



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0906

March 15, 2023

The Honorable Rashad Hussain
U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Ambassador Hussain,

It has long been a goal of the United States to serve as a beacon of liberty and stand up for religious freedom throughout the world. As the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, you play an integral role in this process.

The U.K. is now on an unsettling path that could potentially result in existential threats to freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and even freedom of thought. To date, at least five U.K. municipalities have passed “Public Spaces Protection Orders” (PSPOs) permitting the prosecution of Christians and other people of faith for simply expressing their pro-life and religious views. These unjust laws create “buffer zones,” approximately the size of a football stadium around abortion clinics in which pro-lifers cannot offer help, pray, or express any perceived disapproval of abortion.

PSPOs specifically target the activities of religious believers. For example, the city of Bournemouth has in force a PSPO that prohibits crossing oneself, reciting scripture, genuflecting, sprinkling holy water on the ground, and crossing oneself in the censorship zone.

Enforcement of these laws creates a deeply concerning pattern of legal and state-sanctioned harassment of Christians and other pro-life Brits for not only voicing support for the sanctity of life and for offering resources for women considering abortion, but also for exercising their fundamental right to free speech, religious freedom, and freedom of thought.

The prosecutions of Isabel Vaughan-Spruce for silently praying in public within the vicinity of a closed abortion facility, Adam Smith-Connor for privately praying for his own son lost to abortion, and Catholic priest Father Sean Gough for praying in a censorship zone and having a parked car within the censorship zone with a bumper sticker that read “unborn lives matter” are just three specific examples of the British government’s violation of religious freedom. Both Ms. Vaughan-Spruce and Father Gough were criminally charged for silent prayer, while Mr. Smith-Connor was fined for praying in silence. All three were interrogated as to the content of their thoughts and prayers in the censorship zone.

Even more disturbing, Parliament is considering legislation that would implement these anti-religious-freedom censorship zones around abortion facilities across all of England and Wales, and recently rejected amendments to this legislation that would have clarified that silent prayer and consensual conversations cannot be construed as crimes. Arresting individuals for silent prayer is a gross, aggressive, and needlessly escalatory assault on one's fundamental freedoms.

While it is encouraging that both Ms. Vaughan-Spruce and Father Gough were eventually acquitted¹, that does not excuse or reverse the grievous and unfounded nature of the orders that led to the arrest and interrogation of these individuals in the first place. And even after her acquittal, Ms. Vaughan-Spruce was arrested a second time for mere silent prayer.

As the United States and the United Kingdom share a special and uniquely close relationship, it is imperative that the U.S. speak boldly and clearly to its friend when the U.K. has failed to protect unalienable rights. A free people do not face legal persecution for exercising a natural right. We strongly condemn the actions of the municipalities and the potential legislation before Parliament to persecute Christians and other pro-life citizens for thought crimes.

Ambassador, to fulfill America's commitment to advancing religious freedom around the world, we believe it is crucial for you to speak out on this issue. Respectfully, we urge you to speak out against these specific incidents and pending legislation; to raise this issue with your counterparts in the U.K. regarding these creeping restrictions and the importance of free speech, religious freedom, and freedom of thought in a free society; and to articulate America's interest in seeing the U.K. government affirm these freedoms for all its citizens, regardless of where they might be standing.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,




Chip Roy
Member of Congress



Jeff Duncan
Member of Congress

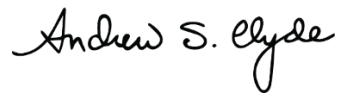


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¹ <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253665/two-uk-catholics-acquitted-after-being-charged-for-praying-in-front-of-abortion-clinic>



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