

Islam and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Community

*Address in Committee Room 6 of the House of Commons,
London, 19th November 2014*

by Dr Abdul Karim Saeed

Hazrat Ameer (World-wide Head) of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Community

'And if your Lord had pleased, all those who are in the earth would have been believers, all of them. Will you (O Prophet) then force people till they are believers?' — The Holy Quran, 10:99

Members of the honourable Houses of Lords and Commons, and ladies and gentlemen:

Firstly, I am thankful that British law and traditions have made it possible for Muslims not only to live in the UK but also practice and preach their faith, Islam, with complete freedom, freedom from discrimination and freedom from harassment. Secondly, my respectful thanks are due to all the successive Governments of this country for promoting tolerance of various religions, and to the British people for living in peace and harmony with Muslims who are settled here.

My first visit to UK was about 40 years back, and it was love at first sight with UK in general and London in particular. Tower Bridge, Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament with the River Thames were a captivating sight. Not in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that one day I would be standing right inside the Houses of Parliament addressing a gathering.

It was in London that I qualified as MRCP UK from the Royal College of Physicians and was later honoured by that prestigious institution which granted me its fellowship, FRCP, in recognition of my services to medical education.

Educated in a Catholic School in Pakistan, I am indebted to all my teachers, in particular the priests from UK who made every effort to impart not only academic knowledge but also a spirit of love for all religions and peoples of the world, all created by the same God called by different names. This was reinforced at home by my parents who were Ahmadi Muslims and hence stood strongly for Islam as a religion of peace, as its name literally means; a religion of tolerance as practised by

Prophet Muhammad, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him. These were also the values reinforced by *Hazrat* Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, upon his followers called Ahmadis.

The name 'Ahmadi' was given to us by him after the name of Prophet Muhammad, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, whose other name was Ahmad. This was also the name referred to in the Holy Quran where there is mention of Jesus Christ foretelling the coming of a prophet after him whose name would be Ahmad (61:6). The name Ahmad in Arabic language refers to a person who is a highly praised and has the qualities of tenderness, peace, gentleness, forgiveness, love, mercy and sympathy. All these qualities stand for the inner beauty of Islam and these were the qualities the Founder envisaged in his followers, the Ahmadis.

I have the honour of addressing you all as the fifth, democratically elected spiritual leader and President of Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore, the name which is translated into English as the Ahmadiyya Association for the Propagation of Islam. It is a movement with no political aspirations but established with the sole purpose of the spreading of Islam through peaceful means.

It was founded in Lahore in 1914 as a movement that, through necessity, became separated from the then Ahmadiyya Movement in Qadian because of some irreconcilable doctrinal differences. Our leader Maulana Muhammad Ali and his companions could not reconcile with some newly introduced ideas into the teachings of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, in particular the idea that he was a prophet after Prophet Muhammad. This we found contrary to the teachings of the Holy Quran, the sayings of Prophet Muhammad and even the teachings of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad himself, as he had most emphatically denied claiming to be a prophet even to a few hours before his death. Maulana Muhammad Ali left Qadian and established our Movement.

Seventy years later, the name Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore had to be amended to just Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore in compliance with the constitutional requirements of Pakistan which not only declared Ahmadis as being non-Muslims in our country but also disallowed the use of any term which was considered an 'Islamic' term. I consider the passing of such laws against us did not only affect us but also harmed the democratic image of Pakistan in the international context. We suffered a double trauma because the basis of that declaration, however unfair, was

belief in a new prophet, and that was not at all our belief! This law, along with the blasphemy law in Pakistan, hangs as a sword of Damocles over the heads of Ahmadis, while the blasphemy law also jeopardizes the lives and rights of other Muslim minorities and followers of other faiths.

Since our inception as a new community in 1914 we have continued and intend to continue propagation of peace, tolerance, goodwill and understanding among the peoples of the world. As a result of our propagation and dissemination of the message of peace, many prominent members of the society in the UK accepted Islam and worked with us in developing greater understanding among the people here.

