



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 0128 | 3 July 2017

Persecution of Christians and the role of UK embassies

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 4 July 2017

9:30pm – 11:00am

Debate initiated by Jim Shannon

Compiled By:
Nigel Walker

Subject specialist:
Ben Smith

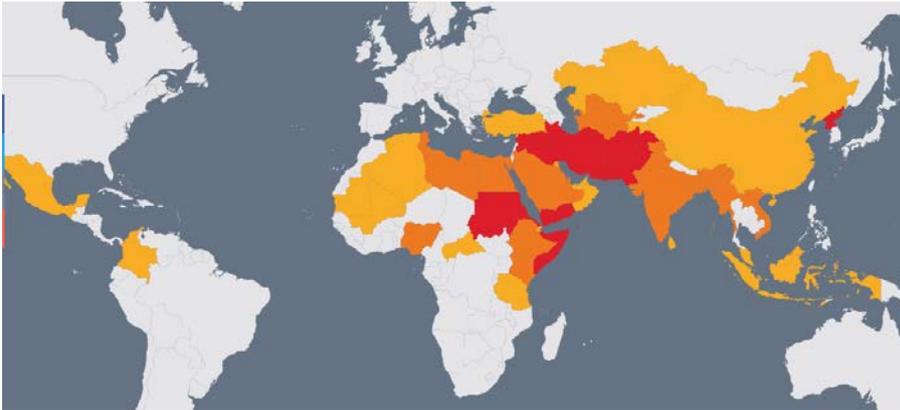
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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Summary

Despite the headlines, Iraq and Syria are not the worst countries to be Christian, according to Open Doors, an NGO that monitors persecution. North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sudan are the top five in Open Doors' 2017 ranking.¹ The group sets out countries of concern on a map:



Christianity was prevalent in the north before the Korean war and many Korean pastors fled to South Korea after it; Christianity has become one of the biggest battlegrounds between north and south, leading to massive repression in what is anyway one of the most repressive countries in the world.

Although Christians are 'People of the Book' according Islam and for most Muslims this means they should be allowed to practice their religion, subject to certain constraints, there are many examples of the persecution of Christians from around the Muslim world.

The most notorious examples recently have been perpetrated by ISIS/Daesh. ISIS in Libya massacred 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in 2015 and in April of that year released a video which the militants claimed showed them massacring 30 Ethiopian Christians.²

Last year reports emerged of the killing of 21 Christians in Syria in a town subsequently recaptured by Syrian government forces – they had broken the terms of their restrictions or tried to escape. Warnings had also been received of Christian girls being enslaved. ISIS militants had destroyed a 1,500 year old monastery along with most of the rest of the town.³

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office answered a PQ in April 2017 on its activities to support Christians at risk of persecution. The minister said that action was being taken in Iraq and Syria and elsewhere:

The Government supports the right of people of all religions – and non-religious people – to practise their beliefs in peace and safety. We are doing this in a number of ways. Through our bilateral work we lobby host governments to raise individual cases and highlight practices and laws that discriminate against people on the basis of their religion or belief. For example, the Foreign Secretary raised the rights of all Pakistani citizens, including religious minorities, during his visit to Pakistan in November 2016. Multilaterally, we work to sustain consensus support for United Nations Human Rights Council resolutions which promote freedom of religion. We also support a number of projects at grass roots level. For example, we are funding a network of human rights defenders who are working for Freedom of Religion or Belief in South Asia. In Syria and Iraq, where Christians and people of other religions have suffered such appalling persecution and violence at the hands of Daesh, our main contribution to ending the persecution of religious minorities is our support for the international effort to defeat Daesh and return the region to stability and peace.⁴

⁴ [HC Written question – 71992, 25 April 2017](#)

2. Press articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

Protesters gather around Qatar embassy to demand end to terrorism and killing of Christians

Christian Daily
Lorraine Caballero
2 July 2017

160 Christians Arrested During Eritrea's Fresh Crackdown on Christianity

The Christian Post
Samuel Smith
28 June 2017

Christian families beaten and left without water in latest horrifying persecution

Daily Express
Katie Mansfield
24 June 2017

For Christians in Syria and Iraq, Trump's enthusiastic words on religious freedom must be met with action

Fox News
David Curry
19 June 2017

Palestinian Christians send open letter to World Council of Churches

Independent Catholic News
13 June 2017

Genocide of Christians in Middle East 'Must' and 'Will End,' Says VP Pence at National Catholic Prayer Breakfast

