



بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE GRACIOUS AND EVER MERCIFUL

LAJNA IMAILLAH UK

AHMADIYYA MUSLIM WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Registered Charity No. 1189468



**PRESS RELEASE**

**EMBRACING EQUITY AND EMPOWERING WOMEN:  
AHMADI MUSLIM WOMEN HOST PEACE SYMPOSIUM**

**14th June 2023**

A diverse group of over 450 women came together at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Peace Symposium held by Lajna Ima'illah, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association UK, on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> June to celebrate and further the journey women have made towards achieving a more equitable and empowering society for women, following the theme of this year's International Women's Day. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association is also celebrating its centenary year since its establishment in 1922.


The symposium – a women's only event – was held at the largest mosque in Britain, Baitul Futuh in south London which has recently undergone a redevelopment.

Academics, charity workers, parliamentarians, civic leaders, and representatives from faith communities were in attendance as well as members of local communities. The aim of this annual gathering was to inspire a concerted effort towards recognising the vital role women play in bringing and ensuring societal peace.



Farzana Yousuf, the Association's National Secretary for Outreach and Community Relations, welcomed the guests and gave an introduction to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, its principles and ethos and the work of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association. She delved into the importance of justice and equity within the ethos of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Love for All, Hatred for None.

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Iwan e Nusrat Jahan (Head Office)  
Unit B1, Endeavour Place, Coxbridge Business Park, Farnham, GU10 5EH  
Tel: 020887482030 / Fax: 02088744815

[www.lajna.org.uk](http://www.lajna.org.uk)



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The first speaker of the evening was Baroness Shaista Gohir OBE, a Crossbench Peer who was awarded an OBE by her late majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 2022. She has worked with the University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust and is the founder of the NISA Global Foundation an organisation working to support women and girls in the developing world. She spoke about the role women have in building communities as well as organising activism to confront a range of societal challenges, including Islamophobia and racism. Mentioning the importance of working with a framework that prioritises 'solidarity, inclusion and safety' as well as looking at the systemic inequalities and re-evaluating structures which have made women's advancement difficult, she gave an inspiring speech on how women can work to overcome barriers.




Baroness Gohir was followed by Councillor Catherine Clark, who is the Vice Chairperson of the East Hampshire District Council and has served as Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Whitehall Town Council. Her speech showed an appreciation of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's efforts in promoting societal cohesion through various activities including fundraising and participation in humanitarian projects as well as working towards the important work the community have done to clarify people's understanding of Islam in an effort to promote interfaith harmony and social peace.



Anne Sengpiel, a 19<sup>th</sup> century historian at Hampton Court Palace, then spoke in detail on the history of women's rights and in particular the Suffrage Movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Britain and the socio-political factors which led to women finally being given the vote being just one step towards women's liberation. Anne Sengpiel remarked that it wasn't until 1928 that all women in Britain were afforded the same rights as men in terms of voting, adding that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association was already six

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years old by 1928 and that the Auxiliary has always been exemplary and will always be, as it has been in the past, ahead of the culture.




The keynote speech was delivered by Dr Fariha Khan, the president of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association UK, who is also a doctor in the NHS. Dr Khan's speech gave a detailed overview of the evening's theme, 'embracing equity and empowering women' through the lens of Islam and explained the many ways in which Islamic teachings uplift women through bonds of sisterhood. The speech worked through the 'past, the present, and the future,' of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association.

Dr Khan commented that the fact we were still talking about women's rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> century illustrated how women the world over were still struggling against injustices and inequalities.

Turning towards the history of women's rights in Islam, which she commented are integral to Islamic teaching, Dr Khan categorically stated that women's rights infringements in any Muslim country do not represent Islam and instead if one looked at the true teachings of Islam, they would see that women are treated on an equitable footing as men. Whilst the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association celebrates its centenary year across the globe, she mentioned that the efforts to promote women's rights began with the advent of Islam, stating: 'the story started many, many, years ago, actually more than 14 centuries ago to be precise.' She cited the Caliph of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, His Holiness Mirza Masroor Ahmad's (may Allah be his Helper) commitment to women's advancement and progress and quoted him: 'Let it be crystal clear that in no respect is a woman's status less than that of a man.'

Emphasising that this is not just a spoken sentiment but is entrenched in the ethos of the Ahmadiyya Community, she gave a brief history of the establishment of the Women's Association. Dr Khan mentioned that the origins of forming this Association was to overcome the barriers society of early 20<sup>th</sup> century India was placing upon women through lack of education and other facets of social independence. She noted that today all over the globe, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has made great efforts towards making education accessible regardless of socio-economic background. Through such practical means, the Community has seen girls from across the globe flourish in their education and achieve highly. Dr Khan said that the Ahmadiyya Community is a source of empowerment and added that it: 'has provided us with a platform where we come together for the betterment of ourselves, for the betterment of society and our children. ...women are nation builders, women are peace makers, women are gate keepers for the future generations.'

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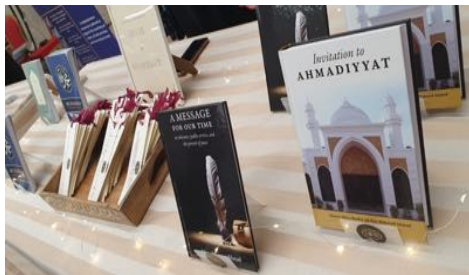
Dr Khan also mentioned the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association's commitment towards climate justice and mentioned the Association's efforts to build a maternity hospital in Sierra Leone, the country with the highest maternal mortality rate in the world, with £1 million being raised for it through donations. Citing that maternal care is at the very core of women's access to equal opportunities, she echoed the words of the founder of the Ahmadiyya Community, the Promised Messiah, His Holiness Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, (peace be on him) who had stated: "my desire, my wish and my objective is serving humanity. It is my job, my faith, my inspiration, and my way."

Mentioning that Islam teaches that love of one's nation is a part of faith, she also took a moment to highlight the important work the Association has done in the UK, supporting 474 charities in the last year and having provided 12,000 hot meals all through volunteer work.

Dr Khan said that it is the spirit of sisterhood which stands at the core of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association, and which inspires women to work towards a positive and empowered future. Dr Khan concluded with the importance of remembering our future generations, as we hand the baton to them, we must ensure we are leaving a world full of peace and that this endeavour is more important than ever as the world hurtles towards a global war with disastrous effects.


Following her address, Dr Fariha Khan presented a donation of £5000 each to two charities, Hestia, a women's organisation which provides support to survivors of domestic abuse and to the MS Trust which provides support for those living with multiple sclerosis.

Attendees were given guided tours of the mosque complex, and several exhibitions and interactive displays were available with the aim of informing guests about the history and the work of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association UK and fomenting societal understanding and harmony across all faiths and backgrounds.



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#### MEDIA CONTACTS:

Mrs Farzana Yousuf  
National Secretary for Outreach and Community Relations  
Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association UK  
Email: [sectabligh@lajnauk.org](mailto:sectabligh@lajnauk.org)

Mrs Shermeen Butt  
National Press and Media Department  
Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association UK  
Email: [press.media@lajnauk.org](mailto:press.media@lajnauk.org)

#### NOTES FOR EDITORS:

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association UK is a national Muslim Women's group established in 1922 with more than 13,000 members across Britain. It is an auxiliary organisation of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK which was established in Britain in 1913. This year marks the centenary year of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Associations with celebrations taking place across the UK and other countries also. Within the UK, the Association has pledged to plant 100,000 trees across the country to commemorate the occasion.

The Community has approximately 33,000 members across more than 100 chapters. The Community built the Fazl Mosque in Southfields London in 1924 which was the first Mosque in London and also the Baitul Futuh Mosque in South London, the largest Mosque in Western Europe.

It was founded in 1889 by Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (peace be upon him) who claimed to be the Promised Messiah and Mahdi awaited by all major religions, including the Jews, Christians and Muslims. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is now established in more than 200 countries with tens of millions of members worldwide. Its motto is "Love for All, Hatred for None".

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is the largest organised Muslim Community in the world and is led by a system of spiritual succession known as Khilafat. Its current Khalifa is the fifth successor to the Promised Messiah (peace be upon him); his name is His Holiness, Mirza Masroor Ahmad. His title is Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih V.



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