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Restrictions on freedom of worship often go hand-in-hand with other forms of repression including against women and minorities, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has warned government ministers from around the world.

He told a global summit on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in London how faith inspires "billions" of people in the world today to serve their communities.

Archbishop Justin was addressing the Fourth Annual Global Ministerial Summit on Freedom of Religion or Belief, which is being hosted by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Thanking the UK Government for hosting the meeting, he told delegates: "Freedom of Religion or Belief matters because, when people are free to worship and express themselves, faiths work with others to bring flourishing: they answer the needs of development and reconciliation bring grassroots community transformations that are the golden hope of the soft power of diplomats and development NGOs."

He highlighted how religious repression can often be linked with wider restrictions in societies.

"We know that, when freedoms of expression and worship are restricted, other freedoms and opportunities are limited too," he said. "Women, minorities, many other people miss out."

The Archbishop also cautioned against marginalising freedom of religion. "When national leaders pursue freedom of religion and belief, they have an opportunity to bring a wealth of wisdom around the table, harnessed to the common good," he said.

Noting that religious communities can themselves be agents of repression and violence, he "went on to say that billions have the kind of faith that "inspires people to care for their neighbour, to motivate work for education in schools, or in healthcare".

He told the summit: "Leadership is never easy. If you don't offer people freedom, safety and opportunity, or if you only offer this to some people and not to others, you are not really leading and your people will not want to follow."

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*Read Archbishop Justin's speech, as prepared for delivery, below:*

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Thank you Foreign Secretary and all in the UK Government team for hosting us today for such an important meeting. I have 4 minutes, so please excuse the blunt and direct way I shall speak.

The greatest privilege of my work is to oversee the ministry of the Anglican Communion, the third largest global church, with presence in 165 countries. The average Anglican is a woman in her 30s in the Global South on less than \$4 per day with a 50% chance of being in a zone of conflict or persecution.

80% of the world describe themselves as religious, and those who don't have the same rights to freedom. FoRB matters because, when people are free to worship and express themselves, faiths work with others to bring flourishing: they bring grassroots community transformations that are the golden hope of the soft power of diplomats and development NGOs.

Religious communities can themselves be agents of repression and violence, often through manipulation. But billions of people take their religion or belief so seriously that they would consider giving their life for it. They have the kind of passion that inspires people to care for their neighbour, to motivate work for education in schools, or in healthcare.

In Mozambique, Christian, Muslim and traditional leaders and their communities work together, with UN training, to resist violent insurgency which itself is driven by religious extremism. They de-stigmatise each other's traditions and share information about early warnings and attacks. They build resilience and also make it possible to air grievances in order to understand root causes and promote reconciliation.

When national leaders pursue freedom of religion and belief, they have an opportunity to bring a wealth of wisdom around the table, harnessed to the common good. They can also hold religious leaders to account for what they do with respect to protecting the freedoms of their, and others' communities.

For the most part, communities of religion or belief are grassroots groups which, in the vast majority, seek the good of all in their societies. They love their neighbourhood and nation, and they pray and work for its prosperity and peace. When you extend freedom of religion or belief, you show that you care for them. When you take it away, you don't care at all.

In some countries, freedom of religion or belief is marginalised because there may be only a relatively small number of people affected. In others, it is treated as too dangerous to deal with because of the large numbers of people who are active in a religion or belief. Both of these approaches are wrong.

We know that, when freedoms of expression and worship are restricted, other freedoms and opportunities are limited too. Women, minorities, many other people miss out.

Leadership is never easy. If you don't offer people freedom, safety and opportunity, or if you only offer this to some people and not to others, you are not really leading. And your people will not want to follow.

God through Christ shows that every human being is of infinite value. These freedoms we call for today are universal; for everyone.

May God whose judgement we will all face guide and bless you.

5 min read

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