

Welcome to the 17th Vaisakhi at Westminster. It is an honour to have so many Members of Parliament, Ministers and guests. May I also thank Speaker Rt Hon Lindsey Hoyle for extending us his home again.

Today we have representatives of over 80 organisations present. They have come from as far as Manchester and Huddersfield. We welcome them all.

We also have Members of Parliament from many constituencies, from Scotland to South of England and from Wales. We have MPs from all parties.

We are grateful to all of them for joining us to celebrate Vaisakhi at Westminster.

We also have Guests from other faith communities. Welcome to them all.

This function is made a success by the many volunteers, donors and the staff of the Speaker's House who assist us in many ways to make this function run smoothly.

We try and focus on a theme every year.

This year we are promoting value based education.

I am also the trustee of the first Sikh School in Britain, the Guru Nanak Sikh Academy.

We have put stress on values from the beginning.

We find that Sikh values resonate with British values.

By bringing them together, we instil a strong understanding of morals, social responsibilities and citizenship in the children that go through the school.

The Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha also run a number of schools. They too emphasise sound and good values.

Our message today from this Vaisakhi function is that Government should encourage all schools to ensure value based education that encourages children to understand social responsibilities, responsibilities towards society and country and respect for their parents, relatives, friends and wider society as well as other faiths and beliefs.

We are in a complex period. We see news of knife crimes, gang violence and petty crimes frequently occurring in our streets. Many, if not most, of these involve children.

The majority of children are well behaved, have good sense of morals and respect towards others.

However we should strive through structured and value based education to ensure that all children come out of their schooling as responsible citizens.

Gurdwaras and religious places also have a great deal of responsibility to promote values among children.

Many Gurdwaras up and down the country run classes for children in Kirtan, as you very attentively heard from children from Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall Kirtan Academy today. Many Gurdwaras run Punjabi classes and many run camps for children during holidays. Some run activities for children at weekends.

These all help children to develop social responsibilities as well.

The British Sikh Consultative Forum will help Gurdwaras to coordinate setting up sound and successful structures to encourage values based programmes to help future generations becoming good citizens.

Last year the British Sikh Consultative Forum engaged in a number of activities and meetings. However a report commissioned by the Government on Faith literacy has caused some issues. Our feeling is that the report failed to focus on better understanding of faiths and the positive values they can bring to society and to the country.

The report unnecessary went into tangents particularly on law and order issues which have no relevance to understanding faiths and their values.

These law and order matters concern society in general. They are not specific to the values and practices of any faith.

We sincerely hope that the Government will look to review this report and work with faith communities to bring a more positive and constructive one that will help Government departments as well as faith communities to work with each other positively.

We now also have a well established interfaith group which is engaged in several inter faith activities. We are hoping that it will get bigger and bring about a better understanding of the Sikh community.

May I thank everyone for joining us at this Vaisakhi at Westminster.

We are honoured that the Secretary of State at the Levelling up, Housing and Communities Department joined us.

We are also grateful to Shadow Foreign Secretary for joining us

We thank representatives of all political parties gracing us with their presence.

We hope you will help your self to the samosas and chai from Punjab Restaurant and enjoy yourself.

Thank you