Our teachings are based on the Holy Quran which we believe to be the ultimate authority, being the word of God. Any other thing we accept if it is not in conflict with the Quran. The Quran teaches tolerance. It teaches that Muslims must live compassionately in peace, with all religions without prejudices or violence.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had stressed that, as in the modern times, attacks on Islam are through literature and by pen, its defence must be with the same weapon, not with the sword and aggression. It is widely accepted amongst non-Muslims that Islam spread by the use of the sword. The unfortunate behaviour of some Muslims who may be misguided or misinterpreting the teachings of Islam, or being taught so by those who may actually believe in violence, or be using it for their own personal gains, is defaming Islam and doing it great disservice.

The heart-rending news of atrocities going on in the Muslim world these days, the hair-raising scenes witnessed on television, are putting to shame the Religion that was meant to bring peace on earth and providing strength to all those who believe Islam is violent. Please permit me to stress Islam is peaceful. The car is good, unfortunately some of those who drive it are reckless drivers. They should take time to reflect upon the very first two verses of the Holy Quran, which state:

'All praise is for Allah Who is the Master of all the creation, the Most Beneficent and the Most Merciful.'

Now if one asks oneself in all fairness and judges impartially, can anyone imagine God introducing Himself with such attributes, and then benevolently smiling over suicide killers who blow up people while these innocent persons are prostrating before Allah in a mosque, kneeling in a church before the Lord, or standing in prayer before YHVH, the haShem, the Elohim in a synagogue, or those sitting in a monastery saying through their Mudra posture, 'We will cause you no harm, we are submitting';

or those in a Sikh Gurdawara, observing 'Sanghat' with all devotion to their the Rabb, the only and one God — all praying to the same Supreme Being. Killing such persons can only be perpetrated by the ungodly who do not care for faith of a person, his gender or age. We and all real followers of Islam condemn violence as it is strongly stressed in the Quran:

'There is no compulsion in religion.' (2:256)

The verse of the Holy Quran that I have recited before the start of this address lays the foundation of a Universal Brotherhood and the basis of all interfaith dialogues which is a deep rooted teaching of Islam. It states:

'And if your Lord had pleased, all those who are in the earth would have been believers, all of them. Will you then force people till they are believers?'
(10:99)

If there were any justification of compulsion in religion, why would such a verse be included in the Quran?

We believe that in accordance with this verse one cannot and should not impose one's own views on any person by threatening to take his life. If only they were to reflect on the Quran and read the following verse:

'...We prescribed for the Children of Israel that whoever kills a person, unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he had killed all humans. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved the lives of all humans.' (5:32)

How can there then be justification for beheading persons for their beliefs, blowing up themselves to kill and maim innocent children, women and men in their prayer houses, shopping centres and their homes? How can they justify suicide bombings when Prophet Muhammad, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, is reported to have refused to join the funeral prayer of a person who had committed suicide. He found this act abhorring.

It must be stressed that the compilation of the text of the Holy Quran had begun in the time of Prophet Muhammad, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, and it has remained unchanged since its revelation. There is not a single verse in it that justifies the actions that are committed in the name of religion by quoting its verses out of context.

It is for this reason that we strongly condemn all these atrocities being committed in the name of Islam.

In accordance with these teachings of the Quran, which are to bring peace on earth, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad formed a Movement that firmly believes in a progressive, liberal and tolerant Islam. These teachings are a matter of principle with us, and not a ploy of temporary convenience in a particular situation. We teach the same in Pakistan and the same in all other countries of the world. We want the same Islamic values to prevail in both Muslim and non Muslim countries.

The Ahmadiyya Movement was founded around 1890 in Punjab, India, by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad when Islam was at the lowest ebb of its decline in every field of life: political, intellectual, moral and religious. It was condemned by its critics as a religion of violence, brutality, sensuality, mere ritual, lacking high values, and devoid of any notion of love of God or forgiveness. The Prophet Muhammad's character was misrepresented in the worst possible terms. Muslim religious leaders were unable to defend this onslaught on their religion. Muslims were leaving their faith and converting to other religions.

