



British Parliament (House of Commons) Debate on the Persecution of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

Date : 26th May 2018

On Thursday 24 May 2018, MPs held a debate on the persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)**

I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern the rising tide of persecution of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, Algeria and other countries around the world; further notes the effect that hate preachers have on radicalising people internationally and in the UK, through the media, social media and otherwise; notes with concern the past activities of hate preacher, Syed Muzaffar Shah Qadri, who radicalised Tanveer Ahmed, who in turn murdered Mr Asad Shah in Glasgow in March 2016; calls on the Government to make representations to the Governments of Pakistan and Algeria on the persecution of Ahmadis; and further calls on the Government to make more stringent the entry clearance procedures to the UK for hate preachers by ensuring that entry clearance hubs and the Home Office have adequate numbers of Urdu speakers to monitor visa applications and online radicalisation.

Let me begin by wishing all Muslims Ramadan Mubarak. Let me also thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting time for today's debate, and all the Members who are present to take part in it.

On the border of my constituency is one of the largest mosques in western Europe, which can accommodate 10,000 worshippers. It is little wonder, therefore, that my constituency and the wider south-west London region are home to a thriving Ahmadi community, who help to make up a global community numbering millions. Let me explain to those who are watching or listening to the debate, and who may be unclear about this, that an Ahmadi identifies as a Muslim, but does not believe that Mohammed was the final prophet sent to guide mankind. That causes the Ahmadi Muslim community to be widely denounced as “non-Muslim”, and to be persecuted around the world—and, I am sad to say, often persecuted here in the United Kingdom.

To introduce the debate, I shall take Members on a global tour, from Africa to Asia and from Greater London to Glasgow. I shall then focus particularly on the persecution faced by the Ahmadi community in

Pakistan, before turning to the shocking overspill of hate into the UK that the House has a duty and a responsibility to address. Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)

As my hon. Friend will know, we also have an Ahmadi community in Manchester. Will she allow me to put on the record a tribute to their work in and for the community in general, and in particular to the offer of refuge and hospitality by their mosque after the Manchester Arena attack last year?

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

Their desire to help the wider community and not only themselves marks Ahmadis in a particular way, in all our communities.

◦ **Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)**

I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important and timely debate. I should be grateful if Crawley could be added to the tour on which we are to be taken. In 2014, the Noor mosque was opened in the Langley Green neighbourhood. As Members will know, “Noor” is Arabic for “light”, and the Ahmadis certainly bring light to the local community with their charitable work and community cohesion. I am very grateful for their message of “Love for all, hatred for none”.

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman.

◦ **Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab)**

My hon. Friend has done well in securing the debate. The Ahmadi community in the Scunthorpe area is very small, but its members make a strong contribution to the area, and I want to record my thanks for all the work that they do. The hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) mentioned the message of “Love for all, hatred for none”. They live those words, and it is ironic that they suffer persecution in parts of the world as a result of that creed.

◦ **Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op)**

rose—

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

I give way to my hon. Friend.

◦ **Seema Malhotra**

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), I pay tribute to the charitable endeavours of the Ahmadi community, particularly through Humanity First. They raised funds for Humanity First to support those affected by the Nepalese earthquake a few years ago, and this weekend the organisation will host a global telethon to raise funds for charity.

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

Just before I continue my global tour, let me say that while all Members present recognise the efforts of the Ahmadi community in their constituencies, former Members also identify with their work. I am delighted that my friend and colleague Tony Colman, the former Member of Parliament for Putney, is present to listen to the debate.

I will begin our global tour in Algeria, where an estimated 2,000 Ahmadis live in fear. Just six months ago, in December 2017, 50 of them were tried on charges related to their religion, and were given sentences ranging from fines to five years in prison. A total of 280 Ahmadi Muslims across Algeria have been arrested on the grounds of their faith in the last two years alone.

We now head east to Egypt, which is home to approximately 50,000 Ahmadis. It was here, earlier this year, that the Interior Minister, Mr Magdy Mohamed Abdel Ghaffar, issued orders for the arrest of 25 innocent Ahmadi men and women. That, however, was just the latest in a long line of persecutions against the Ahmadi community in Egypt, a notable example being the arrest of the community's publications secretary, Ahmad Alkhateeb, and the confiscation of the publications in his property.

Such horrifying persecution can also be found further south, in Burundi. Earlier this year 13 young Ahmadis were arrested in the city of Bujumbura, where they were attending a religious education class. The secret service raided the mosque and arrested the children on charges of alleged terrorism, for in the eyes of the persecutors Ahmadi material is seen in such an extremist light.

Finally, we head to Asia, and specifically to Indonesia. For it is here that the Ahmadi community has existed since 1925, claiming a community of approximately half a million people. It is difficult, however, to know the community's true scale given that revealing oneself as an Ahmadi here can be nothing less than a magnet for persecution.

◦ **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab)**

My hon. Friend is making a forceful argument. I also concur with other colleagues about the contribution of the Ahmadiyya community and wish to mention in that context mine in Slough.

On Indonesia, just five days ago, on 20 May, *The Jakarta Post* reported that an unidentified mob attacked and destroyed several homes belonging to Ahmadis and attempted to expel the Ahmadiyya community from Grepek Tanak Eat hamlet in Greneng village. Eye witnesses claim that at least one house was destroyed, in the presence of police officers. Does my hon. Friend agree that while the persecution of the Ahmadiyya community is well documented, more needs to be done to raise awareness of the persecution of the Ahmadis in countries such as Indonesia, as well as Bulgaria and Thailand?

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

In Indonesia, Ahmadiyya is not an authorised religion. So when an Ahmadi tries to secure identity documents requiring an authorised religion to be shown, they simply cannot get them. Furthermore,



Ahmadi mosques have been burned down, Ahmadiis have been denied their voting rights, and they have been driven out of their homes, as my hon. Friend said.

I am afraid to say that in Indonesia the persecution comes from the very top. In 2008 a joint ministerial decree introduced by the Minister of Religious Affairs, the Attorney General and the Minister of Home Affairs prohibited the promulgation of Ahmadiyya teachings. The Minister of Religious Affairs followed this up with calls for an outright ban against the Ahmadiis in 2011. But perhaps the persecution is best illustrated by the calls from the governor of West Java, who claimed there would be no violence against the Ahmadiyya community if there were no Ahmadi teachings or practices. The “problem”, he suggests, “will disappear if the belief disappears.”

It is no wonder therefore that just last weekend 23 Ahmadiis sought refuge at East Lombok police station, escaping after an angry mob destroyed their homes in an attempt to expel them from the area.

Away from Indonesia, there are currently 10,000 Ahmadi refugees stuck in limbo in countries including Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Thailand, all having fled persecution in their home countries. Sri Lanka even tried to deport 88 Ahmadiis back to Pakistan in 2014 despite claims that they could be at risk in their homeland, and so it is to Pakistan that I now turn.

For it is in Pakistan that the world’s largest Ahmadi community exists, with an estimated 4 million members, and it is there that the persecution Ahmadiis face can perhaps be most prominently found. Only this morning, I awoke to terrifying reports of an attack by extremists on an Ahmadi house and mosque in Sialkot last night, with mob leaders calling for this to happen to all Ahmadi mosques. The situation could not be more precarious, for an Ahmadi in Pakistan faces widespread hatred from the moment they are born to the moment they die. Perpetrators are given free rein to attack innocent Ahmadiis in the knowledge that they will never face prosecution for their actions.

To understand why, we need to revert back 44 years to 1974, when Prime Minister Bhutto amended the Pakistan constitution to declare Ahmadiis as non-Muslim for the purposes of law. Ten years later, under General Zia, the Government of Pakistan made it a criminal offence for Ahmadiis to call themselves Muslim, refer to their faith as Islam, call their place of worship a “mosque”, make the call for prayers, say the Islamic greeting, or propagate their faith. The constitutional right to freedom of religion that is enshrined in Pakistan’s constitution is therefore completely violated, with an Ahmadi liable to arrest, three years’ imprisonment and an unlimited fine if they are considered to be behaving as a Muslim.

◦ **Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op)**

My hon. Friend is making an excellent and moving speech about the pan-global issues faced by the Ahmadiyya community, yet the hate in Pakistan in particular is something many British citizens have faced. It is often why they became British citizens—none more so than my late fellow Glaswegian, Asad Shah, who was tragically murdered in March 2016. He had left Pakistan 20 years before, but sadly the hatred and prejudice followed him on to the streets of our own country. It is important to acknowledge that this is an issue in the midst of our own communities, and we must address it.

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**



I completely agree. Even his holiness the head of the Ahmadiyya faith is now based in London precisely because of the persecution in Pakistan.

◦ **Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD)**

Does the hon. Lady agree that as far as I am aware it is perfectly in order for me or her to say “Salaam aleikum” as a greeting, whereas in Pakistan it is not in order for an Ahmadiyya Muslim to do that?

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

Yes, and that was brought out in the all-party group investigation meeting just on Monday. It had never occurred to me that it was specifically Ahmadis who could not do such things.

◦ **Mr Dhesi**

The all-party group looked into the persecution of the Ahmadiyya community and we heard some very harrowing tales, as we did from the Christian community, about how they are being persecuted. We must all stand against discrimination in all its guises.

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. It is extraordinary that the persecuted Christian community can do some of the things and act in ways that the Ahmadis themselves cannot, so there is a real conflict going on there.

◦ **Seema Malhotra**

My hon. Friend is making a powerful and important speech and I pay tribute to her leadership of the all-party group. Many Members present in the Chamber are members of the group and support its work. Does she agree that the persecution in other countries serves in one way to reflect the positive relationship in our country between Muslims from different countries and of different backgrounds, including the Pakistani ?community in my constituency, where the relationships between all the different Muslim communities are very strong?

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

I wish all the communities did get on as well as perhaps they do in Hounslow, but there are many incidents of Ahmadis experiencing persecution in the UK from other Muslim groups.

◦ **John Spellar (Warley) (Lab)**

I join other Members in paying tribute to the contribution the Ahmadiyya community makes in business and commerce and also very much in community affairs and public consciousness. But is it not also a problem that some of that hatred comes here from other countries? We have seen attacks on individuals—we have seen incidents in Glasgow and elsewhere, even if they do not lead to murder—as well as calls for boycotts on businesses owned by Ahmadis? Does my hon. Friend agree that the authorities

should be cracking down on this and making it clear that it is totally unacceptable in this country?

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

I completely agree, and local authorities need to look to themselves as well, because Ahmadis are also excluded from most SACREs—standing advisory councils on religious education—in English councils, so some of these things are very close to our respective homes.

The statistics on persecution against Ahmadis in Pakistan show that 260 Ahmadis have been killed and 379 have been assaulted for their faith, while 27 Ahmadi mosques have been demolished and 22 have been set on fire or damaged. Some 39 Ahmadi bodies have been exhumed after burial and 66 Ahmadis have even been denied a burial in a common cemetery—and all in a country with a constitutional right to freedom of religion.

Ahmadis in Pakistan live in constant fear that a baseless accusation will be made against them, with the consequences so often proving life threatening. This persecution is faced from cradle to grave, so I would like to describe the day-to-day reality for an Ahmadi living in Pakistan.

When a young Ahmadi in Pakistan attends school, they face immediate persecution. Take, for example, Farzana, a 15-year-old schoolgirl who gave Christian Solidarity Worldwide an honest and saddening insight. In her own words:

“A few of the children in my school knew that I am Ahmadi and what they did was to go and tell the other students, ‘She is Ahmadi, don’t play with her or eat with her, and stop treating her normally.’”

Her teachers encouraged this—this is what I find so hard to understand—and abused her, both physically and psychologically. Farzana says that they punished her, struck her with sticks and told her not to sit with the other kids because she is an Ahmadi and so is not allowed to do that. Farzana has now moved school as a result of her treatment. She has decided not to tell her new friends that she is an Ahmadi so that she is free from the persecution that she sees as inevitable.

