Happy Vaisakhi everyone.

It is really great to be back here again this year and I know that you have all been celebrating over the last, I think couple of weeks with your loved ones in Gurdwaras. I am delighted Pat, that we have been able to get this infamous cross-party group together again for the celebration this evening. So thank you to Pat and his team of course who have done an amazing amount of work to get this evening together.

I am pleased that the celebration of Vaisakhi is a longstanding parliamentary tradition. I think that is really important, and a cross-party tradition, as well because it is very important that our parliament is open to people of every faith and every background.

Thank you to Mr Speaker for allowing us to have this event here in the Speakers' Staterooms. And thank you to the British Sikh Consultative Forum for sponsoring the event with us this evening.

I am pleased that Labour has two Sikh MPs. This is fantastic. Preet Gill the first Sikh woman MP and Tan Dhesi the first turban-wearing Sikh MP. That is a fantastic thing of which we are proud in our party. Because we at the Labour Party want even more representation in this house, and I can tell you tonight that we are proud that we have already selected six candidates from the Sikh community for the next general election. Of course, I was delighted to have appointed Kuldip Sahota to the House of Lords as Labour's first turban-wearing Sikh peer. So we are making progress and want representation across this house.

I do want to reflect also on everything that the Sikh community does across our country. Over 60,000 free hot meals are served every week in Gurdwaras. 60,000 hot meals in the communities by British Sikhs. That is incredible. Particularly important during a cost of living crisis and this has been a lifeline for many families who cannot afford to eat so thank you for all that you do.

I want to thank you more broadly for the community volunteers, the organisations, and the charities that constantly support communities across Britain. British Sikhs are hardworking, aspirational and committed to public service and thank you for your huge commitments and contributions to Britain.

I was pleased, this was last October, to visit Atam Academy to hear about the values they uphold as a Sikh school. It was a really interesting afternoon we had at the school as the children there talked me through what their faith means to them. How it guides them in the decisions that they make, and how it guides them in their aspirations about their future.

It was a really, really incredibly interesting time to see them apply those values to their thinking. Even at actually, a very young age, as they map out not only what they are doing now, but what they are going to be doing with the rest of their lives.

The values that I saw that afternoon at the school, and I have seen in so many other places of; your community serving, fighting oppression and seeking justice, that is something that the labour party firmly believes in. You know, I know that Sikhi is about lifelong learning and that the Labour Party also believes that education means not just imparting knowledge, but developing the creativity, resilience, the curiosity that young people need in this modern world.