

Vol. 826
No. 87



Friday
9 December 2022

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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House of Lords

Friday 9 December 2022

10 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Carlisle.

UK Asylum and Refugee Policy

Motion to Take Note

10.08 am

Moved by The Archbishop of Canterbury

That this House takes note of the principles behind contemporary United Kingdom asylum and refugee policy, and of the response to the challenges of forced migration.

The Archbishop of Canterbury: My Lords, I am very grateful to the usual channels for facilitating this debate, to those among the staff of the House who have had to work extra hard to come in today, and to so many noble Lords for being present. I look forward to hearing the maiden speeches of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester, the noble Lord, Lord Sahota, and the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, on this subject.

This will not be a sermon. As my last well-attended sermon was four and a half minutes long, that may be a disappointment to noble Lords. It is, nevertheless, underpinned by deeply held spiritual principles deriving from the words of Christ, beginning over 1,000 years ago, in terms of our policy and the application of them. The last time I delivered a sermon on this subject, it gained more than the usual attention; so much so that I see some of our newspapers this week have rebutted the arguments I am about to make before I have had a chance to deliver them—or even, for that matter, to prepare them. I am glad they have such gifts of mind-reading. “Get your rebuttal in first,” Willie John McBride, captain of the 1974 Invincibles, almost told his teammates; I think he said “retaliation”. For the avoidance of doubt, my intention today is to examine some of the moral considerations that should drive our policies in this area and then to propose some practical ways forward for the short, medium and long term.

The Church is often, and quite often rightly, criticised for talking about morality in isolation from the complexity of the real world, but when it comes to the treatment of refugees and those seeking asylum, it is the Church, here and abroad, which is doing so much of the heavy lifting of meeting and supporting, of healing and advocacy, right around the world. We look into the faces, we listen to the voices and we speak from that experience.

Two weeks ago, I visited Mozambique to inaugurate a new province in the Anglican Communion. While there, we went north to the area where ISIS is very active indeed. It is a beautiful country, with generous people recovering from civil war and now facing an atrocious extremist insurgency. I met a young woman

who had fled Daesh. She had seen beheadings in her village, she herself had been raped and then she had watched them smash her three month-old baby’s head against a tree. That is one reality.

Last week in Ukraine, standing by a mass grave, I met people who, with astonishing resolve, face a winter under Russian bombardment explicitly to destroy civilian infrastructure; a winter where, next month, it will fall probably to minus 20 degrees centigrade, and they will have neither electricity nor, because of that, water or the ability to heat.

These are two images of suffering which could be replicated in more than 50 other countries around the world. We know—and I make this absolutely clear and underline it—that Britain can neither resolve these problems by ourselves; nor can or should we take everyone who flees such devastation. It is beyond our capacity. But we do need to take a lead: how we shape our policies must look into the faces and listen to the voices.

Recognition of human dignity is the first principle that must underpin our asylum policy. A hostile environment is an immoral environment. Each human being has an inherent and immeasurable worth, regardless of their status, wealth, heritage or background. The Book of Genesis tells us:

“God created mankind in his own image.”

In chapter 25 of the Gospel of St Matthew, in the parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus tells his followers, about those who are strangers:

“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Care for the stranger has long been embedded in societies of Christian and Jewish roots and of other faiths right around the world. The welcome arrival in the UK of other religious faiths deepens these traditions of compassion. A compassionate asylum system is one that sees the faces of those in need and listens to their voices. A compassionate system does not mean open borders, but a disposition of generosity and a readiness to welcome those whose need is genuine and where we are able to meet that need.

It also means compassion and generosity to those communities that will receive refugees, which are often neglected and forgotten. I have seen this with my own eyes around the diocese of Canterbury in east Kent, which I serve and which perhaps bears the heaviest weight of this great crisis.

A compassionate policy is one that has confidence to reject the shrill narratives that all who come to us for help should be treated as liars, scroungers or less than fully human. Compassion is not weakness or naivety. It recognises the impact on receiving communities, which includes the need to limit numbers and maintain security and order. Compassion means ending the criminal activity of people smugglers—perhaps one of the biggest industries in the world, after drug smuggling. It must distinguish between victims seeking help and criminals who exploit them.

So much of the public and political debate on migration is driven by fear linked to change and a fear of loss of control. Some of these fears are understandable. Many people are concerned that their communities

[THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY]

and local services risk being overwhelmed. In east Kent, local schools, businesses and hospitals have risen amazingly and magnificently to the challenge. The RNLi and Border Force have carried out their mandate of saving life at sea, despite the disgraceful politicisation of their work by some. There is real pressure on housing, schools and GP surgeries, to which they respond superbly. By the way, refugees have not caused our housing crisis; we are around 40 years behind in our investment in housing stock. There would be a crisis anyway.

The number of asylum seekers has dropped in the past two decades. In 2021, 48,540 asylum applications were made in the UK; in 2002, there were 84,132—almost twice as many. Other countries have taken significantly more refugees. In the year ending September 2021, Germany received over 127,000 applications and France over 96,000. It is not a competition, but we need to face the fact that the UK ranked only 18th in Europe for our intake of asylum applications per head of population in that period. It cannot be repeated enough that four out of five refugees stay in their region of displacement, hosted by even poorer nations. If you spoke to Uganda and other countries in that area, they would call 45,000 a rounding error.

When we fail to challenge the harmful rhetoric that refugees are the cause of this country's ills—that they should be treated as problems and not people, invaders to be tackled and deterred—we deny the essential value and dignity of fellow human beings. The right to seek asylum and the duty of the global community together to protect refugees has been politically degraded in this country, when it should be a positive source of pride. I am not addressing only the Government Front Bench; this has been a decades-long downward slide over successive Labour, Conservative and coalition Governments.

Noble Lords would expect me to say something about the Rwanda policy. We cannot separate the policy from the moral arguments. The Government did not do this when they announced the policy in Holy Week this year—the most sacred week of the Christian calendar—on Maundy Thursday, when in Christian belief Jesus was washing the feet of his disciples, including Judas Iscariot. The Prime Minister of the time gave a speech in which he used the word “compassion” six times and described the policy as “the morally right thing to do”.

In my sermon on Easter Sunday, I gave a brief view on this—five lines in a three-page sermon—and shortly afterwards, every one of my colleagues on these Benches issued a statement concluding that this was an “immoral policy” that “shames Britain”. It is very rare on these Benches that we are united on almost anything. I congratulate the Prime Minister on managing to unite the Bishops' Benches. What a miracle. It is a good reason for the other 53% of the population to click the census to say that they are Christian.

The Government have said that the Rwanda policy aims to deter people from arriving in the UK through “illegal, dangerous and unnecessary methods”.

There is little or no evidence that this deterrence or the hostile environment works; the Government's own impact assessment confirms that. The complaint I

make is not about Rwanda, a country that I know well and in which there is much that I admire. A compassionate policy is one that recognises that we have a share of global responsibility; outsourcing our share creates more opportunities for people smugglers to operate in and around Rwanda. It is not a solution; it is a mistake, and it will be a failure.

Furthermore, the desire for orderly migration to discourage people from “skipping the queue” is absurd if there is no legal queue. This is a point that the Home Secretary and her officials recently conceded at the Home Affairs Select Committee in the Commons. There is no “safe” or “regular” route for an Iranian Christian or a gay man or woman from Eritrea to come to the UK to claim asylum, yet both would be highly likely to have a valid claim if they got here. Unless you are coming from Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria or Hong Kong—and that, by the way, is not asylum but financial visas—or are eligible for the restrictive family reunion criteria, there is no regular route that you can use. It was reported this month that not one person has been accepted and evacuated from Afghanistan under the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme. The Minister has very kindly written to me to correct that report, which was in the newspapers last Sunday; I hope in his response that he will clarify that correction for the whole House.

When migrants arrive here, our system is grossly wasteful—in both human and financial terms. Control has become cruelty. Staggering inefficiencies by successive Governments trap people in limbo—at incredible expense to the taxpayer—in the system for years, unable to build a life or to contribute to our society. I recently came across someone who had been in the asylum system for 14 years—14 years, my Lords. Evidence from the Home Affairs Select Committee shows that, of all the people who arrived in the UK by boat and claimed asylum in 2021, only 4% of claims had been processed by the Home Office by October 2022. This does not treat people with dignity or compassion, nor is it control. As well as the overcrowded and disease-ridden conditions exposed recently—which the Government are now addressing—camps and hotel accommodation keep migrants separate from the rest of the community. That segregation feeds concerns about lack of control. It fails to treat asylum seekers and refugees as neighbours who are to be loved, or citizens in waiting. We miss out on the gifts they bring and want to contribute. I met someone yesterday who is now a citizen. He is incredibly proud of his citizenship and is contributing enormously to our society by working with people in prison to help them go straight when they come out.

Solidarity with others is built by contact and building relationships. Instead, we feed the politics of suspicion and division. There are real alternatives to this. We have seen in the Ukraine scheme that asylum seekers and refugees can live within existing communities. Such communities should receive prompt and adequate government support. It does cost money, but it is cheaper than exporting our responsibilities and much cheaper if the system is compassionate, clear, efficient, accurate and effective. We are clear that the UK cannot take everyone, but it can make its decisions through a system which balances effective, accurate and clear control with compassion and dignity—a system based

in our history and proper moral responsibilities. We used to talk of no recourse to public funds. A system of segregation risks creating a policy of no recourse to public compassion. We should take heart from the magnificent public response to refugees of recent years. In this country, there are still profound reserves of kindness and good will to draw on.

What can we do in the short, medium and long term which is underpinned by these principles? In the short term, we can combat smugglers and prevent small boats from crossing the channel. To minimise irregular arrivals, we need to provide safe and legal ways for people to get here and receive assessment and, where appropriate, protection. Approaches for this can include expanding the family reunification models, community sponsorship, and humanitarian visas and corridors from a far greater number of countries. We cannot continue with the tenfold increase, between 2010 and 2020, in the number of people waiting more than a year for an initial decision. The average processing time for an asylum case is currently around 15 months—it should be a maximum of six. In Germany in 2021, the average asylum procedure took 6.6 months despite a far higher refugee and asylum-seeker population. Nearly one-third of those who have been waiting more than six months are made up of nationals from 10 countries that have a successful application rate of between 75% and 99%. It is ridiculous and disgraceful that people fleeing Afghanistan and Syria have to wait so long when their applications will almost certainly be granted.

It is right that safe countries are currently determined by statutory instrument; Parliament is then able to democratically scrutinise those decisions, altering them, where needed, on the views and needs of the population. We need a triaging system to cut back which distinguishes quickly between people, based on the likelihood that they will be granted asylum; it would speed up decision-making, and allow those who almost certainly would not be granted asylum to be removed almost immediately. That is not so far from our current policy but, in practice, it is not happening. The Home Office could do that. Removing people whose claims are unsuccessful can happen in a dignified way. There has been real success with voluntary removals in the past when the Government collaborated with civil society. Returns have been on a downward trajectory, however, for a number of years. Removals will be swift, just and fair only if the system is clear, accurate and not overwhelmed. In the meantime, I propose we should also make one major change: asylum seekers should not be just allowed to work but expected to work, except in limited circumstances where it would clearly be inappropriate. This combines and matches the right to fair and dignified protection with a responsibility to their new society and the common good.

I have four seconds left. In the medium term, we suggest that people smuggling, like piracy, should become an international crime and that the UK should take the lead in the struggle against people smuggling by forming an international body to track it down and attack it everywhere. It is what we did in the 17th century against piracy and in the 19th century against slave trading. Surely this is as serious.

Finally, in the longer term, we need to update the 1951 refugee convention, which is hugely valuable in maintaining the importance of protection for all refugees but must be made fit for the new challenges that we face. A recent report by the Legatum Institute lays out some areas of ambiguity, including the role of the safe third-country principle, the responsibility to report other countries that are hosting many refugees, guidance on return and readmission and the eligibility of people fleeing new drivers of displacement, such as climate migrants. This problem is going to get worse. Britain showed global leadership in 1951, and we can do so again. We need more ambition in our policies. Time is not a luxury. Climate change and conflict risk driving migration for future generations at a rate we cannot imagine today—perhaps tenfold more.

Of course, we do not have the answer on these Benches, but the Church of England, together with many others, plays a leading role in dealing with the consequences of our present policy and its chronic dysfunction. We have done so for quite a while. In a chapel in Canterbury Cathedral, there is an inscription several centuries old that bears witness to the protection given to French Huguenots who fled persecution in the 17th and 18th centuries. The community needed a place to worship, and a chapel in the cathedral was offered to them by a simple exchange of one-page letters. They are still there. The French Protestant Church of Canterbury is there today, next to the plaque which heralds

“the glorious asylum which England has in all times given to foreigners flying for refuge against oppression and tyranny.”

This is our tradition, our history and our pride. Let us make it our future. I beg to move.

10.31 am

Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Con): My Lords, it is a great honour to follow the most reverend Primate. I must start by commending him for his choice of topic and for giving us the opportunity to debate immigration and asylum today. I also commend him for his comprehensive opening speech, particularly his acknowledgement towards the end of the need to revisit the refugee convention.

During the passage of the Nationality and Borders Act earlier this year, several Peers justified their opposition to it by claiming that most voters who wanted greater immigration controls did so on a false understanding—basically, that these voters could be ignored because they were not sufficiently informed. According to YouGov’s latest tracker poll, published on Monday this week, 56% of all UK adults believe that the rate of immigration to the UK is too high. In my remarks, I want to focus on why more than half of us who contribute to our economy and our local communities take that view and are demanding action. Let us be clear: they are people of all colours, faiths and religions. Some are immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants. They deserve to be heard and understood.

What we have learned about the divisions in our society exposed by recent democratic events helps us to understand what unites this diverse group. They are likely to work hard, do their best for their family, be good neighbours and enjoy living and working in a

[BARONESS STOWELL OF BEESTON]

place to which they have a sense of belonging. Instinctively, they will share a commitment to social norms, standards of behaviour and common courtesies which support good order and represent fairness and the consideration of others. It is obvious stuff that costs nothing or very little, such as taking our turn and not jumping queues; being reliable and keeping our word; caring about the general upkeep of public spaces; or dressing smartly when the place or occasion deserves a demonstration of respect. These are important shared standards, because they are acts of self-discipline which demonstrate respect and help us to form bonds that cross boundaries and build trust. They are standards that are neither beneath anyone nor beyond anyone. People expect those of us in positions of authority—in politics, business, media or the Church—to help protect and promote these common standards by sharing them too.

But what have we relegated our common bonds in favour of? Something more exclusive. When did virtue signalling to one another within the elite become more important than keeping faith with the values we all have in common, regardless of our status? We have allowed criminal gangs and opportunists to weaponise our differences and endanger the lives of economic migrants in the process. If that is not bad enough, at the same time, we are increasing the divisions in our society by suggesting that the democratic wishes of the majority do not matter. That is why we need to get a grip of illegal immigration.

We should not be surprised that people become distressed by increased pressure on local services. When it comes to those who do unskilled work—in warehouses, distribution centres or factories—we fail to understand that what makes those jobs bearable, alongside decent pay and working conditions, is creating a sense of community through camaraderie, collective effort and friendship. A working environment that is attractive to people doing repetitive jobs is difficult to create when no one cares if the workforce can relate to each other and technology, not human beings, determines operational standards and whether someone is doing a good job.

No one expects or wants zero immigration, and people want to help and support refugees fleeing war and persecution. However, successful and effective immigration and asylum policy relies on us understanding the valid concerns of the majority of our citizens who are opposed to the current rates of people entering the UK. The first step has to be implementing tighter controls. High-minded pronouncements, hand-wringing and the free-for-all it is creating are what is putting lives in danger, not by not doing everything we can to deter people from illegally crossing the channel. I would support any further measure to that end brought forward by the Government, and I hope that serious consideration is given to the recommendations in the CPS report by Nick Timothy and Karl Williams published this week. I hope my noble friend the Minister will comment on that when he comes to wind up.

What I know is that dismissing people's concerns fuels division and drives distrust in the democratic process. If we are serious about building a more prosperous and cohesive society, we need to show that we are proud to be living alongside the great people of this

country, who are what makes us successful and whose good character is what attracts talent and like-minded people from all around the world.

10.37 am

Baroness Twycross (Lab) (Maiden Speech): My Lords, I am pleased and very honoured to make my maiden speech today. I thank your Lordships for the kindness and support I have received since entering this House. I also thank my noble friends Lord Kennedy of Southwark and Lady Smith of Basildon for introducing me to the House and for their advice and guidance over the past few weeks. I am grateful as well for the advice and guidance of all colleagues from across the House. I have hugely appreciated the warm welcome and answers to my many questions from the doorkeepers and other staff. I particularly give thanks for the welcome and assistance given to my parents and parents-in-law on the day of my introduction. I feel blessed that they could attend, along with my stepchildren.

If this country is built on migration, then the same is true for my family. My husband is Norwegian, and my interest in politics was inspired by my Irish grandfather who spent part of his childhood living above a laundry on a country estate, his family in service. My grandfather, Jack Campbell, went on to become a civil servant. I did try to follow in his footsteps but was rejected for being too opinionated at my interview. This rejection, however, has led to me having the most interesting life and career so far and was arguably one of the best things that ever happened to me.

I have been fortunate to work with some incredible people and to study, live and work throughout the UK. My current role is Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience. I am grateful for the opportunity the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, gave me by appointing me to this role, which saw me taking a lead in London's response to Covid. I owe a lot to those I have worked for and the confidence they have shown in me over my career. Indeed, I have worked out that I have well over half a dozen former bosses in this House, mainly from my time working for the Labour Party but also from my time at the health charity Diabetes UK. This alone will make me mind my behaviour. My goal is to avoid faux pas and I aim, as we all do, to make a difference through my work here. At the moment, however, I am trying my hardest to figure out the correct times to stand, where to walk and not to walk, where to sit and how to make sure I do not get shouted at.

My experience here so far reminds me of my early days as a London Assembly member, when everyone else seemed to understand the unwritten protocols and the unspoken rules. I thank all those who are helping to guide me through these rules, in particular the noble Baronesses, Lady Donaghy and Lady Wheeler.

I am also grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. Immigration is an issue I feel passionately about, and I agree strongly with the sentiments so eloquently expressed in the most reverent Primate's excellent speech.

I declare an interest at this point as chair of the London Resilience Forum. The forum has over 200 member organisations. These are generally organised into sector panels to ensure that the voices of all those

organisations that may be called upon to plan for or respond to an emergency are heard. Today's debate is particularly appropriate in recognition of the work of the Church of England in leading the faith sector panel in London, and the work the Church undertakes in similar roles on LRFs across the country. Along with the voluntary sector, including both national and community-based organisations, faith organisations representing all faiths provide the welcome those fleeing conflict or injustice deserve. They play a vital role in the work of LRFs in relation to forced migration.

Local resilience forums over the past few years have become in some ways the go-to partnerships of last resort, often picking up issues where government cannot identify another obvious way to deal with a crisis. LRF preparedness includes responding to support colleagues from other agencies and partnerships, such as regional strategic migration partnerships, when forced migration does not run as smoothly as it might. Over recent years we have seen forced migration increase with conflict overseas. We should be particularly proud of how the British population stepped up to welcome Ukrainians to this country. There is much to learn and ponder in the context of this debate. However, I will briefly refer to the Afghan relocations and assistance policy—the ARAP scheme—which was set up in April 2021.

A number of those with local government expertise have already described the admirable work carried out during this period, and also how numerous people, including families, pregnant women and children, have been accommodated, sometimes for months and years, in overcrowded hotels. It is clear that the Government could have been far better prepared when planning the airlifts from Kabul which took place in August 2021. However, I want to refer instead to the role of the London Fire Brigade.

As your Lordships know, the London Fire Brigade has had some very challenging press over recent weeks, and some of its problems in relation to culture were debated by this House yesterday. I am proud that the LFB is facing its problems head on. However, I would also say that, despite its issues, the LFB is the best type of emergency service when called upon in a crisis. The fire brigade is made up of doers: the type of people who run towards a problem, rather than run away. Therefore, on the August bank holiday last year, when I was told that there was a problem with basic items reaching immigrants and a lack of drivers to deliver them, I picked up the phone to the fire brigade to ask if it had the capacity to deliver essentials such as nappies and sanitary towels to hotels housing recent arrivals from Afghanistan. It sorted the vital deliveries within hours.

In conclusion, it has been an honour to be able to make my first speech in your Lordships' House in this debate and on this important subject. I look forward to making future contributions on this and other matters.

10.43 am

Lord Dubs (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend on her excellent maiden speech. She brings with her a great deal of experience of the sort we want to hear more of, both from the voluntary

sector and from local government, and I am sure she will make outstanding contribution to future debates. I also welcome the fact that she has chosen this particular debate to make her mark, and I hope she will contribute to many of the discussions we are going to have on asylum and refugee policy in the future. This is not the end of it—there will be many more debates.

I must also say how delighted I was when I learned that the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury had chosen this subject, of all possible subjects, for his debate this year. It is one we have all been talking about, it is an issue that matters, and it gives us a chance to talk about many of the things that are relevant and which he raised in his excellent speech this morning.

