



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

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Caroline Lucas MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Ms Lucas,

Thank you for your letter of 23 July to Baroness Warsi, about the situation of minority groups in Iraq. I am replying as the Minister responsible for our relations with Iraq.

The UK Government remains very concerned by the threat from the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), which is seeking to stoke sectarian conflict across the Middle East. ISIL's violence and brutality is a threat to Iraq and the wider region, as well as the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister issued a statement on 8 August condemning ISIL attacks in Iraq, and highlighting the developing humanitarian crisis of those who have fled their homes. On 1 September, he restated to Parliament that the UK will continue to support US airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq. UK Ministers and senior officials have also been clear in condemning the barbaric acts carried out by ISIL.

Since the most recent round of violence began in June, more than 1.5 million people have been displaced across Northern Iraq. The United Nations has now declared the situation as the highest level of humanitarian emergency.

Our position is that Iraq's leaders must show unity, and put aside their differences to focus on the security threat. Moderate forces from all communities need to be brought together to stand up to the extremist threat. The vast majority of Iraqis want to build a safer and more prosperous country, and do not want to return to the violence of the past.

The UK response is focussed on four objectives:

- Alleviating the immediate humanitarian suffering of the victims of ISIL: The UK has already provided £23 million in immediate assistance, to provide clean water and sanitation, essential medicine and funding for NGOs and charities. Some of this has been sent as humanitarian airdrops, including 80 tonnes dropped to refugees trapped on Mount Sinjar. It has also been used to provide technical assistance and supplies.
- Assisting Kurdish forces to push back ISIL: by providing equipment, such as night vision equipment, and which may in the future include weaponry and ammunition. We will continue working closely with our European partners and co-operating with our international partners on intelligence and counter-terrorism. The Prime Minister has made it clear that the UK has no intention

of providing British combat troops to intervene in this conflict but we will consider how the UK can support the Iraqi Security Forces in tackling ISIL.

- Promoting an inclusive, sovereign and democratic Iraq. We are supporting Iraq's Prime Minister-designate, Dr Haider al-Abadi, in establishing an inclusive government that can win the confidence of all Iraq's communities.
- Working internationally to disrupt ISIL and other terrorist groups. Under our Presidency in August, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution 2170 condemning and taking action against ISIL, Al-Nusra Front (ANF) and other groups in Iraq and Syria. This will restrict ISIL's financial and trade network as well as sanctioning individuals. We are also supporting a Special Session at the Human Rights Council to focus on ISIL's abuses and crimes.

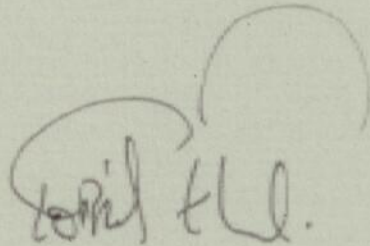
We continue to speak directly to the Iraqi Government on the situation.

In late August, I travelled to Iraq to urge the Iraqi government to protect all communities, and to deal appropriately with those who are found responsible for any acts of violence and intimidation because of political, ethnic or religious affiliation. The UK remains resolute that all perpetrators should be held to account.

During my visit, I pressed the Prime Minister-designate Haider Al-Abadi to ensure his new government in Iraq would ensure the protection of all minorities, promote human rights and reassert the rule of law. I also met with leaders of the Syriac Orthodox Church, the church to which many Iraqi Christians belong, making a statement strongly condemning the persecution that Iraq's religious minorities have suffered.

In support of international diplomatic efforts, the UK has appointed a UK Special representative to the Kurdistan Regional Government and we will use the NATO summit in Wales to further rally international support. Internationally, we will continue to lead efforts to tackle ISIL and help Iraq overcome the challenges it faces.

In the UK, we will take uncompromising action against those who recruit, promote and support ISIL. We are putting measures in place to monitor individuals posing significant risks and working to combat radicalisation of your Muslims in this country under the Prevent strategy. The UK proscribed ISIL as a terrorist organisation on 20 June, which means that membership in the UK is now a criminal offence. New legislation is also being considered to tackle the threat from British extremists in Iraq and Syria returning to the UK.



TOBIAS ELLWOOD MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State