

**FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF: UK STATEMENT TO THE OSCE  
HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING, WARSAW, SEPTEMBER  
2016**

We fully align with the statement delivered by Slovakia on behalf of the EU and its member states and would like to make some remarks in our national capacity.

Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief is a fundamental human right, and one which underpins many of the others. If this freedom is not protected, then other rights, such as freedom of association and assembly and freedom of speech and expression are also restricted.

We must also remind ourselves that this freedom encompasses thought and conscience, not just religion or belief. As such it is relevant to all of us.

In line with this we strongly believe that societies which aim to guarantee freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief are fairer and more confident, in particular in dealing with difference in non-violent ways.

We believe that open and plural societies are more effective in responding to extremism and its associated security challenges. They are able to identify and expose the dangers that extremist rhetoric and activity poses to our comprehensive concept of security.

The UK will explore particular concept this further in a global conference in London on 19-20 October. We hope the conference will generate practical recommendations for action, which we would be happy to share with OSCE partners.

Mr Moderator

Our recommendation is simple, that all participants engage in this working session with respect for those of different beliefs and of none, and in a constructive and supportive manner, recognising the OSCE commitments we have signed up to. And that this leads to a similarly respectful debate on this fundamental freedom in our wider communities.