has resulted in attacks on Christian churches and pastors, and in China, militant atheism has led to a crackdown on a number of different religions.

Religious freedom is often a factor in volatile contexts, particularly situations of ethnic and political conflict, terrorism and the response to terrorism, although it is often not “religion” per se but the manipulation and misuse of religion that contributes to conflicts. As Tom Porteous, Director of Human Rights Watch, told the Commission “the relationship between religion and human rights is complex. Religious ideologies often pose a threat to human rights. Human rights activists should aggressively stand up for religious freedom and oppose pressures from religious groups who attempt to dilute religious freedom.” In apartheid South Africa the Dutch Reformed Church defended the racist system, and in the civil rights struggle in the United States some white-majority churches defended segregation. However, it must also be noted that religion has been a motivating factor behind the work of many human rights activists, notably the examples of William Wilberforce, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Catholic Church in Eastern Europe, South America and East Timor.

The challenge in foreign policy is how to balance concern for religious freedom and human rights with other strategic and commercial interests. Tom Porteous, however, argued that long-term national interests and human rights “are very rarely in conflict with one another”, and that it is in our nation’s long-term interest to promote human rights, religious freedom and religious harmony. Foreign policy must not come down to a false choice between human rights and national interest. “It is possible to pursue both – to engage with countries on religious freedom and human rights, and pursue economic and strategic interests,” Tom Porteous concluded.

### **Violations of Religious Freedom against the Baha’is:**

The Baha’i faith is the youngest of the world’s independent religions, established in Iran by Baha’u’llah between 1817-1892. There are currently between six and seven million Baha’is worldwide, including 300,000 in Iran.

The Iranian Constitution excludes the Baha’is from the list of recognised religious minorities, and some Baha’is have been executed for ‘apostasy’. They are referred to as “unprotected infidels” meaning that they are unable to find employment, attend schools and participate widely in society . Several key Baha’i leaders in Iran are imprisoned, including seven who were arrested in 2008 and detained in Evin prison. They are charged with espionage, cooperation with Israel, spreading corruption and establishing an illegal administration. Their case is continuing.

For further information, please see the written evidence submitted by the Baha’is, in the appendix to this report.

## Violations of religious freedom against Christians:

Christians face restrictions, discrimination and persecution in a wide range of countries. According to some estimates, as many as 200 million Christians in over 60 countries around the world face some degree of discrimination, restrictions or persecution, although precise statistics are impossible to obtain. Sometimes it is as a result of direct intolerance, particularly from extremists from other religions or from authoritarian regimes which regard Christians and their ability to organise and assemble as a threat. Sometimes Christians are caught up in wider conflicts, as in Colombia and Nepal. At times, anti-Christian sentiments are aroused, at least in part, as a result of activities involving proselytism and conversion. Morocco, for example, deported at least 150 foreigners from the country, accusing them of proselytism which is illegal in Morocco although protected by international law.<sup>4</sup>

Eritrea, for example, has one of the worst human rights records in the world, and is rated the second worst violator of religious liberty in Africa after Somalia. Most Protestant churches in Eritrea, including Pentecostal and Evangelical denominations, effectively lost their legal status following a 2002 government decree that obliged them to register, but obstructed this process through stringent requirements. Many Christians suffer greatly for their faith under a regime that seeks to exercise complete control over every aspect of public and private life. An estimated 2,000-3,000 Christians are currently detained without charge or trial in Eritrea in abject conditions where they are subject to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, including torture. The only sure means of securing release is renunciation of one's faith, contraction of a debilitating illness, or death. Members of the three permitted denominations, Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Lutheranism can also suffer restrictions. The most high profile detainee in Eritrea is the legitimate Orthodox Patriarch, Abune Antonios, who, in a violation of canon law, was removed from office and replaced in 2006 after opposing government interference in church affairs.

