

17/5/2020

To Rt Hon Robert Jenrick
Secretary of State
Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government

Dear Secretary of State

**Joint Letter on Easing of Lockdown for Gurdwaras from British Sikh Consultative Forum
And Sikh Council UK**

We appreciate that the government is considering plans to open 'places of worship'. We have also been informed that you had a meeting with representatives of Faith communities.

We were extremely disappointed that no representative from the Sikh faith community was invited to the meeting. This has been perceived both as an insult and an understanding that the government or the department, under your stewardship, does not recognise the Sikh faith community to be of relevance.

We note that there were faith leaders from different faith communities who have the respect and endorsement of their faith communities and who have perhaps the most knowledge about the teachings and tenets of their own faith. After all, any faith leader has to be of the 'faith' that he or she represents, just as any organisation of doctors or engineers will have people who are practising doctors or engineers themselves.

A 'faith leader' from the Sikhs will be *amritdhari*, have the endorsement of Gurdwaras and be able to read the Guru Granth Sahib as well as being able to lead in prayers. We noted that members of the Anglican, Catholic, Muslim and Hindu communities on the platform all have these strengths and commitments in their respective faiths. We didn't see anyone from the Sikh 'faith' community in that platform.

It's very unclear whether in its eighteen years the 'faith department/ division' has understood the basics of the Sikh faith. If not, we feel that it is an extraordinary negligence and lack of propriety on their part. We hope that under your stewardship, you will also see to the discrepancy and require the publicly paid civil servants to read about the faiths of the faith community they are dealing with. After all, you prepare so well for your own briefs, we don't see why department officers dedicated to engagement with faith communities should not also be diligently aware of the field they work in.

We sent you a letter dated 11th May 2020. It laid out the basis on which Gurdwaras would like to open up gradually. It is a detailed road map/plan. As you chose not to engage with a representative of the Sikh faith community, we assume that you have no objection to our plans and consider some aspects of it consistent with the law as we understand it.

Gurdwaras are law abiding and will continue to observe the law with regard to current restrictions as we understand it. Congregations services continue to be suspended as are

provisions for solitary prayer. We will consult among the Gurdwaras and let you know when weddings and some services might be permitted. We would of course welcome a dialogue with the Government on this, if it choses to recognize the 'faith' Sikh community.

However consistent with relaxation on essential services and supplies, 'darshan' of the Guru Granth Sahib is considered an essential part of the life of the Sikhs as is receiving Parshad. This will follow the restrictive practices now operating in supermarkets.

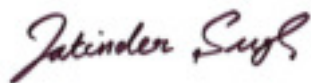
Consequently, some of the key Gurdwaras with the capabilities and necessary number of volunteers and workers will start to permit members of Sikh Sangat to access this essential need in their life starting on Wednesday 26th May 2020, the remembrance day for the shaheedi (martydom) of Sri Guru Arjan Dev Jee, our fifth Guru on behalf of humanity and freedom of conscience. That is a day when a large number of Sikhs will feel the need to do 'darshan' and get 'parshad'. A disciplined system of queueing, physical distancing and different entrances and exits will be followed. We will advise families not to bring anyone who is vulnerable but instead take the 'parshad' for the.

They will just allow 'darshan', meaning Sikhs who desire to be able to pay respect and be able to be in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib Ji will be able to do so. They will be given Parshad in a packet by a sewadar wearing gloves, and necessary PPE. The process takes very short time from entering the Gurdwara and going out the other exit. This process will be assisted by employees or volunteers (sewadars) alongside with stricter guidelines than those followed by Supermarkets and others.

We hope there will not be any tension with any state authorities on this matter and its as clear as crystal that this is , as we understand, consistent with the law. If you wish to discuss these measures with us, please feel free to contact us. At this time it will be uncomfortable to engage with the Faith Policy Team currently as we feel they may not have the necessary competency on Sikh Faith Community. That is a matter we wish to take up in future with the Secretary of State.

We wish to stress that 'Parshad' is not the same as communion. We hope the Faith Policy Team will be able to advise you on that at least.

This letter has been endorsed by the majority of Gurdwaras after consultation.



Jatinder Singh
Secretary General, Sikh Council UK

Jasdev Singh Rai
Gen Secretary BSCF