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Thank you for your e-mail of 6 October about Christians in Pakistan.

You may also be interested to know that I met with Lord Alton on 22 October and we discussed the matter in detail.

The UK's position is largely shaped by caselaw set by the courts. In December 2014, in the case of 'AK & SK (Christians: risk) Pakistan (CG) [2014] UKUT 569 (IAC)', the Upper Tribunal – having considered a range of evidence from numerous different sources – concluded that Christians in Pakistan are a religious minority who, in general, suffer discrimination but this is not sufficient to amount to a real risk of persecution.

We accept that there are individuals, such as Christian converts, who can face persecution. However, we agree with the Upper Tribunal and do not accept that, in general, this is a risk faced by all Christians in Pakistan. The Tribunal stressed the importance of considering each claim on its particular individual facts.

I can confirm that my officials have considered the report commissioned by the British Pakistani Christian Association (BPCA). However, we do not generally consider reports in isolation. To get a balanced and complete picture, we assess individual reports against a range of other material.

Our view is that at present there is no significant new evidence that requires us to revise our guidance. Whilst it does show that attacks against Christians have continued, this is broadly in line with the range of evidence considered by the Tribunal when considering the country guidance case. It does not, in our view, provide significant and sufficient evidence to justify departing from that caselaw. We continue to monitor the situation carefully.

You also refer to the situation facing Pakistani Christians in Thailand. I am aware that the BPCA report estimates there are between 4,600 and 8,000 Pakistani Christians seeking asylum in Thailand and alleges families are arrested for overstaying their visas and face confinement in overcrowded detention centres. The BPCA report also refers to UNHCR-Thailand's slow processing times in refugee status determinations.

We consider the position of Pakistani Christians seeking asylum in Thailand is a matter primarily for the Thai authorities. On a more positive note though, I understand that a number of Pakistani Christians have since been freed from the Immigration Detention Centre in Bangkok.

Returning to the issue of our guidance, there is a suggestion that UNHCR's position has been influenced by the Home Office. It is important to point out that UNHCR issue their own guidelines on protection needs for particular countries and groups. Whilst they may have referred to our guidance, we consider it more likely they are persuaded or influenced by the Upper Tribunal's findings in AK and SK (and the range of evidence considered) than our guidance per se.

We are keeping this under
review. Yours sincerely,
Mimi G.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD BATES