



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Dr Mike Phipps
9 Manson Road
London
NW10 3UG

My ref: JF-ED/Phipps 16-10-14
PLEASE QUOTE IN ALL CORRESPONDENCE

16 October 2014

Dear Dr Phipps,

Iraq

Thank you very much for your correspondence regarding Iraq, which I received recently.

As you know, Parliament was recalled on 26 September to debate and vote on airstrikes on Isis targets in Iraq. I was, unfortunately, unable to attend the debate as I was in Lebanon in my role as chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Refugees.

I was in Lebanon in order to visit projects supporting Iraqi and Syrian refugees who have fled their country because of war -- conflict which has recently escalated considerably because of the rise of Isil – or Islamic State – or "Da'esh" as everyone refers to them in Lebanon.

Da'esh have taken a terrible toll on the people of Iraq and Syria. I have watched in horror as reports of unimaginable violence and suffering have become commonplace. The kidnapping and beheading of Alan Henning and a number of other foreign hostages, and the violence directed towards minorities including the Yazidis, Christians and Shias, compel us to act to prevent such suffering. While in Lebanon I met Iraqi Christians who had fled following threats from Da'esh. Their stories were raw and graphic to listen to.

Last year, the Government proposed military action in Syria following reports of chemical weapons use by the Syrian Government. I voted against this as I believed the case for military action to prevent further chemical attacks had not been made successfully, either practically or ethically. Looking back on that decision now, it is clear that it was the right one. Actively supporting the rebel groups would only have fuelled the rise of Da'esh more quickly.

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When Parliament was recalled in September this year, I considered carefully whether to return to the UK from Lebanon in order to vote. Notwithstanding the difficulties of getting a flight at extremely short notice, which presented a practical barrier to returning in time for the whole debate, I also felt ambiguous about the terms of the motion presented to MPs for support.

I should say that I am not opposed to military action in all situations. I accept that military intervention is sometimes necessary, for example as part of an international peacekeeping mission, as an urgent response to prevent an immediate or imminent humanitarian disaster such as genocide, or as an act of self-defence. The atrocities being committed by Da'esh on the ground provide a strong basis for intervention focused on protecting civilians. I also believe there to be legal basis for UK military intervention in Iraq, following the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's direct request for it. The international coalition that has been formed, and that includes a number of Arab states, is also positive.

However, I am yet to be convinced that we have a clear, coherent and deliverable long term strategy to defeat Da'esh, and am concerned that the piecemeal approach being offered is likely to increase the number of people displaced by the conflict, within Iraq and Syria and into surrounding countries and probably act as a recruiting agent for Da'esh by radicalising more moderate opinion. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, which I strongly opposed, showed the dire consequences of embarking on military action without a coherent long term strategy. Ultimately, I believe defeating Da'esh will require such a coherent political strategy and not just intermittent bombing raids.

Whilst we have seen a change in government in Iraq, there is still a critical need for inclusive governance to bring together Iraq's Shias, Sunnis and Kurds. The weakness of the Iraqi Government is in its failure to do so, and it is in this context that Da'esh has been able to thrive. I also believe we should target our diplomatic efforts on building alliances against Isis in the Middle East.

It was also clear to me during my visit to Lebanon that the need for humanitarian aid is greater than ever. Huge numbers of Syrians are now seeking refuge in Lebanon, some of whom previously sought refuge in Iraq and have now been driven from there as the conflict has spread. The UK has an important role to play here, and is leading the way on aid.

In total, the UK is delivering £23 million of aid, which includes £4 million for humanitarian supplies; £12.5 million of funding to the International Committee of the Red Cross and NGO partners to support over 200,000 people over the coming 6 months; £5 million given to UN partners and NGOs at the beginning of June to provide immediate life-saving assistance to 150,000 people; and a further £1.5 million to strengthen the overall

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humanitarian response. This includes support for logistics and coordination mechanisms to enable Kurdish and UN systems to respond to humanitarian needs in the region, as well as supporting the International Humanitarian Partnership to set up a camp for 20,000 displaced people near Dahuk.

However, we need to go further. Host countries in the region – primarily Lebanon and Jordan – were already struggling to provide food, water, shelter, education and other basic services to refugees. With tens of thousands of people newly displaced by the rise of Da'esh, the need for the international community to deliver humanitarian aid is greater than ever and there needs to be a coordinated plan for supporting refugees, not just in the region but beyond. This was something very clear to me from my visit to the region and is a point I shall be making to the Government over the forthcoming months.

I hope that this letter is helpful in explaining my views on this matter. Thank you very much again for writing to me. If there is anything else I can do please do not hesitate to contact me again using the details below.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Teather MP

Liberal Democrat MP for Willesden Green, Harlesden, Stonebridge, Welsh Harp, Dollis Hill, Dudden Hill, Mapesbury, Tokyngton and Kensal Green

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