

Speech: “The challenge is to talk about women and peace and security when our agenda is Syria, or Somalia, or South Sudan”

Thank you Mr President, thank you to all of our briefers, and to our visiting ministers, for their remarks. I’m particularly grateful that we had the opportunity to hear a civil society voice in this Chamber today. That’s even more vital at a time when so many such voices are being ignored, threatened or silenced around the world. So that’s great and it’s also great that we have so many people attending this debate with us today.

But in the spirit of trying to improve still further how we do things here, let me make a few points frankly. We meet in this format once a year and we repeat what we already know: that we need more women at the negotiating table, that peace deals stand a greater chance of succeeding with women taking part, that we need to turn our words into action.

And yet, year after year, session after session, SG report after SG report, the actual implementation of this agenda still falls way too short. We’ve had resolution after resolution – eight of them since resolution 1325 – and yet the promise of that first historic text still remains unfulfilled.

So I encourage everyone intervening later today to be specific. Specific about what our country is doing since we last met in this format to make the Women, Peace and Security agenda a reality, and then, ideally, to commit to do even more.

This year, the UK has worked to increase women’s participation in conflict resolution in some of the most fragile countries in the world: in Somalia, in Syria, in Yemen, in Afghanistan. We’ve helped women in parliament, in civil society, in the military and in business, to increase their voice, their influence, their participation, and we will keep doing so next year.

But we also know that women, peace and security is about more than work in individual countries. So many of the dangers that women face in conflict are shared dangers, found in every conflict. Dangers like sexual violence. Like stigma against survivors of these horrific crimes. And since these are shared challenges, we must all share in the response if we are to affect international change.

And that’s why the UK has been a champion of preventing sexual violence in conflict. It’s why we launched the global principles on stigma at UNGA this year. It’s why we’re running 23 projects in conflict and post-conflict countries to support survivors, end stigma, and deliver justice. And it’s why we’ve contributed \$2 million to the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund, and I urge others to contribute, too.

Turning to the peacekeeping, this year UK troops on large-scale overseas missions – whether for the UN or anyone else – now receive pre-deployment training on preventing sexual violence, and on the Women, Peace and Security agenda more broadly. And we'll be launching, alongside our Bangladeshi and Canadian partners, a new global network of military gender champions at the peacekeeping ministerial conference in Vancouver next month.

We strongly support the Secretary-General's commitment to gender parity and his efforts to increase the number of women in peacekeeping. However, the Women, Peace and Security agenda is far more than numbers, and we're concerned, frankly, that the UN Secretariat are de-prioritising gender advisors in UN missions, and we urge the UN to reinstate accountability through its compacts with UN leaders.

Mr President, in the UK this year, Baroness Hale became the first woman ever to head our supreme court, which makes it the first time in our history that we've had women as our head of state, our head of government, and head of the most senior court in the land. We also this year appointed our first ever Special Envoy for Gender Equality, putting gender equality at the heart of our foreign policy.

But despite these historic steps, we have more to do. So that's why, next year, we'll be launching the UK's fourth National Action Plan, building on progress made, lessons learned, and our discussions with civil society and focus countries.

And my final point, Mr President, is that there is more that we can all do, each of us around this table, both internally in the missions or ministries that we lead, and externally in the Security Council and around the United Nations. Internally, I commend to you the UK Mission's Gender Compact that I launched this year. I encourage you to read it, to steal its good ideas, and apply them in your own missions. And outside our missions, we must practise what we preach in this Security Council every day.

It's easy to talk about women, peace and security when that is the subject on our agenda, like it is today, but the challenge is to talk about women and peace and security when our agenda is Syria, or Somalia, or South Sudan. We could all do better on that, and I encourage everyone to come together to do so.

Thank you.

Speech: A source of 'inspiration and determination for us all' – PM at

Parkinson's reception

I am delighted to welcome you all to Downing Street and to have this opportunity to thank you all for everything you are doing to support this brilliant charity and to lead the way in the fight against Parkinson's.

I think what we have just heard so movingly from Emma and from Steve this evening should be a source of both inspiration and determination for us all.

Inspiration, because we should all be inspired by all that Parkinson's UK has helped to achieve at the forefront as we've heard of pioneering research that has improved our understanding, care and treatment of Parkinson's.

We should be inspired by the immeasurable support that this charity – and so many people in this room – provide to those affected by Parkinson's, as well as to their loved ones and carers.

