

Meeting Minutes of the APPG for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, AGM (Annual General Meeting)

Date: 17 May 2021

Venue: Zoom

Agenda:

1. **Introductions - *Siobhain McDonagh MP***
2. **Opening remarks by National President of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community U.K.- *Rafiq Hayat***
3. **Election of Officers**
4. **Updates**
 - **APPG Inquiry Report – *Azhar Chaudhry, APPG Secretariat***
 - ***Pakistan Telecommunications Authority notice & Persecution in Algeria Fareed Ahmad, National Secretary External Affairs Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK***
 - **Key issues facing the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community – *Rafiq Hayat, National President Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK***
5. **AOB**

MPs / Lords who attended:

1. Siobhain McDonagh MP (Mitcham and Morden)
2. Imran Ahmad Khan MP (Wakefield)
3. Virendra Sharma MP (Ealing, Southall)
4. Damian Hinds MP (East Hampshire)
5. Kate Green MP (Stretford and Urmston)
6. Fleur Anderson MP (Putney)
7. John McDonnell MP (Hayes and Harlington)
8. Margaret Ferrier MP (Rutherglen and Hamilton)
9. Marsha De Cordova MP (Battersea)
10. Lord Tope
11. Sir Edward Davey MP (Kingston and Surbiton)
12. Jason McCartney MP (Colne Valley)
13. Elliot Colburn MP (Carshalton and Wallington)
14. James Sunderland MP (Bracknell)
15. Jonathan Lord MP (Woking)
16. Taiwo Owatemi MP (Coventry North West)
17. Sir Peter Bottomley MP (Worthing West)

18. Marion Fellows MP (Motherwell and Wishaw)
19. John Spellar MP (Warley)
20. Kirsten Oswald MP (East Renfrewshire)
21. Alison Thewliss MP (Glasgow Central)
22. Heather Wheeler MP (South Derbyshire)

Key Points:

Welcome and introduction

The Chair was pleased with the strong attendance.

Opening remarks by the National President

The National President thanked the APPG for their work over the past year in raising the issue of Ahmadi Muslim persecution. He also thanked the Chair for her support and leadership.

Election of Officers.

The results were as follows:

- Chair - Siobhain McDonagh MP
- Vice Chair - Rt Hon Sir Ed Davey MP
- Vice Chair - Margaret Ferrier MP
- Vice Chair - Marsha de Cordova MP
- Vice-Chair - Imran Ahmad Khan MP
- Vice-Chair - Taiwo Owatemi MP
- Vice-Chair - Lord Tope
- Vice-Chair Fleur Anderson MP
- Vice-Chair - Elliot Colburn MP
- Vice-Chair - Jason McCartney MP
- Vice-Chair - Damian Hinds MP
- Vice-Chair - Alison Thewliss MP
- Secretary - Stephen Hammond MP
- Treasurer - Virendra Sharma MP

Updates

APPG Inquiry Report

An update on the APPG Inquiry Report “Suffocation of the Faithful – The Persecution of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan and the Rise of International Extremism” (<https://appg-ahmadiyyamuslim.org.uk/report/>) noting that it was the first report of its kind produced by an APPG. The publishing of the report led to strong reaction by the Pakistan Government.

Two resolutions passed by the Punjab Provincial Government and the KPK Provincial Government falsely stated that the APPG Report:

- Blamed Pakistan for cruelties against Ahmadis under the state patronage;
- Asked the UK government to make aid conditional on the recommendations the report;
- Recommended to the federal government and the Foreign Office to get the report withdrawn from the UK Parliament so the conspiracy against Muslims and the sovereignty of Pakistan could be foiled, and if not rooted out, this conspiracy would not only hurt the emotions of Muslims all over the world;

Additionally, in March 2021, Pakistan’s Standing Committee on Religious Affairs & Inter-Faith Harmony of Pakistan’s National Assembly unanimously condemned the report as baseless & declared that the State of Pakistan has always protected minorities.

It was also noted that in March 2021, minarets of an Ahmadi Mosque were demolished by extremists in a village in Gujranwala with the assistance of police.