In Nigeria, however, persecution of Christians is not directly state-sponsored, although the authorities are possibly complicit with violence against Christians in northern and central states. Religious violence in these areas has cost the lives of over 50,000 people since 1999, when one-third of Nigeria's 36 states began the process of instituting the Islamic penal code, transforming Shari'a (Islamic) law into the highest legal authority and creating a de facto state religion in violation of the national, secular constitution. For many non-Muslims in northern and central Nigeria daily life consists of a veneer of normality that barely conceals an underlying reality of chronic discrimination and tension which periodically erupts into deadly, but organised, violence. Plateau State, a Christian majority and non-Shari'a state, has experienced periodic violence since 2001 that is slowly but forcibly altering the religious and ethnic demography of parts of its capital city.

In addition to concerns regarding Shari'a law, the introduction of anti-conversion legislation in some parts of India represents a serious infringement of religious freedom. These laws have contributed towards creating a culture of discrimination, persecution and impunity. Similar legislation has been proposed in Sri Lanka. Christians have also been targeted under the blasphemy laws in Pakistan.

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendices: Submission by Matthew Low – *Sequence of events leading up to and following the deportation of Matthew Low*, and *Background Document: Deportations of Christians from Morocco, 2010*

Christian converts from Islam in particular face grave danger, as ‘apostasy’ is an extremely sensitive concept. It would be essential, as Tina Lambert, Advocacy Director at CSW, said in her oral evidence to the Commission, for Home Office officials dealing with asylum claims to be properly trained and knowledgeable about the complexities, sensitivities and dangers involved in apostasy.

For further details and country specific examples, see the written evidence provided by CSW in the appendix to the report.

## **Violations of religious freedom in Tibet:**

According to both Free Tibet and the International Campaign for Tibet, religious freedom is severely undermined and restricted in Tibet. Freedom of religion in Tibet is “an illusion”, according to Stephanie Brigden, Director of Free Tibet, in her oral evidence. China is pursuing policies “aimed to deliberately annihilate Buddhism in Tibet”. Although on the surface, visitors to Tibet are given the impression that monasteries can function openly and religious practise is unrestricted, in reality there is a “complex system of administrative control and restrictions which make it virtually impossible for Tibetans to practise their religion in a meaningful way.” What visitors to Tibet do not see is “the coercion, the culture of surveillance, the threats, the monks and nuns who are in prison for freely exercising their beliefs”. The Dalai Lama said in March 2010 that the Chinese authorities are “putting the monks and nuns in prison-like conditions, depriving them the opportunity to study and practice in peace”. Monasteries, he added, are now “more like museums”.<sup>5</sup>

Tibetan Buddhism is integral to Tibetan identity and society, and so the suppression of religious freedom in Tibet is a direct assault on Tibetan identity and culture. “Many Tibetan religious practices are suppressed and banned,” according to Free Tibet. “China requires that religious belief is practised in a way that accepts the leadership of the Party and the government above all else ... Through an elaborate legal and regulatory framework China intricately manages all levels of religious activity. It requires government officials, including at a community level, to carry out supervision, inspection and guidance and to actively lead religious organisations, places of religious activity and religious personnel to be patriotic and protect the state”. The measures include re-education campaigns designed to force Tibetan Buddhists to denounce their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama; identifying and appointing Tibetan Buddhist lamas, thus weakening the influence of Tibetan Buddhist religious leaders; controlling the running of monasteries; restrictions on the publication and distribution of religious texts, banning religious symbols, and restrictions on religious ceremonies. Free Tibet concludes that religion has “become a pawn in China’s efforts to cement its occupation of Tibet,” and that “Tibetan Buddhism has never been under greater threat”.<sup>6</sup>

For further information, please see the written submissions by Free Tibet and the International Campaign for Tibet, in the appendix to this report.

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<sup>5</sup> Free Tibet, Submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, p.3

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,

## Violations of religious freedom against Falun Gong in China:

Falun Gong has between 70 and 100 million practitioners in China, according to a Chinese government report in 1998. The spiritual movement, which has emerged from Buddhism, was banned by the Chinese government in 1999 and Falun Gong practitioners have faced a ruthless and brutal campaign by the Chinese authorities, including intense propaganda, physical attack, arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, torture and execution. Falun Gong practitioners who are detained are denied legal representation, and some have been sentenced to as much as 18 years in prison. Hundreds of thousands have reportedly been sent to labour camps, and it is estimated that perhaps as many as one million are in labour camps “at any given time,” according to Caroline Brossi Yates. The number of Falun Gong practitioners who have been killed for their beliefs is unknown, but most deaths have occurred as a result of torture, slavery or organ extraction. According to one source, some 4,000 Falun Gong practitioners may have been killed for their organs. In the first part of 2008, at least 8,000 Falun Gong practitioners were detained, prior to the Olympics, and in any given week, according to Caroline Brossi Yates, “at least 20 to 40 new cases [of imprisonment] were reported from China, reaching a total by year’s end of over 2,000 documented cases of practitioners ‘sentenced’ to labour or prison camps.”<sup>7</sup>

