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Press release

CSI welcomes UK review into persecution of Christians

Christian Solidarity International (CSI), a human rights organisation campaigning for religious freedom, has written to UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt welcoming his government's announcement of a review into the plight of persecuted Christians around the world.

It comes amid a surge in cases of violence against Christians in parts of the Middle East, Asia and Africa where Christianity is not the dominant faith. Last year around 250 Christians were killed every month on account of their faith, twice the number of the previous year, the government says.

In his letter to Mr Hunt, CSI International Management Chairman Dr John Eibner noted a "pressing need" for such an initiative at the start of 2019, a year that threatens to see violence against Christian minorities increase further. Recent years have seen Christians driven out of their traditional homelands in Iraq and Syria in particular, in the face of the spread of radical Islamism – a phenomenon classified as "genocide" in 2016 by then US Secretary of State John Kerry.

"We concur with your observation that 'Christianity [is] on the verge of extinction in its birth-place', and that the situation of Christians in many other parts of the world is 'deeply perilous'," Dr Eibner wrote.

"I trust that the review will be able to focus on situations where Christian communities are currently facing existential threats (Middle East), mass systematic violence (Nigeria) or the prohibition of the practice of Christianity (Saudi Arabia and North Korea)."

Regarding the existential threat to Christians and other vulnerable minorities from extremist forms of Islamism, Dr Eibner made two policy proposals to the UK government:

First, the termination of what a British diplomat in the Middle East called nearly 70 years ago the "fixed policy" of the UK government of refraining from raising the issue of anti-Christian discrimination for fear of offending the large number of Muslims under British rule.

And second, to end all military and ideological programmes that fuel the persecution of Christians. Dr Eibner noted that such programmes, aimed at geopolitical adversaries, have been implemented by the UK government from the early 20th century when it supported the House of Saud's radical Wahhabi takeover of the Arabian peninsula. Similar programmes were also implemented throughout the Cold War – most notably in the shape of support for the Mujahideen in Afghanistan – and most recently in the effort to achieve regime change in Syria.

Dr Eibner has also written to the Bishop of Truro, the Rt Reverend Philip Mounstephen, who will head the inquiry, offering support.

The UK government announced its review on Christmas Day 2018, admitting that it was not doing enough to address the issue of persecution against Christians.

About CSI

Christian Solidarity International (CSI) is a Christian human rights organisation promoting religious liberty and human dignity.

About John Eibner

John Eibner is the author of *The Future of Religious Minorities in the Middle East*, Lexington Books, 2018, www.middle-east-minorities.com

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