Discrimination in education takes many forms, however, including nationalising all Ahmadi Muslim schools, expelling Ahmadi students based on their faith, and even the editing out of any Ahmadi Muslim’s contribution to Pakistan’s history. Take, for example, Professor Abdus Salam, a groundbreaking scientist famous for his work in the field of physics, for which he was awarded the first Nobel prize in Pakistan’s history. His faith has led to him being erased from the textbooks, which I remind the Chamber are rife with biases against religious minorities—and these are textbooks that we help to fund. There simply must be greater accountability by our Government and the Department for International Development to ensure that the vital educational projects that we fund continue, but without supporting intolerance, prejudice and hatred.

To return to Pakistan, an Ahmadi student may not even make it through education. In 2008, all Ahmadi students were expelled from a medical college in Faisalabad on the basis of their faith, while a local newspaper printed the headline, “We shall not allow admission in Rawalpindi Medical College of any student guilty of blasphemy”. For those young Ahmadis, their education and religion cannot co-exist side by side.

On leaving education, discrimination and persecution continues for Ahmadis in Pakistan when it comes to applying for a job. Even the rumour that someone may be an Ahmadi can destroy their opportunity of employment. For example, the civil and military services have placed restrictions on Ahmadis progressing to senior ranks.

Outside of work and education, the persecution for an Ahmadi in Pakistan is allowed to flourish in wider society. When an Ahmadi applies for a passport, they must state their religion by law. Anyone who self-identifies as a Muslim is required to take an oath declaring Ahmadis as non-Muslim. The reality, therefore, is that no Ahmadi can go to Mecca to perform the Hajj—one of the five sacred pillars of Islam. Nowhere else in the world are Muslims required to make such a declaration. How can a state be allowed to impose a religion on its citizens in that way?

For an Ahmadi in Pakistan, their persecution continues when they come to vote, which is particularly pertinent due to the upcoming elections in the country. An Ahmadi is prohibited by law to vote as a Muslim. They must either sign a declaration that they are not an Ahmadi or acquiesce to their status as non-Muslim, with a violation of that requirement punishable with imprisonment. That has effectively denied them the right to vote for nearly 40 years. What is more, the separate electoral list for Ahmadis is published and publicly available, enabling extremists to target, intimidate and harass the community. It is no wonder they face such persecution.

When legislators proposed reforms within the past year that could have changed the situation, outrage was sparked across Pakistan, prompting senior political and judicial figures to speak out, coupled with a mass violent rally. The reality, therefore, is that time is running out for an Ahmadi to be able to vote in Pakistan this summer.

◦ **Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)**

Is not the key point that Pakistan uses the state, the constitution and the law to persecute the Ahmadis, which is unique? Of all the horrors we know in Pakistan, the Ahmadi Muslims are singled out by the state and the constitution, which is why we should speak out loudly today.

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Will the Minister take urgent steps to call on the Government of Pakistan to allow Ahmadis to vote in the upcoming elections without denouncing their faith?

After facing a life of hatred, the end of an Ahmadi's life in Pakistan does not necessarily mean the end of persecution. There are countless examples of Ahmadis being denied the right to burial, with the protesting extremists claiming that they have no right to a burial in a Muslim graveyard. Gravestones have been desecrated and vandalised, and there have also been incidents of exhumation of deceased bodies. To return briefly to the case of Professor Abdus Salam, the Nobel prize-winning scientist, the word "Muslim" has been erased from his gravestone, under a court order.

Electoral disenfranchisement, discrimination in law and expulsion by society have left the Ahmadi community in Pakistan voiceless. So today we must be their voice, for even the constraints of life provide

no constraints for the persecution that an Ahmadi in Pakistan may face.

Such persecution, however, is found not just in Pakistan, Algeria, Egypt, Burundi and Indonesia—it can be found right here in the UK, right on our doorstep. Over recent weeks, the all-party parliamentary group on the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, which I proudly chair, has been running a five-part inquiry into the persecution faced by the Ahmadi community. We have heard the testimony of dozens of Ahmadi men and women, describing the scale of hatred that they have faced. It is truly shocking.

The most stark and shocking example in the UK took place just two years ago in Glasgow, where Ahmadi shopkeeper Asad Shah was brutally murdered.

◦ **Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab)**

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the important speech she is making. Will she join me in paying tribute to Asad Shah, who was stabbed to death outside his shop in the Shawlands area of Glasgow in 2016? His death shows that we have much to do to raise awareness of and increase support for an important minority group. He was a brilliant man and loved by everyone in his community, recognising that the differences between people are vastly outweighed by our similarities. Asad left us a tremendous gift and we must continue to honour that gift by loving and taking care of each other. We can honour Asad by living in a world of equality as one race—the human race.

◦ **Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle)**

May I just say that opening speeches usually last 15 minutes? I am sure that the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) will take that into account. I acknowledge that there have been lots of interventions. We do have some time, but I am sure she is nearing the end.

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

I apologise, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is not usually my method to talk for too long, but given the amount of time we have to debate—

◦ **Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle)**

It is the interventions that are doing it.

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

It is, but may I thank everybody for their interventions? I completely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney). The 40-year-old was stabbed in his store, sparking an outpouring of grief from locals for a man they described as a true gentleman with a heart of gold.

During the police investigation, officers established that the incident was “religiously prejudiced”. The murder was celebrated by some on social media right here in the UK. The Khatm-e-Nubuwwat organisation even posted a congratulations message on its Facebook page. This violent organisation in



Pakistan regularly calls for the elimination of Ahmadis, but it has branches in the UK—and is a registered charity, no less. Furthermore, there are reports that Abrar ul-Haq, an extremely vocal supporter of restrictions on Ahmadis in Pakistan, was allowed into the UK just days ago. Will the Minister establish precisely what measures are being taken to ensure that such hate preachers are not allowed entry to this country, so that Asad Shah remains the one and only Ahmadi to be murdered on our shores?

From anti-Ahmadi sermons preached in mosques, to posters calling for a boycott of Ahmadi business and customers, there is a constant undercurrent of hostility against the Ahmadi community. The action taken by Ofcom against a variety of television channels in the UK provides further examples of hate that, if unchecked, will start spreading to other faith groups as well.

One such example was in Waltham Forest in October, when Muslim members of the Waltham Forest communities forum actively stopped an Ahmadi Muslim from being re-elected, stating that he cannot be a representative of Islam. Meanwhile, a former national president of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Students Association describes how

“some things have just become routine”

on campuses across the country. Posters advertising events are torn down and there are examples of other Muslim societies, in an overt or covert way, trying to undermine their activities.

We return a final time to the case of Nobel prize winner Professor Abdus Salam. Earlier this month, Oxford University hosted the first UK screening of a film about him, but the university’s Pakistan society has been accused of discrimination due to its reluctance to get involved based on Professor Salam’s Ahmadi faith, forcing an apology after an extremely successful event. Such a scourge of extremism is a stain on the freedom of religion that we rightly and proudly celebrate in the UK.

I want to bring my speech to a close by going right back to the beginning and singing the praises of the Ahmadi community in my constituency. Above the front of the Baitul Futuh mosque in Morden hangs a welcome banner that reads, “Love for all, hatred for none.” The Ahmadi community in south-west London has raised thousands upon thousands of pounds for good causes and I am proud that they are a vital part of the fabric of Mitcham and Morden. As their MP, I have a duty to stand up against the persecution they face. As a Chamber, we have a duty to eradicate such persecution from this country. As a country, we have a duty to put pressure on Governments around the world that allow such persecution to flourish.?

◦ **Justine Greening (Putney) (Con)**

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for securing this hugely important debate. As she set out, she has a significant local Ahmadiyya community. I praise her speech, which was not only comprehensive but shocking in its detail of the persecution suffered by the Ahmadiyya community around the world.

The Ahmadiyya community plays a key role in my local community. Not only was its first mosque built in 1926 in Southfields—the first mosque built anywhere in London—but the area has been a home to the community ever since. The role that the community plays more broadly within the Putney, Roehampton

and Southfields constituency that I have the privilege of representing adds hugely to our wider community. It was the Ahmadiyya community that got everybody together after the 7/7 bombings many years ago and made sure that we would not be divided by the hatred that led to those attacks. It is the Ahmadiyya community that has had a peace symposium every single year for 14 years, giving us an annual chance to come together and talk about all the issues that our communities face.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association does amazing work around the country raising money for charity. When we had the floods several years ago, its members ran towards them. They went to visit and help many of the communities affected, not only in nearby places such as Surrey, but further afield up in Cumbria. Of course, we have also heard of some of the transformational work that Humanity First does around the world. The funds that it uses are raised by the community and put to good use to help others who are far less fortunate.

Only last weekend we had the royal wedding, and one of the street parties that I had the chance to go to was in Arnal Crescent in West Hill. It was organised by local Ahmadiyya residents who saw it as a wonderful opportunity not only to celebrate the wedding, but to try to bring together for the first time people who live in that little bit of my constituency and might not have had the chance to meet one another.

The phrase that we have already heard—love for all, hatred for none—percolates through not only every single thing the community stands for, but how people conduct themselves. That is the case not only locally to me, but throughout this country and around the world. We have heard about the persecution that the community faces, and it is shocking that we have seen some of that right here in the UK. We heard about the terrible murder of the Glasgow shopkeeper Asad Shah—and for what? Apparently for simply wishing his local community a happy Easter, which apparently disrespected the Muslim faith. What an awful attitude to have to a pillar of the community who clearly played their role in bringing people together every day.

I draw the attention of the House to some of the invidious persecution that happens closer to home, including some of the literature that we know gets put out in places such as Tooting, and the fact that some shops are encouraged not to deal with the Ahmadi community, whether by selling goods to them or by employing them. That is totally unacceptable on our doorstep. Whenever I have needed to, I have always raised the issues with our local police, but we should certainly should not tolerate persecution right in our backyard.

◦ **Mr Dhesi**

The persecution of the Ahmadiyya or any community is abhorrent. If we are to be true to the principles of humanity, we must stand shoulder to shoulder with that community and stand up to discrimination in all its guises. Does the right hon. Lady agree that the appointment of a UK global ambassador for religious freedom would assist in highlighting and tackling the issues that we are discussing today, as well as helping to fight discrimination and promote equality?

◦ **Justine Greening**

It might well help. It is also very helpful that one of our Foreign Office Ministers, Lord Ahmad of

Wimbledon, is himself Ahmadi, so he is intimately familiar with some of the persecution faced by the community.

I draw the House's attention to the excellent report "Ahmadis in Pakistan Face an Existential Threat". It comprehensively sets out the persecution that happens around the world. I thought that the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden did an excellent job of setting out just how many countries the persecution happens in. It is absolutely shocking. As she said, only last night a 500-strong mob attacked a mosque that has been there for 100 years in a part of Punjab in Pakistan.

I know that others want to speak, so I will finish my comments by saying that this is a country that has always stood up against persecution and for religious freedom. A debate in this Chamber is hugely important to set out our renewed determination to stand up against such persecution. The fact that this persecution is against a community that is the antithesis of the hatred shown by so many the people who carry it out is the ultimate irony, and the approach of the community sets it apart in many positive ways. I am proud to have these people as part of my local community. They have been an intrinsic part of it for a century now, and they will always be hugely welcome. They add to it in a way that is impossible to convey through this short debate. I will play my role as a local MP in standing up against the persecution they face, both here in the UK and internationally.

◦ **Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)**

It is a huge pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening). I apologise for not always notifying her when I go to the mosque in Southfields to meet his Holiness the spiritual leader of the Ahmadi Muslim community and others to talk to them about their issues, although I am sure that she does not really mind. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for her leadership on the all-party parliamentary group, of which I am proud to serve as vice-chair. Our current inquiry is a very important piece of work, and I hope that the House will have a chance later this year to look at it. I pay tribute to her for securing this debate.

I do not want to repeat all the warm and correct words that have been spoken already about the role that the Ahmadi Muslim community plays in our country, except to say that one of the joys in my constituency has been getting to know Ahmadi Muslims, learning about the role they play in Britain and around the world, including of course in Pakistan, and seeing how hard they work. I am always astounded by their discipline and by the amount of time they give to charities, in particular, and to raising money. As others have said, the amount of money they raise and the things they do to help British communities in distress, such as during the floods, and through Humanity First, which does amazing work for some of the poorest in our world, is an example of people of faith living that faith through their actions.

