



The Church of England
in Essex and East London
Diocese of Chelmsford

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Dear Iranian friends in Christ,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus.

Thank you for your letter addressed to me, and published more widely, which I received on 7th March. I read it in the spirit of Christian love and respect in which you sent it and I very much hope that you will also know the profound love and esteem in which I hold you. We are all people who have experienced sadness, loss and trauma at the hands of the current regime in Iran and I hold those of you who have suffered so much and come into exile in great respect and in prayer. We all share the same longing and hope for change. And we are united through our faith in Christ Jesus.

There is so much in your letter with which I agree whole heartedly. That this present conflict cannot be understood separately from Iran's recent painful history following the 1979 Revolution, for example; that the Islamic Republic's brutality is shocking and repugnant, not least in its recent suppression of demonstrations; that so many Christians have faced imprisonment and some, execution; that Iran has practiced an unacceptable polemic and policy of political and violent hostility towards foreign nations, especially Israel and America.

I also recognise within myself and more widely the mixture of emotions you describe Iranians experiencing at this time – fear and uncertainty alongside a fragile hope that this attack will bring about the change we long for.

Where we may have different perspectives, however, is around the legal status of this war under international law and whether or not it can be morally justified. As you have said there are different views on this and I respect those of you who may disagree with me.

For me, war should always be a last resort. In this case, negotiations were taking place and had not been exhausted. Iran did not pose an imminent threat to international peace and security. War should also be declared by a proper authority. In this case, President Trump has acted without the backing of the American Congress and the US-Israel action lacks support from the United Nations.

Most importantly, perhaps, if the end is to be proportionate to the means, the conflict must have clear aims as well as a plan for what happens when the killing stops. Currently, it is far from clear what America and Israel are aiming for or what plans they have for the day the war ends. Ultimately, of course, they will act according to their own national interests, rather than those of Iran.



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Regardless, however, the war is now underway and so irrespective of its legal or moral status, my concern is that it will fail to bring about the change you and I hope for. History has shown us that previous attempts at western intervention in Iran and across the Middle East have not ended well. I worry that the same will be true this time and that the result will be even greater suffering for the people of Iran. I hope and pray that I am mistaken.

Sooner or later, once the violence of this conflict has ended, leaders will eventually have to return to the table to talk about peace and a way forward. I hope and pray that too many more lives will not be lost before that happens, and that western nations such as Britain will be part of the talks and will provide support to the Iranian people who must themselves be agents of change if that change is to be deep and long-lasting.

For now, the war has unleashed something whose outcome it is impossible to predict. I hope we can all join together in praying for a swift outcome that paves the way towards peace with justice, not only for Iran but across the Middle East.

So, with you, I pray for the day when no person in Iran will face imprisonment or execution because of their beliefs. Like you I pray for a future in which people may worship freely, speak openly, and live with dignity under laws that protect freedom of conscience rather than punish it. I also pray for the day when the Gospel may be shared openly in our homeland and when followers of Christ may live peacefully alongside their fellow citizens without fear of persecution.

Please be assured of my prayers for you and your loved ones, and for our beloved home country.

Yours,

+ Guli

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