The refugee issue is testing our humanitarian principles to the ultimate. Our response will determine what sort of country we are, what sort of country we want to be seen as, but particularly how we value our fellow human beings who have suffered greatly from persecution due to wars and conflicts. We have to stand firmly behind the principles established by the most reverend Primate this morning.

There is a plaque off Central Lobby in the House of Commons which is a thank you from the 10,000 children who came on the Kindertransport to this country in 1938 and 1939. It is a thank you from the people—I was one of them—whose lives were saved by the fact that this country took them in. There are other people today whose lives have been saved because we are taking them in. I agree with the most reverend Primate that of course we cannot take everybody, but we should accept our share of responsibility.

There is both a positive and a negative side to all this. The positive is that there are some wonderful people, groups and organisations. I will mention just four of them. The faith groups have stood firmly by the principle that we should treat our fellow human beings decently—all of the faiths: the Church of England, Jews, Muslims, and so on. They have all stood firmly by the need for us to be supportive of our fellow human beings. I find it exhilarating and rewarding to talk to schools. Sometimes, when I talk to schools about what is going on, I can hardly stop the children leaving school and rushing off to Calais to help refugees, which is not what the teachers want. The fact is that, in the jargon, they get it. They really get it—more than most people. Also, there are the NGOs that work with refugees. Safe Passage is one of them, and there is the Refugee Council, of which I am a patron, but there are others as well, such as Care4Calais. They are doing an excellent job of being supportive of their fellow human beings.

Lastly, there are the ones who often tend to be forgotten. In visiting some of the refugee camps, or what is left of them in Calais and on the Greek islands, you come across the volunteers—many from this country but not exclusively so—often young people who are willing to devote a year or two of their lives to help their fellow human beings. They do not get all the accolades or the praise, but they should. It is a tremendous sign of how young people are prepared to work for the most vulnerable of their fellow human beings in difficult and uncomfortable circumstances.

[LORD DUBS]

In looking at the asylum and refugee issue, I, among others, have clearly said that this must not be the property of one political party; we have to look across the board. What I found with some of the amendments and arguments in which I got involved was that even Ministers came up to me and said, “Never mind: keep going with your amendment”, even though the official government policy was to deny the amendment. That was pretty exhilarating. I said to one or two Ministers, “But you shouldn’t be saying this to me.” I know for a fact that at quite senior levels there was support for some of these amendments. The Government are not monolithic—they are not saying, “We only have one view on this”—and I am delighted.

Having said that, it is important, in order that we can welcome vulnerable people to our communities, that senior people in government send out the right signals. Public opinion needs to be won over to the arguments we heard from the most reverend Primate this morning. Public opinion matters. It was public opinion that persuaded the Government to accept one of the amendments I put forward, because public opinion was pretty forceful. I remember walking down the road in west London, and somebody shouted at me. Normally, when people shout at politicians it is hostile, but this was not. A voice said, “Keep going with your amendment.” I took a great deal of comfort from that. Although I get a few hostile emails and so on, the number of supportive messages from the public far outweighs the hostility. Maybe that is not a good statistical sample, but I believe that one of our challenges is to keep public opinion on our side. I remember how, at the time of that amendment, public opinion was won over at the sight of a Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, drowned on a Mediterranean beach. Public opinion responded to that positively, and that helped to sway the argument.

However, we have voices going the other way. The most reverend Primate referred to the use of “invaders”. Throughout history, invaders have been the enemies of this country. We should not regard people who come here for safety as the enemy.

I finish with two brief comments. I went to a large refugee camp in Jordan called Zaatari. That camp is physically better than many because it has electricity, sanitation and prefab buildings. I got talking to a Syrian boy who had just finished his education in the camp. I asked him, “What now?” He said, “I can’t get a job in the camp or outside the camp. What hope is there for me?” One of our main responsibilities is to give hope to our vulnerable fellow human beings. It is hope that is important.

Secondly, as somebody who came here as a refugee, let me say that this country has been pretty terrific to me. I value that, and I know that the refugees who come here today also value being able to live in this country, find safety, get on with their education, get work and become part of our local communities. Surely that is the aspiration we should all aim for.

10.51 am

Baroness Hamwee (LD): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, has been valuable to this country. I should say that I chair the House’s Justice and Home Affairs

Select Committee although I will speak for myself, not the committee, today; however, I am of course informed by the committee’s current work on family migration.

Families and migration are significant not only to people who are struggling—it can be a great struggle to be with family now—but to those of us who owe our presence in the UK to our family’s decision to come here, as the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, reminded us. As recently as the previous generation, many are in high places now—and a good thing, too. That is in my mind when I hear about the increasingly exclusionary and unworkable policies. I hear them as rhetoric, not reason, when it is leadership and the calming of suspicions that are needed.

The first time I stood for election, more than 40 years ago, someone said to me, “Where will my grandchildren live?” This is not a new issue. However, the provision of housing, education and a range of other services for the settled community should not be a matter for competition with newcomers. Both groups need them. The House is grateful to the most reverend Primate for articulating what some of us struggle to express.

The Home Secretary is reported as saying that we need a Bill of responsibilities, as distinct from a Bill of Rights. Are both not important? I would hope that that includes a responsibility towards, for instance, employees of the British Council and their families who are stuck in Afghanistan, whose plight I do not need to describe, and those who have provided security for our diplomats—there are lots of examples that one could give. Can the Minister say something about the number of people who have actually been assisted under the ACRS and ARAP? Also, how many are eligible for those schemes but have not been able to take advantage of them?

There is a sort of contract between those whom the UK welcomes and this country, although “welcome” is not the right word given how much of the process is working. Perhaps it is the company I keep, but I have never met an asylum seeker or refugee who is not grateful, keen to contribute to our society and frustrated by the rules that preclude it. Of course, the irony is that the skills, talents and characteristics that many refugees bring are needed here. Would I have had the gumption to get up and go, or would I have put my head in the sand? There are particular character traits involved alongside the external imperative; these are traits that we know employers welcome and are needed.

Slavery and trafficking are not unrelated to asylum seeking. Yesterday, I heard conscription in Eritrea be described as “state slavery”. Not every slavery claim is false. Are the Government retreating from their work on modern slavery? What should we read into the delay in appointing a new Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner? Is every Albanian to be disbelieved? Who can be surprised that Albanian children are going missing? It is a well-known pattern because traffickers and abusers are trusted by victims more than they trust the UK authorities. I understand that 88% of Albanian women have succeeded in their asylum claims; that figure is not an outlier.

The noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, referred to the Centre for Policy Studies’ publication of this week, endorsed by the Home Secretary. The centre’s website page on the publication refers to the views of Conservative

switchers who voted Conservative in 2019 but have since drifted away; they seem to be the audience. Importantly, we must distinguish asylum seekers and refugees from immigrants who come here for various reasons and make up the greater number by far.

Years ago, I heard the term “detained fast track”. I thought that it was benign, fast-track acceptance. In 2015, the system was declared unlawful by Lord Dyson in the Court of Appeal, primarily because

“the time limits are so tight as to make it impossible for there to be a fair hearing of appeals in a significant number of cases.”

Are we heading for “seek asylum” detention, fast-tracked away without assessment? The new tier system means no assessment at all.

The Government seem to focus on excluding asylum seekers. What we do not hear about is the effort that is going into dealing with the criminal smugglers, as distinct from revictimising their victims. The criminals are able to tweak their business model or move it to say, Rwanda, if they are not prosecuted and penalised.

Today’s Motion refers to “forced migration”. Climate change is forcing it, with migrants displaced far and wide within their own regions. People will take avoiding action—that is not economic migration—and will be planning ahead. So should the UK, and with compassion, confidence and practical common sense. We are left with this question: in the context of the current and anticipated international situation, what do the Government regard as the UK’s fair share?

I wish that we had longer for this debate.

10.57 am

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (CB): My Lords, I am grateful to the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury for this important debate. Much of what he told us has resonant echoes in Sikh teachings. I am also grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, for her moving maiden speech. I look forward to the other maiden speeches, in particular that of my friend and fellow Sikh, the noble Lord, Lord Sahota.

In the past, it was normal to look on people in distant lands with suspicion and fear as likely to harm us and our obviously superior way of life. In Shakespeare’s “Richard II”, John of Gaunt underlined this way of thinking when he described Britain as a

“precious stone set in the silver sea”

to guard us

“Against the envy of less happier lands”.

Today, the internet and television have brought distant and supposedly lesser people into our living rooms. We see and share the sorrow of people, as far apart as Ukraine and Afghanistan, who have lost family members and their homes as a result of conflict.

Today, we live in a smaller, interdependent world. The war in Ukraine has repercussions all over the world, with famine in Africa. Although it started in China, the Covid pandemic caused death and suffering across the world. The challenges of climate change and global warming threaten future generations and can be met only by co-operation in universal action. As a Christian hymn reminds us:

“New occasions teach new duties,
Time makes ancient good uncouth;

They must upward still and onward,
Who would keep abreast of truth.”

It is inevitable that people suffering man-made conflict or natural disasters will try to better themselves and move to areas of greater safety and opportunity. Sadly, they are often met with irrational hostility to foreigners, rooted in the mindset of the past. Religious leaders have long been aware that seeing others as lesser people is a recipe for conflict. More than 300 years ago, the Sikh gurus looking at the bigotry and conflict-producing claims of superiority in the India of the day boldly declared that, for peace and justice, we must recognise that we are all members of one interdependent human family.

What was desirable 300 years ago is an imperative today. Despite this, those seeking asylum in this country are seen as alien invaders by many, including our Home Secretary. In a callous desire to appeal to latent bigotry, she even went further, in putting blame for the insanitary conditions and overcrowding at the Manston processing centre on the asylum seekers themselves. With the very same logic, it could be equally argued that patients are to blame for delays in admission to hospitals.

As we have heard, we are not even in the top 10 countries that show generosity to strangers per head of population. Today, there are chronic labour shortages in hospitals, care homes and elsewhere, while at the same time, we are trying to send refugees desperate for work to places such as Rwanda.

In the Prayers that begin our daily sittings, we are urged to put aside our prejudices and use Christian teachings to underpin political decision-making. Deuteronomy reminds us to be kind to strangers,

“for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Leviticus reminds us that, when a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him,

“you shall love him as yourself”.

These far-sighted teachings, echoed in Sikhism and other faiths, are the very opposite of today’s harsh attitudes to those seeking asylum, which harm not only those seeking refuge but our standing in the world. They should be re-examined with urgency.

11.03 am

The Lord Bishop of Chelmsford: My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, for her gracious maiden speech and for mentioning the role of churches in local resilience forums. I look forward to hearing the two maiden speeches to come. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester and I were formerly colleagues when I was Bishop of Loughborough, and I look forward to working with him in this House.

I thank my right reverend friend the Archbishop of Canterbury for securing this timely and important debate. This past year alone, we have seen multiple developments of concern, with an increase in forced migration due to conflict around the globe and over a third of Ukraine’s population displaced by war, with millions seeking refuge beyond their borders. A record 40,000-plus people have made the precarious English Channel crossing. We have also seen deeply troubling conditions faced by people once they are in the UK:

[THE LORD BISHOP OF CHELMSFORD]
overcrowded processing centres, threats of deportation to Rwanda, and a lack of resettlement through the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme.

In the swirl of revelations and challenges, it is easy to be swept along by the immediate, looking for a quick fix before the next issue comes along. There is of course real value in reacting effectively in the moment, particularly from those meeting humanitarian need, as seen in the extraordinary response of the British public to the Homes for Ukraine scheme. But there is also value in reflection on the principles that guide such actions and the system that they exist within.

What is the purpose of our migration system and who is it for? To echo the words of the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury, at the heart of the matter is the recognition that every one of us is created in the image of God, with intrinsic worth and dignity. Scripture calls on us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and welcome the stranger. In our contemporary context, what does welcome look like for those seeking refuge today?

This is the very question that the Woolf Institute's newly formed and independent Commission on the Integration of Refugees is exploring. I declare my interest as vice-chair of the commission. It is an honour to be involved under the excellent chairmanship of the noble Lord, Lord Carlile. As I am sure he will shortly outline in greater detail, we are seeking to bring together a range of views and experiences from our commissioners and from others across the country. Those with very different opinions and approaches are agreed that the system is broken. We have come together to move towards a vision for the better integration of refugees. As the Good Faith Partnership wrote in its report for the commission, published just last month,

“the stage is ... set for those with practical ideas to tap into this widely held desire from the British public to integrate newcomers into their homes and communities.”

I and many others believe that one of those key practical ideas is the provision of housing. Good refugee integration requires good housing solutions. I declare my interest as lead bishop for housing. I arrived in this country with my parents at the age of 13, while the Iranian revolution gripped my homeland. I arrived as a refugee. We were able to build our lives here, in large part thanks to the housing provided to us when we arrived, first in a theological college and later in a vacant vicarage. We had a home again; we had stability and safety from which to build our lives again. It is out of that that my own life has grown. Creating this rootedness remains a key factor for successful refugee integration today.

The report of the Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community, *Coming Home*, concluded that

“good housing should be sustainable, safe, stable, sociable and satisfying.”

However, for many refugees, this is not their experience. Countless refugees remain in overcrowded temporary accommodation for long periods. In August 2021, over 20,000 Afghan citizens were evacuated by the British military. More than a year later, 12,000-plus are still housed in hotels, costing £1.5 million per day. This is both dehumanising and expensive.

So how do we respond? Part of the solution is “meanwhile housing”, the installation of demountable, sustainable, high-quality homes on meanwhile-use land. This provides better outcomes for refugees and improved use of public funds. Bristol City Council's project, Enabling Housing Innovation for Inclusive Growth, has been pioneering in taking the solution forward. We at the newly launched Church Housing Foundation are actively working with government and others to find ways to assist the provision of meanwhile housing.

Additionally, lifting the ban on the right to work, as the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury has said, would have a transformative impact, enabling individuals to create more security for themselves by putting to use the skills that they have. Indeed, a YouGov poll earlier this year found that 81% of the public agree.

A high percentage of those who apply for asylum are granted permission to stay. If these individuals are to have a chance of settling well, they must discover a new sense of belonging. Belonging grows from a combination of receiving good and dignified welcome—for example, in how they are housed—and the opportunity to contribute from the earliest moment, chiefly through the right to work.

Finally, on a positive note, I recognise and praise the incredible work going on in local churches and communities across the country to welcome the stranger, including in the diocese in which I serve, Chelmsford. As we strive towards better refugee integration, in principle and in practice, we can also be encouraged by the many good examples already around us.

11.09 am

Lord Lilley (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the most reverend Primate the Archbishop on introducing this debate and the powerful way he did so. It is good to hear from the Bishops' Benches a statement of Christian principles applied to the issues of the day, rather than the normal aspects of political debate.

This issue raises very difficult dilemmas for Christians. Being a very inadequate Christian myself, I take up the challenge from the most reverend Primate the Archbishop with trepidation: to try to formulate principles for governing our policy on asylum and migration. Not having direct access to the mind of God like the most reverend Primate the Archbishop, I seek those principles in the Bible.

I recall that our Lord said that the essence of Christianity is to love God and love our neighbour as ourselves. When asked who our neighbour is, he gave the parable of the good Samaritan, when a Samaritan helps a Jew—from which I deduce that our neighbour is not just the person next door to us and not necessarily a member of our own nation; it can be anyone. The first principle I therefore deduce is that, although charity begins at home, as a lot of my constituents used to tell me, it does not necessarily end at home. I am at one with the most reverend Primate the Archbishop on that.

Secondly, the Samaritan did what he practically could. We may be called on to help anyone we practically can, but we cannot help everyone. Again, the most

reverend Primate the Archbishop recognised that and it is important that we recognise that our responsibilities are finite, in this respect.

Thirdly, when the Levite and the Jewish priest reached their destination, I have no doubt that they deplored how, owing to years of austerity, there had been insufficient spending on police and the health service to prevent the problem arising in the first place or to treat the person, instead of leaving it to the passing Samaritan. Therefore, my third principle is that, to be a good Samaritan, you have to give care, help and so on at your expense. We, as politicians, may have to take decisions on behalf of others but, in doing so, we should have consideration for the impact we are having on others and not imagine we are being virtuous when we do good at their expense.

The first principle is that charity begins at home, in how we treat people who have come to settle here. When I was a child, mass immigration into this country was just beginning. The parish in which I lived asked each family to link up with a migrant family, many of whom were lonely, isolated and, at worst, facing hostility. My family was linked up to a delightful Mauritian couple, whom we would invite to supper every few weeks. We became good friends. That was done by parishes across south London. I would love to hear from Bishops who have not yet spoken about what the churches are doing today to help integrate those who are here in our society and to be the good Samaritans to our neighbours from abroad.

But charity does not end at home. I pay tribute to those tens of thousands of people who opened their homes to families fleeing the bombing in Ukraine, while their menfolk remained to fight for their country. We should not imagine we are sharing in being good Samaritans if we throw open the doors of our country to everybody because, if we do that, we are doing good at others' expense. We are, in effect, saying that migrants, be they legal or illegal, asylum seekers or otherwise, through housing benefit and social housing, will have access to rented and social homes. We all have our own homes, so we will not be affected. Therefore, more young people will have to wait at home or live in cramp bed-sitters for longer, because of what we, as legislators, think we are doing generously, without taking the impact on others into account.

The second principle is that our neighbour can be anyone, but it cannot be everyone. Millions of people want to come here. Look at the impact of the green card system the Americans operate, when they make 30,000 visas to the US available to certain countries and say, "Anyone can apply; there is a ballot." Some 9% of the population of Albania applied when they heard about that being offered to them, as did 11% of the Armenian and 14% of the Liberian populations. These were only the people who heard about it and responded. The potential number who would like to come to America or Europe, if we open these so-called direct routes, would be enormous. Will we say to those who apply, at an embassy or some place abroad, that they would have the same legal rights, and opportunities to appeal or for judicial review if things are turned down? If so, potentially millions of people would join the queue. It would not shorten but lengthen it, so we have to restrict and to prioritise.

I submit to noble Lords that the priority should not be the boat people. They are not coming by boat from Basra, Somalia or Eritrea; they are coming from France, Belgium and Germany. Why are they coming here rather than staying in those safe countries? They are three or four times as likely to be rejected there. France, in the last year before the pandemic, forcibly repatriated 34,000 people. I find some strange double standards being applied here. There are no criticisms of France for being much stricter than us or of us for being much laxer than them, but one or the other must be the case.

Noble Lords: Time!

Lord Lilley (Con): I am coming to an end. If it is morally and legally right for the French to try to prevent people leaving their shores, and for us to pay and support the French in so doing, it should be morally and legally right for us to return them. If they cannot be returned, it is reasonable to try to deter them by saying, "If you come here, you will go to Rwanda. You always have the opportunity to stay in France." I submit that we do not always consider these opportunities.

Lord Davies of Gower (Con): My Lords, we have been particularly generous with the timings. I remind noble Lords that it is an advisory Back-Bench speaking time of six minutes.

11.18 am

Lord Sahota (Lab) (Maiden Speech): My Lords, I am pleased and honoured to make my maiden speech today, having had the honour of joining your Lordships' House. Noble Lords from all sides of the House have given me the warmest welcome, for which I am most grateful. I thank the staff and doorkeepers of the House for helping me in and out; without them, I do not know where I would be—probably lost. I thank my two supporters, my noble friends Lord Kennedy and Lord Grocott.

I thank the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury for bringing this important debate to the House. I begin by personally thanking the most reverend Primate the Archbishop for going to Amritsar in 2019 to pay his respects to the victims of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre on its 100th anniversary. In the same year I made a documentary on the subject.

A few months after I arrived in the UK to join my father, in 1966, England won the World Cup, so I sincerely hope that my elevation has a similar effect. My family background is one of those typical Sikh families. My uncle served in the British Indian Army in Burma during the Second World War under the command of Lord Mountbatten. My grandfather, his brother and my maternal grandfather all served in the British Indian Army in the First World War. I sometimes wonder what they would make of the fact that their grandson is now a proud Member of your Lordships' House.

My uncle Charan Singh was the first politician in our family and during the British Raj in India, he was a member of the movement which wanted Britain to quit India. When I told him I was going into politics, he gave me one line of advice, that of Guru Gobind Singh: never be afraid of doing the righteous thing.

[LORD SAHOTA]

My father-in-law also dipped his toe in local politics in India and was locally known as Comrade Tara Singh. I would also like to thank my two cousins Dr Pritam Sahota and Faquir Sahota for their never-ending advice and encouragement.

It has been a long and arduous journey for me and my family coming to this country in 1957 to this day. This is a country of which we are immensely proud and in which we play a full part. I said “arduous journey” because in that time we had to face, like countless other economic migrant families, the slings and arrows of racial discrimination, such as substandard and overcrowded accommodation, dirty and heavy work, lack of health and safety protection at work, and once my father was thrown out of the pub for not speaking English.

To return to the substance of the debate, the present policy on asylum and refugees leaves a great deal to be desired. It is slow and cumbersome. People are left in limbo for years, deprived of their dignity and basic human rights. In preparation for this debate, last Friday I visited a refugee and migrant centre in Wolverhampton, where thousands of people come through its doors seeking all kinds of help on immigration, citizenship, resettlement, housing, health and well-being, employment, education, a passport, and so on. I am grateful to the staff there for giving me their valuable time and advice.

