

Government urged to make good on promise to protect persecuted Christians



After Boris Johnson's election victory last week, the government is being urged to keep its promise to protect persecuted Christians.

Paul Robinson, chief executive of Release International, which supports persecuted Christians worldwide, said he wanted to see religious freedom placed at the "very heart of UK foreign policy".

Earlier this year, the government accepted in full the recommendations of a major report into persecution commissioned by the Foreign Office and carried out by the Bishop of Truro.

The report warned that the persecution of Christians was reaching genocidal levels and called upon the government to initiate a new UN Security Council resolution protecting freedom of religion or belief. Other recommendations included imposing sanctions on countries with the worst track records on religious freedom.

Release International is now urging Boris Johnson to make good on the government's pledge to implement the report's recommendations.

"We congratulate the Prime Minister on his success and renewed mandate," said Mr Robinson.

"Release urges Mr Johnson's new government to keep its pledge to make the protection of religious freedom at the very heart of UK foreign policy."

Release said it was particularly concerned about the plight of Christians in Nigeria, China, North Korea and Pakistan.

In Nigeria, thousands of Christians have been killed as a result of attacks on villages by militants hostile to the Christian faith.

Chinese churches are reporting an increasing crackdown under President Xi Jinping. This has resulted in church closures, and the arrest and detention of pastors and church members.

North Korea is one of the most dangerous places to be a Christian, with anyone found practising the faith at risk of imprisonment in labour camps or even execution.

In Pakistan, Christians live at constant risk of false or spurious accusations of blasphemy – a crime punishable by death in the country. Earlier this year, Christian mother Asia Bibi was granted asylum in Canada with her family after spending nearly a decade on death row.

Mr Robinson continued: "Amid the election jubilation and the flurry to deliver Brexit, Release urges the new Conservative government to remember its promises to the persecuted.

"We are immensely grateful that the UK government has declared the world will no longer be able to turn a blind eye to discrimination against Christians.

“The government’s decision to put the plight of persecuted Christians front and centre of foreign policy will send a vital message to governments everywhere that the violence has to stop.”

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