The persecution that Ahmadi Muslims face, particularly in Pakistan, is quite abhorrent. The way in which the law in Pakistan—from the constitutional provisions to the penal code—allows state persecution is quite shocking and quite unique. By putting that into its laws, the state of Pakistan gives a green light to the people of Pakistan—many of whom I am sure, in many ways, are extremely religious and good people—to commit awful behaviour, which means that people who persecute, attack and even murder Ahmadi Muslims get away with it. They know that they will not be prosecuted or brought to justice, which means the rule of law does not exist for Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, which is atrocious. That is why this country needs to speak loudly and clearly to the Government of Pakistan about how this is absolutely

unacceptable.

◦ **Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con)**

I thought the Foreign Office was quite big on this matter and was talking about it quite a lot to the Government of Pakistan. This debate will help, but the Government are already trying their best.

◦ **Sir Edward Davey**

The hon. Gentleman is right. This debate is not an attack on the Minister, who has done a good job. The right hon. Member for Putney mentioned Lord Ahmad. As an Ahmadi Muslim, he is able to speak with authority and credibility, and I pay tribute to him.

◦ **The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field)**

rose—

◦ **Sir Edward Davey**

Does the Minister wish to intervene?

◦ **Mark Field**

I never miss a chance to say a quick word.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) for protecting the interests of the Foreign Office. This is a very serious issue, and all hon. Members will appreciate that the correct and most effective way to represent the interests of a persecuted minority is often in private, rather than through megaphone diplomacy. I hope hon. Members will accept that, but I hope to address in my speech some of the valid points that have already been raised in this debate, particularly in relation to the constitution and the penal code, which are tightening the rights of minorities in Pakistan.

◦ **Sir Edward Davey**

That was a very helpful intervention, because the Minister brings the real issue to bear: our questions on what the Government might do. I understand that such issues need to be dealt with in private, and I am sure that we can take his reassurance that that is happening. I hope that he will focus on the issues of the constitution, and particularly issues of voting and democracy, as the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden mentioned, because it is outrageous that Ahmadi Muslims are prevented from voting in the normal way.?

Three Ahmadi Muslims were sentenced to death last year: Mr Mubasher Ahmad, Mr Ghulam Ahmed and Mr Ehsan Ahmed. They are on death row. I know that the Government are clear—not only in Pakistan but elsewhere—about our opposition to capital punishment, but this is even worse because, in a sense, those people are on death row because of their faith and beliefs, which is abhorrent. I hope the Minister can indicate that the rights of such people are being considered.

We need to try to understand, both by talking to the Muslim community here in the UK and by talking to the Pakistani Government, how we can reduce this aggressive extremism, one of the outlets of which we are seeing in Pakistan. We see extremism and its impact in Pakistan and elsewhere through, for example, the Pakistani Taliban. We need to work out how we can reduce that extremism. We have already learned from the inquiry that this persecution is permitted by the state, but it is ubiquitous in Pakistani society, which is what I find most frightening.

◦ **Siobhain McDonagh**

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the most frightening thing to come out of our inquiry to date is the fact that younger people in Pakistan are more anti-Ahmadi than older people? In the west, we always expect the younger to be more liberal, but that is not currently the case in the Pakistan, and that is very frightening.

◦ **Sir Edward Davey**

I absolutely agree, which is why I want to push the Minister a little further. Although I accept that sometimes we have to tread quietly on such issues, I am alarmed that the persecution of the Ahmadi is accelerating. Given the murders, the assaults and, as we saw last night, the attacks on mosques, there is a concern that this is becoming endemic and deep-rooted, particularly due to the textbooks that children are reading.

I do not want to go too far along this road, but what is happening to the Ahmadi Muslims will ring awful bells for those of us who have had the privilege to visit Auschwitz with the Holocaust Educational Trust to learn about the eight steps to genocide. Although we should not throw the word “genocide” around too freely, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect needs to do a study. This may not be something that comes and goes; it might be something that has potentially disastrous outcomes.

There is cross-party understanding about this, and we need to think quite deeply. I am not suggesting that the Government should do this, but I urge them to consider making it clear—perhaps quietly—that we have teeth.

Pakistan enjoys, through the UK and the EU, GSP+ trade advantages—it is one of I think 10 countries that do. When I was a Trade Minister, I campaigned against Sri Lanka getting GSP+ status because countries with that status are supposed to uphold UN and International Labour Organisation agreements and conventions. I do not think that Sri Lanka is in any way doing that in a number of areas, and nor is Pakistan.

If we look at the UN international covenant on civil and political rights, the UN international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, the UN convention on the rights of the child or the ILO convention concerning discrimination in respect of employment and occupation, it is difficult to see that Pakistan is abiding by the ?international conventions it has signed up to with respect to Ahmadi Muslims. These things need to be pointed out because, if we are to have an impact on the behaviour of the Government of Pakistan, we have to show that we are watching and monitoring them, and that we do not accept their behaviour.

There are things that we can do in this country. The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden mentioned some of the hatred shown to Ahmadi Muslims, and we need the police and local authorities to understand that, and to be strong in preventing and tackling it where it occurs. There are Ahmadi Muslims in refugee camps around the world who have fled from Pakistan, and we are not taking enough of them into this country. That is a Home Office issue, but I ask the Minister to confirm that he will ask the Home Office whether this country can take in more Ahmadi Muslims who are sitting forgotten in refugee camps. Let us not forget them.

If we are to take anything from this debate, let us make some small steps that are under our control and let us revisit our guidance on how Home Office officials are trained to consider asylum applications by Ahmadi Muslims from Pakistan. Let us make sure there is proper guidance so that people understand what Ahmadi Muslims have to put up with in Pakistan.

As we have heard, there is a united approach on both sides of the House. We want to come together and say to the Government of Pakistan that this is unacceptable. We want to say to Ahmadi Muslims here in the UK and around the world, and particularly in Pakistan, that we stand with them, and that we will campaign for their rights, including their right to religious freedom and basic human rights. We will not rest until that happens.

◦ **Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con)**

It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey), my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) and the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), who is almost an hon. Friend, as we share a border. She referred to the Baitul Futul mosque, which spans our two constituencies. It is where we meet, and as she rightly pointed out, it is the largest mosque in the UK and rumoured to be the second largest in Europe. Like my right hon. Friend and many others in this House, I have been pleased to visit it over many years and to visit the mosque in Putney.

When I was first selected as a candidate, some 18 years ago, the Ahmadiyya community was one of the first to come to see me and to say, “This is what we are doing in the community. How can we work together?” They take part in a number of community events—I wish to stress that at the beginning, before we get on to some of the details. A number of speakers have described this work: the community litter days; and the junior poppy collection day, supporting the people who stood up for freedom in this country and the world when it was required in those dark days some 70 years ago. They recognise the memory of that, and it is symbolic in today’s debate.

The Ahmadiyya community also afforded me the most amusing moment of my first year as a Member of Parliament. Every year, they hold a huge Jalsa Salana for the community all around the world. In those days, it was held in Alton, but it has now moved to a bigger farm in north-west Hampshire. As we drove off, my wife said to me, “You are speaking at this event this afternoon. How many people will be there? Have you prepared something?” I said, “Darling, it is a religious ceremony. If we are lucky, there will be a couple of hundred people there.” Members can imagine my surprise when I stood up to address 30,000 people live and a couple of million more watching on the TV—as they reminded me there. That was a salutary lesson: always try to be prepared before standing up to make a speech, wherever you make it.

Let me get on to the serious points about today. I tried to make an initial serious point about how Ahmadiis are integral to my community and to those of so many Members across the House. As we have seen, this community encompass and epitomise their slogan—“Love for all, hatred for none”—and they do so in practical ways. All of us in this House stand up for people’s ability to speak freely and to practise freedom of religion and of political expression. We seek to ensure that people are not allowed to prosecute hate in their speech or actions. In the tour around the world undertaken in the speech of the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden, she not only rightly concentrated on Pakistan, but rightly pointed out, as the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton has just done, that we need to look at a number of issues. If we espouse these values in this House, we should espouse them in the actions taken in our country, too.

One or two people have talked about the worrying development of hate preachers coming to the UK and deliberately infusing hate against the Ahmadiyya community in some of the other mosques. I know from local experience that there was a widespread campaign to boycott Ahmadiyya businesses and shops, which was prosecuted by some of these hate preachers. The hon. Lady was right to mention the TV programme on Waltham Forest, and a Radio 4 documentary “Extremism: Hidden in Plain Sight” revealed recently that certain Urdu newspapers in the UK, which are particularly popular among elements of the Pakistani community, were running deliberate hate campaigns against the Ahmadiyya community. So although I understand this is a debate about persecution in the world, the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that we hope the Minister will say that he will speak to Home Office colleagues to make sure we are doing all we can to ensure that persecution does not happen in this country. If we do that, when we speak to the outside world, we will be able to do so with the surety that we acting to drive out that extremism and hate in this country.

It would be unwise of me to do a tour of the world as the hon. Lady did, but I should say that this persecution is widespread. My right hon. Friend the Member for Putney and others have made the point that it is the Pakistan state that puts this persecution into law. Other states, such as Egypt and Kazakhstan, allow persecution, but the Pakistan state, by putting this into law, has made this official persecution. In Pakistan, the Ahmadiis are not allowed to call themselves Muslim, they cannot refer to their faith as Islam, they cannot call their place of worship a mosque and they cannot preach or propagate their faith. There is deliberate inequality of opportunity in education and in terms of practising whatever profession they may wish to do.?

Although I absolutely respect the Minister’s correct position that much can be achieved in private and with methods that are sometimes not public, I believe that it is occasionally important also to use the megaphone, to use his analogy. He will recognise that this persecution is becoming more widespread and more frequent, and several Members have cited examples, but let me put on the record what Christian Solidarity Worldwide has said in the conclusion of its report on the persecution of the Ahmadiyya community. It said:

“The mood of aggression by certain Islamist groups towards the Ahmadiyya community shows no sign of improvement, even the Pakistani government has lacked the political will to make concession to their community.”

It continued:

“The exclusionary politics...has steadily grown since the creation of Pakistan”

and is playing

“an important role”

in other states in the world.

As the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton said, this is an increasing problem, not a decreasing one. The Minister for the Middle East has made the point several times at the Dispatch Box about the number of times we are speaking to the Pakistani Government. Given the increasing nature of this problem and how it is now becoming, as others have said, more or less commonplace and accepted practice in certain countries, I hope that the Minister will say something about what influence the Foreign Office can exert, both publicly and privately.

◦ **Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op)**

It is an honour to speak in this important debate. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing it and on the work she is doing through the all-party group. As she said, this debate is taking place during Ramadan, and I pay tribute to all the Muslim communities in my constituency and across the UK who are observing Ramadan. I pay tribute to their generosity, compassion and charity, as well as their contribution to our society and our economy.

Much has been said in this debate about the kinds of shocking discrimination that the Ahmadiyya community are experiencing across the world—not just in Pakistan but in many other countries. They face discrimination in schooling, in their ability to practise their faith and in their ability to participate in work, in livelihoods and in civic life. It is shocking to hear, read and comprehend this discrimination. The Ahmadiyya community are held in high regard in our country and across the world. As other Members have said, their contribution to British national life is seen in their ongoing commitment to the values of loyalty, freedom and peace. It is devastating to be here debating the hatred that is being experienced by the Ahmadiyya community in so many countries, and in the UK from a minority who have imported that hate. It is essential that it is understood, challenged and stopped in its tracks in our country by the police, local authorities and all our interfaith communities and that the local police and Ahmadiyya community throughout the country keep a close relationship.?

Last year, along with colleagues from this House and the other place, I attended the 51st annual convention, the Jalsa Salana, which an incredible number of people attended. I was also with colleagues and councillors from Hounslow and throughout the country. I pay tribute to the work in my constituency of Zaheer Khan and Councillor Hanif Khan, their father, Mr Abdul Latif Khan, and their late mother, who helped to build and support the growth of the Ahmadiyya community in Hounslow. The legacy of their work set the tone for how the Ahmadiyya community plays its part in mainstream community life, as seen in the more than 100 Ahmadiyya branches in communities throughout Britain.

