

Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP
The Home Office

25 March 2026

Dear Home Secretary,

As leaders from faith communities across the UK, we write with deep concern about the Government's plans to permanently curtail refugee family reunion.

The current proposals – removing the right to family reunion for most refugees, narrowing the legal definition of “family”, and placing steep new barriers before those fleeing danger – represent a profound departure from values that have long shaped our national life and are deeply embedded in our faith traditions: human dignity, fairness, protection for the vulnerable, and the importance of family life.

We urge you to recognise that family reunion is not a marginal element of refugee protection and resettlement; it is central to it. For many refugees, the presence and safety of close family is essential for their stability, wellbeing and integration. For people of faith, family is foundational to human belonging, resilience, and hope. To further restrict safe routes for family reunion is to push desperate people toward the very smuggling networks we all wish to dismantle.

We are mindful that there are public concerns about current levels of immigration. However, refugees represent a small proportion of immigrants to the UK, and in many communities, anxieties arise not from hostility towards refugees, but from long-standing pressures on housing, health services, and local infrastructures. It is therefore deeply troubling to see refugees and asylum seekers presented, sometimes explicitly and sometimes by implication, as the cause of strains for which they are not responsible.

In recent history our nation has repeatedly shown that compassion can rise above fear. When the world recoiled at the image of Alan Kurdi's lifeless body on a Turkish beach in 2015, and when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, people responded with generosity to those who needed sanctuary. That spirit did not arise from indifference or hostility; it arose from the recognition that every child is precious and every family deserves safety.

Governments can either champion such compassion or be led by the loudest calls against it. We urge you to choose the former.

We also respectfully remind you of your own earlier advocacy on this issue. In 2017, you urged the Government to *extend* family reunion rights – not restrict them – so that unaccompanied refugee children in the UK could be joined by their parents. You argued then that “surely it would be far better for that child, and for the care system, to have their parents in the UK to support them,” and that aligning with European standards would not create a “pull factor” but would express the UK's long-standing commitment to protecting vulnerable children. We offer this reminder in the hope that the moral clarity, practical wisdom and commitment to family life expressed then, might continue to guide your decisions.

Making family reunion inaccessible and/or contingent on a fee-paying route will neither reduce journeys nor create a more settled country. It will simply deepen suffering and place Britain at odds with values long central to our national identity and to every major faith tradition in this land.

We therefore urge you to reconsider these proposals, to protect the right to family reunion, and to demonstrate the moral leadership that this moment demands.

Yours sincerely,

Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary, The Baptist Union of Great Britain

Revd Richard Andrew, President of the Methodist Conference

Matthew Forsyth, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference

Catriona Wheeler, General Assembly Moderator, United Reformed Church

Revd Dr John Bradbury, General Secretary, United Reformed Church

Rt Revd Rosie Frew, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

Rabbi David Mason, Executive Director, HIAS+JCORE

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, Co-chair, Christian Muslim Forum

Imam Dr Sayed Razawi OBE, Chief Imam, Scotland and Director General, Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society

Lord Singh of Wimbledon, Director, Network of Sikh Organisations UK

Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Bishop of Dover and Chair of Churches Refugee Network

Bishop Mike Royal, General Secretary, Churches Together in England

Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Rt Revd John Arnold, Roman Catholic Bishop of Salford

Most Reverend William Nolan, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow

Rt Revd and Rt Hon Lord Rowan Williams of Oystermouth, former Archbishop of Canterbury

Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, Bishop of Chelmsford

Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, Bishop of Southwark

Rt Revd Malcolm Chamberlain, Bishop of Wakefield

Dr Krish Kandiah OBE, Sanctuary Foundation

Revd Inderjit Bhogal OBE, Founder, City of Sanctuary (UK)

Elizabeth Slade, Chief Officer, General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Cecilia Eggleston, Moderator, Metropolitan Community Churches

Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Moderator, Free Churches Group, Churches Together in England

Most Revd Mark Strange, Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness, and Primus, Scottish Episcopal Church

David Thomson, CEO, All We Can

And over 700 further signatories.

This letter was coordinated by the Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church (www.jpit.uk)

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