

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: FCO's Human Rights Work, HC 874

Wednesday 11 July 2018

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Mike Gapes; Ian Murray.

Questions 82-125

Witnesses

I: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Richard Jones, Deputy Director, Human Rights and Democracy, Corinne Kitsell, Deputy Director UN and Multilateral/UN Co-ordinator, and Paul McKell, Legal Director, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Richard Jones, Corinne Kitsell and Paul McKell.

Chair: We will move on to the human rights section of the session.

Q82 **Ian Murray:** I would like to move on to some human rights issues. What are the strategic aims of the UK Government with regard to promoting human rights abroad?

Lord Ahmad: If I may, I will momentarily change my file. As with many such things, you hope you picked up the right file when you left the office.

Ian Murray: If it says three eggs and two loaves of bread, it's the wrong one.

Lord Ahmad: Indeed. First, being Human Rights Minister is one of the things that I take the greatest honour in of all my levels of portfolio. I think it reflects the best strengths of who we are and what we represent as a country. I am proud to say that our human rights priorities are reflective of the broadest agenda. We are talking of issues of gender equality; the importance that we attach to education for children, particularly young girls—you see how many millions of girls around the world are not able to gain education; violence against women; and freedom of religion and belief, which is a key priority. There is an element in there of representing not just all the faiths and different beliefs, but also the rights of humanists, atheists and agnostics to have the right to choose what not to believe, which may be no belief itself. That is an inherent right to protect. There are equally issues of LGBT rights and children in armed conflict. It is a very broad-based agenda. We use international fora as well as bilateral meetings to ensure that those priorities are made very clear to whoever were are dealing with.

Q83 **Ian Murray:** How do you assess the success of those priorities at the Department level, but more importantly out in the posts?

Lord Ahmad: First, I pay tribute to our posts, because one thing we have done is that we have identified that everyone has drivers and motivations. We are passionate about many things, but there may be a few things we are particularly passionate about, which we are identifying in our network, and those people will be leaders on particular elements on human rights. We have seen that focus.

I can give you a very current example. I was on a visit last week to both Tunisia and Algeria. Sometimes we are challenged because they are not in the 30 human rights priority countries. Do you engage with those countries and raise the important issues? The short answer is yes. The agenda was driven by human rights. During the course of my meetings in both countries, we raised the issue of Christian persecution, persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Algeria and the issue of LGBT rights,

in two countries where same-sex relationships and homosexuality are criminalised. We haven't shied away from raising what are challenging issues.

In terms of results, partly because of our efforts and the nature of engagement we have in Algeria, where they had in recent months sealed various churches, we were encouraged to see those churches now reopening and those congregations returning. We have seen not just money being allocated to issues of girls' education in broader terms, but countries now realising that the support they get from the UK, be it bilateral or through multilateral agencies, is reflective of their commitment to girls' education.

I am very keen to go further in that sense. It is not just about educating girls; it is about empowering. Within that, we have work to do on who does the teaching and what children actually learn. You can educate a lot of children around the world, but if the teachers and the curriculum that they are following don't reflect the fundamentals of the values that we extol, then we are not achieving our desired goals. There is much work to be done, but those are some practical examples.

- Q84 Ian Murray:** I understand the amount of work that is done. We see it when we go to other countries. The posts do a tremendous job, particularly with LGBT rights and gender rights, but there is always a discussion about the tension between the UK's trade agenda and the UK's human rights agenda. What are your thoughts on that tension, and how does the Foreign Office cope with it?

Lord Ahmad: There are many tensions we cope with at the Foreign Office, but on that specific issue, when we extend our trading relationships with any countries around the world, it is important—coming back to that values agenda—that that is equally strengthened. I believe that the issue of human rights should be at the centre of how we represent ourselves, be it in our trading relations or bilaterally. That remains a view that I extol to others within and across Government. There are some who will have differing views, but we must instil the strength of our values agenda and share what we believe in a practical and progressive way.

