

National Peace Symposium 2024



BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE PEACE

The keynote address entitled:

'The Critical State of the World – What is the Blueprint for Peace?'

was delivered on 9 March 2024 by the Worldwide Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad.



An Overview of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is the most dynamic denomination of Islam in modern history, with an estimated membership in the tens of millions spread across 212 countries. It was established in 1889 by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (peace be upon him, photo above)(1835-1908) in a small and remote village called Qadian in Punjab, India. He claimed to be the expected reformer of the latter days and the awaited one of the world community of religions (the Mahdi and Messiah of the latter days). The community he started is an embodiment of the benevolent message of Islam in its pristine purity that promotes peace and universal brotherhood based on a belief in the Gracious and Ever-Merciful God. With this conviction, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has expanded globally and it serves mankind by raising millions of pounds every year for charities, building schools and hospitals open to all, providing energy to remote villages, encouraging learning through interfaith dialogue and by providing food and water to those in need across the world.

The UK chapter of the community was established in 1913 and in 1924 it built London's first purpose-built mosque (in Southfields), that became a Grade II listed building in 2018 in recognition of its historical significance to the UK. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is, therefore, one of the oldest and most established Muslim communities in Britain and it now has 147 branches. In 2003 it opened, in London, the Baitul Futuh Mosque, the largest mosque in Western Europe, and the landmark building serves as the headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the UK.



His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad: *A Man of Peace*

His Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (may Allah be his Helper) was elected as the fifth Khalifa (Caliph) of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in 2003. His Holiness inspires his community to serve humanity with the spirit of kindness and humility that is integral to Islam. In accordance with the teachings of Islam he upholds the honour of all prophets of God and highlights the role of religion in the promotion of peace. His Holiness has delivered addresses at the House of Commons, Capitol Hill, the Canadian Parliament and the European Parliament and also written to world leaders urging them to inculcate absolute justice and peace in international relations, to avoid regional conflicts from engulfing the entire world.

“...the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, based on the teachings of Islam, continues, and will always continue, to strive earnestly in the cause of peace and champion the rights of those who are powerless and are the victims of injustice. We will, God willing, constantly endeavour to use whatever means we have to influence those within our reach, be they politicians, policymakers, intellectuals, and others, towards establishing peace in the world.” (*National Peace Symposium, 2024*)

National Peace Symposium 2024



On 9 March 2024, the Worldwide Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, the Fifth Khalifa (Caliph), His Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (may Allah be his Helper) delivered the keynote address at the 18th National Peace Symposium hosted by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK at the Baitul Futuh Mosque in London.

The event was attended by more than 1,200 people including 550 dignitaries and guests who had gathered from 30 countries, comprising Ministers, Ambassadors of State, and Members of Parliament. The event was broadcast live globally via the satellite television channel MTA International.

THE CRITICAL STATE OF THE WORLD – What is the Blueprint for Peace?

Official transcript of Keynote Address by Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (may Allah be his Helper), Worldwide Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, from the Baitul Futuh Mosque, London, at National Peace Symposium UK, 2024.

Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (*may Allah be his Helper*), Worldwide Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, said:

'Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem – in the name of Allah, the Gracious, Ever Merciful.

All distinguished guests, *Assalamo Alaikum Wa Rahmatullahe Wa Barakatuhu* – peace and blessings of Allah be upon you all.

Today, once again, we have gathered together for this event hosted by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community to discuss and reflect upon how we can bridge division in society and establish genuine peace in the world.

Over Two Decades of Warning

For over two decades, I've urged governments, politicians, and all people to play their roles in ensuring social cohesion of our individual societies and the wider peace and harmony of the world. I have expressed my views on how we can bring an end to all forms of warfare, whether conflicts fought falsely in the name of religion or those which are overtly geopolitical. I have not only spoken of the pressing need to end wars between nations, but also to tackle the frustrations that exist locally within communities and to strive for peace in those nations where civil wars or internal disputes arise. Certainly, history teaches us that internal conflicts can spiral into regional wars, often fueled by the interference and influence of external powers and ferment instability and division in other countries to serve their interests.

In recent decades, we have witnessed the devastating consequences of such interference in countries such

as Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, and Sudan. Above all, I have repeatedly warned that the unjust policies of the major powers and unfair political, legal and economic systems that have prevailed in much of the world are triggering an ever-rising tide of inequality, which in turn is fueling global instability and insecurity.

Over the years, politicians, intellectuals, or members of the public have invariably agreed with my assertion that we must strive for peace. However, many also expressed their opinion, either directly or indirectly, that I was wrong to believe that existing conflicts could conceivably escalate into a global war and even trigger the use of nuclear weapons. Many considered this to be unnecessarily pessimistic. For a long time, even those intimately engaged in world affairs, such as politicians, foreign policy journalists, or analysts, did not agree with me, either due to their idealism and desire to look at the world through rose-tinted glasses or perhaps due to an incapability to learn lessons from history. They seemingly ignored the widening cracks that have been opening up in recent decades in international relations. Perhaps they simply did not wish to accept the reality of what was staring them in the face. As they say, ignorance is bliss.

