

## Christians in the UK are being persecuted - MP



Christian MP David Simpson has raised his concern over the treatment of Christians in the United Kingdom and around the world in a debate in the House of Commons this week.

The DUP politician told ministers that if they wanted to see instances of Christian persecution they need not go to other countries but “simply look to our own back door”.

“In the United Kingdom, the policy seems to be that people can do whatever they like against Christianity – criticise it or blaspheme the name of Christ – as long as they do not insult Islam,” he said.

“It is sad because this country is based on civil and religious liberty for all. When Queen Victoria was on the throne, the secret behind England’s greatness was its open scriptures and open Bible.

“Today, that policy is being hammered into the ground, and that concerns me greatly for the years and months that lie ahead.”

The Commons debate follows the case of a Christian driver who was told to remove a small cross from the dashboard of his company van over concerns that it would offend people of other faiths, even though the company, Wakefield District Housing, allows a Muslim employee to display a verse from the Koran in her company car.

WDH launched an investigation into Colin Atkinson after he refused to remove the cross but backed down after media reports prompted outcry against the action.

Mr Simpson spoke of his concern over the proliferation of violent attacks on Christians in other parts of the world.

He pointed particularly to “wave upon wave” of violent attacks against Christians in Nigeria, where hundreds have been killed in post-election violence, and Pakistan, where the blasphemy laws continue to be used by Muslims to justify attacks against Christians.

In many parts of the Middle East, meanwhile, evangelism and conversion are prohibited, he noted.

Mr Simpson warned of the “inherent dangers” accompanying the Arab Spring, as groups seek to exploit the recent uprisings and establish a purist society “in which the plight of religious groups will be made worse”.

He echoed concerns that democracy will fail in the Arab world unless the G8 provides adequate financial support to democratic players.

He said Britain had a responsibility to use its influence to help establish democracy in places like Egypt and Tunisia.

“Although the current situation for Christians in many Middle East countries is difficult, it could become increasingly dangerous in the coming months and years,” he said.

“We, as a Parliament and a nation, should not be like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan and simply pass by on the other side.”

As important trading partners and recipients of British aid, Mr Simpson said the Government should not respond to the human rights situation in many Arab nations with “silence”.

“I urge the Government not simply to chase the financial bottom line in our dealings with neighbours and partners,” he said.

“As one of the great economies of the world and one of the beacons of democratic freedom, we have a duty to use all of our influence to help those who suffer injustice around the world.

“There is a rising tide of affliction that is swelling around Christians across the world. This nation and this Parliament should be more to the fore in the campaign against that and for civil and religious liberty. I urge the Government and all hon. Members to rise to that challenge.”

Tory MP Tony Baldry agreed that the Government should set out clear benchmarks for progress on religious freedom in its bilateral and multilateral dialogue with other states.

“Pakistan will soon be the largest recipient of UK bilateral development aid, which legitimately gives us some leverage in our dealings with it. We should continue to make representations in the strongest and most forceful way about the impact that its blasphemy law is having on its people,” he said.

Mr Baldry is due to meet Christians in Cairo, Egypt in the coming days, where the Christian community is still reeling from deadly attacks by Muslims in recent weeks.

“It is not only Egypt that is affected,” he said. “The tragedy is that Christianity in the Middle East is on

the slide.

“Indeed, it is not just sliding into obscurity; it is almost in danger of being extinguished in many countries, such as Iran and Iraq.

“About 50 years ago, this was a part of the world where Jews, Muslims and Christians lived side by side.

“Now, for various reasons, it is extremely difficult for Christians to profess their faith in many Middle East countries.”

Jim Shannon, also of the DUP, said there was a tendency to become “desensitised” to the plight of others but urged people to remember victims of persecution and help them practically and prayerfully.

“We must listen, be stirred by what we have heard, then do all we can to help,” he said.

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