



Churches Update

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LABOUR BACKS MAJOR CHURCH REPORT

Shadow Foreign Office Minister urges Government to do more on Christian persecution overseas

Labour has welcomed a report by the Rt Rev Philip Mountstephen, Bishop of Truro, which examined the extent and nature of Christian persecution across the world.

The report recommended that the Government should be prepared to impose sanctions against countries that persecute Christians. It also suggested that Ministers adopt a definition of anti-Christian discrimination and persecution, similar to those applied to Islamophobia and antisemitism.

An estimated one-third of the world's population suffers from religious persecution in some form, with 80% of them being Christians, it is claimed.

The report said: "*Evidence suggests that acts of violence and other intimidation against Christians are becoming more widespread.*" It also noted that in parts of the world, there was a declared intent to eradicate the Christian community, which had led to several declarations that Christians were suffering a genocide.

Among the report's recommendations to the Foreign Office were that it should "...be prepared to impose sanctions against perpetrators of ForB abuses" and "seek a [UN] security council resolution urging all governments in the Middle East and North Africa to protect Christians and other persecuted minorities".



Speaking in the House of Commons, Labour's Shadow Foreign Office Minister, Liz Macinnes (above), endorsed the report's findings noting that "*...genuine action on the persecution of Christians was long overdue.*" She later urged the Government to adopt the report's recommendations and encouraged the Prime Minister to make the role of Special Envoy on Freedom and Religion Belief, which was previously held by the Conservative Peer, Lord Ahmad, permanent.

Henrietta Blyth, Chief Executive of *Open Doors* echoed Liz's comments, saying "*...the [Special Envoy] role must be made permanent so that its existence is not subject to any political agenda.*"

"*This will also ensure that persecuted Christians are rightly placed at the heart of Government decisions on trade and aid,*" she said.

WATSON: "FAN WELFARE MUST BE PRIORITISED"

Deputy Leader calls on realignment between the sports and betting industries following deal

Labour MPs have joined with the Church of England in criticising Wayne Rooney over his multi-million pound move to Derby County which involves a lucrative deal to promote the gambling firm, 32Red.

Wayne Rooney will have some of his reported £90,000 weekly wage paid by the online casino and will wear the number 32 shirt for the club.

Dr Alan Smith, the Bishop of St Albans and the church's gambling spokesman, said celebrities such as Wayne Rooney must have a greater awareness of the impact of their choices. *"Players need to start using their considerable power to reject gambling's influence on football,"* he said.

32Red was fined £2m last year for repeatedly failing to help a problem gambler. It offered the customer VIP status and free bonuses instead of advice as he deposited more than £750,000 over two years.

Labour's Deputy Leader, Tom Watson, echoed Dr



Smith's comments, calling the deal *"concerning"*. On Twitter, he wrote *"...[this] highlights a fundamental problem with football governance. The system prioritises profit over fan welfare. Football governance needs to change and do far more to protect the public."*

Last year, the Labour Party announced a raft of measures it would introduce in Government as part of a crackdown designed to tackle an addiction *"epidemic"*. The proposals included restricting advertising on television during live sports and a ban on the use of credit cards to place bets.

CALL TO PRAY FOR THE NATION

The former Director of Christians on the Left has said that the new Prime Minister faces a huge struggle to unite the country. He went on to encourage Christians to pray for politicians from all parties.

Speaking to *Premier Radio*, Andy Flanagan, said: *"The gift of unity is something that the Church can offer the nation. The reality is, whether it's between churches or between parties, you can't*

get to that unity without humility."

Andy, who is now Director of Christians in Politics, went on to say *"...we need to be on our knees in prayer, not just because our prayers will change the situation, but because our prayers will change us."*

"It is only when we spend time, in the presence of God, do we realise that we don't know it all."

HISTORIC CHURCHES IN DANGER AFTER CUTS

Government urged to extend refunding of VAT on repairs in Spending Review

Labour's Faith Envoy, Stephen Timms, has written to the Chancellor asking him to continue the practice of refunding VAT paid by churches. His letter followed a report which found that a severe shortage of funding is endangering many of the UK's historic churches.