Yet, today, as wars rage here in Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere, many of the same people are now raising the alarm, warning of global war in which nuclear weapons could be used to wreak unimaginable devastation on the world. Despite this realisation, many still seem unwilling to consider what must be done to end these conflicts and remain reluctant to hear the genuine voices for peace that exist in the world.

Given this, as I thought about today's event, I wondered whether there was any point in us gathering here again. What benefit was there for us to speak about peace and justice if those with the power and ability to influence change were determined not to hear us? The stark reality is that even those institutions founded with the primary objective of maintaining the peace and security of the world are becoming increasingly irrelevant.

The Crippling Effects of Veto Power in the United Nations

For example, the United Nations has become a weak and almost powerless body where a few dominant nations wield all the power and easily override the views of the majority. Instead of deciding each issue based on its facts and merits, nations have formed alliances and vote according to their self interests. Ultimately, critical decisions are made by a few privileged nations in whose hands rests the veto power. Instead of faithfully serving the cause of peace and justice, they wield their veto like a trump card wherever their narrow interests are threatened, irrespective of whether their decision shatters the peace and prosperity of other nations and leads to the death and destruction of scores of innocent people. Let it be clear, therefore, that where a veto power exists, the scales of justice can never be balanced.

Nonetheless, despite these reservations, I realised that I must use this opportunity to speak, because Islam teaches Muslims never to waver in the pursuit of peace. It teaches us to speak the truth so that when held accountable before Allah the Almighty, a believer can truthfully claim to have tried his utmost to save His creation from destruction.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Strives for Peace and Justice

Furthermore, the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has stated that the greatest form of *jihad* – a term that is consistently misunderstood and misrepresented – is to speak truthfully and courageously before one's leaders, especially those who are hard-hearted, unjust, and cruel. Certainly, if weaker nations or individuals, like myself, who have no political affiliation try to speak up, it is rarely appreciated, and those who do can face difficulties or risk sanctions.

Despite this, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, based on the teachings of Islam, continues, and will always continue, to strive earnestly in the cause of peace and champion the rights of those who are powerless and are the victims of injustice. We will, God willing, constantly endeavour to use whatever means we have to influence those within our reach, be they politicians, policymakers, intellectuals, and others, towards establishing peace in the world. Indeed, some of you may well be aware of the consistent efforts our community is making to foster peace and to alleviate the suffering of those who are in grave physical or emotional distress.

All Major Religions Promote Peace

And so, after these introductory words, I now wish to offer my thoughts on how to establish peace in the world. As far as religion is concerned, none of the founders of the major religions, whether the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him), Prophet Moses (peace be upon him), or any other prophets of God, nor the founder of Islam, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) ever taught their followers to disregard the peace of society and to resort to injustice or aggression. While it is true that in certain extreme circumstances, they permitted the use of limited force, it was always exerted solely with the intention of ending warfare and oppression.

As for Islam, it literally means peace, and every aspect of its teachings reflects this name. For instance, in chapter 42, verse 41 of the Holy Qur'an, Allah the Almighty commands that where a person or nation has been wronged, they must never respond disproportionately or stray into the realm of seeking revenge. Furthermore, Allah says that it is better to forgive if it can lead to reformation. Chapter 49, verse 10 of the Holy Qur'an, says that if two nations are at war, neutral parties should mediate between them and strive to establish peace based on the principles of justice and equity. If having reconciled, one party violates the terms of the agreement and again resorts to warfare, other nations should forcefully unite against the aggressor until it desists from its aggressive conduct. Once it stops, the other nations must also cease using force.



“Let it be clear, therefore, that where a veto power exists, the scales of justice can never be balanced.”

Building Sustainable Peace is Underpinned by Justice

The objective should always remain to build sustainable peace underpinned by justice. It should not be that a third party takes advantage of the vulnerability of the warring parties by usurping their rights for his own benefit. If this principle were observed at the United Nations and other relevant bodies, conflicts would be resolved far more amicably and swiftly. However, it will prove impossible for true peace to emerge so long as nations, either directly or through their powerful allies, can utilise a veto power. Regrettably, due to its inherent lack of justice, the fate of the United Nations seems set to mirror that of its failed predecessor, the League of Nations. And if the system of international law, weak as it may be, completely collapses, the resulting anarchy and destruction is beyond our comprehension.

Whilst there are a myriad of conflicts taking place in the world, the most pressing and dangerous are those taking place between Israel and Hamas and the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. Some people may believe or may have been conditioned to think that the conflict between Israel and Palestine is

a religious war. However, in reality, it is a geopolitical and territorial conflict. As for the war in Ukraine, it is very evidently a geopolitical war being fought for territorial reasons. I firmly believe there is only one way to end these wars: by ensuring that justice prevails and that whatever settlements are made are based on equity as opposed to what better serves the interests of external powers. Otherwise, there’s no benefit to the United Nations or international laws, and the only rule that shall hold weight will be the one that declares “might is right.”

In terms of the Ukraine war, Russia has veto power at the UN Security Council, whilst, in effect, Ukraine also has one by virtue of its alliance with those Western nations who have permanent membership of the Security Council. How can a settlement be agreed if both sides can effectively wield a veto? Why would either party be motivated to move even an inch if they know they can veto any deal not weighted entirely in their favour?