And I believe we should be inspired too by the achievements of those living with the condition.

People like Emma who, as we have seen tonight, are changing attitudes towards Parkinson's.

And people like the conductor James Morgan – who together with his partner Juliette – have raised more than £270,000 for Parkinson's UK by staging star-studded concerts at the Royal Albert Hall.

These concerts have enabled James to show just how much he can still achieve living with Parkinson's, while at the same time raising vital funds to help others.

And I was delighted earlier to be able to present James and Juliette with a Point of Light award – which recognises outstanding volunteers in our country for their service to others.

But as we draw inspiration from all of these things, so we should also renew our determination to step up the fight against Parkinson's.

For two centuries on from Dr James Parkinson's Essay on the Shaking Palsy, we have simply not done enough or come anywhere near far enough.

We still do not have the capability as Steve has just said to slow or stop the condition in its tracks.

And as Emma and Steve have said so powerfully, the time to act is now.

For our part, this government is investing over £1 billion a year through the National Institute for Health Research – which has doubled its spending on neurological conditions since 2010.

Already Parkinson's UK and the UK research community have achieved a great

deal together.

We have many of the world's top scientists and researchers – and while several great discoveries have been made across the world – it is in the UK that we are joining them up.

We have been steadily building towards a tipping point in Parkinson's research and we must do everything possible to bring that moment to pass.

So I would urge everyone across the country to do all they can to support this effort – and to support the vital work of charities like Parkinson's UK.

So that together we can reach that breakthrough moment and bring forward the day when no-one need fear Parkinson's again.

So on behalf of the whole country, thank you again for all that you are doing in the fight against Parkinson's; thank you for the leadership you are showing in changing attitudes towards Parkinson's, and thank you for all the support that you give to thousands of people across our country.

[Speech: Rona Fairhead promotes UK as a leading Western hub for Islamic finance](#)

Thank you for inviting me here to speak today; I have to say, after 3 weeks of getting lost in the winding corridors of Parliament and Whitehall it's somewhat of a relief to be somewhere I know like the City.

I'm delighted to be standing here today, today is an opportunity, as I see it to speak about 3 things: the extraordinary growth we are witnessing in Islamic Finance the strength of London as a world class financial centre, and how we as government can support you as a business to prosper within the UK and overseas.

I have to say, this historic building could not be more perfect a setting.

A monument to entrepreneurialism Lloyds of London was built on the back of Edward Lloyd selling marine insurance out of a coffee shop in the late 17th Century.

Since then, and for over 300 years London has been the home of international risk.

It is here where investors, with confidence, have taken advantage of a peerless mix of expertise, talent and innovation.

The first marine insurance market in the world, it truly reflects London's status as the epicentre of global free trade.

Islamic Finance, or Takaful, has its own impressive history. Having been practised for around 1,400 years, but has only recently experienced the surge in growth which has forced us in government and you in industry to stand up and really take notice.

And this progress is now shows no sign of slowing.

Islamic finance markets projected to post double-digit growth in the coming years, presenting clear and significant opportunities for investment and further expansion.

Currently worth \$2 trillion in total assets. Sharia compliant assets currently, even at \$2 trillion, make up only 1% of global financial assets. Yet, 25% of the global population is Muslim and it does not take a genius to conclude that this sector has extreme latent potential.

Indeed, the sector is forecast to grow by almost 20% next year.

So turning to London, in my view there is pre-eminent location to build expertise in Islamic financial services and be a foundation for growth for the global Takaful market.

That is why the launch of the Islamic Insurance Association of London in 2015, and the ongoing terrific work that Max [Taylor] and his team are doing, is so important and timely.

Having just had a few minutes with Max, it's very clear what they are focusing on is doing the practical things right to help make it happen.

Their work illustrates that this city is leading rather than following: reinforcing the UK is the Western hub of Islamic finance through innovation and industry.

So my message today is simple. Whilst London leads the way in Europe in the provision of Islamic financial services, we now have an opportunity to be at the vanguard of insurance provision too.

I would urge you to take advantage of the global opportunities in that market, knowing that government we are here wanting to working hand in hand with you in industry, ready to support you.

But I don't want rhetoric to govern your impressions of London as a centre for trade; I want to let the facts to do some of the talking.

I want to point to 3 clear reasons why the UK is perfectly placed to lead the growth in this sector.

Firstly, we are already home to strong bedrock of Islamic financial services expertise. We have over 20 international banks offering specific Islamic finance.

