

3rd February 2016

House of Lords

Debate on Genocide against Christians and Yazidis***Amendment 234A****Moved by Lord Alton of Liverpool***234A:** After Clause 38, insert the following new Clause—

“Conditions for grant of asylum: cases of genocide

(1) A person seeking asylum in the United Kingdom who belongs to a national, ethnical, racial or religious group which is, in the place from which that person originates, subject to the conditions detailed in Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, shall be presumed to meet the conditions for asylum in the United Kingdom.

(2) The adjudication of whether the group to which the person seeking asylum belongs meets the description specified in subsection (1) shall be determined by a Justice of the Supreme Court after consideration of the available facts.

(3) Applicants for asylum in the United Kingdom from groups designated under this section may submit their applications and have them assessed at British missions overseas.”

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, in moving the amendment, I thank those noble Lords, from all sides of your Lordships’ House, who encouraged me to table it, and especially the co-signatories, my noble friend Lady Cox, the noble Baroness, Lady Nicholson of Winterbourne, and the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth of Drumlean. The amendment provides a presumption that a person will be granted asylum when a judge of the Supreme Court has determined that a group to which that person belongs is, in the place from which that person originates, subject to genocide. The presumption will operate in the UK but, in addition, applicants would be able to apply at British consular posts overseas. Genocide is defined in Article 2 of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as follows:

“In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group”.

Just one week ago, in Strasbourg, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution condemning the actions of Daesh/ISIS in the Middle East as genocide. The resolution, “Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”, states that ISIS,

“has perpetrated acts of genocide and other serious crimes punishable under international law”.

The resolution unequivocally states that the actions that ISIS has committed are genocide, and was passed by 117 votes for and just one against. While we have been considering Day 4 of the Committee stage of this Bill, the European Parliament has been debating and will, tomorrow, vote on a similar resolution to that of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, identifying the plight of minorities such as Yazidis and Christians as genocide. This is a view also shared by 75 Members of your Lordships’ House and another place, who wrote to the Prime Minister just before Christmas urging her Majesty’s Government to declare events in Syria and Iraq as a genocide. In that December letter to the Prime Minister, the signatories said:

“There is no doubt in our minds that the targeting of Christians and other religious minorities by Daesh falls within that definition”.

Signatories include the former chief of staff, the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Guthrie, and the former head of MI5, the noble Lord, Lord Evans. The letter urges the British Government to seek agreement at the United Nations that we should name things for what they are. The letter insisted:

“This is not simply a matter of semantics. There would be two main benefits from the acceptance by the UN that genocide is being perpetrated”.

The first is that those responsible would one day face a day of judicial reckoning, and the second is that it would require the 147 states who have signed the convention to step up to the plate and,

“face up to their duty to take the necessary action to ‘prevent and punish’ the perpetrators”.

There is now clear evidence that this genocide includes assassinations of church leaders, mass murders, torture, kidnapping for ransom, the sexual enslavement and systematic rape of Christian girls and women, forcible conversions, the destruction of churches, monasteries, cemeteries and Christian artefacts and theft of lands and wealth from Christian clergy and laity alike. The caliphate has made public statements taking credit for the mass murder of Christians and expressing its intent to eliminate these minority communities and other groups, such as homosexuals, from its territory.

The Government response thus far seeks to avoid the duty set out in the convention stating:

“It is a long-standing Government policy that any judgements on whether genocide has occurred are a matter for the international judicial system rather than governments or other non-judicial bodies”.

This is a frustrating and circular argument. Which international courts and judges should decide, on the basis of what process and in considering what evidence? What steps are the Government actually taking to ensure that those courts do indeed urgently consider the matter and reach a conclusion? On 16 December in Parliamentary Answer HL4327, the noble Baroness, Lady Anelay of St Johns said:

“We are not submitting any evidence of possible genocide against Yazidis and Christians to international courts, nor have we been asked to”.

As for referring this matter to the International Criminal court she told me:

“I understand that, as the matter stands, Fatou Bensouda, the chief prosecutor, has determined not to take these matters forward”.—[*Official Report*, 16/12/15; col. 2146.]

