

# Friday Sermon: Conference of World Religions 2014

March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih said that about three weeks ago Jama'at Ahmadiyya UK held a conference to commemorate its 100 years in Britain. Scholars and representatives of various religions were invited to present concept of God and religion based on their scriptures. The theme of the conference was God in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Indeed, Islam was going to be represented at the conference and it was done by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih. Other religions represented were Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Druzes and Zoroastrianism. Also present at the event were Sikhs and Baha'i. In addition politicians and human rights activists were also given the opportunity to present their views. The conference was held in a traditional venue called Guildhall which was built around 1429 or perhaps even earlier and is known to be one of the two oldest buildings in London. It has historical significance.

The conference was shown on MTA and people must have seen it and it is hoped that it will be mentioned in Al Fazl with reference to its historic significance. The purpose to speak about it in today's sermon was not to give its history but to give some details of the conference. It is hoped that Urdu translation of Huzoor's address as well as the other addresses has been done. It has been requested from Pakistan that the conference should be mentioned in Friday sermon as Huzoor mentions his tours so that listeners may have a good understanding and appreciate its significance. Some people do not watch [such] proceedings on MTA, only yesterday someone wrote to Hazrat Khalifatul Masih that they had read about the conference in such and such newspaper. People listen to the Friday sermon with greater eagerness. It would be better if Ahmadi watch it on MTA, it was a great occasion.

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih gave brief extracts of some of the speakers' talks and also gave a summary of his keynote speech and gave views and comments of some guests as a mark of God's help and support and so that we and the world could know that the triumph of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) is being demonstrated through his true and ardent devotee.

Before giving the details Huzoor said that the administration of UK Jama'at which organised such a big event did not promote it ahead of time as they should have and were satisfied by simply organising it and anticipating a large number of guests. This was a chance to introduce the Jama'at on a wide scale and disseminate the beautiful teaching of Islam to as many people as possible. If the media had been contacted properly it would have produced better results than what we have as a result of efforts Ameer Sahib and his team is making now. These days press is a huge source of promoting one's message. In this regard most Jama'ats around the world do not perform as required and show failings. USA is now improving somewhat in this regard and good work is being carried out in this regard in Ghana, Sierra Leone and francophone Africa countries. We should have access to the media on every level so that the world gets to know the beautiful teaching of Islam. This is great source of Tabligh and Jama'ats need to pay attention to this.

Some speakers spoke well and it is hoped it was the voice of their heart. Chairman of the Hindu Council in Britain, Umesh Chander Sahrma said: 'Today's topic is very interesting, it means at least one thing is for sure that all of us believe God exists. The other thing that is very clear is that all the political leadership and groups have failed to bring peace, harmony among the communities or in the world. You can see conflicts all over the place and for one reason or the other people do not believe the political leaders. This is the time when I think we have to come back to our faith.' He also said that we should lead by example and not simply advise others. Huzoor remarked may Allah make them practice this because this is indeed the reality.

The Dalai Lama's message was read out by his representative in London. He said: 'All religions teach the virtues of love, altruism and patience. Therefore even if they may hold different philosophical views we should respect them all. Every religious tradition has made significant contribution to the humanity for centuries past. In the future too such traditions can help us promote peace in our own respective communities and bring about harmony and understanding between the neighbours. The important thing is for all believers to put the teachings of their respective religious traditions into practice sincerely into their day to day life. Conflict in the name of religion occurs when people fail to grasp true intent of their respective faith. We should encourage contact between the followers of different religions...general public will develop respect for others' religious traditions this in turn will promote harmony in society. I give my whole hearted support to the conference of world religions being convened in London on 11 February 2014 by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK. I believe that meetings of this sort have a powerful symbolic effect ...my prayers that fruits of your exchanging will be far reaching and long lasting.'

The spiritual head of the Druze community in Israel, Sheikh Moafaq Tarif said: 'We have strong relations and close ties with all sects and religions in the Holy Land, the cradle of faith and the home and place of the spiritual journey of all the Prophets. The Holy Qur'an states: **'O mankind, we have created from a male and a female; and We have made you into clans and tribes that you may recognise one another. Verily, the most honourable among you, is he who is the most righteous among you. Surely, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.'** (49:14) I am really grateful to His Holiness, the head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Community and its members for this invitation and I am congratulating you for this impressive conference of world religions which is a part of the Ahmadiyya Muslims' UK centenary celebrations. As Druze community we established very strong ties with the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in the Holy Land. Let us join our hands in denouncing violence and aggression in all its forms and sow the seeds of love by developing peace not only in the East but all over the world.'