Such times were foretold by the Prophet Muhammad, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, who being the last Prophet sent by God for guidance of humankind foretold that a person would come amongst the Muslims from amongst themselves and bring the lost teachings of the Quran and the glory of Islam back to the people. Such a person, he said, would remove the misinterpretations and misrepresentations that would creep into the religion and would revive the faith in the hearts of its followers. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad sought to present Islam to the Western nations and the modern world. He stressed that God, the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad are for all humans and for all times to come, and not just for the Muslims.

We believe in all the fundamentals of Islam, as do other Muslims. Like them, we believe in following the teachings of the Holy Quran and the example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. These two are our supreme authorities for determining our religious creed and moral values. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, and our own great scholar and leader Maulana Muhammad Ali, also held exactly this view. The interpretation of Islam that they gave, which we follow and which is refined and adapted further with time, is derived from these two supreme authorities of Islam, namely, the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad.

We have condemned the killing of innocents in our time as did our Founder in his time. I quote what he wrote 114 years ago when there were some incidents of British people in India being murdered as an act of terrorism in the late 1800s:

'Is it a virtuous deed that there is a man going about in the market place, we have no connection with him so much so that we do not even know his name and he doesn't know our name, but despite this we take a shot at him intending to kill him? Is this religious behaviour?

Contrast this with those holy early Muslims whom Allah instructed in Makkah not to respond to violence even if they were cut to pieces. ...

Alas! today Muslims and especially the religious leaders have forgotten all those events ... and think that to fire a gun at an innocent man constitutes Islam.'

He continued and asked:

'Is such killing taught in the Quran or Hadith? Can any Muslim religious leader answer?'

He then went on to write:

'The ignorant ones have merely heard the word Jihad and are using it as pretext for satisfying their own selfish desires, or due to lunacy they are perpetrating bloodshed.'

And he advised us, as 'his army', and said:

*'Those who join my army, I order them to give up these misconceived ideas of Jihad with the sword, and to purify their hearts, develop and nurture their feelings of mercy towards all humankind and be helpers of those in distress and suffering. **They should spread peace on the earth as this is how their religion will spread.'***

(*British Government and Jihad*, published 1900, p. 11, 12, 15)

Whatever abuse is used against Islam, and by whatever means, we believe it should be tolerated but with a firm will to defend Islam by means of the pen, this being declared the 'the age of Jihad by pen' by our Founder.

We strongly condemn the taking of the law into one's own hands or issuing *fatwas* against those who express liberty of speech. However we do stress that other peoples of the world should reciprocate the same courtesy, not only to Islam but all other religions of the world and their holy, ancient founders. This was the message that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad gave through the last of his 83 books, namely *Paigham-e-Sulah* or 'Message of Peace'.

We have served Islam with all sincerity and continue to do so. We have presented the picture and practice of Islam as a religion of peace and harmony in Britain since the year 1913 when our Mission at the Woking Mosque, Surrey, was established and operated under our leadership till 1968. The pristine teachings of Islam as presented by us were impressed on truth seeking and receptive minds and hearts and many people accepted Islam, including Lord Headley. He along with our first missionary in the UK, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, performed the pilgrimage to Makka in 1923. We celebrated the centenary of the establishment of our Mission in UK last year. We were honoured by the attendance by many guests from several countries and faiths, as well as government officials and elected representatives of the people of the UK.

In keeping with the desire of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to spread Islam by the pen, Maulana Muhammad Ali and other elders of the society took to producing literature as means of peaceful propagation. One such great work was the English translation of the Quran with full commentary by Maulana Muhammad Ali which was published from Woking, England in 1917. It was the first-ever English translation and commentary by a Muslim to be available in the West. He and many other members of our Movement produced a huge number of books in English covering all aspects of Islam. These publications, especially the translation of the Holy Quran, now form the basis of translations of our literature into all major languages of the world, especially European languages. They can all be read on our website www.aaiil.org and downloaded free by anyone interested in learning more about Islam.