Just to put that in perspective, that is nearly double the number located in the US and we are far ahead of other Western countries.

These institutions themselves are supported by the largest legal services market in Europe, with over 20 law firms, with offices in the UK, supplying legal services tailored to Islamic finance for global and domestic markets.

In 2013, we hosted the World Islamic Economic Forum, the first non-Islamic city to do so.

Soon after, we became the first western nation to issue a sovereign sukuk; and now the London Stock Exchange is the global hub of these bonds, with 65 issues to date totalling in excess of over \$48 billion dollars.

And in the realm of consumer products, there are now over 100,000 Islamic finance customers in the UK, benefiting from Sharia-compliant current accounts, home finance and savings.

And this is just the beginning.

The FCA recently authorised the first Sharia compliant fin-tech company – property investment firm Yielders. And more are set to follow.

London's sky-line is awash with projects that could only have been made possible with Islamic finance.

The iconic Shard, the Olympic Village and the £400 million Malaysian investment into Battersea Power Station are just some of the examples of London's gravitational power when it comes to Islamic investment.

We're already building a reciprocal foothold in the Takaful market, assuming a role as a leading provider of Islamic insurance.

There are plenty of success stories to note here too.

Willis, for example, in conjunction with Cobalt Underwriting, launched the UK's first Sharia compliant commercial real estate insurance solution.

Cobalt Underwriting, in partnership with AIG, have also underwritten the first merger and acquisition insurance in the Middle East region.

And Lloyd's of London's first fully Sharia compliant syndicate is in the process of being launched, thanks to Cobalt Insurance and Capita Managing Agency.

The globalisation of the Takaful industry has only emerged over the past 25 years. But even with its infancy comes opportunity.

The market has already recorded double-digit growth in recent years, with premiums averaging 14% per year growth between 2012 and 2014.

My message here today is that we in government are here to assist.

So far, Whitehall has organised 4 global Islamic Finance and Investment Group

meetings, the second of which was co-hosted by Bank Negara Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur.

These meetings work to identify the key global opportunities but also the barriers facing Islamic finance, and aiming to harness the expertise of the attending foreign ministers, CEOs and central bank governors, to help build an Islamic financial market that supports growth and prosperity.

We are also levelling the regulatory playing field.

London is one of the few jurisdictions in the world where Sharia-compliant financial firms and products are covered by a single, secular regulatory framework.

This development is crucial, because it means everyone in the market is held to one consistent standard, giving all customers the same protections and the same safeguards.

And as a minister at the Department for International Trade, I will use the full force of my department, and indeed government, to ensure the UK remains one of the most open jurisdictions for Sharia-compliant investments in the world.

Global investment continues to flow to the UK because of our strong economic fundamentals, our openness, our expertise, our innovation and our hard work.

We offer low tax, and our low regulation is business friendly. We offer political stability combined with a strong impartial rule of law which inspires commercial trust. We have world class universities and institutions; 22 of our universities have specialist modules focusing on Islamic finance and that's helping us to continue to feed our workforce to keep our economy dynamic and innovative.

For the first time in decades, we now have a dedicated department for international trade to ensure our key sectors, such as financial services, are given the support they need to thrive on the world stage.

I can assure you that DIT and government are here to support you and will place British firms at the heart of our growth.

In financial services this has the potential to create significant economic value for the City.

As you will all know, the UK had the second largest trade surplus in financial services and we will look to see that grow as we strengthen relations with other countries.

I know there will be divisions among you on the effects of Brexit. Some will see it as a new beginning and others will worry about uncertainty and division.

However, I would urge you to take confidence in from the talent that we have here, we are awash with people and institutions of extraordinary capacity and

capability.

We will not be turning our backs on Europe. We want to continue to have the closest possible barrier and tariff free access to the European market, whilst offering the same access to the UK market for firms across the EU 27.

We have been clear that a strict time limited implementation period on current terms is crucial to give businesses as much certainty and time to adapt to the new global landscape.

It is in no-one's interests to create disruption to trade, with barriers erected where none now exist, therefore our ability to collaborate will be key.

We are starting from a unique position of regulatory alignment and our future relationship with the EU, I hope will reflect this.

This means we are in a strong place to achieve an agreement with Europe: igniting new relationship at a point when we have shared the same rules for so long and had huge economic integration.

And so it is important that both the UK and the EU together think creatively about how our future relationship will work and look forward with hope.