Notably, the Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi during a visit to Germany in April 2021 when questioned on Persecution of Ahmadis,

responded that it was: "Propaganda Disinformation ... & Concocted Stories".

The Chair thanked all those involved in the production of the report. It was agreed that a follow-up action plan should be developed to ensure that the recommendations of the report were implemented.

Pakistan, The PTA and Cyber Laws

An update was provided on the recently introduced Cyber Laws in Pakistan. It noted that the Pakistan government is using new laws to deny freedom of religion inside and outside of Pakistan.

On 30 November 2020, Pakistan enacted a new regulation which amends the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (“PECA”).

The new Cyber Laws:

1. empower PTA to block or remove online content (Section 37 of PECA) “it considers [] necessary in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defence of Pakistan . . . public order, decency or morality[.]”; and
2. have extraterritorial reach by applying to “any act committed outside Pakistan by any person if the act constitutes an offence under [these laws] and affects a person, property, information system or data located in Pakistan.” Section 1(4).

First use of these laws was against Ahmadi Muslims included:

- Targeted Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA
- Targeted Wikipedia and Google to remove legitimate Ahmadi content
- December 2020, the Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court instructed warrants to be issued for arrest of any individuals outside Pakistan publishing online content deemed blasphemous in Pakistan.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK has received several notifications to block our UK websites.

This compounds actions in 2020 and 2021 when Twitter suspended UK accounts following complaints by Pakistan authorities.

Ahmadis in Pakistan have been named in arrest warrants on the basis of cybercrime laws - campaign being driven by Lahore FIA Cybercrime Wing by Hasan Muawiya - brother of Tahir Ashrafi.

Pakistan is closing down the only remaining space for Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan to learn about their beliefs, as our publications are already banned in Pakistan.

The update was concluded by stating that this has become a new frontier that needs urgent action to ensure platform providers do not become complicit in persecution by denying the right to self-identify and the right to manifest religious views and beliefs online.

Algeria

An update was provided on the worrying situation for Ahmadi Muslims in Algeria. Ahmadis have been in Algeria since the 1920s and have around 2,000 members.

In February 2016, it sought to build a community center in Blida to meet the community's growing needs. In June 2016 the National Gendarmerie, on orders of the Prime Minister, destroyed the building in Blida without any notice.

Nine Ahmadis were arrested, including the community's national president.

It was further noted, the government and media ran a full-scale, anti-Ahmadi defamatory campaign for two years to 2018. More than 100 Ahmadis were arrested, 292 were prosecuted and some imprisoned.

The persecution included raids, detentions, arrests, court cases and sentencing, pressuring employers to dismiss Ahmadis, and non-stop state media propaganda fueled by the Minister of Religious Affairs.

International pressure successfully advocated in halting this campaign.

In October 2020, the Government resumed its hostile campaign.

The charges include:

- Denigrating the dogma or precepts of Islam, an offense under the penal code
- Participation in an unauthorised association
- Conducting worship in unauthorised places, under the law on the exercise of religions other than Islam ("Law 06-03").

The use of Law 06-03 is premised on the notion that Ahmadis are non-Muslim

Questions from the floor included:

- Sir Ed Davey MP – thanked for providing the update and also urged the APPG to raise the issue of Ahmadi Muslim refugees.
- Margaret Ferrier MP - suggested a PTA specific report be issued by the APPG to raise awareness on the matter. The secretariat suggested this be incorporated in a 'One year on' update to be published on the matter since the launch of the report.

Key Issues Facing the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community,

Mr Rafiq Hayat provided an update on current issues facing the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Main points covered included:

- The EU Parliament looking to pass resolutions condemning the Blasphemy laws and their use in targeting minorities. The UK should consider what action it can take to protect the rights of religious minorities
- He urged that the APPG keeps raising awareness amongst social media companies on the issue
- Regarding refugees he stated that life has become intolerable for Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan and the APPG should lobby the government to take more Ahmadi Muslim refugees

The Chair thanked everyone for attending. The meeting ended at 6pm.