July 2020



Thank you for contacting me about the persecution of Christians.

The UK has always championed freedom of religion or belief for everyone. As a country that has always been a beacon for freedom and tolerance, I passionately believe the UK should not shirk its responsibilities.

The Independent Review of Foreign and Commonwealth Office support for persecuted Christians, conducted by the Anglican Bishop of Truro, the Right Reverend Philip Mounstephen, has been published, and the UK Government is committed to implementing the recommendations from the Bishop of Truro’s Review.

The recommendations have been divided into short, medium and long term priorities and Ministers have already implemented a good number of them. This includes recently appointing a Director General level champion for Freedom of Religion or Belief and marking Red Wednesday in support of persecuted Christians and members of other minority groups. Some of the recommendations will take longer to implement and many will require an ongoing effort to embed into the working practice of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other Departments.

In the Middle East, the UK has been at the forefront of global efforts to bring Daesh to justice for their crimes, including through a commitment of £1 million in support of an investigative team to collect evidence of Daesh crimes. The UK supported efforts to help Christians and other minority groups in Iraq to return home, and in Syria the UK provided a range of support to help bolster civil society and promote human rights and accountability. The UK government has provided £252.5 million of humanitarian relief to Iraq since 2014, and £2.71 billion to Syria and Syrian refugees since the start of the conflict. This is the UK’s largest ever humanitarian response to a crisis.

I can assure you that the UK is committed to supporting Nigeria in upholding the right to freedom of religion or belief, as protected by its constitution. The recent escalation in intercommunal violence has affected multiple states of Nigeria and communities of all religions. Ministers regularly engage faith-based organisations and raise our concerns with the Nigerian government. In northeast Nigeria, Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa seek to undermine the right to freedom of religion by attacking both Muslims and Christians who do not subscribe to their extremist views. The UK is supporting Nigeria in tackling the insurgency through a substantial and increasing package of security, humanitarian, and development support.

I understand concerns about the increased vulnerability of Christians during the coronavirus outbreak. It is of course vital that we do all we can to ensure aid gets through to those that need it most. I know that the UK Government works to ensure that all aid reaches the most vulnerable including those from religious minorities. Covid-19 is likely to reinforce their marginalised position in society, their experience of discrimination, violence and stigma, and further limit their access to essential support and services. I welcome that, for this reason, guidance was circulated across DFID highlighting that inclusion must be central to the UK’s response and the specific contexts and needs of all religious minorities should be taken into account when developing practical programmes to tackle Covid-19.

Thank you for taking the time to contact me.



Yours faithfully,

**CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP**

**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY**