

## **STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY**

### **Read Out by Faith Leaders at Luton's 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Peace Walk on 23<sup>rd</sup> Sep'23**

#### **Reader-1 [Gulie Butcher]**

A spate of Quran burning in Sweden & Denmark, the rise of far-right politics in Finland & Netherlands, and a staggering 102% growth reported in the far-right and anti-migrant activism at home in Britain, has highlighted how globally, there appears to be a growing intolerance of both immigrants and Islam, particularly in the right-wing political discourses.

#### **Reader-2 [Charmaine Mhlanga]**

Majoritarianism backed by nationalism is becoming a threat to minorities everywhere globally. It was therefore worth reviewing how and why a few people's freedom of speech, has come to take precedence over the sacredness of religious texts and the sanctity of human dignity. How and why a few people's freedom of speech is allowed to propagate hate and desecrate what is held sacred and revered by millions & billions around the world?

#### **Reader-3 [Ifraz from Central Mosque]**

So, at a very short notice, Luton Central Mosque on Westbourne Road hosted an urgent meeting. In this meeting, we were blessed with the presence of many different faith leaders, many of our elected Councillors and the Luton Council staff members. And together we discussed the PASS initiative – an initiative to 'Protect All Spiritual Scriptures' (PASS).

We were moved and humbled by the presence of so many different faith leaders who had given at a very short notice, their valuable time, presence, and input which was highly appreciated and very encouraging. This meeting certainly fostered interfaith dialogue & interfaith cooperation and strengthened community bonds in Luton.

#### **Reader-4 [Yogesh Mistry]**

The meeting acknowledged that the deliberate burning of any sacred Scripture is a violation of human rights. We live in an interconnected world. It is essential that we work collectively to foster an environment of understanding and mutual respect for all religious and non-religious, beliefs and values.

#### **Reader-5 [Gerald Fox]**

The meeting requested Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF) to write a letter to the UK Prime Minister and to the Deputy Secretary General of the UN, requesting stronger legislation to prevent such hostile acts of burning the religious scriptures and provoking communal discord. We need robust international laws and treaties to prevent acts of religious desecration and to safeguard the rights and beliefs of religious communities worldwide.

#### **Reader-6 [Paramjit Kaur]**

These laws should be designed to safeguard the rights and beliefs of religious communities worldwide, ensuring that every individual can practise their faith without fear of persecution or discrimination and that freedom of speech should not be used to spread hate and that freedom of speech should not be used to desecrate what is held sacred and revered by millions & billions around the world.

#### **Reader-7 [Sanjeev Kumar]**

We live in an interconnected world, where incidents that transpire in one corner of the globe can have far-reaching consequences in other parts of the world too. It is therefore essential that we work collectively with other nations to foster an environment of understanding and mutual respect for all religious beliefs and values.

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**Reader-8 [Aruni Alahapperuma]**

It is crucial that our government actively engages in diplomatic efforts to encourage other countries to join us in this endeavour. By building alliances and fostering dialogue with nations and communities from diverse religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, we must garner support for the implementation of much-needed protection of all sacred scriptures and of all religious freedoms for everyone.

**After a slight pause...**

**Reader-9 [Peter Adams]**

In another unfortunate incident last month, we were shocked and extremely saddened at the reports of the attacks on churches in the Punjab Province of Pakistan. We are grateful to Luton's Muslim leaders & Mosques who unequivocally condemned attack on Churches in Pakistan. They called it appalling, un-Islamic. They called it as an offence against God and humankind, and they called it a scourge that mustn't be and cannot be tolerated.

**Reader-10 [Farzad Forghani]**

So, in a letter from Luton Council of Faiths to the UK High Commission of Pakistan, the Government of Pakistan was urged to take strong and firm action against those responsible for these acts of violence and ensure the safety and well-being of not only Christians, but all religious minorities in Pakistan.

**Reader-11 [Zafar Khan]**

Our Christian brothers and sisters, just like any other religious community, have the right to live and practice their faith freely. Their rights and freedoms must be protected. We stand united with our Christian brothers and sisters in Pakistan. And we reaffirm our commitment to living in peace and harmony with one another and creating an inclusive society for all.

**Reader-12 [Johny]**

We are a town where the majority of Lutonians adhere to a faith tradition, and those of no faith also want the best for our town. Let nothing distract us from walking together in solidarity and in mutual respect for one another. And that is exactly what we are doing in today's Annual Peace Walk event. In our coming together we are reaffirming our commitment to living in peace and harmony with one another and creating an inclusive society for all.

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