



Christianity in The Holy Land APPG

AGM

21 June 2023

10.30 - 11.30

Minutes

Attendees:

Members

- Caroline Ansell MP
- Lord Richard Chartres
- The Lord Polak CBE
- Bishop Christopher Chessun
- Patrick Grady MP

Support

- David Small
- Austin Tiffany, Secretariat

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Election of Officers for 2023/4

- Chair

- i. Caroline Ansell, intention of this being an interim basis with hope of finding a new chair or a co-chair
 - ii. Elected unanimously
- Vice-Chairs
 - i. Bishop Christopher Chessun, elected unanimously
 - ii. Andrew Selous MP, elected unanimously
 - iii. Jim Shannon MP, elected unanimously
 - iv. Patrick Grady MP, elected unanimously
 - v. Stephen Timms, in absentia, elected unanimously on basis he accepts
 - 1. Update: Stephen Timms has confirmed he is happy to serve as Vice Chair

3. Updates on Issues Facing Christians in the Holy Land

- Update on recent hate crimes against Christians in the Holy Land
 - i. Hate Crimes
 - 1. Growing prevalence of crimes against property and people, specifically in Jerusalem
 - ii. National Park Expansion on the Mount of Olives
 - 1. Implications of this on a number of Christian holy sites, including the Garden of Gethsemane

4. Report from the Bishop of Southwark

- Reflections from his visit to the Holy Land in January
 - i. Christians in Jordan benefit from interreligious peace courtesy of the leadership of the Royal Court, exemplified by the generous hosting of refugees (country of 11 million host 4 million refugees)
 - ii. On 16 March, the APPG hosted the Ambassador of Jordan and leaders from the region on Custodianship of Holy Spaces, restrictions on Al Aqsa and attacks against Christians.

- iii. There is a need for solidarity of Parliamentarians and Governments, and engagement with the Government of Israel. In a recent meeting with Ambassador Dabbas, he reiterated that he is keen to be of service to the APPG.
 - iv. Evidence of civil society in opposition to actions of those discriminating against clergy, and this counterbalance is a positive development in Israel
- On wider points made in the discussion which followed (the return of refugees for example) CA: it is important this APPG focuses on the ability and freedom of Christians to live their lives and express their faith. Noting other APPGs address the issues associated with the wider conflict affecting all citizens (regardless of their faith background). Also, that this APPG maintains breadth across the region and focuses on the very different contexts within which Christians live across the Holy Land.
 - CC: Important to read annual Holy Land Coordination Communiques on this point. He chairs a Jerusalem roundtable for the Archbishop of Canterbury, and he sees the role of amplifying their voices.
 - CA: Noted but important to maintain the APPG's frame of reference as the 'Holy Land' which takes in a geography beyond Jerusalem. How Christians live out their faith in their everyday life in the Palestinian Territories is worthy of focus too, for example.
 - CA: As part of the programme, proposed that the APPG pursue the lines of enquiry in the ICoHS report (Defeating Minority Exclusion and Unlocking Potential 2021) one element of which was the granting of visas and the perception that low numbers meant discriminatory practice. The report's authors offered fieldwork findings but recommended hard data be sought to affirm or otherwise i.e., to what extent perception or entirely a well-founded reality?

- CC: In Gaza, only half of Christians receive visas. There are only 900 Christians in Gaza.
- SP: On the issue of Christians in Gaza. Request to get a briefing note on Christians in Gaza, and those applying for festivals. Secretariat to provide to Members and inviting relevant experts to present on this at next APPG meeting.

5. Upcoming Meetings & Rhythms

- Monthly Newsletter
 - i. This would be useful, could cover questions raised in Parliament. Secretariat to action.
- Bi-Monthly Meetings
 - i. Mixed in person and virtual
 - ii. Bi-monthly, Secretariat to engage with Chair's office to coordinate.
- Engagement with US and EU Colleagues
- More engagement with leaders in Holy Land

6. AOB