I have had the privilege of attending Ahmadiyya community events in Parliament and the peace symposium, from which I have learned a great deal. Such events have brought together leaders from all walks of life to engage in a shared mission for peace, common values and prosperity. The motto “Love



for all, hatred for none” is one that reaches out and touches the hearts of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Many of us will have experienced that tone and message of humanity from the Ahmadiyya community. Ahmadis have been quick on the scene and quick to help in moments of need and suffering, such as the attack outside Parliament. Like other Muslim communities and interfaith communities, they brought people together. In the aftermath of that terrorist attack, I stood with them on Westminster bridge, where they brought together young and old, with a message of healing and solidarity.

I am proud of the work of two mosques in my constituency—Baitul Wahid in Hanworth and Baitun Noor in Hounslow West—which unceasingly reach out and bring people together to share in their faith and wisdom. Every year, the community raises hundreds of thousands of pounds for British charities, giving hope to many people who may never know where that support came from.

The Ahmadiyya community continues to suffer persecution around the world. It is important to send the message from the House today that we in Britain are on the side of the Ahmadis and seek their safety in every nation around the world. That requires joined-up action in our country. We have seen the seeds of hatred and discrimination. I do not believe that that is at all representative of the majority in the Muslim community, and it must be dealt with and rooted out. The message must be sent that we will not tolerate that hate being imported from other parts of the world. We must have a joined-up national strategy, involving the police, schools, local authorities, the Home Office and the Foreign Office, because it will take a joined-up strategy to tackle this issue at home as well as abroad.

Will the Minister tell us whether the Foreign Office has raised this issue with the UN? When we see such hatred, which goes against article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights, which requires states to guarantee the freedom of religion and belief, it is important that we have a way to stand together as nations to root out this hatred and to make sure that Ahmadis are free to practise their religion and their faith in every country around the world.

◦ **Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)**

Salaam aleikum, Mr Deputy Speaker. That means “peace be upon you”. It is seemingly inoffensive and is a very traditional and heartfelt greeting in all parts of the Islamic world. I can say it here and the Ahmadiyya community can say it here in the UK. When I go to Bangladesh, I say “Salaam aleikum” as a mark of respect to Bangladeshi friends and people I meet for the first time. I could do that in Pakistan, but unfortunately people in the Ahmadiyya community who live there cannot. As we have heard, they cannot have a call to prayer or self-identify as Muslims.

I have spoken a lot in this place about the Rohingya situation. Before that situation exploded last August and people were persecuted and pushed out into Bangladesh, as part of what people have described as ethnic conflict, the first identifiable thing that people raised about the taking away of the Rohingya people’s citizenship was their inability to vote. In Burma, I met the daughter of a former MP. Not only was he no longer an MP but he could no longer even vote in his own country. When that seemingly fundamental and simple right is taken away, there is a real risk of it leading into something so much worse.

We have already heard about the attack by a violent mob on the 100-year-old mosque in Sialkot in Punjab during the night. The house next door was damaged. Local administrators, police and journalists were all

at the scene when it was going on, but they were powerless to do anything other than stand by as spectators while people ran around and continued unabashed with the destruction of the Ahmadiyya property. We have also heard about how the violence and lack of any sense that an Ahmadiyya Muslim could even be human, frankly, has come to this country, with the murder of Asad Shah. Someone actually drove from Bradford to confront a Glaswegian shopkeeper and stab him on the doorstep of his own shop—how can that possibly be humane in any sense?

I often mention my hon. Friend Minister for the Middle East talking about the fact that when people are in effect considered sub-human, there are no depths to which their persecutors will not go to punish, hurt and damage them. I really hope that this is not the thin end of the wedge and that we do not see at some point in future an extension of this persecution—that it does not go so much further, like some of the violence we have seen elsewhere in the world.

The Ahmadi Muslims are fantastic advocates for what is going on around the world. They are a very tight and aware community. The all-party group is doing fantastic work, and I pay testament to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh): not only for her speech and for securing this debate, but for her work and leadership. I am absolutely delighted to serve alongside her on the all-party group, particularly in respect of the important work we are doing to take that testimony.

The most recent report of any great length of which I am aware was done by the International Human Rights Committee, which specialises in Ahmadiyya affairs. The foreword to the report talked about

“the systemic nature of their persecution”

and

“Pakistan’s draconian blasphemy laws”.

The report goes on to quote Prince Charles, who said:

“The scale of religious persecution around the world is not widely appreciated. Nor is it limited to Christians in the troubled regions of the Middle East. A recent report suggests that attacks are increasing on Yazidis, Jews, Ahmadis, Bahá’ís and many other minority faiths.”?

We must keep having these debates and we must keep these conversations going, because it is so important that we make people aware of what is happening to these people around the world, including in this country.

The key findings of the International Human Rights Committee report include the fact that anti-terror laws are being used—or misused—in Pakistan against the Ahmadis and other religious minorities. We have heard that educational texts provoke intolerance and hatred, particularly the syllabus for religious education, and that nationalised schools and colleges of the Ahmadis have still not been returned to the Ahmadiyya community in accordance with the Pakistan Government’s policies.

Effectively, the constitutional amendment of 1974, designating Ahmadis as non-Muslims, laid the foundation for many, many years of hardship and persecution. Such behaviour is now entrenched in

Pakistan, so, as the Minister has said, we must use not megaphone diplomacy, but every lever that we have to ensure that this important community around the world, but particularly in their homeland of Rawabi in Pakistan, can feel free to express themselves and worship in the form that they feel appropriate.

We have heard some of the fantastic and wonderful things that the people of the Ahmadiyya community do. I remember going up to Trafalgar Square, just after the Westminster attack: the first people that I saw were from the young Ahmadiyya community. They were holding a big banner saying, “Love for all, hatred for none.” They were there right at the forefront, showing solidarity with us after what they had seen.

I am looking up at the plaque of Jo Cox. When she was murdered, many of us felt at a very low point—I certainly felt at the lowest point in my three years of being in this place. I felt that we were given great succour by the people in the Ahmadiyya community. They came together to pay tribute—metaphorically to put their arm around us to say that these violent, extreme attacks have no place in this country, or anywhere in the world. That is really the basis of the annual peace symposium at the Baitul Futuh mosque. Those peace symposiums are replicated in smaller Ahmadiyya communities as well. The Sutton Ahmadiyya community holds a smaller symposium in my local area; I am always pleased to go and listen to what they say and to share messages of peace with my neighbours.

People from the Ahmadiyya community were among the first to volunteer at Grenfell. They are so aware of what is going on. Going back to the Rohingya situation, the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden mentioned their wonderful work raising money for charity. I went to the telethon at the Baitul Futuh mosque where they raised £140,000 in just four hours for the Rohingya community in Burma. They are driven by such situations.

We have heard a lot today about “Love for all, hatred for none”. Anyone just dipping in and out of this debate on television or in the *Official Report* may think that people are just coming up with a strapline, but it is so much more than that—it really is. That strapline is part of the beating heart of every single member of the Ahmadiyya community. There are no extremists in the Ahmadiyya community; extremism is anathema to their very being. Interestingly, Lord Ahmad, whom we have heard about today, was one of the first Ministers looking after the counter-extremism policy. That was a perfect choice at the time.

In conclusion, we must make sure that Pakistan does everything that it can to tackle the religious zealots in its country, because we have seen in other countries such as Saudi Arabia how often the Government, the people and the religious leaders work at different speeds. We must make sure that we help them, effectively, to align. They will, of course, fundamentally disagree with the beliefs of the Ahmadiyya Muslims as they believe that Muhammad is the last prophet and the Ahmadis do not. There is no way in which we can reconcile that, but that does not mean that the Ahmadi Muslims should not be able to celebrate their religion and live in peace.

◦ **Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD)**

It is a pleasure to follow my neighbour, the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully). We do not see eye to eye on many issues, but in relation to this matter we certainly do. We are both advocates of campaigning against the persecution of the Ahmadiyya community, and, indeed, of religious communities more widely. May I thank the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for bringing



this debate to the House, for the excellent work that she does on the inquiry that she is conducting, and for the support that she gives to the Ahmadiyya Muslim community?

Clearly, unfortunately, religious persecution is a worldwide phenomenon; it does not just affect the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. I am sure that many Members here will have been contacted by the Baha'i community, which faces very serious, systematic persecution in Iran—whether in relation to trying to run a business or trying to get education in that country. The fate of Pakistani Christians is also of concern. They suffer persecution not just in Pakistan, but, to some extent, here, with people trying to disrupt some of their services. We know that the Sunni and Shi'a communities in different parts of the middle east are persecuted by the other sect, and that the Yazidis in Iraq have suffered genocide at the hands of Daesh. The Jehovah's Witnesses suffer persecution in Russia and, of course, Jews also face persecution in many parts of the world and, indeed, close to home here and in Europe.

Unfortunately, this issue does not just affect the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, but, obviously, I welcome the fact that the debate this afternoon is focused on them. A number of Members have referred to the motto, "Love for all, hatred for none", which the Ahmadiis live by. As the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said, it is not just a motto or a strapline, or something that they put on a leaflet or website, but something that they follow and observe in their daily lives. They are fully engaged in all aspects of UK life. A number of Members have referred to the different events that they hold, including the peace symposium. I have also attended the Jalsa Salana on a number of occasions. I was surprised not only at the scale of it in the United Kingdom, but at the reach that it has around parts of the world. We even have live coverage from Ghana. They hold a very successful annual fundraising march. I suspect that a number of Members have suggested to the community some charities that it should support, and it has done so very generously.?

I am very proud that the Ahmadiyya community is able to practise its faith here without any risk or reservation, and we must ensure that that continues. A number of Members have rightly pointed out that, even in the United Kingdom with the murder of Asad Shah, there have been issues. A leaflet has been circulated by the organisation Khatam-e-Nabuwat, which, frankly, should never have been allowed off the printing press.

I hope that, when the Minister responds, he will be able to say a little about what discussions the Government have had with social media companies—there are issues with Facebook in particular to do with not taking down posts quickly enough. Certainly, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community has presented evidence that, on social media, there are significant issues. Have the Government had a dialogue with Facebook and other social media providers about how and how quickly they tackle these issues?

In the briefing that was supplied, there were some examples of where Ofcom has taken action. The most recent one, certainly on the list that we were provided with, goes back to 2013. I would like some assurances from the Minister that Ofcom is indeed properly resourced so that it can look at every single complaint that comes in. Given the number of channels available, I accept that it is difficult for Ofcom to monitor the range of output, but it is clearly something on which it has to keep a close watch. I hope that it is properly resourced to do so.

There is a worrying domestic picture of which the police, Ofcom, the Government and the social media providers should be aware, as should we as individual Members of Parliament. We should not become

complacent about our democracy and the ability of people of different faiths to practise their religion here openly and freely.

I turn briefly to the international aspect of the issue, on which many hon. Members have focused, starting with Algeria. We were fortunate in getting a meeting with the Algerian ambassador some months ago. It was a very cordial and frank meeting; my only concern was that there did not seem to be any recognition that there was actually an issue. I am afraid that, to a great extent, that was the also the impression that we got when we met with the deputy high commissioner from Pakistan. The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden may be able to confirm my impression that there did not seem to be an acceptance that there was, in fact, an issue for the community. After reading out some quite detailed evidence, we were asked to provide more evidence to demonstrate that there was a problem. Many Members have referred to the problem that exists in Pakistan, and there needs to be some recognition on the part of the Pakistan high commission here that there is one.

The third country that I should mention, as others have, is Indonesia. Christian Solidarity Worldwide provided us all with some excellent briefings ahead of today's debate. It has suggested some recommendations for the UK Government. I am not sure whether the Minister received the CSW briefing, but I will refer to it for him if he did not. The organisation said that the Government should perhaps be a bit more circumspect when describing Indonesia as a role model of tolerance, because the evidence as far as the Ahmadi Muslim community is concerned, unfortunately, shows that that is not necessarily the case.?