If no one is willing to name this for what it is or to take this forward then the genocide convention becomes nothing more than window dressing and is an insult to the intention of the original drafters and ratifiers as “never again” inevitably repeats itself over and over again.

Meanwhile, people are being ruthlessly targeted, and so is their culture and history. Last week, we learned that ISIS has obliterated Mosul’s ancient, stone-walled monastery of St Elijah, dating from the sixth century, where monks had etched “chi rho”, the first Greek letters of the word “Kristos”. This attempt to eradicate memory has been accompanied by the

obliteration of those whose beliefs do not comply with theirs. Last year, 200 Assyrian Christians in the Khabour river valley were kidnapped and jihadi websites showed graphic executions of some of the group, warning that others would be executed if the ransoms remained unpaid. Last August, the ancient Saint Eliane monastery in central Syria, which was founded more than 1,500 years ago, was destroyed by ISIS and dozens of Syriac Christians were abducted. Last year, a UN report said that ISIS continues,

“to deliberately and wantonly loot and destroy places of religious and cultural significance ... which ISIS considers as un-Islamic. Generally, these sites are looted before being destroyed”.

Along with the Yazidi community, Christians have been told to convert or die. Children have been seized, propagandised and indoctrinated with jihadist ideology. That UN report warns that the situation continues to deteriorate, saying:

"UNAMI/OHCHR continues to have grave concerns for the welfare and safety of those held in ISIL captivity”.

The United Nations report states that that ISIS is holding 3,500 slaves hostage, mainly women and children. It said that ISIS has committed acts that,

“amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and possibly genocide”,

against minority groups, and that ISIS’s “systematic and widespread violence”, including beheadings, shootings and burnings, was “staggering”. Mass graves honeycomb part of the region. In a recent Parliamentary Answer HL4065, the noble Baroness, Lady Anelay, told me:

“We are aware of reports that mass graves have been discovered ... at least one of which was allegedly booby trapped by Daesh”.

Murder is accompanied by other horrors. An estimated 5,000 young Yazidi women and girls have been abducted by ISIS, suffering horrific and prolonged sexual abuse. They were imprisoned for months on end, beaten, burnt and exposed to daily rape and torture. Horrifyingly, some of those victims were as young as nine. Sadly, some girls have taken their own lives in desperate attempts to escape the horrors of captivity.

10 pm

A few weeks ago I chaired a meeting here that was attended by the Archbishop of Aleppo. We were told how, in a village outside Aleppo, ISIS cut the tops off the fingers of a 14 year-old boy because his Christian father refused to convert. They then crucified the boy and killed the father. At a meeting organised by the noble Baroness, Lady Nicholson, a former Yazidi MP, speaking here, said that she could not understand why the West had not declared these

events a genocide and why we had remained silent. Hillary Clinton says that although she was reluctant to use the term “genocide” a few months ago to describe the IS atrocities, there is now “enough evidence” for her to use that word to denounce the murders of religious minorities by the jihadi group. Mrs Clinton said:

“What is happening is genocide, deliberately aimed at destroying not only the lives but wiping out the existence of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East in territory controlled by ISIS”.

The amendment is designed to focus the debate, rouse our consciences and provide some practical help. I heard yesterday from Assyrian Christians who had been told that it may take up to six years to process their asylum applications. Many Christian refugees in Lebanon are not even registered with UNHCR, too fearful even to go into the camps. In the context of continuing threats to their security, impoverishment, lack of access to work or schooling and no hope of a home, these delays are undoubtedly contributing to the decision of many to undertake the hazardous journeys that we have been discussing during our proceedings, and undoubtedly many more will follow in their footsteps. Given that the Weidenfeld Fund, Mercury One and Operation Safe Havens are able to process applications and do the necessary security clearances—to a higher standard than UNHCR—in a matter of weeks, such delays are completely unacceptable. The late Lord Weidenfeld’s decision to create a special fund to assist Syrian Christians should inspire us all to do more. Although the noble Lord, Lord Bates, said in a Parliamentary Answer to me only yesterday:

“We recognise the plight faced by vulnerable women and girls in the region, and particularly Yazidi women who have escaped following enslavement by ISIS”,

and although the Government detail the significant sums of money that they provide for humanitarian relief, the reality is that Yazidis and Assyrian Christians have simply not been prioritised.