At this very moment, thousands of people are awaiting a decision on their asylum application. The system is clearly broken and bursting at the seams. There are many problems refugees face while waiting for their applications to be processed. They are unable to settle down and do not know when they may be uprooted. They are often taken advantage of by unscrupulous employers who pay them next to nothing, never mind the minimum wage. Private landlords often charge high premiums to rent out a room or a house. Many are forced to work in the sex industry to make ends meet. Many women face domestic violence as a result of being taken advantage of by predators. The stress of waiting for their case to be resolved takes a severe toll on their health and well-being. Their children struggle at school as they are unable to settle down. They are forced to beg and use food banks to survive. There is a cost to the police, the National Health Service, schools and the housing sector. All that I ask is that the Government invest in a proper asylum system and treat people who are fleeing tyranny and prosecution in their own country with dignity and compassion.

When the founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, was a young man, his father gave him some money to start a business. Instead of investing in a business, he spent the money feeding the hungry and destitute. When he was asked why he had done that, his reply was, “This was the best deal I could find on the market.” We, too, must strive to find the best deal on the market for our fellow human beings.

11.24 am

Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Lab): My Lords, what a privilege it is to follow that. The prodigious amount and breadth of work that my new noble friend has

done in his community—his communities—is extraordinary. He has invested his energy in making life better for people across the spectrum, with special emphasis perhaps on the Sikh and Punjabi communities. He has written a book of poetry in Punjabi. As a lover of poetry, I wish I could read it. I shall sit with my noble friend and expect some explanations. He has spent his time cheering up so many people.

I last officiated at an event for a Shropshire lad at the funeral of the late Lord Murray of Epping Forest, and Telford, and I quoted then, as I quote now, although the energy with which that speech was made makes it clear that this is not a funeral:

“You and I must keep from shame
In London streets the Shropshire name;
On banks of Thames they must not say
Severn breeds worse men than they.”

My noble friend Lord Sahota is a force of nature and part of what I hope will be a levelling-up moment in the life of this House. I am most grateful—as indeed I am to the most reverend Primate. It is the first time in a long time that I have wanted to stand up and cheer—although that would have been against all propriety in this House—because he said so much that many of us would have wanted to say.

Perhaps I should declare that I am a member of the delegation from the British Parliament to the Council of Europe and I sit on its migration committee. I was there two days ago in Paris considering a whole host of things related to and consequent upon the problems being faced not just in this country but across our continent and around the world. I heard from the most reverend Primate and others a question about a possible updating or modification of the 1951 convention. I was asked by the migration committee to compose a report for the 70th anniversary of the convention that was approved by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe just one year ago. I will certainly be taking back to the migration committee a proper expression of the need—it would have to be an international need—to look again at the convention to see what modifications are appropriate at present.

However, I have to say that, for the moment, the 1951 convention is embedded in our law. It is the law that we must obey. We had discussions about this in the Nationality and Borders Bill as it moved through this House, and great dismay was expressed at our apparent readiness to depart from our legal obligations. That is the most worrying thing. Noble and learned Lords expressed their views forcefully on this matter. I, in my work for the report I prepared, worked with UNHCR offices in London, Strasbourg and Geneva, and all of them have given the British Government a very clear and lucid understanding of the law that would have taken into consideration even what I have to declare to be the extraordinary views of the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, which he expressed after his time was up a moment ago.

So, it is the law. We must obey it. We can modify it. The most reverend Primate called for international consensus around this and other matters, and this is perhaps the moment for that. At the heart of the convention lie three principles: non-refoulement, non-discrimination and non-penalisation. Those are cardinal elements in the way that the convention is spelled out,

and an examination of current British practice measured against those cardinal elements would—let us say—raise questions of an inordinate nature in our minds and force us to look again at our moral position against the law under which we sit in a country that prides itself on the rule of law.

Two days ago in Paris, statistics that are not the usual ones came my way from a high official of the international Red Cross who spoke to our meeting. She told us about the numbers of people who are registered missing. Only 13% of those registered missing in their attempt to find refuge somewhere are ever found and forensically identified; 87% never are. Although it is not my custom to read parts of a report, this chilling paragraph is the one with which I will conclude my remarks:

“These extremely alarming numbers are only the tip of a tragic iceberg, and many more migrants are likely to have lost their life or become untraceable. Their families and friends typically do not have any sign of life or death of their loved ones. Anonymous dead migrants are washed ashore in Europe and the southern Mediterranean Sea or are found in forests and cities or even lorries, requiring forensic analyses and the transfer of corpses or their burial.”

The figures are 14 in the English Channel and 25,271 in the Mediterranean Sea. Should we not be worried? Should this debate not apply the greatest possible pressure, as far as we are concerned, to obtain the highest possible standards?

Lord Davies of Gower (Con): Can we now please make it six minutes?

11.31 am

Lord Roberts of Llandudno (LD): My Lords, what a privilege it is to have the opportunity to take part in this debate and to follow my fellow Welsh Methodist minister, the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths. We were introduced on the same day, quite a few years ago now, and I am delighted that we are both able to take part in this debate.

Are the Government satisfied with the process that asylum seekers have to go through to achieve their status? This September there were 127,000 asylum applications waiting to be dealt with, some for a considerable time. Decision-takers are doing their very best, but clearly their whole recruitment and training needs to be of a standard that inspires confidence. With 100,000 negative immigration decisions rejected and reversed in the past five years, clearly the present system does not inspire confidence—not in the staff, who see their original decisions rejected 50% of the time. There is unnecessary anxiety for so many applicants, often with very serious and sad consequences, and millions of pounds in unnecessary expense because of these reversals and appeals; when an application must be reconsidered, that counts as unnecessary expense. The unnecessary delays lead to Governments acting harshly and the UK’s reputation being smeared.

There are steps that can be taken in a thoroughgoing overhaul of the Home Office. Its immigration responsibilities are crying out for research. The organisation Humanitarians Together is preparing a humanitarian manifesto, which I hope will propose changes that can be accepted by all parties in this Parliament.

11.34 am

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): My Lords, the choice of topic by the most reverend Primate for his annual debate, Britain’s asylum and refugee policies, is a timely and necessary one. I thank him and his colleagues on the Bishops’ Benches more widely for their contributions to the national debate on these issues, and for injecting a tone of humanity and respect for Britain’s international obligations into a discussion that frequently lacks either of those qualities.

Why is it necessary to debate? Because, however discordant the views expressed on this subject—and they are—everyone seems to be in agreement on one thing: our present policies for dealing with asylum seekers and refugees are defective and not working. We really need an overall rethink of our policies, not just a desperate attempt to patch them up or to remedy one or other defect highlighted by the *Daily Mail* in screeching headlines. Any rethought policy needs to be consistent and coherent if we are not simply to emulate the little Dutch boy plugging holes in the dyke with his fingers.

In that category of desperate remedies, the Government’s aim of flying asylum seekers off to Rwanda or any other developing country ready to have its palm crossed with silver ranks high indeed. The legality of the policy is before the courts, so I will not comment on that aspect. It does not seem to be acting as a deterrent to asylum seekers, as its protagonists claimed it would, and the accounting officer at the Home Office cannot certify value for money—so the sooner it is dropped, the better.

In the same category comes our adamant refusal to allow asylum seekers, even those waiting for several years to have their claims dealt with, to take legal employment. Other European countries permit asylum seekers to work after six months. Why can we not do so, and thus both reduce the mental and physical stress put on the refugees and their families and save ourselves some taxpayers’ money?

So much for the negatives of our present policies. Here are some positive suggestions. First, we surely must cut the ever-lengthening delays in processing asylum claims. The Government seem to realise this, but are they taking effective action to speed up the process? Secondly, we really need to thrash out with our continental European partners, not just the French, a whole range of policies designed to put the human traffickers out of business and behind bars, where they deserve to be. That means more co-operation with Europol and Eurojust and a better, more trusting overall relationship with the EU and its member states. Just telling them to get a grip will not achieve that. Thirdly, we need to give serious consideration to opening up ways in which claims for asylum can be submitted outside our borders and then processed expeditiously. That could be one of the ways of reducing the temptation to take the perilous route by dinghy across the channel.

All those measures are fully consistent with our international obligations; some of the Government’s policies are not. Brushing off the views to that effect of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, whose job it is to oversee implementation of the refugee convention, and saying that we think otherwise is simply Alice’s

[LORD HANNAY OF CHISWICK]

Red Queen's response of "It's so, because I say it's so". It is not consistent with asserting that we are strong supporters of the rules-based international order—an assertion that Ministers stand at the Dispatch Box and repeat several times every week.

I sometimes wonder whether those who champion more restrictive and inhumane policies have any understanding of our country's record down the centuries in welcoming Huguenot refugees from France, Jewish refugees from Russia, eastern Europe and Nazi Germany, and Asian refugees from east Africa. Did we benefit from that, or were we harmed by it? The answer is evident. Just look around this Chamber, the Chamber of the other place or the Cabinet table and you will see the answer. It is surely time to apply the same values we did earlier in our history when it comes to treating today's asylum seekers.

11.38 am

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Hannay. I have always admired him, but I do not think I have ever agreed with everything he has said until today. I usually agree with most things he says, but today I endorse everything and thank him for his vigorous speech. It is also a great pleasure to be able to say a brief word of thanks to the two maiden speakers and to look forward to the third, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester.

It is singularly appropriate that the most reverend Primate should have chosen this subject for the debate today. We are in Advent, approaching the season of Christmas; some of our thoughts, even prompted by some of our Christmas cards, will make us think of the flight into Egypt by the most famous refugee family in history. What the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, just said about refugees coming to our country was so true. They enrich our society. I benefited from a German Jewish refugee who was a neighbour of ours when I was a schoolboy. He lectured in English literature and gave me my passionate love of Shakespeare, which I retain to this day. He was married to a Spanish refugee, who had fled Franco's Spain.

It is only a few weeks since, in this very Chamber, my noble friend Lord Popat introduced the debate to mark the 50th anniversary of the coming of the Ugandan Asians. They too have enriched our society. Of course, if one goes further back one thinks of Canterbury, of Spitalfields, of the weavers and the Huguenots, who numbered among them the greatest silversmiths of the 18th century, such as Paul de Lamerie and Courtauld—those are names to conjure with.

We have to be very mindful of our enriched past when we look at the present. I am very proud of the way that our country has responded to the bestiality in Ukraine, and of those families who have taken in Ukrainian families. I am very proud of the fact that we are giving refuge to people from Hong Kong because of the abrogation of an international treaty by China, a treaty that it signed with us, which itself should underline the importance of our always honouring our international treaties and commitments.

I want to make one or two practical suggestions, as did the most reverend Primate. I very much agreed with what he said about the traffickers, of course; the

noble Lord, Lord Hannay, echoed that a moment or two ago. They should indeed be rounded up as vigorously as we can possibly round them up. They can now be imprisoned for life, which is right and proper. We should deal with them but should also, at the noble Lord just touched on, process applications not only more quickly but outside this country.

I put to my noble friend a suggestion only a week or so ago at Question Time in this House. I asked: "Can we not get together with our friends in France?" France, despite what my noble friend Lord Lilley says, has received many refugees; the most reverend Primate gave the figures in his speech. Can we not get together with our neighbours and friends to build a really large hostel near Calais—spartan, if you like, but clean and decent—where these people can live relatively comfortable lives and have their applications processed by British officials? That would be a sensible, practical thing to do. It would help to cut down on these dreadful cross-channel journeys, in which a number of people have perished. Of course, we had the number given a little while ago of the 25,000 in the Mediterranean.

We are dealing with human beings, made in the likeness of God. These human beings have every right to expect their dignity to be respected and if they are genuine, and of course some of them are not and deserve punishment, to be given all the help that it is practical to give. I am grateful to the most reverend Primate, as I am sure we all are, for the manner in which he introduced this important debate. Let us hope that it leads to some action, if not this day, then at least tomorrow.

11.45 am

Baroness Chakrabarti (Lab): My Lords, I declare my interests as a member of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee chaired by the noble Baroness, Lady Hamwee, and as a long-time supporter of the wonderful charity Refugee Tales. It is a pleasure, as always, to follow the noble Lord, Lord Cormack, and to mark the end of the 90th birthday week of my noble friend Lord Dubs in this way.

My thanks, like everyone else's, go to the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury for convening this timely debate on the eve of Human Rights Day. I congratulate my noble friends—two maidens in Labour, if that is not a contradiction in terms—on their wonderful and contrasting maiden speeches. I look forward to the maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester, which will follow in a moment.

Like the noble Lord, Lord Cormack, I always think it is apt that Human Rights Day is so close to Christmas, for the reasons he gave: Christmas is a time when so many people all over the world celebrate the birth of a very special refugee child. However, it is worth remembering why we celebrate Human Rights Day. Noble Lords will remember that it was in October 1942 that the then Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, famously wrote to the predecessor of our present most reverend Primate in the following terms:

"The systematic cruelties to which the Jewish people—men, women, and children—have been exposed under the Nazi regime are amongst the most terrible events of history, and place an

indelible stain upon all who perpetrate and instigate them. Free men and women denounce these vile crimes, and when the world struggle ends with the enthronement of human rights, racial persecution will be ended.”

He was inspirational if perhaps optimistic, as it turned out.

In remembering the failure, and there was some failure, of the Allied powers to give adequate passage and protection to those desperate to flee the Nazis—I remind noble Lords that Albert Einstein was denied asylum and had to go to the United States for it—came even after Kristallnacht in 1938 heralded a policy of systematic genocide. Refugee protection is therefore perhaps the most poignant paradigm of post-war human rights.

Given the emerging understanding of the sheer horror of the pre-war and war years, it is unsurprising that the refugee convention should have been one of the earliest priorities of the post-war international legal architecture. It brings detail and binding effect to supplement the right to asylum in Article 14 of the universal declaration, came into force in 1954 and has been amended only once. The 1967 protocol removed the original limitation of the protection to those fleeing events before 1951 in Europe, so the subsequent protection was always intended to be worldwide and permanent.

We have heard how the convention defines a refugee as someone with a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political opinion, who is therefore unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin. As we heard from my noble friend Lord Griffiths of Burry Port, it is built on three principles: non-discrimination, non-penalisation and non-return, so the protection should be applied without discrimination on the basis of race, religion or country of origin but also, as international law has developed over time, on other prohibited grounds such as sex, age, disability, sexuality, and so on.

It recognises that the most desperate genuine refugees may have no choice but to flee—as from the Nazis—via illegal means using false papers, false identities and clandestine transport across borders, in breach of ordinary immigration controls of nations. The convention prohibits penalising them, for example, for criminal offences relating to their seeking of asylum or by way of arbitrary detention. Crucially, the convention absolutely prohibits their return or expulsion to places where their lives or freedoms would be in peril.

It further provides for minimum standards for the treatment of refugees. They should have access to courts, primary education and papers including travel documents. The UN high commissioner is charged with supervising the operation of the convention, which signatory states undertake to co-operate with.

The refugee convention is a vital part of human rights machinery in providing at least a basic safety net when individual nation states, which bear the lion's share of responsibility for guaranteeing rights and freedoms, fail in that duty. To undermine it in thought, word and deed, as so many Governments have done for so much of our still-young century, is to forget or ignore the worst atrocities of the last one.

11.51 am

The Lord Bishop of Leicester (Maiden Speech): My Lords, it is a privilege to make my maiden speech in this most important debate. I am grateful to my most reverend friend the Archbishop of Canterbury for putting forward this Motion. I am grateful also to noble Lords for their welcome today. I look forward to learning from, and working with, them in service of His Majesty's Government and our great nation. As one of my relatives was the first ever manager of the English football team, I echo the noble Lord, Lord Sahota, in his hope that his and my elevation may lead to success as in 1966.

As Bishop of Leicester, I have the honour of serving a city which has been made by migration, including those seeking asylum. Among them were Asian refugees expelled from Uganda 50 years ago and Somalian refugees fleeing the civil war in the 1990s. Socially, culturally and economically, Leicester has benefited phenomenally from the talents, hard work and rich heritage of migrant communities.

I do not wish to speak of migrants, as I believe we often do, as “other”—a group distinct from ourselves—for I too am a migrant. I was born in Indonesia and spent my early years growing up there. I also benefited from several years working with my wife in Guinea in west Africa. Here in the UK, I have moved between Sheffield, Gloucester, and Leicester. Most fundamentally, I belong to a spiritual tradition which sees all those who follow Jesus as “pilgrims in this foreign land”, as the famous hymn goes. At many points in my life I have been dependent on the hospitality of others; dependent upon them seeing me as kin, as a fellow human, as a friend and not a foe; dependent also on the generosity of strangers, friends and ultimately, on the graciousness of God.

Indeed, since entering this House, I have depended on the advice, patience and thoughtfulness of my sponsors, my fellow Lords spiritual and Members of this House, the officials and staff here and my diocesan colleagues; I am very grateful to them all. Like any newcomer, I have needed shepherding into unfamiliar spaces and ways of doing things. However, I fear that as a nation we offer little of that welcome, guidance and orientation to refugees and asylum seekers—our fellow men and women who have suffered trauma, terror, abuse and hardship on their journey.

In Leicester, we have a number of hotels accommodating asylum seekers. They may have a roof over their heads, but they are not given even the most basic of means of living as human beings. They do not have the freedom to make even small decisions like what to eat, the independence that comes from having enough money to buy essentials for oneself, or the stable connections to a community which offers a sense of belonging and support. At the drop of a hat, they can find themselves relocated to another part of the UK or deported forcibly, returning to a place they were so desperate to leave.

The noble Lord, Lord Lilley, asked for examples of what the Church is doing to support such people. I want to assure him that in Leicester there are those from our churches who visit people in these hotels to provide clothing and food. In one recent event I know

[THE LORD BISHOP OF LEICESTER]

of, they held a cultural evening for Kurdish women with food and dancing. This was an opportunity to learn from their culture even as they learn from ours.

In denying refugees and asylum seekers their agency, dignity and their need for creativity and community, it is not only them we dehumanise, but ourselves as well. I believe that Christ showed us that true humanity is showing love over fear. When we are possessed by fear of the “other”, fear of losing control over our borders, or fear of what refugees show us of the fragility of human structures and ways of life, we are lesser versions of ourselves.

Of course, recognising our kinship with asylum seekers and refugees does not decide the political questions around immigration. Questions of integration and how to live well together must still be wrestled with, but those are questions we must grapple with regardless and we must do so with sincerity and integrity. The unrest that Leicester experienced in September this year demonstrates why we need robust strategies that support integration. On both sides of the Chamber and in both Houses we can all agree that we want a country where people of all backgrounds and beliefs can work, live and learn together, enriched by our diversity. However, we cannot be naive in assuming that strong, cohesive communities occur by default.

Integration requires efforts from all government departments, not just the Home Office. The DCMS, with its new Online Safety Bill, for example, can help to limit the sort of disinformation that fuelled the disorder in Leicester. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office can take seriously how political affairs in other countries have ripple effects here in the UK. The Department for Education can ensure that all children leave schools with a strong understanding of and respect for the various faith traditions present in the UK.

We cannot offer true refuge if we do not have a collective home to welcome people into. Through kindness, compassion and the recognition of someone’s inherent dignity and worth, we can make anywhere feel like home. It is how the UK and Leicester have come to be home to me, and how I hope this House will also come to be somewhere I am familiar with.

11.58 am

Lord Robathan (Con): My Lords, I am delighted to follow the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester, in whose diocese I live and worship. He made an excellent speech. I have never heard him give a sermon; perhaps we can put that right at a later date. I agreed with quite a lot of what he said—surprisingly. I regard his predecessor, Tim Stevens, as a friend; I hope Tim Stevens regards me as a friend as well.

My view is as a still-loyal member of the Church of England. On Sunday I heard an excellent sermon from David Hebblewhite, who the right reverend Prelate might know, in Stanford-on-Avon on the origins of the Christmas stocking. How many people here know the origins of the Christmas stocking? I did not until then and I am 71. My view is that we need a spiritual and moral dimension to politics, government policy and legislation. It is a minority view, but I therefore

support having an episcopal Bench in the House of Lords and having an established Church—and I will continue to do so. I welcome the right reverend Prelate. Another of his predecessors, Guy Vernon Smith, married my mother in Cosby—twice, unfortunately, because her first husband is on the war memorial. I hope to see more of him here and in Leicester.

I applaud the two serving most reverend Primates for their excellent sermons at the Platinum Jubilee service and Her Majesty’s funeral. These occasions showed the Church absolutely at its best and, frankly, rising to the occasion, so I thank them for that.

I speak as a member of the Church of England and a Christian—but not worthy to preach, I assure noble Lords, and my faith is a private matter. I will give at least one view today: a view from the pews. It is not my intention to attack either the Church or the bishops, so I shall ask questions that the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury might have time to address at the end.

I agreed with a lot that the most reverend Primate said today. In April, he said:

“love your neighbour as yourself. For me, that is the standard by which we must treat those seeking asylum.”

I agree. This brings me to the question that prompted that most powerful parable of the good Samaritan. Who is thy neighbour—or, on this occasion, who is a refugee? Refugees typically return when it is safe to do so, like the Holy Family, which my noble friend Lord Cormack mentioned. I absolutely accept the direction in the lesson in Matthew, chapter 25, that we have to show compassion but there is huge pressure on our borders, services and infrastructure, caused by people who understandably want a better life. They want to come to Britain, which is a fantastic country—although, if you heard some in this Chamber, you would think it was the most awful place and you could not think why they would want to come.

