Thank you, and happy Vaisakhi.

I am so grateful to my friend Pat, whom I’ve known now for three decades, he was a schoolboy at the time, for inviting me along this evening to celebrate with you. I am also grateful to Mr Speaker for letting us come here. The Speaker’s apartments are, of course, essentially a form of social housing, he pays rent for it, and it belongs to the government. So in effect, we are in the nicest council house in the country. And it is very, very kind of the Speaker to allow us here.

As we all know, the Speaker is a very busy man and wants to make sure that this historic building is here to celebrate the very best of Britain, and you are the very best of Britain. I know, as both a Constituency Member of Parliament and as a Minister, the countless kindnesses that the Sikh community provides, not just for its own members, but for so many others as well.

I know, and I’ve seen in Gurdwaras, the generosity extended to charitable and philanthropical causes. I’ve seen people invited in for communal meals in genuine need. And I have seen the way in which the founding principles of the Sikh faith; generosity, philanthropy, service, family, and community, are lived every day by all of you.

And, of course, we have been reminded by the Speaker, and by Preet of the courage of British Sikhs over many decades in making sure that those values can be defended against; those who are enemies of their generosity, enemies of pluralism, enemies of decency. So, the debt that the United Kingdom owes to the Sikh community is deep, profound and long-lasting.

And, I was privileged when I was an Education Sectary to work with the Sikh Community in order to ensure that more teaching could be done in a way that was consistent with the Sikh faith. So that new schools could be established by the community in order to ensure that the very best of Sikh traditions could be passed on. But at the same time, I was also inspired by the example of Sikh teachers and Sikh parents who recognised that a great education was the best way of ensuring that the next generation could succeed. And our society could be more inclusive and more equal.

In my current job, where our second departmental quarters are in Wolverhampton, we have a direct responsibility that every community in the country is valued. I am reminded every day of the huge contribution that British Sikhs make; to commerce, to public service, but above all, to making Britain the plural, democratic, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic success story that it is. Everyone in this room is a success story; everyone is an example to others, as the Sikh community is an example to all.

That is why at this Vaisakhi when we remember in 1699 those initial promises that were made, and the example of the Guru and what the other speakers have said. On behalf of the United Kingdom Government, and all the members of Parliament here, I want to join my voice with others in saying a profound thank you. To say it is my duty and my responsibility to ensure that the achievements of the Sikh community are understood by all and that the future for every Sikh citizen is safe, secure, warm and successful.

Thank you all very much.