

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing St
London SW1A 2AA

21 December 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to express our serious concern, in the strongest possible terms, at the decision to appoint Fiona Bruce MP as the next special envoy on freedom of religion or belief.

Fiona has been a committed opponent of FoRB for the non-religious – for many years, the most committed and active opponent in Parliament – as well as a strong opponent of the human rights of women and the human rights of LGBT people. She has actively worked to see the teaching of non-religious worldviews eliminated from the school curriculum. She has worked tirelessly to restrict women's right to choose an abortion, through private members' bills, amendments, and as Chair of the 'Pro-Life' APPG. And she has opposed the expansion of equal rights to LGBT people. I outline all of this in more detail overleaf.

Her record shows her not only as an opponent of freedom of belief for the non-religious, but also as someone who does not treat freedom of religion or belief as one of a family of human rights, that are universal, indivisible, and interrelated. Her actions and convictions are perfectly legitimate in a free country but they are incompatible with the UK's stated commitments on FoRB.

As a result, we are deeply concerned that her appointment will have a negative impact on FoRB, both internationally and at home.

We urge you to think again about this decision.

Best wishes,



Andrew Copson
Chief Executive

Fiona Bruce MP's record

Her behaviour on the human rights of the non-religious includes:

- Ms Bruce has taken action to block the teaching of non-religious worldviews in English schools, which courts have said is required by the human right to FoRB and which treaty bodies such as the OSCE, of which the UK is a member, have made clear is part and parcel of FoRB. In 2016, Fiona Bruce was elected Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on RE – an election she orchestrated without informing the then-secretariat, the RE Council, the subject association for RE. She then removed the REC as the secretariat, and held a meeting of the Group solely to amend its purpose statement from being to ‘advocate rigorous education for every young person in religious and non-religious world views’ to remove ‘and non-religious’. The vote passed – something that was then [condemned](#) by the RE Council and the National Association of Teachers of RE at the time.
- Prior to that, in 2013, she [lobbied DfE ministers](#) against the REC’s curriculum framework for RE at key stage 1-3, opposing its equal inclusion of non-religious worldviews as it is of the major religions. And in 2014 she similarly lobbied ministers in opposition to the inclusion of non-religious worldviews in GCSE and A level RS.
- In 2016 Fiona hosted the parliamentary launch of a report [advocating that](#) the then-mooted new Bill of Rights for the UK must be ‘based on Christianity’.

On women’s rights, Ms Bruce is, of all MPs, the most prominent and active opponent of abortion – something the UK accepts is a human right for women. She is the Chair of the ‘Pro-Life’ APPG, and has tabled several bills aimed at curtailing Britain’s abortion provisions. This is very much at odds with the UK Government’s own policy on global women’s rights, in particular as relates to sexual and reproductive health, including where it spends its development aid around the world.

On LGBT rights, in 2016 she was on the advisory panel for and spoke at the launch of [another report](#) that called for the law to be amended to require employers to accommodate the religious beliefs of employees, even if that results in discrimination against others. For example, it argued against the judgment in the case of the Christian B&B owners who weren’t allowed to refuse accommodation to a same-sex couple, and that of the Christian registrar who wasn’t allowed to refuse to perform civil partnership ceremonies. The statutory primacy that this would give to the prejudices of religious people is incompatible with the human rights framework of which FoRB is a part.

Ms Bruce has, on at least two occasions, spoken in Parliament about the persecution of atheists in Islamic countries. But that doesn’t offset her wider record of seeking to *increase* discrimination against the non-religious, particularly at home, nor her operating completely outside of the universal human rights framework in a number of policy areas that intersect with freedom of belief and conscience.