

Regimes that commit genocide must not be rewarded with trade deals

Britain has an obligation to stand up for the Uighur people and all tyrannical governments

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The term ‘genocide’ was created by Raphael Lemkin, a Holocaust survivor who wanted a legal word to define this most heinous of crimes - the deliberate destruction of a nation or race.

Last week we commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day, and in an unprecedented act Britain’s Jewish community reflected on the persecution of the Uighurs by China.

With compelling evidence of forced sterilisations, mass rape, indoctrination, invasive surveillance and 2 million Uighurs incarcerated in slave prison camps or ‘re-education centres’, the Board of Deputies of British Jews highlighted the chilling similarities to Nazi Germany.

In Donald Trump’s last days as US president, his outgoing administration determined that these atrocities amounted to genocide, and the incoming Biden administration has reconfirmed that position, but the UK Government is yet to follow suit.

Worse still, our current policy on genocide – once described by the Prime Minister as “baffling” – is to say that genocide is a “judicial matter” whilst not allowing British courts to play a role.

Only last week a Foreign Office minister stated three times in Parliament that the determination of genocide is for judges and last month the Prime Minister said that the “attribution of genocide is a matter for the courts”.

The Genocide Amendment to the Trade Bill, which will be voted on Tuesday, aims to ensure that the Government’s long-held position that genocide determination is a judicial matter, can actually be a judicial matter.

In the 75 years since the Nuremberg trials, the UK and the United Nations have never succeeded in recognising a genocide whilst it was ongoing because China and Russia’s veto at the UN blocked every road to the international courts.

By entitling UK judges to make a preliminary determination based on the evidence, we can put behind us the decades of paralysis whilst equipping Government and Parliament with the information they need to make informed decisions about who we trade with.

On the whole it is better to trade with countries than to boycott or fight them, but there are limits. Governments that oppress and commit genocide on their own people must not be rewarded for with preferential trade deals.

Britain already leads the world on environmental standards and animal welfare, and when it comes to the Covid vaccine rollout, Global Britain has been leading the way. This week the House of Commons has an opportunity to lead the world again in standing up to tyrannical, genocidal regimes.

Over 50 years ago the UK signed the UN Genocide Convention, to ensure that atrocities such as the Holocaust could never again take place.

The Genocide Amendment is our moment to actually do something to honour that obligation, to blaze a trail, and for Global Britain to become the bastion of freedom and democracy we want to be.

Not only will supporting it put Britain on the right side of history, but it will put us on the side of the Uighur people, who are looking to us to save them from destruction and for us to truly mean it when we say, ‘never again.’

Nus Ghani is the Conservative MP for Wealden