I have always said that the human rights agenda shouldn't be about us going out, wagging our finger and telling people in the world, "Look at how wonderful we are and what we've achieved." One hundred years ago, women didn't have the vote. Our own experience in this particular field is something we have learned from. I believe that sharing our experience of how we got to where we are today is the progressive way, so as we strengthen our trade ties, we should use that as an opportunity to share our experiences without pointing a finger in a preachy or teachy way. We should share our experience of the challenging journey we had to get to where we are today. We mustn't say, "We've now done it. That's great." We have to keep paying attention domestically, as well as internationally, to ensure we stay true to those principles.

- Q85 Ian Murray:** Under what circumstances would you recommend to the



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Secretary of State for International Trade not to do a trade deal with a particular country because of their human rights record?

Lord Ahmad: I think that would be a broader discussion beyond my remit, and many other voices would come to it. In any relation we have with particular parts of the world—for example, if we take the issue of our arms sales—there are processes, conventions and procedures under way. We have to be very diligent and focused to ensure we are meeting the criteria of those processes in whatever trade we may be doing. That is something I raise regularly to ensure that is exactly what is happening.

I am a firm believer in the adherence to principles of trade in terms of strengthening trade, but we should also use this as an opportunity to stress what our values agenda is. For example, we should ensure access to opportunities, in terms of employment opportunities for all, not just for component parts of the population. We should see what changes we are making there. Although that might not be a component part of the deal itself, we can strengthen our bilateral work in that respect with whatever country we are talking about.

Q86 **Ian Murray:** To continue your analogy, you said it is not very productive to wag a finger at another country, but you can see the tension when you wag a finger with one hand and sell them a rifle with the other.

Lord Ahmad: We tend not to. I am trying to think about where we are wagging fingers. I was talking about the approach I have undertaken. It should not be one of wagging fingers. On selling them a rifle, we have got procedures and processes in place, and we need to adhere to them. We have a justice system that tests us in that respect.

Q87 **Ian Murray:** Given that you are in charge of human rights in the Foreign Office, are you encouraging the international trade team to include human rights clauses in any post-Brexit trade deals if, rather than when, we leave the European Union?

Lord Ahmad: That is a question under discussion. I am not going to pre-empt discussions about what is happening on Brexit at this juncture.

Q88 **Chair:** I'm not quite sure it is a Brexit question.

Lord Ahmad: I think Mr Murray is referring to EU clauses within the context of the deals we have done within the European Union.

Q89 **Ian Murray:** I am not necessarily referring to EU deals and clauses. I am referring to Foreign Office policy. What is the UK Government's policy on including, strengthening, weakening, removing or adding to the human rights clauses that would be put in when the UK does bilateral trade deals with third countries? For example, you mentioned the 30 countries with human rights concerns. Are we currently talking to any of those countries with regard to post-Brexit bilateral trade deals?

Lord Ahmad: There are many discussions going on within the Department for International Trade. It is certainly my perspective that the importance of talking about human rights in existing trade deals, within the context of



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the European Union, remains. I am being very candid with you, and the specifics are still very much under discussion.

- Q90 **Ian Murray:** Would you be very, very upset if a trade deal was done post-Brexit that didn't include human rights clauses, given that you are in charge of human rights for the UK Government?

Lord Ahmad: I think my job as the Human Rights Minister is to ensure that human rights are fully reflected in trade deals and the support we give. I talked in broader terms about the development support we do. We need to ensure that human rights are reflected in all the different guises that I have talked about—on a bilateral basis, or through multilateral forums—and that we do so to ensure that we reflect and respect the different cultures and the ways in which countries are moving forward, but—

- Q91 **Ian Murray:** You give the impression that it is not a priority.

Lord Ahmad: Oh no, of course it's a priority, but we have also got to be reflective of how we can get the greatest traction with particular countries.

- Q92 **Chair:** May I ask a direct question? Churches are open, and congregations are free to practise their faith—you are now the faith advocate in—

Lord Ahmad: Envoy.

- Q93 **Chair:** The faith envoy in Government, sorry. They are free in countries like the United Arab Emirates, where, in fact, various members of the royal family have paid for churches. In other countries in the region, not only are churches not open, but Christians are persecuted. As you know, one branch of Islam is tolerated and none other. How do you think that should play into our trade policy in the region?