The Commission heard oral evidence from Annie Yeng, a Chinese Falun Gong practitioner who was arrested on 1 March, 2005 and jailed for being a Falun Gong practitioner. She told the Commission hearing:

*Seven or eight policemen came, but only one was in uniform. He didn’t show any ID. I was held for 40 days, without access to a lawyer and without a trial. Then I was sentenced to forced labour camp. During the initial interrogation, they used electric batons to beat and shock me. They took all my basic human rights away. Every day, I was given half a steamed bun for meals, three times a day – no vegetables, no pickle, no porridge. I asked for my food to be increased, and they told me if I do not renounce my beliefs, I will be considered to be against the government, and so they would not give me any more food.*

*It was so hot – 40 degrees temperature. I was given just two cups of water a day. I was not allowed to sleep – I got a maximum of two or three hours sleep a day. I was not allowed to shower, change my clothes, wash my hair, for two weeks. I was forced to sit on a plastic stool with a rough surface for over 20 hours. My back must be very straight, my knees and feet together. I was not allowed to close my eyes. For every movement, I had to ask permission. They used three prisoners, drug addicts, to monitor me. I had to ask them for permission to drink, permission to my cup down, permission to scratch my head because it was itchy, permission to go to the toilet. Sometimes I had to wait half a day for permission to use the toilet, and I got a pain in my bladder.*

*They want our organs because Falun Gong are very healthy. We don’t smoke, we don’t drink, we exercise, so our bodies are very healthy.*

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<sup>7</sup> Caroline Brossi Yates, *The Persecution of Falun Gong in China*, written submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission

*I want to ask the UK Government to publicly tell China to stop persecution of Falun Gong. Canada has been very outspoken, yet their trade with China is better than the UK's. The more pressure, the better. Make a noise about this. Closed door conversations won't help.*

For further information, please see the Falun Gong's written submission to the Commission, in the appendix to the report.

## **Violations of religious freedom against the Rohingya Muslims in Burma:**

Burma is ranked by the US State Department as a Country of Particular Concern for religious freedom and one of the world's worst violators of religious freedom. The military regime in Burma has imprisoned, beaten and tortured Buddhist monks who have participated in protests, and is especially intolerant of non-Buddhist religious minorities. Christians, particularly among the Chin, Kachin, Karen and Karenni ethnic nationalities, face severe discrimination, restrictions and persecution, as detailed in CSW's written submission. Rohingya Muslims are among the most persecuted groups in Burma, and are targeted for their religion as well as their ethnicity.

The Rohingyas are ethnically related to the people of Chittagong in Bangladesh, and are closely related to the Bengalis. However, they have inhabited northern Arakan state, Burma, for generations, and there are today 1.4 million Rohingyas in Arakan State and other parts of Burma, while 1.5 million are living in exile as refugees in Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other countries.

According to Maung Tun Khin, President of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK), many mosques and madrassas have been demolished by the military regime in Burma, and many religious clerics have been jailed. Restrictions have been imposed on religious events and gatherings, and permission to hold celebrations such as Qurbani Eid is difficult to obtain.

Furthermore, the Rohingyas are denied citizenship in Burma, despite living in northern Arakan for generations, and this is the major cause of other restrictions. They face severe restrictions on movement, marriage and access to education as a result.

For further information, please see the written evidence submitted by BROUK, in the appendix to this report.

## **Violations of religious freedom against the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community:**

The Ahmadiyya Muslim community was founded in 1889, and today has an estimated 160 million followers around the world. Their motto is "Love for all, Hatred for none" and they explicitly reject all violence. Their headquarters have effectively been in London since 1984.

