

29 October 2018

Tom Tugendhat MBE MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

King Charles Street  
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Secretary of State

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your letter of 8 October about the case of Asia Bibi in Pakistan, a case which raises many concerns for us. I know Mark Field spoke to you about the specifics of handling this highly sensitive matter on 23 October. We continue to monitor developments in the case closely. Pakistan's Supreme Court heard Ms Bibi's appeal on 8 October 2018. However, it reserved its judgement and regrettably has given no indication of when its decision will be released.

The UK has been following this case since it started. The UK joined EU member states in expressing deep concern at the earlier decision of the Lahore High Court in October 2014 to uphold the conviction of Ms Bibi. We continue to work with our international partners and others to ensure the international community's views are clear to the Pakistani authorities. As you know, it is a longstanding policy of the UK Government to oppose the death penalty, in all circumstances, as a matter of principle. We have raised our concerns about the continued use of the death penalty in Pakistan.

The British Government is deeply concerned by restrictions on freedom of religion or belief in Pakistan. As an FCO human rights priority country, we regularly make public our concerns about human rights in Pakistan, including our concerns about restrictions on freedom of religion or belief in our Annual Human Rights Report.

We urge the Government of Pakistan to guarantee the rights of minority religious communities and to take steps to prevent the misuse of the blasphemy laws. The Prime Minister emphasised the importance of advancing the rights of minorities during a telephone call with Imran Khan in August following his election as Prime Minister of Pakistan.

The UK raised concerns about freedom of religion or belief at Pakistan's UN Universal Periodic Review of human rights in November 2017. We further urged Pakistan to strengthen the protection of minorities, including by establishing an independent National Commission for Minorities for all faith communities. The UK also pressed Pakistan to explain the steps being taken to tackle the abuse of the blasphemy laws.

Under the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy, the UK has supported projects in Pakistan to promote greater tolerance and religious freedom. Pakistan remains a priority for UK development assistance also, with programmes designed to improve human rights.

The UK Government is committed to promoting and defending the right to freedom of religion and belief globally. The freedom to practice, change or share your faith or belief without discrimination or violent opposition is a fundamental human right that all people should enjoy. We believe that societies which aim to guarantee freedom of religion or belief are stronger, fairer and more confident.

In July this year, the Prime Minister appointed Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN, as her Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Lord Ahmad raised our concerns about freedom of religion or belief and the protection of minority religious communities with Pakistan's Human Rights Minister in September 2018.

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.

As Special Envoy, Lord Ahmad is leading work with our diplomatic network to achieve a step-change in our efforts on this agenda across government. He will proactively seek change in key countries, and promote respect in education. This will be supported by £1m of programme funding.

Yes  
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**THE RT HON JEREMY HUNT MP**