I urge the Government to collect the evidence—the names; the dates; the photographs of atrocities; the numbers killed, tortured, abducted or sold into sexual slavery; the accounts of forced conversions; the churches, shrines and manuscripts destroyed—and to trigger the process of bringing the perpetrators to justice and to name this for what it is. Words matter. History proves that once the word “genocide” is used to designate heinous and targeted crimes against sections of humanity, as in Yugoslavia or Cambodia, it is followed by swift international action to stop those atrocities. The Khmer Rouge prosecution continues and includes charges of genocide against the Cham and Vietnamese people, so there are precedents.

The amendment would ask a Justice of the Supreme Court to examine the evidence and make a determination. It would provide a process and duty to act. It would then ensure that victims of genocide were given priority in asylum applications. This is not about numbers, nor about those who threaten the security and ideals for which this country stands. Many suffer, but this

is about those who have been singled out and our duty under the genocide convention to protect them. I commend the amendment to the Committee, and I beg to move.

Baroness Cox (CB): My Lords, I support the amendment, to which I am a signatory. Last week, my noble friend Lord Alton and I presided over a hearing here in Parliament, where we heard graphic accounts of genocide and crimes against humanity from Yazidis and Christians from Syria and Iraq. Their first-hand testimonies were accompanied by supporting statements from relief organisations and charities working with these beleaguered communities, including Canon Andrew White, the courageous Anglican vicar of Baghdad.

Some 100 years after the Armenian genocide, these contemporary events are a continuation of a systematic campaign of annihilation which was planned by one caliphate, abolished in 1924 by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey but continued by another caliphate under the guise of the Islamic State—Daesh—today. Mass graves, beheadings, rapes, forced conversions, lootings and confiscation of property, are, sadly, nothing new. Nor is our failure to respond adequately to acutely vulnerable minorities. This amendment is not about the misplaced free-for-all mistakenly promoted by Germany and now being urgently reassessed: nor is it about quotas or the unseemly bidding war about how many people any particular country has taken. Instead, the amendment focuses on a particularly vulnerable group of people now being subjected to genocide and argues that their asylum claims should be prioritised. Our first priority should always be those who have been singled out because of their religion, ethnicity or race. Although many people have been caught up in this suffering, we have particular obligations, as my noble friend highlighted, under the provisions of the Genocide Convention, to these minority groups. We also know that those who have been targeted do not represent a security threat to the United Kingdom and that, unlike for other categories of people, there are no countries in the region where they will be secure in the long term. They have nowhere to go.

In November I and my noble friend wrote to the Prime Minister, urging him to give priority to the most vulnerable—these minorities and children. We welcomed his decision to take vulnerable groups from holding countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, but we also pointed out that many of those fleeing from genocide have been too frightened to enter the camps and were living in informal settings, often without any help being given by UN agencies. In December, I was also a signatory to the letter sent to the Prime Minister—which my noble friend referred to—signed by 75 parliamentarians from both Houses and all sides, urging Her Majesty's Government to name this genocide for what it is. So far, HMG have failed to do so—but, last week, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe declared that the treatment of Christians and Yazidis is indeed genocide.

Our colleagues in the House of Commons have been equally clear. I share with the House the wording of the all-party Motion tabled last week by a group of MPs in another place, which stated that,

“this House is appalled by the beheadings, crucifixions, shootings, burnings, other murders, torture, rape and

extensive violence being perpetrated by Daesh or IS against Christians and other minorities in Syria and Iraq on the basis of religion and ethnicity; observes that this disgusting behaviour clearly falls within the definition of genocide as determined by the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide; notes the recent report from the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq*, which concludes that Daesh is holding approximately 3,500 slaves, mostly women and children in Iraq, primarily from the Yazidi community, and describes Daesh's systematic and widespread violence as staggering, concluding that these acts amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and possibly genocide; and calls on the Government to use all its influence at the UN to create a stated consensus that genocide is indeed being perpetrated so that the provisions of the Convention can urgently, legitimately and effectively be invoked and implemented".