I will focus particularly on small boats in the channel, which is of course very close to the most reverend Primate’s diocese of Canterbury. We have heard about smuggling by criminal gangs, and nearly half the people who have come across the channel in the last five months have come from Albania, via France. Albania is a safe country—I am not sure about France, although people go there on holiday, and I have been there and to Italy, Greece and Germany. But are people being persecuted in either Albania or France? They come here because we welcome them—we give them accommodation, benefits, et cetera. Frankly, we are extremely generous, which is why they do not want to stay in France, which is less generous.

The Albanians are instructed by their people smugglers to say that they are victims of trafficking, against the human trafficking Act. Those from the Middle East or from countries that outlaw homosexuality are to say that they are apostates or gay, so that they cannot be sent back. Anyone that can credibly do so, even if he or she is 25, says that they are children. I fear that we are being taken for fools—largely by smugglers, who know their market, if I can put it that way—just as Emad al-Swealmeen took the clergy at Liverpool Cathedral for naive fools when he said that he had converted to Christianity and was confirmed, having

been supported by Asylum Link. He then took a bomb in a taxi to blow up the Remembrance Day service in Liverpool Cathedral. Please let us be sensible, not naive.

One reason that people want to come here is our history and culture, which my noble friend Lady Stowell referred to. I am very proud of the welcome that we gave to Jewish refugees from the pogroms in Poland and Russia in the late 19th century and in Germany in the 20th century, but, as a result, we are literally changing the way our country carries on and its culture, through mass migration.

There are distressingly many people who do not share our values and liberal attitudes—let us not pretend that everyone does—so let me ask some questions on, for instance, culture. I missed this, but did the Church or bishops lobby to continue having daily acts of worship in schools? Noble Lords may think that unimportant but, pace Church schools, very few state schools now have a daily Christian service and hymn. Of course, the most basic loss to culture is that people do not know those glorious hymns, and they now sing “Sweet Caroline” at matches rather than “Abide with Me”—noble Lords many not think that important, but it is a pointer. What is the Church of England planning to do to reverse the decline in Christian belief? Bishops will be irrelevant if no one believes in Christianity. The worst news this month was the fact that there has been a huge decline in those who call themselves Christian, which of course relates to education.

Does the most reverend Primate believe that the Church is institutionally racist? If it is, I do not want anything to do with it—but we hear bishops say that. Also, why was the ordinand Calvin Robinson kicked out? I do not know him, and he may be very unsuitable, but his story is coming out and it is not good.

I will give an illustration that is closer to home, though I do not wish to embarrass the right reverend Prelate whom I follow. I live in a group of 11 parishes, and we have had no resident priest for three and a half years, so I travelled over 10 miles on Sunday, burning fossil fuel. But there are two bishops in Leicester, the population of which is now apparently only 32% Christian. I note that the people whom I see in church—

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con): My Lords, this is perhaps a good time for me to remind noble Lords about the speaking time.

Lord Robathan (Con): Some 100 years ago, every parish had a resident priest—and no bishops, because the diocese was founded only in 1927. I will sit down, but I have to say that, as a loyal member of the Church of England, I frankly hope that the most reverend Primate might commend the people and Governments of this country and his flock nationally and in Kent for the generosity and hospitality that we have shown over the last half-century to the over 10 million people who have settled here, every one of whom has been a stranger in this land.

12.05 pm

Lord Carlile of Berriew (CB): I thank the most reverend Primate for initiating this debate and, above all, for the characteristically profound ethical foundation

of his speech. I also commend three truly promising maiden speeches, and I look forward to hearing more from all of their Lordships.

As the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chelmsford said, I agreed to chair an independent Commission on the Integration of Refugees—in my view, integration is a core necessity of the subject under debate. Convened and funded by the Woolf Institute, which is based in Cambridge, the commission has more than 20 commissioners from many disciplines, some of whom have real lived experience of life as a refugee. I thank the right reverend Prelate and two other noble Lords who have kindly consented to be on my commission—namely, the noble and learned Baroness, Lady Hale, and the noble Baroness, Lady Neuberger. Just telling your Lordships those names confirms the promise of a thoroughly penetrating debate, as well as a chilling charring challenge. Our purpose is to bring together different experiences and opposing views to build consensus on this sometimes-contentious political issue. Ours is neither a campaigning commission nor politically partisan; in many ways, it is simply a corollary to the most reverend Primate’s debate today.

Integration means different things to different people—it is a two-way process for new and existing communities respectively. The nature and outcome of integration is multifaceted. British values and culture are diverse, and integration most certainly should not be confused with assimilation. It comes from a neutral position, so one can say that policies geared towards refugee integration have been seriously neglected by all Governments over the past 30 years or so.

The lens of migration management is inappropriate for asylum and leads to unnecessary polarisation and toxicity. The UK refugee and asylum system should not be lumped together with general immigration policy—the former is wholly morally grounded, while the latter is more opaque, so immigration by refugees and through asylum is founded on a wholly different set of principles. At our first hearing in Birmingham, our commission heard from refugees, local officials and voluntary organisations. All raised major concerns about the way that the UK’s current refugee and asylum system functions. The polarising media discourse in this area was particularly identified as the enemy of fairness.

Recent successful and country-specific settlement schemes should be distinguished from the main subject that I am talking about: they have come with funding and resourcing to facilitate the integration of specified groups of new arrivals, but the same cannot be said for those who apply for asylum in the UK. Poor resourcing, the unprecedented waiting times for those in the system and the ensuing trauma and uncertainty make long-term integration much more difficult for anyone who exercises their right—it is a right—according to the Geneva convention to apply for asylum in the United Kingdom. I am afraid that additional damage is caused by legislation that puts into statute a two-tiered asylum system, depending on the method of entry.

We can all understand the argument for deterrence—and I think we should send back quickly those who clearly are not genuine refugees—but the current system has the effect of punishing those who legitimately

[LORD CARLILE OF BERRIEW]
claim asylum in the UK by putting severe restrictions on access to English language training, work, which has already been mentioned, and good accommodation. The current policy does not seem to deter a single person; it is a fiction that government policy has increased deterrence.

Finally, I want to raise a point about unaccompanied asylum seeker children. I believe that they should be treated as children first and foremost. The British state has a duty of care to them. Sadly, in many circumstances, that is not provided. Unaccompanied asylum seeker children are often processed as adults on arrival at the UK border. They are sent to adult accommodation, and it is left to local authorities to try to pick up the pieces later on. Those children are usually not provided with access to the health support and, especially, the mental health support that they require. Sadly, some simply disappear into child trafficking, sex work and human slavery. There are serious issues about the age assessment of people who claim to be children and the disputes process on that matter. These must now be resolved in a way that is fast, fair and imaginative. If the system does that, it will also be accurate.

The UK must play its role in working to alleviate these defects through an improved system that respects the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, while also winning the acquiescence of the British public.

12.11 pm

The Archbishop of York: My Lords, despite my probably sensible and timely demotion on the speakers' list, I am nevertheless delighted to speak in this very moving debate and to thank my brother, the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury, for bringing it to us. I also thank the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, for his kind words about our preaching earlier this year. I can assure him that on almost every other occasion when I rise to speak, although not on this occasion, it is to speak about the Christian gospel, whose values underpin everything I am about to say. I was also very moved by the noble Lord, Lord Singh, who quoted the Jewish and Christian scriptures to us. That is such a powerful sign of the generous spirit of the Sikh faith, which we can all learn so much from. I am also grateful for the three powerful maiden speeches that we have heard today.

I want to emphasise a small but significant point. Getting this right, and doing the right thing, is a blessing for everyone in our society and the best way of shifting the opinion of the public, whose anxiety about this issue is fuelled by the dysfunction of our current system. The hard truth is that our asylum system simply does not treat everyone the same. It does not give people the dignity, safety and agency that their humanity deserves. I say to the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, that everyone is our neighbour. Of course, we cannot take everybody, but that makes it even more important that we have a fair system for everyone.

Dehumanising language promotes fear. Threat of destitution is used as a deterrent. Children are treated as if they are adults. Yet in our own country, among our own people, in our churches, other faith groups and communities, some things have gone well, such as

the Homes for Ukraine scheme, where many people have found a home, other family members have joined them, and people have been able to get work. This is really good.

But why has our response to people fleeing other conflicts been different? Currently, the definition of family in our asylum system would not allow someone to join their sibling even if they were the last remaining relative, and being able to work and contribute is a long way off. The tragedy of our system lies in its exceptionalism, meaning that people receive differential treatment usually because of their country of origin. That underpins the Nationality and Borders Act, and I fear that further legislative action will be the same.

But we could learn from what is happening in our communities. The noble Lord, Lord Lilley, asked us directly about integration. I do not know where to begin. In hundreds of parishes and schools, and in other faith communities up and down our country, that is what we are doing—in English language classes, in befriending and in teaching people. I would be the first to admit that there are lots of things about the Church of England that could be better, but that is something that we are doing, alongside others, and it shows the best of British.

We need a system that will simply provide safe and legal routes for everyone to have equal opportunities to apply for asylum. All I am saying is that I think that would be good for us, as well as for the people who are fleeing unimaginable conflict and evil.

Finally, when it comes to being able to work, the Church of England, alongside the Refugee Council and the Government's own Migration Advisory Committee, is a long-standing supporter of the Lift the Ban campaign.

I say all this—like many of us, I would wish to say more, but the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury said most of it—as winter arrives, and it is cold, and a cost of living crisis will inevitably affect the British people's capacity to be hospitable. I say simply that a functioning asylum system is not a threat to our social cohesion as some fear or predict, but a dysfunctional, unfair one is.

As every small child knows at this time of the year, as the noble Lord, Lord Cormack, mentioned, Mary and Joseph came looking for somewhere to stay, but there was no room at the inn. Saying no, accusing those who are being hospitable of being naive, or passing the buck are easy, but saying yes, with a fair and equal system for everyone, opens up blessings for everyone.

12.18 pm

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne (Con): I thank the most reverend Primate for the opportunity that he has given us by challenging us to respond to the enormous problem of forced migration. I speak today about religious persecution as a driver, probably the key driver, for forced migration. We have with us today His Highness Prince Hazem of the Yazidis. All will recall that the Yazidis are perhaps the most persecuted minority of all at the moment. Of course, there are many others as well, but the Yazidis are victims of genocide, which is of course the worst crime in the UN convention assembly.

My colleagues and I have worked hard in recent years to do everything we can to support the Yazidis in their enfeebled situation in camps in northern Iraq and we have come out with one or two important conclusions which I shall put before the House and hope that we may have the opportunity to discuss, privately or in groups, at another place.

We have formed the Windsor Dialogue, under the chairmanship of Bishop Alastair Redfern and with the support of Canon Edmund Newell, Rev Dr Paul Edmondson and other members of Westminster Abbey, including the dean himself. With the Yazidi spiritual council, which is headed by the prince himself, we have tied ourselves to another oppressed and persecuted religious minority which has broken through, become immensely successfully and given us an example of what can be achieved: the Latter-day Saints—the LDS—also known as the Mormons. We have Jeffrey Holland as our co-chairman, and we work hard with Sharon Eubank and the US friends of the AMAR Foundation, which is generating energy to support dialogue.

We brought ourselves together because we learned that the excuse for the genocidal actions by ISIS against the Yazidis was that they were supposed to worship the devil. This has led us to the conclusion, looking in great detail over a number of years at the issue of refugees everywhere and forced migration, that religious persecution is a very important driver of forced migration. Without looking at the religious persecution angle, you cannot recover the lives, livelihoods and agency of those who have been beaten, oppressed and forced to become sex slaves and endure other disgusting activities that humans undertake when they lose their thread of morality.

We have worked intensively in the camps, and have been practical by building, equipping and running health centres. We have also brought in music, IT, English language and business training, and now we are starting to be able to offer jobs. We particularly focused on music because the prayers of the Yazidis are all sung, and we found that the onslaught on them was intensified by the onslaught on their own religion. That meant that those who held the music in their heads—the priests of the Yazidi spiritual council—were the ones whom ISIS was ultimately targeting. Indeed, at one point I could count only just over 10 remaining priests, meaning that the entirety of their equivalent of the Sistine Chapel, Westminster Abbey or Canterbury Cathedral was in the heads of just a very few priests, who were being targeted by their bitter enemy, the ISIS rebels. So we recorded the music with the agreement of the prince of the Yazidis, and it is stored in the Bodleian Library, so it can never be lost again. It has given us an understanding of what happens when your religion is attacked.

It seems that your religion is a key part of your identity, your personality. Of course, in Britain we like to think that religion does not count, and we simply discard the knowledge that 83% of the globe belongs to one faith or another, the principal faith being Christianity, the second being Islam, and then Hinduism and so on; and then, we have wonderful minority faiths such as the Yazidi faith. Understanding the reason for the onslaught was one of our key first efforts, and we have managed to articulate and write

down what the Yazidi faith is. The prince's predecessor, who is sadly dead, said that this was the first time ever that their faith had been properly and accurately written down, without being targeted by an onslaught claiming that it was wrong. The treatment of the Yazidis as a supposed enemy rests on this bizarre concept that they worship the devil. Of course, that is not the case at all, but it is very odd how humans refuse to dislodge an idea when it gets in their heads, and there remains an awful lot of thinking around that idea at the moment. So, first, we understood the reason for the onslaught and then we worked out how to tackle it.

Today, I am very happy to say that instead of a disaster, we now believe that we have a way out and a way forward. In that belief, which we are writing down, researching and will be presenting, we have the support of the UNHCR and the World Health Organization, and we hope very much that the formula we are developing may be of use and value elsewhere too. The Yazidis themselves are very happy to know that their suffering can help others. Much of that formula is based on music, and I am very pleased to say that we have been able to perform to King Charles and in the Bodleian Library, Westminster Abbey and St. George's Chapel, Windsor: Exaltati, sing unto God, is basically where we are coming from. It is time to restart how we look at refugees by seeing them as a tremendously capable group of people, and to help them flourish, perform, be successful and be victims no longer.

12.24 pm

Lord Browne of Ladyton (Lab): It is a privilege to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Nicholson. We have heard three excellent maiden speeches: I thank my noble friends Lady Twycross and Lord Sahota and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester for their excellent contributions. I thank the most reverend Primate for the opportunity to debate this important question today. It is timely for many reasons: in addition to the seasonal context offered to us by the noble Lord, Lord Cormack, my noble friend Lady Chakrabarti reminded us that tomorrow is Human Rights Day.

Only two weeks ago, the Home Secretary admitted that we have "lost control" of our borders. In that loss of control, we have a gridlocked asylum system: 144,000 people are awaiting an initial decision on their asylum applications. For six months or more, 70% have been unable to work, to access key services or accommodation and, most importantly for a significant proportion of these people, to live without the fear and torment of being sent back at the risk of persecution and torture. Over a third are from five countries with grant rates of 80%, meaning they will likely have a legitimate claim to asylum.

As the noble Lord, Lord Carlile, emphasised, within this appalling chaos, there are children at risk. In the year to September, of those who applied, over 14,000 were children, including 5,152 who were unaccompanied, and far too many have gone missing and disappeared, including 39 child refugees in Kent. The Home Office has a legal duty to safeguard the welfare of those children, which it is failing to do. Not only have children gone missing but there was a 212% rise in age disputes this past year. It is worth emphasising that

[LORD BROWNE OF LADYTON]
the Home Office policy on this was revised so that those who look “significantly over 18” are treated as adults, a policy which has resulted in children as young as 14 being placed in immigration detention or alone in adult accommodation facing significant risk of harm. That is a breach of our duty of care and of the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and our own consequent legislation.

I will now ask the Minister a question that he must have anticipated. I will quote Tim Loughton’s question before the Home Affairs Select Committee on 23 November. He role-played as follows:

“I am a 16-year-old orphan from an east African country escaping a warzone and religious persecution, and I have a sibling who is legally in the United Kingdom ... What is a safe and legal route for me to come to the United Kingdom?”

If he is unable to better the Home Secretary’s floundering and seeming inability to provide a coherent answer and her Permanent Secretary’s offer that they should engage with the UNHCR—while, at the same time, admitting that there are many countries in Africa and, indeed, elsewhere where it is not possible to apply for asylum via the UNHCR—should we infer that the principles informing contemporary UK asylum and refugee policy are not in compliance with the refugee convention and that that is by design?

My final point is about the Government’s now-notorious Rwanda policy: an immoral policy that shames Britain. On the release of government documents about the process by which Rwanda was selected for the offshoring of asylum seekers, we saw the degree to which the then Prime Minister and the Home Secretary overrode the concerns of senior officials, their own equality impact assessment, the UNHCR, the British high commissioner in Rwanda and the UK’s Global Ambassador for Human Rights. So we have spent £140 million, but what have we received in return? The answer is: the prospect of years of ongoing litigation, disquiet among many of our key allies and partners, the disapproval of the UNHCR and other supranational agencies, and a further erosion of our reputation for compassion and adherence to international law.

In its latest country report, the US State Department said that among the things that characterise Rwanda are arbitrary detention, ill treatment, torture in official and unofficial detention and the fact that fair trial standards are routinely flouted. Last Sunday, the US Secretary of State called President Kagame. He reported having

“discussed credible reports indicating that Rwanda continues to support the M23 rebel group and has its armed forces inside the DRC”.

In an Oral Question yesterday in your Lordships’ House, the noble Lord, Lord Goldsmith, twice reminded us that this egregious behaviour in sponsoring conflict in a neighbouring country undermines peace efforts and is causing insecurity and significant human suffering there, so much so that the FCDO has raised its concerns at the highest levels with Rwanda. How do our assessments of the robustness of judicial systems, the likelihood of arbitrary arrest and the propensity for agents of the state to use torture in Rwanda differ from that of the US State Department? I am interested to know whether we have a superior methodological practice that might explain this disparity in outlook.

Of course, the Government are right to emphasise the importance of breaking the grip of people smugglers, but there is no evidence at all that the Rwanda policy will accomplish that. Since it was announced, the number of arrivals has gone up, not down. Cynics may be forgiven for thinking that the Government are happy to invest money in a policy that is purely symbolic. Small boat arrivals continue at record levels, due in part, at least, to a lack of safe and legal routes for asylum. We face significant systemic challenges to our immigration and asylum systems, and it is time we confronted them constructively and not just symbolically. I welcome this debate as a step towards doing exactly that, and I commend the most reverend Primate’s proposals as a good starting point, particularly when they are read in the context of the detailed interviews with my right honourable friend Yvette Cooper.

12.31 pm

Baroness Prashar (CB): My Lords, I, too, thank the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury for introducing this important debate, and for doing so so effectively. It is essential that we discuss this issue in the way it has been framed, because the debate about asylum and refugee policy has become very toxic. We have lost sight of the principles which should guide this policy.

Challenges facing asylum and refugee policy are quite different from those facing voluntary migration policy. Of course, every country has the right to control voluntary migration and develop policies to meet its needs, but we have to remember that involuntary migration is different. Asylum seekers and refugees do not move out of choice; they are forced to flee persecution and other intolerable conditions. Unfortunately, debates about asylum and voluntary migration have been conflated—sometimes, I fear, deliberately. This has confused the issue and has led to a very negative and ill-informed public debate. Of course public opinion matters, but those in authority have the responsibility to explain. Inappropriate terminology has crept into this discourse and has influenced policy. For example, the term “illegal refugees” is used by many, even by those in authority, and as we know, under international law this is a misnomer.

The 1951 refugee convention is the cornerstone of the international refugee protection regime. We are party to this convention and we have a duty to comply with its provisions, but the UNHCR said that our current asylum and refugee policy undermines established international refugee protection law and practices. It said that arrangements that seek to transfer refugees and asylum seekers to third countries in the absence of sufficient safeguards and standards simply shift asylum responsibilities, evade international obligations and are contrary to the letter and spirit of the refugee convention. For a country that prides itself on promoting the rule of law here and abroad and that wants to influence international standards, this is a damning statement.

The Nationality and Borders Act will create differential status for asylum seekers based on their mode of travel to the UK. It will divide people into “genuine refugees” and “failed asylum seekers” through the creation of a two-tier system. Furthermore, under this Act, asylum

seekers now face the threat of criminal charges and a four-year prison sentence for entering “illegally”. This policy is not only contrary to the spirit and letter of the refugee convention; it is estimated that these misguided measures will cost £2.7 billion.

In trying to justify the provisions of this Act, some have said that the 1951 convention is a Cold War relic with outdated definitions and is not suitable for the challenges we face today. In my view, the principles contained in the convention provide a humane and compassionate framework that should remain the cornerstone of our asylum policy, as was so eloquently stated earlier by the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths of Burry Port. It is deeply regrettable that our policy is now based on two guiding principles: deterrence and creating a hostile environment, the consequences of which have been dire. What we need is a refugee protection system that provides safe and legal routes and treats refugees with compassion and humanity. This will be a better deterrence against smugglers than costly and ineffective surveillance at sea.