The Christian Post
Brandon Showalter
6 June 2017

100 Eritrean Christians Arrested, Locked in 'Horrific' Storage Container Prisons Reaching 120°F

The Christian Post
Stoyan Zaimov
5 June 2017

Why America won't save the Christians

Washington Times
Cheryl K. Chumley
3 June 2017

Global persecution of Christians is 'growing worse than ever'

National Catholic Reporter
Michael Sean Winters
25 April 2017

Christians most persecuted group in the world as vicious attacks grow

Fox News
Perry Chiaramonte
14 April 2017

Persecution Of Christians In Egypt

Forbes
Ewelina U. Ochab
10 April 2017

3. PQs

Sudan: Religious Buildings
16 Mar 2017 | 67612

Asked by: Gregory Campbell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to his counterpart in Sudan on the reported decision by the Sudanese Government to order the demolition of up to 27 places of worship.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We remain concerned at the continued persecution of Christians in Sudan, including the alleged destruction of churches. Officials from our Embassy in Khartoum immediately raised our concerns directly with the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs when these particular allegations surfaced in January 2017. More widely, we continue to urge the Government of Sudan to uphold the commitment to their citizens in the Interim Constitution of 2005, within which religious freedom is enshrined.

Sudan: Prisoners
06 Mar 2017 | 65874

Asked by: Alison Thewliss

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his Sudanese counterpart on the imprisonment of Reverend Hassan Abduraheem, Petr Jašek and Abdulmonem Abdumawla.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We welcome the release of Mr Petr Jasek, but remain concerned about the sentencing of Pastor Hassan Abduelraheem Kodi and Mr Abdulmonem Abdumawlla. Officials from our Embassy in Khartoum regularly raise this case with the Government of Sudan, most recently with the Director for Europe at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 25 February.

More widely, we remain concerned at the continued persecution of Christians in Sudan. We continue to raise the importance of freedom of religion or belief in our human rights dialogue with the Government of Sudan. We urge the government to uphold the commitment to religious freedom in the Interim Constitution of 2005.

Middle East (Persecution of Christians)
10 Jan 2017 | 619 c154

Asked by: Kevin Foster

What recent reports he has received on the persecution of Christians in the Middle East.

Answered by: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Government regularly receive reports of sectarian attacks on Christian and other religious communities in the middle east. We want to work with all Governments across the middle east and north Africa to ensure that freedom of religion or belief is respected.

Asked by: Kevin Foster

Although the genocide of Christians in the areas ruled by Daesh has rightly taken the most attention, my hon. Friend will be only too aware that the persecution of Christians across the region is way too common. Will he join me, therefore, in welcoming the work done by Open Doors to highlight that, and what plans does he have to consider its latest report, which is due to be launched in the House tomorrow?

Answered by: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

May I briefly say that I very much welcome the work that is done by organisations such as Open Doors, and the work that my hon. Friend has done to promote them? I look forward to reading the report, which I think is due out tomorrow. Open Doors makes a major contribution to that work and the Government's thinking to try to support Christians and other religious communities in the middle east and north Africa.

Asked by: Danny Kinahan

Given all these crimes against Christians in the middle east, will the Government ensure that we do everything we can to make sure that this is recognised as genocide in the international courts?

Answered by: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

I have said in this House that I personally believe that acts of genocide have taken place, but it is not my view that counts; it is whether we can legally prove that. As we have debated here before, it is important that we collect the evidence. I am sure that the House will be delighted to know—it has been confirmed already—that the Foreign Secretary joined other countries, including Iraq, at the United Nations General Assembly to launch the work to be done to collect the evidence to make sure that we can hold those who have conducted these horrific activities to account.

Islamic State: Religious Freedom
10 Jan 2017 | 908046

Asked by: Michelle Donelan

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent reports he has received on the persecution of Christian and other religious minorities by Daesh.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We regularly receive reports of Daesh attacks on Christian and other religious minorities. We are working with partners to bring Daesh to justice. This includes working with the Government of Iraq to bring a proposal before the UN to gather and preserve evidence in Iraq as a first step.

Persecution of Christians
24 Nov 2016 | 617 cc1018-9

Asked by: Henry Smith

What recent representations the Church of England has received on the persecution of Christians overseas.

