

“This is a hugely complex and wicked crisis that underlines our human frailty and the fragility of our political systems. My heart is broken by the images and stories of men, women and children who have risked their lives to escape conflict, violence and persecution.

“There are no easy answers and my prayers are with those who find themselves fleeing persecution, as well as those who are struggling under immense pressure to develop an effective and equitable response. Now, perhaps more than ever in post-war Europe, we need to commit to joint action across Europe, acknowledging our common responsibility and our common humanity.

“As Christians we believe we are called to break down barriers, to welcome the stranger and love them as ourselves (Leviticus 19:34), and to seek the peace and justice of our God, in our world, today.

“With winter fast approaching and with the tragic civil war in Syria spiralling further out of control, we must all be aware that the situation could yet worsen significantly.

"I am encouraged by the positive role that churches, charities and international agencies are already playing, across Europe and in Syria and the surrounding areas, to meet basic humanitarian needs. These efforts may feel trivial in the face of the challenge, but if we all play our part this is a crisis that we can resolve.

“We need a holistic response to this crisis that meets immediate humanitarian need while tackling its underlying drivers. I commend the UK Government for its strong commitment to the world’s poorest people through the delivery of the aid budget. It has shown global leadership by providing £900 million in aid since 2012 to the crisis in Syria. It has also shown moral leadership in using Royal Navy ships to save the lives of hundreds who have tried to make the dangerous crossing across the Mediterranean.

“I hold in my heart particularly those who are most vulnerable in conflict, and those who we have a special duty to protect. In the past, the Government has rightly sought to provide sanctuary to unaccompanied children, women and those who have been victims of, or are at risk of, sexual violence. I welcome this, while urging a renewed commitment to taking in the most vulnerable.

“The Church has always been a place of sanctuary for those in need, and Churches in the UK and across Europe have been meeting the need they are presented with. I reaffirm our commitment to the principle of sanctuary for those who require our help and love.

"The people of these islands have a long and wonderful history of offering shelter and refuge, going back centuries – whether it be Huguenot Christians, Jewish refugees, Ugandan Asians, Vietnamese boat people or many, many more.

“It has always been controversial at the time it happened, always been seen as too difficult. Yet each time we have risen to the challenge and our country has been blessed by the result.

“We cannot turn our backs on this crisis. We must respond with compassion. But we must also not be naïve in claiming to have the answers to end it. It requires a pan-European response – which means a commitment to serious-minded diplomatic and political debate, but not at the expense of practical action that meets the immediate needs of those most in need of our help.”

Listen to Archbishop Justin Welby speaking to the BBC about the refugee crisis

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