In the same spirit of the teachings of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, we built a Mosque and established a mission in Berlin, Germany, of which the 90th anniversary was celebrated a fortnight back and I had the honour to attend.

God had foretold Mirza Ghulam Ahmad that he would spread his message to the 'four corners of the world'. We have striven to make this prophecy a reality and set

up important missions in Europe including UK and Berlin, and in other countries of the world.

The need to spread Islam through our Movement is more important now than ever before. The world is bleeding, the world is in pain, and the world is desperate and yearning for peace; we have that recipe for peace. We believe that an Islamic society is not created by imposing laws and regulations on people. It is only created by reforming the character of individuals through moral training and example, and this was what the Holy Prophet Muhammad did. This is what Mirza Ghulam Ahmad reminded us when he gave the message:

*Spread peace on earth as this is how religion will spread;
don't aspire to conquer the territories of people conquer their hearts;
don't spread Islam by sword but through the practice of its beauty and by the pen.*

We have taken this advise by our Founder to the letter and taken the pen as our weapon; we have no aspiration to conquer territories but the hearts of fellow human beings. Calling them gently to what we believe in is the way to connect to the Creator of the heavens and the earth, Who is referred to in the first verse of the Holy Quran as I have already pointed out.

In the time of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the doctrine of Jihad was greatly misunderstood by most Muslims as well as the critics of Islam. It is little different today, a hundred years later, with the tragic international consequences that we see. Jihad was taken to mean that Muslims were required to wage war against unbelievers. Naturally this portrayed Islam as a violent religion. By explaining the true meaning of this teaching, as found in the Quran and the example of the Prophet Muhammad, a great stigma was removed from the name of Islam.

It was also taught by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad that Muslims could not only live peacefully under non-Muslim rule, but indeed it was an obligation upon the Muslim citizens of a non-Muslim state to be law-abiding citizens of that country if they had the freedom in it to practise and preach their religion. He had a deep conviction that if Islam was propagated by argument and peaceful means it would win over the hearts of the non-Muslim nations ruling the Muslims. Therefore he wished to dissociate Islam altogether from force, violence and fanaticism. He also believed that, being in the likeness of the Messiah, he too should adopt peaceful means of preaching, and reject recourse to force.

We believe that no Muslim has the right to declare any other Muslim a non-believer or harbour hatred against any person who does not follow Islam. As someone has said: *'God is too big to fit into one religion.'*

God himself endorses this view when in the Quran He too says:

'Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good, they have their reward with their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.' (2:62)

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was opposed by most Muslim clerics, but after he died on 28th May 1908 the Editor of the Muslim newspaper *Wakeel* of Amritsar wrote:

'Such people who produce an intellectual revolution in religion are not born often.... In spite of our strong differences with Mirza Sahib in respect of some of his claims and beliefs, his separation forever has convinced the educated and enlightened Muslims that one of their very great personage has left them.... he acted against the enemies of Islam as a victorious general ... This service rendered by Mirza Sahib will place the coming generations under a debt of gratitude, in that he fulfilled his duty of Jihad by the pen and he left behind him as a memorial such literature as will last so long as Muslims have blood flowing in their veins.'

In 1936, Marmaduke Pickthall, well-known British Muslim and a translator of the Holy Quran into English, who was a Sunni Muslim, wrote of Maulana Muhammad Ali, our founding Head and President, as follows:

'Probably no man living has done longer or more valuable service for the cause of Islamic revival than Maulana Muhammad Ali of Lahore.'

It is an irony of fate that we have been declared non-Muslims in Pakistan since 1974 by an amendment to the state constitution in spite of the fact that with our hearts and souls we believe in all the tenets of Islam. We continue to strive to defend Islam in a peaceful way wherever and whenever needed, propagate it peacefully and in a tolerant manner in all places with all our resources, energy and determination.

We always appreciate it whenever we get support from those who stand for justice, whether it is voiced by those in Pakistan or any other place in the world. For

that we are grateful to those who extend us the moral support that any 'declared minority' needs.

The declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslims in 1974 and then an Ordinance XX of 1984 placed a yoke around our necks in our work to spread Islam in a peaceful manner. Permit me briefly to explain briefly what this ordinance means to our freedom of practice of our religion.

On 26th April 1984 the anti-Ahmadiyya Ordinance was issued by a military dictator in his capacity as President of Pakistan. It could be cited as the most blatant defiance of human and religious rights, preventing a large section of people, the Ahmadis of Pakistan, from preaching or professing of their beliefs. It forbids Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslims, completely ignoring their professing Islam as their faith and practising all its tenets. They are barred from the use of Islamic expressions, such as *assalamu alaikum*, *Bismillah*, etc.

In the light of this ordinance, Ahmadis could no longer pray in public as their praying would be akin to what is termed as 'posing as Muslims'. They cannot use the Azaan like other Muslims when they call worshippers for prayer. Their house of worship cannot be called a Mosque or Masjid by Ahmadis. They are similarly forbidden to pray in mosques used by other Muslims irrespective of their sects. Reciting the Quran in public, or quoting from it, was also forbidden. Most painful is the barring of Ahmadis from going from Pakistan to perform Hajj or Pilgrimage to Makkah, which is the greatest form of spiritual and devotional service which every Muslim who can afford must do.

The official application forms for national identity cards or passports, and in some cases entrance forms to educational Institutions, have a mandatory column for all Muslims to sign a statement, a section of which reads:

'I consider Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani to be an impostor nabi (prophet) and also consider his followers whether belonging to Lahori or Qadiani group to be non-Muslims.'

This has to be signed by all applicants who call themselves as Muslims, irrespective of their actual inner convictions about the Ahmadis.

Defiance of any of the above conditions imposed under ordinance is punishable with three years of imprisonment and in addition a fine for some of the 'offences'.

Since this ordinance has endorsed intolerance against us, it has been brushed onto Muslims residing in other countries. It has also formed a precedence for bigoted attitude against other minorities, both Muslim and non-Muslim. The blasphemy law too hangs like a sword of Damocles over the heads of minorities who face the potential threat of a false accusation.

Muslims living in countries such as the UK have freedom of religion, and we strongly believe that the laws of the country of residence must be obeyed. The practice of double standards is not desirable. There can be no acceptance of reaping the benefits but defying the law. Thus we hold and teach that Muslims in the UK must abide by the law of the land, as passed by these Houses of Parliament. We openly and unambiguously declare that religious extremism, whether violent or non-violent, is contrary to the teachings of Islam, and must be shunned by all Muslims. We abhor acts of violence carried out in the name of Islam, which are wrongly considered to be jihad. The word *jihad* in Arabic means struggle and that struggle begins with one's own self and soul; the struggle is against the temptations which lead one to error and distance him from God.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who resided in the small, remote village of Qadian in Punjab in India, wrote and published a letter addressing Her Majesty Queen Victoria on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of her reign. I think this letter bears a great message for what is relevant even today. It also shows the conviction of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad about his claim to be a man of God addressing the Queen of a vast Empire in which he lived. I quote from his letter:

'I consider it my duty to take advantage of the freedom granted by British rule concerning religious discussions, and to draw the attention of those who are passionate about Islam to this legal method in order to turn their feelings away from thoughts of illegal acts and emotions. Muslims were awaiting a violent Messiah, and awaiting also a violent Mahdi. These beliefs are so dangerous that a lying imposter can drown a world in blood by claiming to be the promised Mahdi. For, Muslims still have the characteristic that they will follow any beggar calling them to jihad with such absolute obedience as they will not show even to a king. Allah desired that such wrong notions be removed, and so by giving me the titles of Promised Messiah and Mahdi of the time, He made known to me that waiting for a violent Mahdi or a violent Messiah is an utterly erroneous idea. On the contrary, God desires to spread the truth in the world through heavenly signs. Therefore, my principle is that kingdoms of the world are for worldly kings; we do not have anything to do with their states or wealth. For us is the heavenly kingdom. Of course, it is necessary also

to deliver the message to kings with sincerity and true sympathy. As for this British government, since we can live peacefully under its protection, it is also our duty to pray for its material and spiritual welfare.