Answered by: Dame Caroline Spelman | Department: Church Commissioners

The Church of England remains concerned about a number of religious minorities across the world, not just Christian ones. Recently, the Lord Bishop of Coventry travelled to northern Iraq to visit the Christians in Mosul because it is clear that questions remain about their continued safety and the need to make their homes and businesses safe if they are to sustain themselves there.

Asked by: Henry Smith

Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the Open Doors organisation, which does so much to raise awareness of the persecution of Christians around the world and often courageously defends communities?

Answered by: Dame Caroline Spelman | Department: Church Commissioners

Yes. There are a number of excellent organisations such as Open Doors, Christian Solidarity Worldwide and Aid to the Church in Need which are working to support the Christian community overseas. I plan to attend a reception for the launch of the 2017 World Watch List in January, and I encourage hon. Members also to attend.

Asked by: Fiona Bruce

What discussions did the Archbishop of Canterbury have during his recent visit to Pakistan about religious persecution there?

Answered by: Dame Caroline Spelman | Department: Church Commissioners

The Archbishop of Canterbury made his second pastoral visit to Pakistan last weekend and met the victims and the bereaved of the recent suicide bomb attacks in Islamabad and Lahore. He also met the adviser to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, where the conversation was warm and constructive on a range of matters, including the contribution of the Christian community in Pakistan and the suffering of many Muslims and Christians in the struggle against terrorism.

Asked by: Bob Blackman

What representations has my right hon. Friend received in relation to the persecution of Christians in Iran? Last week, we had a conference attended by several bishops, and the concern there was that Christians cannot even congregate and are subject to military rule.

Answered by: Dame Caroline Spelman | Department: Church Commissioners

As I mentioned, the Lord Bishop of Coventry made a recent visit to Iraq, precisely to look at the terrible oppression that religious minorities, including Christians, are suffering. There is no question for any Member of this House but that safety and security are paramount issues, and we look to the Foreign Office to help us in our support for persecuted religious minorities in the region.

Asked by: Philip Hollobone

If we made it a criminal offence in this country for a Christian to become a Muslim, there would be outrage across the world. Yet people in many Arab countries face legal persecution and prosecution if they convert from Islam to Christianity. What representations is the Church making to these Arab countries that have such rules on apostasy?

Answered by: Dame Caroline Spelman | Department: Church Commissioners

Obviously nations are sovereign, and we know that in this country there is an appetite to respect sovereignty, but that does not preclude Government Ministers and Church leaders from speaking with force to the Ministers of countries where religious minorities are oppressed, to ensure that there is tolerance towards those minorities in their society.

**Mexico: Religious Freedom
21 Nov 2016 | 53206****Asked by: Gregory Campbell**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to the government of Mexico on the alleged persecution of Christians in Chichiltepec, Chachalaca and other parts of that country.

Answering member: Sir Alan Duncan | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Issues relating to human rights and the rule of law are a priority for our engagement with Mexico. British Ministers and officials at our Embassy

in Mexico City regularly raise our human rights concerns with the Mexican Government, including freedom of religion or belief and the treatment of the Christian community.

Syria: Religious Freedom
10 Oct 2016 | 46104

Asked by: Gregory Campbell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to the UN Security Council on the persecution of Christians and other minorities living in Syria in the last three months.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK Government has consistently supported the need for accountability for atrocities that have been committed in Syria, in the UN Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council (HRC).

On 19 September, the Foreign Secretary, my Rt Hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), alongside the Foreign Ministers of Iraq and Belgium, launched a global campaign to bring Daesh to justice for its crimes at the UN General Assembly – this initiative includes crimes committed against religious minorities.

The UK plays a leading role in the tri-annual Syria resolutions at the UN HRC, the latest of which took place in September. The HRC resolutions draw attention to the ongoing violations and abuses of human rights in Syria, the vast majority of which are the responsibility of the Asad regime, and refer to the need to protect ethnic, religious and confessional communities. We will continue to use our leadership role in the HRC to shine a spotlight on the dire human rights situation, and make clear our strong condemnation of the Asad regime.

We consistently use our interventions at the UN Security Council – most recently at an emergency session on Aleppo on 25 September – to highlight the suffering of the Syrian people, of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.

China: Religious Freedom
20 Sep 2016 | 45890

Asked by: Natalie McGarry

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Chinese counterpart on reports of the persecution of Christians and other minorities living in China.

