



Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Lord Khan of Burnley

*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Faith,
Communities and Resettlement*

2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our reference: MC2024/20608

Network of Sikh Organisations
By email: info@nsouk.co.uk

19 September 2024

Dear Network of Sikh's,

Thank you for your email of 4 September to the Deputy Prime Minister, Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP, regarding the APPG 'Islamophobia' definition. I am replying as this falls under my ministerial responsibilities.

All forms of racial and religious discrimination are completely unacceptable, and they have no place in our communities. This Government is committed to tackling religious hatred, and we recognise that the language surrounding this, including the definition of Islamophobia, plays an important role.

Defining Islamophobia is a complex issue, and we want to ensure that any definition comprehensively reflects multiple perspectives and implications for different communities. This Government is actively considering our approach to tackling Islamophobia through a more holistic lens, and will provide further information on this in due course.

As you have mentioned, the definition proposed by the APPG is not in line with the Equality Act 2010, which defines race in terms of colour, nationality and national or ethnic origins. More appropriately, the Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination, harassment or victimisation to anyone with a religious belief as well as to those who lack a religion or belief, subject to certain exceptions. A person who experiences Islamophobia from their employer or when accessing goods and services may be able to bring a case of religious discrimination or harassment to an employment tribunal or other civil court.

As you point out, freedom of speech and the freedom to discuss religion are incredibly important. The Government's approach to tackling religious hatred would never inhibit the lawful right to freedom of expression. However, hateful speech that is motivated by hostility towards individuals based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or transgender identity is a form of hate crime, and will be dealt with by the full force of the law. This Government advocates for open discussion and collaboration on issues surrounding religious hatred, and interfaith work plays a significant role in this. We are absolutely committed to supporting all communities, fostering cohesion, and bringing together voices from our faith and belief groups to deliver on the Government's priorities and missions.

I am proud that the first official event that I attended in my role as Faith Minister brought together leaders from Jewish and Muslim communities to discuss how to tackle religious hatred, challenge extremism, and engage better over conflict.

The recent violent disorder exposed deep weaknesses in our society and, as you have mentioned, much of this violence was rooted anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant hatred. Violent thuggery of any form is abhorrent, we will always condemn this. Following the disorder, the Government's immediate focus was to make sure that the cowards provoking this violence and hatred were swiftly brought to justice. We took swift steps to address this criminality through a new National Violent Disorder Programme, meaning that criminals intent on causing violence and unrest on our streets will be stopped in their tracks. This programme brings together the best policing capabilities from across the country to share intelligence on the activity of violent groups so the authorities can swiftly intervene to arrest them.

These abhorrent attacks also stressed the importance of putting provisions in place to protect all places of worship. That is why £50.9 million has been made available to protect faith communities in 2024/25. The Government will never tolerate those who seek to sow divisions and wreak intimidation across our communities, and we remain absolutely committed to protecting the right of individuals to freely practice their religion at their chosen place of worship. My department is working closely with local authorities and communities to address these issues and build stronger and safer communities across the country. Tackling religious hatred is a priority for this Government, and we are exploring a more integrated and cohesive approach to achieve this.

Thank you again for your letter on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Khan', written over a light blue horizontal line.

LORD KHAN OF BURNLEY

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Faith, Communities and Resettlement