



On Monday (22 March 2021), the House of Commons considered a House of Lords amendment to the Trade Bill. This amendment would require that where a parliamentary committee states that there are credible reports of genocide being carried out by a potential partner to a free trade agreement with the UK, the matter would be referred to a Parliamentary Judicial Committee made up of five members of either House of Parliament who have held high judicial office. This committee would then be able to make an initial judgment on whether genocide had taken place. The amendment was a compromise following the Government's defeat of previous House of Lords amendments that would have enabled the revocation of trade agreements where the High Court judged that a partner country had committed genocide.

Trade should not be just about self-interested commercial gain. While some may believe that who we sign trade agreements with should be dictated entirely by commercial interests, I believe we must draw a line somewhere – there are certain countries whose crimes are so great that they cannot simply be ignored on the basis of self-interest. The UK must be willing to say no to trade deals with countries that cross that line.

The Lords amendment considered on Monday sought to draw that line by giving Parliament the power to debate whether Britain should sign any form of bilateral trade or investment deal with a Government held responsible for genocide by our country's most experienced judges. I supported the amendment. The UK should not be willing to sign trade agreements with governments who are committing genocide and engaging in torture, mass detention, slave labour, organ harvesting and non-judicial executions on an industrial scale. I cannot see how anyone could read the evidence of such crimes being committed against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang and believe that a potential trade or investment deal with China should be considered only on its commercial merits and not on the basis of morality.

Unfortunately, the Government opposed and defeated the amendment, returning the issue once more to the House of Lords.

Yours sincerely,

Mary