We should commend our colleagues, such as Mrs Fiona Bruce MP, the chair of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, who tabled that Motion, and we should give legislative force to an appropriate response to those who are suffering so grievously. This is urgent, as Christianity and ancient religions such as Yazidism are being wiped out in the Middle East.

Last week's hearing took place on Holocaust Memorial Day. Among those who participated was Major General Tim Cross. He has said:

"Crucially, the various minorities in the region are suffering terribly. There can be no doubt that genocide is being carried out on Yazidi and Christian communities—and the West/international community's failure to recognise what is happening will be to our collective shame in years to come".

He also pointed to the irony that while we are neglecting our duty to protect these minorities we have been opening the door to others who may threaten the very fabric of our society.

Major General Cross quoted the Lebanese Prime Minister, who told David Cameron that he believed that for every 1,000 migrants entering Europe illegally there are at least two extremists—inner-core jihadis—which means that around 16,000 IS fighters have probably entered Europe over the last year or so. While we have been doing this, we have failed to protect those to whom we have a specific duty under international law. Major General Cross said:

"Our dilemma is how we separate 'values' and 'interests'".

This amendment offers us the opportunity to uphold our values, especially our belief in the rule of law, while also protecting our interests.

If we are not prepared to respond to the victims of genocide, we must seriously ask whether we should remove our signature from the 1948 convention on the prevention and punishment of genocide. What is the point of being a signatory if we are not prepared to accept the obligation—to see, to judge and to act? If we do not take such obligations seriously, as the amendment urges us to do, it fundamentally undermines that convention.

To remind noble Lords of what our obligations are, the convention makes it clear that genocide is not a random killing of individuals but a systematic killing or serious harming of people because they are part of a recognisable group. That group may be,

“national, ethnical, racial or religious”.

The treaty identifies acts committed with intent to destroy that group,

“in whole or in part”.

The convention also covers within the term “genocide” a range of other acts already highlighted by my noble friend.

In short, international law is clear and undeniably covers the many horrors unleashed by ISIL/Daesh in the Middle East—and, I may point out, by Islamist extremists in other countries, including several African states such as northern Nigeria and Sudan, both of which I have visited in the last two months and where I saw comparable horrors and atrocities perpetrated.

If an international law, defined by treaty, is being flouted, and if hundreds of thousands of innocent people who are entitled to rely on the protection of that law are being killed, and millions are being driven from their homes, it is absolutely incumbent on the signatories to that treaty to take action to ensure that it is enforced. Sadly, however, to date the issue has not been high on the agenda of the leaders of more than 100 nations that are signatories to that convention.

The convention is specific. The signatory nations may honour their commitments either by acting alone or by calling on the United Nations to prevent and punish genocide. That provision is hugely important in sending a clear message to the perpetrators of these dreadful acts: it warns them that they will be punished. So how can officials argue and give ambiguous replies that we can do nothing until others act? From the Nuremberg trials of the Nazi leaders after the Second World War to the more recent trials for genocide perpetrated in Rwanda and Bosnia, a very clear message should go out to all those involved in these evil movements of genocide. The message should be: the international community will, sooner or later, come for you. You will be found, you will be captured, you will be tried in accordance with the convention and you will be punished proportionately to your offence. And, as this amendment insists most importantly, we will care for those whom you target in these unspeakable ways.

I urge our Prime Minister and our Foreign Secretary to utter that one word, “genocide”. By using it in relation to the carnage befalling the Christians, Yazidis and other minorities in the

Middle East, Her Majesty's Government would be sending a clear message to ISIS and other groups that there will be a reckoning for their despicable actions.

In conclusion, Britain punches far above its weight in world diplomacy and international relations. We must ask our Government to have the courage to speak the right word to the international community and to follow the word with appropriate deeds. This amendment is an opportunity for us to do just that. At the very minimum, I hope that the Minister will undertake to go back to the Home Secretary and other ministerial colleagues and weigh these arguments with great care between now and Report.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con): My Lords, I apologise for not having taken part in any of the proceedings on this legislation. Quarter past 10 at night in the middle of the week seems, perhaps, not the best moment to set forth on this matter. However, I am ashamed to say that until I was briefed by a friend, Mr Graham Hutton, chairman of the Aid to the Church in Need, about the position of Christians in Syria and Iraq, I was wholly ignorant of the extent of the atrocities that are occurring.

10.15 pm

I do not wish to detain the House by repeating examples that have been given by the noble Lord, Lord Alton, and the noble Baroness, Lady Cox. Both of them are held in the highest regard in this House but, if I may say so, particularly the noble Baroness, who seems to put herself in harm's way on behalf of people in trouble all over the world and to provide us with an authoritative account. So I say to my noble friend the Minister: throw away the brief from the Home Office and go back to the department and tell it what has been said this evening. I am certain that, despite the media coverage and the information that is available, people in this country have no idea of the extent of the horrors that are being perpetrated against Christians.

In Syria, 56% of Christians have left during this conflict. The point about them is that they are not just fleeing civil war, they are fleeing persecution, and there is nowhere for them to flee to. If they go to the UN camps, they find themselves in fear and in danger because they are a minority there and subject to persecution. If they do not go to the official camps, they are not eligible under the Prime Minister's programme to be brought to this country. So they have no place to go and wherever they go they live in fear. The magnitude of this catastrophe is enormous. I am told that, prior to 2003, there were 60,000 Christians in Mosul, and now there is none. The noble Lord, Lord Alton, has described the appalling atrocities that are going on day after day to people, including women and children, simply because they are Christians.

I do not wish to repeat the arguments about the 1948 convention on the prevention and punishment of genocide, except to say that it does say that genocide is the systematic killing or serious harming of people because they are part of a recognisable group. These people are being persecuted because they are Christians, and that is a recognised group. As has been

pointed out, the importance of designating this as genocide is that it will enable us to take action and give these people sanctuary quickly and effectively as they need it.

I am told there are people who say that we cannot be seen to be discriminating in favour of Christians. Why not? This is a Christian country, and these people are in trouble because they are being discriminated against because of their religion. I say to the Minister that the plight we have heard of this evening is of fellow Christians, some of whom speak in the language of our saviour and who have been there since the birth of Christ himself. They are being driven out of their lands and horribly persecuted. We should not pass by on the other side. If it is impossible for the Government to adopt the suggestions contained in this amendment of recognising genocide for what it is, then at the very least they need to come up with some ideas as to how a safe haven can be provided for those Christians and how they can be helped by us, a Christian country with a historic record of being there for those in need.

When I studied history at university, I could never really understand how it was that the Nazi persecution of the Jews was allowed to go on for so long and that people were either unaware or unwilling to take action. In those days, there was at least the excuse that people might not know because communications were difficult. We know what is going on in Syria and Iraq daily, from the internet and the videos and the information provided. Even at this late hour, I hope that the Minister will take on board what has been said on this amendment and, if he cannot accept the amendment, that the Government will take some effective and urgent action to deal with those Christians, our brothers and sisters, in Syria and Iraq.

Lord Dubs (Lab): My Lords, anyone who went to any of the events connected with Holocaust Memorial Day just a few days ago will know that people said in 1945, “Never again”. Then we had serious tragedies and genocides in Bosnia, South Sudan and elsewhere. We keep saying that it must never happen again but it still does. I found the arguments put by the three Members of the Committee who have spoken to the amendment very powerful. They are in the spirit of the commitments made on Holocaust Memorial Day—“Never again”. They are saying that because it is still happening we have to do something about the victims. I very much support the amendment.

Lord Marlesford (Con): My Lords, the Government should be rather ashamed that this debate is necessary. It has taken the whole consideration of the Bill on to a different plane from all the other amendments that I have listened to. It is so terrible that so-called diplomacy should be unable to do what is right. I have been deeply shocked that the Government, in being asked to give priority to Christians among the 20,000 Syrians who we are to admit during this Parliament as refugees, have said that they cannot do so because they cannot discriminate. The whole concept of refugees and asylum is discrimination. It is giving succour to those who need succour. I will go no further except to say that if the amendment were to come back to the House at Report and the Government resist it, they would be overwhelmingly and humiliatingly defeated.

Lord Judd (Lab): My Lords, apart from all the powerful arguments of support that have been put forward, the speech by the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, is one that we must all take particularly seriously. No one in this House has put their own life more on the line on issues of this kind than she has, and she has consistently done that with great courage. When she comes to us and says, “Please take this one step that would help, in terms of all that I have experienced”, we must take that seriously. I also feel very deeply that there is a real crisis in credibility with populations across the world. Governments speak with great rhetoric about these issues, but sometimes fail to provide the practical evidence that that rhetoric adds up to anything. Here is a chance to demonstrate that we mean what we say.

Baroness Hamwee: My Lords, from these Benches I support the amendment. When I first started going to ceremonies to mark Holocaust Memorial Day, what struck me most were the current examples that were used and of which we were reminded. Each year a theme is chosen and it is salutary to realise how topical those themes are. This is topical. There are many groups of people who are the subject of the treatment which has been described, and it has been notable during debate on this Bill how many noble Lords have referred to the experiences of their families. We may not be directly related to the people who are in such a situation, but as noble Lords have pointed out, we are all part of that one family.

Lord Wigley (PC): My Lords, I had not intended to intervene in this debate either, but having listened to the noble Lords, Lord Alton and Lord Forsyth, and others, I cannot help but raise a voice on behalf of the Christian community. We are to a greater or lesser extent Christians in this country. We may not be very good Christians, but the idea that we cannot intervene on behalf of a Christian community because we might be discriminating strikes me as being absolutely unacceptable and appalling. I hope that the Government will take close notice of that and think about this serious issue.

Lord Bates: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Alton, for his moving speech. He spoke with his typical passion, and the way he presented the arguments and the accounts he gave have certainly had a great effect on me. I think that he has done a great service to the Committee by drawing the plight of Christians in the Middle East to our attention. My noble friend Lord Forsyth invited me to tear up my speech before he had actually had an opportunity to hear it, and of course he invited me to do it while I am currently enjoying the privilege of the company of the Chief Whip, who perhaps is little worried that I might take my noble friend’s advice.

I feel very strongly about this. We cannot be anything other than moved by the brutality and evil that we are seeing unleashed in the Middle East by Daesh. I have seen something of the situation for myself on a personal visit to Zahlé, which is the capital city of the Bekaa Valley

and a Christian community. I am acutely aware of the pressures to which people are subject out there. However, I cannot accept that this Government are not doing everything they can; we are leading the way. We are in the week—tomorrow, I think—when the Prime Minister will host a conference on Syria here in London, just across the way. He will urge other people to step up to the mark. A DfID report pointed out that Britain is paying more than its fair share. It recognised that we are paying 226% of our international obligation in terms of cash to support people in the region. We are hosting the event and acting diplomatically by urging for a solution to the crisis, and of course we are also acting militarily in the region.

We need to put on the record some of these points because I think some myths are arising within the Christian community, and I say this very carefully as a member of that community. Some myths are emerging about where the discrimination occurs. We are not saying that Christians will not be considered but that they will be considered on an individual basis, and the criteria we are looking at, particularly within the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement scheme, include women and girls at risk, those in need of serious medical care, and the survivors of torture and violence. Of course, in all the accounts we have heard about, they would certainly seem to be people who would qualify under that definition by what they have suffered and what they have experienced when they present to the authorities rather than by a general description. That is the central case we have put. At the moment, the basic principle is that applicants for refugee status must establish their need for protection on an individual basis, and for that reason we do not think that putting this to the Supreme Court is necessarily the right way. We believe that under the current rules, we have the ability to help the people who are in need.

We also need to put on the record at this point that the people who are actually suffering the greatest brutality at the hands of Daesh are fellow Muslims in the region—and the Yazidis, the Kurdish groups, that are there as well. They are suffering, too, and our prime driving force when providing international humanitarian protection, which is what it is, is on the basis of need. That will continue to be our position.

I am very happy to meet noble Lords who have an interest in this area, with officials, to ensure that our system is sufficiently sensitive to understand what is happening on the ground—and the accounts of the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, and the experiences of the Bishop of Aleppo. We want that understanding so that it can inform our decision-making and ensure that our system is correct and appropriate. I reiterate that those Christians who are female, at risk of persecution, survivors of torture and/or violence are exactly the people that our systems of humanitarian aid in the region and our systems of relocation to this country are designed to help.