Indonesia has the same issue with blasphemy laws as Pakistan. This country should probably recognise that we only abolished our blasphemy laws 10 years ago ourselves—not exactly that long ago. However, we are now in a position whereby we can advocate that other countries should get rid of their blasphemy laws, and Indonesia falls into that category. It passed an anti-Ahmadi Muslim decree in 2008, which I hope that the Government will push to be repealed.

CSW has various concerns, including the need for Indonesia to extend human rights education, including the principle of freedom of religion, and the need to promote inter-faith dialogue and protect and promote the rule of law. It also requests that the Government of Indonesia invite the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to visit the country with unhindered access. Those are some specific recommendations for the Minister. If he has not received this briefing, I will give it to him at the end of the debate, so he will be able to refer to it as well as to what I said on the record.

CSW also flagged up a number of specific recommendations regarding Pakistan, including the repeal of blasphemy laws, and the repeal of section 298 of the Pakistan penal code, which is the provision meaning that Ahmadi Muslims cannot say that they are Muslims, either directly or indirectly. CSW calls for evidence that there are prosecutions taking place of those who attack Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, and for curriculum reform. In fact, a number of hon. Members have mentioned textbooks that teach things that are a direct threat to the Ahmadi Muslim community.

I accept that the UK Government face a bit of a dilemma about whether to invest in education in Pakistan or not. On balance, I think that it is much better that we do. It is better that the UK Government are making that contribution and providing education, rather than relying on religious institutions, which may promote an agenda that is not favourable towards the Ahmadi Muslim community. CSW recommends

restoring the Ahmadi Muslim schools. The Ahmadi Muslim community complied with all the requirements for that as long as 12 years ago, but they are still waiting for that to happen. Safeguards are needed—the kind of safeguards that we advocate around the world for human rights defenders—to ensure that no seminary is spreading hate speech or hate material.

CSW also suggests that we encourage Pakistan to move towards a more democratic and pluralistic society. That is obviously quite a wide request for the UK Government, but the list I have mentioned does include some very specific ones. Given that the UK Government have a positive relationship with Pakistan, are a contributor through international development funds and have a security relationship with the country, we are in a position to exert some leverage.

This is a timely debate, in which all Members have reflected on the very significant contribution that the Ahmadi Muslim community make to the United Kingdom. We are all very proud of that, and both sides of this House should do everything we can to defend the rights of the community to practise their religion here and abroad.

◦ **Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con)**

I apologise for having missed the opening speeches. I indicated to Mr Speaker that that would be necessary, but I am nevertheless sorry not to have heard the opening remarks from the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). I congratulate her on securing this vital debate. It is also an honour and a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), who represents a wonderful seat. I wholeheartedly endorse all his comments.

I have been hugely fortunate during the time in which I have been an MP to see at first hand—I have to admit, not much before I was elected in 2010—the incredible contribution made to this country by the Ahmadiyya community. We hear all the time, rightly, about the need for better and stronger integration of our diverse communities. That is at the very heart of the values that run right the way through the Ahmadiyya community. It angers me that the community has faced, and continues to face, so much persecution around the world.

The community's motto, "Love for all, hatred for none", which colleagues will remember was plastered across buses in 2011—paid for, in fact, by the Ahmadiyya community—shines out from absolutely everything that the Ahmadiyya community does. Colleagues will also remember, following the appalling attacks just across the road from here last year, the scenes of Muslim women from London's Ahmadiyya community holding hands in solidarity and in condemnation of the violence.

I want briefly to highlight the 10-year partnership between the Royal British Legion and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association—an extraordinary organisation that has raised more than £200,000 for the poppy appeal. The same organisation runs blood drives, elderly home visits, feeding the homeless, charity events, all kinds of green initiatives, peace conferences, interfaith meetings and so much more. Last year, like other hon. Members, I had the tremendous honour of being invited to the Jalsa Salana—the annual convention of the Ahmadis—which saw around 35,000 people from all over the world coming together to hear the Ahmadiyya message of unity, understanding and mutual respect. I left that event, as I know other hon. Members did, with a bounce in my step. I was inspired by the single-minded commitment of absolutely everyone there to peace, harmony and decency. I feel very lucky that we have such a thriving



Ahmadiyya community right here in this great city.

Despite their amazing contribution, wherever they are in the world the Ahmadiyya community is one of the most persecuted groups of people on earth. As hon. Members will be aware, Pakistan—a country with which I have great and deep familial links, and for which I have a great love—is tragically at the heart of much of this persecution. Indeed, we heard only last night that a mob of 500 people is reported to have attacked a 100-year-old mosque in Punjab. We do not yet know the cost of that attack in terms of human suffering.

In that country, there exists deep structural and institutional prejudice against Ahmadis. By defining in law that Ahmadis are not Muslims, Pakistan has justified decades of religious persecution against them, and denied them anything resembling religious freedom. Those who have killed Ahmadis for their faith are often hailed as heroes. Ahmadi figures from Pakistani culture and history are simply deleted from the school curriculum. As the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington mentioned, the use of blasphemy laws against Ahmadis can see them imprisoned or even put to death simply for expressing their beliefs. If anyone is in any doubt, I recommend that they read a copy of a 2016-17 report by the Asian Human Rights Commission, titled “Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan Face an Existential Threat.”

This is not just happening in Pakistan. In Algeria, Ahmadis have been detained and forced to worship in secret. In Indonesia—a country with a proud tradition of religious tolerance—Government Ministers have called for a ban on the Ahmadiyya Muslim faith altogether. Most depressingly, anti-Ahmadi persecution exists in the UK as well. Leaflets have been circulated outside mosques and in universities across the country calling even for the murder of Ahmadis. I saw similar in my own constituency a few years ago. Much of it is anonymous, but not always so.

Extremist clerics have called on fellow Muslims to sever all ties with the Ahmadi community. In 2010, the imam of Tooting Islamic Centre demanded a boycott of Ahmadi-owned businesses. An organisation in Pakistan called Khatm-e-Nubuwwat, which has already been mentioned, calls for the elimination of Ahmadis. It has offices here in the UK. That organisation congratulated all Muslims after the murder in 2016 of Ahmadi shopkeeper Asad Shah, who was killed for being Ahmadi. Appallingly, that organisation has been an affiliate of the otherwise respected Muslim Council of Britain. The MCB has since set up a panel to look at the group, but why on earth do we need a panel when the group has quite openly and brazenly celebrated the murder of people whose version of Islam they do not like? Even calling a panel to examine such a phenomenon is an insult. To add to the insult, two of the members that have been put on to it have strong ties to the very group it is investigating. One of them gave a speech shortly before, saying:

“having any sort of ties with them”—

Ahmadis—

“is far worse than being addicted to drugs and alcohol...I am humbly requesting you, do not meet them or your faith would suffer from an incurable cancer... Leave this place with the promise that not only will you sever all ties with the”

Ahmadis

“but also with anyone who sympathizes with them.”

Well, I guess that includes all of us in the Chamber today.

So this is not just an international problem, and we need to be much, much tougher on those propagating anti-Ahmadi hatred in the UK. When leaflets are distributed advocating violence or boycotts against the Ahmadis, we all need to speak out as one, more strongly, and law enforcement needs to clamp down on it and pursue those making these threats and incitements in a much more robust manner than we have seen in recent years—as well as, of course, condemning the actions of Governments overseas. The UK must use its considerable historical and cultural ties with Pakistan and other nations to call for an end to inhumane laws that criminalise innocent people simply for expressing their beliefs. The Ahmadiyya Muslim community has faced persecution and hate not with violence but with extraordinary dignity and compassion. They deserve every single bit of support that we can provide, here and abroad.?

◦ **Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP)**

It is not often, speaking on a Thursday afternoon, that I realise that I have two hours and 40 minutes to do so. I am only joking, Madam Deputy Speaker—I know that I do not. Everybody else in the Chamber is probably very relieved to hear that as well.

We have a very serious issue before us. I commend the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for her efforts to secure this debate and for her commitment to the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. She introduced the debate with compassion, deep interest, and feeling. Every one of us in this House is indebted to her for setting the scene. I thank her very much for that, because we all appreciate it.

In December 2017, I attended an inter-faith event in Omagh in County Tyrone that was organised by the Ahmadiyya community. I was really pleased to be invited, because I had met some of the people there at events over here on the mainland. The organisers of the event invited Muslims, Sikhs, Protestants, Catholics and Jehovah’s Witnesses. People of many other faiths and beliefs were also represented, many of them travelling from the Republic of Ireland to share in the positivity of this truly cross-border, cross-community event. I was very impressed by the commitment of the Ahmadiyya community to worshipping in their own way, but also to bringing together people from all walks of life. It was great to have that in Northern Ireland, with probably 120 or 130 people from across the community. I believe that we can all learn a salutary lesson from their inspiring example.

The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) mentioned Jalsa Salana. He and I may have very different opinions on Brexit, but on issues of human rights and persecution we agree on almost everything, to the last line and letter. I commend him for all the hard work that he does in this House, as do others. I have spoken at Jalsa Salana events over the past two years. I am very fond of some of the very spicy food that they have there. It is nice to get away and enjoy those things. We cannot fail to be touched by the love and warmth that there is at those occasions. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) said that he came away with a warmth and a goodness in his heart, and I think we would all do the same.

This week I was fortunate enough to participate in another excellent event—the Westminster Hall debate on the persecution of Christians. One thing that stands out to me from that debate, and this one, is that in

many countries where Christians are persecuted, Ahmadi Muslims, and indeed many other religious and belief groups, are also persecuted. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief, and also chair of the APPG on Pakistani minorities, I have come to understand that to protect freedom of religious belief for any one group means to protect it for all. When I speak, as I do, for the Christian community, I also speak for those of other faiths, and indeed for those of no faith. That is what we should all be doing, and I believe that it is what we all do.

When any one group is persecuted for their beliefs, it is a statement that human rights do not apply to everyone. When such a poisonous thought exists in a society, no one is safe. Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Jr. famously said—his words are important words that have been recorded in *Hansard*—

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

He also said:

“No one is free until we are all free.”

We should take those words and think about how important they are. They encapsulate this debate and where we are on these matters. It is vital for people of all faiths and none to follow the example of the Ahmaddiya Muslim community and to come together to stand up for the right to freedom of religion or belief for everyone.

In that spirit, I will speak out about the persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Pakistan, and then about practical steps that Her Majesty’s Government can take. I am pleased, as always, to see the Minister for Asia and the Pacific, the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) in his place. I have no doubt that in his response he will encapsulate the feelings, the passion, the beliefs, the words and the thoughts of us all in this Chamber—as indeed will the shadow Minister.

As we have heard, Pakistan is the only country in the world that officially declares Ahmadis to be non-Muslims in law. The Ahmadiyya community is the most widely institutionally and constitutionally persecuted religious group in Pakistan, with Ahmadis facing persistent, systematic violence and structural discrimination that affects their economic, social and employment status, political life, and educational activities. It affects every facet of their lives. In 2017 alone, at least four Ahmadi Muslims were murdered for their beliefs, and since the mid-1980s, 260 other Ahmadis have met a similarly tragic fate. Whenever people go to Jalsa Salana, they will be taken down to one of the exhibitions there and see images of those who have lost their lives because of their faith. I am always very touched by that. It is poignant occasion that brings home to me, as it would to all of us, just what it means to suffer and to give one’s life for one’s faith.

The Pakistani penal code is used to prevent Ahmadi Muslims from identifying as Muslims, using Islamic terminology and symbols, preaching, disseminating materials on their faith, or referring to their houses of worship as mosques. Any of the above is punishable by three years imprisonment and a fine. If the offence is regarded as blasphemy, then an Ahmadi could be sentenced to death. How tragic and how wrong that would be. Ahmadis are also technically prohibited from voting because in order to do so, the state requires them to register as non-Muslims, which many refuse to do. Blasphemy laws in Pakistan are disproportionately and unfairly used to target Ahmadi Muslims and other religious or belief minorities.

Since 1984, over 300 Ahmadis have been charged with blasphemy under the penal code. While the Pakistani Government may be unwilling to repeal the blasphemy laws, there are many legal and procedural changes that can be made to make sure the law is applied more fairly.

