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Dear David,

1<sup>st</sup> Sept 2014

I am writing to follow up on the debate on 24 July on Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, in the course of which I was unable to respond to all questions orally.

A number of peers raised the current situation in Iraq. We are engaging with our regional partners to discuss the situation in Iraq. The Foreign Secretary discussed Iraq with the Saudi Foreign Minister on 21 June and the Defence Secretary visited Saudi Arabia on 23 June. The UK has also provided £5m of humanitarian aid to support people displaced by ISIL's attacks. We call on all governments in the region to condemn ISIL's actions, violence and terrorism. The recent threats against Mosul's Christians and the Yazidi community are the latest example of the brutality and intolerance of ISIL, which has claimed responsibility for numerous atrocities. We are also aware of reports of destruction of churches, mosques, libraries and other holy sites.

Our Embassy in Baghdad and Consulate General in Erbil have discussed this issue with church leaders including the Chaldean Patriarch and the Archbishop of Mosul; with civil society representatives; and with the Iraqi Prime Minister's Office. Minister for the Middle East, Tobias Ellwood, recently met the Archbishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church in London and issued a statement strongly condemning the persecution of Christians in Iraq: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fco-minister-concerned-by-persecution-of-christians-in-iraq-and-syria>

We continue to call on the Government of Iraq to protect all communities, provide humanitarian assistance, and deal appropriately with those who are found

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responsible for any acts of violence and intimidation of others on the basis of their political, ethnic or religious affiliations. We regularly discuss terrorist financing with governments in the Gulf including through the mechanisms of the Financial Action Task Force.

There were a number of questions raised on Iran. Since the election of President Rouhani, there have been some positive steps in the human rights situation, such as the release of a number of political prisoners in September 2013. However, the human rights situation in Iran remains dire.

The UK has repeatedly called on the Iranian government to end all persecution of individuals on the basis of their faith or belief, and to guarantee the human rights of all Iranians. We raised the human rights situation in Iran with the UN Special Rapporteur at the UN Human Rights Council in March 2014, and the UK's non-resident Chargé d'Affaires discussed freedom of religion with the Iranian authorities during his visit to Iran on 12 March 2014.

The reopening of the British Embassy in Tehran will enable more detailed and regular discussions with Iran on a full range of issues, including on human rights. We will continue to call on Iran to abide by its international commitments and ensure respect for the rights of all its citizens.

You asked what priority we will be giving to Egypt's minorities as we engage with the new President. Foreign Office Ministers have been clear throughout recent events in Egypt that the freedom of religion or belief needs to be protected and that the ability to worship in peace is a vital component of a democratic society. The Egyptian constitution contains protection for freedom of religion or belief and it is important that this is implemented. The UK government will continue to raise concerns with the Egyptian authorities and keep a close eye on their actions to guarantee religious tolerance.

We deplore all discrimination against individuals on the basis of their religion or belief along with any constraints placed on their freedom to practise their faith. Hugh Robertson, former Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, discussed the situation faced by Coptic Christians and implications of the new constitution in a meeting with Bishop Yulios during his visit to Cairo in December 2013.

You also asked about religious freedom in Kenya and in Eritrea. Kenya has experienced several attacks of terrorism recently, including the attack on the



Allegations of human rights abuses, including those on the basis of an individual's religion or belief, must be dealt with immediately through a clear, independent and transparent investigative and prosecutorial process that meets international standards. We have made this clear to the Burmese government and will continue to do so.

The UK is providing funding to train journalists in Burma on responsible coverage of religious issues and conflict, and supporting a project to enhance the capacity of civil society groups to advocate freedom of religion or belief. We have previously provided funding for interfaith dialogue and peace building amongst youth.

You asked for a response to Christian Solidarity Worldwide's new report, "Indonesia: Pluralism in Peril". We welcome this report. The promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief is a priority for this Government, and one on which we regularly engage with international partners.

Indonesia has a strong tradition of religious diversity and tolerance, but there has been a rise of localised instances of inter- and intra-religious conflict, and examples where the rights of religious minority groups, including Christians, have not been protected. We continue to closely monitor the situation and to engage at senior levels with the government of Indonesia about our concerns. Indonesia's constitution guarantees freedom of religion and continues to have wide-spread support. The Presidential election period has been remarkably peaceful and is testament to Indonesia's progress over the last 15 years. Mr Joko Widodo has been announced by the Indonesian Election Commission as the winner. Mr Subianto's legal challenge is part of the democratic election process. The outcome is due to be announced by the Constitutional Court before 22 August.

You asked about the situation in China. We have concerns about all restrictions placed on freedom of religion or belief in China. We believe that freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right, and continue to raise our concerns with Chinese counterparts. We most recently raised the detention of the Bishop of Shanghai with Chinese authorities during the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue on 19-20 May, where we also raised our concerns around religious buildings.

We are concerned by the detention of those who peacefully express their views in China, including reports of Tenzin Lhundup. We urge the Chinese authorities

to respect the constitutionally guaranteed rights of all detainees, and to ensure they have access to lawyers, adequate medical care and family.

We publicly highlighted our concerns over self immolations in Tibet in the FCO's Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy, and continue to do so in the quarterly updates to it. We believe that meaningful dialogue is the best way to address and resolve the underlying grievances of Tibetan communities and we continue to urge all sides to restart talks.

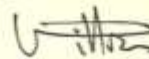
A number of peers asked about Religious Education in our schools. The government firmly believes in the importance of RE to develop children's knowledge of the values and traditions of Britain and other countries, and to foster understanding among different faiths and cultures. That is why RE remains compulsory at all key stages and why schools have a duty to teach a broad and balanced curriculum.

RE is also part of schools' activity to meet their legal duty to promote young people's spiritual, moral and cultural development. The government wants to see all schools reflecting shared British values of diversity, tolerance and community cohesion. Local authorities are responsible for drawing-up locally agreed syllabuses that must be followed by maintained schools without religious designation. These syllabuses should be broadly Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain. Schools with religious designation can develop their own syllabuses according to their trust deeds and/or the tenets of their faith.

The Religious Education Council (REC) have published a national curriculum framework as a national benchmark to support teachers in providing excellent RE.

I have copied this letter to all Peers who spoke in the debate and will place a copy in the Library of the House.

Yours ever,

  
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LORD WALLACE OF SALTAIRE