Lord Ahmad: That is a very challenging question. There is a twofold response. First, there is importance in strengthening the work that we do for any persecuted minority within the context not just of trade, but of bilateral relations. At the same time, however, we should take a very progressive attitude with countries on a bilateral basis.

I shall give you one case in question: Saudi Arabia. In terms of some of the changes that we see taking place on the ground there, I was greatly encouraged by the Crown Prince when he, Mohammad bin Salman, visited the UK. That was not so much by the fact that—of course, we were pleased—he engaged directly with the Archbishop of Canterbury when here, but because, en route to the UK, he visited Egypt, where he visited the head of the Coptic Church. As we know, the challenges of Coptic Christians are pretty much at the forefront of many questions that we receive in Parliament, because of the issues on the ground.

Therein lies one of the practical things that we can be doing through strengthening our relationships on a bilateral basis and through sharing experiences of the importance of living to the values that you extol. We are beginning to see some progress, although it is very minor progress, by some of the countries where we have seen the greatest repression of



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individual rights, particularly freedom of religion and belief, with persecution of Christian minorities, but where we can, with a progressive attitude, effect change. That is the way in which we are seeing traction.

We don't shy away from it, however. I am very clear in my role and, as I did on my latest visit, where we see persecution of minorities, we have demonstrably shown active engagement both on the ground and by meeting the representatives of those communities. For example, in Algeria during my visit, I met directly with the heads of the Protestant Christian community, as well as the Ahmadiyya community. Both those community issues were discussed with the appropriate Ministers as well.

- Q94 **Chris Bryant:** You have just shied away! As a for instance, in an attempt to ensure that Colombia moved in the direction of peace, the EU insisted—at the insistence of the British Government, apart from anyone else—on human rights clauses in the trade deal with Colombia, which then transmogrified with Peru and so on. That is one of the issues that will be penned in with the new Government in Colombia, and it is one of the very few ways that we have of exercising authority, or of leveraging in human rights, when it comes to trade. But you seem very hesitant about advancing that in future. There must be a Government policy.

Lord Ahmad: What I am saying is that the future trade deals that we do are subject to different voices in Government. What I am not able to share with you at this time is the exact specifics of how those trade deals would work. It would be wrong for me to do so—

- Q95 **Chris Bryant:** What is the Government policy now?

Lord Ahmad: Just repeating back the example that we have given you, we have stood up for human rights—

- Q96 **Chris Bryant:** We did. You lot didn't.

Lord Ahmad: I am talking about the collective UK Government. The importance of human rights is not lost on us, and it is an important priority, as has been demonstrated by some of the examples I have given. What I cannot give you is an assurance of exactly how that will be reflected—in what clauses, in what way, in what nature—in future trade deals we will strike with other parts of the world once we leave the European Union.

- Q97 **Chris Bryant:** The Government is going around the world trying to sign up trade deals at the moment. It must surely have a policy on whether it intends to have human rights clauses in them or not.

Lord Ahmad: We are very clear that the human rights agenda is a key priority. I will not get into the nature of the clauses, Mr Bryant. I hope—

- Q98 **Chris Bryant:** If you don't know, it's fine—

Lord Ahmad: No, it is not a question of not knowing. I am saying that the policy is one of strengthening trading relations, while reflecting the values that we have, but until those trade deals are signed off I cannot give you chapter and verse as to what—



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Q99 **Chair:** Forgive me for interrupting. Have you spoken to the Secretary of State for International Trade about all this?

Lord Ahmad: Yes, we have, Chair—not specifically on the issue of trade clauses, but I regularly speak to my counterparts in the Department for International Trade, as I do with those in other Departments, about the importance of human rights.

Q100 **Chris Bryant:** Have you exchanged letters with them about it?

Lord Ahmad: Specifically on this issue?

Chris Bryant: Yes.

Lord Ahmad: No.

Q101 **Chris Bryant:** May I suggest that you might want to consider doing so? And sharing them with us, obviously.

To move on to a different human rights issue, I wonder whether you would like to give us an update on same-sex marriage in Bermuda.

