

Written evidence submitted by the Network of Sikh Organisations

Executive summary

- Despite some high profile attacks *Action Against Hate* has categorically failed to acknowledge the backlash to Islamism suffered by Sikhs and Hindus
- Through FOI we identified that 28% of the victims of 'Islamophobic hate crime' recorded by the MET Police in 2015 were non-Muslims – this included Sikhs, Hindus, Christians and people of no recorded faith.
- Government supported initiatives which improve levels of religious literacy are urgently needed to tackle prejudice fuelled by ignorance
- The status quo is causing disquiet. The government must take steps to pursue a more inclusive approach for Sikhs, Hindus and other non-Abrahamic faiths

About us: The Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) is a registered charity no. 1064544 that links more than 130 UK gurdwaras and other UK Sikh organisations in active cooperation to enhance the image and understanding of Sikhism in the UK.

Action Against Hate

1. The cross-governmental 4-year hate crime strategy - *Action Against Hate* focuses solely on Abrahamic faiths.¹ The report categorically fails to acknowledge the suffering of Sikhs, Hindus or other non-Abrahamic faith victims. There are 45 examples of the suffering of Muslims, Jews and Christians – but not one from non-Abrahamic communities. The report outlines a number of taxpayer-funded projects designed to challenge Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, but none for Hindus or Sikhs. The existing 'Abrahamic centric' strategy is causing significant disquiet amongst Britain's Sikh and Hindu communities. Our Director, Lord Singh of Wimbledon has raised concerns about this biased approach in debates and correspondence with Ministers.² We recommend an urgent review of the plan to bridge the gap.

Islamism and its backlash

2. Hate crimes against Sikhs in particular are well documented since 9/11. In the US, the first killed in retribution for 9/11 was a turbaned Sikh.³ In 2015 we saw the conviction of a neo-Nazi for the attempted beheading of a Sikh dentist in Wales – a revenge attack for Lee Rigby.⁴ He was targeted because of the colour of his skin. Last

¹https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/543679/Action_Against_Hate_-_UK_Government_s_Plan_to_Tackle_Hate_Crime_2016.pdf

² <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2016-10-18/debates/B3D75106-307B-4C38-A17B-52E5F7415B37/HateCrime#contribution-8643B865-FE90-44D0-823C-DC698D2B49FE>

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2016-09-14/debates/16091430000415/HateCrime#contribution-1609143000029>

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2016-01-27/debates/16012745000325/ReligiousHateCrime#contribution-16012745000014>

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2015-12-01/debates/15120143000484/ParisAttacksViolenceAgainstMuslims#contribution-15120143000057>

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2015-06-25/debates/15062547000484/CommunitiesYoungMuslims#contribution-15062547000058>

³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/17/us/sikh-owner-of-gas-station-is-fatally-shot-in-rampage.html>

year saw the conviction of a man for referring to his Sikh neighbours as “ISIS slags” and “ISIS bitches.”⁵ In Germany (last year) an ISIS inspired bomb attack against a Sikh gurdwara further demonstrates the difficulty the community finds itself in.⁶ We believe the government’s existing policy is out of touch with the wider ramifications of Islamism in Britain, and its consequences for all faiths groups.

Reporting and recording hate crime

3. In 2016 (through FOI) we discovered that 28% of the victims of ‘Islamophobic hate crime’ recorded by the MET in 2015, were in fact non-Muslims. This included Sikhs, Hindus and Christians and people of no recorded faith. Non-Muslim victims therefore, have become invisible through this reporting methodology, whereas the perception of hate crime against Muslims has been inflated beyond the reality, and reported in the media as such.⁷ It is good news that all religious hate crime will be disaggregated (on a mandatory basis) from this April onwards, however Britain is still lagging behind the United States (U.S).

3.1 Following the massacre of Sikh worshippers in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, the U.S Attorney General announced the FBI would start tracking hate crime separately for Sikhs and other minorities.⁸ Since 2015, the FBI has been separately monitoring hate crime against Sikhs, Hindus, Arabs and Muslims.⁹ Prior to this Sikhs and others were classified as victims of ‘anti-Muslim’ hate crime.

3.2 We understand third party hate crime reporting sites provide victims both valuable support and the confidence to report incidents. We believe there is significant under reporting of hate crime from within the Sikh community, and initiatives to support this are urgently required. The government could provide support for Sikh/Hindu communities with projects designed to raise a wider awareness of sites like True Vision.¹⁰

Improving religious literacy

4. Much of the backlash faced by Sikhs is driven by ignorance about Sikh identity. The NSO would welcome government support for the expansion of existing initiatives, which help improve levels of religious literacy. Government supported projects, which facilitate an understanding of Sikhism across the media, government and in schools and colleges would go some way in tackling prejudice fuelled by ignorance. This would mirror projects already in place for the Abrahamic faith communities, details of which have been highlighted in *Action Against Hate*.

⁴ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/an-act-terror-sikh-family-9528045>

⁵ <http://metro.co.uk/2016/09/18/ex-soldier-jailed-for-racially-abusing-sikh-neighbours-and-calling-them-isis-bitches-6135147/>

⁶ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/sikh-temple-bombing-in-germany-was-carried-out-by-isis-sympathisers-a7007166.html>

⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-34138127>

⁸ <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/blog/2015/fbi-finally-recognizes-sikhs-in-new-hate-crime-tracking-program/>

⁹ <http://europe.newsweek.com/fbi-track-hate-crimes-against-hindus-sikhs-arab-americans-317563?rm=eu>

¹⁰ <http://www.report-it.org.uk/home>