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Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

Our reference: MIN/95273/2016

The Rt Hon Fiona Mactaggart MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

*Dear Fiona,*

Thank you for your email of 14 March on behalf of a number of your constituents about the persecution of Christians in the Middle East. I am replying as Minister responsible for human rights.

We are deeply concerned about the persecution of Christians, Yazidis and other religious minorities in the Middle East on the basis of their religion or belief. In many cases they are being subjected to discrimination and persecution, and in some countries there is a risk of communities that have existed there peacefully for centuries disappearing altogether. The Government has repeatedly condemned the horrific attacks on religious communities by violent extremists, particularly inside Syria.

On the grave issue of genocide, it is the policy of the British Government that any judgement on whether genocide has occurred is a matter for judicial decision, rather than for governments or non-judicial bodies. Our approach is to seek an end to all serious human rights violations, and to prevent their further escalation, irrespective of whether these violations fit the definition of specific international crimes.

Ultimately, the only way of safeguarding minority and other communities is by defeating Daesh and establishing a lasting peace in both Syria and Iraq. This is what we are working towards through a comprehensive strategy for defeating Daesh and continuing to work with our international partners towards a political settlement in Syria and supporting the Government of Iraq.

If your constituents would like more information about what the Government is doing to promote and protect the right to freedom of religion or belief in individual countries, they may wish to look at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Annual Human Rights Report, which is available on our website at:  
[www.hrdreport.fco.gov.uk](http://www.hrdreport.fco.gov.uk)

*Yours, as ever  
Jayce*

**RT HON BARONESS ANELAY OF ST JOHNS DBE  
MINISTER OF STATE**