As for what is happening in Gaza, though both the Israelis and the Palestinians have their supporters, the veto power has only been used in Israel’s favour since



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the current war ignited several months ago. For example, in February, 13 out of 15 members of the UN Security Council voted in favour of an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, but the United States utilised its veto power and the resolution was defeated. How can peace be established when the majority view is so easily discarded? That is not justice, instead, it is a rejection of democracy and the principle of equality.

Islam’s Teachings Emphasise Superlative Justice

Contrary to these man-made laws, Islam’s teachings emphasise justice to such a degree that chapter 5, verse 9 of the Holy Qur’an states that the enmity of any nation or people must never incite one to deviate from the path of justice and fairness. Manifesting such integrity is nearer to righteousness. Even non-religious people will surely recognise the wisdom and

benefit of adopting this preeminent standard of justice.

At the same time, you may wonder why, if Islam’s teachings are as I am describing, it is often alleged that Islam is an extremist religion. Indeed, this debate has come to the surface again in recent days due to inflammatory and misguided comments by certain politicians. In this regard, it should be categorically clear that the wars and battles fought by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his Rightly Guided Successors were entirely defensive. The Holy Qur’an permitted the Muslims to fight back only as a last resort after they had been mercilessly attacked by the opponents of Islam and been the victims of years of sustained persecution. This permission is enshrined in chapter



22, verse 40 of the Holy Qur'an, which states that those upon whom war is forced unjustly have a right to defend themselves because they have been wronged and are the victims of oppression and persecution.

Moreover, the Holy Qur'an clarifies that permission to fight back was granted not just to defend Islam, but to defend all religions and to enshrine the principles of freedom of conscience and freedom of belief. Thus, in the subsequent verse, Allah the Almighty states that if He did not stop those who transgressed by means of others, then churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and all other places of worship where the name of God is oft-recited would be destroyed. Hence, Muslims are commanded to defend and protect all religions and places of worship rather than cause them any harm.

Islam's Rules of Warfare are a Lesson for the Modern World

Furthermore, wherever the conditions for defensive wars were met, the Muslim armies were governed by stringent rules of engagement given by the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Firstly, he stated that wars must never be fought to fulfil personal or vested interests, to conquer

lands, or to establish supremacy over others. Rather, Muslims are only permitted to fight if war is waged upon them. In the event of war, other nations should unite to stop the aggressor. Once the aggressor ceases to use force, the other nations should immediately end the war and seek to establish lasting peace. In addition, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) strictly forbade targeting civilians, something all too common in the wars being fought in the modern world. Further, he instructed Muslims to ensure the scope of the war remained as limited as possible. All forms of escalation or expansion of the war, both in terms of territory and means, were to be avoided.

Islam also teaches that unless one's opponent uses a place of worship as a military base, it is not permissible to violate the sanctity of a place of worship by fighting within it or even near it. It is strictly forbidden to knock down or desecrate the places of worship of your opponents. Further, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forbade the previously common practice of mutilating the bodies of enemy soldiers and instructed that their bodies were to be treated with care and respect. He also taught that no form of deception was permitted in warfare. As already



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outlined, women, children, the elderly, and other innocent civilians were never to be targeted. Similarly, priests, rabbis, or other religious leaders were not to be harmed or prevented from carrying out their religious duties.

The Holy Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also prohibited Muslim soldiers from inflicting any form of terror or fear amongst the general public during wars. Indeed, all non-combatants and civilians were to be treated kindly, and no injustice was to be perpetrated against them. Furthermore, he instructed that Muslim armies should not make bases or camps in towns or areas where they would cause anxiety or discomfort to ordinary civilians. He stated that during battle, soldiers should not strike their opponents in the face and should cause them the least possible harm and distress. If prisoners of war were caught, they were not to be separated from their relatives if they, too, were imprisoned. Additionally, every effort was to be made to make prisoners of war comfortable, to the extent that their comfort and needs were to be prioritised

over those of the captor. If a Muslim was guilty of any form of cruelty or harshness towards a prisoner of war, they were to release him immediately to make amends.

Another instruction of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was that the representatives or emissaries of other nations should be held in high esteem, and any mistakes or discourtesies on their part ought to be ignored in the interest of peace and harmony.

And so these are the basic Islamic rules of war, and the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said that if a Muslim violated these principles, it demonstrated that they were not fighting for justice; instead, they were fighting to inflict cruelty and out of self-interest. Without a doubt, every Muslim nation and government must abide by these Islamic teachings. Setting aside religion, I also believe if non-Muslim nations adopted these principles, then even if wars occurred, they would not lead to such deep-rooted enmities forming that remain embedded

“Political leaders and those who have access to policymakers must take a long-term view of what is in the best interest of mankind rather than being blinded by a selfish desire to assert their superiority over others. We must all come together, setting aside national, political, and other vested interests for the greater good of humanity and to ensure that we leave behind a prosperous world for our future generations. It is the need of the time that we must focus all our energies and efforts on establishing true peace so that we may live in a world of hope and prosperity rather than a world defined by inequality, hatred, and bloodshed.”

generation after generation. So, all nations involved in warfare, be they Western nations, those who harbour enmity for the Islamic world, or Muslim countries, should recognise that peace can only be established if they act upon these principles of warfare and conflict resolution. Otherwise, we lie at the precipice of a catastrophic global world war that will undoubtedly lead to such immense levels of destruction and carnage that lie far beyond our imagination.

