

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

30th November 2020

New Content,

RE: PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of the persecution of Christians and particularly during the Coronavirus pandemic; your comments upon which I have read with great interest.

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. That is why I am glad the Independent Review of Foreign & Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians, conducted by the Anglican Bishop of Truro, the Right Reverend Philip Mounstephen, has been published. The UK Government is committed to implementing the recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's review by July 2022.

The recommendations have been divided into short, medium and longer-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 practices of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and other Government Departments.

The 'World Watch List' report launch is an important event to be hosted by my colleague, the Rt. Hon Theresa Villiers MP, on the 13th January 2021, which I hope to attend. Rest assured, that if I am unable to attend the launch, because of my other parliamentary duties and my work as a Government Whip, I shall be sure to read the report with interest and care.

I understand your concerns about the increased vulnerability of Christians during the Coronavirus outbreak, including access to PPE. 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 and the FCDO is using its international partnerships to support the delivery of medical supplies and PPE. COVID-19 is likely to reinforce Christians' 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 the FCDO 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. I know that the Government is continuing to assess the impact of the virus on members of all minority religious and belief communities, including Christians.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE