



**CENTRUM MYŚLI
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Professor the Lord Alton of Liverpool

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A universal right – universally broken: freedom of belief and religious persecution in the XXI Century

The lodestar, or navigation point, for my lecture today is Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – promulgated in the aftermath of the defining horrors of the Holocaust.

Article 18 insists that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

The declaration's stated objective was to realise,
a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.

However, with the passage of time, the declaration has acquired a normative character within general international law. Eleanor Roosevelt, the formidable chairman of the drafting committee, argued that freedom of religion was one of the four essential freedoms of mankind.

In her words:

Religious freedom cannot just mean Protestant freedom; it must be freedom of all religious people, and she rejoiced in having friends from all faiths and all races.

Article 18 emerged from the infamies of the 20th century — from the Armenian genocide to the defining depredations of Stalin's gulags and Hitler's concentration camps; from the pestilential nature of persecution, demonisation, scapegoating and hateful prejudice; and, notwithstanding violence associated with religion, it emerged from ideology, nation and race. It was the bloodiest century in human history with the loss of 100 million lives.

The four great murderers of the 20th century — Mao, Stalin, Hitler and Pol Pot — were united by their hatred of religious faith.

Yet, how quickly we forget. In today's lecture I want to examine examples of contemporary genocide, persecution and discrimination, all of which demonstrate how Article 18 is honoured daily only in its breach: why words matter and deeds to follow words matter even more; and what happens when we fail to take our Article 18 duties seriously.

I will talk first about Genocide and then about Persecution – how one can flow from the other and the culture of indifference and impunity which allows both to occur on a vast scale.

GENOCIDE

Last year I read Franz Werfel's novel, "The Forty Days of Musa Dagh", published in 1933, based on a true story about the Armenian genocide. His books were burnt by the Nazis, no doubt to try to erase humanity's memory, Hitler having famously asked, *Who now remembers the Armenians?*

The Armenian deportations and genocide claimed the lives of an estimated 1.5 million Armenian



Christians. Werfel tells the story of several thousand Christians who took refuge on the mountain of Musa Dagh. The intervention of the French navy led to their dramatic rescue.

A hundred years later – in a further cruel twist of the systematic persecution of difference - the Yazidis besieged on a different mountain, Mount Sinjar, were saved, but what has happened to them and to the Christians of Syria and Iraq illustrates how that slow burn genocide initiated by the Ottoman Turks – and which has its Genesis in persecution and discrimination and in the violation of Article 18 - continues to this day – and how we, who enjoy so many freedoms, so often choose to look the other way.

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI has called on those of us who enjoy freedom of speech and belief to speak out more clearly on behalf of the Christians in the Middle East warning as long ago as 2007 that: *Churches in the Middle East are threatened in their very existence.*

Pope Francis has explicitly said that Christians are subject to genocide, while His Royal Highness the Princes of Wales has condemned these events as *horrendous and heart-breaking* persecution, and speaking of his anguish at the plight of Christianity in the Middle East, in the region of its birth, he described events in Syria and Iraq as an *indescribable tragedy*.

Yet, despite the warning and words Christians in Iraq say:

The attacks on Christians continue and the world remains totally silent. It's as if we had been swallowed up by the night.

Not only is Iraq-Mesopotamia - the cradle of civilisation, it forms an essential part of the cradle of Christianity. The scriptures celebrate the great city of Nineveh, the waters of Babylon and Ur of the Chaldeans. Today, the cradle of the ancient churches is the scene of their asphyxiation and annihilation.

In 1914, Christians made up a quarter of that region's population. Now they are less than 5%. Archbishop Bashar Warda of Irbil, during a meeting that I chaired in the British Parliament two years ago, underlined their traumatic, degrading and inhuman treatment, pleading with the international community to provide protection.

Where genocide has occurred, we have an obligation to prevent, protect and to punish. Our obligations are set out in the preamble to the sixth recital of the 1998 Rome statute of the International Criminal Court, which recalls that *it is the duty of every State to exercise its criminal jurisdiction over those responsible for international crimes*, while the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide states that the obligation each state thus has to prevent and to punish the crime of genocide is not territorially limited by the convention.

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.

In 1948, while Article 18 was being promulgated, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. It was in the



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wake of some of the worst atrocities in history. It was the culmination of years of campaigning by the Jewish lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, and recognised that *international co-operation* was needed *to liberate mankind from such an odious scourge*.

When countries added their signature to the Convention it laid them the moral and legal duty to *undertake to prevent and to punish*, genocide — surely the crime above all crimes.

Yet all the minorities in the Middle East, whose very existence is under direct and immediate threat, have received from western governments is a woolly undertaking that they will collect evidence. I visited the genocide sites in Rwanda — a salutary and chilling experience.

I am always struck that President Clinton and British Ministers of the day say that their failure to identify and take action to prevent that genocide, which led to the loss of 1 million Tutsi lives, was their worst foreign affairs mistake. In the past two years, two serving British Foreign Secretaries have similarly lamented the failure of the international community to decry the genocides in both Rwanda and Bosnia quickly enough, despite the overwhelming and compelling evidence that existed.

William (Lord) Hague, speaking as Foreign Secretary on the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, said:

The truth is that our ability to prevent conflict is still hampered by a gap between the commitments states have made and the reality of their actions.

His successor, Mr Philip Hammond, said last year that the horror of Srebrenica, *demands that we all try to understand why those who placed their hope in the international community on the eve of genocide found that those hopes were dashed.*

The reality has been that once it is recognised that genocide is being committed, serious legal obligations follow, and states have proved reluctant to engage with their responsibilities. There are really only two options here.

If there is no genocide, our obligations under the genocide convention have not been triggered, but if there is, how could we sleep at night having disregarded the chilling lessons of past genocides and endless equivocating? Instead of doing everything in our power to bring this unmitigated suffering to an end, are we content simply to let these matters pass?

Last year I chaired a meeting in Parliament attended by Syrians and 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. That same week, a mass grave of Yazidis was uncovered near Sinjar. Months ago, a former Yazidi MP, speaking in Parliament said that she could not understand why the West had not declared these events a genocide.

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.

Antoine Audo, the Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo, has said that two-thirds of Syrian Christians had either been killed or driven away from his country. Zainab Bangura, the United Nations special representative on sexual violence in conflict, has authenticated reports of Christian and Yazidi females



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— girls aged one to seven —being sold, with the youngest carrying the highest price tag.

One 80-year-old Christian woman who stayed in Nineveh was reportedly burned alive. In another Christian family, the mother and 12 year-old daughter were raped by ISIS militants, leading the father, who was forced to watch, to commit suicide. One refugee described how she witnessed ISIS crucify her husband on the door of their home.

More than two years ago, on 23 July 2014, I warned in an opinion piece in the Times:

The last Christian has been expelled from Mosul [...]. The light of religious freedom, along with the entire Christian presence, has been extinguished in the Bible's 'great city of Nineveh' [...]. This follows the uncompromising ultimatum by the jihadists of Isis to convert or die.

I said that,

the world must wake up urgently to the plight of the ancient churches throughout the region who are faced with the threat of mass murder and mass displacement.

But the world did not wake up and for those caught up in these barbaric events, the stakes are utterly existential.

Genocide is never a word to be used lightly and is not determined by the number of people killed but by specific genocidal intent. The position of my country's Government has been to insist that declarations of genocide are not made by them but by the international judicial system, yet there has been no referral of any evidence by the Government to any court in Britain or elsewhere.

And while this macabre game of pass the parcel of responsibility continues people are being ruthlessly targeted, and so is their culture and history.

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 year, 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. A British Government Minister told me:

We are aware of reports that mass graves have been discovered [...] at least one of which was



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allegedly booby trapped by Daesh.

Murder is accompanied by other horrors. 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.

Little wonder that a former Yazidi MP told me that she could not understand why the West had not declared these events a genocide and why we had remained silent.

In a leading article the "Times" newspaper said the destruction of Christians from the Middle East *now amounts to nothing less than genocide [...]. That crime, most hideously demonstrated by the Nazis, now enjoins others to take active steps to protect the victims.*

Writing in "The Daily Telegraph", the Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson said *Isis are engaged in what can only be called genocide [...] though for some baffling reason the Foreign Office still hesitates to use the term genocide.*

Now that he is the UK's Foreign Secretary perhaps he will replace bafflement with clarity and words with actions – insisting on the upholding of the rule of law.

In the battle of ideas, the rule of law is the best antidote to ISIS. Capturing and holding those responsible for these atrocities to account — whether in Syria, Paris, Tunisia, the Sinai or elsewhere — would underline the justice of our actions, and the declaration of genocide should have preceded further military action. We should name this for what it is.

While Governments have been failing to act, Parliamentarians and Legislators have spoken out and made explicit declarations.

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 European Parliament passed a similar resolution. So has the American House of Representatives, the Australian House of Representatives and the British House of Commons.

Hillary Clinton says that although she had been reluctant to use the term "genocide" there is, she said, 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.

Congress and the State Department have received a 300-page report detailing more than 1 000 instances of ISIS deliberately massacring, killing, torturing, enslaving, kidnapping or raping Christians. It had similar evidence about the plight of Yazidis, along with the findings of the International Association of Genocide Scholars.

The American House of Representatives, by 393 votes to zero, declared that grotesque and targeted beheadings, enslavement, mass rape and other atrocities against Christians and other minorities indeed constitute a genocide:

the atrocities committed against Christians and other ethnic and religious minorities targeted specifically for religious reasons are, and are hereby declared to be, 'crimes against humanity', and



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'genocide'.

On behalf of the White House, Secretary of State John Kerry, said: *Naming these crimes is important*, and that Daesh, in targeting these minorities with the purpose of their annihilation is *genocidal by self-proclamation, by ideology and by actions* — in what it says, what it believes and, indeed, what it does. He called for criminal charges to be brought against those responsible.

The UK's former commander of our armed forces and the former head of our intelligence service were among those who signed a letter to the Prime Minister which stated:

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

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.*

Yet, despite all of the words western Governments, like the British simply seek to avoid their duty to act:

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? Government Ministers told me:

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, I was told:

I understand that, as the matter stands, Fatou Bensouda, the chief prosecutor, has determined not to take these matters forward.

Little wonder that John Pontifex of the charity Aid to the Church in Need, who was recently in Syria says:

Christians feel that they have been abandoned by the West as a whole, why they have been left to face the worst that extremism can throw at them [...]. We must throw a lifeline of hope and show that there are people who care about what has happened and are determined to bring these people to justice, sending a signal very clearly that the world will not tolerate this butchery.

Governments should now be both collecting 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 — but also triggering 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.

We also have a duty to protect as well as to prevent and to prosecute those who are victims of genocide. Even for those who successfully flee we give no priority for asylum to the victims of genocide.

Illustrative of this is the recent revelation in the United States of what Nina Shea has called *a Gross injustice* - of 10, 000 Syrian refugees begging accepted in the US, of whom, only 56 are Christian.



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In the UK official policy does not even designate these victims of genocide as *vulnerable persons* for the purpose of western aid.

How ironic when we seem to have an open door policy for some who have been involved in Jihadism but lock the door to their victims.

Persecuted minorities are frequently too frightened to enter refugee camps where they are once again hunted down; some have been thrown overboard from boats seeking to reach Europe; others who have got to Europe have described how they have been targeted by Islamists.

Our failure to re-examine our asylum rules to reflect the lethal threats faced by families and individuals fleeing their native homelands is a disgrace.

Helping the vulnerable should not be about the misplaced free-for-all which was mistakenly promoted by Germany: nor is it about quotas or the unseemly bidding war about how many people any particular country can be expected to take. Instead, our asylum policies should focus on people being subjected to genocide and prioritise their asylum claims. 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 the suffering in Syria and Iraq, we have particular obligations, under the provisions of the Genocide Convention, to assist these minority groups first.

We also know that those who have been targeted do not represent a security threat to Europe or other countries 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.

I recently heard 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 hazardous journeys.

Speaking on Holocaust Memorial Day Major General Tim Cross 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. And he went on to point 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 the then Prime Minister, 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'.*

Many suffer, but this is about those who have been singled out and our duty under the genocide convention to protect them. Victims of genocide should be given priority in asylum applications.

If no Government 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.

The international community needs to close the gap between the commitment we made in ratifying



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the 1948 genocide convention and the reality of our actions. 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 and to honour its duties.

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 the genocide convention.

Of what use are Conventions and Proclamations of Articles such as Article 18 if there is no basis for enforcement?

Rights are meaningless unless those whose rights are being infringed have access to a remedy.

It is our belief in the rule of law that marks us as radically different from ISIS or others responsible for these crimes and we must make a step change by moving beyond aerial bombardment to a consideration of justice, to demand that, under our commitment to the rule of law, however long it takes, we will bring those responsible for abhorrent mass executions, sexual slavery, rape and other forms of gender-based violence, torture, mutilation and the enlistment and forced recruitment of children to justice.

It was a Liverpool lawyer, Hartley Shawcross, who was British Attorney General and at the end of World War Two. He was Chief Prosecutor for the War Crimes Trials at Nuremburg.

In his closing speech at Nuremburg Shawcross remarked, *in all our countries, when perhaps in the heat of passion or for other motives which impair restraint, some individual is killed, the murder becomes a sensation. Our compassion is roused, nor do we rest until the criminal is punished and the rule of law vindicated. Shall we do less when not one but 12 million men and women and children are done to death, not in battle, not in passion, but in a cold calculated deliberate attempt to destroy nations and races.*

Shawcross reminded his generation that such tyranny and brutality could only be resisted in the future not simply by *military alliances but firmly on the rules of law.*

This passionate belief in the upholding of law and in the administration of justice is central to the upholding of civilised values; to the maintenance of human rights and hard won liberties. The rule of law determines the way in which we govern ourselves. It is the bedrock of the parliamentary system and the corner stone of our democratic institutions. Without it we all descend into chaos. And are we going to settle for less in other nations?

I said that I would also say something about other violations of Article 18 that may fall short of genocide but represent a serious attack on the right of the freedom to believe, not to believe or to change belief.

PERSECUTION

All over the world, from North Korea to Pakistan, Article 18 is *an orphaned right*, a flouted right, a right that is contemptuously ignored - evident in new concentration camps and gulags, abductions, rape, imprisonment, persecution, public flogging, mass murder, beheadings and the mass displacement of millions of people.

Article 18 is a universal right but all over the world and in dozens of other jurisdictions Article 18 is not worth the paper on which it is written.

A principal argument that I want to advance today is that Governments must reclaim their patrimony of Article 18; argue that it be given greater political and diplomatic priority; insist on the importance of religious literacy as a competence; discuss the crossover between freedom of religion



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and belief and a nation's prosperity and stability; and reflect on the suffering of those denied this foundational freedom.

The annual Pew study found that in the countries which face violations of Article 18 – in which 74% of the world's population lives - there were serious restrictions on religious freedom, whether caused by government policies or the hostile acts of individuals, organizations or groups within society. Pew found that of the 185 nations studied, religious repression was recorded in 151 of them.

Although Christians are persecuted in every country where there are violations of Article 18 — from Syria and Iraq, to Sudan, Pakistan, Eritrea, Nigeria, Egypt, Iran, North Korea and many other countries — Muslims, and others, suffer too, especially in the religious wars raging between Sunnis and Shias, so reminiscent of 17th-century Europe.

But it does not end there.

Think, too, of those who have no religious belief, such as Alexander Aan, who was imprisoned in Indonesia for two years after saying he did not believe in God. Article 18 is also about the right not to believe. Think, too, of Raif Badawi, the Saudi Arabian atheist and blogger sentenced to 1 000 public lashes for publicly expressing his atheism. That has been condemned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as, *a form of cruel and inhuman punishment*.

It is risible, and makes mockery of Article 18, that Saudi Arabia – which is responsible for so many violations of human rights and allows no religious pluralism, has been given a key UN human rights role leading Raif Badawi's wife to comment that handing the role to Faisal bin Hassan Trad, Saudi Arabia's ambassador at the UN in Geneva, was effectively *a green light to start flogging [him] again*.

It was Pope John Paul II who said that if Saudi Arabia – which has exported Wahhabism worldwide - was so keen to build a mosque in Rome he would expect to see permission granted for a church, at least one, to be built in Saudi Arabia. His point was that there must be reciprocity and that we who insist on respect for difference in our own countries must insist on respect for difference in every jurisdiction. Yet, many countries erect laws and practices which prevent this.

One quarter of the world's countries have blasphemy laws – and the more than one in 10 that have laws penalizing apostasy. Both laws are used to falsely accuse, intimidate, and persecute those who dare to hold beliefs that are different from the prescribed beliefs of the regime.

This leads, to a death sentence in cases like that of Pakistan's Asia Bibi; to public beatings, as with Raif Badawi.

In Iran – where there were almost 1000 executions last year (including the execution of Baha'is) - flagrant disrespect for Article 18 has led to the imprisonment of Saeed Abedini, imprisoned for 10 years for "undermining national security" by hosting Christian gatherings in his home; Baha'is in Iran have seen their cemeteries have desecrated; 136 Baha'is are in prison, some since 2008. As *unprotected infidels* they can be attacked with impunity.

Repression against Christians in Iran includes: waves of arrests and detentions; raids on church gatherings; raids on social gatherings; harsh interrogations; physical and psychological torture, including demands to recant and to identify other Christians; extended detentions without charge; violations of due process; convictions for ill-defined crimes or on falsified political charges; economic targeting through exorbitant bail demands; and threats of execution for apostasy.

Violation of Article 18 has led to Chinese Catholics like the late Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang, who died last year at 94 years of age, having spent to spend half his life in prison; to Chinese Protestants, since



the beginning of 2016, seeing 49 of their churches defaced or destroyed, crosses removed and a pastor's wife crushed to death in the rubble as she pleaded with the authorities to desist. Last month I attended the premiere of "The Bleeding Edge" – hosted by Mr. Speaker in the House of Commons – and which draws attention to the harvesting of organs of Falun Gong practitioners in China. In 2009, I visited Tibet and published the report Breaking the Deadlock. In highlighting the religious dimension, I argued:

Any attempts to resolve the political situation [...] must take due account is of the profound spiritual life of Tibetan people".

Think too of countries like Nigeria, Sudan and Kenya.

Think, in Sudan of the barbaric treatment of Meriam Ibrahim - a young mother of two was charged, and sentenced to death for apostasy and 100 lashes for adultery. Having refused to renounce her faith, she was forced to give birth shackled in a prison cell in Khartoum.

Meriam Ibrahim was ultimately freed but her case is not an isolated one. Archaic and cruel laws lead to stonings and lashings, with Al-Jazeera reporting that in one recent year, 43 000 women were publicly flogged.

And, meanwhile, Sudan's leaders, indicted by the International criminal court for genocide, continue to carry out their bombing of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile – home to many who do not share the regime's religious ideology.

In Nigeria think of the 200 schoolgirls abducted in Chibok by Boko Haram – whose jihadist ideology also seeks to stamp out difference and to eradicate diversity.

In Egypt, as honorary president of the UK Copts, I have seen the way in which Copts were targeted by the Muslim Brotherhood. In the single largest attack on Christians in Egypt since the 14th century, more than 50 churches were bombed or burnt. It was Egypt's Kristallnacht. And who can ever forget the execution by ISIS of Egyptian Copts in Libya – after they refused to renounce their faith?

I have seen, first hand, contempt for Article 18 in many other situations: in the degrading detention centres in South East Asia where fleeing Pakistani Christians and Ahmadis are incarcerated; among Rohingya Muslims persecuted in Burma. In March 2013, I visited a village just outside Naypyidaw. In the charred embers of a burnt-out madrasah, I took statements from the few Muslims who had not fled. I met Rohingya Muslims and heard from ethnic Kachin and Chin Christians facing terrible persecution. Proposed new legislation to restrict religious conversions and interreligious marriage will hardly help; practical initiatives countering hate speech and intolerance might.

Elsewhere in Asia, religious intolerance is rising, too, for example in Indonesia. There are also threats to Article 18 in India, with a BJP attack on an evangelical church in Uttar Pradesh; in Sri Lanka, where anti-Muslim violence has erupted; in Bangladesh, where nuns were brutally attacked and beaten and atheists murdered; in Malaysia, where a court has ruled that only Muslims can use the term "Allah", even though Christians have traditionally also used that same term in their texts and in their languages; and in Brunei, where a full Sharia penal code is being introduced.

In Laos and Vietnam, the situation is perilous: Article 18 is under threat in almost every corner of the world.

And there is one corner we often forget, North Korea, a country which I have visited four times and have written about in my book on North Korea. The United Nations Commission of Inquiry into North Korea concluded that *there is an almost complete denial of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as the rights to of freedom of opinion, expression, information and association.* The regime, its says, *considers the spread of Christianity a particularly severe threat,*



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and, as a result, *Christians are prohibited from practising their religion and are persecuted; Severe punishments are inflicted on people caught practising Christianity.*

I have chaired evidence taking session where we have been given horrific accounts of life in North Korea's gulags – where around 300,000 people are incarcerated - and of the use of torture and public executions.

Among those giving evidence was Hea Woo. She gave a graphic and powerful account of her time inside a camp -where torture and beatings are routine, and where prisoners were so hungry they were reduced to eating rats, snakes, or even searching for grains in cow dung. She said that in such places *the dignity of human life counted for nothing. The guards told us that we are not human beings, we are just prisoners, so we don't have any right to love. We were just animals. Even if people died there, they didn't let the family members outside know.*

Voices like Hae Woo's are a radical counter point to a regime which, when it speaks, does so with a mixture of braggadocio and blackmail – alternating between threats to blow us to kingdom come and demands that we stay quiet about gulags which executes and incarcerates and e vast numbers of its own people.

We can see these killings either as a display of strength or the actions of a weak regime, paranoically trying to cling to power at all costs. Of course, the creation of mass fear is a time-honoured technique of dictators from Nero and Caligula to Ceausescu and Stalin.

And it brings to mind my first visits to Poland, Russia, Romania Albania and the Ukraine. In Lviv I met with Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk who had spent 18 years in prison, in Prem, and the Ivan Gel, the chairman of the committee of the defence of the Greek Catholic church who had spent 17 years in jail I met a young priest who had been sent to Chernobyl to clear radio-active waste as a punishment for being caught celebrating the liturgies in the open. It helped to remind me how precious the freedoms are which we enjoy in our own country and the liberties that we prize, but how fragile those things can be.

Stalin, of course, once mockingly asked "How many battalions does the Pope have?". The election of a Polish Pope in 1978 and the crucial role which he and the churches played in eastern Europe in challenging Marxist totalitarian regimes more than provides the answer.

During a visit to Albania I saw the abandoned mausoleum which Albania's Marxist dictator, Enver Hoxha, had erected in the heart of Tirana. Hoxha had committed himself to the eradication of religion in Albania. Among the last of his victims was a priest who was executed in 1975 after conducting an illegal baptism. The marble mausoleum was being used as an unofficial ski slope by local children, while just over the road a new cathedral was being erected. The day before we arrived there the local archbishop ordained 10 deacons from among 100 young seminarians preparing for the priesthood.

But as Pope John Paul's courage and fidelity demonstrated change from North Korea to Syria does not come about by itself. It was the former British Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks who, writing about the enormities which led to Dachau, Auschwitz and Belsen, said: *People ask where was God at Auschwitz? They should ask, where was man?.*

Dr Sacks rightly argues against quietism or pietistic faith and urges us towards political and civic engagement in speaking up for those who are persecuted and affirming Article 18.

As Britain commemorated the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, we should recall that, long before



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Article 18, it asserted the importance of religious freedom.

Societies which deny such freedoms are invariably unhappy societies. Research shows that there is a direct link between economic prosperity and religious freedom.

At their bloodiest worst such societies foment genocide against groups like the Chaldean and Assyrian Christians and Yazidis that I have already described.

But before it became genocide there was persecution – to which we were indifferent. And, as is the case in Pakistan, we refuse to even use the word persecution preferring instead to talk about discrimination. But unless you stop it at source one invariably leads to the other.

Over the summer I was guest of honour at Liverpool's refurbished Pakistan Centre. It was a wonderful evening of celebration.

Pakistan's green and white flag was designed to represent the green of Islam and the white of the minorities

In 1947, Pakistan's great statesman and founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah crafted a constitution which promised to uphold plurality and diversity and to protect all its citizens. Jinnah said: *You may belong to any religion, caste or creed — that has nothing to do with the business of the State [...] Minorities, to whichever community they may belong, will be safeguarded. Their religion, faith or belief will be secure. There will be no interference of any kind with their freedom of worship. They will have their protection with regard to their religion, faith, their life and their culture. They will be, in all respects, the citizens of Pakistan without any distinction of caste and creed.*

They are values not just for Pakistan but for us too. They are values under attack and we do one another no favours by failing to say so.

Whether judged against the backdrop of the assassination, five years ago, of the country's Christian Minister for Minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti – who questioned the blasphemy laws - or the orgy of bombings, killings, rapes, imprisonment and abductions, of which the Lahore massacre was the latest bloody and shocking example, Pakistan has allowed the systematic targeting of religious minorities in a culture of impunity.

A report on Pakistan which I launched in Parliament catalogues this systematic campaign and followed evidence taking sessions, witness statements, and a visit I made to a detention centre where escaping Pakistani Christians are held.

One escapee recounted how his friend, Basil – a pastor's son – was targeted by Pakistani Islamists attempting to convert him.

He reminded them that there should be no compulsion in requiring religious adherence. Their response was to launch an arson attack on his home. The fire destroyed his home and Basil, his wife and daughter, aged 18 months, were burnt alive.

Following their deaths the assailants turned their attention to his friend.

He was attacked and beaten. He reported this to the police – who then informed the assailants of the complaint. The assailants telephoned him and said that they would kill him. He, his wife, and little girl, fled the country.

In the aftermath of this systematic campaign of visceral hatred there is little evidence that Pakistan's



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contemporary leaders are doing anything whatsoever to uphold Jinnah's vision – and, equally, there is little evidence that more than £1 billion of British aid, given over the past two years, is doing anything to support beleaguered minorities, often the poorest of the poor, or to promote religious freedom or peaceful co-existence.

The failure to prevent such egregious depredations, and to punish those responsible, is a major contributory factor in fomenting conflict.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, says that the "*most common feature*" of Anglicanism worldwide is that of being persecuted. Twenty-four of the 37 Anglican provinces are in conflict or post-conflict areas. Referring to the 150 Kenyan Christians who were killed on Maundy Thursday last year, Justin Welby said:

There have been so many martyrs in the last year [...]. They are witnesses, unwilling, unjustly, wickedly, and they are martyrs in both senses of the word.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, calling for an end to violence against Muslims in Burma is emphatic that: *The violence in Buddhist majority countries targeting religious minorities is completely unacceptable. I urge Buddhists in these countries to imagine an image of the Buddha before them before they commit such a crime.*

As those trying to escape such violations of Article 18 try to flee and escape their persecutors, we can see how the conflict contributes significantly to the refugee crisis – with 55 million people now living as refugees, asylum seekers or internally displaced persons, with a further 60 million people forcibly displaced. Conversely, in those countries which promote freedom of religion or belief, there is a direct correlation with prosperity, stability, and the contentment and happiness of the populace. Where Article 18 is trampled on, the reverse is also true, as a cursory examination of the hobbled economies of countries such as North Korea and Eritrea immediately reveals

How right is the BBC's courageous Chief Correspondent, Lyse Doucet, when she says: *If you don't understand religion - including the abuse of religion - it's becoming ever harder to understand our world.*

Western Governments are often illiterate when it comes to religious faith – and so they don't understand what motivates people to kill Christian students in Kenya, Shia Muslims praying in a mosque in Kuwait, Pakistani Anglicans celebrating the Eucharist in Peshawar; British tourists simply on holiday in Tunisia; or in trying to understand the dramatic rise in Christian persecution, the vilification of Islam – and a state of war between Sunnis and Shias - in some parts of the world and, in Europe, the troubling reawakening of anti-Semitism. They just call it terror and we have developed a worrying moral equivalence or timidity to call evil by its name for fear of giving offence.

Learning to live together in respect and tolerance - whether we have a religious faith or not – is truly the great challenge of our times and scholars, media, and policy makers need to promote far greater religious literacy and shape different priorities.

Jonathan (Lord) Sacks, in his brilliant critique, "Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence", provides some valuable insights into the shared stories of the Abrahamic faiths — not least the displacement stories of Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Leah and Rachel, and Joseph and his brothers. He argues that these can be used to promote mutual respect, coexistence, reconciliation and the healing of history.

This underlines the urgent need for scholars from those faiths to combat the evil being committed in God's name and to give emphasis to the ancient texts in a way which upholds the dignity of difference — the title of another of Jonathan Sacks' books. In "The Dignity of Difference"



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he writes:

The great faiths provide meaning and purpose for their adherents. The question is: can they make space for those who are not its adherents, who sing a different song, hear a different music, tell a different story? On that question, the fate of the 21st century may turn.

If Jews, Muslims, Christians, atheists and others are no longer to see one another as an existential threat such a narrative - with Article 18 at its heart - must be capable of forestalling the unceasing incitements to hatred which pour from the internet and which capture the unformed minds.

The urgency of life and death task was starkly underlined by the recent execution of the 84-year-old French priest Fr. Jacques Hamel and by the murder of the Glasgow shopkeeper, Asad Shah, who often reached out to Christian neighbours and customers. Tanveer Ahmed, allegedly drove up from Bradford to kill Mr. Shah because he was disrespectful of Islam. Mr. Shah was an Ahmadi who, in Pakistan, are denied citizenship unless they renounce their description of themselves as Muslims. Now, it seems, they are to be targeted in Britain too.

Europe, for all its faults, is a place in which adulterers are not flogged, gays are not executed, women are not stoned for not being veiled, churches are not burned, so-called apostates had not, until recently, been killed, and non-believers are not forced to convert or treated as 'dhimmis' or second-class citizens.

We who enjoy those freedoms here must work to achieve the same freedoms for all; and in that task Article 18 must remain our lodestar. Perhaps we need a new Convention on Religious Freedom to sit alongside the Convention on Genocide – but if we promote such Conventions let's dedicate ourselves to upholding and enforcing them too – and with universal application.

Article 18 is a foundational human right — many would say the foundational right — because, while there should be no hierarchy of rights and all rights are interdependent, without the freedom to choose, practise, share without coercion and change your beliefs, what freedom is there?

And what are the consequences when we fail to uphold this freedom?

In 1965, "Dignitatis Humanae", the Second Vatican Council's proclamation on religious freedom, said correctly that a society which promotes religious freedom will be enlivened and enriched and one that does not will decay.

But let me end where I began.

Eleanor Roosevelt, described the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as,
the international Magna Carta for all mankind.

She said that Article 18 freedoms were to be one of the four essential freedoms of mankind.

Who can doubt that this essential freedom needs to be given far greater emphasis and priority in these troubled times? Here in Warsaw no one really needs to be reminded of the admonition of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Protestant theologian who was executed by the Nazis and who said:

"Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act".

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