Lord Ahmad: I am sure you are following it as closely as I am, but the fact is that we have seen the Supreme Court decision again, which was taken most recently—

Chris Bryant: As we predicted.

Lord Ahmad: Yes. They now have six weeks from that decision to respond. We are monitoring that very closely. We have seen something encouraging demonstrated by that decision again, I would suggest. Although I know the decision that was taken by the former Foreign Secretary in this respect was not something that you were following very closely, and I totally understand concerns and priorities with regards to that, I think we can take great strength from the fact that the justice system within Bermuda reflects the broader priorities of human rights when they come to the LGBT community. We are monitoring the situation.

Q102 **Chris Bryant:** To be clear, the Government of Bermuda has not yet appealed the Bermudian Supreme Court decision—yes? As yet. It has one more week in which to do so.

Lord Ahmad: They have six weeks from the decision—

Chris Bryant: Which runs out next week.

Lord Ahmad: Yes. For the sake of absolute clarity—

Q103 **Chris Bryant:** If there were an appeal, it would be to the Privy Council?

Lord Ahmad: That is the way their justice system works—they would go from Supreme Court to Privy Council.

Q104 **Chris Bryant:** My anxiety is that, previously, Government Ministers, including Sir Alan Duncan, have said in the Commons that their legal position is that same-sex marriage is not a human right. This ends up



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coming back to the Privy Council and therefore the British Government, so my anxiety would be that the British Government will stand by the Bermudian Government rather than by the Bermudian Supreme Court. Is that your understanding of the Government's position on same-sex marriage?

Lord Ahmad: On the issue of LGBT rights, the Government remains very supportive. At this juncture, however, it would be wrong for me to speculate as to what we would do pending any decision made by the Bermudian Government.

Q105 **Chris Bryant:** Okay. May I move on to other issues, to do with the United Nations? One of the big issues relating to human rights is that Russia and China have a completely different understanding of them, and they are pushing back very aggressively. How do we intend to deal with that backlash?

Lord Ahmad: Again with specific examples that I can give you, a recent one is Russia in terms of both the LGBT community and Jehovah's Witnesses on the freedom of religion and belief. Indeed, Jehovah's Witnesses were actually proscribed as an extremist entity within Russia. We have raised that at the strongest level internationally. We have also raised it quite publicly as well. Your point I share—that some people, particularly the Chinese and the Russians, have different perspectives—but I think it is important that therein lies the strength of the bodies and opportunities within the context of multilateral forums such as the UN—that we can ensure that we raise such issues and do so quite publicly, which we have done.

Q106 **Chris Bryant:** What effect do you think that the departure of the US from the United Nations Human Rights Council will have? How are you trying to mitigate the problems that might arise?

Lord Ahmad: That is a very valid question. We deeply regret that the US has left the Human Rights Council. I am a firm believer that if you want to see change and effect change you have to stay at the table to effect that change. It is regrettable that the US has done that. However, we remain very committed to the council. I do not know how the US's future proposals will play out in terms of the Human Rights Council, but I am minded of the fact they made certain statements to the effect that this is not a final final decision and they could return at a future date.

The other thing I would say is that we are clearly seeing some traction on broader human rights issues. On what we have just touched on—freedom of religion and belief—Secretary Pompeo is hosting a conference at the end of this month in Washington, which I will be attending and supporting as well. Notwithstanding the decision on the Human Rights Council, it is important that we continue to work with the United States on agendas that are common to our priorities and theirs.

Corinne Kitsell: Going back to your previous question, Mr Bryant, I want to give a very practical example. We know that the Russians and the Chinese are attacking the human rights functions within the UN system.



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Negotiations on the UN's peacekeeping budgets and the posts in peacekeeping missions that deal with human rights finished earlier this month. One of the priorities of our negotiating team was to fight for those posts and positions that are created within peacekeeping missions to deal with human rights. We are working alongside our EU partners—and the US, actually—to ensure that we protect the posts that the Russians and the Chinese are trying to cut from peacekeeping missions.

