

Archbishop of Canterbury speaks out on Afghanistan

The following is a statement by Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, in the House of Lords,.

â??I look forward today especially to hearing noble and gallant Lords, diplomats, and others with local knowledge in Afghanistan. We rightly remember the courage, suffering and sacrifice over the last 20 years, and the courage being shown by our ambassador and the service people in Afghanistan at the moment, together with their colleagues and reporters. When we look back, I remember a cathedral, full for the funeral of a soldier: family and many colleagues silent in dignity, some wounded, mourning their loss.

â??The failure we face today is not military or diplomatic: they did all they could. It is political. Recovery and hope will come to Afghanistan with us supporting commitment to the neediest and most desperate. We have proven capacities in soft as well as hard power.

â??We owe an absolute, lavishly generous moral covenant to all those who are at risk because they served with us in Afghanistan or took seriously our frequently professed commitment to its future, women and girls included. An Afghan refugee, now a UK citizen said to me this week, â??families in such times of trouble belong togetherâ?•. His words are not politics but humanity. This is about morals not numbers. Will the Government confirm that their policy will reflect moral obligation and not be controlled by numbers?

â??In Pakistan, a country facing huge pressure including from refugees, we must undertake dialogue and support, learning afresh the religious and cultural literacy which is essential to effective work. We must not put any groups there, or in Afghanistan, into a corner where they may be driven to greater extremes. The aid we offer must support dialogue, inspire hope and prepare reconciliation. And that aid must be genuinely additional, not a transfer from other places of need. Is that going to be the case, I ask the Government?

â??We must renew commitment to freedom of religion and belief everywhere, a point not much mentioned so far. That will count in Pakistan and Afghanistan for Christians and religious communities such as Shia, Hindus, Jains, Ahmadis and Sikhs. A WhatsApp, from a Christian in Afghanistan yesterday, asked for support there and in Pakistan. Memorably, it said, â??I am willing to die for Jesus, but I do not want to die forgottenâ?•.

â??My Lords, this is a very bad time, especially for so many in Afghanistan, and for those who served there. It is a time for prayerful humility â?? and for us to display generosity, virtue, and courage. Rebuilding our reputation in such ways will give many others hope as well.â?•

Date Created
August 22, 2021