The *National Churches Trust* says the total number of applications it received for its grant programmes increased by 24% in 2018 from the previous year, with 593 applications made and that over the last two years applications have increased by 56%.

Luke March, Chairman of the *National Churches Trust* said: *"The funding of urgent repairs of church buildings remains a source of great concern."* He cited the ending of the Government supported



Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund as one of the reasons churches are struggling to make much needed repairs.

The current model of refunding of VAT for church repairs is only guaranteed until 2020. The government has said it will look at the issue.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth has resigned as Minister for Faith over the possibility of a no deal Brexit.

Speaking about Lord Bourne's departure, Labour's Faith Envoy, Stephen Timms said he had done *"a good job"*. He went on to say, however, that a new Minister should be appointed forthwith.

Speaking to Churches Update, Stephen said: *"The Conservative Government has consistently failed to recognise how important faith is in the UK."*

"The fact that we are still waiting to hear of Lord Bourne's replacement reflects that."

More than 100 religious leaders have demanded that the new Prime Minister commit the UK to taking in 10,000 refugees every year.

In an open letter, the signatories — bishops, rabbis, moderators, imams, and clerics — said that Britain *"can and must resettle more refugees"*. They continued: *"As one of the world's richest countries, seeking to build and demonstrate global co-operation and good will, this is a small ask of the UK."*

The Labour Party - who welcomed the letter - has consistently argued that Ministers have neglected their moral duty in taking refugees from abroad.

CONFERENCE DIARY 2019

Sunday 22 September

9.15 a.m: Labour Conference Church Service: Freedom Sunday - Together seeking global justice and freedom (with Jeremy Corbyn MP, Baroness Maeve Sherlock and Ruth Jones MP)

One Church Brighton, Gloucester Place, Brighton BN1 4AA.

Monday 23 September

8 a.m: Christians on the Left prayer breakfast: How can we build a more compassionate welfare state? (with Marsha de Cordova MP and Stephen Timms MP)

St Paul's Church, 60 West Street, Brighton BN1 2RS. In partnership with The Trussell Trust.

12.30 p.m: Faith in aid? (with Grace Blakely, New Statesman and Preet Gill MP)

St Paul's Church, 60 West Street, Brighton BN1 2RS. In partnership with World Vision, Christian Aid, Islamic Relief and Tearfund.

4 p.m: Labour Party Faith Reception:

Welcoming the Stranger - faith fighting for refugees (with Jeremy Corbyn MP, Stephen Timms MP, Afzal Khan MP and Samina Haq, Islamic Relief)

Trent Room, Hilton Hotel, inside the secure zone.

Tuesday 24 September

8 a.m: Christians on the Left prayer breakfast: Ending violence against children. World Vision in the World's largest refugee camp (With Rev Barbara Glasson, Hilary Benn MP and Kate Green MP)

St Paul's Church, 60 West Street, Brighton BN1 2RS. In partnership with World Vision.

12.30 p.m: Developing our horizons: fighting for social and environmental justice abroad (with Jonathan Reynolds MP, Bill Esterton MP and Rachel Maskell MP)

St Paul's Church, 60 West Street, Brighton BN1 2RS. In partnership with SERA: Labour's Environment Campaign.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

More than ever, the Labour Party is committed to listening to and learning from those of religious faith—including those in the churches. We realise that many will not commit to supporting any particular political party, and we respect that. But we are interested to hear what you have to say. There are a few things you can do to help us in this work:

- 1. Tell your friends about this newsletter.** We want to be in dialogue with as many people of faith as possible. Encourage others to join our mailing list at www.labour.org.uk/faith.
- 2. Tell us how we can help you.** Write to Stephen Timms MP (Faith Envoy), c/o The Labour Party, Southside, 105 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QT; or email stephen@stephentimms.org.uk.
- 3. Ask to display this newsletter in your church.** Ask your church leader if they are willing for this newsletter to be displayed so others can read about what Labour is doing.