

**JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

**HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL**

**SUBMISSION FROM BETHANY EVANGELICAL CHURCH DUMFRIES**

I am writing this as a concern regarding the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill that has been submitted for being voted on in the coming months.

I find it very surprising and worrying to see this issue even considered in a country that boasts of its principle of democracy and legal freedoms of speech and beliefs by all the citizens and residents living here. If this Bill is passed the immediate effect will be to transform UK into a totalitarian state... Personally, I feel like a Déjà vu as one who comes from a former communist country. I have experienced the effect of such discriminatory laws even as a child as the antichristian Communist laws were a reason for encouraging the government, the school education and the neighborhood to turn against those who held beliefs other than the atheistic regime. Loving caring pastors and priests to their parishes have become the target of hatred abuse being fined and even imprisonment for the crime of believing in God in a regime that denied expression of belief and freedom of conscience. I have lived with being bullied and offended even as a child in front of the class by my teachers for going to church on Sunday or for simply believing in God.

I find this even more dangerous now than then, as this Bill will give opportunity overnight for “crimes” too easy to commit... if one says they are “offended” for being disagreed with by another’s belief, opinion and views and they consider this to be “abusive”, it will suddenly become legal to prosecute people, criminalizing their very right to freedom of opinion, which is totally contrary to the free civilized society, the one that has been built here over hundreds of years...

This infringes the basic human rights of freedom of speech and freedom to believe in whom and what one wants to believe. This right to freedom was purchased with the blood and sacrifice of our forefathers, just to see it now trampled, ignored and done away with.

The distress I felt then when I was growing up in Romania under Ceausescu I am sensing it again now as I read and found out about the intention of the Hate Crime and Public Order Bill. Please don't go in the direction that joins the same path of policies that legalizes hostilities against freedom of speech and conscience as the Communist regime of Romania was known for before 1989. This will surely be a backward rather than a forward step...

I'm writing this in the name of Bethany Evangelical Church Dumfries.

In the hope that impartial consideration will be given before the final vote.

Bethany Evangelical Church Dumfries  
23 July 2020