



Read the Archbishop's speech as delivered:

My Lords, I hope this section may be a bit shorter. As the noble Lord, Lord Deben, already knows, because he just said it, I am rising to introduce Amendment 139D tabled in my name and Amendment 144B, which is consequential to it. I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy of The Shaws, and the noble Lords, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth and Lord Blunkett, for co-signing it. I have had letters of apology from the noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy, and the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, who are not able to be here for very good and sufficient reasons.

I particularly appreciate when we come to this that the Government are taking action—I am not suggesting for a moment that they are not. The Chişinău statement made in Moldova recently by the Prime Minister was striking, as were the recent raids by the National Crime Agency in tackling criminals involved in this area.

This amendment mandates the Secretary of State to produce a 10-year strategy for tackling the global refugee crisis—I do say “crisis”—working in collaboration with signatories to the 1951 refugee convention and others. As with human trafficking, a statement of policies for implementing the strategy must be presented to Parliament within a year of the Bill becoming law and every following year. Of course, a subsequent Government can change that. Each time a statement is made, an opportunity must be given for both Houses to debate and vote on it via a Motion for resolution.

As with my previous amendment, Amendment 139C, this amendment is intended to require the Government to consider the long-term global nature of the refugee crisis, only a very small part of which—a minute, almost unmeasurably small part of which—are we seeing on our shores in Dover, in the Canterbury diocese which I serve and where we work extremely hard with those who are arriving. This Bill currently focuses solely on our domestic situation; the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, spoke very eloquently on that in the last group. It proposes action that not only is unlikely to achieve its aim domestically but also undermines the principles of the global refugee system, which the UK was influential in setting up in the first place. The call for a 10-year strategy for international collaboration on the refugee crisis is an attempt to address this by requiring the Government to look beyond our shores and into the longer term, and to lead internationally, as this country should and as it did in 1951.

On the global crisis, some figures have come but they were for the middle of 2022: I happen to have the ones for the end of 2022 and they are worse. At the end of 2022, there were 108.4 million people displaced; 35.3 million were refugees; 62.5 million were internally displaced; and 5.4 million were seeking asylum. As I said at Second Reading, conflict and climate change mean that these numbers are predicted widely to increase as much as tenfold in the next 25 years. The number arriving in small boats in the UK—45,755 in 2022—is tiny when set in such a horrifying context. Other countries, as the noble Lord, Lord Deben, said, are taking far more refugees. Turkey alone was hosting nearly 3.6 million at the end of 2022. It is greatly to be admired, as are Rwanda, Uganda, the DRC and South Sudan, itself after 10 years of civil war having received almost three-quarters of a million people since the war broke out in Khartoum a few weeks ago.

Many other European countries also are taking more, including France and Germany. It is not a competition, but the UK ranked 18th in Europe for our intake of asylum applications per head of the population in the year ending September 2021. Most crucially, 76% of refugees are being hosted in low and middle-income countries—countries infinitely poorer than our own—and 70% in countries neighbouring their home countries.

It is neither morally right nor strategically sensible to fail to engage with the global context or to leave other countries to deal with the crisis alone. Doing so damages our reputation as a nation, but it also risks unbearable pressures being placed on other countries and the possibility of state collapse and an ever-growing avalanche of further numbers of refugees across the world, adding to the problems we face.

The 1951 convention is a fundamental bedrock for the care and protection of refugees. To be very clear, this amendment is not proposing that the convention be scrapped or rewritten, where there might be a risk of it being watered down and protections removed. Instead, I am suggesting that the convention should be built upon and added to for the very different context we face today from 1951.

One area where work is needed is clarity on protection for certain types of refugee, such as those fleeing due to climate change or gender-based violence, who are not currently covered, or consistently covered, by the convention and would find themselves in great trouble under this Bill. Another is clarity on the allocation of state responsibility for refugees, including the safe third country principle, and the support for countries dealing with far greater numbers of refugees. Professor Alexander Betts, Enver Solomon and others have proposed a possible approach for this in the form of a state-led solidarity pact, an intergovernmental coalition of donor and host countries which clarifies respective state responsibilities and is supported by what they call the global refugee fund, administered to support host countries affected by large refugee movements.

Although the European Union's agreement on migration, announced just in the last day or two, is a major step forward, it does not go as far as this. It does however give an example of numerous countries working out how to share their burden, and when the burden is so huge, that must be the way we go.

There have been many suggested policies and alternatives presented in this area and I am not going to waste your Lordships' time by going into detail on them. This amendment does not specify exactly what should be pursued; it simply mandates the Government to engage seriously with other countries about the options through existing groups such as the Global Refugee Forum—whose meetings I understand the Foreign Office attends but not the Home Office, though I am happy to be corrected by the Minister. Given that refugees under this Bill come under the Home Office, that would seem to be something that might be changed. The amendment further mandates the Government to report back to Parliament annually on action and progress.

Again, if the Minister replies, as I anticipate, by saying that the Government already have longer-term strategies and that this Bill and amendment are not the place for them, I ask him to explain clearly the one place and one plan where we can find them. What guarantees are there that the Government are working and will continue to work with international partners? The amendment seeks to ensure that this Government and future Governments have to consider this rather than focus solely on the domestic context.

I regret that to date there has been little agreement in this Committee between Ministers and those on these Benches or, in fact, any other Benches—and, of course, the previous amendment was supported by every Bench, including the Conservative Benches. I wish to make it entirely clear that we are always willing to work in close partnership, as we have done with the Government on community sponsorship, on receiving Ukrainian citizens fleeing that terrible war and many other projects, including interfaith projects.

If the Government as part of their strategy wish to work in partnership with faith groups and NGOs to identify and support refugees anywhere in the world where we have a presence, we would be delighted to work with them—we normally have excellent sources of information on such things. We want the UK again to be a moral leader on the world stage. We are more than capable of it. A global crisis requires global solutions, and we need to develop them now. If all other countries adopted the approach the UK Government are taking with this Bill, the whole international refugee system would collapse. That is not in our interests—regardless of morality, purely pragmatically—nor any other country's, never mind those in need of protection.

I urge the Government to take an opportunity for the UK to lead again in the care for and protection of refugees as we have in the past, to set their sights on effective, equitable long-term solutions to this crisis, working with international partners. In this amendment we seek, as were quite rightly challenged to do by the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, to put forward a practical solution with practical ways of dealing with this and practical outcomes. If the Government have other ways of achieving the same ends which give security for the plans, I am very happy, as are my colleagues, to meet the Minister and discuss how that can be done. In the meantime, I beg to move.

7 min read

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