Of course with ever challenge and with every change there is opportunity. 90% of future global growth is projected to occur beyond the borders of Europe, we need to continue to look overseas beyond the EU too.

This is why I am confident that London will remain the premier financial centre of the world, with the financial services sector continuing to drive forward our economy.

There is no better place outside of the Muslim world, to access Islamic finance and insurance. The level of our support government and industry support for this burgeoning sector exceeds the comparisons elsewhere. We have in place an incredibly strong foundation, boasting expertise, experience and innovation in Islamic Finance.

London is the most dynamic financial city in the world and for those in this room who are ready to take hold of this exciting growing market, I believe the rewards will be significant.

Thank you.

[**News story: New support for flexible**](#)

working in schools pledged at summit

Education Secretary Justine Greening today (30 October) brought together leading figures from the education sector and the world of business at the first Flexible Working in Schools Summit, which aims to boost support for flexible working in the teaching profession.

Speaking at the ARK All Saints Academy in Camberwell to representatives from the teaching unions, Teach First, and leading businesses including Microsoft and Barclays, the Education Secretary announced new pilot programmes to look at ways of supporting and employing teachers flexibly, and enhancing coaching schemes for women working in education.

Co-chaired by Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, the summit is part of the government's commitment to recruiting and retaining great teachers and tackling the gender pay gap by encouraging employers to support alternative ways of working.

The summit comes days after the Prime Minister called on businesses to improve workplace equality by advertising jobs as flexible unless there are solid business reasons not to.

Education Secretary and Minister for Women and Equalities Justine Greening said:

Teachers are at the heart of our plans to offer all children a world class education. It is important that we recognise there are many great teachers who would welcome a more flexible workplace, whether as parents themselves who want more options on how and when to return to the workplace, or for staff later in their careers who may also want to better combine staying longer in the profession with other interests. Progress on more flexible working is great for schools who can keep their valued teachers and great for teachers who can stay in the profession.

This is already happening in many other sectors – it's vital we ensure it is happening in our schools too so we continue to attract the best and brightest into teaching. And, given this disproportionality affects women, it's a smart way to help close the gender pay gap.

The pledges we have made today show that we are determined to leave no stone unturned to make the best of all of the talent and dedication in the teaching profession.

The government will be working in partnership with the unions and leading organisations from across the education sector to promote flexible working across the profession. The plans announced at today's summit include:

- a pilot programme to look at how schools are already bolstering the careers of part-time teachers, so recruiting best practice can be shared;
- a pilot to strengthen the Women Leading in Education coaching offer, so women can continue to get the professional development support they need; and
- update existing guidance on flexible working, to help make it easier for schools to know what works.

The government is tackling the issue of flexible working as part of its wider plan to ensure schools can recruit and retain the teachers they need. Flexible working can particularly support female employees in the workplace and help to tackle the gender pay gap, which is 18.4 per cent nationally and stands at 4.8 per cent for secondary school staff and 1.9 per cent for primary school and nursery staff. As well as requiring all employers with 250 or more staff to report their gender pay gap and bonus gap, the government has introduced 30 hours free childcare, shared parental leave and support for returners to help tackle the gap.

Alongside these announcements, the government will publish a new myth buster to help answer any questions school leaders may have around recruiting for roles with flexible hours. The need to include more part-time or flexible vacancies will also be considered as part of the proposals for the Teacher Vacancy Service.

Hannah Essex and Claire Walker Directors of Communications at Teach First said:

Flexible working and part-time opportunities for teachers and school leaders has the ability to not only improve their work-life balance, but also has the potential to attract former teachers back into the profession – addressing significant supply problems.

The sector should always be looking for ways to make the profession more attractive by understanding the individual needs of teachers and also understanding the benefits of flexible working, particularly job sharing, to the workplace. This is why at Teach First we will help to develop ideas through our Innovation Series, supporting our community to find new ways to break down the barriers to flexible working in schools.

Dame Alison Peacock chief executive of the Chartered College of Teaching said

It's great to see the Department for Education consulting with the profession about flexible working. I would like to use this opportunity to think about how we can take a much more open and flexible view on teaching careers as a whole.

We need to be more responsive to the needs of teachers throughout their working lives. At the moment we see teaching careers in a

binary way, where you make a lifelong commitment to the profession and are 'in' or 'out'.

But we must start to think about how we facilitate teachers to move into and out of the profession at different points in their lives. We must find ways to keep the door open to those who want to return to teaching, making sure there is adequate support and opportunities for those who want to take a break from teaching. It is only in this way that we can help teachers pause their career, not leave it.