Q107 Chris Bryant: You made election pledges, as it were, to get elected to the Human Rights Council. How are you doing on fulfilling them?

Lord Ahmad: In terms of where we are, we have stood by many of the priorities, as we see it, on the broad human rights agenda. There are challenges on the Human Rights Council, which are quite obvious, in terms of the effectiveness of how countries have operated. Again, to take the most recent example, because of the position we took on the conflict in Burma, we actually saw real traction and support for our position on intervention and support—both support for the Rohingya community in Bangladesh and, importantly, gaining access for the UN to Burma itself.

Q108 Chris Bryant: Remind us what pledges you made.

Lord Ahmad: Bear with me one moment. The first one—I have alluded to it already—was very much about strengthening the protection of human rights work within the UN's work. We have supported that constantly through—

Q109 Chris Bryant: Which is sort of pushing back against the point that Corinne just made, yes?

Lord Ahmad: No, I think it actually complements that. I cannot see—

Q110 Chris Bryant: Sorry, I meant pushing back against the Russians' attempts to undermine it.

Lord Ahmad: Exactly—sorry, I thought you were saying something else. We have talked about how we can translate much of the agenda on sustainable development and the sustainable development goals, and our priorities have reflected that. My recent appointment by the Prime Minister reflects our focus on making a stand for freedom of religion and belief, and we are supporting that through additional resourcing as well.

I would add a point, which Corinne made earlier, about cross-Government working. This is not just a Foreign Office initiative. I am delighted to be working very closely both on the domestic agenda with colleagues in Education and Local Government and, importantly, with DFID through Lord Bates. We are working against violence against women and girls, we are promoting women and girls' participation, and we have a commitment to girls' education. We are also promoting open societies and challenging threats to civil liberties—we have stood by that, particularly through our many bilateral engagements on girls' education, freedom of religion and LGBT rights.

Q111 Chris Bryant: A final question from me. Is it getting easier or more



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difficult to get UK human rights experts appointed to some of the key posts?

Lord Ahmad: There is a general issue, which we mentioned earlier, about how other countries in the wider family of the UN are operating in terms of how they view not just the UK but other P5 members. Most recently, on the broader human rights agenda, the Secretary-General appointed Karim Khan as the leading advocate who will assimilate evidence in Iraq, particularly on one of the priorities I stated—violence against women. I think it reflects a real recognition that the UK continues to play an important role, but there is a real challenge, not just for the UK but for other P5 members, in contested elections, a subject which I know we have talked about previously.

Chair: No doubt we'll come back to it.

Q112 **Mike Gapes:** In March the Government said that it had not put forward a candidate for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women after "making difficult decisions about which bodies to seek election for." Which elections were prioritised in preference to that?

Lord Ahmad: Again, going back to one of my previous sessions with the Foreign Affairs Committee, one of the issues was ensuring resources and focus on elections. The election that we are currently focused on in terms of international bodies is the election in the ITU—the International Telecommunication Union—for the position of the deputy secretary-general, who is going for a second term. We have sought to focus a great deal of our diplomatic efforts on that because of the growing importance of technology, and the important focus that we have put on issues of cyber-security. We believe that the continuing of Mr Johnson's role in that capacity as deputy secretary-general is an important priority.

I hear what you say, Mr Gapes—they are always difficult decisions to make, but I think one of the key experiences of recent elections is that we need to ensure that our diplomatic networks, and the ministerial engagement that we have, is focused on fewer elections, to ensure that we can build the strength of our campaigns.

Q113 **Mike Gapes:** How will you evaluate whether to put forward a candidate for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women next time it comes up, which I think is in 2020?

Corinne Kitself: Maybe I could answer that question. We have a cross-Whitehall process. As you might imagine, there is a very large number of international elections, covering not just UN organisations but other international organisations. There is a process each year basically to consult our colleagues across Whitehall on all the elections that are on the horizon to look at where we may have good UK candidates. Of course, there is not much point running for something if you do not have a good candidate. Then there is a process to agree, and a committee that is chaired by Jeremy Heywood that makes those decisions. At director level, there is a committee chaired by the multilateral policy director in the Foreign Office.

