

Speech: Foreign Secretary speech on Christian persecution around the world

Thank you Henrietta for those very moving words. I recently moved house and I was moving some of my books and one of the oldest books I've got – which I've had since about the age of 10 – is called God's Smuggler by Brother Andrew and I only realised literally as I was walking over today the connection between Brother Andrew and Open Doors and it's a great privilege to be here and an extra thrill for me in that context. But that book is the extraordinary story of daring do of Brother Andrew, a Dutchman who smuggled Bibles behind the Iron Curtain and the incredible courage and extraordinary adventures he had in doing that.

Since then of course we had in 1989 the fall of the Berlin Wall and that ushered in a great era of freedom for the world. In fact in the period directly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, 45 more countries became democracies across the world which is about a quarter of all the countries in the UN so it was an immensely positive period. But I think we also became a little bit complacent that this was the inevitable direction of human history and unfortunately in the last three years according to Freedom House, which is an American think tank, 71 countries have seen a net decline in their freedom and that is why I think this is a particularly important issue and I want to thank everyone at Open Doors for the work they've been doing in shining a spotlight on this issue. I think it is an extraordinary figure that nearly a quarter of a billion people are suffering persecution today because of their Christian faith. It's also extraordinary to think that 80 percent of people who are suffering persecution because of their faith are Christian. And when you look at the countries on that watch list, countries like Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, North Korea you realise that life is very very tough indeed for some of the people that you're going to hear from later this evening.

I want to think about what Britain's role could be. We are not a superpower but we are a global power and just as we shouldn't overestimate our strength we shouldn't underestimate it either and one thing we have despite all the travails of Brexit that we brilliantly timed this event to coincide with is we do have the most fantastic links around the world through our links with the Commonwealth our alliance with the United States, our links with our European friends and neighbours. And I want us to use those links to be an invisible chain that binds together countries that share our values. And I'm very pleased that we have Lord Ahmed here who is my Foreign Office Minister responsible for Freedom of Worship and who has been banging the drum for this for much much longer than I have and does an absolutely fantastic job and is himself someone who has a faith that is a branch of Islam that had to leave Pakistan because they were being persecuted in Pakistan. So this is someone who himself understands from his own family what religious persecution is about. We've also got Mark Fields who is the Foreign Office Minister for Asia. And Henrietta mentioned issues in both India and China where we need to

draw attention to the issues.

So I want us to think about what we can do to use those connections that we have as a country and I've asked Bishop Philip Mounstephen, the Bishop of Truro, to do an independent report looking at what the FCO does. And what I want to do is to remove any nervousness or sense of political correctness that might have said that Britain shouldn't be championing the rights of Christians around the world for whatever reasons, reasons of history and empire and all that sort of thing which may have been an issue that we have been a bit shy about in the past and we mustn't be. And I think it's also very important to remember that although we are a western country and a very wealthy country and a Christian country, the vast majority of people we're talking about are Christians in much much poorer countries and they are entitled to our thoughts and prayers and action just as any persecuted minority are anywhere in the world and I think that must be part of our mission.

So, let me just finish by making two requests; firstly for those of you that are Christians the next time you go to church, please hold in your thoughts and prayers those people in other parts of the world for whom that very simple act is an act of great courage. For me when I go to church the biggest stress is trying to get my kids to come along with me. But for other people who have much much more serious issues and we must remember that indeed Christianity has its heart in the story of persecution and so we should always be alive to those people suffering it today and secondly, please don't just hold it in your prayers but also remember there are things that we can do about this and this is not something that is just about making speeches. This is something where I want Foreign Office Ministers when we're interacting with countries where there are these issues for it always to be high on our list to raise with our Foreign Minister counterparts whether in private or in public. And I also want those people suffering this terrible persecution to think that there are people who understand what they're going through and are sincerely trying to do everything they can about it. So let me leave you with the words of a great American thinker Margaret Mead who said "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

Thank you very much.

[News story: Further Education providers invited to deliver new T Levels](#)

Further education providers across the country are being invited to apply to

be the first to deliver the next wave of T Levels to be taught from 2021, Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Anne Milton has announced today.

T Levels will be the technical equivalent of A Levels combining classroom theory, practical learning and an industry placement. The first three T Level courses in Digital Production, Design and Development; Design, Surveying and Planning; and Education will be taught in over 50 further education and post-16 providers from September 2020.

In December 2018, the Government announced the [next 7 T Levels](#) to be taught from 2021 as: Health; Healthcare Science; Science; Onsite Construction; Building Services Engineering; Digital Support and Services; and Digital Business Services. Today it is inviting providers to apply to deliver these new courses.

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister, Anne Milton said:

This is a truly exciting time. I'm absolutely thrilled at the progress we have made to deliver new T Levels. These transformational reforms have been designed in partnership with industry experts so employers can access the skilled workforce they need, and so more young people gain the skills they need to get a great job, go on to do a higher level apprenticeship or further study.

I would absolutely urge further education providers that meet the criteria to consider applying to be the first to teach the next wave of T Levels from 2021. It is a fantastic opportunity to be part of education history and help change lives for the better.

Deputy Chief Executive of The Association of Colleges, Julian Gravatt said:

We are delighted to see the publication of the Expression of Interest for 2021 T Level providers. The commitment that both good and outstanding providers will be eligible to deliver the first 10 T Levels from 2021 will ensure that many more young people from across England will have access to these new, innovative study programmes.

Principal at The College of Richard Collyer, Sally Bromley said:

Collyer's was successful in a bid to be one of the first providers of the T Level in the country. The courses will be available from September 2020 and there has already been lots of interest from prospective students. Employers have been involved in the course design because there is a significant work place element and I think this is what is attractive to students.

The Government has also set out that [UCAS points will be awarded for T Levels](#) in line with three A Levels – so young people, parents and employers know they are as stretching as their academic equivalents and will act as a stepping stone to progress to the next level whether that is a degree, higher level technical training or an apprenticeship.

T Levels will be backed by an additional half a billion pounds of investment every year when the new qualifications are fully rolled out. The Government also has announced an extra [£38 million to support the first T Level providers to invest in high quality equipment and facilities](#). As well as this, the Government is investing £20 million to support the further education sector to prepare for new T Levels. This includes the [£5 million Taking Teaching Further programme](#), which aims to attract more industry professionals to work in the sector, and the [£8 million T Level Professional Development](#) offer to help teachers and staff prepare for the roll-out of the new qualifications. The introduction of new T Levels are just one part of the Government's wider ambition to transform technical education and create a highly trained and competitive workforce that is a match for the best in the world. The Government has also worked with employers to overhaul the apprenticeship system so that it delivers higher quality, more flexible apprenticeships that cover a wider range of sectors and professions. Expressions of Interest are being invited until midnight on Thursday 28th February. Successful providers are expected to be announced in June 2019. For more information on the criteria, visit [here](#).

[News story: D-Day 75: events to mark 75th anniversary of Normandy Landings announced](#)

Events to commemorate the 75th anniversary of D-Day in June 2019 have been announced at an event at The D-Day Story in Portsmouth.

Vice Chief of the Defence Staff General Sir Gordon Messenger announced the official commemorations during a visit to The D-Day Story in Portsmouth. The Ministry of Defence has worked with The Royal British Legion and Portsmouth City Council to organise a series of events to take place in Portsmouth and Normandy.

The centrepiece of the D-Day 75 programme will be a specially-chartered ship which will carry D-Day veterans to key commemorations in Portsmouth and Normandy in June. The ship, chartered with funds from The Royal British Legion and a LIBOR grant from HM Treasury, will offer the veterans and their carers accommodation and travel for the duration of their visit at no cost to them.

Welcoming the announcement, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

75 years ago the forces of 13 Allied countries gathered in Britain before launching the historic operation to liberate Europe. Winston Churchill rightly said that D-Day was “undoubtedly the most complicated and difficult” operation that had ever taken place. This June we will show our veterans that the debt to them is never forgotten for the price they paid for the freedom and peace we now enjoy.