Regrettably, ever since I announced to Muslims of India that no violent Mahdi or violent Messiah shall appear in the world, and instead a man was to come in peace and I am that man, the ignorant clerics have become my adversaries. They declare me to be an unbeliever and as expelled from the faith. It is strange that these people are pleased at the shedding of the blood of human beings, which is not the teaching of the Quran, nor do all Muslims hold this notion. It is also the dishonesty of the Christian clergymen that they have unjustifiably ascribed the teaching of a permanent jihad to the Holy Quran, thereby deceiving some ignorant people and exciting their animal passions. It is not of my own feelings or my own thinking, but by the command of God, that I remain occupied in praying for this government, under whose shadow of protection I am living my life in peace, express gratitude for its favours, regard occasions of its celebration as occasions of my happiness, and convey to it with the best of intentions what has been taught to me by God. Therefore, on the occasion of this jubilee, remembering the unceasing favours of Your Majesty in respect of our lives, property and honour, I offer a gift out of gratitude, and that gift is prayers from the heart and from every iota of my being for the welfare and glory of Your Majesty.'

(Tuhfa Qaisariyya, May 1897, p. 12–14)

As President of our Worldwide Movement, I have responsibilities to keep up the morale of the followers and to remind them of their duty to spread the awareness of the true message of Islam and refute the allegations against it in a peaceful way.

Recently I have travelled to several countries. During the last few days that I have been here, I have had an opportunity to get our members to focus on their role as peacemakers, who have an important mission in life and that is to bring harmony amongst all people and religions in this lovely country, and to play their role in improving the image of Islam and presenting its true face to the people of the country and indeed to the whole world. I have advised them to practise Islam in accordance with its teachings and spread it through their own examples.

Today, as an international representative of the teachings of *Hazrat* Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, I as the present Religious Head and President of the Worldwide Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore deem it my duty to repeat the message of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and members of this august House. I emphasise that it is time to work together as a Universal Nation to bring

peace and avoid spreading of hatred based on propaganda against one another's religions, peoples and countries. It is time to study one another's faiths and adopt the commonalities that we share, and not fan hatred through the differences we have.

How well is the point I am making demonstrated through this story from the Buddhist Scripture:

'Some children were playing beside a river. They made castles of sand, and each child defended his own castle and said, 'This one is mine.' They kept their castles separate and would not allow any mistake about which was whose. When the castles were all finished, one child kicked over someone else's castle and completely destroyed it. The owner of the castle flew into a rage, pulled the other child's hair, struck him with his fist and bawled out, 'He has spoiled my castle! Come along all of you and help me to punish him as he deserves.' The others all came to his help. They beat the child with a stick and then stamped on him as he lay on the ground. ... Then they went on playing in their sand castles, each saying, 'This is mine; no one else may have it. Keep away! Don't touch my castle!' But evening came, it was getting dark and they all thought they ought to be going home. No one now cared what became of his castle. One child stamped on his, another pushed his over with both hands. Then they turned away and went back, each to his home.'

(Yogacara Bhumi, Sutra 4)

We have to achieve peace in this world before it is time to 'go home' and don't have time to worry about what happens to our castles. That will be the only way we leave a better tomorrow for our children and grandchildren. It is time that we side with the right and shun together the wrong; it is time that we should work as a team to remove all impediments in the way of peace; it's time we show zero tolerance to aggression, terrorism, use of force to enforce one's own beliefs and ideas; and above all it's time to stop abhorrent acts like bombing, slaughtering human beings and spilling of blood in the name of Islam; it's time to act upon the true messages and teachings of Islam and all other religions, all of which have one goal: submitting to God in full obedience, respecting His creation and living with all humans as one family. We must all play our role to achieve this goal and I assure you working together we can.

In the end I thank you all once again for your time. God bless you all. Amen.