We adopt a cross-Whitehall process and try to look across all the elections and then make decisions. We are in the process now of trying to lengthen the timeframe of that and look forward for a whole five years at the elections that we might target in different international organisations for the coming five years.

Q114 **Chair:** May I just jump in? Are you doing the same for experts?

Corinne Kitsell: For appointments rather than elections?

Chair: Yes.

Corinne Kitsell: That is a separate work strand, because of course it is much broader, and it depends on the level of seniority and how far down the hierarchy you go. We are in the process of expanding the team that tries to secure jobs for Brits in different international organisations.

Q115 **Chair:** Are we doing better or worse at that?

Corinne Kitsell: Well, the UK is already over-represented in most international organisations, so in the past we perhaps have not devoted as much resource to it, just because there were lots of very good British candidates who had applied for jobs in lots of places. We have been very successful, so actually we are generally very well represented. That makes it a bigger challenge to have even more representation, because of course other countries would say that it is perhaps not fair.

Lord Ahmad: If I may just add to that. One of my previous sessions with yourselves was very helpful and constructive. As Corinne just said, one of the things we have put in place is a far longer window for what elections are coming up and when, so we can prioritise resources, and so our international efforts align.

On the second point you raise, certain appointments have been made—I will just refer to the 2018 ones. I mentioned Karim Khan's appointment. Sir Christopher Greenwood, whom we all know and respect, was appointed in June to the Iran-United States Claims Tribunal. Jane Ellison was appointed as deputy director general of the World Health Organisation in March this year, and Martin Griffiths, who I know is also known to the Committee, was appointed as the UN Secretary-General's special envoy for Yemen.

If I may add to that, we were delighted earlier this year to host all the UN bodies' key meeting under the Secretary-General at the UK Foreign Office—they held that in London. That building of relationships with the UN hierarchy is also an important part of our diplomatic efforts.

Chair: We saw many of them and, as you know, the Committee is extremely supportive of trying to get British citizens elected into these various positions. We are already working with DCMS on the ITU election and we will be very happy to support others.

Q116 **Mike Gapes:** We currently give money to the European Union for the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. I understand its



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total budget is €1.33 billion. Obviously we make a small contribution percentage-wise. If we are leaving the European Union, what will happen to that money? Will we buy into European schemes, or will we guarantee to spend an equivalent sum on bilateral or unilateral human rights activity? Has that been thought through? Is it in the forthcoming White Paper?

Richard Jones: My understanding is that we are still thinking about it. *[Interruption.]* Well, I have to say I have not seen a copy of the White Paper myself. It is a question for the Europe directorate of the Foreign Office, who are leading on it.

Q117 **Mike Gapes:** Are you aware of possible gaps and the adverse unintended consequences that might arise?

Richard Jones: Indeed, but it is another of those situations, as the Minister was describing earlier, where there is a larger context within which the decision has to be taken.

Q118 **Mike Gapes:** That is, if we get a deal.

Richard Jones: Well, that is further down the track.

Mike Gapes: I won't pursue it.

Q119 **Ian Murray:** Apologies Minister—I had to nip out to vote in a British-American Parliamentary Group election. It hasn't hit the front pages yet, though I am sure you will hear about it shortly.

To return to human rights, the predecessor Committee in the previous Parliament produced a report on Turkey and suggested that it should be added to the Foreign Office human rights priority countries list. Why has it not been?

Lord Ahmad: Among the different criteria we use on human rights priority countries—there are 30 countries—it is also about what traction we can make with the countries in discussions we are having bilaterally. In Turkey's case, I believe we have a strong relationship. We have certainly seen some positive traction on human rights defenders from our representations and we have been working closely with bodies such as Amnesty International. I meet Kate Allen regularly to discuss Turkey issues.

So while we have 30 priority countries and decisions are made every year as to which should be demonstrated, generally in recent years we have stayed with the ones currently identified. I assure you that is not to the detriment of making representations elsewhere in the world. Indeed, I cited earlier the example of Algeria and Tunisia—I do not recall whether you were in the room—both of which are non-priority countries where we have seen positive traction in that regard, particularly in the area of freedom of religion or belief.

