



Archbishop Stephen spoke in the Archbishop of Canterbury's debate on the principles behind the contemporary UK asylum system and refugee policy, and of the response to the challenges of forced migration. His speech follows in full

My Lords, I am delighted to speak in this very moving debate and thank my brother, the Archbishop of Canterbury, for bringing this to us.

Thank you also to Lord Robothan for his very kind words on our preaching earlier this year, and I can assure him, not on this occasion, but on almost every other occasion when I rise to speak, it is to speak about the Christian Gospel, whose values underpin everything I am about to say.

I was also very, very moved by Lord Singh who quoted the Jewish and Christian scriptures to us. And that is such a powerful sign of the generous spirit of the Sikh faith, which we're going to learn so much from. And thank you indeed, for the three very powerful maiden speeches we've heard today.

And I want to emphasise a small, but significant point. That is, that getting this right, and doing the right thing is a blessing for all of us, for everyone in our society. And the best way of shifting public opinion, whose anxiety about this, I believe, is fuelled by the dysfunction of our current system.

The hard truth is, our asylum system simply doesn't treat everyone the same. It doesn't give people the dignity, safety and agency that their humanity deserves.

Lord Lilley, everyone is our neighbour. Of course, we can't take everybody. But we must therefore, even more so have a fair system for everyone. But dehumanising language just promotes fear. A threat of destitution is being used as a deterrent. And children, children are treated as if they are adults.

Yet, in our own country, amongst our own people, in our churches, or faith groups and communities, some things have gone really well. Such as the Homes for Ukraine scheme, where many people have found a home, other family members have joined them, people have been able to get work, this is really good. But why my Lords has our response to people fleeing other conflicts been different ?

Currently, the family definition in our asylum system would not even allow someone to join their sibling, even if they were the last remaining relative. And being able to work and contribute is a long, long way off. The tragedy of our system lies in its exceptionalism, that means people get differential treatment, usually because of their country of origin. And this underpins the nationality and borders act. And I fear, further legislative action will be the same. But we could learn from what's happening in our communities.

And again, Lord Lilley, let me assure you, you asked us directly about integration. I mean, I don't know where to begin. In so many, and I do mean hundreds and hundreds of parishes and schools, and indeed in other faith communities up and down our country, that is what we're doing. I mean, English language classes, in befriending people, in teaching people. Yes, there's lots about the Church of England, which could be better, I'll be the first to admit it. But actually, this is something we're doing, alongside others, and it shows the best of British.

So, we need a system that will simply provide safe and legal routes for everyone to have equal opportunities to apply for asylum. And all I'm saying is, I think this 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 support supporter of the 'Lift the Ban' campaign.

My Lords, I say this to you, and like many of us would wish to say more, but I think the Archbishop of Canterbury did actually say most of it. I say this as winter arrives, and it's cold. And the cost of living crisis will inevitably affect British people's capacity to be hospitable.

And I want to say simply this, a functioning asylum system is not a threat to our social cohesion as some fear or predict. But a dysfunctional, unfair one, is.

Every small child knows. This time of the year, as Lord Cormack has mentioned, Mary and Joseph came looking for somewhere to stay. But there was no room at the inn. Saying no, accusing those who are hospitable of being naive, passing the buck. That's the easy thing to do.

But saying yes, with a fair and equal system for everyone, now, this also opens up blessings for everyone.

To [watch the debate](#) in the House of Lords

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