



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



Department
for International
Development

Our reference: MC2020/02733

Iain Stewart MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

5 May 2020

Dear Iain,

Thank you for your letter of 9 March to the Secretary of State for International Development, on behalf of several of your constituents, about persecuted religious minorities. I am replying as the joint FCO and Department for International Development (DFID) Minister of State responsible for Human Rights.

I remain deeply concerned about the treatment and suffering of many based on their religion or belief, across the world. Defending the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief, is one of the UK's human rights policy priorities.

We recognise that women and girls from religious minorities can often suffer because of both their gender and their faith. That is why we ensure our human rights policy work considers the intersectionality of human rights, for example the importance of addressing the specific vulnerabilities experienced by women from religious minority communities. One example of our work in this area is related to the UK's commitment to preventing sexual violence in conflict. We are working with international faith and belief leaders to issue a 'Declaration of Humanity' which calls for the end of sexual violence in conflict and to tackle the stigma so often faced by survivors.

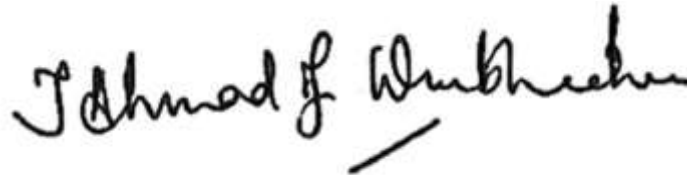
The Government has also agreed to implement all the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's independent Review of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians. One of the recommendations suggested that the FCO should bolster research into the critical intersection of FoRB and broader human rights issues, such as gender equality, gender based violence, forced conversion and forced marriage. We funded two projects under the John Bunyan Fund on this issue, and will look at what additional research we can support in future financial years. This work is being led by the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for FoRB, Rehman Chishti MP.

Your constituent urges the UK Government to take additional steps so that aid and support can reach women from persecuted religious minorities, including through recognising in our policy development the hidden vulnerabilities of women from persecuted religious minorities. While there is more work to do, DFID's programmes increasingly factor in vulnerabilities through country context analyses. These analyses assess gender and religion amongst other factors when delivering aid.

On the specific example of Nigeria, I want to reassure you that we will continue to work with the Nigerian Government, non-governmental organisations and civil society to improve the security situation and human rights for all the people of Nigeria. This includes continuing to push for solutions that meet the needs of all communities affected.

The British Government, and I personally, remain totally committed to standing up for freedom of religion or belief, and gender equality, all over the world.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON
Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth
Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict