

**HUZOOR'S TOUR OF EUROPE**

**SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2019**

**Part 2**

**A Personal Account**

*By Abid Khan*

## **Introduction to part 2**

In *part 1*, I wrote about the first week of the tour of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) to Europe in September and October 2019, which was spent in Holland.

In this second part, I will write about the second week of the tour during which Huzoor graced the France Jalsa Salana and delivered an historic address at UNESCO.

## **Journey to France**

On the morning of 2 October 2019 several hundred members of the Holland Jamaat gathered at the Bait-un-Noor Mosque in Nunspeet to see Huzoor off and after a silent prayer, Huzoor and the other members of his Qafila departed at 11.30am.

The Qafila drove for around three hours before stopping at the *Klokhof Hotel* in the Belgian city Kortrijk for lunch and Namaz.

It was a quaint and picturesque hotel. On one side was a dining area, on another side was a hall, where we offered *Namaz* and on another side were hotel rooms.

At lunch, there were two options. One was a *grilled fish* dish, which was very good. The other dish was *beef steak* but instead of being fried or grilled, the steak appeared to have been steamed.

As a result, the colour of the meat had turned weirdly white. I took a small piece and immediately realised that it was better to stick to the fish!

As we finished our meal, I approached one of the dining staff and asked if it was possible to get a coffee, which I had been craving for a few hours. The waiter responded in fluent French and so I was left none the wiser as to whether they had coffee or not.

Before I could ask a member of the French Jamaat to translate I saw that Huzoor was outside and ready to depart. Thus, I quickly said '*Merci*' to the staff member and rushed back to my car, no coffee to hand!

Before resuming the journey, Huzoor graciously met Ameer Sahib Holland and the other members of the Dutch Jamaat who had been on duty throughout Huzoor's stay in Holland.

Thereafter the Qafila, now being escorted by the French Jamaat, continued its journey to the countryside town of *Trie-Chateau* in northern France, where the *Jalsa Salana France* would take place in the coming days.

### **Arrival at Baitul Atta**

The Jalsa Salana was taking place at the Baitul Atta complex, an outdoor site, consisting several acres of farmland purchased recently by the French Jamaat.

Upon arrival, just after 6.30pm, Huzoor officially inaugurated the complex by unveiling a plaque and offering a silent prayer.

Apart from the hundreds of Ahmadis present, Huzoor was officially welcomed to the town by the *Mayor of Trie-Chateau*.



### Settling down

Upon arriving at a new place, it often takes a little while to settle down. Once you know where you are staying, it is much easier, and you can focus on your work.

On this occasion, it took a little longer than normal for things to settle down.

There were a lot of people who required accommodation and the number of rooms available at the Jalsa site was limited.

During the evening, I was assigned *three* different rooms.

Initially, I was given a room to share with Munir Javed sahib (*Private Secretary*) but then after a few minutes, I was informed that the room allotments had been changed and I would now be staying in a different room in the same block.

I took my luggage to the second room and unpacked my suitcase and went to the Mosque in time for the Maghreb and Isha prayers.

After *Namaz*, I observed Huzoor speak to Ameer Sahib France for a few moments on the way back to his residence.

A few minutes later, I was informed by Ameer Sahib that Huzoor had instructed that Ahmad bhai and I could stay in Huzoor's own residence at the site.

I felt incredibly blessed and privileged to be able to stay in Huzoor's residence.

### **Two staircases**

Huzoor's residence had two separate staircases. Adjacent to the main front door was a staircase used by Huzoor, which led to his room.

Further along the ground floor was a kitchen, a dining area and a living room and on the far side of the living room was another set of stairs, which Ahmad bhai and I used to get to the first floor where the bedrooms were.

As I reached my room, Ahmad bhai pointed to a door at the end of the corridor and said:

***“If you stay this side of the door you are fine but don’t open that door whatever you do as Huzoor’s room is on the other side!”***

For a moment, I felt myself freeze!

In Holland, we had the privilege to stay in Huzoor’s residence but, reassuringly, we were staying on a different level of the house to Huzoor.

Here though, Huzoor’s room was on the same level and just a few metres away.

I felt my heart race and was instantly consumed by a fear of disturbing Huzoor in any way.

On the other hand, I cannot deny it was exhilarating to think that beloved Huzoor was staying just a few metres away.

No matter what I can never be grateful enough to Allah the Almighty.

### **An unexpected house tour**

It was 10.45pm when, whilst unpacking, I heard a door open and, given where the sound was coming from, I knew it was the same door that Ahmad bhai had warned me not to open a little while before! So, I knew it must be Huzoor who had opened the door.

I could hear footsteps and so, as quick as I could, I ran to the corridor.

I looked up and saw beloved Huzoor, who was wearing a white *shalwar kameez* and a white cloth *topi (hat)*, walking towards me.

After briefly inspecting the room in which I was staying, Huzoor proceeded to inspect the rest of the building.

Huzoor entered another room on the same floor and because it was almost pitch black, I asked if I should switch the light on. However, Huzoor told me to leave it off and a moment later, I realised why.

Huzoor walked towards the window facing outwards and looked at the Ahmadis who were standing outside.

If he had put the light on, it would have drawn the attention of the people outside towards the room but Huzoor wished to quietly enjoy the spectacle of seeing *his* people and the wider complex. I remember thinking that if the people outside only knew *who* was looking at them how overjoyed they would be!

Thereafter, Huzoor asked me if I had seen the lounge.

As he walked down the stairs towards the lounge, Huzoor said:

***“The lounge and the other rooms downstairs are quite large. They must have reminded you of your home in Hartlepool!”***

Huzoor continued:

***“They have laid down a red carpet in this building which is similar to the carpet in your house in Hartlepool!”***

I was genuinely amazed at Huzoor’s recollection!

Truth be told, it took me a few seconds to remember which carpet Huzoor was referring to in the house I had grown up in!

I had forgotten how it was, yet beloved Huzoor, who had not been to Hartlepool for many years, remembered the style and colour.

At that moment, images of beloved Huzoor’s visits to Hartlepool in 2004, 2005 and 2007 came flooding back to my mind.

I also recalled Huzoor’s first visit to Hartlepool.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) visited Hartlepool quite frequently and in August 1997 he brought several members of his family with him.

In addition to his immediate family, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) brought *Hazrat Mirza Mansoor Ahmad sahib*, father of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) and *Hazrat Mirza Muzaffar Ahmad*, the Ameer Jamaat USA. He also brought his nephew, *Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (aba)* with him.

In our family, we have always considered that trip to be extremely special.

My late father, Dr Hameed Ahmad Khan, once told me that he had not slept for a single moment on the first night of that visit, as he could not believe how fortunate he was that the direct progeny of the Promised Messiah (as), from three sons from his marriage to Hazrat Amma Jaan (ra) were staying in his home.

Sadly, my father did not live long enough to learn that the person who was to be chosen by Allah the Almighty as the Fifth Successor to the Promised Messiah (as) was also on that trip.

That visit was the first time I met Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (aba) and though our main focus was on hosting Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) and his elderly relatives, I remember being struck by Huzoor's humility and demeanour.

Given the number of guests staying at our home, the standard of accommodation we offered to Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (aba) who stayed with his respected father, was extremely inadequate. Yet, Huzoor never once complained and remained content at all times.

Observing Huzoor's humility stayed with me and it motivated me to write a few letters to him in the years before he was elected Khalifatul Masih.

I still have a few of Huzoor's replies, which are a treasure for me, as they are my link to him from before he was elected Khalifatul Masih.

Anyway, as I continued to wonder how Huzoor was able to recall the colour of our carpet in Hartlepool, he walked to the lounge and then to another room adjacent to it.

Upon reaching the second room, Huzoor said:

***“The French Jamaat had arranged this room as my study but I do not need such a big room for my work. Instead, I arranged for a small desk to be placed upstairs outside my bedroom. That will be far more convenient for me to work.”***

I understood why the French Jamaat had chosen that room as Huzoor’s study. It was a spacious room and the furniture and décor were very impressive. It is the type of office you would imagine a world leader having or desiring.

However, in contrast to other leaders, Huzoor did not desire opulence of any kind. Rather, all he desired for was a simple and efficient work environment.

A few moments later, Huzoor permitted me to return upstairs with him and so I was able to see his makeshift office. It was in the small landing area directly beside his bedroom.

It was literally just a small table and chair, but it meant that Huzoor did not have to waste time going from the upper level of his bedroom to the ground level to work.

Before returning to his room, Huzoor showed me the kitchen area and adjacent to the kitchen was a small patio, which led directly to the Mosque. Huzoor appreciated the patio area and it seemed that he liked the countryside environment.

Having observed this, I asked:

***“Huzoor, perhaps this place reminds you of Islamabad?”***

Upon this, Huzoor said:

***“No! No! There is nothing to compare to Islamabad!”***

As he said this, Huzoor laughed!

It was clear my comparison had rather short-changed the beautiful Islamabad complex in Huzoor’s mind.

Huzoor continued:

***“In the past, I used to really enjoy visiting Nunspeet in Holland and some other scenic places, as it enabled me to breathe some fresh air and to see some greenery and natural beauty that was not possible in London. However, now it is completely different. Ever since we left England, I have missed Islamabad.”***

Huzoor rarely shows his emotions, yet in that moment I was able to get a glimpse of how it must have been for Huzoor and his family to be confined

for sixteen years to a small flat and being unable to sit outside with any privacy or to take in some fresh air.

On the other hand, I saw how, with the *Grace of Allah*, the *Markaz* was now in a place which afforded Huzoor greater space and the greenery and fresh air which before he only occasionally enjoyed whilst on tours abroad.

### **A WIFI code**

After Huzoor returned to his room, I finished my unpacking before getting ready for bed. I changed into my night-clothes and walked towards the bathroom to brush my teeth, which was at the other end of the corridor.

As I reached the bathroom, I heard the door at the other end of the corridor open again.

A moment later, I heard Huzoor say:

***“Assalamo Alaikum”***

I ran back and was startled to see Huzoor again so soon.

As I approached him, Huzoor said:

***“Do you now the WIFI password. The password they gave me is not working!”***

By chance, I knew the password because a few minutes before coming to my room, I was with Munir Javed sahib (*Private Secretary*) who had asked a local member of the Jamaat for the WIFI password.

As I was there, I had noted it down, otherwise, I had planned to use my 4G connection that night and to find out the password the next morning.

As Huzoor now required it, I was glad I had been standing with Munir sahib when he asked for the password.

I mentioned the password to Huzoor, which he then typed it into his phone.

As he did so, I was hoping and praying in my heart that it would connect!

Thankfully, a couple of seconds later it connected to the WIFI.

After seeing it connect successfully, Huzoor said:

***“Kamaal kar dia hai!”***

I was glad I could offer some, albeit tiny, assistance to Huzoor.

Before returning to his room, Huzoor told me to look out of the window at the view outside.

To the left, it was pitch black and nothing could be seen except the night-sky. However, to the right, I could see streetlights and some buildings that were lit up. It appeared to be a village or small town nearby.

After I had observed the view, Huzoor said:

***“I did not think there would be a town or village for miles around here but the town that is lit up does not appear too far.”***

With that, Huzoor returned to his room and I returned to mine.

I could not help but feel emotional. I had been instructed to come on this trip for official duty, yet I was able to spend personal time with Huzoor in a way that I would forever be grateful for.

### **Feeling unwell**

Earlier that evening I had begun to feel the first effects of a cold and a fever. I was immediately alarmed because flu and severe colds had started to spread amongst the Qafila members in the preceding few days.

My experience is that on all the longer tours, most of us become sick at some point. Probably because, in addition to the travel, we sleep less, often eat at irregular times and not always healthily.

I fell asleep soon after lying down but woke up in a sweat just a few minutes later.

I had a fever and my throat was extremely sore and for the rest of the night, I hardly slept and felt progressively worse.

I managed to get ready for Fajr but even during it I felt seriously unwell. Once *Namaz* had finished, I returned quickly towards my room.

As I entered the building, it so happened that Huzoor had entered at the same moment. I had come in from the front of the residence, whereas Huzoor had entered through the patio next to the kitchen.

My spirits were immediately lifted at seeing Huzoor. It was rare in the extreme for me to meet Huzoor straight after Fajr. He looked so graceful and immaculate in his *achkan coat* and *paghri (turban)*.

Huzoor mentioned that it had been quite cold at night and asked if it was the same in my room.

In the past, whenever I have been unwell on tours, I have tried to conceal it for as long as possible. Even though it cannot be helped, I do not wish for Huzoor, or anyone else, to think that I am not ready for duty. This is not exclusive to me and I have seen the same attitude amongst most of the Qafila members.

However, something different went through my mind at that moment. Instead of thinking of my duty or work, all I could see was my spiritual father and so I told Huzoor that my night had been difficult, and I continued to feel quite unwell.

Very lovingly and affectionately Huzoor asked what symptoms I was suffering with.

Just to hear the affectionate and sympathetic tone of Huzoor's words made me feel better.

Huzoor then advised that I take homeopathic medicine and paracetamol.

Huzoor returned to his residence via the stairs in the hall, whilst I returned to my room via the stairs on the other side of the building.

Three or four minutes had passed and I had just started to recite the Holy Quran when I heard the door open from Huzoor's residence and Huzoor called out my name.

I rushed out to the corridor and upon seeing me, Huzoor said:

***"It occurred to me that you will not have homeopathy with you and so I have brought it for you. Also here is a packet of throat lozenges to soothe your throat."***

With his hand, Huzoor poured a dose of the homeopathy into mine. He then handed me the lozenges which were *cherry menthol* flavoured.

With that, Huzoor returned to his residence.

I was completely overcome by emotion that Huzoor had come himself specially to give me medicine. How kind, how compassionate, how loving!

I had seen first-hand how busy Huzoor was and how relentless his schedule was, yet upon learning that I was unwell, Huzoor had taken the time to come and personally give medication.

With the Grace of Allah, and Huzoor's prayers, the medication worked well and I was feeling much better soon.

### **The most beautiful of sounds**

A few moments later, I could not help but hear Huzoor reciting the Holy Quran in the most beautiful voice from the other side of the door in the corridor.

To hear Huzoor's recitation during *Namaz* is something that always soothes a person's heart and soul but hearing Huzoor's recitation, early in the morning, with no one else present was a gift that was beyond words.

For a few seconds, I wondered whether it was an invasion of Huzoor's private worship for me to listen. But short of my covering my ears, it was not possible not to hear.

So, I cherished those moments, which were repeated over the next few mornings and considered it a great fortune to be able to listen to the Quran being recited in the most melodious way by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih (aba).

### Observing some old photos

On Thursday 3 October, at 1.20pm, I was extremely fortunate to spend some more time in the company of Huzoor.

As he took a short break from his work, Huzoor entered the corridor outside my room and spent the next few minutes looking at various old photos that the France Jamaat had framed and hung on the wall. Most of them were from the 1950s.

There was also an even older group photo in which Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) was sitting with some other members of the Jamaat, including some children.

Underneath were the names of those present and the list included the name of Huzoor's father, Hazrat Mirza Mansoor Ahmad.

Huzoor looked closely at the photo but could not identify his father and so he returned to his room and came back a moment later with his glasses now on.

Thereafter, Huzoor was able to recognise his father, who was a young child in the photo.

As he looked at some further photos, Huzoor said:

***“You will see that in these photos Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) is not wearing an achkan coat but is wearing an overcoat. The Promised Messiah (as) also used to wear an overcoat, rather than an achkan. It was during the***

***era of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih III (rh) that the tradition of the Khulafa wearing achkans began.”***

In the photos I had seen of Huzoor before 2003 and whenever I had met Huzoor prior to his Khilafat, I could never remember him wearing an *achkan*.

Thus, I asked:

***“Huzoor, prior to your Khilafat did you ever wear an achkan?”***

Huzoor smiled and said:

***“Haan, shadi par!”***

Meaning:

***“Yes, at my wedding!”***

Huzoor added that he had also worn an *achkan* coat given to him by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) a few times, most likely on the occasion of Eid.

As he continued to look at the photos, Huzoor said:

***“If you look at these photos, many of the people sitting with Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) are not wearing topis (hats). Even in the time of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih III (rh) I recall that often Ahmadi men would come before Khalifatul Masih without covering their heads. It was in the era of***

***Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) that he was stricter in this regard and encouraged people to wear topis in front of him.”***

As Huzoor was about to return to his room, I asked if his *WIFI* connection had been ok. Thankfully it had been fine and Huzoor took out his phone from his pocket to check it again. Thereafter, Huzoor graciously showed me some photos and videos he had taken of Islamabad.

As Huzoor showed me the photos, suddenly we heard a *Nazm* being played fairly loudly from the room next to mine which was being used by Ahmad bhai.

A few moments later, after Huzoor returned to his room, Ahmad bhai came out into the corridor.

Seeing me, Ahmad bhai asked:

***“Was Huzoor just here?”***

I replied affirmatively and that Huzoor had been present for around twenty minutes looking at the various photos on display.

Grinning, Ahmad bhai said:

***“I was in the shower and then when I got out, I started to watch a comedy, whilst I got ready. However, after a few minutes, I heard a voice and it sounded like it was Huzoor and so I switched the comedy off and quickly put a Nazm on instead!”***

## Inauguration of Jalsa Salana France

At 2pm on 4 October 2019, Huzoor inaugurated the 27<sup>th</sup> Jalsa Salana France with the traditional flag hoisting followed immediately by the Friday Sermon.



During the sermon, Huzoor spoke of the importance of adopting *righteousness* and fulfilling the *rights of God Almighty* and the *rights of creation*.

Huzoor said:

***“To be righteous, you must be humble. Humility should not only be expressed towards those who are senior in rank in worldly terms, rather humility should be adopted towards those who are weak and poor within society too. Righteous are those who remain firm upon the truth in all circumstances and they realise that speaking the absolute truth takes one towards God Almighty, whilst falsehood leads one towards associating partners with God.”***

Speaking about the importance of exhibiting grace and benevolence, Huzoor said:

***“True believers are those who focus on trying to forgive others rather than seeking revenge. They try to make sacrifices for one another... If a person does not have love in his heart for their brother, they are void of righteousness.”***

After the conclusion of *Jummah*, as he exited the stage, Huzoor called Ameer Sahib France and directed him about the Jalsa stage backdrop which was quite elaborate and showcased the entire Jalsa complex in detail.

Huzoor instructed that during *Salat*, the backdrop must be covered by a plain sheet to ensure no one's Namaz was disturbed.

### **French food!**

Before Jumma, I was pleased to meet my niece Nadia, the daughter of my sister *Munawara Ghauri*. She was working temporarily in France and so had come to attend the Jalsa. I shared with her a traditional French sweet *macaron* a friend had given to me.

She seemed very impressed with the *macaron* and told me that the pastry chef whose macaron I was eating was extremely famous! I had not heard of him before but unquestionably the *macaron* was very good!

The friend who had given the *macaron* had also sent some to Huzoor as a gift and so I later asked Huzoor if he had tried them. Huzoor confirmed he had tried one and had liked it.

During the visit, we were served food in the same building where the majority of Qafila members were accommodated. However, Mubarak Zafar sahib (*Additional Wakil-ul-Maal*), who had joined the Qafila for the French leg of the tour, suggested to me that we should eat in the normal *langhar* (kitchen) rather than in the designated area.

Thus, after *Isha*, he and I joined hundreds of others in the main dining area of the Jalsa Salana.

The meal consisted of a traditional Jalsa speciality of *aloo ghosht*, fresh out of the pan, along with a soft, fresh French baguette.

It was truly wonderful! We returned the next evening as well and it was equally as good!

### **A moment at Fajr**

The next morning, I came down from my room for Fajr a few minutes before Namaz was due to start.

As I headed to the Mosque, Ahmad bhai asked me to remain in the hall of Huzoor's residence and to inform Huzoor that Namaz was in the main Mosque, rather than at the Jalsa Gah.

It meant that Huzoor would go through the kitchen to the Mosque as usual, rather than through the main front door.

A few minutes later, I heard Huzoor's footsteps as he walked down and in a loud voice, I heard Huzoor reciting a prayer in Arabic.

Living in the same building as Huzoor enabled me to observe in greater detail how Huzoor fulfils every single act of worship in the best possible way.

As Huzoor came down, I mentioned that *Fajr* would be in the Mosque.

Huzoor said he was already aware of this and then kindly gestured that I walk to the Mosque with him through the patio door.

### **Address to Lajna Imaillah France**

On 5 October 2019, Huzoor delivered two speeches at the Jalsa Salana France.

In the morning, Huzoor addressed members of Lajna Imaillah directly, whilst in the early evening, he addressed an audience of guests.

In his address to Lajna, Huzoor spoke of how in the modern world people were not only moving away from religion but from a belief in the existence of God and that some Ahmadis were also being influenced by materialism.

In such circumstances, Huzoor said ever Ahmadi needed to strive to guard their faith and that of their children and to ensure their families lived their lives according to Islam's teachings.

Furthermore, parents needed to remain in close communication with their children and discuss their issues and explain to them the wisdom of Islam's teachings.

Huzoor condemned the fact that young children in certain countries were being taught in schools things that were wholly inappropriate to their age.

Though Huzoor did not specifically stipulate, I am sure Huzoor was referring to recent issues where schools have started teaching children, at an ever-younger age, about sex, gender issues, homosexuality etc.

Huzoor said that rather than shutting down the conversation, parents should be ready to answer the questions of their children, without hesitation and embarrassment. And where they had been taught inappropriate or immoral things, it was the duty of the parent to correct them and guide them about what was moral and right.

### **Address to guests**

Later in the day, Huzoor addressed a gathering of dozens of guests, including several French dignitaries.

Huzoor began his address by strongly condemning the spate of terrorist attacks carried out by Muslim groups in recent years targeting the West.

Making it clear that such attacks bore no correlation to the teachings of Islam, Huzoor said:

***“The true teachings of Islam have nothing to do with terrorism and extremism; rather, Islam is a religion of peace, love, tolerance and reconciliation. The word ‘Islam’ literally means ‘peace’ and ‘security’ and so a true Muslim is a person who is himself peaceful and who strives to establish peace and harmony in the world.”***

Huzoor further said:

***“Terrorists who commit suicide bombings, attack nightclubs, concert halls or stadiums or manically drive vehicles into members of the public are all guilty of violating the teachings of Islam in the most ghastly and barbaric fashion.”***

Huzoor explained that *justice between nations* was a prerequisite in establishing a harmonious international order. However much of the world was prioritising self-interest and greed over what was fair and right. The results were there for all to see.

Huzoor said:

***“In both the East and the West, the blue skies of peace and prosperity have given way to heavy clouds of war and injustice. Across much of the world, nations are being torn apart by dissension, revenge-seeking and a desire to degrade others. This state of unrest will continue to increase,***

*until and unless international relations are based upon justice and integrity and fulfilling the rights of others.”*



As he had on previous occasions, Huzoor spoke of his fears of a potential nuclear war.

Huzoor said:

*“If a nuclear war breaks out, generations of children will be born with mental and physical disabilities and so instead of contributing to their nations, they will live miserable existences and be a strain on society. Their homes will be filled with despair. Their towns will be filled with grief. And their nations will be consumed by misery. They will be justified in cursing us for engaging in such selfish and senseless warfare that shattered their dreams even before they were born.”*

It was an extremely powerful conclusion.

On many occasions, in various parts of the world, Huzoor has warned the world of the risks of injustice and a failure to respect each other's cultures and beliefs.

Yet, instead of heeding his warnings, it seems as though nations are hell-bent on pushing mankind towards the kind of lasting misery and despair that Huzoor has warned will destroy the futures of coming generations.

### **Impact of Huzoor's address**

Following the event, Huzoor graced a dinner with the guests in a tent a few metres from the Jalsa Gah.

During this period, I took the opportunity to meet some of them.

A French lady, working as an anthropologist, said:

***"I was extremely impressed by His Holiness. Throughout his speech, it became ever clearer that he is a peaceful man, he is open-minded and that these are defining characteristics of Islam. The picture of Islam he presented is one that is welcome in the West and if Muslims are like him, they will not have any problem integrating into the West."***

The guest continued:

***"I am a scientist and researcher and I have observed how the media has played a direct role in harming the reputation of Islam and Muslims. I salute your spiritual leader for travelling the world to reverse the***

***damage done by that false portrayal of Islam by propagating its real teachings.”***

A Muslim man, *Morteza*, living in France but originally from Iran, said:

***“The personality of His Holiness is extremely impressive and he gave a beautiful defence of Islam, which no fair person could object to. Most Muslims do not know what their faith is and are just Muslim in name. Many moral weaknesses have entered the Muslim community and so I would urge all Muslims to come and learn from your Khalifa and your Jamaat. I am not an Ahmadi but I will be the first to declare that your Khalifa is a man of peace and a man of great wisdom.”***

Another Muslim guest, *Sofian*, originally from Morocco, said:

***“Today’s event was enough to prove to me that Ahmadis are true Muslims and those who say you are not Muslims are wrong. What I had heard about Ahmadis from some other (non-Ahmadi) Muslims is false. Your Khalifa gave a very persuasive defence of Islam and addressed those issues that the French people feel and fear. His determination to defend Islam and the way he went about it today was magnificent.”***

A Christian pastor, *Jacob*, said:

***“His Holiness has proven that terrorists have political motives and are not guided by religion. Second, he proved that religion is a good thing. He spoke repeatedly about freedom and liberty and I am sure the French people will not have heard these words from a Muslim leader before.”***

Another guest, Ms *Danielle*, said:

***“After listening to this speech, I feel today should be remembered and designated as ‘the day of tolerance’ because the Khalifa kept reiterating the need for tolerance of one another’s beliefs. I just wish all French people could have heard this speech so that the widespread fears of Islam would subside.”***

Noticing that several guests had approached Huzoor during the meal, Ms Danielle said:

***“It shows the humility of the Khalifa that he is standing up and meeting people even during his dinner. However, I am embarrassed that others are not letting him eat in peace! We should give such an inspirational and important person at least a few minutes to rest.”***

### **A few blessed moments**

It was quarter past eleven at night and, having returned to my room a few minutes before, I heard the door open at the end of the corridor and knew it must be Huzoor.

I went outside my room and offered *salam* to Huzoor.

There was a chair in the hall just opposite the entrance to my room and so Huzoor took a seat on it, whilst I stood at my door.

Huzoor asked me about the event earlier in the evening and so for the next few minutes, I mentioned some of the discussions I had with guests after the event.

After listening for a few minutes, Huzoor said:

***“I looked over my notes thirty minutes before the event and at that time I decided to cut around two hundred words from the original draft. I also changed some of the words.”***

Huzoor continued:

***“For example, I replaced the word ‘exacerbate’ with ‘aggravate’ at one place, as I felt that the latter would be more easily understood by the guests who were listening without translation. Furthermore, in the context, where I was speaking about how attacking each other’s religion would increase division in society, the word ‘aggravate’ was stronger and conveyed the point better.”***

I am always fascinated when I hear or see how Huzoor works on his notes and looks carefully at each word and sentence.

I do not know where Huzoor finds the time but somehow, he always does!

### **Concluding Session of Jalsa Salana France**

The final session of Jalsa Salana France commenced at 3.40pm on 6 October 2019 after a Bai’at ceremony and Namaz.

During the final session, Huzoor announced that over 2,700 people from 21 countries had attended the Jalsa.

In his concluding address, Huzoor spoke of how the success of the Prophets of God was destined and could not be stopped by any worldly forces. Though each Prophet faced persecution and trials, ultimately each was able to fulfil his mission.



In this era, it was certain that the objectives of the Promised Messiah (as) would and were being fulfilled with the Help of Allah.

Huzoor said:

***“Today, we are seeing how Allah the Almighty continues to support and provide for the progress and expansion of the Jamaat through Khilafat. We see how God Himself implants the message of the Promised Messiah (as) in the hearts of people and how He guides them towards accepting Ahmadiyyat. The claim of the Promised Messiah (as) which originated***

***from a small village, now reverberates across the world and has reached the corners of the earth.”***

Thereafter, Huzoor narrated several incidents of individuals or groups of people who had personally learned of the truth of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community through the Grace of Allah.

Concluding his address, Huzoor said:

***“There is no doubt that the triumph of Islam is destined to occur through the Promised Messiah (as). Allah the Almighty will surely manifest this triumph... However, if we, who have been Ahmadi Muslims for a long time, wish to partake of these blessings we must play our part in the propagation of this message. Similarly, those who are new to the Community should also try to reap the blessings of Allah the Almighty by spreading this message to others, which itself was the source of their guidance. May Allah the Almighty grant this ability to everyone.”***

### **A convert's story**

Later in the evening, Huzoor held a session of family Mulaqats and one of the people fortunate to meet him was *Abdel Halim Bridja (38)*, an Algerian convert to Ahmadiyyat.

He had accepted Ahmadiyyat in 2009 and now lived in the French city of *Nice*.

Telling me why he had accepted Ahmadiyyat, Abdel Halim Bridja sahib said:

***“My father was an avid viewer of MTA and, as a result, he came to accept the truth of Ahmadiyyat. He told us that Jesus (as) had died a natural death and was not destined to return physically to the earth. Initially, I was angry and confused but he then gave me a copy of the Promised Messiah’s (as) book ‘The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam’, which was enlightening.”***

Abdel Halim Bridja sahib continued:

***“I realised that the Holy Quran had not, God forbid, been changed or altered in any way by Ahmadis, though the interpretation of certain verses was different. For example, I learned that Ahmadi Muslims consider the Holy Quran to be a universal book to guide all of mankind, whereas I had previously been taught that the Holy Quran was only for Muslims. I really loved this and soon I realised that the path taken by my father was the right path and I also accepted Ahmadiyyat.”***

Abdel Halim Bridja sahib told me that his entire family had now accepted Ahmadiyyat. His sister was the last to accept it.

Narrating what caused her to accept Ahmadiyyat, Abdel Bridja sahib said:

***“My sister did not take the Bai’at immediately. After the rest of us had accepted Ahmadiyyat, she was involved in a very serious car accident. The car was completely smashed, and shards of glass fell into my sister’s pocket, yet somehow, she survived without even a scratch on her face. She***

*felt that the crash had been a warning from God, and it led to her to accept Ahmadiyyat immediately.”*

Regarding his Mulaqat, Abdel Halim Bridja sahib said:

*“Huzoor is the brightest living light in the world today. Before accepting Ahmadiyyat I used to pray that I could live in the era of true Khilafat and I believe this is the reason Allah the Almighty guided me towards the Khilafat of the Promised Messiah (as). Today, the Khalifa of the Time is here in France and it means that it is the most blessed country in the world today.”*

### **Nine days, nine speeches!**

Later that evening, at 10.45pm, I was once again blessed with the opportunity to meet Huzoor for a few minutes.

Most graciously, Huzoor came to the part of his residence where I was staying. Rather than sit down, Huzoor stood at my doorway with his hands rested on the door frame.

I stood a few steps back inside my room, and after offering *salam*, I said:

*“Huzoor, I counted today and Huzoor has given nine public addresses during the past nine days!”*

Hearing this Huzoor smiled. As I stood before him, it appeared that Huzoor seemed tired and somewhat fatigued. I hoped and prayed Huzoor would

have some time to rest in the coming days, though I was not sure when the schedule would allow him to do so.

I also mentioned the *naara* (slogan) raised by an African Ahmadi at the conclusion of the Jalsa. Anyone who was there or who may have seen it on MTA will surely remember the *naara*, as it seemed to go on and on and on!

Unquestionably, it was the longest *naara* I had ever heard and, ever since, I had marvelled at the lung capacity of the Ahmadi who had delivered it!

Huzoor laughed as he recalled the *naara* and in the most enjoyable and funny way, he proceeded to imitate the African Ahmadi's *naara*. I could not control my laughter and Huzoor also laughed a great deal. It was a joyous moment!

I was able to spend a few more blessed moments in Huzoor's company before he returned to his room.

I was sad that it would be our last night in Trie-Chateau and that the period of staying physically so close to Huzoor was coming to an end.

Yet, at the same time, I could not thank Allah the Almighty enough for the privilege of the past few days.

### **Meeting with Deputy Governor**

On the morning of 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019, Huzoor departed from the Jalsa Salana complex in Trie-Chateau at 11:20 and arrived an hour later at the Mubarak

Mosque in St Prix, which is the headquarters of the Jamaat and lies on the outskirts of Paris.

Upon arrival, Huzoor was welcomed by hundreds of Ahmadi Muslim men, women and children. You could sense the excitement and happiness, as Huzoor was visiting the French Jamaat headquarters after several years.

Later, Huzoor met two local dignitaries.

The first meeting was with *Denis Dobo-Schonenberg*, the *Deputy Governor of Val d'Oise*, a region in France, with a population of 1.2 million people.

During the meeting, the *Deputy Governor* mentioned a horrific incident that had taken place a few days earlier, where a Muslim convert had violently murdered members of the French police.

He said the French authorities believed that he had been radicalised in France.

Upon this Huzoor said:

***“The Salafis and many so-called Muslim clerics do not practice the true teachings of Islam and their extremist rhetoric is completely against the teachings of Islam. Such attacks must be condemned, and I offer my sympathies and condolences to your nation that a number of police officers were killed in this heinous attack.”***

Huzoor continued:

***“Sadly, the whole world has become disturbed. For instance, in the UK, there is so much unrest and confusion because of Brexit. The Prime Minister continues to say that Brexit will be achieved by 31 October, but it seems impossible that he will achieve that deadline.”***



The guest suggested that if the UK was to leave the EU, then border controls would have to resume, and it would naturally lead to increased security checks for people who were travelling from the UK into mainland Europe.

Smiling, Huzoor said:

***“People like me who travel often to Europe will suffer then!”***

## **Meeting with Mayor of St Prix**

Following the first meeting, Huzoor held separate Waqfe Nau classes with girls and with the boys.

Thereafter, Huzoor held a meeting with *Jean-Pierre Engalbert*, the *Mayor of St. Prix*, who had previously met Huzoor in 2008.

As the meeting started, the Mayor informed Huzoor of a new healthy-eating initiative he had launched in St Prix. The main element was that only *organic* food was served in local schools.

Upon hearing this, Huzoor said:

***“This is very good. You should encourage schools in other cities to do the same.”***

Thereafter, the Mayor spoke of how he had witnessed first-hand that the Ahmadi Muslims living in the area had always been extremely peaceful and served their community and sought to integrate with other members of society.

The Mayor said:

***“I wish to make it clear to you that I am greatly honoured to have the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in my area. The morals and good manners and etiquettes of your community, and the way you integrate,***

***is such that everyone in this society can only be attracted by you and your community.”***

As the meeting continued, Ahmad Bhai (*Head of security*) and a French Khadim, brought in some tea and coffee.

Occasionally, Huzoor will take tea or coffee with guests during meetings but it is rare. However, on this occasion, Ameer Sahib France had mentioned beforehand that the Mayor had particularly requested to take tea or coffee with Huzoor.

Though it was almost time for his evening meal, Huzoor graciously accepted the request and so both Huzoor and the Mayor took tea.



Huzoor mentioned he had heard that there had been an eco-friendly drive in the St. Prix area.

In response, the Mayor informed that they had tried to ban the use of single-use plastics in schools and public buildings.

After hearing this, Huzoor said:

***“I am pleased to hear this. You should encourage the use of recyclable material and avoiding single use plastics. These single use plastics are ending up in the oceans in vast quantities and destroying the sea-life. Furthermore, industrial waste and carbon emissions are polluting the environment. Hence, it is very important that policies are enacted that protect wildlife and the natural world.”***

The Mayor stated that he considered the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community to be eco-friendly, as the Jamaat was active in planting trees.

In response, Huzoor said:

***“Yes, we do whatever we can to help the environment. It is a cause of great regret that, at one level, warfare and conflicts are destroying the peace of the world, whilst, at another level, mankind is failing to protect the environment and to care for nature. As I said, plastic waste is a prime example of this.”***

Responding to Huzoor’s comments, the Mayor said:

***“I agree with you 100%. My reach is very limited as I am the Mayor of a small town, whilst you are an international religious leader, who is***

***respected around the globe. So, I ask you for your help in tackling this issue.”***

In reply, Huzoor said:

***“However we can help you in this good cause of protecting the environment, we will do so. In whichever city or town we live in, we strive to serve the local people and to help them. In terms of the environment, if you desire, we will plant trees and flowers. Personally, my preference is always for grass over concrete!”***

Thereafter, the Mayor expressed his gratitude at Huzoor’s commitment to spreading peace in society and for representing Islam’s true teachings.

The Mayor said:

***“I believe that we all have a duty to improve the world in which we live, and you are certainly fulfilling your responsibilities as a religious leader. You are working tirelessly to reverse the negative impression of Islam that exists, and you are striving to show the world that Islam is a religion of peace.”***

The Mayor continued:

***“Your Holiness, you appear completely different to any other Muslim leader that I have met. You are the person that can remove the stains that hurt the name of Islam. Your community is the only community that can do this!”***

In reply, Huzoor said:

***“We are trying our level best within our limited resources to present the true teachings of Islam and are working from a grass-roots level by engaging within local communities across the world. In this regard, I hope and pray that our Ahmadi Muslims living in your town are cooperating with you in all respects and they are examples of the true, peaceful Islam.”***

Hearing this, the Mayor admitted that initially the local people had been fearful when the Jamaat’s headquarters in France was established in St Prix.

However, over time, their fear had evolved into feelings of warmth and respect.

The Mayor said:

***“Ahmadi Muslims individually and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community as an organisation have shown great patience. In the beginning, the local people here did not trust you. Many of them did not like the fact that so many Muslims were coming here. But, over time, you were able to win their hearts through your kindness, compassion and generosity. When the people of this town came to see who Ahmadi Muslims really are, they realised that they had misjudged you.”***

As the meeting ended, Huzoor thanked the Mayor for his comments and for welcoming him to St Prix.

Huzoor said:

***“I am very happy that you came to meet me and to welcome me to your town and that you have remembered our relationship and friendship after 11 years.”***

### **Revising his address**

The next morning, 8 October 2019, a session of *family Mulaqats* was due to start at 11am. However, Huzoor did not come to the office until a few minutes after 11.

It was raining heavily and, so I stood under an umbrella with a member of my office staff who had come for a couple of days to report on the UNESCO event taking place later that day.

As we waited, I mentioned to him that I thought that Huzoor may be preparing his notes for the UNESCO event and this was probably the reason he was a few minutes late.

Moments later, Huzoor came out of his residence and headed to his office and upon seeing me, Huzoor called me towards him.

As I walked with him towards his office, Huzoor said:

***“This morning I have been looking through the text of the UNESCO address, as until now I did not get a chance. I have reduced the word count by around 500 words.”***

I had presented the printed text to Huzoor, after he had given dictation, a few weeks earlier. At the time, Huzoor had indicated that he would try to reduce the word count later.

As he entered his office, I asked if I should reprint the text so that it would be easier for Huzoor to read.

Smiling, Huzoor said:

***“There is no need. I have cut paragraphs and redrafted some parts with my pen and will just use these original notes.”***

### **Organising the UNESCO event**

With the *Grace of Allah*, on 8 October 2019, Huzoor delivered an historic and extremely blessed address at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

However, organising the event had not been an entirely smooth process and even *during* the reception there were issues.

Though the event took place in a room within the UNESCO complex, it was not the room that the French Jamaat had envisioned or hoped for.

Asif Arif, the *National Umoor-e-Kharija (External Affairs) Secretary* in France, under whose department the event was arranged, told me the reason for this.

Asif Arif sahib said:

***“Our aim was to acquire a bigger room in UNESCO, but we were informed by someone working within UNESCO that Pakistan, as a member of UNESCO, had rejected our request – because we were Ahmadi Muslims. Though one country does not have a veto, practically UNESCO cannot take any steps against its member states because they are funding them. In the past, Israel and the United States left UNESCO because they felt that it was not respecting their agendas and UNESCO does not want any other member to leave it.”***

### **The majesty of Khilafat!**

Another issue had arisen before the start of the tour. When the programme was first drawn up, it was agreed with the ambassador of an African country, who was officially hosting the event on behalf of UNESCO, that the event would start with the recitation of the Holy Quran.

However, a day before the start of the tour, on 24 September 2019, I received a call from Asif Arif sahib that the ambassador had now informed that the function could not begin with *Tilawat*, as it would contravene the secular instincts of the French Republic and UNESCO.

He asked me to inform Huzoor of this development.

Thus, during Mulaqat, I mentioned it to Huzoor, and he expressed his disappointment at the decision.

Huzoor said that the French Jamaat should still try to persuade the ambassador and to try to appeal to his heart.

Huzoor said:

***“Our Jamaat in France should remind the ambassador that he himself is a practising Muslim and so he should not be fearful but, rather, his love for the Holy Quran should give him the courage to make a stand and withstand any pressure he might face on this issue.”***

After giving this beautiful advice, quite suddenly, Huzoor asked:

***“Will they try to stop me starting my address with ‘Bismillah’?”***

I was taken aback by Huzoor’s question.

In response, I said:

***“Huzoor, no one can ever stop you from saying Bismillah or reciting any portion of the Quran!”***

I do not think I will ever forget what Huzoor said next.

Huzoor’s tone of voice and demeanour normally remains extremely calm.

Yet, for a few seconds, Huzoor’s tone of voice and demeanour became much firmer.

In words that, to this day, continue to ring in my ears, Huzoor said:

***“If at that time when I start my address in UNESCO anyone tries to stop me from saying ‘Bismillah’, I will walk out of the hall at that very moment without delivering my speech!”***

Huzoor continued:

***“You all might become embarrassed, but I will leave without a second glance!”***

There are many times when Huzoor says something and I remain quiet or respond in a way which I later consider to be inadequate.

However, at that moment, I was completely inspired by the way Huzoor had expressed his unwavering love for the Holy Quran and how he would leave the hall without looking back if anyone tried to stop him from starting his address with the words *‘In the Name of Allah, the Gracious, Ever Merciful’*.

Thus, my response to Huzoor were words that will remain my response forevermore. I said:

***“Huzoor, never for a second will I be embarrassed or hesitate! Rather, I will walk out right behind you feeling nothing but pride!”***

Hearing my response Huzoor smiled and I think he appreciated what was my heartfelt response.

Unfortunately, the recitation of the Holy Quran was not included by the ambassador in the formal programme but Huzoor began his address with '*Bismillah*'.

As he did so, I felt pride and joy knowing that nothing was going to stop beloved Huzoor from beginning his address by invoking the name of Allah.

### **Driving into Paris**

The Qafila departed from the Mubarak Mosque in St Prix at 3.25pm after a silent prayer.

As we drove into the city of Paris, I could not help but feel we were on the precipice of something historic, something that would be remembered for decades to come.

Even Nadeem Amini, who was driving and is the most relaxed person I know, was moved to say:

***"I am feeling very nervous! And I am not doing anything! It is Huzoor who has to deliver a speech!"***

Nadeem's comment lightened the mood in the car and for the next few minutes, we enjoyed seeing various Parisian landmarks through the car window.

We drove by the *Arc de Triomphe*, past the *Eiffel Tower* and a wave of other buildings that represented the magnificence of French architecture.

Initially, the Qafila was taken to the *Pullman Paris Eiffel Tower Hotel*, where we arrived at 4.20pm. It was situated in the heart of Paris and, as its name suggested, was located about as close as possible to the Eiffel Tower.

### **Meeting with Deputy-President of Muslim Council of France**

Most members of the Qafila and Jamaat members remained in the lobby but a few of us were taken to a meeting room in the hotel where Huzoor met some guests prior to the main UNESCO event.

The first meeting was with *Mr Anouar Kbibech*, a well-known French Muslim of Moroccan descent, who was previously the *President of the Muslim Council of France* and was now its *Deputy-President*.



During the first meeting, Mr Kbibech informed Huzoor that there were around five million Muslims in France and that there were 2,500 Mosques attached to the French Muslim Council. He said they were training around

150 Imams each year but required many more, as most of their Imams worked part-time.

Most of their Imams were immigrants from Algeria, Turkey and Morocco, who would receive training for around two years but would continue with their work careers at the same time. Very few were fully dedicated to the service of Islam.

In my mind, I could not help but contrast their position with the Missionaries within our Jamaat, who obtained seven years of training in Jamia and were full-time life devotees.

After a discussion about countering widespread fear and misconceptions about Islam, Mr Kbibech asked:

***“I have heard a lot about Ahmadis and a lot about what you believe from people outside of your community. Thus, I want to take this opportunity to ask you, as Head of the Ahmadiyya community what are your beliefs and how do you think different Muslim sects should interact with one another?”***

In reply, Huzoor first outlined his vision and hope for unity amongst Muslims of all sects.

Huzoor said:

***“There are more than 70 Muslim sects and they speak ill of one another and even wage wars against one another, whereas all Muslims should***

***unite in peace and brotherhood. Muslims should not have hatred but should be considerate and sympathetic to one another.”***

Responding to the guest’s query about the beliefs of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Huzoor said:

***“We, Ahmadi Muslims, believe the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) to be Khataman-Nabiyeen, the Seal of the Prophets. We believe the Holy Quran is the final religious law bearing book and that no new religious law can now come. We believe we must follow the Sunnat (practice) of the Holy Prophet of Islam (sa) and live our lives accordingly. We believe that all the Ahadith that correlate with the Holy Quran are correct and those that contradict the Holy Quran in any way or shape are false.”***

Huzoor continued:

***“The same as other Muslims, we believe that in the latter days an Imam Mahdi and Promised Messiah was destined to come. However, we also believe that the Messiah of Moses (as), the Prophet Jesus (as), died a natural death and that no person can physically ascend to the heavens and live there for over two thousand years waiting to return. Rather, we believe, according to a Hadith recorded by Imam Bukhari, that the Imam Mahdi and Messiah destined to come is one person, from within the Ummah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa). Hence, this is the fundamental difference between Ahmadi Muslims and other Muslims, otherwise, we believe in the same Holy Quran, we believe in the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) and the Fiqah (jurisprudence) we follow is virtually the same as most Sunni Muslims.”***

After expressing the beliefs of the Jamaat with impeccable clarity, Huzoor said:

***“We, Ahmadi Muslims, believe that anyone who proclaims the Kalima is a Muslim and no person or nation has the right to pass any Fatwa declaring him or her as non-Muslim. This is the instruction of our master, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa).”***

After hearing the true teachings of our Jamaat from Huzoor directly, Mr Kbibeck expressed his happiness and thanks.

It was clear that, at a personal level at least, any misconceptions he held had been removed though it was not clear whether it would lead to any change in how the Muslim Council of France considered Ahmadi Muslims.

### **A unique photo opportunity!**

As Mr Kbibeck left the room, the French Jamaat officials ushered in the guests who would be meeting Huzoor next.

During the very brief interval, I noticed that Huzoor was seated with no one else around him.

As it was very rare to see Huzoor outside his office with no one else sitting or standing near him, I took the opportunity to take a photo of Huzoor.



More than any other photo, whenever I see this picture, memories flood back of that blessed day in Paris!

### **Meeting with French guests**

The second meeting was with *Valerie Thorin, a Protestant Journalist, Florence Taubmann, a Christian Pastor* and *Alfonssina Bellio, an Italian sociologist*.

During the early part of the meeting, the guests spoke of the ever-decreasing influence of religion in the lives of young people.

The Christian pastor admitted that whilst there were millions of people who called themselves Christian in France, the numbers who were truly practising their faith was dwindling rapidly.



Upon this, Huzoor said:

***“At a basic level, irrespective of religion, we must strive to bring people towards a belief in a Creator – a belief in the existence of God. If people come to believe in His existence, they will naturally be drawn towards religion.”***

Huzoor continued:

***“If all religious people were to follow the original teachings of their religion the world would be a much more peaceful and happier place. Mutual respect and love would spread and people would value the rights of one another.”***

Later, the atmosphere of the meeting became more light-hearted and informal.

*Alfonssina Bellio*, the sociologist, mentioned that she was originally from Italy but now lived and worked in France.

Hearing this, Huzoor asked her what type of fruits and vegetables were grown in Italy. Ms Bellio informed that Italians followed a Mediterranean diet and so shared many common food tastes with Spanish people and grew many similar fruits and vegetables.

Turning to the French guests, Huzoor said:

***“Here in France, croissants are very popular.”***

The Christian Pastor, *Florence Taubmann* replied:

***“Yes, in France we have coffee, tea, croissants and bread for breakfast – that is all! Our breakfast is very simple!”***

Smiling, Huzoor said:

***“I prefer the British breakfast as they have eggs and cereal which fills you up more and satisfies your stomach!”***

The French journalist, *Valerie Thorin*, said that there was often a lot of traffic in Paris and enquired if Huzoor had faced any difficulties coming into the city.

In reply, Huzoor said:

***“It took us one hour to get here from our Mosque and the total distance was just 16 miles. However, the worst traffic I have ever seen is in Nigeria, especially in Lagos! In fact, the traffic in Nigeria has its own name – ‘Go Slow!’”***

Laughing, Huzoor said:

***“No matter what the Nigerian authorities and government do to try to control the traffic it has no effect! Most Nigerians drive rashly and have no desire to respect the traffic laws! I remember I travelled once from Lagos to Kano, which is 1100 miles and I think I counted around 1100 accidents on the way!”***

### **Arrival at UNESCO**

At 6.15pm, on 8 October 2019, Huzoor arrived at the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)* headquarters in Paris.

In the first few minutes, before Huzoor’s address, there were a few issues that would prove learning experiences for the France Jamaat.

For example, when Huzoor arrived it was apparent that many of the guests had not yet arrived.

Thus, Asif Arif, the Umooor-e-Kharija Secretary, requested Huzoor to proceed to a separate room where he could wait for a few minutes until the guests all arrived.

However, in response, Huzoor said:

***“I am going straight to the event and I will sit by myself if necessary!”***

Later, Asif sahib recounted his feelings and emotions. He felt deep embarrassment that some of the guests had not yet arrived.

Asif Arif said:

***“At the moment Huzoor entered into the UNESCO premises we were not fully ready and so I requested Huzoor to go to a second room where we had some refreshments for him. Yet, Huzoor rejected this proposal and said that he would go straight to the main hall. Huzoor said he was happy to sit by himself until the guests arrived! This is the love of Huzoor – that he was not worried about himself and was ready to sit by himself. This is his humility!”***

For a few moments Huzoor was waiting at the main head table unaccompanied and it was uncomfortable and regrettable to witness this. Yet, as Asif sahib had said it was an example of Huzoor’s outstanding humility that he waited until the other guests arrived.

After a few minutes, most of the guests arrived and the event started.

Initially, the *Ambassador of Mali* was seated on the head table, however, during the period he was called to deliver the opening remarks, another dignitary was seated in his place at the head table.

Immediately, Huzoor noticed this and called Asif Arif sahib.

Telling me about that moment, Asif Arif said:

***“It was not intentional but, in the stress, and pressure of the event, I accidentally seated a guest in the seat of the Mali Ambassador whilst he was speaking at the podium. Huzoor called me and said this was against etiquettes and we should make space for the Mali Ambassador at the head table. In the middle of this event, Huzoor was noticing everything and I was struck by the fact that Huzoor did not admonish me, rather he was guiding me and training me on the spot. We made space for the Mali Ambassador by bringing an extra chair and afterwards Huzoor appreciated this fact. He is so kind.”***

Having observed all of this, I too was struck by how Huzoor did not care about his personal protocol but was very particular about ensuring that nothing was done to hurt the feelings or disrespect the guests.

### **A security breach**

An additional issue, which I became aware of, during the early part of the event was that a person had come to the event on the pretext of being a ‘guest’ but had actually come to protest against the event and the teachings of Islam.

The person was distributing leaflets to all the guests, which contained anti-Islamic propaganda and levelled various false assertions and accusations about Islam.

The document was in French and when it was translated, it became apparent that whatever accusations he had made about Islam had been directly addressed by Huzoor in his address.

It was very faith inspiring to see how Allah the Almighty had inspired the Khalifa-Waqt to respond to those questions and allegations that an opponent of Islam was determined to spread at that event.

Nonetheless, it was, in my view, extremely unfortunate that this incident happened.

Some people were of the view that in Western society, such protests are normal and to be expected. However, the local Jamaat had placed an advert of the event online which gave the impression that anyone could register to attend. Thus, the individual had not turned up without our knowledge but had been able to officially register as a guest for the event.

The dignity, status and indeed security of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih (aba) demands that the local Jamaat is aware of every person who is attending an event graced by the Khalifa-Waqt.

Having observed this incident, a member of our group was extremely emotional when I spoke to him the next day.

As tears streamed down his face, he reminded me of the time when Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) was viciously attacked whilst leading prayers in the Mubarak Mosque in Rabwah.

Though, this breach of security at UNESCO was thankfully very minor in comparison, I fully agreed that it was our duty to take every possible precaution and to be fully vigilant with regard ensuring that there are no risks at any Jamaat event, most especially those graced by Khalifatul Masih.

### **UNESCO Reception**

The formal event started at 6.15pm with an introduction to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the Promised Messiah (as) given by the National Umoor-e-Kharija Secretary in France, Asif Arif.

This was followed by short speeches from a range of dignitaries.

Ambassador Oumar Keïta, *Delegate of Mali to UNESCO*, said:

***“Your Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, we salute all the contributions you have made (in Mali) such as the building of hospitals, mosques and schools and the various projects you have set up through Humanity First.”***

*Religious Advisor of Foreign Affairs Ministry*, Mr Jean Christophe Auge said:

***“We are very familiar with the positive values the Caliph and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community represent both in this country and***

***around the world. I would like to salute the visit of His Holiness to this country and I wish you every success for this visit.”***

*Director of the Central Religion Advisory Board to the Interior Ministry of France, Mr Clément Rouchouse said:*

***“I am very pleased to be here today to salute the Caliph of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community’s visit to France. I would like to welcome you to France, a country which has a tradition of welcoming different religions based on the principle of secularism.”***

*Mayor of Eaubonne, Mr Guillaume Dublineau, said:*

***“Despite the differences in colours and cultures and languages we all aspire to live in peace and with justice, with tolerance and a sharing of our values. I would like to praise the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, as it is a community that brings love and warmth but also friendship and brotherhood.”***

*President of the NATO Memorial, Mr Willy Breton also spoke and commended the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community for its continued efforts to promote peace.*

### **Huzoor’s address at UNESCO**

As the guest speeches came to an end, Huzoor walked to the podium and delivered an historic keynote address entitled ‘*Islamic Principles on Education and Serving Humanity*’ to an audience of over 80 dignitaries and

guests, including diplomats, politicians, academics and representatives of think tanks, as well as business leaders and various other professions.

During his speech, Huzoor commended the objectives of *UNESCO*, which included developing *sustainable peace*, promoting the *rule of law*, the protection of *human rights*, safeguarding the *cultural heritage* of different groups and communities and seeking to ensure the future prosperity of the world.



At the same time, Huzoor said that over 1400 years ago, Islam instructed Muslims to pursue these same goals in the interests of the peace and prosperity of mankind.

Furthermore, Huzoor refuted the allegation that Islam was a religion that failed to encourage intellectual advancement. Rather, he emphasised how from the very outset Islam taught that human beings should continually seek

to push the boundaries of human knowledge and that there was no contradiction between science and religion.

In one passage, Huzoor spoke of how the Holy Prophet of Islam (sa) established the *Charter of Medina*, which was the basis for the peaceful relations between the Muslims of Medina, their Jewish counterparts and the other members of society.

Huzoor said under the leadership of the Holy Prophet (sa) the *Charter of Medina* ***“proved to be a magnificent charter of human rights and governance and it ensured peace between the different communities”***.

Thereafter, Huzoor explained the revolutionary steps the Holy Prophet (sa) took to ensure that Medina remained a peaceful and progressive society.

Huzoor said:

***“Underpinning the society (in Medina) was a justice system that was fair and in which the rule of law was upheld. The Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) established an impartial judiciary for dispute resolution. He made it clear that there would be one law for the rich and powerful. Rather, in what was a revolutionary concept, all people were treated equally according to the law of the land.”***

Huzoor spoke of how the Holy Prophet (sa) established an excellent education system through which the intellectual standards of society were raised.

Literate and educated people were instructed to teach the illiterate and special measures were put in place to provide education to orphans and vulnerable members of society.

Furthermore, a system of taxation was established to help develop the city and to assist weaker members of society.

A code of business and financial ethics was established. Public sanitation systems and a city cleaning programme were set up, whilst people were educated about the importance of personal hygiene and physical health.

Roads were expanded and improved, and a census was carried out to collect data and to identify the needs of the citizens.

After identifying various elements of the society in Medina under the leadership of the Holy Prophet (sa), Huzoor said:

***“Thus, during the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, under the government led by the Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), astonishing progress was made in Medina to advance the cause of individual and collective rights. Indeed, for the very first time amongst the Arabs, an orderly and civilised society was established.”***

Huzoor continued:

***“In many ways, it was a model society - in terms of infrastructure, services and more importantly, in terms of the unity and tolerance displayed in what was a multicultural society. The Muslims were***

***immigrants, yet they integrated smoothly into the local society and contributed to its success and development.”***

Thereafter, Huzoor spoke about the intellectual achievements of Muslim scholars through the Middle Ages and how they had been inspired by their religion.

It was the first time I could recall Huzoor addressing in such detail the role of Muslims towards the intellectual development of the world and it was truly inspiring to hear.

Huzoor said:

***“Another allegation levelled against Islam by certain critics is that it is a backward and archaic religion or one that does not promote intellectual advancement. This is a lazy stereotype that is based on fiction rather than fact.”***

Huzoor continued:

***“The truth is that the Holy Quran and the teachings of the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) inspired the works of generations of Muslim intellectuals, philosophers and inventors in the Middle Ages. Indeed, if we look back more than a millennium, we see how Muslim scientists and inventors played a fundamental role in advancing knowledge and developing technologies, which transformed the world and remain in use today.”***

Over the next few minutes, Huzoor narrated the brilliant achievements of Muslim scholars and inventors such as *Ibn Haytham, Ibn-Nafees, Al-Zahrawi, Jabir ibn Hayyan* and others, who had established scientific or mathematic principles or invented instruments that continued to be the basis for modern science and maths.

Moving to the modern era, Huzoor presented the example of *Professor Dr Abdus Salam sahib* and how he had always maintained that the Holy Quran was his inspiration and the guiding light underpinning his work.

As he moved towards the conclusion of his address, Huzoor emphasised the importance of education in the pursuit of peace.

Huzoor said:

***“Certainly, we believe that access to education is key to breaking the cycle of poverty that has plagued economically weak countries for generations... Only if people have food to eat, water to drink, shelter, schooling for their children and healthcare will they be able to live in peace and escape the deadly clutches of frustration and resentment that lead people towards extremism.”***

Concluding, Huzoor said:

***“At the end, I pray with all my heart that mankind forsakes greed and forgoes the pursuit of narrow self-interests and instead focuses on relieving the pain and anguish of those who are suffering in the world.”***

It had been a truly magnificent address.

I had heard many speeches of Huzoor, and each was filled with wisdom and knowledge, yet as Huzoor returned to his seat at the head table, I could not help but think this speech was unique in many ways.

It proved that science and religion could and did go hand in hand. It proved that Islamic governance, if practised according to Islam's original teachings, could and would lead to pluralistic societies in which the rights of all citizens were protected.

It proved the fundamental importance of education in opening up opportunities that could bridge the gross inequalities that had plagued society for centuries.

The formal event concluded at 7.20pm and thereafter Huzoor proceeded to an adjacent room where guests were served with refreshments.

For the next few minutes, Huzoor met various guests who expressed how much they had enjoyed and benefitted from his address.

### **Impact of Huzoor's address**

During this period, I also met several guests, including *Maxine Onfray*, who worked at a geo-political think tank. He said:

***"The words spoken by the Caliph were perfect for this venue and event. At a time when people have misconceptions about Islam and whether it***

***promotes learning, the Caliph outlined the huge intellectual heritage of the Muslim world. Furthermore, he outlined his desire for modern-day Muslims to build upon this heritage and to be the pioneers and advancers of this era.”***

After listening to Huzoor’s address, another French guest, *Mr Goddard* said:

***“I learned so much about Islamic history this evening and about the character of Islam’s Prophet (sa). It was incredible how he built up the society (in Medina) and introduced so many things that we would class as ‘modern’ and implemented the rule of law. In addition, I did not know how much Muslims had contributed to science and maths and how their efforts continued to benefit us today.”***

*Ms Danuta*, the Director of a non-profit organisation said:

***“I was trained as a scientist and so hearing a religious leader promoting science was wonderful! Normally, religious people are scared of science, but your Caliph made it clear that science and religion go hand in hand.”***

Asif Arif sahib also met many guests and told me how some had expressed surprise that Huzoor had not raised the topic of the persecution of Ahmadi Muslims during his address. A French journalist had particularly noted this.

Asif Arif said:

***“The journalist and other guests expected that the leader of a persecuted community would come here to express the difficulties that his Jamaat is***

*facing and seek help and assistance. They were surprised that Huzoor did not come to Paris or UNESCO seeking anything – rather he sought only to give back to the people.”*

Asif Arif continued:

*“Given how the Pakistani delegation to UNESCO had actively campaigned against this event, I think it was a sign of Huzoor’s wisdom that he did not mention the persecution we face. It showed that we hold no ill will or hatred towards any country and that instead of using such events to lobby in our favour, we rely only on the Help of Allah the Almighty. It showed that when Khalifa-Waqt has the chance to speak he chooses to present the true teachings of Islam and to bring people towards God, rather than to ask for help for our issues.”*

### A blessed few days

As I continued to meet some guests, Huzoor saw me and called me towards him for a moment.

Huzoor asked me if I had noticed the edits that he had made to his address, wherein he had cut several hundred words.

I replied by saying that the speech had been edited in an excellent way, but I could not help but feel a tinge of regret that Huzoor had reduced the length of his speech in the interests of time.

Every word of Khalifatul Masih is precious and so when sometimes Huzoor cuts parts of his speeches because of its length I always feel a sense of sadness.

Upon this, Huzoor smiled and said:

***“It was not only before the speech that I edited, even during the speech there were a few lines I cut out. I wanted the speech to last 30 minutes but even with all the edits, I think I spoke for 35 or 36 minutes.”***

With a sense of trepidation, I asked Huzoor if he would be minded to permit those extra parts he had edited out to be included in the official transcript of his address that would be printed by the Jamaat. Huzoor said he would compare the original and revised scripts and decide later.

Later, Huzoor did most graciously permit for the official transcript to include those extra parts which he had omitted from his speech.

A moment later, Huzoor was informed by Ahmad bhai that the cars were ready and, as it was time for Maghreb and Isha, Huzoor departed immediately back to the Mosque.

By now, daylight had given way to night and so the Eiffel Tower was lit up and looked much grander than earlier in the day.

We also drove past the *Elysée Presidential Palace* and other landmarks.

*Alhamdulillah* the past few days in Trie-Chateau and Paris had been truly special and filled with blessings.

We were not even at the halfway stage of the tour and already so many blessed events had taken place. I looked forward to the next stage of the tour in Strasbourg before Huzoor would once again visit Germany.

### **End of Part 2**

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