

Read the Archbishop's speech in today's House of Lords debate on the UK Internal Market Bill. ???

My Lords, I look forward to hearing, here and online, the contributions to come, especially the maiden speeches of Baroness Hayman of Ullock and Lord Sarfraz. I also concur totally with the powerful and remarkable speech by the noble and learned Lord, Lord Judge.

What we are above all called to do in this country, deeply embedded in our Christian culture and history, is to act justly and honestly. We cannot do so if we openly speak of breaking a treaty under international law reached at properly on which peace in part of the UK relies.

My distinguished former colleague Sentamu, who paid with beatings for his defence of law and justice in Uganda, would have spoken trenchantly. I regret his absence.

There are some who claim that I and my colleagues, who wrote in the FT this morning, are misinformed, but the letter and this intervention follow the lead of those who have spent their lives seeking peace in Ireland. Peace is surely something of which religious leaders should speak.

We also listened to the select committee on the constitution, to all five living former Prime Ministers, two former Conservative leaders, and distinguished judges including former Presidents of the Supreme Court and a former Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, to name but a few.

This country has different characteristics and needs in its regions and nations. They must be reflected in all our relationships if the Union is to survive. There is no watertight door in relationships between economics and constitutional issues. They overflow from one into the other.

The timing of anything that the UK Parliament or Government does in Northern Ireland is always especially significant to relationships. It is particularly so at present. The revived Assembly is scarcely a year old. 2021 is the Centenary of the establishment of Stormont and the creation of the border.

Much progress has been made since the 1990s in building confidence and peace. Yet it is clear from many visits in the last few years, and clear to anyone who listens, that the tensions continue.

Peace and reconciliation need continual reinforcement and continual progress. I will therefore be seeking to work with others for amendments which ensure that the process of peace and reconciliation is pursued and that powers exercised under this Bill when it becomes law involve consultation amidst the immense complexities of Northern Ireland. I hope we may act on a cross-party basis.

Politics, if it is to draw out the best of us, must be more than just the exercise of binaries, of raw majority power unleashed. It exists to seek truth, to bring diverse peoples together in healthy relationships.

Our reputation as a nation, our profoundly good and powerful influence and example which I know from experience around the world, will suffer great harm if law breaking is pursued, greater harm than this Bill seeks to prevent.

In the Church of England, my Lords, we are all too clearly aware of the shame that comes with failing morally. Let us not make the same mistake at national level. This House exists to amend and improve legislation, not to derail it, and that must be our urgent aim now.