Realisations of Western Academics

As I said earlier, many people are now reaching the same conclusion. For example, Professor Jeffrey Sachs, a highly respected economist from Columbia University, writes, “The world is on the edge of nuclear catastrophe, in no small part because of the failure of Western political leaders to be forthright about the causes of the escalating global conflicts.” He continues, “The relentless Western narrative that the West is noble, while Russia and China are evil is simple-minded and extraordinarily dangerous. It is an attempt to manipulate public opinion not to deal with very real and pressing diplomacy.” Professor Sachs continues, “Above all, at this time of extreme danger, European leaders should pursue the true source of European security: not US hegemony, but European security arrangements that respect the legitimate security interests of all European nations, certainly, including Ukraine, but also including Russia, which

continues to resist NATO enlargements into the Black Sea. At this stage, diplomacy, not military escalation, is the true path to European and global security.”^[1]

Furthermore, much has been written or spoken about the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas and the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza that worsens by the day. For example, during a recent interview, US Senator Bernie Sanders, who himself is Jewish, strongly condemned the actions of the Israeli government. He said, “What Netanyahu and his right-wing government are doing right now to the people of Palestine, of Gaza, is indescribable and unspeakable. I mean, we are looking at 25-26 thousand people who have been killed already (this was the figure when he [was] interviewed, now this figure has gone beyond this number), two-thirds of whom are women and children. 65,000 people have been wounded. We are looking at 70% of the housing units in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed. You are looking at 1.8 million people pushed out of their homes, God knows where they are going.” Senator Sanders continued by saying, “Right now, and I hope everybody hears this, you are looking at the possibility of hundreds of thousands of children starving to death, and we in the United States, through our financial support of Israel, are complicit in what is happening and I will be damned if I am going to give another nickel to the Netanyahu government in order to continue this war against the Palestinian people.”^[2]

Asked if and how a settlement could be reached in the Middle East, Senator Sanders said, “The history of the region is terrible. It deals with the Holocaust, 6 million Jews, it deals with the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes, but at the end of the day, the Palestinian people are entitled to a homeland of their own. So, we are talking about a two-state solution.”

In addition to the two people I have quoted, many other commentators are now reaching the same conclusion about the critical state of the world I have long warned of. I take no satisfaction in this; rather, with all my heart I hope and pray that before it is too late, the world comes to its senses and brings an end to the brutalities and wars taking place in the world. Certainly, it is my opinion that there should be a full ceasefire between Israel and Hamas or Palestine, and also in the war between Russia and Ukraine. Thereafter, instead of inciting their respective allies towards further warfare, all members of the international community should prioritise ensuring relief efforts are stepped up to help those in desperate need and focus on bringing about a lasting and peaceful settlement. If, instead, we stand by and let these wars escalate further, countless more innocent lives will be lost, and surely, history will judge us with contempt as the author of our own destruction and misery.

Saving Our Future Generations

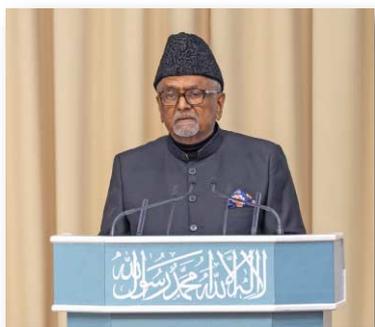
And so, in conclusion, if we wish to save our future generations from being born with the ill effects of radiation caused by nuclear warfare, and desire to save them from deprivation and desperation and if we wish to save ourselves from their curses and laments, we must act with urgency and wisdom. Political leaders and those who have access to policymakers must take a long-term view of what is in the best interest of mankind rather than being blinded by a selfish desire to assert their superiority over others. We must all come together, setting aside national, political, and other vested interests for the greater good of humanity and to ensure that we leave behind a prosperous world for our future generations. It is the need of the time that we must focus all our energies and efforts on establishing true peace so that we may live in a world of hope and prosperity rather than a world defined by inequality, hatred, and bloodshed.

With these words, I sincerely thank all of our guests for joining us this evening and listening to what I had to say. I apologise for speaking at length, but I felt it necessary to do so, given the precarious state of the world. Thank you, and once again, I express my sincere appreciation to you all. Thank you very much.’

ENDNOTES

1. <https://www.jeffsachs.org/newspaper-articles/h29g9k7l7fymxp39yhzwxc5f72ancr>
2. <https://twitter.com/BernieSanders/status/1754921738880593967?lang=en>

Introduction and Extracts of Guest Speeches



RAFIQ HAYAT –

National President of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK

I'm delighted to welcome you to the 18th National Peace Symposium of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK. As you will no doubt be aware that this event is being held at a time of great significance due to the raging conflicts around the world.

Last year's event was held as the Russia-Ukraine War was raging, and sadly, not only is that still the case, but also it has been added to by the horrific situation in Israel and Palestine. The horrific acts of 7th October have been compounded by the onslaught on the people of Gaza.

The conflict has seen nearly 30,000 people killed, mostly women and children. And we are witnessing unbearable scenes on our screens of innocent children been killed by the bombing. I don't think any of us are unaffected by such horrific scenes, and this has been made all the more worse with the tragic suffering due to the lack of aid reaching those in need.

The response of the international community has seen immense support for the victims of war. But such sympathy has been sorely lacking from our political leadership, almost as if there was no genuine desire to end the conflict.

We must stop the suffering and have an immediate ceasefire so that the killing stops, hostages are released, and people can get food, water and medicine to give them a chance of survival.

His Holiness has repeatedly warned for the past two decades, that there's growing risk of national and regional conflicts, spreading and engulfing the entire world in a devastating nuclear conflict. We have

unfortunately witnessed the risk growing ever more acute, and talk of a third world war is sadly now commonplace.

It is now more than ever, that the world needs principled leadership for global peace, and the event today focuses on that, to seek how we can build a sustainable peace so that it is not just for today but for the future, too.

In this regard, we're deeply honoured that His Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, May Allah be his Helper, the fifth Caliph and the worldwide head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is with us this evening. He has consistently raised his voice for peace in Parliaments across the world, including the UK, EU, Capitol Hill, and in Holland, New Zealand, as well as numerous other fora.

His Holiness is a champion for the cause of peace, and works tirelessly for this objective, and for the sake of humanity, I think we can all agree, that these times they can be no greater objective.

So I again, thank you all for being with us today. And I pray that in our discourse today, we can revitalise our commitment to peace at all levels and become a true family that respects each other, helps each other and works together for the cause of peace.

Thank you very much.



DAME SIOBHAIN MCDONAGH MP

Member of Parliament for Mitcham and Morden, and Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

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It’s a privilege to be with the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community this evening. I’m honoured to be around so many friends, community leaders and most importantly, that His Holiness is able to deliver the keynote speech.

The theme for tonight’s event is ‘Building a Sustainable Peace’, and we all know that there is only one place to start. And it is with pain and sadness. The pain and sadness of war that has been going on for far too long. It is now 154 days since the appalling war began. And since that day, the killing has gone on. Flattened cities and refugee camps and hostages in chains.

I’m sure you are with me and saying that not a day has gone by without being horrified by the images of war in Gaza. My thoughts are squarely with everyone who is suffering at this very moment.

Gaza's hospitals have been devastated and victims who survived the bombings now face a complete lack of medical facilities. Disease and hunger are rife, with very little aid being allowed to reach those in desperate need.

Before the crisis about 500 trucks a day were getting in, and today the figure is less than 95. The destruction of at least 16 cemeteries add further to the horrors of the attacks in Gaza. With all of the destruction happening before our eyes, on TV and on our phone screens, there has never been a more important time to come together to express our common desire for the fighting to stop.

I know that as a national politician, I have a duty to be part of the call for peace. Let me be clear, the Labour Party is calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. And when that ceasefire comes, we do not want to see the fighting restart. I'm

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no expert in foreign policy, and I'm certainly not the Foreign Secretary, but I can join with everyone here today in saying that we want the agony and the fighting to stop. And what better place to make that plea.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has been at the forefront of calling for peace since the very start of the conflict. It is His Holiness who urged all world powers to de-escalate and work towards a lasting, peaceful solution. I know that a ‘Prayers for Peace’ event was hosted bringing communities together to stand in solidarity with victims of the conflict.

With a war that seems like it will never end in Gaza, the tensions have simmered over into the UK. According to statistics, there has been more than a 600% rise in Islamophobic incidents in the UK, including both verbal and physical abuse, as well as vandalism. Sadly, many people here today will have experienced this. At a time when anti-Muslim hatred is on the rise, I find myself becoming more and more thankful for the work of the Ahmadi Muslims, building trust and cohesion in our communities.

We all have a focus on resolving the bigger issues, but we have a group here that is holding communities together and building resilience at home.

The unique motto of ‘Love for all, hatred for none’ has never been more important.

I want to finish by saying that I am not an expert in Middle Eastern politics, but I have seen another conflict closer to home that I thought would never end. I saw over many decades in Northern Ireland, that a ceasefire is not the final destination, but a step

on the road to a lasting peace, one that requires hard negotiation, and a road roadmap for political process.

There is no way out of the crisis, without the hope that both Palestinians and Israelis have a path to security, justice, and an opportunity in lands that they can call their own. Hamas and Israeli hardliners want to bury a two state solution, and we need to show that we will not let that happen.

Thank you.



JONATHAN LORD MP

Member of Parliament for Woking, and Vice-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

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Your Holiness, Mr President, distinguished guests, Assalamo Alaikum.

On behalf of the residents and communities of Woking and of Surrey, and on behalf of the Conservative Party, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to you on the occasion of the 18th Peace Symposium at this, Western Europe's largest and most impressive mosque.

Your commitment to promoting peace, justice, and tolerance across the world is truly commendable. With the recent rise in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, I want to extend my heartfelt support and solidarity to you during these very challenging times. It also pains me to know that your community continues to face persecution in Pakistan and around the world.

In the face of such uncertainties in the international situation, Your Holiness and your community have been true beacons of peace, reminding us of the values that should unite us all. The shared belief in freedom, the right to choose and the freedom to worship.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's motto of ‘Love for all, Hatred for none’ is truly wonderful, and more needed at this time than at many times in the recent past, and it should resonate with people of all faiths, all religions, and those of none.

So my very best wishes go out to all of you participating at this peace conference. May it be a moment of strength and of unity, reinforcing the importance of peace and love in our world. Thank you.

“Your Holiness and your community have been true beacons of peace, reminding us of the values that should unite us all.”



RT HON SIR EDWARD DAVEY MP

Leader of the Liberal Democrats, and Vice-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

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Assalamo Alaikum.

Like many of you, I've had the privilege and honour to attend many other peace symposiums here at the mosque and to listen to His Holiness and to work with the Ahmadiyya Community for peace. That has never been as important as it is this year.

We see war in conflicts across the world, in Sudan, in Yemen and of course, in Ukraine and in the Middle East in Gaza. And we need to redouble our efforts for our country to play its role and bring an end to these wars and to these conflicts. And that's why we're looking forward to the keynote speech of His Holiness tonight.

When it comes to what's happening in Ukraine, it is with fear and foreboding that we approach the next few weeks and months, as the prospect of a further Russian assault on East Ukraine becomes ever more likely.

But of course, all our thoughts in recent months have been with what's been happening in Israel and Gaza and what we are seeing daily on our television screens. And our hearts and minds go out to the people who are suffering from the bombs, the bullets and have little or no food or medicine or even water. We must hold them in our hearts tonight.

I've actually just come back from a visit to Israel and Palestine. I wasn't able to go to Gaza, of course, but I saw the trauma. The trauma of both peoples. I met an Israeli father in Tel Aviv. He told me about his two grown up sons held hostage by Hamas. And the suffering he's endured every single minute since they were taken. And I met Palestinians seeing the settler violence that's growing on the West Bank, in addition to the violence in Gaza, and the horror that

“We have to follow the Ahmadi Muslim message of ‘Love for all, hatred for none.’ As we listen to His Holiness later, let us commit ourselves to all play our part in that.”

many Palestinian communities are seeing with that violence having got worse, while people's attention is elsewhere.

I want to tell you a story of going to a hospital, a Palestinian Hospital in East Jerusalem, to a special ward where three little girls, triplets, had been born a few months previously. As I held one of these little girls, I was told by the nurse that the mother had been allowed from Gaza to give birth to her children, and then being forced to go back straight away to Gaza. And not being given permission to come back to be with her three babies.

The horror of children being killed, of men and women being killed, of course is beyond description, but just thinking of the trauma of those children not being able to be with their mother – human stories that should touch our hearts and force us to redouble our efforts.

It's why I and the Liberal Democrats have called for immediate bilateral ceasefire for months now. We need that ceasefire, so that killing can stop, so the aid

can get in, so the hostages can be released, so we can start a peace process that gets to the two-state solution, that could be offered, so both Palestinians and Israelis could live side-by-side in peace and Palestinian-Israeli children could grow up together in peace. We have to commit ourselves more than ever, to strive for that.

And I'm looking forward to His Holiness's speech to talk about what's happening and how we can play our role, all of us play our role. I'm sure he will, talk about how we need to commit ourselves to peace in the years ahead, because of the huge dangers there are in this world. And the dangers come from us accepting division, not standing up to extremism and not standing up to hatred. And we have to tackle that here at home, so we are empowered for that peace.

There is too much division, sown by too many people. The rise of anti-semitism since 7th October, the rise of Islamophobia since the 7th October has been truly horrific in our own communities. And that's our responsibility. These aren't faraway things. These are things that we have to stand up and speak against.

We have to follow the Ahmadi Muslim message of 'Love for all, Hatred for none'. As we listen to His Holiness later, let us commit ourselves to all play our part in that.

Thank you.



THE AHMADIYYA MUSLIM PRIZE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF PEACE

This is an international award that was launched by His Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad in 2009. It is an award in recognition of an individual's or an organisation's contribution to the advancement of the cause of peace. The 2024 National Peace Symposium was the second to be held after 2019 due to the Covid pandemic, so two peace prizes were presented for 2020 and for 2023.

2020 Peace Prize Winner

Adi Roche – Ireland.

Adi started her journey in the 1980s with the Irish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and devised a peace education programme that was delivered to several schools across Ireland. In 1990, she became the first Irish woman elected to the Board of Directors of the International Peace Bureau at the United Nations in Geneva, and in 1997, was a candidate for the presidency of Ireland. In 1991, she founded 'Chernobyl Children's Project International', which gives aid to children who have been deeply impacted by nuclear disaster.



The organisation raises proximately 1.9 million euros on an annual basis for children in Belarus, western Russia and Ukraine. Her organisation went on to pioneer a groundbreaking adoption agreement between Ireland and Belarus, and due to the incredible efforts, she had enable hundreds of children to be adopted in Ireland.

Adi continues to support the United Nations specifically bringing awareness to the tragic consequences of Chernobyl, and she addressed the United Nations assembly in 2016 regarding the matter. Adi's inspirational work has brought light to people's lives from a very dark situation.

2023 Peace Prize Winner

David Spurdle – UK.