The APPG on freedom of religion or belief, alongside the humanist APPG and the APPG on human rights, recently held a roundtable meeting with Foreign Office Minister Lord Ahmad and the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief in which we discussed some of those changes. For example, the Pakistani criminal justice system does not currently carry penalties for false accusations of blasphemy, encouraging allegations based on personal vendettas, enmities, or pure and simple hatred for religious or belief minorities.

Similarly, the current procedure, which we have heard examples of today, of allowing the local police to register blasphemy cases at the behest of any angry individual allows for false or frivolous cases built on the basis of personal animosity. Police stations are easily accessible, and police officers are often happy to register cases without proper investigation. Corruption is unfortunately rampant. If the law was updated to make it an offence to falsely accuse someone of blasphemy and the registration procedure was strengthened to require that any complaint of blasphemy must be submitted to a judicial officer, rather than a local police officer, that could significantly reduce the number of blasphemy charges laid at the feet of Ahmadi Muslims and other minority groups.

It is important to mention that the persecution of Ahmadi Muslims is not limited to Pakistan. Anti-Ahmadi hate has also surfaced in the United Kingdom, as the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden said. The most extreme example of that was the brutal murder in Glasgow of Ahmadi shopkeeper Asad Shah in 2016, who was killed for his faith. Members have referred to the fact that leaflets calling for members of the Ahmadi Muslim community to be killed have been distributed in universities, mosques and shopping centres in London. A recently broadcast documentary by BBC Radio 4, “Extremism: Hidden in Plain Sight”, revealed that Urdu newspapers in the UK such as *Nawaijang* and the *Daily Ausaf*, popular among some of the British Pakistani community, were running hate campaigns against the Ahmadi Muslim community. That speaks to the point I made earlier, that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. That is what we need to keep at the forefront of our minds. Persecution of one group naturally spreads like a virus that can travel across the world, without regard for distance or borders, infecting every society it touches. It is therefore vital to tackle this persecution wherever we find it.

I know that I am pushing at an open door when I speak to the Minister—I say that genuinely and sincerely—so I want to suggest some steps that I believe will be helpful in addressing these issues. First, we must develop strategies to advance freedom of religion or belief in countries with severe restrictions on it. I thank the Minister and his Department for their proactive work on that, as I believe that several country desks in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have already produced such strategies. I ask that he continue to encourage other desks to do the same and that he request that the Department for International Development lends its expertise and input to the strategies, as it can support the FCO in many ways. For example, it can promote freedom of religion or belief through its training programmes and its work on developing education systems that do not discriminate against minority groups.

Secondly, we must develop a database that tracks quantitative data on issues relating to religious or belief minorities. That will help to ensure that the Government are better equipped to recognise and understand patterns of religious discrimination and to respond effectively, in order to reduce hostility and conflict

between groups. That is also vital to ensuring that UK aid is effectively used to support marginalised communities.

Thirdly, we must increase Government expertise, either internally or via external experts, on violence and persecution with religious characteristics and how religion interacts with society and conflict. DFID has previously expanded its expertise in areas such as gender and preventing sexual violence in conflict, and it is vital that the same is done for religion and religious conflict if the Government aim to promote stability. Stability is a multidimensional phenomenon, but I say sincerely and gently that the case of the Rohingya in Myanmar shows us how unaddressed Government and social hostilities and persecution of religious groups can explode into violence and create humanitarian crises.

Fourthly, we must introduce mandatory training for FCO and DFID employees working in countries with severe levels of discrimination of religious or belief groups. That training should focus on the relevant religions, patterns of discrimination and conflict, and how religion and religious actors interact with the specific societal and conflict context. While FCO staff currently have access to training at the LSE Faith Centre, that training is not mandatory for staff who work in countries with severe freedom of religion or belief violations, and it does not necessarily address all the areas I have highlighted.

To sum up, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community continues to be persecuted for its beliefs. Wherever there is violence and discrimination against Ahmadis for their faith, we can be almost positive that we will find violence and persecution against many other religious or belief groups. What that teaches me and hopefully all of us is that to protect freedom of religion or belief for any one group means to protect freedom of religion or belief for all. It is therefore vital that people of all faiths and none follow the inspiring example of the Ahmadiyya community and come together to stand up for the right to freedom of religion or belief for everyone.

I believe that there are many practical steps that Her Majesty's Government and we in this House can take to increase our capacity to do that. The Government can develop strategies to advance freedom of religion or belief in countries with severe freedom of religion or belief restrictions; develop a database that tracks quantitative data on issues relating to religious or belief minorities; increase Government expertise on violence and persecution with religious characteristics; and introduce mandatory training for FCO and DFID employees working in countries with severe levels of discrimination of religious or belief groups. By taking those steps, the Government can dramatically improve their capacity to promote freedom of religion or belief and to guarantee the fundamental rights of Ahmadi Muslims and other groups across the world. I sincerely thank the Minister for his hard work in this area; we are deeply indebted to him. I encourage him to give serious consideration to my recommendations, and I look forward to hearing his remarks.

◦ **Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)**

Salaam aleikum, Madam Deputy Speaker. I join others in sending my best wishes to all those around the world observing Ramadan. As someone who struggles to observe Lent each year, I think that people's commitment to observing Ramadan, which involves even stricter discipline, is something we can all learn from.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing the debate



and thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting such a significant length of time for it. Everyone who has spoken has made heartfelt and personal contributions, and there is a clear consensus across the Chamber on the disgraceful nature of the persecution faced by the Ahmadiyya community. I hope that we will hear positive responses from the Minister.

I pay tribute to the various all-party groups that work on this issue, some of which are represented by Members here today, as well as the organisations that have provided us with background briefings, not least the Ahmadi community and Christian Solidarity Worldwide. I will say more about this later, but I want to say at the start that I join the tributes paid to Asad Shah. It is very fitting that that dreadful outrage is specifically referenced in the motion as it is one of the most terrible examples of persecution that we have seen.

The Scottish National party is, of course, utterly opposed to religious persecution. Religious freedom is a fundamental human right, and it should be respected all around the world. We are deeply disappointed that the Pakistani Government continue to condone, and indeed oversee, some of these religiously motivated attacks, and we call on the Foreign Secretary to press the Pakistani Government to take action against such religious persecution. Reform of blasphemy laws, which has been touched on, is vital, as those laws are incompatible with the international covenant on civil and political rights to which Pakistan has committed. As we have heard, it is alarming that there appears to be increasing persecution of the Ahmadi community here in the United Kingdom, especially given the valuable contributions that the community makes to wider society and our constituencies. I want to reflect on those points in the short time available.

At the end of April, Pakistan's Ahmadi community released a report detailing the growing hostilities that it faces, including indiscriminate arrests, impediments blocking people from voting in general elections, and the various other forms of discrimination that we have heard about. That is why it is vital that there is reform of blasphemy laws in Pakistan, and in other countries around the world that continue to keep such laws on the statute book.

In Pakistan, blasphemy against any recognised religion is illegal, with penalties ranging from a fine to death. Anyone can file a blasphemy case claiming that their religious feelings are injured for any reason. That is being applied to the Ahmadi community, whose faith is not recognised as a religion. Blasphemy laws are bad for freedom of speech, and blasphemy laws that actively ban another religion by name are really quite exceptional and a matter of serious concern. We have heard throughout the debate the impact of that—killings, attacks, and exclusion from schools and other aspects of civil society. Sadly, that has gone on for decades, dating back to at least the amendments to the constitution.

I was particularly taken aback by the fact that to apply for a passport, Pakistanis are required to sign a declaration that they consider Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to be an impostor prophet and his followers to be non-Muslims. That is a quite astonishing thing for any holder of a religious belief to be asked. The theological and religious parallels are not identical, but it seems to be the equivalent of asking me to sign a document saying I do not recognise the authority of the Pope in the Catholic Church, which would just be astonishing.

This is very difficult to comprehend although, as the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) said, it is not so long since the blasphemy laws were taken away here. There was a form of

religious persecution or discrimination in this country for many years, but we have moved beyond that, and we have to continue to hope that we can encourage other countries to do the same. As Members have said, once we start to allow some form of state-sponsored discrimination against any minority, community or faith group, there is a very real risk that this is the thin end of the wedge, and that the experience of persecution begins to be felt by other minority groups or anyone who does not subscribe to the position put forward by the state.

As we have heard from Members on both sides of the House, although some of the worst and most concentrated abuse of Ahmadis is taking place in Pakistan, there is growing persecution around the world. We have heard about particularly stark examples from Indonesia, but we know of others in Bangladesh, Belarus and various other parts of the world. We have seen the same kind of thing: people being targeted for their beliefs, as well as being attacked and murdered. None of that is acceptable, and it must be called out.

I understand that Ahmadis are officially banned from entering Saudi Arabia and performing the Hajj pilgrimage. Again, I encourage Members to consider what the equivalent would be for members of Christian denominations. If they were suddenly told that they could not visit Rome or the holy places in the middle east—Jerusalem, Bethlehem and so on—what kind of a message would that send? We have to think about how that reality is experienced by the people affected.

Sadly, we have seen such persecution on our own doorstep. Several Members from Scotland have spoken about the experience of Asad Shah, as have others who have contributed to the debate. The right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) made the point—it is very true—that the root of the attack appears to have been the fact that Mr Shah was wishing his Christian customers, and his customers generally, a happy Easter. As the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) said, he was living out the phrase, “Love for all, hatred for none”, yet that was one of the motivating factors in his murder.

If anything positive is to be taken from that murder, it is the way in which the community has united in support of the Ahmadis in Glasgow against the kind of extremism displayed in that attack. There was an interfaith campaign, “United against Extremism”, with posters spreading a message of tolerance paid for by the various religious communities, and supported by politicians and civil society across the board. The First Minister was one of several politicians among hundreds of people who attended the vigil that was held.

At that vigil, Ahmed Owusu-Konadu, one of the leaders of the Ahmadi community in Glasgow—I know him very well, and I think every Glasgow MP has got to know him over the past few years since we were elected—called on all Muslims to condemn the killing of Shah, saying that spreading a message of intolerance was unacceptable. He and others invited the First Minister to a peace symposium in their mosque, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). At that meeting in December 2016, the First Minister said:

“The Peace Symposium demonstrates the commitment of the Ahmadiyya Community to promoting the values of peace, tolerance and understanding and is an important opportunity for us to restate our shared values and our shared aims.”

Following the incident, the Scottish Government launched a review of the suite of laws covering hate

crime offences in Scotland to ensure that they remain fit for purpose in the 21st century. In launching the review, the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, Annabelle Ewing, said:

“Racism, intolerance and prejudice of all kinds are a constant threat to society, and while Scotland is an open and inclusive nation, we are not immune from that threat.”

That is absolutely correct; we must have a constant vigil.

We have heard from Members on both sides of the Chamber about other incidents of intolerance and bigotry towards the Ahmadi community throughout the United Kingdom. It was worrying to hear what the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) said about the distribution at universities of leaflets calling for attacks on members of the Ahmadi community. We have also heard about the issues at Oxford University this month, and all that is a matter of great concern.

We are deeply disappointed that the Pakistani Government continue to condone and oversee the conduct of religiously motivated attacks. We call on the Foreign Secretary and Foreign Office Ministers to press the Pakistani Government to take action against religious persecution. It was in 2013 that the Foreign Office first listed Pakistan as a country of concern in relation to its human rights record, particularly due to its record on freedom of religion and belief. An update from the Minister on how the Foreign Office is acting and what representations it is continuing to make through diplomatic channels would be very welcome. What discussions are taking place at a global level through the United Nations and other forums on persecution in the middle east and other Muslim-majority countries?

It is important to hear a response from the Minister to various points made by hon. Members. The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), who is no longer in the Chamber, proposed a global ambassador for religious freedom, and I believe an equivalent has been appointed in the United States. The right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) raised the issue of support for refugees, which is absolutely vital. We must be welcoming, and we must be willing to offer refuge to people who are fleeing persecution and hostility. It would be helpful to hear about some of the recommendations made by Christian Solidarity Worldwide and others, including the action that could be taken in Indonesia and elsewhere that was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington. It would also be useful to know what steps the Government are taking to monitor and tackle the rising violence in the UK and to promote solidarity with the Ahmadi community, and what steps they are willing to take to work with the devolved Administrations in promoting such tolerance.