Answering member: Alok Sharma | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Government is concerned by restrictions placed on Christianity in China, such as the demolition of churches, the removal of crosses from

buildings, and harassment or detention of individuals for their beliefs. The freedom to practise, change or share your faith or belief is a fundamental human right that all people should enjoy.

We are robust in raising religious freedoms with the Chinese authorities. The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my noble Friend, the Rt Hon. the Baroness of Anelay of St Johns DBE, raised the destruction of churches and religious symbols with the Director of the National People's Congress Foreign Affairs Committee on 7 July 2016. I also raised the case of Ding Cuimei, who reportedly died while protesting the demolition of her church in Zhejiang province, with the Chinese Ambassador on 1 August.

**Pakistan: Religious Freedom
20 Sep 2016 | 45889**

Asked by: Natalie McGarry

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Pakistani counterpart on reports of the persecution of Christians and other minorities living in Pakistan.

Answering member: Alok Sharma | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We are concerned about continuing reports of abuses against Christians and other religious minorities in Pakistan. The Government strongly condemns the persecution of all minorities, including the targeting of innocent people based on their religion or beliefs. Our concerns are reflected in the latest update to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office annual human rights report. We regularly raise our concerns about the protection of minority communities, including religious minorities, with the Pakistani Government at a senior level. In April, the previous Foreign Secretary, my Rt Hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Philip Hammond), raised the importance of safeguarding the rights of all minorities with Sartaj Aziz, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs. It is encouraging that the Government of Pakistan has enacted legislation to protect religious minority groups. The United Kingdom continues to urge Pakistan to honour in practice its human rights obligations, including those related to religious minorities, and to uphold the rule of law.

**Vietnam: Human Rights
13 Jul 2016 | 42119**

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Vietnamese government on human rights abuses and persecution of Christians.

Answering member: Hugo Swire | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Government is committed to promoting and protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief around the world, and to being a strong voice internationally in defence of this fundamental right. We raise these and other human rights issues with the Vietnamese government regularly and at all levels. We also work with non-government organisations and likeminded embassies on human rights issues in Vietnam. I raised concerns about the general human rights situation in Vietnam with the Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister during the UK-Vietnam Strategic Dialogue in London in March 2016. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my Rt Hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), discussed human rights with the Vietnamese Prime Minister during his visit to Vietnam in April 2016. We will continue to raise these issues with the Vietnamese authorities, including a concerning report from Amnesty International which has just issued on the treatment of prisoners of conscience in Vietnam.

**China: Religious Freedom
07 Jul 2016 | 41584**

Asked by: Nigel Dodds

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to the government of China on the persecution of Christians and other faith groups.

Answering member: Hugo Swire | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We pay close attention to the human rights situation in China and remain concerned by all reports of restrictions to freedom of religion or belief and persecution of faith groups. The full range of our human rights concerns in China are set out in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy, most recently published on 21 April. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my Rt Hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), has continued to raise concerns about the detention of human rights lawyers, a number of whom have represented clients who have been punished for exercising their freedom of religious belief. He did so with both Foreign Minister Wang Yi in January and President Zhou Qiang of the Supreme People's Court last month.

**Open Doors UK
10 May 2016 | 36198**

Asked by: Michelle Donelan

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if his Department will provide funding to support the work of the charity Open Doors in tackling the persecution of Christians around the world.

Answering member: David Lidington | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Government values our close working relationship with a wide range of NGOs working on human rights issues, including Open Doors. Whilst we are not currently providing funding to Open Doors, it is open to them to apply to the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy for funding to implement specific projects overseas. The fund supports targeted projects which aim to tackle the root causes of human rights violations, strengthen institutions and governance, promote and protect human rights, and support democracy and the rule of law.

**Iraq: Christian Communities
05 May 2016 | 609 c306****Asked by: Fiona Bruce**

Persecution of Christians is an increasingly worldwide concern. I recently hosted the launch by Open Doors of its report on northern Nigeria—I visited Nigeria with the International Development Committee just a few weeks ago. The report, entitled “Crushed but not defeated”, outlines how more than 1 million Christians there have been affected by targeting, discriminatory practices and violence, including by Boko Haram. Does the right hon. Lady agree that it is crucial that the whole international community helps to address this, to restore reconciliation in communities there?

Answered by: Caroline Spelman | Department: Church Commissioners

Yes, we are all familiar with the terrible pictures from northern Nigeria. When the Archbishop of Canterbury convened representatives of the middle east Churches, he actually spoke at a prayer vigil, where he highlighted that this is a moment for such evil to be brought to an end. He said: “It must stop...If it does not stop...in...places around the world, such as northern Nigeria...it will continue to spread.”

