



Motions to the Unitarian General Assembly 2026

Motions for the General Assembly

The following motions have been submitted for consideration at the GA Annual Meetings 2026. Amendments may be submitted at any time prior to the final vote on a motion. However, it is in the best interests of clarity for amendments to be advised as far in advance as possible.

Motion 1 - From 12 full members and Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead

Total list of full members supporting this motion (23):

Kate Brady McKenna
Eric Breeze
John Carter
Jim Corrigall
Kate Dean
Kath Forder
Chris Goacher
Elizabeth Harley
Peter Hewis
Jo James
Anna Jarvis
Margaret Kirk
CJ MacGregor
Marianna Michell
Celia Midgley
John Midgley
Feargus O'Connor
Ann Peart
Andi Phillips
Lynne Readett
Lewis Rees
Martin Whitell
Sue Woolley

"Mindful especially of the need to respond in a timely way to the growing threat to basic human rights across the world, this General Assembly empowers the Chief Officer to issue statements giving a view on current public events, provided that:



(i) Where they consider it necessary this will be after consultation with the Unitarian Social Justice Network, and/or the Executive Committee and GA President;

(ii) Where a resolution on the same topic as the statement has been passed by the General Assembly in the preceding 20 years, the statement shall be consistent with that resolution (or if there are more than one, the most recent); and

(iii) Any statement issued shall not be contrary to the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its two covenants: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)."

This motion comes from a sense that Unitarianism in the UK at a national level is keeping quiet about many issues where we should be speaking out and standing up for the values we believe in.

Currently we find ourselves very often seen as "poor relations" of the Quakers, who often publish timely statements responding to current public events, and sometimes we slowly follow on behind the Church of England (or more often do nothing at all). Of course those organisations have more members and staff, so the comparison may be seen as unfair, but nevertheless there are situations where even very small numbers of people speaking out can make a difference.

Any change in arrangements making it easier to speak out must come with safeguards, and this motion sets out what we think those safeguards ought to be -

1. For the sake of clarity and in order to avoid confusion, only one person is empowered to issue statements on behalf of Unitarianism in the UK at a national level: the Chief Officer. This does not of course prevent people from speaking out as individual members, ministers, congregations, etc. This motion is concerned with statements on behalf of the Unitarian movement nationally.

2. In most cases it will be useful for there to be consultation. We have specified in the motion the possibility of consulting the Executive Committee, the GA President, and the Unitarian Social Justice Network.

3. We want to make sure that statements don't contradict the policies established by GA Annual Meetings, so that's a necessary constraint on what the Chief Officer can say. Because circumstances change, we have specified that only resolutions carried in the previous 20 years shall be binding in this way.



4. Where we don't have a GA resolution it is difficult for us to specify in advance in the abstract what can and can't be said, so we have used three already existing documents that any statement from us should be consistent with. The UK is a signatory to all three of these, and in 1998 the GA reaffirmed support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The three documents are: the Human Rights Declaration plus the two covenants which the UN has put in place to guide its implementation: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Motion 2 - Protest Motion From Octagon Chapel, Norwich

- That this General Assembly of Unitarians and Free Christians recognises and strongly affirms that protest is a fundamental Unitarian Spiritual practice.
- Believes that recent and ongoing proposed legislation is an attack on the right to protest and is thus a stifling of religious freedom
- Calls on Unitarians to demand a repeal of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023
- Calls for withdrawal of further plans to increase police powers and ban protests in England and Wales contained in the Crime and Policing Bill
- Urges Unitarians to join campaigns to effect the above and that the Chief Officer and President continue to join other civil rights, climate change and faith groups to pressure the government to repeal, reverse and/or amend this draconian legislation

Unitarian People So Bold podcast - Unitarian minister Stephen Lingwood explains why he took part in a protest against the proscription of Palestine Action during which he was arrested and why he thinks his actions are part of a deeply spiritual practice. He also describes the law under which he was detained as dishonest, illiberal and immoral (Terrorism Act 2000) requiring him to point that out and protest. (<https://youtu.be/Bk9WjcgYBus>)

Since the ban against 'Palestine Action' under the Terrorism Act 2000 came into effect on 5 July, police have made over 2700 arrests across the country for people's engagement in acts of peaceful protest opposing the proscription. (Amnesty International)

Quakers in Britain have urged politicians to curb increasingly repressive protest laws, warning that recent and proposed legislation is preventing them from practising their faith (9 January 2026)

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/quakers-urge-parliament-to-curb-increasingly-repressive-protest-laws>

UK government falls short on international human rights commitments, says regulator EHRC

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/media-centre/news/uk-government-falls-short-international-human-rights-commitments-says-regulator>

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023 have significantly expanded the scope of criminal penalties for protest-related activities, which enable courts to impose harsh sentences on individuals engaging in peaceful protest under the guise of maintaining public order. In practice, these laws have led to the arrest and prosecution of peaceful



protesters for actions such as slow marching, carrying protest equipment, or simply being present at demonstrations. Individuals have been given disproportionate sentences for non-violent protest actions—raising concerns that the legislation is being used to suppress legitimate dissent rather than address genuine threats to public safety. (Human Rights watch)

The Unitarian website prides Unitarianism as being active, and supporting protest, mentioning the Unitarian minister in Dundee, Thomas Fyshe Palmer, was transported to Botany Bay in 1794 for his radical politics and pro-democracy activism. As well as many other great historical figures. It carries on to champion “A willingness to stand up to authority has been a constant theme, with international Unitarian involvement in women’s suffrage, civil rights and the LGBT movement. More recently in the UK, Unitarians have been arrested for Welsh language activism in the 1960s, at protests against nuclear weapons in the 1980s, and at climate protests today.” (Uk Unitarians)

Prior motion resolutions (2018 res 5.4, 2016 res 5.c, 2007 res 2.4, 2006 res 2, 2005 res 2.a) include a direct call to action, mentioning taking specific collective action, in coalition with other organisations and concerned citizens, for a shared goal. This motion is in continuation of these motions, and the many more which have come before and called our unitarian congregations, and members and friends of them to act. So that motions can come after in a society that still allows protest, a society of Unitarians that still holds true the motions passed by the great minds, and caring hearts who have come before.

As political discourse in this country becomes more and more polarised we will be called upon to stand up, and defend our neighbours, congregants and communities. Think of our future ancestors, and the future of Unitarianism. Support this action! Support this motion! Support a right to protest!

Procedural Motions

1. That the Report of the General Assembly Executive Committee and the Accounts of the General Assembly be received and adopted.
2. That Sayer Vincent be appointed as Auditors.
3. That John Bates be appointed Honorary Treasurer for the year 2026-2027.
4. That the thanks of the Assembly be given to John Bates for his service as Honorary Treasurer during the year 2025-2026, and to district association and local officers for their invaluable services.
5. That greetings be sent to kindred churches and societies abroad.
6. That the thanks of the Assembly be given to Rev Daniel Costley, for preaching the Anniversary Service, and to all those who provided music and other content for the Anniversary Service and on other worship occasions during these Meetings.
7. That the thanks of the Assembly be given to the members of the General Assembly staff and to all volunteers for their inestimable help in organising the Meetings.
8. That Rev Jean Bradley and Rev Alex Bradley be appointed jointly as President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches for the year 2026-2027.



9. That Jo O’Sullivan be appointed as Vice President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches for the year 2026-2027.
10. That this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches expresses its gratitude for the services provided by Geoff Levermore as President during the year 2025-2026.
11. That the Ministers Stipend Report be received and adopted.