Today's summit follows the Secretary of State's speech at the Teach First conference last month, where she confirmed the 25 areas that would be selected to run a pilot programme to reimburse student loan repayments for modern foreign languages and science teachers in the early years of their careers, as well as two new projects that will receive a share of the £75 million Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund.

Statement to Parliament: International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day 2017: Mark Field's statement

I am delighted to represent the Government in this debate and, along with everyone else, to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing it on such an important occasion. I pay tribute to him and to all the members of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief for their continued strong commitment to promoting this universal human right. We welcome the views of parliamentarians and civil society groups on what more we might do, and we seek to act on those views where possible.

I was going to thank the new boy and the new girl who have made speeches today, but unfortunately the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) has now left the Chamber. Perhaps he took to heart the idea of catching a plane home—he has a slightly longer commute to his constituency than I do, of course. He and the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) made good and heartfelt speeches, as indeed did all Members who contributed.□

To speak slightly personally, I have spent all but four months of my 16 years in this place as a Back Bencher. Although I believe firmly that I must speak today on behalf of the Government, I am also aware, as the Government need to be aware, that we do not have a full majority in the House of Commons. Therefore, the opinions of Parliament in this and many other matters have

increasing importance. I take seriously this sort of debate. In my role as a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister, I will endeavour to pass it on to the high commissions and embassies within my bailiwick, in order to ensure that the concerns expressed by parliamentarians do not just die in the ether or appear on a few pages of Hansard for a particular day, but are given practical effect. I give my word to everyone here that I shall endeavour to do so and to boil down the issues debated, as well as the important report, to make a practical—if not life-changing—day-to-day difference in how our embassies and high commissions operate. I will ensure that the concerns addressed by parliamentarians, not just in this debate but in numerous others, are brought to bear.

To an extent, that has already been done in relation to Burma, as the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) pointed out. As my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford rightly said, more than 600,000 Rohingya have been forced to flee to Bangladesh since 25 August. Parliamentarians' active role has contributed to the UK's continuing leading international position on the matter. The issue is evolving, and I know that frustration has been expressed at various times, not least by the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton, and rightly so; it is her role in opposition to provide a practical sense of concern about the pace of reform.

I spoke about the issue yesterday at a Foreign Affairs Committee hearing. The situation continues to evolve, in diplomatic and political terms. As recently as Monday I was at the United Nations in Geneva to pledge on behalf of UK taxpayers an additional £12 million, bringing to £47 million, or \$62 million, the UK's contribution to the heartfelt international efforts in response to this terrible humanitarian catastrophe, which at the moment is occurring predominantly in Bangladesh. The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton is absolutely right that we are doing all we can to ensure that the displaced can return to Burma, and one hopes that some of the money will be spent to rebuild lives and villages on that side of the border.

That is an example of what is going on; no doubt in three or four months' time there will be other issues for me, as a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister, or one of my colleagues, to deal with. That is why we appreciate the work of the all-party parliamentary group and parliamentarians to raise the temperature of such important issues; it informs and complements our work overseas. I stress that I will, in my own small way as a Minister, take it seriously. If we hear such representations, we will try to ensure that we can act on them in our embassies and high commissions elsewhere.

Tomorrow our posts across the diplomatic network will mark International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day in various ways. I want to mark the occasion by reiterating the Government's commitment to promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief, reflecting on the situation in a number of countries of particular concern and setting out what action the Government are taking on the issue.□

Article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights is the fundamental principle underpinning our work. It defines freedom of religion or belief as

“the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion”.

As a number of hon. Members have pointed out in this debate, the article states that everyone has the right to choose a religion or belief, or to have no religious belief at all. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke earlier this year about her

“determination to stand up for the freedom of people of all religions to practice their beliefs in peace and safety.”

I set out my own personal commitment on this issue when I last spoke on it in a debate in July, and I know that Lord Ahmad, the FCO Minister with responsibility for human rights, regularly expresses sentiments similar to mine, both in the other place and in his engagements in London and overseas. I also know that he was with many Members yesterday in Speaker’s House for the [launch of the APPG’s report](#), which is a genuinely impressive piece of work that will further inform our efforts in this area.

We make those efforts not just because the right to freedom of religion or belief is a principle worth defending for its own sake. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), who said that we also make those efforts because we believe that societies in which people are free to practise their faith or belief are, by their very nature, more stable, more prosperous and more resilient to extremism.

