



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

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Message from Archbishop Moth about ACN's Article 18 campaign for religious freedom

As Archbishop of Westminster and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, I warmly invite you today to join a vital call to action in support of people around the world oppressed for their faith.

Crafted just after the Second World War, when the world peered over the edge of nuclear catastrophe, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms the right to freedom of religion or belief. It was ratified by the United Nations and quickly became recognised around the world.

The Second Vatican Council affirmed this right, teaching that "this freedom means that all people are to be immune from coercion... in such a way that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his or her own beliefs."¹

And yet, all too often Article 18 is ignored. Men and women are imprisoned, others are driven from their homes, or even killed, simply because of their peacefully held beliefs. In some countries women and girls are kidnapped, forced to renounce their faith and marry their abductors; children are denied the right to learn about their faith; many people – young and old alike – are the victims of religious hatred; they suffer abuse and discrimination in the streets, at school and at work.

The richly diverse communities we have here in the Dioceses of England and Wales are made up of so many people with their own story of persecution and oppression, men, women and children who have sought a fresh start, recognising that violations of religious freedom are contrary to the values of a just society.

We need to stand up for our brothers and sisters in Christ and stand in support of all those who suffer for their beliefs, recognising religious freedom as a universal human right.²

And so, in this year when we mark the 10th anniversary of #RedWednesday, ACN's global campaign of solidarity with those persecuted for their faith, I invite you to support Aid to the Church in Need's petition in defence of freedom of religion or belief.

Please add your support to the campaign which calls on the UN and governments worldwide to uphold in full Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As Pope Leo has said, "Religious freedom is not merely a legal right or a privilege granted to us by governments. It is a foundational condition that makes authentic reconciliation possible."

In the words of the Holy Father, there can be – quote – "no peace without freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and respect for the views of others."³

Religious freedom is a right not a privilege. Please take a moment and sign ACN's Article 18 petition today at **acnuk.org/petition**.

+ Richard

Most Rev Richard Moth
Archbishop of Westminster
President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

¹ Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, Art. 2

² <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2026-03/holy-see-christian-persecution-religious-freedom-human-rights.html>

³ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-10/pope-leo-xiv-aid-church-need-international-religious-freedom.html>