While there are specific schemes for people from countries such as Ukraine, Hong Kong and Afghanistan, for many others no such routes exist. At present, asylum seekers must be present in the UK before applying for asylum. If no safe route is available, irregular entry is the only option, which the smugglers exploit. Unfortunately, in recent years the Government have severely reduced the number of people coming through global resettlement schemes and have relied on an inconsistent, piecemeal approach and creating a hostile environment. Instead of expanding refugee resettlement programmes and dealing with an asylum backlog that has left more than 100,000 people waiting for over six months, billions of pounds have been wasted on deterrence measures that do not work. Meanwhile, as we have heard, thousands of people are left in limbo, banned from working and living in dreadful, isolated accommodation. A more humane approach would be to open up targeted and limited legal asylum routes, along with a new humanitarian visa for asylum seekers.

The challenges of forced migration are unlikely to abate and are likely to be exacerbated by climate change. It is estimated that by 2050, 200 million people globally each year will require humanitarian assistance due to climate change. This underlines the importance of international co-operation to develop responses which are compassionate, humane and preserve human dignity. Working with the United Nations and other multilateral institutions to find ways of dealing with this should be a priority. Having left the EU, Britain is no longer a party to Dublin III. Apart from with France, to date, no equivalent arrangement has been made either bilaterally or between the EU and the UK. In 2023, the Global Refugee Forum will be held in Geneva. These are opportunities to strengthen international co-operation in order to develop viable international responses that tackle the plight of refugees and asylum seekers.

The current situation is untenable and a blot on our image as a country which has a proud history of welcoming refugees. I look forward to the Minister’s response.

12.38 pm

The Lord Bishop of Durham: My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Prashar. We are not often afforded the opportunity to look at asylum policy forensically and dispassionately, so I thank the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury for choosing this debate. I also congratulate those who have given their maiden speeches today, and note my registered interests as a trustee of Reset and a principal of RAMP.

I begin by laying out clear principles that come from how ancient Israel was called to treat refugees: to welcome people, to treat them with dignity as fellow humans, to provide support, and to enable self-support and integration. It is no secret that we are not doing the mechanics of “welcome” through asylum processing well. The applications backlog means we are unable to prioritise those in need or humanely return those not recognised as refugees. There were close to 140,000 unanswered applications in the system by the end of September, so men, women and children were left in limbo and unable to rebuild their lives. This is not treating people with dignity. Chronic underinvestment in both people and systems at the Home Office has caused this, but there are workable solutions, such as to recruit more caseworkers and set up a dedicated case clearance unit that effectively triages.

Currently, 35% of the backlog is applications from five countries with grant rates of over 85%, including countries with an acceptance level of 98%. Asylum law identifies safe countries, so there should be no barrier to prioritising those we know have credible asylum claims and urgently need our support. This would involve a cost, but if we were to allow asylum seekers to work after six months of waiting for a decision, enabling them to support themselves, money would be recouped by the Exchequer. And what is the real cost, especially on children, of dealing with past trauma while not knowing that their future is safe?

Current policy does not allow asylum claims outside the UK, except for Ukrainians, Afghans and people from Hong Kong. Last week, the Minister confirmed that, outside the limited schemes available, the Government do not propose to offer any more. Therefore, are we not pushing vulnerable people into perilous journeys if there is no safe way to travel? Under existing safe route schemes, there have been examples of success. The Ukraine scheme has seen us welcome very many. Will the Minister comment on suggestions that this safe route will be closed to new applicants in the near future? Equally, both ARAP and ACRS have seen significant numbers of Afghan arrivals. Will he comment on the difficulties that remain for some hiding for their safety inside Afghanistan or apparently blocked in neighbouring countries?

The Government need to commit to expanding resettlement routes, working with UNHCR and instigating humanitarian visas that people can apply for at embassies. Further, family reunion cannot continue to be neglected. Family reunion numbers have dropped by 36% from pre-pandemic levels, and 90% of those who use this route are women and children. We must seek to maintain and restore family unity wherever possible. Will the Minister affirm the Government’s commitment to family

[THE LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM]

reunion as a safe route and drop the argument that this acts as a pull factor when the evidence is clear that it does not?

Some have called this week for a complete reversal in immigration policy, but I urge the Government to realign the system with the outward-facing values we hold as a nation and our rich history of giving sanctuary to those in need. Of course, we should ascertain whether individuals are in fact true refugees, but this needs to be done in accordance with international agreements and the upholding of human rights. It is simply wrong to abdicate our moral and legal responsibility to consider a person's claim to asylum on their arrival in this country: here is where they must be dealt with.

I noted earlier that there is much to be proud of in the routes for Afghans, Ukrainians and people from Hong Kong. Through these schemes, we have established good practice. There is therefore now an opportunity to expand community sponsorship and develop a single refugee sponsorship scheme, one that is scalable, flexible and accessible to all refugees, so we do not need to reinvent it every time a new crisis arises. I encourage the Government to see this as an important element of their commitment to safe and legal routes, one which may move us towards an environment of hospitality rather than hostility. Will the Minister agree to meet me and those working to design a proposed single refugee sponsorship scheme, to explore this together?

I have two quick comments before I close. As the lead Bishop for education, I will write to the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, about worship in schools. I invite the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, to ask one of us, or others on these Benches, to show him examples of what is happening locally. We can all give him plenty of examples.

When one looks into the faces of those in need and listens to their voices, as the most reverend Primate called on us to do, we learn that what ultimately pushes someone to escape tyranny, while carrying immense grief, is hope. We need an asylum system that provides sanctuary and gives the opportunity for people to rebuild hope. Jeremiah wrote:

"I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

It is political maturity and courageous, compassionate leadership, not hostility and defensiveness in policy, that can bring people hope.

12.44 pm

Lord Horam (Con): My Lords, I am always amazed by the simple fact that, when I was born 83 years ago at the beginning of the Second World War, there were 2 billion people in the world and now there are 8 billion—a fourfold increase. That is an explanation of climate change, if you need any other. If you add climate change to bad government, wars and extremism, it is scarcely surprising that forced migration is on the scale that it is and, frankly, likely to get worse.

I have a family member who works for Marie Stopes International, now known as MSI Reproductive Choices. She is working on bringing family planning

help to women in developing countries, including in west Africa. I always say to her that no one in the world is giving more practical help than her.

Obviously, the UK will want to make its contribution to helping with this problem. We always help with these international problems and have an outstanding record, but we are a small and heavily populated country. Since the Blair Government opened the floodgates, net migration has been at a very high level. We have been importing a city the size of Newcastle upon Tyne pretty well every year since the beginning of the century. In the last 12 months, it was two such cities, as the net migration figure was over 500,000.

This has had massive consequences for housing and public services, particularly in the poorer parts of our country, as my noble friend Lady Stowell pointed out in a very perceptive speech, which is where immigrants mainly go. The Labour and trade union activist Paul Embery described in his book *Despised* the catastrophic effect on his hometown of Dagenham. There have been severe environmental consequences. The *Times* columnist Emma Duncan pointed this out recently in an article with the headline "green space trumps migration". Then there is the threat to social cohesion, a product in Lancashire that I know very well. All the while, public opinion, which is strongly against mass immigration, has been ignored. If you ignore people's views in a democracy, you eventually get a raspberry. We got that raspberry in Brexit, which was partly caused by the weaponising of immigration.

How do we square this circle? How do we make a contribution to the international problem yet cope with the serious downsides? My answer is the same as that of my noble friend Lord Lilley. Let us prioritise. I would give maximum priority to those in greatest need: the genuine asylum seekers, the real refugees, properly defined. If you give priority to genuine refugees, that means there is less room for other migrants. I am particularly appalled by the recruitment teams that leave the UK to hire doctors, nurses and care workers for the National Health Service. The countries from which we hire them need them far more than we do. I remember paying a visit as part of a parliamentary delegation to Botswana when the AIDS problem was at its height. I asked how they were dealing with putting out the necessary drugs; they said they did not have enough nurses, as they had all gone to the NHS because they got more money. That is the consequence of our immoral migration policy in that area.

I am an economist. In my view, much the same arguments apply to economic migrants. I remember a Jamaican politician saying to me, "How do you expect us to build a modern society when every year half our graduates disappear to the United States or Europe?" The CBI has said that it wants more immigrants to fill vacancies. This is ridiculous. I started out running a successful medium-sized business. Manpower planning is a major part of the job. You have to think ahead and train. The CBI and the Government should stop moaning and see this as an opportunity. I would readily reduce the number of migrants of this kind, which is far larger, as you could then have an increase in the number of asylum seekers coming to this country and widen the scope for them.

Finally, there is the question of illegal immigration across the channel. The problem here is that those who criticise it never put forward any solution. Simply saying that we should have more legal routes is not a solution because it leaves the traffickers in business, and while they are in business, people will take their chances. I listened carefully to the remarks of the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham on this point, and neither of them filled in this hole in their argument, I am sorry to say. We have a new team in place—including my noble friend who sits on the Front Bench, whom I welcome to his place—and in my view its watchwords should be “compassion” and “control”; if the team keeps those two words in mind, it will not go far wrong.

12.50 pm

Baroness Stroud (Con): My Lords, as we have heard this morning, from Ugandan Asians fleeing Idi Amin to French Huguenots fleeing persecution, Britain has a proud heritage of welcoming those in need to these shores. Tragically, refugee and asylum policy has now become one of our most divided and polarised debates. We urgently need a better and unifying story, a clear narrative about refugee and asylum policy as distinct from illegal migration, and a better and more effective national refugee strategy. I am delighted that it is the most reverend Primate who has called this debate today. It is the Judeo-Christian foundation of this nation that makes it the country that people fleeing war, intolerance and conflict want to come to, with its principles of fairness, safety and dignity.

Of course, there is no question that control and integration are also paramount. The Government have a duty to their own people, and our failure over decades to properly control our borders has fuelled the anxiety which underpins much asylum and refugee discourse. But it is not those in need who are driving this. According to the ONS, small boat crossings accounted for only 3.5% of the total immigration figures in 2022. Let me give a broader example of what is happening: 277,000 non-EU citizens arrived on long-term study visas, 151,000 people arrived for work, 89,000 Ukrainian visa scheme holders arrived, and over 100,000 BNO Hong Kongers arrived. Meanwhile, an estimated 35,000 people arrived by small boats, the majority of whom applied for asylum. If we want to reduce net-migration numbers, asylum claims are the smallest of categories.

Today's theme is how we balance compassion with control, as my noble friend Lord Horam has just mentioned. My argument is that there will be no constructive way forward until the Government address three public priorities: the control of our borders; control of our asylum system; and controlled safe and legal routes.

I begin with the control of our borders. This matters because narratives about the Calais border are often equated with headline migration numbers and wrongly tied into refugee policy. It also matters because, by putting the numbers in context, it becomes clear that the catastrophising rhetoric about the so-called crisis is overblown. We need clarity in our language. One of the reasons why 56% of those polled say that immigration

is too high is that politicians and the media relentlessly use terms such as “illegal migration” and do not distinguish between illegal migration, economic migration and those who have been trafficked or are seeking refuge or asylum. This is disingenuous. When I explain the numbers that I have just shared with the House, people are genuinely stunned and say that they had no idea that the number of people claiming asylum here was so small in comparison with those that we are actually inviting to come here.

If we want to regain control of our borders, diplomacy with our European allies should be our first port of call. I am pleased that the Prime Minister has been seeking to deepen his collaboration with his French counterpart on this matter. It is the most likely way of genuine control being restored.

Although control of our borders needs diplomacy, retaining control of our asylum system is a matter of administrative competence. If application and decision rates stay the same as the last year, by June 2024 the backlog will be over 200,000 cases. The status quo is quite simply not sustainable. We must take immediate action to clear the backlog. I was pleased to see in the *Times* that the Government are looking to fast-track claims from countries with a high grant rate, as well as those from safe countries where claims are very unlikely to be credible. If this policy were enacted, at a stroke a considerable amount of the burden on the taxpayer would be lifted. We must also improve the processing of cases. While Britain made only 16,400 asylum decisions in the year to September 2022, France made nearly double that number of decisions between July and September alone. We can quite obviously do better with our decision-making.

Much of this, though, will take time. But given that we are in a time of labour shortages, it is a matter of pure common sense that people who are in the backlog should be granted the right to work. In fact, I profoundly agree with the most reverend Primate that they should be not just granted the right to work but expected to work. The arguments for this are fundamentally Conservative, and I made them at some length during the passage of the Nationality and Borders Act, so I will not go into them in depth here. In short, we need their skills, and we do not need to pay for their accommodation or support their incomes—they can do this themselves. Surely this, at the very least, should be addressed.

As I come to conclude, I turn to the final area where we need to develop control in our asylum system: controlled safe and legal routes for genuine asylum seekers. It seems extraordinary that, whether you are a victim of the Yazidi genocide or of state oppression in Eritrea, there is no safe route to come here. I suggest that, if the Minister laid out controlled routes for people from Iran to Eritrea who genuinely need our support, he would find broad support in the House for getting a grip on the border and would significantly depolarise this divisive issue.

We need a British national refugee policy which is grounded in the best of British values, ranging from compassion to control. This is the only viable way forward.

12.57 pm

Lord Cashman (Lab): My Lords, it really is a privilege and a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Stroud, with whom I agree entirely. There have been a lot of references to religion and Christianity this morning—not surprisingly, I suppose, given that the debate is in the name of the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury. However, I want to point out, for the avoidance of doubt, that I am not a Christian. I am an atheist, and I come to these matters from the concept that what is happening to others could so easily be happening to me—and if I would not want it to happen to me, how dare I allow it to happen to others? I commend and celebrate the work I see being done by those of all faiths and none. I also congratulate the three maiden speakers: the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester; my dear friend from the West Midlands, my noble friend Lord Sahota; and, of course, my noble friend Lady Twycross.

At times of crisis, and when countries and their systems are under increasing pressure, we have even more need to adhere to international standards and agreed human rights obligations, as my noble friends Lady Chakrabarti and Lord Griffiths of Burry Port so eloquently outlined. Indeed, in times of crisis, we need certainty, and we need to abide by principles and standards that I believe define us as a civilised nation. How we treat those most in need defines us long after our actions. Therefore, the demonisation, stereotyping, misrepresentation and defamation of asylum seekers and migrants by the media, politicians and government Ministers is deeply reprehensible, serves no one and does nothing other than fuel hatred, despair and greater isolation.

Only when we deal with the reasons why people flee their country will we ever reduce the need for refuge, and until we can achieve resolution of those issues, we must meet our international—indeed, our moral—obligations.

As we have heard, the UK asylum system is in an utter state of collapse. It is overwhelmed by backlogs which government policy has created. The impact is one of crisis: thousands of people stuck for long and indefinite periods, frequently in inadequate, unsanitary, overcrowded and even unlawful conditions, which cause disease, distress and—there is every indication to conclude—deaths. There are now significantly more people dying in the system, including babies.

The last three Home Secretaries, discounting Grant Shapps, whose term of office lasted less than a week, have made crossing the channel by small boat a focal point. During their respective terms, they have each contributed to the sense that these crossings constitute a national threat. Priti Patel significantly cranked up rhetoric and policy that is hostile to people seeking asylum. The current Home Secretary has continued this, describing people seeking asylum as invaders, and doing so barely 24 hours after a firebomb attack upon people seeking asylum detained in Dover—shameful in the extreme. The express aim of such policy is deterrence, primarily expressed as deterrence of small boat crossings, but the real policy aim is the deterrence of seeking asylum.

We witness a dangerous cocktail of deterrence and the demonisation of asylum seekers. No good has come from this policy and no good can come from it. We need safe, clear, obvious ways to seek asylum; no more confusion, ducking and diving; no more Home Secretaries using asylum seekers and desperate migrants as political capital to shore up their bid for power in the future; and no more dangerous rhetoric, aided and abetted by a right-wing printed media that fills me with shame. We urgently need the creation of real and accessible safe routes by which people—especially those with family and connections here—can seek asylum in the United Kingdom, and we need the Government to respect international human rights and asylum law in the case of every person who exercises their right to seek asylum in this country.

I quote from a briefing from the Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium:

“Over recent years, we have seen the government significantly erode the rights of children seeking asylum, not just by making the asylum system less accessible and more punitive but by also excluding them from the child protection and welfare frameworks that should apply to all children in this country regardless of nationality, ethnicity or immigration status.”

If such an appalling indictment does not shame the Government and fill us all with a sense of shame, I wonder what kind of country we have become.

However, I finish on a positive note. A man who experienced the best of British decency when he arrived here under the Kindertransport, my noble friend Lord Dubs, reminded us that we must give hope.

1.03 pm

Lord Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood (CB): My Lords, I am sorry to say that we have two atheists in a row—a bit like No. 73 buses. I greatly like the noble Lord, Lord Cashman—I would call him a friend—but I do not like following him in debate. The fact is that he was trained to hold an audience and I have not been.

I start with this story. On my maiden visit to Albania, some 20 years ago, I was driving into Tirana from the airport when I was struck by the number of high-grade fast cars that were overtaking us all the time. There they were: Maseratis, BMWs, Mercedes, Bentleys and Porsches. I pointed them out to my driver and asked about them. He said, “Well, what are you going to notice about them? Just look at their number-plates.” All of them were still bearing the number-plates and other registration marks that they had borne on the streets of the European capital cities from which they had been stolen. Nobody had thought it necessary to change them. The criminal gangs there were so powerful and established that there was no need to hide that criminality.

The fact is that, as its ambassador told a Commons Select Committee two days ago, Albania is an obviously safe country. It is not riven by civil war. It is not suffering acutely from climate change and all the perils that go with it, such as fire, flood, drought and famine. It is just a lawless, ill-governed country. The point is that, if ever one could say that the great rush of people coming here—the young, fit Albanians coming here are economic migrants; at least they should be if we are to have any credibility at all in terms of controlling

our borders—should be instantly removed, it is about them. Of course you treat them with respect and compassion and do not discriminate, but let us look at the problem realistically. Above all, the reason I tell that story is this: they are crossing the channel and putting their lives at risk because they are hoping to improve their lives; how much more can one expect—how much more likely to do so—are those who are genuinely fleeing persecution?

That brings me to the point that my noble friend Lord Carlile made. The policies that this Government adopt to deter people from crossing the channel do not work, cannot work and will not work. The most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury was right to say that people trafficking must be confronted on an international basis; everything possible must be done. One would have hoped for intelligence-led attacks, given the apparent ease with which boats are still sailing from France and Belgium.

In the meantime, recognising that the policies do not work is surely a compelling reason, as so many noble Lords have argued, to relax the absurd 12-month ban on employment. These people should work. There is no point in this ban; it does not deter them, which is the only reason anybody has ever suggested having it in the first place.

On the outsourcing of our responsibilities, I must say that I take a more nuanced, less censorious view than most of your Lordships—certainly the Spiritual Benches—in this House. It is a difficult point, I think. Even if the Rwandan threat to those arriving from the channel crossings does not deter them, it does not follow that we should not be making arrangements such as those proposed here. I have read—I hope and imagine that the Bishops' Benches have done so too—the three Oxford professorial papers that have been written about all this, circularised under the aegis of Policy Exchange. It is a much more difficult problem than is said; it is tempting and easy just to stand on one's moral high horse and say, "It's obviously wrong: the responsibility is ours and we can't shift it." Assuming that the policy is legal—of course, we still await the outcome on that—it seems to me that the argument is much deeper and more difficult than has hitherto been recognised.

The other point made in those papers is that it is all very well saying, "We must have safe routes", but we are not alone in not having safe routes. They do not have safe routes for the general run of aspiring asylum seekers or economic migrants in Canada or America—indeed, in most other countries—because they would be swamped. The most reverend Primate is plainly right that we need a new refugee convention to meet the acute problems that are, as everybody recognises, going to get ever more acute with climate change. Migration is going to be impelled. We think that we have a problem now, but you ain't seen nothing yet.

1.10 pm

Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-Afl): My Lords, I thank the most reverend Primate for encouraging us to consider the question of asylum from a moral position, but I warn those who made such interesting maiden speeches—I warmly welcome them—that debates in this House are not always so erudite or ethical.

One concern when we discuss this topic is how we are regularly urged to deploy our moral sentiments in feeling compassion for refugees. Is it emotionally manipulative to suggest that policy should be decided by such one-sided emotional concerns? There are millions of people who could have their lives enhanced by living in the UK. When I watch the news and see the plight and suffering of those around the world, I am tearful and want to do something desperately, but, as the most reverend Primate admits, we cannot take all the world's suffering as refugees here. We have to prioritise, and that does not make us immoral. I therefore feel uncomfortable when some accuse those who raise concerns about the numbers arriving in small boats of lacking a disposition of generosity or not caring. Is not that demonising and dehumanising language too?

Let us not pretend that this is an easy moral question. For all the moral righteousness expressed here, I ask what the moral difference is between a man fleeing a war-torn country, which is considered legal, and a man fleeing grinding poverty, which is not. This highlights a moral problem thrown up by the asylum system: it treats the cause of someone fleeing a country as the basis for creating deserving and undeserving migrants. It implies somehow that a refugee is a victim worthy of our generosity, unlike economic migrants.

I am not sure the fashion for emphasising that Jesus was a refugee helps, if I am honest. It feels like a bit of a cheap shot. Did not Christ allegedly die for us all? This sanctifying narrative and the present system definitely incentivise anyone arriving to follow the script and claim they are refugees, but, as explained so well by the noble Baroness, Lady Chakrabarti, people arrive without papers or with letters from tyrants as evidence. There is a problem: the system is open to abuse.

