

5 May 2016

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The Rt Hon George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
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Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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Thank you for your email of 22 April to the Foreign Secretary, on behalf of your constituents, about Daesh. I am replying as Minister responsible for our relations in the Middle East.

We are very concerned about appalling crimes committed by Daesh against Christians, Mandaeans, Yezidis and other minorities, as well as the majority Muslim populations in Iraq and Syria. It is vital that there is accountability for crimes committed.

As the Prime Minister has said, we maintain that genocide should be a matter for judicial authorities rather than a political decision. However, it is clear there is a growing body of evidence that terrible crimes have been committed. We are working with the international community to find ways of providing justice to those who have suffered at the hands of Daesh.

Whilst a UN Security Council referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC) is one option for bringing Daesh to justice through the courts, there are other potential options. When efforts were made to refer the situation in Syria to the ICC in 2014, it was vetoed by Russia and China. In the meantime, we will do everything we can to support the gathering and preservation of evidence that could in future be used in court to hold Daesh to account.

Our approach is to seek an end to all violations of International Humanitarian Law and to prevent their further escalation, irrespective of whether these violations fit the definition of specific international crimes.

Ultimately, the only way of safeguarding Christians and other minority communities is by defeating Daesh and establishing a lasting peace in both Syria and Iraq. The Government is committed to this: we have a comprehensive strategy for defeating Daesh and continue to work with our international partners and the UN towards a political settlement in Syria.

We are also using our aid budget to alleviate the immediate humanitarian suffering of the most vulnerable people in the region, including minorities. The UK has pledged over £2.3 billion, our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. The funding is providing support, such as food, medical care and relief items, to over a million people including those affected by the fighting in Syria and Iraq and refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Yours sincerely,

TOBIAS ELLWOOD MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State