The key commemoration events will include an inauguration at the site of the Normandy Memorial Trust’s British Normandy Memorial and The Royal British Legion’s services at Bayeux Cathedral and Bayeux Cemetery. The commemorations will conclude with an evening of music and entertainment for veterans beside the beaches at Arromanches.

Portsmouth, from where much of the D-Day landing force sailed in 1944, will be the focal point of the UK commemorations and will host the UK national event on 5 June 2019. Portsmouth City Council is planning a series of events over five days to reflect the area’s unique role in one of the largest and well-known military operations in history.

Cllr Gerald Vernon Jackson, Leader, Portsmouth City Council said:

This June the city will be the focal point for reflection on the events of 1944. Veterans, military personnel and civilians will commemorate those lost and celebrate the achievements of the operation that sailed from Portsmouth 75 years ago. It’s fitting that we’re revealing the programme of events for D-Day 75 at The D-Day Story – the museum which has captured the human stories of those involved in that epic event.

D-Day veterans or those who would like to help a veteran attend the commemorations are asked to register with The Royal British Legion using the forms available [on their website](#).

The Royal British Legion’s Commemorative Events Lead, Bob Gamble OBE, said:

As we mark 75 years since the largest seaborne invasion the world has ever seen we salute the bravery and sacrifice of all those who took part in liberating Europe. We invite those who wish to attend the events to commemorate their historic achievements to get in touch with the Legion and join our all-costs-covered journey by ship back to France. The veterans will be the VIPs at this event and we will make sure their every need is catered for as they travel back to Normandy to take part in this landmark event.

Earlier today, the Defence Secretary published [an open letter](#) to D-Day veterans inviting them to register to take part in the commemorations.

Press release: Brighton drug-dealer jailed after Solicitor General's intervention

A man who dealt drugs to the Brighton party scene has today had his sentence increased after the Solicitor General, Robert Buckland QC MP, referred it to the Court of Appeal for being too low.

Police were called to the flat of Daniel Lewis, 30, after Aimee Spencer, 27, fell from his kitchen window, sustaining injuries which resulted in her death. Lewis was under the influence of drugs when police arrived, and a search of the flat revealed large quantities of drugs and drug-related paraphernalia.

They also found information which led them to a rented garage where Lewis was storing more drugs. The drugs found included high-purity cocaine and prescription medications.

Lewis was originally sentenced in November 2018 to 2 years imprisonment suspended for 2 years at Lewes Crown Court. He was also ordered to complete 300 hours of unpaid work, 15 days of rehabilitation activity requirements, and to be on curfew for 4 months. The Court of Appeal has today jailed Lewis for 3 years.

Commenting on the increase, the Solicitor General said:

“By selling large quantities of dangerous, high-purity drugs, Lewis was destroying the lives of others to support his own lavish lifestyle. I am pleased that the Court of Appeal has seen fit to bestow a custodial sentence on him today.”

Press release: Minister for Europe calls for investigation into

persecution of LGBT community in Chechnya

The Minister for Europe's remarks come following further disturbing reports of the continued persecution of LGBT people in Chechnya, concerns which previously surfaced in 2017.

The most recent reports suggest that a further 40 individuals have been detained, alongside two deaths in custody following torture. These must be investigated urgently.

FCO Minister Sir Alan Duncan said:

The persecution of LGBT people in Chechnya is utterly appalling. Recent reports indicate that two people have died in custody following torture, and a further 40 remain in detention – all simply for their sexual orientation. Persecution for being LGBT, in any country in the world, is abhorrent.

The Russian authorities must protect their people from these human rights abuses, and conduct a credible investigation into these reports immediately. There should be no climate of impunity for those who commit these abuses.

We and the international community have repeatedly called for the Russian Government to conduct an investigation and hold those responsible for human rights abuses in Chechnya to account, including through the 2018 OSCE Moscow Mechanism.

All decent people very much hope that Chechnya can put an end to this sort of barbaric persecution and step into the modern world of civility and tolerance.

Following similar reports in 2017, the OSCE Moscow Mechanism, invoked by the UK and 15 other countries in 2018, set out recommendations to Russia. We urge the Russian Government to implement these recommendations as a matter of urgency, and to uphold its international human rights obligations to its people.

Further information