If the host authorities say they will give asylum to Syrians, those from the Middle East will inevitably claim to be Syrians. If the rules say asylum will be given to under-18s, young-looking 20-somethings will understandably claim to be younger. In 2016, the Church of England clerics warned about fake conversions from Islam to Christianity. In Nick Timothy's major report published this week, he notes that modern slavery laws are being "abused". It is now standard advice, especially for those coming from Albania, to claim they are victims of trafficking.

Noting those truths is not about blame. I do not blame people for trying their luck—they want a better life—so there are no accusations of "scroungers" or "invaders" from me. But it is simply disingenuous to suggest that the objectivity of the law is not being strained when determining asylum status is so difficult. I am especially worried when we gaslight the British public, who feel that some are gaming the system—and they are right to think that. They also believe that, no matter how many times they vote for control of our borders, they are being ignored at the expense of asylum seekers.

When people considered the original 1951 convention on refugees, the spectre of those fleeing the Holocaust death camps informed the spirit of "never again". Many Jewish refugees were, shamefully, turned away. British citizens understand that, and they understand those fleeing the bombs and terror of Putin's barbaric

[BARONESS FOX OF BUCKLEY]

war in Ukraine and our obligation to those escaping the Taliban in Afghanistan, and so on. They are more than welcoming, but they are also understandably upset about the 40,000 currently crossing the channel, who they know are not fleeing from the terror of the Nazis or the Taliban, but who are leaving peaceful France.

They are right as well to ask British politicians about their priorities. Did your Lordships see the film of the recent public meeting in Skegness, called by the mayor in response to the local seaside hotels? There was a lot of hostility in that meeting, but it was aimed not at refugees but at the local MP. It was frustration at a system where, without consultation, asylum seekers in their midst were being given free accommodation, utilities and three meals a day, while local people face desperate times and the brutal reality of austerity. Homelessness is on the rise in the town, and the veterans sleeping rough in Skegness also deserves our compassion; the interviews with them were heart-breaking. Of course refugees are not living in five-star hotels, and I am not suggesting that, but can we also empathise with citizens who cannot get to see a GP, get into A&E or get medical treatment for chronic pain when they are told that medical services are being made available to refugees in local hotels?

Dismissing the plight and aspirations of our own citizens, so well-articulated by the noble Baronesses, Lady Stowell and Lady Stroud, is just as divisive and mean-spirited as using the language of invasion. This issue requires that we deploy a full range of moral principles. Our duties stretch beyond compassion for migrants. If we flaunt the democratic duty to uphold the integrity of national borders and treat the social cohesion of settled communities as a distasteful, inconvenient obstacle, we indeed risk a backlash against all refugees and migration schemes, which would be terrible. In my view, we need a complete overhaul of the laws on the issue. At present, who is in control?

In his foreword to the recent pamphlet *From the Channel to Rwanda: Three Essays on the Morality of Asylum*, Doctor Michael Nazir-Ali, the former Bishop of Rochester, wrote:

“if people smugglers can simply nullify carefully thought-through and debated legislation and policy by landing people in small craft on the beaches in Kent, this cannot indefinitely be acceptable in a democratic and law respecting nation.”

I think Nick Timothy is right that, if human rights laws or the 1951 refugee convention prevent us democratically deciding our priorities, we must be prepared to leave both if necessary. Those who disagree, who think there should be more refugees, should argue for that democratically and push that up the next election's list of things to be debated.

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con): The noble Baroness has run out of time.

1.17 pm

Lord McInnes of Kilwinning (Con): My Lords, I begin by declaring my interest as a member of your Lordships' Justice and Home Affairs Committee. I thank the most reverend Primate who once again

brings before us today a subject that allows us to rise above the topicality of daily politics and properly focus on and think about an important policy area.

Six years ago, I made my maiden speech in your Lordships' House in another of the most reverend Primate's debates, that time on British values. In his opening remarks he said:

“In short, we need a more beautiful and better common narrative that shapes and inspires us with a common purpose, a vaulting national ambition, not a sense of division and antagonism both domestically and internationally. We need a narrative that speaks to the world of bright hope and not mere optimism, let alone simple self-interest.”—[*Official Report*, 2/12/16; col. 418.]

In the area of migration, it seems that we have reached a place wherein lots of competing values and aspirations are clashing and failing to provide the necessary framework that can command consensus and that common purpose that the most reverend Primate so eloquently described in that debate.

Only last week we witnessed outrage in many quarters about the number of migrants who have entered the UK this year, forgetting the enormous public support there was, quite rightly, for the Afghan, Ukrainian and Hong Kong humanitarian resettlement schemes. However, with figures of net migration juxtaposed and conflated with images of small boats, it is the case that, as my noble friend Lady Stowell referred to, a poll earlier this week showed that only 9% of people think current immigration in the UK is just right.

All too often the debate seems characterised in a way that consensus and a settled position may never be reached. I have yet to meet anyone—the most reverend Primate referred to this—who does not think there should be controlled migration. Of course government policy should be considered, and will always be challenged in your Lordships' House, but if the Government can be expected to control migration and thereafter allow more humanitarian channels, they will have to act to defeat the evil of people smuggling. I am glad to say that it is a priority of the Prime Minister.

In this regard, I tend to agree with the Policy Exchange paper, which noble Lords have referred to, on controlled immigration, published last month. We must be realistic that the extra humanitarian routes many of us want will gain popular and then political consent only when the small boats issue and evil gangs have been confronted.

Consensus on migration issues requires leadership. If there are three principal buckets of migration that the UK wishes to fulfil—humanitarian, economic and educational—each must be properly defined and promoted to the people of this country. In each of these areas, a consensus of support can be built. It has been done before. However, it will require significant improvements in the systems deployed to control immigration, as well as assurance that the UK is proactively seeking to improve its humanitarian and asylum offer. Humanitarian needs will only increase. The UNHCR has identified that 1.5 million more people will require asylum or resettlement in the coming year.

Undoubtedly, something that leads to a lack of public consensus is the very slow processing rate of asylum claims by the Home Office, which a number of noble Lords have referred to. I hope that my noble friend the

Minister can reassure your Lordships that there will be the kind of human and creative investment in a Home Office system to ensure that asylum claimants are given as quick a decision as possible. The tiny numbers of asylum decisions at present cause only further distress for those escaping horrific tragedy, but mean that others see the UK as a place where a very slow process will allow leave to remain for a long period.

As well as being efficient, such a system must be humanitarian. I believe that the United Kingdom has a proud history of humanitarian action, but almost always at a point where it is just a little too late, as referred to by the noble Baroness, Lady Chakrabarti. We must move away from a situation where legal resettlement schemes are reliant on media reports to gain public traction, in turn to ensure political support for legal resettlement. We have one of the best diplomatic networks in the world. Surely we should have proactive resettlement plans that do not require horrific humanitarian circumstances before we allow a regular legal route to the UK.

Yes, we will disagree on the numbers, but the current schemes do not allow an organic ability to react to humanitarian crises from outside of specific countries. Can my noble friend the Minister outline what work His Majesty's Government are doing with UNHCR to identify regular resettlement routes from areas of the world such as sub-Saharan Africa? Unless we allow such a mechanism, can we be surprised about the large numbers who end up on the north coast of Africa and then onwards to the channel?

With deep regret, I conclude that we currently do not have the clear consensus and values-based migration strategy that we would want, and which would then shape policy. This is the worst of all worlds. I hope that my noble friend the Minister can reassure us that this new Conservative Administration are determined to provide the leadership that the country needs in managing migration, while offering the humanitarian leadership that we all desire.

1.23 pm

Lord Green of Deddington (CB): My Lords, I congratulate the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury on a very powerful speech. He reminded us of our duty to receive, indeed to welcome, refugees. As many noble Lords have remarked, that cannot be challenged. The challenge is to distinguish between those who are genuine refugees and those who are economic migrants, and it is not an easy thing to do. The present situation in the channel is extremely damaging, to the reputation of the Government, to the rule of law, to community relations, and perhaps even to confidence in our political system as a whole.

That said, a major incentive for these arrivals is that they are now very unlikely to be sent home. Most of those whose claims fail will join the illegal population of the UK, which runs to at least 1 million—more, even—and might well include some of their relatives. As a matter of fact, 15% of cross-channel arrivals in 2019 had already made a claim elsewhere, 70% were men aged between 18 and 39, and 98% had no passport. Why? Because they had destroyed it to make their case

more difficult to decide. Of course, 100% are coming from a safe country. This really cannot be allowed to continue. We must find a way forward within the framework of ethics that the most reverend Primate mentioned.

Suggestions from the asylum lobby, if I may call it that, that we should establish safe and legal routes may be useful as soundbites but are simply unrealistic. Applications would have to be made in some third country, presumably at an application centre run by the British Government. Surely it is absolutely clear that such a facility would be immediately overwhelmed by applications. Any host Government would immediately see this and that they would be left holding the baby, responsible for the people we had rejected. They just will not go down that route and, of course, none has.

Meanwhile, our Government are in real difficulty. Nearly 60% of the public think they have lost control of our borders—there is something in that—and 84% think they are handling immigration badly. Yet much of the national conversation, including this debate, simply does not reflect the reality of public opinion on this issue. Here I commend the courageous speech by the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, at the outset of this debate, and the later remarks of the noble Lord, Lord Horam.

The fundamental issue is that the authority of our Government is being blatantly undermined. The Government are tied up in knots by the current framework of law, so perhaps it is time that whole framework was re-examined. The 1951 refugee convention is so often referred to and widely applauded, but it is seldom realised that it applies only to events in Europe and only to those that preceded 1951. It was not until 1966 that the UN protocol widened its application to the whole world, without time limit or geographical restriction and with very little public discussion at the time. In the ensuing half-century, conditions have changed enormously throughout the world, as has the legal framework. It is now possible for cases to include the fate of women in some countries and gay people in others, persecution by factions that are not the Government and, in some circumstances, degrading treatment.

At this point it is important to note that both the refugee convention and the UN protocol provide for signatories to withdraw at 12 months' notice. I therefore suggest that we need to give serious consideration as to whether this legal framework is still appropriate. There may be cries of horror at any such a suggestion, but we must recognise that a continuation of the present chaos will be harmful to those who need asylum. We should therefore consider establishing a mechanism, perhaps a royal commission or something of that kind, to examine all options. My noble and learned friend Lord Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood and the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, touched on that possibility. The overall aim would be to ensure that the system continues to be supported by the wider public and is not overwhelmed by the huge number of claims, some of which are unlikely to be successful.

To conclude, I say a word of welcome to the wide-ranging report on asylum published this week by the Centre for Policy Studies. In her foreword to that report, the Home Secretary wrote:

[LORD GREEN OF DEDDINGTON]

“The British public are fair-minded, tolerant, and generous in spirit. But we are fed up with the continued flouting of our laws and immigration rules to game our asylum system.”

Exactly so.

1.29 pm

Lord Desai (Non-Affl): My Lords, it is genuinely a pleasure to follow the noble Lord because I have always listened to him and, while I have never agreed with him, he studies the problem thoroughly and I like that. I respect what he said and, in some cases, I want to follow him.

I am not a Christian and not only am I an atheist, it is much worse: I am an economist. The question I want to ask is: who gains from this policy that we have? We are definitely losing. There is no doubt that everybody knows that the UK, as a country, is losing its reputation and losing money, so who gains? It is the gangsters. As an economist, I ask myself: why is there clearly profit to be made from smuggling people here? Because there is a demand for coming to the UK and people are willing to pay a hefty price for what the gangsters charge. Why can we not have that money? Why do we not say this? “Okay, no problems, come to us. We may not accommodate you but we will not throw you out yet, and we will give you a temporary pass, perhaps for one or two years. Give the £2,000 you were going to spend to us, not to the gangsters.”

I say that because it is clear that the legal routes which people use for coming here are so porous that people have figured out how to game the law, so the law is clearly inadequate. We might appoint a royal commission to find out whether we can improve on that law, but the law is certainly not working. I welcome people who want to come here for genuine economic reasons; I think they are the only people who genuinely want to come here. Obviously, they may be pretending to be asylum seekers or refugees, or that they are stateless or being persecuted. The law is such that we have to have hearings to find out whether that is right. Some will obviously have lost their passports because they are not stupid; they know how to game the system.

We are being gamed by people who are perfectly capable of paying money to the crooks to come here, while we ourselves are losing money because we have to spend a lot of it accommodating these people. In some cases, as others have said, it takes months and years. As the right reverend Prelate also said, we do not allow them to work—and we should. Why are we losing money each week by our inefficiency in not being able to solve this problem?

The solution is very simple. They are going to stay here anyway, illegally, so why do we not allow them to stay legally and get the money ourselves? I have always wondered, I am sorry to say, whether there is a kind of perverse reputation to be made in politics. I hope I am wrong about there being a political career to be made by being hostile—by saying, “Oh, these immigrants are illegal and dirty”, and so on. But they are just people who have figured out that staying in the UK is a better bet than staying anywhere else. We should be flattered. We should tell them, “Okay, come here if you want to, but pay a price for that because you’re going to benefit from it and that will cost us something”.

In a sense, as many people have said, we need to rethink the whole question of immigration. First, we ought to clear up our statistics because, while everybody talks about there being so many crossings and so on, the bulk of the people who come here do so legally. They come regularly and there is no problem.

The headlines are about these boat people. We ought to seriously compete with the gangsters and offer a facility. We may set up an office in Calais, Tirana or wherever, and say to people, “There’s no problem, just come”. We will run the boats ourselves and nationalise the gangsters’ business. We should stop being absurd about this; we need some clarity. Without worrying about our reputation with the right-wing press, or whatever it is, we should say, “Who gains from what we do?” We are not controlling our borders; we are just losing money and our reputation. We are being made to look like fools. Stop being foolish; stop losing money; stop losing our reputation. Play the game better than they can.

1.35 pm

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB): My Lords, the quality and quantity of contributions to this debate show how grateful the House is to the most reverend Primate for choosing this subject and introducing it so inspiringly. I thank him.

I think it was in Sebastian Haffner’s wonderful memoir *Defying Hitler* that I read the story of the south London Germans—mainly Jewish—who were rounded up in 1939 and taken to the Crystal Palace football ground en route to internment on the Isle of Man. Haffner, being a German, was used to German efficiency. He was surprised when the transport failed to turn up and even more surprised when the speaker politely invited all those sitting on the pitch to go home and come back tomorrow, please. It is a nice story, with the incompetence taking the edge off the cruelty. Alas, it does not seem to work that way now. The incompetence of our asylum system compounds its cruelty.

Just as the 1939 round up of those who particularly wanted to resist Hitler was a bit perverse, so in today’s economic circumstances it is very perverse to spend £1.5 million per day not allowing able-bodied asylum seekers to take a job. The Isle of Man was no Rwanda and the fear of invasion then was well founded, whereas rhetoric about “invasion” now is totally unjustified. We get eight asylum applications per year for every 100,000 of us. The French get more than twice as many and the Germans three times as many—a point rightly made by the most reverend Primate.

The effects of Home Office practice are a stain on our society but, giving the benefit of the doubt, I do not believe that is deliberate. I think it is the unintended consequence of inefficiency. Consider the facts: in the year to September there were 86,000 new applications for asylum, including 5,000 from unaccompanied children. Only 16,000 of those were decided, so the queue of those waiting for an initial decision grew to 143,000. In the year to October, over 3,000 children were housed in unsuitable hotel accommodation. Currently, over 200 of those placed in hotels are known to have gone missing. That is shocking; it shames us.

It gets worse. The Refugee Council, where I used to be a trustee, tells us that of the 140,000 now waiting for their cases to be considered, 98,000 have waited for over six months, 41,000 for between one and three years and an astonishing 10,000—including over 150 children—have been waiting for over five years. That is longer than internment on the Isle of Man. It is shocking and it shames us. Remember, we are not talking about appealing an initial decision. These numbers are just those waiting and hoping that one day the Government will get around to looking at their claim. Remember, too, that 77% of claims are found valid and accepted, as are over 50% of those that go to appeal, so in the main we are not talking about fraudsters and chancers.

More than nine out of 10 of those in the queue will in the end be found to have a valid case, and a genuine and well-founded fear of persecution, having fled oppression, violence, war or famine. I have to tell the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, that the reason why they have come here is because they speak our language; they have family here, or they have heard—alas, it seems that it is not always the case—that we are still a friendly and hospitable people. Actually, I believe that we are, but we have been let down by a system that is not deliberately callous. The Home Office knows that the delays have no deterrent effect. The system is callous in effect because of inefficiency. That means that the problem is fixable—and, indeed, it is relatively easy to see what we need to do.

I have two questions for the Minister. First, when will the Government implement the recommendations on asylum casework made over a year ago by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration? Why not streamline the system? Secondly, is not it time to set up a dedicated task force to clear the backlog, prioritising the most vulnerable and those who have waited longest? It really is not rocket science. Given clear ministerial instruction, the admirable Permanent Secretary at the Home Office could reallocate the resources tomorrow. Yes, we should also shut down the scandal of small boat channel crossings, but that is also soluble. People would not risk their lives if they had the option of a safe, official route. At present, unless you are from Ukraine, Afghanistan or a UNHCR camp in Syria, there is no safe route, as the most reverend Primate pointed out.

You can ask for asylum only when you get here, and we will not give you a visa to come here if it is asylum you seek—Catch 22. Why not have a humanitarian visa? Why not process applications in France, as the French keep suggesting? Getting back to our values means tackling the backlog. I repeat that I believe that it springs from inertia and not malign intent, but sins of omission are sometimes the worst. These problems are all soluble, so let us solve them and, as so many in this debate have said, while people wait in the queue, let us allow them to work. It would be good for them, for the Exchequer, for the economy and for our consciences.

1.42 pm

Baroness Berridge (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to the most reverend Primate for this debate, which follows neatly from last year's debate, which was on

freedom of speech. We had a terrible period in the last decade of repression of free speech on this issue. You could not talk about immigration or asylum, as it was synonymous with being racist. For the overwhelming majority, of course, it was not—it was more to do with pressure on school places, GP appointments pre pandemic, housing and depressed wages affecting ordinary working folk at that time, who are and were then affected much more so by these issues than the middle classes. I wholeheartedly welcome the recognition of this by the most reverend Primate, which is a change of position in the leadership of the Church of England. Sadly, in the run-up to the 2016 referendum, it did not champion those communities, barring of course some comments from the Bishop of Burnley.

I count myself in the only-blessed-by-migration category. I glanced at my Christmas gift spreadsheet, which includes British Nigerians, British Trinidadians, British Singapore Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese, British Eritreans and Syrians. The latter two families have educated me on the issues of asylum, and I am very grateful—but I hope briefly just to make some ordinary people points. It is unclear to the ordinary person, why thousands of Albanians are claiming asylum in the UK. Despite the comments of the noble Baroness, Lady Hamwee, what are they fleeing? It may just be a communication issue, but it needs addressing, as do the fears that the landmark modern slavery legislation is being misused.

As His Majesty's loyal Opposition have, as of yesterday, joined His Majesty's Government in saying that we should fast-track claims where a claim is manifestly unfounded, could my noble friend the Minister please confirm that the only matter therefore left in dispute is whether you can designate a whole country for such consideration and still comply with the 1951 convention? I hope that the most reverend Primate is right that we can introduce something akin to striking out a claim, as happens in the civil courts when there is no reasonable prospect of a claim, but I would be interested to know whether the most reverend Primate and my noble friend have any view on what appeal rights would or would not be appropriate. Laudable aims could be strangled by necessary judicial procedures.

As a lawyer, I enjoyed reading the UNHCR document *Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters*. It is hard to understand why, if your territory disappears—literally as could happen to the Maldives or the Pacific island states—you are not automatically a refugee. Then there are convoluted arguments like this one: you are a victim of a flood caused by climate change, but you are also part of a religious group that was not given aid by your Government, so you had to flee your borders and you needed refuge. Arguments such as this will take up valuable time and money when these kinds of claims reach our tribunals. Is it not time for a separate convention, in addition to the refugee convention, on the issue of refugees due to climate change, rather than straining the interpretation of the 1951 treaty? I am interested in my noble friend the Minister's view on this, but I also caution the noble and learned Lord, Lord Brown, and the most reverend Primate on reopening

[BARONESS BERRIDGE]

the treaty itself, unless there is a guarantee of the same post-Second World War consensus on this, which I very much doubt.

To turn to Ukraine, we are rightly proud of our response to this crisis. I think there are over 125,000 people here, but they are not refugees—it is that fudged legal distinction again, as with Hong Kong migration. Under the Ukraine family scheme there was a very broad definition of family members who could join you if you were already in the UK: a niece, nephew, cousin, mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, and even a grandparent-in-law.

On this issue, I would like my noble friend's assurance that the Home Office is proactive and meets with the FCDO about areas of geographical instability. I think I am correct in saying that, mercifully, there have been only sporadic conflicts in nations where British citizens have heritage, such as the recent conflict in Ethiopia and Eritrea. But that might change in February of next year. We all hope and pray—I am sure the most reverend Primate is praying—for successful Nigerian elections and that the nation holds together, but there are serious concerns. The Yoruba tribe in the west has already petitioned the United Nations to supervise a referendum to split, and it is said that the Igbo of the 1960s Biafran separatist war look to do the same. Rarely are such matters settled peacefully. This is a nation of—in conservative estimates—250 million people, many with family in the UK. Those British citizens with Nigerian heritage might rightly expect the same generous definition of family ties under the Ukrainian scheme to apply to Nigeria. Can my noble friend assure me that the Home Office is considering policy for this kind of eventuality, and is thinking through all the eventualities to ensure that our policy—should the worst happen—is racially just?