Sadly, however, the situation in a number of countries around the world continues to cause grave concern, and as I have a little more time than I had anticipated I will give some specific examples. The information provided by the Pew Research Centre shows that Christians have been harassed in more countries than any other religious group. The middle east is the cradle of the religion, although obviously it is also the cradle of other religions, namely Islam and Judaism. However, Christians in the middle east are particularly suffering from harassment. In Iraq the Christian population has fallen from over 1 million in 2003 to a current estimate of 250,000. We are also concerned about the plight of Christians in Syria, Burma and a number of other countries.

However, followers of all faiths and religions suffer persecution, as at times do people of no faith, so I will set out what the UK Government are doing in some specific cases. Essentially, our approach is to tackle the issue on two fronts: first, working with and strongly lobbying countries individually; and secondly, working within organisations such as the United Nations.

A recent example of our bilateral approach is our work to defend the rights of Christians in Sudan, and we welcomed the release of several pastors earlier this year. We have also called for the release of the Eritrean Patriarch, Abune Antonios, and we are supporting the rights of many faith groups, including the Baha’i in Iran and, as has already been said, the Rohingya Muslims in Burma. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) made the important point that some Rohingya are actually Hindu and that some have no religion at all, but they too have been persecuted during

these terrible times. What I am saying also applies to [Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia](#) and Shi'a Muslims in several countries, including Saudi Arabia.□

Lord Ahmad recently visited an Ahmadiyya mosque in Dhaka in Bangladesh for a multi-faith gathering, at which he made a call for universal religious tolerance. Most recently, we have expressed concern about proposed amendments to the law in Nepal, which my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford rightly said would restrict religious freedoms. Only last month I had the opportunity to speak about that issue directly with my US counterpart at the UN General Assembly.

As an example of our multilateral work to defend and protect religious freedoms, I draw the House's attention to the UK's leading role in the global efforts to bring ISIS or Daesh to justice. All of us here are only too aware of the absolutely appalling treatment that that paramilitary group has meted out to anyone who does not subscribe to its extremist ideology. That has included religious minorities in Iraq and Syria—Christians and Yazidis—and of course the majority Muslim populations in those countries.

The UK is determined that Daesh will not get away with it. That is important not only in countering extremism, but in defending the right to freedom of religion or belief. We have led the multilateral response to Daesh. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, together with his Belgian and Iraqi counterparts, got the ball rolling last year with a UK-led initiative to bring Daesh to justice. Just last month a new UK-drafted UN resolution, co-sponsored by 46 member states, including Iraq, was [adopted unanimously by the Security Council](#), as Daesh Accountability Resolution 2379. The resolution calls on the UN Secretary General to establish an investigative team to collect, preserve and store evidence of crimes by so-called Islamic State, beginning in Iraq. I know that we will be supported by members of the APPG, who focused on the issue when their report was launched yesterday.

That UN investigative team will be led by a special adviser with a mandate to promote the need to bring ISIS to justice around the globe. We have contributed, as a down-payment, £1 million to support the establishment of the team, to ensure that it is adequately resourced at the outset and that the evidence collected is used to bring the perpetrators to book.

However, our work on promoting freedom of religion or belief goes beyond bilateral or multilateral efforts overseas. We are also now committed to stepping up our engagement with faith leaders here in the UK. That is why Lord Ahmad has established a regular roundtable with a variety of faith leaders and representatives, the first of which he hosted as recently as Monday. The aim of the roundtable is to discuss how the Government and faith leaders can work together to address issues of religious freedom. We want faith groups to play a bigger role in seeking solutions to international crises and to broader international challenges. That international network will be of critical importance. Also, when the Foreign and Commonwealth Office marks International Human Rights Day in December, we will focus particularly on promoting freedom of religion or belief, and on the important role that faith leaders can play in driving that agenda.

We shall continue to support religious freedom and tolerance through our project work under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Magna Carta fund for human rights and democracy. I must confess that I am particularly proud of a project that is helping secondary school teachers in the middle east and north Africa to create lesson plans that promote tolerance and freedom of religion or belief among all their pupils. The project is being implemented by an organisation called Hardwired Inc, which, along with other civil society organisations, is a vital partner in our efforts to make article 18 a reality. I pay tribute to its dedicated work.

