



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

September 2019.

Dear Constituent,

A Response to the Persecution of Christians Campaign

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.

Today, about 245 million Christians worldwide are believed to face persecution for their faith. The evidence suggests the problem is getting worse. The number of countries where Christians face religiously-motivated harassment rose from 128 in 2015 to 144 a year later, according to the Pew Research Centre. Perhaps because of a misguided political correctness - or an instinctive reluctance to talk about religion - British governments have not always grappled with this problem.

That is why I am glad 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. As you may know, the Review is the conclusion of a project that began in December 2018, when the Foreign Secretary asked Bishop Mounstephen to carry out this important research with the full support of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

In recent years, the FCO has stepped up its work on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). In response to new evidence and as a sign of the UK's commitment, the Prime Minister appointed Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon in 2018 as the UK's first Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. In that role, Lord Ahmad has championed FoRB across government, through the FCO's diplomatic network, and in his travel overseas. The UK has raised the rights of religious minorities at the highest levels, including in Nigeria, Iraq and Pakistan. Lord Ahmad has also worked with British diplomatic missions to defend FoRB, including at the United Nations in Geneva and New York. Furthermore, he has overseen the provision of significant funding through various projects and programmes, including over £250 million to support people who were driven from their homes by Daesh's persecution.

I welcome Bishop Mounstephen's report and its recommendations. The Review was independent and, in some respects, is critical of the FCO's approach. The FCO must accept such criticism in the constructive spirit in which it was intended.

I will continue to engage with Ministers across government as they agree a formal collective response.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alister Jack'.

The Rt. Hon. Alister Jack MP
Dumfries and Galloway constituency.