

To my Esteemed Member of Parliament,

I am writing to draw your attention to the excellent work of local faith actors, (such as religious leaders, communities and faith-inspired organizations) in Iraq and Syria, where religious communities have suffered atrocities, displacement and persecution over recent years. Approximately, 50% of the Syrian Christian population has left since 2011 and 87% of the Iraqi Christian population since 2003. Those who remain are in need of encouragement and support to rebuild their livelihoods and many look to their faith leaders to find this.

Through all the struggles, local faith actors have served as first responders, providing humanitarian assistance and social services. They remain and engage long after media attention dwindles, and international organizations leave. Faith actors have great logistical access, knowing their communities well and often speaking several languages. They have often provided impartial assistance to their compatriots, becoming credible and trusted even by those from faith groups outside of their own. They have the ability to effect social change. For more research and details on the positive contribution of local faith actors, please see the attached policy paper by Open Doors.

Despite this, there are often barriers to faith actors accessing international funding for their work – for example, lacking the necessary expertise to navigate the complex application processes for international or government grants.

I am encouraged to see the UK and US government acknowledging the role of local faith leaders in the 2019 Wilton Park statement¹, and international funders like USAID starting to provide direct support to faith-based organizations in countries like Iraq². I would encourage you to look for creative solutions and strategies to streamline the allocation of humanitarian funds to qualified and trusted local faith actors in Iraq and Syria.

In order to partner with and adequately resource faith actors to continue to do their excellent work, and given the trend towards localization, I propose allocating a minimum of 5% of these localized funds to local faith actors by 2022.

I would be grateful to hear which actions you will take in this regard and I thank you in advance for your attention to this crucial topic.

Yours sincerely,

[Your name]

Resident of your riding – [POSTCODE]

¹ <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WP1641-Outcome-statement.pdf>

² <https://www.usaid.gov/npi>