

## **UNITED KINGDOM STATEMENT ON FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE, RELIGION OR BELIEF**

We fully subscribe to the statement made by the Netherlands on behalf of the EU member states, and would like to add a few remarks in our national capacity.

The UK is committed to promoting fundamental freedoms and human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. As Chair of the Human Dimension Committee the UK has devoted meetings to this topic this year and last. Indeed in October 2017 the Committee explored issues highlighted for discussion today, namely the link between “security and full respect for the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief”, a link acknowledged by OSCE states in Kyiv in 2013.

The United Kingdom strongly believes that protecting this fundamental freedom strengthens, rather than threatens, security.

Violations and abuses of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief, are of increasing concern across the OSCE region. Our Prime Minister has promised to ‘stand up for the freedom of people of all religions to practice their beliefs in peace and safety’. On 4 July, she appointed Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon as her Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, a new role demonstrating UK’s commitment to defending this universal right.

Lord Ahmad will be working with our global diplomatic network and international partners for work for change and respond to suppression fundamental freedom. We will promote respect through education in order to eliminate intolerance and break down barriers between communities. Within the UK, we are committed to building a strong and integrated society where everyone is free to express their religious identity, and where respect and understanding is promoted.

In conclusion, the UK Government is strongly committed to the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for people of all faiths and of none.

Protection of this fundamental freedom not only enhances mutual respect and increases understanding, Freedom of Religion or Belief also strengthens democratic governance and enhances the stability and security of our societies and states. It is strongly in our common interest to protect it.