

MPs put pressure on David Cameron to recognise Christian 'genocide' in the Middle East



Senior British politicians have put pressure on David Cameron with a letter urging that the UK joins other nation states in recognising the persecution of Christians in the Middle East as “genocide”.

Last week the Lithuanian parliament became the first EU state to recognise legally that religious genocide is occurring across the Middle East, particularly in Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and northern Africa.

Now 66 UK MPs and members of the House of Lords have written to the UK prime minister urging that the British Government “use all the influence of Her Majesty’s Government at the United Nations to obtain an agreement that the word 'genocide' should be used” in relation to the atrocities being committed in Iraq and Syria.

They cite evidence of assassinations by Isis of Church leaders; mass murders; torture, kidnapping for ransom in the Christian communities of Iraq and Syria; sexual enslavement and systematic rape of Christian girls and women; forcible conversions to Islam; destruction of churches, monasteries, cemeteries, and Christian artefacts; and theft of lands and wealth from Christian clergy and laity.

Defining the atrocities as “genocide” would require the United Nations and the 127 signatory nations to act to implement the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide which defines genocide as a systematic killing or seriously harming of people because they are part of a recognisable group. That group may be “national, ethnic, racial or religious” and the treaty identifies “acts committed with intent to destroy [that group] in whole or in part.”

Rob Ffello MP (Labour, Stoke on Trent South), one of the lead signatories of the letter says: “Daesh [Isis] are an evil cult who have unleashed a tide of death on Christians and other minority religions in the areas where they have seized control. We must send a clear and unequivocal message to them that

eventually they will be held to account by the international community for their atrocities. We hope the Prime Minister will now act swiftly to encourage the United Nations to describe these killings as the orchestrated genocide they are.”

Former Liberal Party and Liberal Democrat MP and Roman Catholic Lord Alton of Liverpool, said: “If beheadings, crucifixions, enslavement, rape, the seizure of homes and property, and mass graves, does not constitute genocide it is hard to imagine what does.

“The deliberate targeting of people because of their ethnicity or religion is precisely what constitutes genocide and that is precisely what has happened to Yazidis and Christians. Under international law, the failure of Governments and political leaders to name this as genocide is a serious dereliction of their duty.”

The 66 signatories are from all faiths and none are drawn from both Houses of Parliament, all political parties and include three Anglican Bishops, a former Director General of the Security Services Management Board [Lord Evans], a former Chief of the Defence Staff [Lord Guthrie], professors and senior lawyers.

The letter’s organiser, Chris Whitehouse, Secretary of the Catholic Legislators’ Network, added: “One word, genocide, is all it takes this Christmas to send a powerful message to evil-doers of ISIS that they will be caught, tried and punished. It would force the 127 nations that are signatories to the Convention to act to “prevent and punish” the perpetrators of these evil acts”.

Sean Smith - The Tablet