Archbishop Kevin McDonald represented the Catholic Church. He said: 'I am both honoured and grateful for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Catholic Church at this conference of world religions organised by the Ahmadiyya community in your this centenary year. It is a sign of the times that a gathering like this should take place and it is a reason to be grateful for the times in which we live.' He read out a message from Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice: 'I am grateful for the opportunity to direct my prayerful greeting to the centenary conference of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community especially as representatives of different faiths gather to consider peace.'

Rabbi Professor Daniel Sperber, represented the Chief Rabbi of Israel. He said: 'We live in a society where materialism is seen as a positive value of the highest order and where the gap between the haves and the have-nots has reached terrifying proportions. In the name of progress and comfort we are depleting the world of its natural resources polluting our fresh water assets, destroying our forests and I hardly need to continue this litany of ecological maladies. We live in a world riven with political and religious strife and turmoil. The name of God and His messages are trampled underfoot in the name of rationalism and political convenience.' The Rabbi said everyone should get together and work against these aspects. Hazrat Khalifatul Masih remarked that he hoped these thoughts were also appreciated by the head of their country and were also related to him.

High Commissioner of Ghana read out a message from the President of Ghana. The message said that the event once again reminds us that God sent His beloved Prophets in this world who gave their message to people of all races without discrimination that mankind should live peacefully and in mutual harmony. He said that a Peace Council has been established in Ghana and the country has religious tolerance where everyone has representation.

Baroness Warsi said: 'It is an honour to speak before such an illustrious audience in such prestigious surrounding here at the conference of world religions. It is a testament to the openness and the pragmatism and the humility of the Ahmadiyya community that your flagship global event today is not just about celebrating

your own faith but you are celebrating all faiths. You only have to look around Britain to see the huge contribution Ahmadiyya community is making in all walks of life especially in relation to charity and especially in relation to social action...It has clearly been an important moment for so many faiths to come up here and express their solidarity to each other and their solidarity and commitment to inter-faith work and it has been a privilege for me to be part of that.'

Dr Katrina Lantos Swett, vice-chair US Commission on International Religious Freedom who has known the Jama'at for quite some time also came to the conference all the way from USA. She said: 'It truly is an honour and a privilege to be here with all of you this evening as we celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the presence of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in the UK ...in a joyful celebration of tolerance and freedom which is the hallmark of your community and its people. Simply stated you, the Ahmadiyya community are living proof that religion can indeed be a true friend of peace, understanding and liberty. Looking back at the twentieth century we also see something beautiful and precious. We see brave human beings imbued by their religious teachings rising up and becoming a light in the darkness...' She went on to give some examples in this regard and then said that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Jama'at Ahmadiyya was seen to raise voice against oppression towards all people. Huzoor said she was not quite accurate here because the Jama'at has been raising voice against oppression since the time of the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) and in accordance with his teaching which dates back to 19<sup>th</sup> century. She said: 'Looking back at the 20th century we see you, the Ahmadiyya community, standing not just for yourselves but for all of humanity against humanity's oppressors. We, like you, stand for tolerance and freedom. We, like you, stand for a world where people of all backgrounds and beliefs can come together and learn from each other. To learn implies listening and to listen implies respect and tolerance. I am grateful indeed that the Ahmadiyya community is about respect for our fellow human beings...May we redouble our efforts to do just that.' Huzoor said may Allah make the big powers understand this.

Rt Hon. Dominic Grieve, the Attorney General read out the Prime Minister's message prior to which he said: 'I don't think I can think of a more apt location for this interfaith conference looking forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century that we should meet in a great hall of merchants, the very people who took Britain, England outward towards the rest of the world and had the miraculous consequence of bringing all of you together in this place...As a person of Christian faith it has always seemed to me that it is very much easier for somebody who has faith to understand people of other faiths than it is for those who have no faith at all.' Huzoor said may Allah make it so that he was accurate in saying this. The Prime Minister's message was: 'I send my sincere greetings to the Ahmadiyya Muslim community as you come together with faiths around the world to unite for social and international peace. I recognise the great work you do here in Britain from inter-faith events across the country to helping communities who had been affected by the recent floods and today highlights the significant work you do for inter-faith relations and peace overseas. I am delighted that the British Government is represented today. We join His Holiness and faiths leaders around the world to discuss how faiths can come together to help bring about peace.'

A message from Her Majesty the Queen who is the supreme governor of the Church of England and defender of the faith read: 'The Queen was pleased to receive your kind message sent on behalf of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK on the occasion of the conference of world religions being held today at Guildhall as part of your centenary celebrations. Her Majesty was interested to learn of the aims of the conference and appreciates your thoughtfulness in writing as you did. In return, the Queen sends her best wishes to you all for a most successful and memorable gathering.'

Next Huzoor gave a summarised version of his own keynote address.

God wills to reform mankind and for it to fulfil rights of God and rights of God's creation and it is for this purpose He sent His Prophets. Those who listen to the Prophets are successful and those who reject them eventually reach a bad ending. Each such nation that opposed Prophets, rejected them and rejected the existence of God and said that these were mere fables and there was no God and no chastisement met a sorry state. The

Holy Qur'an is replete with accounts of such people as are books of other religions. These matters should give us cause for concern for these are not fables.

Huzoor told the conference that the Holy Qur'an is the heavenly Scripture that he believes in and it informs us that by sending Prophets God wills to establish high levels of spirituality among humanity and for it to connect to God and thus fulfil His rights and by attaining high level of morals, also fulfil the rights of God's creation.

Huzoor told the conference that when God sent the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) to reform the entire world, he surpassed in disseminating the message and not only that, he spent his nights in intense prayer and supplication made to God. In doing so he wept with such anguish and heartache that the place where he prostrated would become submerged in tears. His agony and anguish to reform mankind cannot be described in words. In the Holy Qur'an God addresses him directly asking: **'So haply wilt thou grieve thyself for sorrow after them if they believe not in this discourse.'** (18:7) However, God Almighty is He Who listens to earnest and heartfelt prayers. And so He answered those prayers of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him). History testifies to the fact that those very people who were ignorant and uncivilised became those with the most magnificent moral values. Never could any worldly power brought about such a spiritual revolution.

Huzoor told the conference about the Holy Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) deportment with his enemies. He said: They were witnesses to the truth that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) responded to their brutality, hatred and vicious assaults with nothing but forgiveness, mercy and compassion. They were witnesses to the truth that when the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) gained victory over the sworn enemies of Islam who, in the past had left no stone unturned in their efforts to destroy the religion he responded with peace by saying to them, 'I have no personal enmity towards you, I do not wish to take any revenge for the cruelties and persecution you inflicted upon us in the past. As long as you guarantee that you will live peacefully, you are free to remain in Mecca, you will not be treated cruelly or unjustly'...when the countless enemies of Islam observed this incomparable benevolence they had no option but to acknowledge it and they accepted Islam.

Huzoor told the conference that the Holy Qur'an has conferred the title of 'mercy for all mankind' on the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) and there are thousands of examples which prove the truthfulness of the Word of God about the Prophet's compassion. In light of these compassionate teachings one question or allegation could potentially be raised and indeed is regularly invoked by some of the non-Muslims...that if Islam teaches Muslims to show love and sympathy and if the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) truly was the mercy for all mankind then why religious wars were fought! To understand this you must be acquainted with the true history of early Islam and keep in mind two important points. 1. History testifies to the fact which even impartial non-Muslim Orientalists recognise that in the early years after the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) made his claim he and his followers were subjected to the most barbaric and horrific persecution in Mecca. Yet the Muslims did not seek any revenge. After years of sustained persecution the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) and his Companions migrated to Medina. However when the people of Mecca invaded Medina to eliminate the Muslims they responded by Divine command which is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an: **'Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is made, because they have been wronged — and Allah indeed has power to help them — Those who have been driven out from their homes unjustly only because they said, 'Our Lord is Allah' — And if Allah did not repel some men by means of others, there would surely have been pulled down cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is oft commemorated. And Allah will surely help one who helps Him. Allah is indeed Powerful, Mighty —'** (22:40 – 41)

Huzoor told the conference that in light of these verses the oppressed were given the right to defend themselves and the verses also safeguard other religions and state that God is Powerful and has the power to defend

Muslims against pagans. In spite of their might and weaponry the pagans were to be defeated and indeed, giving proof of His existence God helped Muslims to defeat an army much larger than them which was also extremely well equipped. The wars fought by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) and his Rightly Guided Khulafa were in defence and to establish peace and were not for power or governance.

Huzoor told the conference that both the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) and the Holy Qur'an prophesised that a time would come when Muslims would forget the true teachings of Islam and today any injustice perpetrated by Muslims or their deteriorated condition is exactly as it was prophesised. Huzoor told them that this is not the ultimate condition of Muslims, he said it was his strong belief that just as the prophecy of the deterioration of Muslims has been fulfilled, the prophecy of their spiritual condition improving will also come true which was to take place in conjunction with the advent of the Promised Messiah. Huzoor told them that he and the Ahmadiyya Jama'at believed that the Promised Messiah came in the person of the founder of the Ahmadiyya Jama'at and he established the teaching of true Islam among his followers. He formed a community that aspires/tries to practice true Islam. God's help and support is with the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) and Huzoor gave just three examples of his truthfulness. First, he had said that in this age many earthquakes and natural disasters will occur and this has been proven right as we note that compared to previous centuries, a lot of earthquakes occurred in the previous century. He had also foretold that the Russian Czar will be overthrown and this was proven correct. He also foretold about great wars and the world has seen two great wars since then. The world is trying to head that way once again. Defence budgets around the world are disregarding other needs and attention is focussed on enhancing military capability. The world needs to reflect once again. Absence of peace in the world is not due to religion, on the contrary it is due to greed and politics.

Huzoor also told the conference that God's help is with the one He sent in this age, otherwise how could a claimant from a small village in India become renowned throughout the world. And following his passing away without God's help he could not have left behind such a flourishing community. A community which due to being firmly attached to the institution of Khilafat, was furthering his mission throughout the world. Huzoor told the conference that the founder of our Jama'at has given us the insight that the Word of God is not old fables, rather God is lives today and speaks to His righteous servants and shows them true signs. It is our duty to pay heed to the reformer of the age and recognise our God's true spirit. Instead of laying the blame of our mistakes upon God and upon our religions we should take a look in the mirror and assess our own shortcomings. May God enable the world to practice this!

Next Huzoor presented some of the views and comments of the guests at the conference.

Stein Villumstad, secretary general of the European Council of Religious Leaders said that coming together like this where people of different faiths listened to each other with open-mindedness and for everyone to acknowledge that we all wish for peace was a great success.

His Excellency Joslyn Whiteman, High Commissioner for Grenada to the UK said that it was a great conference. It is a source of enhancement of faith that so many people belonging to different faiths could come together under one roof. Another advantage of this is that we can have an idea how to get people together to solve the problems the world faces.

Mak Chisty, Commander of London Metropolitan Police said that he liked that people of different religions spoke about the qualities of their religion and no one criticised the other. This is what fosters concord and harmony.

Huzoor said the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) indeed had written to Queen [Victoria] in this vein.

MEP Charles Tannock said that there is no other option but to adopt this way in future. We all believe in God and cannot accept that God wills us to be in conflict with each other in the name of religion. He supported the message of peace that the conference gave and appreciated the Ahmadiyya motto love for all hatred for none and said that it was a universal message. The more religions came together the better it would be.

Baroness Berridge, chair of All Parliamentary Group on International Religious Freedom, UK, said that she was aware of the charitable services of the Ahmadiyya community as mentioned by the head of the community in his address. She said she was pleased to cooperate with Ahmadiyya community in their works and was happy that Ahmadis have complete freedom in this country.

A member of the All-Parliamentary Group on International Religious Freedom said that as the head of the Ahmadiyya community said all religions basically teach love, tolerance and peace. The media has presented religion as a cause of mutual conflict but as we saw in the conference today the reality is quite the opposite.

Another message from the Chief Rabbi was that the message of the head of the Ahmadiyya community was about peace and mutual understanding. All world religions should exchange ideas with each other because we are all children of Adam and are creation of God. We should respect mutual sentiments and co-exist in peace rather than in conflict. As much as possible we should strive for peace. Huzoor remarked as the Chief Rabbi he should also give this message to the government of Israel.

A Councillor said that he felt the head of the Ahmadiyya community was putting across the idea that all religions have a lot of commonalities and all religions teach values of humanity.

A member of a political party of Norway said that the head of the Ahmadiyya community had given a very important message in the end which is that we need to come together to work for peace. He felt this was the most needed thing in the world and it was also needed a lot in Norway.

A professor from the University of Amsterdam said that the head of the Ahmadiyya community had said in very clear words that the teachings of Islam and the Qur'an emphasised maintaining peace rather than extremism.

Fr. Aethelwine of Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch said that he had attended many gatherings of the Ahmadiyya community and he sincerely appreciated the head of the community and his message. As ever the best speech of the conference was that of the Ahmadiyya Khalifa. Certainly it is courageous and commendable to get people of different religions together and speak about religion.

A guest from Ireland said that he was moved by the message of the conference. He said to the Ahmadiyya community that it is very difficult to spread one's message without publicity. The community did so much work and he would be happy if this work was promoted in a better way as only a handful of people in the world were aware of the community's work.

Jehangir Sarosh of the European Council of Religious Leaders said that he was Zoroastrian by faith and was very impressed by the conference. All speakers were very good and the concluding address was simply great.

A teacher of religious studies said that he did not realise how spiritual the conference would be. He said he had listened to all faiths and would go home and reflect on what he had heard. He hoped that the text of the address of the head of the Ahmadiyya Community will be published soon.

A guest from the Catholic Church said that for quite some time people had started to consider that religion was not needed. The conference proved this to be a baseless thought.

Two academics from a university in Antwerp had come to the conference. They said they were very impressed by the address of the head of the Ahmadiyya community with reference to the correct teachings of Islam and the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him). They had decided to return home and provide Flemish translation of the Holy Qur'an to the students at the university so that they could be aware of the correct teachings of Islam. Huzoor remarked they had been provided with the Flemish translation of the Qur'an.

Mr Santiago, a university professor from Madrid, author of many books who has close ties with the Jama'at was also present at the conference. He said that he could fill many pages to express his views on the significance of the conference and the message of the Ahmadiyya community. He said different religions have been the source of conflict in the history of world. In the current era too there are conflicts between different cultures, the East and the West, Islam and Christianity, developed and developing countries. These conflicts can be used as excuses to fan the fire of hatred and injustice. However, the motto of the Ahmadiyya community, love for all hatred for none is the summary of all religions. This motto brings together all peoples and religions rising above their creeds and views. At a time when quite a few Muslims are putting their own lives and lives of others in danger by promoting cruelty and oppression, the role of Ahmadiyya community is most significant. Therefore an event such as this should be promoted on global level by the ideological and religious communities.

Mr Garcia from Pedro Abad is a former mayor of the town and had in this capacity allowed the construction of Basharat Mosque to go ahead in spite of opposition. He had met Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (may Allah have mercy on him) who had presented him with a framed copy of the Kalima which adorned his office. He is quite impressed by the Jama'at. He said that coming together of so many delegates, MPs, political personalities, academics and representatives of various humanitarian organisations was a very positive step. He said he congratulated the Ahmadiyya community for this and wished them to attain their objectives. He said he was deeply honoured to have met the third Ahmadiyya Khalifa at the foundation-laying ceremony of Basharat Mosque and also met the fourth Khalifa at the inauguration of the Mosque and now through this conference he had met the fifth Khalifa. He appreciated the words of Mr Mirza Masroor Ahmad who had spoken with reference to a peaceful society, free from war and conflict and had censured those governments which give preference to armaments in the name of defence over humanity. He said he was delighted that Mr Mirza Masroor Ahmad had brought together people of different religions to uphold society based on justice and mutual respect. We live in a world full of contradictions. Some countries have reached the height of progress while a large number of people are dying of hunger and are destitute. On the one hand we dump hundreds of thousands of food in the sea and on the other hand millions have difficulty to feed themselves. While the number of millionaires is on the increase, some sections of society are extremely underprivileged. What is needed is a world which abandons war and is desirous of peace and which moves forward with everyone else and promotes societal justice.

Next Hazrat Khalifatul Masih said that may the world turn to its Maker, it can only be saved from the destruction that it faces by turning to God. Indeed, the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) had warned about this in his writings. Huzoor asked for prayers for the situation in Pakistan. May God save the country from the evil and keep Ahmadis safe and also them safe who wish for peace and wish to avoid conflict and strife. Prayers should also be made about the situation in Syria, may God protect Ahmadis there. Recently yet another Ahmadi was imprisoned without any reason. Pray for all Ahmadis and also generally pray for the world. With the developing situation around the world it appears to be heading towards war and the big powers do not seem to understand how horrific a situation would emerge if war ensues. The world stands on the edge of destruction it is our duty to pray a lot for them.