

WORKING SESSION 6: FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS:

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE, RELIGION OR BELIEF

UK STATEMENT, SEPTEMBER 2017

We fully support the statement delivered by the Netherlands on behalf of the EU and its member states and would like to add some remarks in our national capacity.

The UK is committed to promoting and protecting all human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief and gender equality. They remain a key part of the UK's wider human rights work and are part of our programme of work as Chair of the Human Dimension Committee this year.

We continue to speak out publically and privately when we see changes in laws and practices that discriminate against individuals on the basis of their religion or belief and to raise cases of persecution in individual countries. For example, in response to Russia's Supreme Court ruling banning Jehovah's Witnesses as 'extremists'.

We will stand up, not just against persecution, but to secure full respect for the human rights of members of minority, and majority, communities including religious communities around the world. We must continue to promote inclusion, integration and tolerance, so that we can protect freedom of religion or belief

As we just mentioned, in parts of the OSCE region, we have witnessed attempts to justify limitations on the freedom to manifest religion on the basis of combating extremism.

We believe in the opposite: that promoting respect for freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief is essential to countering violent extremism. Societies which aim to guarantee freedom of religion or belief are stronger, fairer and more confident.

The universal declaration on human rights recognises the inherent dignity of the human and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. This applies to all. It is important that all states and all religious practices support that.