Q120 **Ian Murray:** It is well known that the situation in Turkey is deteriorating, not getting better. What is the difference between Turkey and Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia and Colombia in terms of the human



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rights list? Would you at least acknowledge that there is a perception that Turkey's importance to trade might slightly influence the fact it has not been given the status of a country of concern?

Lord Ahmad: First, I know human rights in Turkey is very much at the centre of our concerns and discussions. On the importance we attach to them, the Prime Minister, Mrs May, met the President on 15 May, and she raised quite specifically the issue of human rights and specific cases within that. We also continue to strengthen our support for Turkish civil society organisations on important human rights issues, including LGBT rights.

Q121 **Ian Murray:** But you are doing that in other countries of concern, too. That is not just a Turkey issue.

Lord Ahmad: No, but there are certain issues, such as those I have quoted. I give those examples because it is quite a specific programme that we are undertaking. Turkey is on our radar. To be very honest with you, when we look at the 30 priority countries, the criteria we apply include where we are already making some traction bilaterally. In Turkey's case, challenges remain, particularly in, as we have seen recently, issues of LGBT rights. Press freedom is another that has been seriously curbed, because of the state of emergency.

We continue to make strong representations bilaterally. However, your general point on Turkey is well made, and I understand the concerns on its non-inclusion, but the non-inclusion of a country does not necessarily mean, as I hope I have illustrated, that we are not doing quite specific things bilaterally with that country.

Q122 **Ian Murray:** Finally, you said earlier that you didn't want to get into which particular countries the International Trade Department may or may not be having bilateral discussions with about when we leave the European Union. Of the 30 countries with human rights concerns, how many are you aware of—or how many has the International Trade Department advised you of—that we are talking to about a bilateral post-Brexit trade deal?

Lord Ahmad: I am sure discussions are under way. Richard, do we have specific numbers?

Richard Jones: We would have to check that for you.

Chair: Can I begin to draw this to a close? We will have to vote at 4 o'clock. We are nearly finished. Does anyone have any more questions?

Q123 **Chris Bryant:** I've got one. Is there anything that really winds you up and makes you angry, and that you throw all your passion and zeal into?

Lord Ahmad: Human rights, I assure you.

Q124 **Chris Bryant:** Could you show it a bit more?

Lord Ahmad: When I am before such a distinguished Committee, I show decorum. You should hear some of the conversations I have and see the challenges I rise to. I assure you that I feel very passionate about this



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issue. It is the right thing to do. The pursuit of absolute justice, despite how far away it seems in certain countries, is not something I take lightly.

Human Rights Minister is the most honourable position to have, but it is probably one of the most challenging as well. I assure you that my passion is unabated. Perhaps I will show greater passion in my presentation here, but I assure you that it is not something that I take lightly at all.

Q125 **Chris Bryant:** I don't want you to absorb all his issues, but if you could, just channel a bit more Peter Tatchell. Chain yourself to something. Arrest the Archbishop of Canterbury or something, I don't know. You are obviously a good man. I just want you to burst out.

Lord Ahmad: Okay. With the weight I've put on, some may suggest I am already bursting out, but I take your point. There are times to show absolute zeal and passion. There are also times for quiet diplomacy. I feel that I try to balance both in my role.

Chair: I assure you that the Committee is not necessarily looking for passion in the Committee but around the world.

Lord Ahmad: Compassion and passion.

Chair: Exactly. I hope you will have heard from our questioning that we are extremely interested in this. We will follow up your work, including on freedom of expression. After all, freedom of religion is a fundamental freedom of expression, without which you have no democracy.

Lord Ahmad: On that particular issue, because it is a new role, I very much welcome the Committee's personal perspectives on how we can strengthen our work in that respect.

Chair: I hope you will speak to faith leaders in the United Kingdom, to understand their perspective as well.

Lord Ahmad: I sometimes have the honour of sitting next to the Archbishop of Canterbury in their lordships House, and I assure you that that is an active and live conversation.

Chair: I am sure he is very engaging. Thank you very much indeed.