I want to reflect, as other Members have, on the contribution that the community makes to my own constituency. I have had the pleasure of interacting with Glasgow’s Ahmadi community since the 2015 election. We paid tribute to former Members earlier, and it is right to pay tribute to the former Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West, Margaret Ferrier. Even since the 2017 election, she has continued to be a champion for the Ahmadi community, standing in solidarity with people, supporting their campaigns and attending their events. She contributed greatly to the all-party group on the Ahmadiyya Muslim community when she was in the House and, indeed, to similar debates in the Chamber.

Much as in the other communities that we have heard about, the community in Glasgow has responded incredibly. In spite of and in the face of violence and persecution, people respond, as the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said, with peace, love and tolerance. They are actively involved in their community,

which shows what a positive contribution can be made. They organise an annual fun run in Glasgow—the money often goes to the children’s hospital in Glasgow—as well as litter picks, and they make space in their mosque available for wider community events. They hold peace symposiums, many of which I have had the privilege of attending. Indeed, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, we are always guaranteed a memorable catering experience when we take part in them.

That experience stands in stark and welcome contrast to the violence and persecution that the community is experiencing, sadly, in the UK and around the world. As other Members have said, the phrase “Love for all, hatred for none” is not simply a slogan; it is a way of being, and a philosophy that permeates every aspect of the community’s life. It also reflects the golden rule in other religions, such as, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. Governments who seek to persecute minorities ought to reflect on that, especially if they themselves are doing so in the name of a religion, because there is not a single global religion that, in its purest form, condones or accepts the violence and persecution we are seeing.

Tolerance is absolutely key, and we must speak out because, as other Members have said, if we allow blasphemy laws, persecution or intolerance towards one set of minorities, the risk is that other minorities and indeed larger groups may be affected as well, with the risk of increasing persecution of others and growing intolerance of all kinds. That is what we must unite against, and that is what has been shown by today’s debate.

◦ **Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab)**

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). We have heard some excellent speeches and interventions in this very important debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), the chair of the all-party group on the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, for speaking so eloquently on behalf of the community in her constituency and for very skilfully taking us on a global tour and showing us the truly dreadful extent of the persecution suffered by Ahmadi Muslims worldwide.?

My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) highlighted in an intervention the hospitality offered by the Ahmadi Muslim community in Manchester following last year’s attack. The hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith), my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), among many others, recorded the contribution the Ahmadi Muslims make to our national life and their constituencies. Like many who spoke, they quoted “Love for all, hatred for none”. That is something we will all take away with us this afternoon.

My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) talked about the charitable endeavours of the charity Humanity First and again the contribution the Ahmadis make to our national life. My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) talked about the situation in Indonesia and quoted an incident of a mob attacking several homes and attempting to expel Ahmadis actually in the presence of police officers. The murder of the newsagent in Glasgow, Asad Shah, was highlighted by my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) and for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney), who both paid tribute to Mr Asad Shah and said we needed to do much to deal with the prejudice here in this country.

The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) and the hon. Member for Sutton and

Cheam (Paul Scully) highlighted the restrictions on Ahmadis even on using traditional greetings. The right hon. Gentleman also highlighted the problems of online hatred being spread on sites such as Facebook. My right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) talked about the contribution of Ahmadis in business, commerce and community affairs and asked that the authorities crack down on the discrimination in this country. The right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) made the important point that Pakistan uses the state and the law to persecute Ahmadis and highlighted the case of the three Ahmadi Muslims still on death row. The Minister knows that I have written to him about this case.

The right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) and the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) talked about the Ahmadi peace symposium held every year and the great work done by the Ahmadi people in bringing communities together. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), the chair of the all-party group on religion or belief, highlighted the important point that freedom of religious belief and thought must apply to those of all faiths and none.

The motion notes the rising tide of persecution of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, Algeria and other countries. It also notes the effect that hate preachers have on radicalising people internationally and in the UK and highlights the past activities of hate preacher Syed Muzaffar Shah Qadri, the Pakistani Muslim cleric who has been banned from preaching in Pakistan because his sermons are considered too incendiary. He is held responsible for radicalising Tanveer Ahmed, the murderer of Mr Asad Shah. As several Members have mentioned, Mr Shah was apparently targeted after messages he put out on social media, including an Easter greeting to Christians. That was highlighted by the right hon. Member for Putney and the hon. Member for Glasgow North. The right hon. Lady also brought attention to the excellent report from the International Human Rights Committee and the Asian Human Rights Committee entitled, “Ahmadis in Pakistan Face an Existential Threat”. I would recommend that excellent report to anybody here who has not read it.

The motion also calls on the Government to make representations to the Governments of Pakistan and Algeria on the persecution of Ahmadis and to make more stringent the entry clearance procedures to the UK for hate preachers by ensuring that entry clearance hubs and the Home Office have adequate numbers of Urdu speakers to monitor visa applications and online radicalisation.

As we have heard, Ahmadis believe they are Muslims, yet in 1974 the National Assembly of Pakistan declared them to be non-Muslims. This was done by passing the second amendment to the constitution of Pakistan, which declares Ahmadis to be non-Muslim despite their own belief and thought. Pakistan’s blasphemy laws remain a key area of concern. These legal provisions, which criminalise insults against Islam, are often misused to settle personal scores, and Ahmadis continue to face blasphemy allegations.

Ahmadis cannot defend themselves against charges of blasphemy without committing blasphemy and placing themselves in acute legal, physical and social jeopardy. Ahmadis who voice opposition to legislation making their religion a crime are considered traitors. The International Court of Justice has found systemic and widespread fair trial violations related particularly to Ahmadis accused of blasphemy.

Under Pakistan’s election law, Ahmadis are effectively denied the right to vote and are disenfranchised unless they declare themselves as non-Muslims, which effectively would mean giving up their faith. The Electoral Commission of Pakistan has decided that Ahmadis can be permitted to vote only under a



separate register and by self-identifying as a non-Muslim minority. This requirement to deny their faith to vote has caused their disenfranchisement from politics for more than 30 years, and worse still the separate Ahmadi electoral register is publicly available, making it much easier for extremists to target them.

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom identifies Pakistan as a country of particular concern. Its 2017 annual report states:

“Ahmadis are subject to severe legal restrictions and suffer from officially sanctioned discrimination. The second amendment declares Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. Penal Code Section 298 makes it criminal for Ahmadis to refer to themselves as Muslims, preach, propagate or disseminate materials on their faith, or refer to their houses of worship as mosques. They are also prohibited from voting. Ahmadis frequently face societal discrimination, harassment and physical attacks, sometimes resulting in murder.”

I want to mention here the discrimination faced by Ahmadi women, who live in a patriarchal society. As well as facing similar harassment to Ahmadi men, they can become socially isolated and face overt discrimination during routine activities, such as shopping or going to the market. Some shops display signs and banners that say they do not deal with “Qadianis”, the pejorative term used to refer to Ahmadi Muslims. The term originates from Qadian, a small town in northern India, which was the birthplace of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement.

Many Ahmadis leave Pakistan to seek refuge elsewhere and a safe haven where they can freely practise their religion and live a normal and peaceful life. As we have heard, many have fled to countries such as Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Thailand where they may end up in refugee camps or prisons and be denied access to health, education and work. Discrimination against Ahmadis is not confined to Pakistan, and my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden took us on a comprehensive global tour.

Human Rights Watch reports that in Algeria, where the Ahmadi minority amounts to around 2,000 people, about 280 people faced criminal trials in 2016 for denigrating tenets of the Islamic faith or taking part in “unauthorised association”. Algeria’s religious affairs Minister, Mohamed Aïssa, has made disparaging remarks about Ahmadis, stating that they are not Muslims and suggesting that the community is part of a wider Israeli conspiracy to destabilise the country.

In Indonesia, Ahmadis were declared “deviant” by that country’s top Islamic body in 2008. Ahmadi leaders have complained of intimidation since 2005 and say that their prayers and activities have been banned in many districts. In February 2011, 20 Ahmadis were attacked on the Java peninsula by about 1,500 radicals. Three members died and five were severely injured.

In Egypt, the Interior Minister has issued orders for the arrest of 25 innocent Ahmadi Muslim men and women. In Burundi, the secret service raided the Ahmadi mosque in Bujumbura, and arrested 13 children and youths who were attending a religious education class. Those children were arrested on alleged charges of terrorism.

Article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights enshrines the right to freedom of thought and religion. In their persecution of Ahmadi Muslims, countries such as Pakistan, Indonesia, Algeria, Egypt, Burundi and others are denying their citizens that universal right. Pakistan’s founder, Ali Jinnah, expressed a clear commitment to defending religious freedom when he said:

“You are free; you are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed.”

It is time for Pakistan to return to that vision and for the UK and our international partners to work more effectively and consistently to secure the rights of the Ahmadi community across the world. Although I appreciate that the more sensitive details may not be made public, we can and must clearly condemn the persecution of Ahmadi Muslims.

Will the Minister call on the Government of Pakistan to pay particular attention to the findings of the International Court of Justice and ensure that Pakistan’s judicial processes deliver fair trials for Ahmadis and other persecuted groups? Will he call on the Government of Pakistan to order the immediate release of all Ahmadis on death row and those held in prison? Will he urge the Government of Pakistan to repeal its anti-Ahmadi and blasphemy laws, which are the basis of the persecution of Ahmadi Muslims? Finally, will he call on all member states where Ahmadis are living in diaspora to ensure compliance with UN conventions and that the UNHCR completes its due process??

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field)

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for securing this important debate. I pay a heartfelt tribute to her work as chair of the all-party group for the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, and for all she has done to support the community in the UK and overseas. That gratitude extends to the contributions of other hon. Members, and I shall try to respond to the points raised. I notice that there is a bit of a south-London mafia in the House this afternoon, but I appreciate the good reason why that is the case. I have the misfortune of living just the other side of the river in my constituency, but in a previous life as shadow Minister for London before the 2005 election, I went out and saw the mosque, and was able to meet many leading members of the London Ahmadiyya community.

As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) pointed out, only two days ago I addressed the House in another debate about the persecution of Christians. On that occasion, Members from across the House gave horrifying accounts of the suffering of Christians in the middle east and in north and west Africa. Today, we have heard similarly appalling descriptions of the discrimination suffered by Ahmadi Muslims.

This has been a very heartfelt but calm debate. I hope that the world outside, in particular the countries mentioned today that clearly discriminate against Ahmadi populations, do not think that that calm does not underpin a certain amount of anger and our real sense of mission. The plight of the most peaceable of communities should be in all of our hearts. I hope we continue to work consistently and persistently on it.

Hon. Members have focused their concerns on events in Pakistan and Algeria in particular, but lest there is any complacency we must accept, as has been pointed out, that the UK is not immune from the scourge of religious intolerance. I take this opportunity on behalf of the Government to extend my personal condolences to the family of Asad Shah from Glasgow and to members of the Ahmadi Muslim community. When the Prime Minister was Home Secretary, I know that she wrote to representatives of that community to express the Government’s condolences and solidarity. We took the opportunity to meet representatives of the community to hear at first hand about the issues they face in their day-to-day lives.

I understand what the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) says. There is a great worry that in the world at large minorities are becoming increasingly undermined. We need to recognise that and stand up to it. The Government will continue to challenge extremism in our own community. We all know that our country is built on the values of democracy, respect and tolerance, but we were rightly reminded by the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) that we had our own blasphemy laws on the statute book. They were perhaps never going to be pursued, but none the less the fact that they were on the statute book until barely a decade ago reflects the significant change in our own society in the decades and centuries gone by.

I know I speak for everyone in the House when I say that we do not believe it is acceptable for any organisation or individual in this country to promote hatred or to condone violence, particularly on social media. I will come on to that in a moment or two. Where messages are posted in this country that incite hatred and murder, they should be reported to the police. Such activity is criminal and will not be tolerated.

The right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton made a point about legislation. This is under active review. He will know and appreciate, as we all do, that the balance between freedom of speech and ensuring safety is very delicate. We need to recognise that many global internet service providers are precisely that: global organisations. The internet itself, in a very positive way, is a global resource. We therefore need to ensure that we are able to work with other countries to try to secure global protocols. That will be a major challenge in the decades to come.