David was a teacher from Hornchurch in the UK when he visited Lebanon in 1983, during the Lebanese civil war, and saw first-hand the suffering of children who were in dire need of help.

Motivated by his Christian faith he committed, without knowing how he could manage, to care for 60 orphaned boys, and then sought to find a sponsor to help fund care of the boys.

With that he founded the charity 'Kids Alive UK', that later became a charity 'Stand by Me'. Since then, the charity has rescued over 20,000 children across 11 countries and has opened 24 children's homes, six care centres, seven schools and has fed over 1500 families a month.

The charity helps by providing shelter, food, education and healthcare for children with a mix of in-home support, where possible, and in family homes where that is the only option to give children life chances.

Whilst now retired, Mr. Spurdle still has strong links with his charity. The mission and work that was inspired by him continues to grow today at an international level.



Adi Roche – Ireland.

Assalamo Alaikum from your neighbouring island of Ireland.

Your Holiness, esteemed guests, it is my honour and my privilege to become a recipient of the Ahmadiyya award today. And as I stand here, I am reminded of the prophetic words of that wonderful scientist Albert Einstein, when he said: “The splitting of the atom has changed everything except our way of thinking, and thus we drift towards unparalleled catastrophe.” These words reveal how Einstein foresaw what would happen on 6th August and 9th August 1945, on the innocent of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which led to the beginning of what we now call the ‘Nuclear arms race’, and the symbiotic relationship with nuclear power energy.

And ultimately, Einstein's words show that he foresaw what would eventually happen at 1:23am on 26th April 1986. An explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine, leading to what the United Nations deemed to be the greatest environmental catastrophe in the history of humanity. A new word, ‘Chernobyl’ entered the history of language, the history of world disasters, and indeed, into the history of the world itself.

Now, unfortunately, like many disasters, they passed quickly, out of sight, out of mind, relegated to the past. And for the people of Chernobyl, for them, it is a living reality, for the survivors and the victims. And while yes, Chernobyl has been consigned to the history books, the war that was unleashed and is raging from Chernobyl is silent, invisible, and deadly. No smell, no taste, nothing to forewarn you of the danger. This invisible enemy, permeates every aspect of the cycle of life, from which there is no antidote, no escape, and no safe haven.

And today, in humility, I can only offer you my truth, my witness, and the evidence of my heart. For I know what I have seen and continue to see – so many babies and children with poor health, such neglect, and abandonment. And yet, I can see such beauty, such innocence and such potential that I am challenged to act, and to reach out and say, here are my helping hands. And here are our sheltering arms. And here are our loving hearts, for it is a privilege to be invited into the life of a child, and to be of some benefit to their scarred and broken bodies. And in many cases, it is intervening to save a child's life; that my friends is a rare and special privilege.



And as in most tragedies is children who pay the highest price, their small little bodies absorb adult doses of radioactivity. And those who are either in the womb, or who were children in 1986, are the parents of 2024. And thus, we see what is now known and acknowledged as Chernobyl lineage, as it passes from one generation to another in the genetics.

So our work emphasises two words, ‘Doing Something’. And that's what translates into an understanding that the power of our love for humanity can and does move mountains. And that's what brings me here today, to this mosque. It brings us right to the heart of the matter. It is about children whose very existence depends on our response, whose lives are dangling in the balance, and the power of what we together can do to alleviate that suffering. And, you know, sometimes it just takes two hands, to take away fear and pain. And sometimes it takes a whole mosque full. And it takes a whole world of effort to end that suffering. Because we together, can stand up and speak out and give witness and be on that frontline of humanitarian support. And that's just where we are, on the frontline, in Belarus, and in Ukraine.

But the pinnacle of our work in this war continues to be our child cardiac surgical programme. Despite the raging war, our surgeons and our nurses run the gauntlet of the war. Two weeks into the war in 2022, we got in a surgical team because they knew that these babies and children would not survive because they were on the cusp of life and death, because they suffer from a condition surgeons called ‘Chernobyl Heart’, which is not a condition that baby can live with, but will die with, without surgical intervention.

An example of this just in December passed, the life of one such baby called Sasha. We intervened, because the day our surgeons arrived, the local doctors were telling the parents to take their little baby Sasha home to die, that there was nothing they could do. But our philosophy is that we work until the last breath, even if that child or baby dies on the operating theatre, we will still fight for that life. What followed was a 14-hour surgery, during which baby Sasha bled the entire volume of blood in her body, twice. But where there's life, there's hope. And she survived. Now, that's what we are all about, because we believe, we believe in the power of the possible. And we do believe in miracles, because it is breath by breath, heartbeat by heartbeat.

And events such as this, act as an inspiration. It restores our faith, and our hope, and we say to those who feel

David Spurdle – UK

Peace and blessings. Just to acknowledge His Holiness and all you honoured guests, and to say what a privilege it is to be here this evening.

As strange as it may sound, my peace story starts in the middle of the Lebanese civil war in 1983. As a technology teacher with long holidays, I volunteered to lead a team to a boys orphanage to repair the sewage work. That system that had been destroyed in the fighting.

The situation was much worse than anything I'd ever witnessed or imagined in my life. Buildings razed to the ground checkpoints, gunfire bombings and extreme hardship ethnic cleansing, a regular occurrence. It was tough. We had little equipment or expertise. But things were slowly changing. But not just the sewage system. My life was changing too. As I learned the boys stories and of their harrowing backgrounds. Most had lost their parents. Some had even witnessed their parents killed by snipers, including one of my adopted sons. But they were loving and happy to see us helping as best we could.

I returned home to Essex and back to school. I'd done my bit for peace and humanity, or so I thought, but I was wrong. I had changed.

I was so affected by my trip to Lebanon, that I went

abandoned and forgotten, to the people in Israel, to Gaza, to Syria, to Ukraine, to the Horn of Africa and beyond; that you are not forgotten. You are not irrelevant. You are not peripheral. For we believe together, that there is nothing more precious in life than life itself.

Together, we have come to break bread, to hope, to pray for peace. Together, let us show that love is alive and hope is also alive. And our compassion for the other is the heartbeat of our society. The power of our humanity is strong, and we can feel it in this room, in this mosque today. That spirit of love in action. We stand together on the side of peace, because we know that the power of our love can overcome the love of power.

Thank you very much.



back at Christmas on my own to be Santa Claus to the boys. I arrived secretly at the orphanage, got dressed as Father Christmas, and with a large sack of toys entered the dining room, and said, 'Ho, ho, ho', only to hear it's 'Daoud, it's Daoud', and I was immediately swamped by all the boys, who I realised loved me, and I certainly loved them.

And so I lived with eight Muslim lads, who had no families to go to. We had fun in our makeshift bomb shelter. We watched the 'Jungle Book' 17 times, and then Christmas day arrived. Our dinner was a meagre affair, and I felt guilty as I had money in my back pocket, that kept telling me to take the boys out. And then somewhat reluctantly, I said: "Who wants to go out for dinner?", and immediately, there was loud "yes

please". Well, an hour later, as I and Mohammed and Fidel, and Ahmad and Wissam and the other lads were about to enter a restaurant, a high ranking Christian militia officer and his bodyguards emerged from the shadows. "Who are you?", he demanded. "Daoud" I said, thinking we're in trouble. "Who are these kids?". I explained. "Why are you here?". "Celebrating Christmas", I said. "Do you know these kids are my enemy, and in years to come, they may want to kill me?"

There was silence, for a moment. My heart was beating. Then he gave a command. And his soldiers escorted us into the restaurant. He bought us all the most amazing Christmas dinner. And before long, that hardened soldier was walking around the table, picking up each of the lads in turn, and giving them a huge kiss, as tears trickled down his face.

Do you know, I could never have afforded that meal. But God didn't need my money. He had other plans. As we left that restaurant, the officer said to me: "Tell them in the years to come, their enemy bought them Christmas dinner today."

Well, a few days later, after a night of heavy fighting, and as I was on my way to the airport and home, my driver took a wrong turn, and suddenly, we were approaching a Hezbollah Militia checkpoint. I now knew I was in real trouble.

My heart was beating. And I was once again praying. The young soldier pointed his gun through the window. And again, I heard the words, "Who are you?" "Daoud", came my reply again. I explained I had come to Beirut to care for Muslim boys. "Why?", he asked. "Because God wants me to", I said. He asked me if I knew the Queen. I've never sat next to a politician until tonight! He asked me about London, Manchester United, and then after 20 minutes of interrogation. He looked me in the eyes and said: "You are lucky, I'm letting you go." And so in the space of just a few days, from both Christian and Muslim militiamen, I and those I loved, had witnessed mercy, compassion and love.

Our lives and freedoms had been spared. I came home changed, ready to start my journey of peace. I knew I had to act and despite not having the personal means I trusted God, and committed to caring for the 60 boys. But again God had greater plans.

Eventually I resigned my headship and founded 'Stand By Me', in the shed at the bottom of the garden. I never imagined back then that my small steps of faith would have led 'Stand By Me' into seven countries, caring for thousands of children from war torn Myanmar, Ethiopia and onto Columbia. May I just say on behalf of Myanmar, another war, totally forgotten.

On this incredible journey, I've been joined by outstanding supporters who have stood by me, helping us to rescue over 20,000 children from terrible circumstances.

And may I just mention that one of my three Lebanese adopted sons is here tonight, Ahmad. I'm so proud of him and his family and he is now the Executive Director of 'Stand By Me'. From the slums of Beirut, to director of this amazing charity.

The work goes on, somebody mentioned that I was retired. Well, if you'd see me last Saturday in Eldoret, Kenya, rescuing a baby in a brown paper bag, who'd been left by the roadside, you'd realise that it's a kind of retirement.

If tonight you've been inspired by my story, then let each one of us determine to leave here and walk a walk of peace together, to make this world a better and more peaceful place for all humanity. On behalf of our amazing kids, who have overcome unbelievable challenges and triumphed, I humbly receive your award.

Thank you very much.



The Baitul Futuh Mosque (above) in south London is the largest mosque in Western Europe. The mosque complex is a landmark building and it includes the administrative headquarters (photo below) of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK. The distinctive architecture of the buildings combines traditional and modern Islamic designs. The complex serves as the iconic venue of the National Peace Symposium.



Loyalty

Freedom

Equality

Respect

Peace



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