The Church is well aware, as I am sure we all are, of the need to make a stand against this evil, so that it does not spread further.

**Nigeria: Christianity
11 Mar 2016 | 30187****Asked by: Helen Jones**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the Nigerian government on the persecution of Christians in Nigeria.

Answering member: James Duddridge | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Religious freedom in Nigeria is protected by the Nigerian Constitution. Boko Haram seeks to undermine this constitutional provision by attacking all Nigerians who do not subscribe to its extremist views. It has

committed atrocities against people of all faiths, including Christians and Muslims, with the majority of those killed having been Muslims. We regularly discuss with the Nigerian Government at the highest levels our concern about the threat Boko Haram poses to communities of different faiths and ethnicities. We will continue to work with the Nigerian Government, non-governmental organisations and civil society to improve the security situation and human rights for all in Nigeria.

Jordan: Christianity
08 Mar 2016 | 29063

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, with reference to the Open Doors World Watch List on the persecution of Christians, what discussions his Department has had with the Jordanian government on ensuring that Christians in that country are not persecuted.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We have had discussions with the Jordanian Government on the status of Christians and other religions in Jordan. The Jordanian Government and His Majesty King Abdullah II are explicit about the need for religious tolerance, as demonstrated by King Abdullah's 22 December 2015 message to the nation on the occasion of Christmas and the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed.

Middle East: Minority Groups
29 Jan 2016 | 24334

Asked by: Robert Ffello

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what information he holds on the number of Iraqi and Syrian Christians and other religious minorities who have been murdered or displaced from their homes by Daesh in each of the last five years; and what steps he is taking to provide practical assistance and asylum opportunities to persecuted Christians seeking to flee that region.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We do not hold figures for the numbers of minorities who have been murdered or displaced by Daesh. The situation is desperate for many communities within Syria and Iraq. We condemn in the strongest terms the atrocities committed by Daesh against all civilians, including Christians, Mandeans, Yezidis, and other minorities, as well as the majority Muslim population in Iraq and Syria who continue to bear the brunt of Daesh's brutality.

The persecution of Christians, and individuals of all faiths, anywhere in the world, is of profound concern to us. The freedom to practice,

change or share your faith or belief without discrimination or violent opposition is a fundamental human right that all people should enjoy.

The Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) announced that the existing Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) scheme would be expanded to resettle 20,000 refugees during this Parliament. The Syrian VPR scheme is based on need and does not discriminate on religious grounds. As many Christians are likely to be particularly vulnerable it is highly likely that some will qualify under the scheme's criteria.

Ultimately, the only way to protect Christians and other religious minorities from Daesh is by defeating this terrible organisation, which in turn requires, amongst other things, ending the conflict in Syria. The Prime Minister set out the UK's comprehensive strategy for defeating Daesh and finding a political settlement to the Syria conflict in his response to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 26 November 2015.

Christianity

27 Jan 2016 | 22877

Asked by: Anne Main

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the conclusions of the report from Open Doors, Freedom of Religion and the Persecution of Christians; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: David Lidington | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Government is firmly committed to promoting and protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief around the world, and to being a strong voice internationally in defence of this fundamental right. We value our close working relationship with organisations such as Open Doors and their insights from practical work around the world. We welcomed their recent report, which Baroness Anelay of St Johns, FCO Minister for Human Rights, was pleased to discuss with Open Doors on 13 January.

Our new strategic approach to human rights refocuses our work around three themes: democratic values and the rule of law; strengthening the rules-based international system; and human rights for a stable world. Our work on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is integral to all three of these themes.

We have an active programme of religious literacy training amongst staff from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and across Whitehall, including through our new Diplomatic Academy.

Multilaterally, we are working through the UN General Assembly to establish an internationally agreed set of principles for promoting tolerance through education. We also carry out project work in a range of countries, working with non-governmental organisations on issues such as promoting better understanding between faiths, bridging

sectarian divides, promoting dialogue between faith groups and government and offering technical advice on amending discriminatory laws. Earlier in January, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office announced an uplift to £10.6 million for the 2016/17 programme, named the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy. We are encouraging strong bids for projects focused on promoting freedom of religion or belief, and promoting FoRB as one way of tackling the root causes of extremism.

Christianity
25 Jan 2016 | 22719

Asked by: Anne Main

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to the UN Human Rights Council on the persecution of Christians.

Answering member: David Lidington | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK has a strong record of supporting freedom of religion or belief, including christianity, at the Human Rights Council. We supported the resolution on freedom of religion or belief in both the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly in 2015, and will look to do so again in March 2016. The UK also supported the appointment of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, who is tasked with monitoring and reporting these issues worldwide.

In addition, we regularly support language in country specific resolutions about the importance of protecting religious minorities, as evidenced in the Syria resolution of September 2015. We also regularly work with EU partners to ensure a strong EU position on freedom of religion or belief at the Human Rights Council.

When raising persecution faced by one faith group, we endeavour to frame our remarks in the wider context of the rule of law and freedom – making the point that when one faith community is persecuted, the liberty of all is jeopardised.

Islamic State
19 Jan 2016 | HL4828

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the number of Iraqi and Syrian Christians and other religious minorities who have been murdered or displaced from their homes by the actions of ISIS in each of the last five years; and what specific plans they have to provide practical assistance and asylum opportunities for persecuted Christians seeking to flee that region.

Answering member: Baroness Anelay of St Johns | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We do not hold figures for the numbers of minorities who have been murdered or displaced by Daesh. The situation is desperate for many communities within Syria and Iraq. We condemn in the strongest terms the atrocities committed by Daesh against all civilians, including Christians, Mandeans, Yezidis, and other minorities, as well as the majority Muslim population in Iraq and Syria who continue to bear the brunt of Daesh's brutality.

The persecution of Christians, and individuals of all faiths, anywhere in the world is of profound concern to us. The freedom to practise, change or share your faith or belief without discrimination or violent opposition is a fundamental human right that all people should enjoy.

The Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron), announced that the existing Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) scheme would be expanded to resettle 20,000 refugees during this Parliament. The Syrian VPR scheme is based on need and does not discriminate on religious grounds. As many Christians are likely to be particularly vulnerable it is highly likely that some will qualify under the scheme's criteria.

Ultimately, the only way to protect Christians and other religious minorities from Daesh is by defeating this terrible organisation, which in turn requires, amongst other things, ending the conflict in Syria. The Prime Minister set out the UK's comprehensive strategy for defeating Daesh and finding a political settlement to the Syria conflict in his response to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 26 November 2015.

4. Other Parliamentary material

4.1 Debates

Daesh: Persecution of Christians
22 March 2016 | 607 cc541-9WH

Persecution of Christians
3 December 2013 | 571 cc840-886

Persecution of Christians (Middle East)
5 November 2013 | 570 cc1-25WH

Persecution of Christians
16 April 2013 | 561 cc58-67WH

4.2 Early Day Motions

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DISPLACED PEOPLE IN IRAQ
EDM 449 (session 2016-17)
13 September 2016
Jim Shannon

That this House condemns the human rights abuse and persecution of Christians, Yazidis and other ethnic groups in Iraq; calls for financial assistance for displaced persons in Kurdistan in Iraq; further calls for a fair distribution of aid from Baghdad to Kurdistan's regional government for the displaced persons; and calls on the Government to make training and equipment available for Kurdistan Regional Peshmerga Army.

CHINA AND ORGAN HARVESTING
EDM 323 (session 2016-17)
13 July 2016
Jim Shannon

That this House expresses deep concern over forced organ harvesting being carried out in China; further expresses dismay at the ongoing persecution of Christians in China and that human rights are being denied in Tibet and Hong Kong; and calls on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to bring these matters to the attention of the Chinese government as soon as possible.

OPEN DOORS**EDM 978 (session 2015-16)****19 January 2016****Jim Shannon**

That this House congratulates Open Doors on the launch of its 2016 report and for highlighting the persecution of Christians; stands alongside Open Doors in its fight to protect both Christians and those who follow other religions; and believes that freedom of belief and religion should be available to all without fear of persecution

PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**EDM 797 (session 2014-15)****12 February 2015****Jim Shannon**

That this House expresses concern over the continued unrest in Northern Nigeria which has left 2,000 people dead since 3 January 2015 and has displaced 30,000 people, with over 1,000 churches destroyed since 2009; and calls for better protection to be given to Christians in Northern Nigeria, particularly in light of Boko Haram's statement that it will continue its attacks on Christian communities in Nigeria.

PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS**EDM 617 (session 2014-15)****11 December 2014****Jim Shannon**

That this House condemns the persecution of Christians, particularly in the cities of Donetsk and Lugansk in Ukraine recently where some Christians have been killed or injured; and calls on all relevant authorities to help bring such persecution to an end.

IRAN AND THE PERSECUTION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES**EDM 453 (session 2014-15)****30 October 2014****Jeffrey Donaldson**

That this House condemns the persecution of Christians, Bahá'ís and other religious minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran which has increased under the leadership of President Rouhani and calls on the Iranian government to release prisoners incarcerated on account of their faith such as Farshid Fathi, Benham Irani, Alireza Seyyedian, Hodayoun Shokouhi, Vahid Hakkani, Mojtaba Seyyed Alaedin Hossein, Abdolreza Ali Haghnejad, Silas Rabbani, Shahin Lahooti, Suroush Saraie, Ebrahim Firouzi, Maryam Naghsh Zargaran and Rasoul Abdollahi; is concerned by Iran's refusal to allow entry to a delegation of UK parliamentarians to open positive and respectful dialogue on these matters; notes the recent

comments of President Rouhani's Advisor on Religious Affairs that underlined the illegality of religious conversion in Iran which sits contrary to Iran's obligations under international law; urges the UK and the 46 other member states of the UN Human Rights Council, to raise the cases of individual Christian prisoners of conscience during Iran's Universal Periodic Review on 31 October 2014, and to recommend their release; and further urges Ministers to recognise the significance the UK population places on putting human rights and religious liberty at the heart of the UK's international relations, noting the Iranian government's eagerness to see its embassy reopened in London.

NORTH KOREA

EDM 1143 (session 2013-14)

5 March 2014

Jim Shannon

That this House expresses concern about North Korean human rights abuses and persecution of Christians; further expresses anger that North Korea has concentration camps where horrific crimes take place at Yodok and Chongori and other locations; and requests that the Government engages with the North Korean Ambassador and conveys disgust at how the Christian minority have been treated, opens up discussions with the Chinese authorities to assist Christians and those suffering horrendous human rights abuses and requests that China does not repatriate those fleeing from North Korea to China because of the persecution.

5. Press releases

Foreign Secretary's 2017 Easter message

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

16 April 2017

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson sends his warm wishes to all celebrating Easter.

The Foreign Secretary said:

Easter is a time of hope and new life for all Christians. This year my thoughts are with all those facing persecution and denied the right to worship freely, particularly Christians in the Middle East – and especially those who suffered in the terrible attacks on Palm Sunday in Egypt.

The UK will continue to stand with our international friends and partners as strong advocates for freedom of religion or belief for all. We must work to spread the mutual respect, tolerance and understanding of different faiths which bind us together as a global community and build a better, more peaceful world.

I send all Christians my warm wishes for a happy and peaceful holiday.

Baroness Anelay marks International Religious Freedom Day

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

29 October 2016

One week on from groundbreaking conference on freedom of religion or belief, Human Rights Minister Baroness Anelay reiterates the importance the government attaches to promoting this fundamental right.

Human Rights Minister Baroness Anelay said:

On International Religious Freedom Day, I would like to take the opportunity to emphasise the importance that the UK government attaches to promoting and protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief around the world.

The right to choose your religion, to practice it, share it, change it or live without a religion at all is something that everyone should enjoy. In a world where over 80% of the population identifies as religious, this is fundamental to the lives and identity of the vast majority of the world's citizens.

Freedom of religion or belief is also one of our most powerful tools in the fight against extremism. One week ago, I hosted a major international conference to explore with experts from around the globe how we step up international action to promote inclusive societies where religious diversity is celebrated.

This is not something that governments alone can do. So on this international day, I call on faith leaders, academics, teachers, media and civil society to join us as we fight for a world where no one suffers discrimination or persecution simply on the grounds of what they believe.

6. Further reading

Reports

In Response to Persecution

Under Caesar's Sword Project on Global Christian Communities
20 April 2017

Websites

Christian Solidarity Network

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) works in over 20 countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, defending everyone's right to freedom of religion or belief.

International Christian Concern

ICC acts as a bridge between believers in free countries and believers in persecuted countries.

Open Doors

Open Doors supports persecuted Christians with Bibles, Christian materials, training, livelihood skills, advocacy - and in a whole host of other ways - so that they know they are not forgotten and can stand strong to serve their communities.

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