10.30 pm

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: I am grateful to my noble friend. I entirely accept what he says about Muslims being subject to horrors as well as Christians, but could he deal with the point that the problem for Christians is that they cannot go to the official camps because they fear for their safety, because, once again, they are a minority? Is there any possibility of creating

some kind safe haven? That in itself may create a further security problem for them. The genocide point is that it would enable immediate action to be taken.

Lord Bates: Certainly, the situation is that we would take families from within the camps and from the surrounding areas. It is not exclusively from the camps; it is those who are identified as being in greatest need. The noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, raises an interesting point on the camps. I shall certainly feed that back to the department and seek some reassurance, and perhaps write to him and other noble Lords on what protections are arranged in the camps where DfID and others are involved to be sensitive to the needs of Christians.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: I thank my noble friend Lady Cox, the noble Lords, Lord Forsyth, Lord Dubs, Lord Marlesford and Lord Judd, the noble Baroness, Lady Hamwee and the noble Lord, Lord Wigley, for their contributions to the debate and for supporting the amendment. I thank the Minister as well for the characteristic way in which he has tried to deal with the arguments that have been raised during our debate.

He mentioned the conference that will be taking place tomorrow. Last week I attended a briefing that was hosted by Justine Greening, the Secretary of State at the Department for International Development. Throughout the presentation, not once was the position of minorities mentioned. I specifically raised that at the end of the presentation and the Secretary of State was helpful in her response, but it was not a presentation about events on the ground; it was about money being provided in humanitarian relief and aid. Important though that is, it is not the subject of the amendment and it is not the subject of my concern. I pay tribute to the Government for what they have done by way of humanitarian aid and I agree with them that countries such as Germany, which is co-hosting the conference, need to do more on that front and that we need to tackle these problems at source. Until we rectify some of the reasons why people are being driven out of their homeland, we will continue to see this exodus of biblical proportions.

The Minister and I are on the same page on that. I agree with what the Government are doing in that respect, but money and aid are not the same as recognising what is happening on the ground as a genocide. That is why I cited the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe last week. We will see what the European Parliament decides today, but other national Parliaments, the 75 Members of both Houses, and the Motion referred to by my noble friend in the House of Commons last week say something altogether different, which is why the noble Lord, Lord Marlesford, said he was ashamed that this debate was necessary at all. So am I in many respects; we should not need to be debating this.

The Supreme Court is different from the Government. It is one step aside. If there is no evidence to demonstrate that there is genocide then the Supreme Court would say that. The Justices of the Supreme Court would make that determination and nothing further would have to happen. But if it decided that there was a prima facie case of genocide, then it would kick-start all the other things that need to happen, especially the special status that would then be

given to those groups who had been targeted. Yes, they include Christians, but not Christians alone. They would be prioritised because they are victims of genocide. That would be the reason.

I am grateful for what the noble Lord said about meeting those of us who proposed the amendment tonight. I welcome that and certainly I would be happy to take part in discussions between now and Report, but it is important that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Justice and DfID, which the Minister referred to, are also part and parcel of that discussion. I know that some of the pressures against doing something on this issue have come from other departments.

We were told during this brief debate that we should recognise the magnitude of this catastrophe, but people had no idea of the scale of what is happening. There cannot be decent societies in the Middle East without plurality, diversity, tolerance and respect. Surely those have to be the reasons why we put this at the very top of the agenda. I have said before that Einstein's definition of insanity is simply doing the same thing over and over again. Whatever military campaigns we have, however necessary it may be to engage in military action, will not fundamentally change things on the ground. What marks us out as different from organisations such as ISIS is our belief in the rule of law. Surely this goes to the very heart of what it means to believe in the rule of law and to uphold conventions that we are signatories to and which impose on us a duty to protect and to prosecute.

I beg leave to withdraw the amendment, but I also give notice that I intend to bring this back on Report if we are unable to make appropriate progress.

Amendment 234A withdrawn.