Finally, on reading many reports for this debate, I am concerned that we are repeating the mistakes of the past—I note the comments made by my noble friend Lady Stowell. While residents in the UK, especially ordinary working people, are not fleeing for their lives, they are deeply affected by these issues—more than most of us here in your Lordships' House. If we forget ordinary working folk again, I fear that we will not build a home together, as the late Lord Sacks so wisely advised us to do, and we may not have a referendum on the issue as a necessary release valve.

1.48 pm

The Earl of Sandwich (CB): My Lords, the end is nigh—not for all refugees, but possibly for lunch. I start with the unfortunate remarks of the senior lady-in-waiting last week. She asked a visitor, “Who are you and where are you from?” Perhaps the questions were not entirely innocent. We all have a tendency to inquire about other people as a sort of defence against the unknown, but the other person may read the defence as a form of attack or even racism. It is not racism, it is ignorance and fear. It can happen to any of us, we just have to try hard to get to know each other; our upbringing and training surely demand it.

The Church, as the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, said, refers to this as: “Who is my neighbour?” It is a perennial question. The answer, of course, is everyone,

including those tens of millions of migrants and asylum seekers who at times seem to be coming towards us. We have a reputation for welcoming refugees, as we have seen, and recently we have gratefully received compliments from refugees about this country. There are many reasons why people want to come. Albanians seem to be the most self-assured—even though they might not have those smart number plates any more—but they have no real reason to leave Albania except that they can earn so much more in the UK. Can we blame them? This is why I am very tempted by the suggestion of the noble Lord, Lord Desai.

The numbers have recently felt overwhelming; we must accept that. We need to congratulate the Government on some of the resettlement schemes, which have at least secured more orderly arrivals. The UNHCR's Syria scheme has had some success, if only after much pressing from the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, and others in the House. The Ukrainian scheme is not really equivalent, but it has undoubtedly worked well until now. However, the scale of the Afghan exodus last year took everyone—and certainly the Government—by surprise. No one could say that was a satisfactory operation, but there were some remarkable rescue stories, including the evacuation of women judges by the noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy. Today, there are many women in hiding from the Taliban who would or should qualify for resettlement. May I ask the Minister what is happening to these resettlement schemes? Why are they falling short?

At the other end of the scale, there are the many asylum seekers outside these schemes, especially those living on charity or detained indefinitely, awaiting removal. In many cases, these are people from war-torn countries such as Sudan and Somalia which are on the margin of the convention, fleeing drought and poverty as well as persecution. They struggle to claim asylum, having few documents—not always for the reasons just given—and little evidence of their past life and treatment.

The noble Lord, Lord Dubs, described the amazing work of the charities which toil to make people's lives more tolerable. Church members, lawyers, experts in torture, NGOs and campaigners of every kind condemn the treatment meted out to these refugees. The waiting lists for the courts are lengthening just as they are in hospitals.

Almost one-fifth of those claiming asylum are children under 18, including many who are wrongly treated as adults. The noble Lord, Lord Cashman, and others mentioned this. The Helen Bamber Foundation, a very respected body, is concerned that too many young children are kept for long periods in hotels without proper care.

Every Peer has admitted that the Home Office sometimes appears to be seizing up, unable to cope with the numbers and lacking the necessary skills. Under successive Governments, it has been called a shambles. This is a national crisis; is it not time for more co-operation between the political parties? I am also concerned that funding is being diverted from the aid programme, but that is another subject.

I hope the Minister will respond to the practical suggestions that the UNHCR put forward last February to improve registration and screening and avoid where

possible the unpleasant side of forced removal and inadequate protection. Why are the Government not making more use of schemes which are still behind pre-pandemic levels?

Is the answer to deter or restrict refugees? Possibly, but that has not worked either. We have talked about “real and accessible safe routes”, but I do not think even Amnesty is right about that. What are the alternatives? Can the Minister present some? There are some utterly wicked traffickers, as we have heard.

Returning to the Church, I sincerely thank the most reverend Primate for inviting us to hear his very cogent pre-Christmas reflections. We have also heard three splendid maiden speeches and the personal experiences of some Peers. I especially commend, in her absence, the noble Baroness, Lady Nicholson, who talked very movingly about the Yazidis.

The most reverend Primate may think, as I do, that Anglicans could further improve our rather dismal attitude to strangers. “Diversity” is now the cover word, but I will not go into all that. The Church could do more to include other religions in Prayers, for example. We need to do more work on our church services. Some of us are still singing old lines such as

“Lands of the East, arise,
he is your brightest morn”,

or, worse than that,

“O'er heathen lands afar
thick darkness broodeth yet”—

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con): Could the noble Earl bring his comments to a close? He has exceeded the speaking time.

1.55 pm

Lord Kamall (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to the Whips of both parties for allowing me to speak in the gap. I thank the most reverend Primate for opening this debate and congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, and the noble Lord, Lord Sahota, on their maiden speeches. I must apologise to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester for missing his maiden speech. The irony, which I am sure is not lost on him, was that I popped out because it was time to pray. I also thank my noble friend Lady Berridge for mentioning the Bishop of Burnley. He and I were best friends at school; when we were in detention 40-odd years ago, little did we think that one of us would end up a bishop in the Church of England and the other a Member of the House of Lords—not a great incentive for schoolchildren to behave well.

As an academic and a former head of research at a think tank, how would I write about this issue? There are lots of challenges. As the son of an immigrant who came on two big boats—one from Guyana to Trinidad and one from Trinidad to the UK—in the early 1950s, my heart says that we should let everyone in and open up to the whole world. However, my head says that we cannot. The difficulty is, where do we draw the line? This has troubled me for some time. We all draw that line very differently, and it has been a struggle to try to decide where we should draw it.

We have to look at two issues: those seeking asylum and those seeking to immigrate here. On asylum, of course we have to open our hearts to people suffering

terribly in the rest of the world, but we also have to ask questions. How do we differentiate the genuine asylum seekers and process them as quickly as possible to get them into British society to contribute in a positive way? How do we make sure that we have tough love for those who fail and send them away in the most humanitarian and appropriate way possible, despite people perhaps campaigning for them to stay? We also have to think about the causes of people wanting to come to this country. We have to ask whether we have a moral responsibility to bear from some of our foreign adventures that have led to refugees from some of these countries, even if we cannot let them all in. How do we speed up processing—I thank my noble friend the Minister for answering my Written Questions on the Government's plans for this; I hope he will share some of those thoughts—and make sure that we return people as quickly as possible?

On the other part of immigration—those who want to come and make a better life in this country, as my parents did—I am pleased that we now seem to have a fairer system after leaving the EU. We no longer give priority to mostly white Europeans over mostly non-white non-Europeans, and we treat everyone equally. But can we have a dynamic points system whereby we identify skills gaps in this country, are clear and transparent with people about the skills we are looking for, and encourage them to come? Could we use technology, for example AI, to scan vacancy boards and give those vacancies higher points so that people can come here?

I also agree that we should look at legal routes of migration outside this country, but what are the unintended consequences of that? Can we change our language so that we are welcoming and understand why people come, and not treat everyone as invaders? Can we work internationally, find those clear rules and have a dynamic points system? Can we have a system of compassion and be clear that we will welcome those who want to come and work here, where we have those gaps, and help those who are genuinely fleeing as much as we can, in conjunction with international partners and organisations and civil society? Let us hope that this and future Governments can come up with a more compassionate policy that most of us can share in.

1.59 pm

Baroness Ludford (LD): My Lords, this has been an excellent, very important and timely debate on the eve of Human Rights Day, as the noble Baroness, Lady Chakrabarti, pointed out. These Benches very much welcome this vital opportunity to reflect upon the impact of government asylum policy. The most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury is to be greatly congratulated on instigating the debate, and the number of speakers shows the volume of interest in this topic and is a tribute to him.

The most reverend Primate said, among many other things, that a compassionate asylum system

“does not mean open borders, but a disposition of generosity and a readiness to welcome those whose need is genuine and where we are able to meet that need”,

and that it

“has confidence to reject the shrill narratives that all who come to us for help should be treated as liars, scroungers or less than fully human.”

[BARONESS LUDFORD]

I agree very strongly with those words—and indeed his whole speech—and with his view and that of the Bishops collectively that the Government’s policy of shipping asylum seekers to Rwanda is “an immoral policy” that “shames Britain”.

The only thing I am not persuaded about, rather like the noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, is the wisdom of opening up the refugee convention for amendment. Even if I accept the point about new causes such as climate change, I fear that revising the convention could be a Pandora’s box and invite backsliding; the words of the noble Lord, Lord Green, put me on notice about that. I would also comment that trafficking is already an international crime under EU law, but the UK Government refused to take part in that directive—though, confusingly, I noticed that they revoked it recently anyway.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester, the noble Lord, Lord Sahota, and the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, have all made important and valuable maiden speeches. The noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, rightly praised the community response to Afghan refugees, as well as recalling her own family’s diverse origins. I can relate to her fate of being too opinionated for the Civil Service—I lasted only 15 months, for the same reason. The noble Lord, Lord Sahota, recalled the impressive history of his family in both India and the UK, and

“the slings and arrows of racial discrimination”.

He deplored the limbo and exploitation into which asylum seekers sink, and the cost of this to society and the public purse as well as to individuals. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester recalled how Leicester has thrived as a city of migration, as well as speaking of his own history. We are all, he says, pilgrims in a foreign land. My own mother was born in Dublin, which makes me a dual national, so I have a tinge of that.

The contribution of the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, on refugee issues is second to none. I congratulate him on his 90th birthday. He looks embarrassed at that, but he is a splendid colleague on the Joint Committee on Human Rights, though we are both about to be chucked off—by rotation only, I should add. The noble Baroness, Lady Nicholson, talked of the terrible plight of the Yazidis. Going back to the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, he said that our asylum policy tested who we are as a country, which I so agree with, and he recalled, of course, the Kindertransport. The noble Lord, Lord Cormack, spoke of the Huguenots.

However, government policy and the language around it seems to junk this heritage, displaying a growing politicisation playing to populist nationalism, a shirking of our share of global responsibility, and an utter failure to uphold international human rights and refugee law and set an example of international leadership and partnership, including through co-operation with our European neighbours. The noble Lord, Lord Hannay, spoke on those themes. As my noble friend Lady Hamwee noted, I am sorry that the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, and others have conflated economic migration—which the Government have full control over but have allowed to increase—and flows of refugees.

The Government’s policy is one not of shelter but of deterrence, which the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 has entrenched in several ways that violate international human rights and asylum law. As the noble Lord, Lord Kerr, said, the incompetence compounds the cruelty. These measures punish and penalise people for seeking asylum by the only means that is available to them: usually a dangerous journey controlled by dangerous organised criminals. The noble Lord, Lord Griffiths, told us that only 13% of asylum seekers who go missing are ever found.

But all of this has not prevented the escalation in the rhetoric of the Home Secretary and her Immigration Minister, Robert Jenrick, who throw around terms like “threat”, “invasion” and “illegal” about largely vulnerable and frightened people seeking asylum. As others have said, the Home Secretary called them “invaders” barely 24 hours after a firebomb attack upon people seeking asylum detained at the Western Jet Foil site in Dover. I certainly agree with the noble Lord, Lord Kamall, on the need to change the language used around this issue.

This debate takes place days after the Home Secretary welcomed and apparently endorsed as “vital and necessary” a collection of proposals, including pulling out of the European Convention on Human Rights and the refugee convention and proposing indefinite detention for arrivals, put forward in a report for the Centre for Policy Studies by Nick Timothy, a former adviser to Theresa May. These reckless proposals elicited a public denunciation from UNHCR, saying that they were based on

“critical factual and legal errors”.

UNCHR pointed out, again, that

“there is no such thing as an ‘illegal asylum-seeker’.”

The noble Baroness, Lady Chakrabarti, also made this point.

A far better report than Nick Timothy’s came in October from the Oxford Refugee Studies Centre, the Refugee Council, the NGO Unbound and the noble Baroness, Lady Stroud, of the Legatum Institute, whose excellent speech I was delighted to listen to today. Of course, she did so much in the debates on the Nationality and Borders Bill to advocate for the right of asylum seekers to work, which is a win-win policy on every level, including self-respect, self-support and fairness to taxpayers. I think this is the answer to the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, who talked about people complaining about generosity to asylum seekers—they are not allowed to support themselves and give back. Such a policy would also help to address our acute shortage of labour, as well as providing one of the keys to successful integration—but the Government stubbornly refuse it and no doubt will again today. I very much look forward to the report of the commission chaired by the noble Lord, Lord Carlile, on integration.

The contrast between the two reports I have mentioned could not be greater: one is rooted in fear and dislike, the other on hope and opportunity. The second report, in which the noble Baroness, Lady Stroud, played a role, says:

“Refugee policy should be a strategic priority for the United Kingdom ... it can and should be a source of national unity as it has in the past for Conservative and Labour-led governments”.

I am pleased to see that the Bill of Rights Bill—also known as the rights removal Bill—which seeks to destroy the Human Rights Act, has been “deprioritised” by the Prime Minister. But my pleasure is tempered by the fact that the apparent reason is to make more space for a Bill to overhaul the “broken” asylum system and combat the so-called channel boats crisis.

But the asylum system, which my noble friend Lady Hamwee called “exclusionary and unworkable”, is only broken because successive Conservative Home Secretaries have failed to get to grips with what ought to be a manageable administrative task of establishing, through a fair and efficient determination of claims, whether people are refugees, and sending back those who are not. We received 70,000 asylum applications in the year to September 2022—that is a fair number, but it is far fewer than France or Germany, and it should not overwhelm the Home Office.

Other noble Lords, including my noble friend Lord Roberts and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham, cited the backlog figures, so I do not need to repeat this sorry tale—but I note the dire effect that this has on physical and mental health. As the most reverend Primate said,

“Control has become cruelty. Staggering inefficiencies by successive Governments trap people in limbo ... at incredible expense ... in the system for years, unable to build a life or to contribute to our society.”

This is the worst of all possible worlds and such a waste.

However, rather than prioritising the clearing of that backlog, the complications, differential treatment and inadmissibility rules in the Nationality and Borders Act are likely to add further delays. What assessment has the Home Office made of the impact of the inadmissibility rules, which provide a new sort of red tape, on the prospect of reducing the backlog? As the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of York said, we have a dysfunctional asylum system that threatens our social cohesion.

I have a particular interest in family reunion because I steered the latest version of that Private Member’s Bill through the House recently, taking up the baton from my noble friend Lady Hamwee. The rules are far too restrictive; for instance, they do not allow even unmarried daughters who are 19 or in their early 20s from somewhere like Afghanistan to join their parents, siblings to be reunited or, in particular, children to sponsor family members, so those children have to remain alone, lonely and vulnerable. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham referred to this.

Child refugees are getting a raw deal all round, as the noble Lord, Lord Carlile, described. The Home Office placed nearly 3,300 children in hotels in the year to October 2022, with no lawful basis and outside the child welfare and protection systems of local authorities, meaning that opportunities to protect children from trafficking have been missed. Will the Minister set out the department’s plan to end the use of hotels, particularly for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children? As the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chelmsford highlighted, housing is an important feature of integration. The noble Earl, Lord Sandwich, noted the scandal of money being diverted from the aid budget to the Home Office.

The results of the Government’s failed deterrence policy have been disastrous for all parties except organised criminals, as the noble Lord, Lord Desai, pointed out. Smugglers, traffickers and other abusers are thriving because Governments, including, sadly, our present one, refuse or fail to take up their responsibilities to provide fair and efficient asylum systems. I say to the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, that an efficient system would, *inter alia*, identify and remove those who did not qualify. Expanding safe, regular and accessible pathways for refugees to travel to the UK—including through expanded family reunion and humanitarian visas, as the noble Lord, Lord Kerr, stressed; processing on French soil, probably, as the noble Lord, Lord Cormack, said; and greater resettlement, as the noble Lord, Lord McInnes, spoke of—would offer real alternatives to dangerous, irregular journeys.

The debate today has provided numerous ideas for the Government to improve our asylum system, instead of it being stuck in the disastrous state in which it currently resides.

2.13 pm

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Ludford. I thank the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury for initiating what has been a remarkable and memorable debate. For his information, I tell him that I emailed his speech to my wife, who is currently on a train to Scotland. She has just read it and she thought it was a magnificent speech.

I also congratulate my noble friends Lady Twycross and Lord Sahota. I wrote down that my noble friend Lady Twycross said she had six former bosses in this House. I also note that because of her role in the GLA, where she is really used to being in the eye of the storm, she seems exceptionally well qualified to be a Member of this House. I also wrote down a comment from my noble friend Lord Sahota, who said that he wants the best deal in the market for our fellow human beings. I thought that was the theme for his whole speech, and I welcome him to our House. Of course I also welcome the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester, who gave a moving speech about the situation in Leicester and how Leicester has benefited from migrating communities.

It is common to hear, and we have heard it in today’s debate, the proud history of our country in welcoming those in need of safety. We have seen in recent years the generosity of the British people in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

We must always be aware of what we are talking about when we are talking about asylum: we are talking about people fleeing horrors and situations we cannot imagine and making decisions we hope never to have to make for our own families. We in the Opposition need to be careful in our rhetoric and need the Government to be honest and careful in their language too. We must not conflate the economic migration of those travelling without a well-founded fear of persecution with those who are travelling to the UK to flee torture, war and persecution. These people are asking the UK to provide a place of safety.

[LORD PONSONBY OF SHULBREDE]

That was the central point of the intervention of the noble Baroness, Lady Prashar. We need responsible and consistent policy-making.

The principles of the UNHCR were referred to a number of times in the debate. They are: strengthening and expediting the decision-making process; ensuring that those without well-founded claims are returned to their own countries; stepping up co-operation with European neighbours; and expanding safe, regular pathways for refugees to travel to the UK that offer real alternatives to dangerous and irregular journeys. The most reverend Primate added to this by introducing a form of triaging system to try to expedite that process. Unfortunately, that is not what we have seen from recent Home Secretaries of the party opposite.

I turn briefly to the issues we have seen under this Government. They have spent £140 million on Rwanda. As my noble friend Lord Browne said, this is just a symbolically tough policy; it has been completely ineffective. We have also not seen a commitment from Ministers on who will not be considered for a flight to Rwanda. We have repeatedly asked whether they will commit not to send people from Ukraine to Rwanda. There is no commitment that, for example, girls and women who have fled here from Iran will not be sent to Rwanda either.

We have a backlog. A number of noble Lords referred to the figures; in November 2022, about 150,000 people were still waiting for an initial decision, with nearly 100,000 waiting over six months. The Refugee Council offered a stark comparison to 10 years ago, when only about 13,000 people were waiting. It must be recognised that the backlog has increased more dramatically than the number of claims and, as mentioned by the most reverend Primate, in some cases by 305% over the last five years. These figures are from the Institute for Government. This is an operational failure at the root of many of the problems that the system faces today.

Of those who travelled by small boat in 2021, only 4% of claims had been processed as of November. The Nationality and Borders Act, far from addressing these problems, baked them in with: first, an inadmissibility clause, which added six months' delay to cases, but did not deliver safe-return agreements with our closest neighbours; secondly, differentiation policies, which will require some asylum seekers to have their claims repeatedly reassessed, even when they been found to have a well-founded reason to seek asylum; and, thirdly, restrictions on access to family reunion routes, which will push more people into taking extremely dangerous journeys to try to reach their loved ones.

We have seen the scale of safeguarding problems in Manston. We heard from the noble Lord, Lord Kerr, and others about children who have gone missing under the care of the Government and of various local authorities. Can the Minister say something about what action is being taken to try to increase safeguarding for children in this extremely difficult situation?

What will actually make a difference? First, we must speed up asylum decisions so that people are not left in limbo, and so we do not have the spiralling costs of hotels and overcrowding in our reception systems. Secondly, there must be safe routes, including access

to family reunion. I have been following what the noble Baronesses, Lady Ludford and Lady Hamwee, have done on that matter. Thirdly, international co-operation is the heart of any solution to the problem. Finally, we must tackle criminal gangs, whose members are the ones acting illegally by taking advantage of people in desperate situations and making profits from misery. However, I did not agree with the solution to that problem which my former noble friend, the noble Lord, Lord Desai, proposed.

It needs to be said that the Labour Party would set up a new dedicated cell in the National Crime Agency to work cross-border to crack down on the criminal gangs, and would seek new arrangements with France, Belgium and other European countries on returns and family reunion. The Labour Party would also fast-track returns to designated safe countries, such as Albania, as other noble Lords have noted. We believe that safe routes are a genuinely powerful alternative to stop people being pushed into the hands of people smugglers, and we think that the Government should look at that route and open their minds to that possibility of reducing the current state of the crisis.

I acknowledge that this is a complex, emotive and fast-changing issue. The Government need to build on the history of receiving people in very difficult circumstances; we have heard many emotive and powerful examples of that over the years. In conclusion, I say to the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury that I live in Wandsworth, in south-west London, where we also welcomed many Huguenots. In fact, the coat of arms of Wandsworth Borough Council features the tears of the Huguenots who came to our borough; they are recognised in many parts of the borough, so that is a source of pride for my part of London.

