

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

24 January 2023

Dear Prime Minister,

We write as faith and belief groups to express our concerns regarding the Public Order Bill, in advance of its Report Stage in the House of Lords later this month.

Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is of the utmost importance to faith and belief groups across the United Kingdom. Protest has always been an essential part of putting faith and belief into practice. In a climate of rising intolerance and discrimination, from antisemitism and islamophobia to sexism and racism more broadly, religion and belief communities have always been at the forefront of tackling such injustices. The Bill undoubtedly presents a profound threat to the values and practices of faith and belief groups, and could result in members of faith and belief groups facing fines, prosecution, and even imprisonment for putting their beliefs into practice.

The Bill creates a vast range of new criminal offences, which would empower the police to criminalise those involved in a range of peaceful activities, including prayer vigils, public acts of worship, community events, and protests. The offence of 'locking on', for example, is so broad that an individual who puts their faith or belief into practice by offering a 'locked-on' protestor a simple drink of water could fall foul of the law, since the bottle itself could count as an object used in connection with the offence.

As faith and belief groups, we care deeply about combatting discrimination and inequality within our society. We are concerned that the new stop and search powers, especially those that can be exercised without the need for reasonable suspicion, would exacerbate the unacceptable levels of discrimination that already result from existing powers.

We are also concerned that the proposed Serious Disruption Prevention Orders, which would place serious restrictions on individuals' liberty, could be issued to members of our communities who organise peaceful processions and protests, or are tangentially involved, for example, by organising a bus to take community members to the procession or protest or funding community members to attend. This represents an unprecedented attack on religious and belief communities, members of which will undoubtedly face such restrictions if introduced.

This Bill has no place in modern British society, and history teaches us to be wary of granting the State with overly broad powers with the potential for grave misuse. We hope, given the Government's express [commitment](#) to defending freedom of religion or belief for all, that you agree that it is unacceptable to expose such communities to fear of criminalisation as a result of putting their faith or beliefs into practice.

We therefore invite you to think again, and withdraw the Bill at the earliest opportunity. It is not too late to set things right.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk, Quakers in Britain

David Walker, Bishop of Manchester, Church of England

Zara Mohammed, Secretary-General, Muslim Council of Britain

Lord Singh of Wimbledon CBE, Director, Network of Sikh Organisations UK

Elizabeth Slade, Chief Officer, General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Neil Thorns, Director of Advocacy and Communications, CAFOD

Mia Hasenson-Gross, Executive Director, René Cassin - the Jewish voice for Human Rights

Revd Graham Thompson, President of the Methodist Conference, Methodist Church in Britain

Revd Fiona Bennett, Moderator of General Assembly, United Reformed Church

Pete Moorey, Head of Campaigns & UK Advocacy, Christian Aid

Jamie Cresswell, Director, Centre for Applied Buddhism

Graeme Hodge, CEO, All We Can & Y Care International

Revd Dr Darrell D Hannah, Chair, Operation Noah

Olivia Fuchs, Coordinator, Eco Dharma Network

Sue Claydon, Chair, Anglican Pacifist Fellowship

Sarah Kerr, President of the Pagan Federation

Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary, The Baptist Union of Great Britain

Imam Dr Sayed Razawi, Chief Imam, Director General, Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society

Deborah Tomkins, Co-Chair, Green Christian

John Cooper, Director, Fellowship of Reconciliation