As I said on Tuesday, all religious persecution, in whatever form it manifests itself, is abhorrent and deplorable. Governments, religious groups and right-minded people must condemn such incidents wherever they occur and do everything they can to bring them to an end. That is why we will continue to work tirelessly to promote and defend the rights of people of all faiths and none all around the world, so they can practise their faith or belief without fear or discrimination. I tried to explain our approach to defending freedom of religion or belief internationally in some detail on Tuesday, so I will not rehearse the same points today.

I would like to address specific issues raised in the motion, which, if I may say, was extremely comprehensive, about the prosecution of Ahmadi Muslims overseas and on UK policy on counter-extremism. I will be travelling to Indonesia in August and I am very happy to ensure that the very specific points raised by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden are brought up in the context of that visit. I have visited, and will visit in the future, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Thailand. Specific concerns raised here will be brought up. The hon. Lady raised an issue about the Department for International Development and textbooks. I do not believe it is correct to say that we fund biased textbooks, but I will look into that and, if she will forgive me, will write to her in due course.

The hon. Lady also talked about entry clearance and the processes that we focus on, and I know that a number of Members had concerns about that. Ministers of religion and religious workers can come to the UK through one of two routes: either tier 2 as a minister of religion, for longer-term postings, or tier 5 as a religious worker, for temporary positions of up to two years. Those routes cover coming to preach, to carry out pastoral duties, to work as a missionary or to be part of a religious order, and other religious duties. Both visa routes sit under the points-based system and require a certificate of sponsorship from a licensed sponsor.

It is important that we look at context in this debate. In October 2013, in a relatively recent change—as recent as four and a half years ago, although we have to keep the situation under constant review, given the matters raised in this debate—the Government introduced a genuineness test to better identify those who may be trying to abuse either of those routes. The test applies to applications under the points-based system and is part of a wider policy of assessing the credibility of visa applicants.?

That is ultimately a Home Office—rather than a Foreign Office—matter, but we will try as far as possible to have as joined-up an approach as we can. However, I am concerned that the system is being played to a certain extent, and that there are people who may be on dark lists in their home countries—as people who would incite religious hatred—but who are able to come to this country through the rules that we have in place and utilise being based in the UK to preach against Ahmadis in particular. We will do all that we can, and the fact that we have had this debate is useful. This is perhaps something that my Home Office colleagues need to work on more closely, but I give my pledge to the hon. Lady, and indeed, to all Members here, that between us and the Home Office, we will try to ensure that these abuses do not continue.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) spoke about a number of issues that I will come on to in my speech. She mentioned having a special envoy on freedom of religion or belief. I think this matter is almost literally sitting on the desk at No. 10 Downing Street at the moment. This is something on which we have work in progress, and I think we would want to emulate the US model to which the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) referred.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) is a very close and long-standing friend, and I fear that it is in fact 19 years, rather than 18, since his selection as a candidate—I only know that because we are such good friends that we had a celebratory dinner with our wives, within a few days of that event. I will speak to the Home Office about issues related to domestic persecution—he is not here at the moment because he had another pressing meeting to go to, but I am sure that he will read *Hansard* avidly.

My hon. Friend touched on the issue of hate preachers, a subject that a number of others mentioned. The official line is that the Government take a robust stance against individuals whose presence in this country might not be conducive to the public good, but I recognise that there is now a much more deep-seated concern among the public that that test—rather a vague test as it is—is not necessarily capturing some people who really should not be in this country. I fear that part of the difficulty with such a test is that if there is a big hue and cry in the media, or on social media, we highlight particular individuals, and I suspect it is probably the case that the Ahmadi community, by its nature, is not organised on social media so is not able to start a big campaign to stop individuals coming into this country. We will need to look at cases on an individual basis—particularly those that are brought to our attention—but like many hon. Members, I am not convinced that we have got this absolutely right. We will need to tighten up and to try to have a more robust test to ensure that those who would do harm, who would wish to incite religious and other division, are not allowed into this country. Again, this is ultimately a Home Office-related matter and it would be wrong of me to be overly prescriptive at this stage.

The right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton referred to GSP Plus. He will know that the EU issues reports on this matter. The most recent report was produced in January this year, and made a number of recommendations to Pakistan, among other countries. Along with our European Union partners, we will



continue to press Pakistan in this regard.?

The right hon. Gentleman made some thoughtful comments. I think he recognised that this was not necessarily the place for immediate action. One of the difficulties of putting countries on to a blacklist, or taking them off a blacklist, is that it becomes difficult to move away from inertia and to have a list of priorities. There can be dangers in going down that route. I think it is important for us to work with international partners, whether in the EU or, in the time to come, in the broader international community. However, the right hon. Gentleman has made a fair point, and I will take this opportunity to revisit precisely where we were with GSP Plus.

When he was a Minister, the right hon. Gentleman rightly spoke up at a time when the Sri Lankan Government were making international commitments, too many of which had not been fully and properly adhered to. He will recognise that there is also a need and desire at all times to bring countries within the international community so that we can try to work together. Trade and commerce constitute one aspect of that. It must not be an overriding aspect, but it has a part to play in bringing countries back into the international community. These are complex issues, and I shall be happy to take them up with the right hon. Gentleman directly. I should be interested to learn more about his own experience in this regard, especially given that—as he is well aware—Sri Lanka is another country for which I have responsibility in the Foreign Office.

We are aware of a number of reports of Ahmadi Muslims being arrested in Algeria. The Government in Algiers have said that the arrests relate to breaches of law applicable to all religions. However, it is also the case that, while the Algerian constitution provides for freedom of religion, it is not always compatible with domestic law. We will continue to raise our concerns with the Government of Algeria, and urge them to rectify the anomaly and to respect the right of freedom of religion or belief. Last October my colleague the human rights Minister, Lord Ahmad—himself an Ahmadi Muslim, and a man of deep faith—discussed the plight of the Ahmadiyya with the Algerian Minister for Religious Affairs, and our ambassador also raised the issue with him at the beginning of this year.

I should point out that we also have grave concerns about the treatment of the Christian Protestant community in Algeria. We know that, for example, a number of churches have been closed. We have raised that at various levels with the Algerian Government, and our embassy keeps in close contact with the Protestant Church there. Our ambassador met representatives of the Church as recently as last month.

Many Members rightly raised the issue of Pakistan. The debate is particularly timely, in that—as has already been pointed out—it has taken place the day after a brutal mob attack on an historic 100-year-old mosque in the Punjab. We strongly condemn the continuing attacks on a peaceful community. The mob attack serves as an unwelcome reminder of the seriousness of the issue, and I tweeted my condemnation of it earlier today.

Let me say a little about our relationship with Pakistan. We have a tremendous high commissioner there, Tom Drew. He and his team do a great deal of challenging work in relation to counter-terrorism and a huge number of consular issues. The Department for International Development has its biggest single programme there, and efforts are being made to work with British Pakistanis to develop trade connections for the future. It all involves a huge amount of work, but that is not in any way to downgrade the work that we do in standing up for the Ahmadi community. I will take the opportunity to ensure that we raise

that issue more extensively. I have been to Pakistan once in my present post, and I shall be going again later in the year.

I feel, to an extent, that we are not doing enough, but I hope the House will recognise that we are not ignoring the plight of people who are deprived of freedom of religious belief. There is a huge agenda, not least given the importance of Pakistan as a neighbour of Afghanistan, its relationship with China, and the sense in which the United Kingdom is a trusted partner at a time of uncertainty in that part of the globe. I accept that we may need to do a little more, and that we may do more publicly. That was raised by a number of Members today. I did not wish to suggest that because we tend to deal with these issues privately and quietly—and we do, very persistently, with all of our counterparts—there is no opportunity to go a little more public on them, and I will do my level best to achieve that.

◦ **Jim Shannon**

Sometimes in Pakistan and across the world we speak to people at high levels of Government responsibility, but the problem is getting that down to the lower levels from where it branches out. How do we do that, because if we get that done, we can address many of the issues?

◦ **Mark Field**

The hon. Gentleman is right. We do get the highest levels of access to political leaders, and Pakistan is now in a pre-election period which is a time of particular vulnerability for many minorities, and we have touched on that. It is entirely unacceptable that the Ahmadi, for example, are electorally disenfranchised. However we also work at state level, and in my visits going out to Mardan, for instance—I will be heading out to Karachi and Lahore in due course—I try to speak to senior state officials. Pakistan is a large country with over 210 million citizens and many of the states are as populous as parts of the United Kingdom.

We have raised, and will continue to raise, with the Pakistan Ministry of Human Rights the issue of the protection of minority religious communities. I have also done so in writing to the Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif, and my ministerial colleague Lord Ahmad raised this issue as recently as February with the Pakistan Minister of Interior.

The Ahmadi community are prevented by the terms of the Pakistan constitution and penal code not just from practising their religion freely, but from being electorally franchised or indeed, dare I say it, from really being full members of the Pakistani community. That is unacceptable; we state that here and now and will continue to state it in our conversations with our Pakistani counterparts.

Followers of other religions, including Christians and Shi'a Muslims, also suffer persecution, and at the UN last November the UK pressed Pakistan to strengthen the protection of minorities. We also urged it to explain the steps being taken to tackle the abuse of blasphemy and anti-terror laws, which leads to attacks against members of religious minorities. Algeria and Pakistan are not the only countries where this persecution takes place. In Bangladesh, regrettably, the authorities have often failed to protect minority religious groups. *[Interruption.]*

I am being told by the Whips that my time is almost upon me. I have tried to address many of the issues raised in the debate and, if I may, I will say a few brief words about some of the issues raised on our



counter-extremism work. Ultimately, that is a Home Office responsibility, but it is also an important aspect that we deal with. The Government remain committed to tackling extremism in all its forms, violent and non-violent, Islamist and extreme far-right and extreme far-left. The threat from extremist influences continues to grow, and we are responding with a joined-up, cross-Government approach.

We have also established a new Commission for Countering Extremism, with Sara Khan as the first lead commissioner. She will provide support and advice to UK civil society, to help it identify and challenge all forms of extremism. While this currently has a domestic focus, it also recognises that extremism needs to be tackled at source, which on many occasions can be traced to what happens overseas. Incidents of religious persecution in Pakistan have a tangible impact on community relations in the UK, and we are working hard to reduce the risk of extremist influences being projected into our own communities.

There is so much more that I would like to say, but I recognise that we need to move on to other business. I have touched on social media and on what needs to happen and on entry clearance, but let me conclude by saying the following. The Foreign Office will continue to promote freedom of religion or belief right across the globe. We also intend to protect our communities here in the UK from the scourge of extremism by working with partners at home and abroad to counter extremist propaganda, by working with global internet service providers and other social media to close down the space from which some of this terrible divisive material can be disseminated, and by using every other means at our disposal to exclude from this country those who would do us harm.

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and all Members of the House for what has been a very worthwhile debate today.

• **Siobhain McDonagh**

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing us the time to debate this issue. I also thank the eight Back-Bench MPs, mainly from south-west London—the best place in the world to live—who made speeches and everyone who made interventions. I appreciate that this is a difficult day as we go into recess, so I am grateful to the shadow Minister my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), the Minister, and the Scottish National party spokesperson the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) for being here.

None of us should underestimate the power and importance to the Ahmadi community of a debate of this sort taking place in the British Parliament, on the Floor of this Chamber. It means that they are recognised and heard—and they desperately need to be heard.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes with concern the rising tide of persecution of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, Algeria and other countries around the world; further notes the effect that hate preachers have on radicalising people internationally and in the UK, through the media, social media and otherwise; notes with concern the past activities of hate preacher, Syed Muzaffar Shah Qadri, who radicalised Tanveer Ahmed, who in turn murdered Mr Asad Shah in Glasgow in March 2016; calls on the Government to make



representations to the Governments of Pakistan and Algeria on the persecution of Ahmadis; and further calls on the Government to make more stringent the entry clearance procedures to the UK for hate preachers by ensuring that entry clearance hubs and the Home Office have adequate numbers of Urdu speakers to monitor visa applications and online radicalisation.

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