Ahmadi Muslims (Ahmadis) face severe persecution in a number of countries, including Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Malaysia, but their plight is most serious in Pakistan, where they face four elements: State discrimination, violence and persecution, media-driven social discrimination and harassment, and a climate of impunity in which no action is taken to prevent such attacks. They are, according to Qudsi Rasheed, a member of the External & Foreign Affairs Team of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association (UK), “excluded, disenfranchised and persecuted in Pakistan”.

Although Ahmadis consider themselves to be Muslims, Pakistan has by law prohibited the Ahmadis from using any Islamic language or terminology, because the Ahmadis are regarded as heretics and apostates. Therefore, they are forbidden from calling their places of worship ‘mosques’ or from using Islamic greetings, and can be jailed for three years if convicted of using Islamic greetings or any Islamic terminology. They are denied a vote, forbidden from holding public office, and subjected to violence and harassment. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has said the Ahmadis suffer by far the worst treatment of any minority, and this is made worse by what Qudsi Rasheed describes as “a climate of acceptability or at least indifference” towards such violence, created by media propaganda against the Ahmadis. For example, extremist clerics are regularly and increasingly given air time on television to call for the killing of Ahmadis, and yet Ahmadis themselves are denied opportunities to speak on television. They are denied legal and political protection and have “no legal, political or social voice”. Qudsi Rasheed highlighted the attack earlier this year in Lahore, in which two mosques were stormed by extremists, 86 people were killed and many more injured. There was very little reaction from the authorities. He concludes that the prospect of a “real genocide or ethnic cleansing” of the Ahmadis is “not at all unlikely”.

The United Kingdom is the largest aid donor to Pakistan, and therefore has the opportunity to raise the plight of the Ahmadis with the Pakistani authorities regularly.

For further information, please see the written submission by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK, in the appendix.

## **Defamation of Religions:**

An issue which is causing increasing concern for those who care about religious freedom is the concept of ‘defamation of religions’, as proposed in multiple resolutions adopted at the United Nations (UN). These resolutions, proposed by the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), pose a serious threat to freedom of religion and belief. As Open Doors says in its written submission, these resolutions “provide support to states that have already codified anti-blasphemy laws in their national legislation” and, if the resolutions are ever established in international law, “it would potentially criminalise” any criticism, debate or discussion about religion, any attempt to change or abandon a religion, “and severely restrict the foundational freedoms of religion or belief as outlined in Article 18 of the UDHR”. The effect would be to silence expression and intimidate religious minorities and those with no religious belief.

The United Kingdom has strongly opposed the resolutions at the UN in the past, and the Commission would urge the new government to work pro-actively to build an international coalition to oppose future resolutions and further attempts to impose internationally-applicable blasphemy laws.

For further information, please see the written submission by Open Doors, “Defamation of Religions at the United Nations: A threat to religious liberty”, in the appendix.

## **Conclusions:**

Religious freedom is a very broad subject, and violations of freedom of religion and belief are widespread throughout almost all parts of the world. It has therefore been impossible for the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, in the course of this inquiry, to examine in detail every aspect of religious freedom from around the world. Instead, the Commission heard evidence from representatives from as broad a range of organisations and religious communities as possible, and their evidence is summarised in this report. The evidence presented concerning the persecution of Christians, Ahmadis, Baha’is, Tibetan Buddhists, Falun Gong and Burmese Rohingyas provides a representative sample of the breadth of religious discrimination and persecution around the world.

The Commission concludes that religious freedom is a fundamental human right, and is under severe threat in many countries. It is a freedom that affects us all, whether we are religious or not, because it includes the right not to believe. The right to hold, practise and change our beliefs lies at the core of human rights, and as such should be at the heart of foreign policy.

## **Appendices: Written Evidence:**

1. Amnesty International UK
2. Christian Solidarity Worldwide
3. Open Doors
4. Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK
5. Baha’i Community of the United Kingdom
6. Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK
7. Falun Gong
8. Free Tibet
9. International Campaign for Tibet
10. Submission by Matthew Low - *Sequence of events leading up to and following the deportation of Matthew Low, and Background Document: Deportations of Christians from Morocco, 2010*