2.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Murray of Blidworth) (Con): I thank the most reverend Primate for leading the debate and initiating a constructive dialogue on the important topic. I also thank noble Lords from all sides of the House for their insightful contributions.

I especially welcome our three new Members and thank them for their opening contributions. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester is currently spearheading the Shaped By God Together process within the Leicester diocese, helping each parish to live out better their everyday faith in their communities. The noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, has been a notable force for change in the health sector, through her work with Diabetes UK and Action Against Food Poverty, including calling for London to become a zero-hunger city. I also agree with her point on the great work of the London Fire Brigade and refer her to the debate we had yesterday concerning the culture of the fire service, to which many noble Lords who have spoken today contributed. Over the past two decades, the noble Lord, Lord Sahota, has been tireless in serving the Telford community, while also finding time to run a business with his family. He is the only Sikh on the Benches in this House. I know that our debates here will be richer with the noble Lord, Lord Sahota, the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester.

Noble Lords: Lord Singh of Wimbledon!

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): My apologies; he is the only Sikh on the Labour Benches.

I also share the sentiment of both the noble Lord, Lord Sahota, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester in hoping that their elevation will be an omen for the success of the English football team on Saturday.

I will make one further point, as a fairly recent entrant to the House myself. The three new Members will have noticed that there is a tendency in the House for noble Lords to make speeches in Question Time when they should be asking questions, and for them to ask questions in debates when they should be making speeches. So I ask for the House's indulgence, as I will not be able to answer all the questions that noble Lords have asked me today, but I will endeavour to answer as many as possible. I am sure that those I do not answer will be converted into Written Questions in due course.

I also thank my noble friend Lady Nicholson for her heart-rending history of the Yazidi position, and welcome her special guest to the House today.

It is no secret that the UK's asylum system has, of late, come under severe strain. This year, we have seen around 40,000 people arriving by small boats. Around 100,500 individuals are currently on asylum support. The cost of accommodating asylum seekers in hotels has reached more than £5 million a day. Clearly, something has got to change.

The Government have been clear on their priorities; namely, first, tackling small boat irregular arrivals by encouraging claims to be made in the first safe country and deterring unnecessary, dangerous journeys to the UK; secondly, alleviating pressures on accommodation, including by tackling lengthy stays in processing centres, while of course taking the safety and welfare of those in our care extremely seriously; thirdly, delivering our migration and economic development partnership with Rwanda; and, finally, providing safe and legal routes for people in need of protection and combating the asylum application backlogs. In doing that, we will seek to streamline the asylum decision-making process.

On safe and legal routes, while we are clearly grappling with significant challenges, the UK has maintained our long and proud record of welcoming refugees and people in need of protection through various resettlement schemes. Under the 1951 convention, people should claim asylum in the first safe country which they reach—that is the fastest route to safety. While we know that many people are in difficult situations around the world, the UK cannot possibly accommodate everyone who might wish to come here, as the most reverend Primate identified.

We have adopted a proactive stance in responding to world events. In the wake of Russia's appalling aggression, we introduced the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Since January 2022, those schemes have received a total of 220,225 applications, of which 85.8%—that is, 189,131—were granted. I thank the noble Earl for commending the efforts of the department in relation to those schemes.

We continue to welcome people through the existing global UK resettlement scheme, community sponsorship, mandate resettlement scheme and the Afghan resettlement schemes. The Government's refugee resettlement schemes are focused on those with the greatest need as determined by the UN Refugee Agency. The UNHCR has well-established procedures and submission categories for identifying and resettling the most vulnerable refugees. The UK's refugee resettlement schemes aim to do exactly what my noble friend Lord Horam has pointed out: to bring those to the UK who are considered refugees as per the UNHCR's criteria.

Since its expansion in September 2015, a total of 20,103 people have been resettled in the UK through the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme, or VPRS, across more than 300 local authorities. Alongside the VPRS, we ran the gateway protection programme, which has resettled more than 9,939 people. The VPRS closed in February 2021 and is succeeded by the global United Kingdom resettlement scheme, which has since its creation settled some 1,882 people. We have also resettled more than 800 through the community sponsorship scheme since it began in 2016.

The noble Baroness, Lady Hamwee, asked what the actual number of Afghans assisted is. The Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, or ACRS, was formally opened in January of this year, with pathways 2 and 3 launched in June. This will provide support for up to 20,000 people affected by events in Afghanistan. This is in addition to those coming under the Afghanistan relocation and assistance package. Operation Pitting was the largest UK military evacuation since the Second World War and saw around 15,000 individuals evacuated to the UK, some of whom were the first to be settled under the ACRS.

In the year following the evacuation, around 6,000 people had arrived in the UK via neighbouring countries under a combination of ARAP and the ACRS pathway 1. The number of vulnerable and at-risk individuals granted leave under pathway 1 now stands at over 6,300. Therefore, to say we have not welcomed anyone through the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme and the Afghan relocation and assistance policy is simply not true.

In addition to these routes, the Government provide a safe and legal route to bring families together through their family reunion policy. This allows a partner or spouse and dependent children to join their refugee family members in the UK if they formed part of the family unit before the sponsor fled their country.

On asylum decision-making, which has been a topic of many speeches in your Lordships' House, we agree with the point that many have made today that it is unacceptable that there are so many outstanding claims awaiting a decision. The asylum system has been under mounting pressure for several years. Increased and sustained intake and a growing number of people awaiting a decision have led to significant delays in concluding asylum claims. Current efforts are focused on deciding older claims, high-harm cases, and cases with extreme vulnerability such as mental health, child cases, new claims and those in receipt of support since the Nationality and Borders Act came into force on 28 June of this year.

[LORD MURRAY OF BLIDWORTH]

I thank my noble friend Lord Horam for his insightful comments about the impact of excessive immigration on communities. Prioritisation is the answer. We cannot favour those who can afford to pay the people smugglers over other asylum seekers. I also thank the most reverend Primate for his suggestion of triaging asylum claims and removing those who are not going to be granted asylum immediately in order to speed up decision-making, an idea also canvassed by the noble Lord, Lord Carlile of Berriew. In practice, however, while we endeavour to remove individuals as quickly as possible, delays to removal occur due to legal barriers such as fresh claims, further representations, modern slavery claims and judicial reviews, all of which must be considered before removal.

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB): Before the Minister leaves consideration of how to improve the working of the system, can he tell us what has happened to the recommendations from the reviewer in the independent review of 13 months ago?

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): Those considerations are being studied in the department and will feed into future policy on this issue.

Where an individual's claim is unsuccessful, they would need to be removed to their country of citizenship or another destination where they would be accepted.

It was apparent that there was a tension between the suggestion of the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of York and the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury on whether we should extend our Ukrainian policies to all nationalities. As the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury rightly noted, it is of course not immoral to have a limit or restrictions on immigration. While we sympathise with the many individuals who are in difficult situations around the world, the United Kingdom simply cannot help everyone who may like to come to this country.

We have introduced the asylum transformation programme, which aims to bring the system back into balance and to modernise it. It focuses on increasing productivity by streamlining, simplifying and digitising processes to speed up asylum decision-making and increase efficiency and output. Since the programme was established in the summer of 2021, a number of positive steps have been taken. More decision-makers have been recruited, alongside steps to keep experienced staff in post.

We have also tested a range of initiatives aimed at reducing the time it takes to interview and decide asylum claims. Changes in recent trials have doubled the number of decisions made per week; we are looking to roll these initiatives out nationwide as a result. This is undoubtedly a significant task, but I assure the House that efforts to address the backlog and alleviate the current pressures will continue in earnest. I hope this assures my noble friend Lord McInnes that the changes we are making will fix the issues with the asylum decision-making process.

Many of those arriving in the UK claim to be children and do not have clear evidence, such as a passport, to back this up. Decision-making is very challenging, and the current process is very subjective

and can be disputed in long and expensive legal proceedings. The United Kingdom typically receives more than 3,000 asylum claims from alleged unaccompanied asylum-seeking children per year. Many of those arriving in the UK who claim to be children do not have evidence. Between 2016 and September 2022 there were 7,357 asylum cases in which age was disputed. In the subsequent resolution, some half—3,696 individuals—were in fact found to be adults. If there is doubt whether a claimant is an adult or a child, they are referred to a local authority social services department for a careful, case law-compliant age assessment. They will be treated as a child until a decision on their age is made. I do not need to remind noble Lords that one of the consequences of an adult being treated as a child is that this has the potential to expose those in local authority care to risk.

Beyond our domestic reforms, we are working closely with our international partners to deter small boat arrivals and put an end to the practices of people smuggling and clandestine travel into the United Kingdom. I entirely agree with the comments from the noble and learned Lord, Lord Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood, who pointed out the nonsensical position that Albanians can prioritise themselves by crossing the channel in a small boat and, on that basis, effectively jump the queue. It is incumbent on us to prevent that sort of self-selection and queue jumping. The noble Baroness, Lady Prashar, and others overlook the basic fact that not all those who claim to be refugees are actually refugees. It is not immoral to point this out. As my noble friend Lord Robathan stated, we must be sensible and not naive about this.

While legal challenges are ongoing, we remain committed to delivering the migration and economic development partnership between the United Kingdom and Rwanda to address the shared international challenge of illegal migration and break the business model of the people-smuggling gangs. This policy does not subcontract or outsource our responsibilities to Rwanda. Instead, the United Kingdom and Rwanda working together will help make the immigration system fairer and ensure that people are safe to enjoy the new opportunities to develop. It is by reforming the asylum system and taking bold international action to address the global migration crisis that we can keep providing protection for those who need it through safe and legal routes.

I would like to respond to the assertions of the noble Lord, Lord Browne of Ladyton, on our assessment that found Rwanda to be

“a fundamentally safe and secure country with a track record of supporting asylum seekers.”—[*Official Report*, 14/6/22; col. 1518.]

This is set out in the relevant country policy and information notes available on GOV.UK. These assessments are kept under review and updated periodically to reflect any significant new issues or evidence. We regularly monitor and review the situation in Rwanda and are working closely with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Last month the United Kingdom and France signed a new agreement further to bolster our combined efforts to prevent dangerous channel crossings, including through strengthened operational co-operation and

investment in cutting-edge surveillance technology. The UK remains committed to addressing illegal migration with France via our enduring relationship. We continue to engage with our French friends at all levels, political and operational, supporting the meeting of our shared strategic aims with the provision of technology and sharing of intelligence. France and other EU countries are safe countries and, like the UK, have asylum systems that provide protection to those who need it.

Baroness Ludford (LD): I apologise for interrupting the Minister, but I did not do so earlier. He talks about safe countries, and earlier he said there is an obligation to claim asylum in the first safe country, but he will of course be aware that the UNHCR said that it is absolutely not the law. Indeed, if it were, the refugee convention would never have been signed because countries that neighbour conflict areas, which already take the bulk of refugees, would never have signed it.

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): I hear what the noble Baroness says. I commend to her the excellent Policy Exchange paper *From the Channel to Rwanda: Three Essays on the Morality of Asylum*. On page 14 of that excellent paper, Professor Finnis reminds us that

“the Rwanda scheme does not sub-contract anything. The UK as a founding party to the Refugee Convention, did not undertake to receive or process or admit refugees. Its contractual undertaking and obligation is (a) to give certain rights and privileges to those refugees whom it has chosen to admit and given leave to stay, and (b) not to deport anyone to an unsafe country.”

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB): The difficulty with that argument is that the refugee convention imposes on us the duty to hear the claim. If we deport someone to Rwanda on the basis that even if their claim were justified, that will not be established and they will not be allowed to return. They will be investigated in Rwanda to see whether they may have asylum in Rwanda, but they will be unable to pursue their claim to asylum in this country. That is clearly contrary to the refugee convention.

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): Hesitate as I do to disagree with the noble Lord, that matter is currently before the High Court, and the Government’s position is clearly at odds with his assessment.

I crave the indulgence of the House to carry on for a few more moments, if I may.

Lord Cormack (Con): I am going to miss my train.

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): I would be terribly sorry if my noble friend Lord Cormack were to miss his train.

I turn to the questions in relation to climate change. We will not remove anyone to any other country where they would face persecution or serious harm as a result of their country ceasing to exist, as was premised in one noble Lord’s speech.

It is always right in this context to remember that, as pointed out by my noble friend Lord Lilley, arrivals by small boats put significant pressure on local authorities.

The Home Office acknowledges the strain that dispersing asylum seekers is putting on many authorities, and it is for this reason that it is working collaboratively with local authorities and commercial partners to agree regional and national plans on implementation for full asylum dispersal. This process will enable us to continue to meet our obligations to accommodate destitute asylum seekers while not overcrowding local areas.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): My Lords—

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): Forgive me, I am afraid I really must make progress. I am sorry to decline the noble Lord’s intervention.

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con): I fear we really must make progress at this stage. We still have to hear from the most reverend Primate Archbishop of Canterbury.

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): I am afraid that time does not permit me to address all the issues raised by noble Lords. However, I fully understand that this is and will remain an emotive issue for many. Although our compassion may be limitless, our capacity, resources and infrastructure to help people are finite.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): I wish to make a point.

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): I am afraid not.

This country has shown time and again—from those who arrived on the Kindertransport, which the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, raised, and the Ugandan Asians expelled by Idi Amin, to those fleeing the present dreadful conflict in Ukraine—that when people are suffering and they need sanctuary, we step up. We extend the hand of friendship and provide a welcome born of our natural compassion. As the Government have demonstrated, we are committed to maintaining that long and proud tradition through safe and legal routes, and we will continue to do what is right and help those who are in most need.

As my noble friend Lord Cormack referenced in this debate, I completely agree that refugees enrich both our history and our present. At the same time, the public expect us to control migration, uphold our immigration laws and discourage those who would risk their lives by making unsafe and unnecessary journeys to the UK across the channel. As I hope I have made clear today, the Government approach these responsibilities with the greatest seriousness, and that will continue to be the case.

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): Before the Minister sits down, will he undertake to write to the noble Lords who have spoken in this debate in order to answer the questions that he has been unable to answer because of the length of time he had available?

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): I invite noble Lords to ask Written Questions in relation to those points instead.

Noble Lords: Oh!

Baroness Royall of Blaisdon (Lab): My Lords, I am a former Leader of the House. I have never, ever heard such a reply from a Minister. If a Minister is unable to respond verbally, he or she must reply in writing.

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): Very well. I shall write, as requested.

2.46 pm

The Archbishop of Canterbury: My Lords, keeping to my sense of compassion, I shall have compassion on the train of the noble Lord, Lord Cormack, and do my very best to be as brief as possible. I will write where I do not answer questions—but probably not until after Christmas. I have higher claims.

Lord Robathan (Con): Why, what is going on?

The Archbishop of Canterbury: Not a lot.

First, I thank noble Lords for their extraordinary contributions. I cannot refer to all of them because so many of them were so excellent. This has been a remarkable debate; I am very grateful. I am particularly grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Sahota, the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester. They all contributed remarkably from their experience and have demonstrated the reasons why they are in this House. I thank them.

Secondly, I am not going to mention 90th birthdays—oh, I just have. I was not going to mention birthdays, which come round increasingly frequently, but I must say that I sat in awe listening to the noble Lord, Lord Dubs. I am sure that that is true for the entire House. His moral authority vastly exceeds that of anyone else here, going right back to the Kindertransport. It has been a privilege for me—and, I am sure, for everyone else here—to engage with him on this subject.

As the Minister rightly said, this is a very emotive and difficult subject. I am just going to throw out a few headlines. I had this issue in an earlier draft but I, or one of my advisers, took it out; I am now going to annoy them by putting it back in. I just wonder, in view of the level of difficulty of this subject and its immense importance—numerous noble Lords have emphasised this very strongly—whether it would not make more sense to have a separate department for immigration. It could focus on this issue rather than having it fall within the complexities of the Home Office, which, as we know, is one of the most difficult offices to lead.

That leads me to say that, in listening to the Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Murray, I felt a great deal of sympathy. It is a new and complex system that is being looked at. It is under serious strain, as he said. However, I say to him that affirmation is not evidence. He made a number of affirmations about what would be done, what has been done and what is being done but, certainly, other noble Lords tried hard to go for evidence. In letters that are written, it is important that we look at that.

I sympathise with his legal difficulties. Anyone in the Church of England would sympathise with people's legal difficulties. I have just had a clergy discipline measure against me dismissed, thankfully. It was for not recognising a particular claimant who said that he

was the living incarnation of the Lord God—I had ignored him more than 1,000 times and therefore should be dismissed from my post. In a totally strait-laced judgment after some months, the relevant judge dismissed the claim. Regarding his comment about the most reverend Primates the Archbishop of York and the Archbishop of Canterbury disagreeing with each other, there is nothing new about that. It is different from the iron discipline of the Conservative Cabinet, but we suffer what we must—the poor most reverend Primate the Archbishop of York, in particular.

I am very nervous about venturing into economics but, with the noble Lords, Lord Horam and Lord Desai, I will dance into the minefield. My days in the oil industry were a long time ago. Maybe economics have changed since then, but it was said that the lowest-cost producer would always survive—there is such a thing as a law of supply and demand. If we have safe and legal routes, we automatically become the lowest-cost producer. That by itself will completely undermine the business model of the people smugglers. I throw that out as probably a wrong answer, but I do my best.

The Minister did not answer the question asked by the noble Lord, Lord Browne, about the assessment by the Foreign Office and others of what is going on in Rwanda. He said other things about Rwanda, but did not answer that question. It would be useful if he could write with an answer to the very clear question on why the Government's assessment is so different from that of their professional Foreign Office advisers. We need some answers on that.

I agree with noble Lords who made a very strong and clear argument that we need to talk about asylum as distinct from migration. They are very different things. Asylum happens because of what happens elsewhere; migration happens because of what we choose to happen—around students, for instance, since most places do not confuse the two in quite the same way. Whether we allow or even encourage—even possibly compel—people in appropriate positions to take employment while they are waiting for claims is a question that, again, I do not think was answered. It was put forward by a large number of noble Lords and is extremely important.

I agree very much with the noble Baronesses, Lady Berridge and Lady Ludford, that I was wrong to suggest that we need to replace the 1951 refugee convention. We need a new convention and to keep the 1951 refugee convention. The point on that is very powerful. It was an error on my part.

I return, if I may, to the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Lilley. I sort of use my hotline to God, as he referred to it, but I regret to say that I appear to have been disconnected for not having paid the bill. All that I got when I pressed button 3 was a long recorded message, so I went back to the Bible. It may seem unusual but in fact, during my first speech and that of the other Members of this Bench, we all quoted only the Bible and no other form of hotline. So, who is my neighbour? We can answer the question by saying “Everyone is my neighbour, but it is not a logical consequence that everyone must come here”. The logical consequence is that we need to do all that we can to ensure that those who are suffering find

their suffering reduced. That may well not include bringing them to a different country from the one in which they grew up.

My long experience of over 20 years in conflict zones, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, is that almost no one wants to be a refugee. They want to stay at home and build their country, as we do. They love the United Kingdom but not all of them want to stay here. We can see that when, thanks to the good work of the Home Office last summer, we had almost 700 Anglican Communion bishops from 162 countries coming here, with much help, and not one of them overstayed. Many of them live in war zones; most of them are never paid but live off the money they get from tilling some ground, while working under enormous personal risk, in intense poverty and much danger.

“Who is my neighbour?” is dealt with not only by asylum but by stabilisation—it is a great pity that the Government have almost abolished the stabilisation unit in the FCDO—by development, and by creating hope locally by addressing the kind of awful and heart-breaking situation spoken of by the noble Baroness, Lady Nicholson. That is what stops people coming.

The noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, mentioned the upcoming Nigerian election. I am not going to develop that theme but I entirely agree with her and have spoken recently to the Foreign Office about it.

I will answer the particular questions of the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, by letter if I may, because they are not all directly connected with this service—sorry, this place; I do have a lot of carol services. To pick up the question asked by him and, I think, the noble Lord, Lord Lilley—it may not have been him—about

what we are doing to increase attendance at churches, we are working extremely hard. Yesterday evening, we had more than 100 people in my chapel to hear the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I am very glad that there are atheists here in such profusion because it gives them a chance to hear that, and they might just be converted. You never know, but I do not think so—I am looking at the noble Lord, Lord Cashman. We will see in our post-retirement existence whether we exist or not.

Finally, in my last minute I will talk about the Policy Exchange. The Policy Exchange document is interesting and is certainly worth reading; I commend it to the House. I do not agree with it any more than I agreed with an earlier Policy Exchange document which suggested that the best way to deal with levelling up in the north—particularly the city of Liverpool, where I was living at the time—was to move the entire population of Liverpool to Cambridge. That was in 2008. That was not very popular in Liverpool; I did not consult those in Cambridge. Policy Exchange has a valuable function in provoking ideas, but not always quite as a valuable a function in solving problems.

Once again, I thank noble Lords across the whole House for a remarkable debate and a huge number of wise ideas, which I will be going through; we will no doubt consider them at great length within the Church. With that, I wish noble Lords a good weekend and thank them very much.

Motion agreed.

House adjourned at 3pm.