We continue to strive to be as effective as possible in promoting freedom of religion or belief. Ensuring that our embassy and high commission staff are properly trained is an essential part of that programme, and I know that the APPG's report rightly highlighted such training. I will continue to look for ways to improve religious literacy among our staff. We already provide a set of resources to support their work, which we will promote more widely to our posts overseas. Earlier this month the FCO launched a new religion and diplomacy course. We will continue to review actively both that course and the feedback it receives from our staff, to ensure that it meets our needs in a fast-changing world.

In addition, my noble Friend Lord Ahmad will write to all our ambassadors and high commissioners tomorrow, reissuing our freedom of religion or belief toolkit and instructing them to give serious consideration to freedom of religious belief in their diplomatic engagement with host Governments. Where there are violations of religious belief, Members can be assured that the FCO and its Ministers are clear that they will be addressed through our diplomacy with international partners.

In partnership with Lord Ahmad, I will also write to the embassies and high commissions in key countries for which I have responsibility, asking them to report on precisely what they are doing to promote freedom of religion or belief. I will ensure that our embassies are aware of the strength of both parliamentary feeling and my own personal feelings on this issue.

As recently as 2011 there were 150,000 Christians in the city of Aleppo in Syria, which is a country I visited in my first term as a Member of Parliament. Now, as far as we can understand, there are fewer than 35,000. Religious persecution has increased in other Muslim countries, such as Pakistan, Sudan and Iran. In Nigeria, 1.8 million people have been displaced by Boko Haram. In India, it has been suggested that the harassment of Christians has increased with the current rise of Hindu nationalism. However, I also take on board what my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East said on that issue, namely that Hindus and Sikhs themselves are under day-to-day threat in parts of the subcontinent. In China there are now no fewer than 127 million Christians, which I fear has upset the authorities there, who see Christianity as some form of foreign infiltration and seek to Sinicise it in some way.

I will now take the opportunity to address one or two issues that were specifically raised by a number of Members. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford that there are concerns that some provisions of the new

penal code in Nepal may be constructed to limit the freedom to adapt, change or practise a religion. I have already raised those concerns with the Government of Nepal and will continue to do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) mentioned Egypt, which is a human rights priority country. Her Majesty's Government have been clear that freedom of religion or belief needs to be actively protected. The Government of Egypt have stated their commitment to protecting the rights of minorities and the need for religious tolerance. We regularly raise concerns with the Egyptian Government about the deteriorating human rights situation, including issues that affect Christians. The Coptic Christian community is made up of 8 million to 9 million people and has been around as long as any other Christian group, but there are great fears for its future, and certainly for its future stability.

May I take this opportunity to apologise to the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day), who has not yet received a response to his letter on behalf of his constituent from 25 August? I will endeavour to find out where the letter has gone in the system. He made some interesting comments about the apostasy issue. I will contact the Home Office to request that it finds a way to include such cases within the hate crime statistics, if that is at all possible. I will get back to him when I have a reply.

There was a slightly discordant shot from the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) on genocide. Genocide is strictly a legal term. Whether a parliamentary motion or Ministers refer to it as genocide is neither here nor there; it is strictly a legal term. With what has been happening in Burma and various other parts of the world, it is clear that a process has to be gone through in the UN and finally in the International Criminal Court before a genocide can be proven.

I want to reassure those Members who raised the issue of funding. All DFID's support to Governments involves discussions on human rights, and we will continue to give serious consideration to adopting recommendations 1 and 2 from the report to take account of DFID and FCO funding streams. I do not want to commit my Department on the Floor of the House without it having had a proper look through all the recommendations. To be brutally honest, many of them relate to issues that we already address on a day-to-day basis, but we will give the report serious consideration. Once we have had a chance to look through all the recommendations, I will get back to the shadow Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford to say which ones we are in a position fully to adopt and what action we would look to take elsewhere.

In conclusion, the Government believe strongly that whole societies benefit when the fundamental rights of all their citizens are respected and protected. That includes the right to religious freedom or belief, or to have no religion at all. That is why we will continue to work with individual countries, with the international community and with faith leaders and civil society organisations to promote and defend this fundamental right. The UK Government's position is to remain absolutely committed to promoting freedom of religion or belief as enshrined in article 18 of the international covenant on civil and political rights, supported by article 2 on non-

discrimination and article 26 on access to justice. I think I speak for everyone who has contributed to this important debate when I say this: only when these universal rights are universally respected can there be religious freedom for everyone, everywhere.