

HUZOOR'S TOUR OF IRELAND

SEPTEMBER 2014

A Personal Account

By Abid Khan

Introduction

On 21st September 2014, *Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V* (aba) and his entourage set off for an 8-day tour of Ireland, where Huzoor would inaugurate the Ahmadiyya Community's first Mosque in the country.

Apart from Huzoor and Khala Saboohi (*Huzoor's respected wife*) there were 14 members of the Qafila. There were 6 security staff, Muhammad Ahmad Sahib (Ahmad bhai), Nasir Saeed Sahib, Mahmood Khan Sahib, Khawaja Qudoos Sahib, Ijaz-ur-Rehman Sahib and Mohsin Awam Sahib.

The office staff were Munir Ahmad Javed Sahib (*Private Secretary*), Abdul Majid Tahir Sahib (*Additional Wakil-ul-Tabshir*), Mubarak Ahmad Zafar Sahib (*Additional Wakil-ul-Maal*), Bashir Ahmed Sahib (*PS Office*), Omair Aleem Sahib (*in-charge Makhzan-e-Tasaweer*) and me travelling on behalf of the central *Press & Media Office*.

Also travelling as part of the Qafila were Nadeem Amini Sahib and Dr Momin Jadran Sahib who were designated drivers.

On this occasion, Huzoor also permitted a team of 5 members of *Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya UK*, led by Mohtamim Amooni, Imran Zafar Sahib, to travel with the Qafila throughout the tour to provide additional security.

Finding Out

I found out a few days before the tour that I would once again have the opportunity to travel with Hazrat Khalifatul Masih (aba).

Whenever you hear this news it fills you with a sense of happiness, but also a sense of fear and trepidation. I am always scared that, *God forbid*, I could do something that reflected badly on Huzoor's Qafila or displeased Huzoor in any way.

My late packing

The day before the tour begun, Huzoor asked me if I had packed to which I replied that I had not. I said that I always seemed to leave my packing until the last minute.

With a smile, Huzoor responded by saying:

"That is why your shampoo ends up leaking throughout your suitcase!"

Huzoor was referring to an incident that had happened in Australia where my shampoo had leaked because it had not been properly packed. Thus, when I went home I told my wife Mala to make sure the shampoo and conditioner were both suitably packed! I think in the end we put them inside at least 3 carrier bags before putting them in my suitcase!

Leaving home

As I left my home at midday I went to see my son 17month old son *Mahid* but he was asleep in his cot having an early afternoon nap. I thought that when he woke up he would wonder where I had gone but was reassured by the fact that I had been on much longer tours and he had always been fine, *Alhamdolillah*.

Departure from Masjid Fazl

A year earlier to the day, on 21st September 2013, Huzoor departed for his long and extremely blessed tour of the Far East and Australia and by coincidence on the same date this year he was departing for Ireland.

Huzoor led the *Zuhr* and *Asr* prayers at *Masjid Fazl* and then after a few moments he and Khala Saboochi came out of their residence. Many Ahmadis had gathered at the Mosque to bid farewell to Huzoor.

One person who had come to Jalsa from Pakistan was my maternal cousin from Rabwah, *Arsalan*, son of *Qamar Suleman Sahib*.

Upon Huzoor's departure to Ireland, Arsalan said to me:

"It now feels that my own visit to London is over - because the entire trip was based around seeing Huzoor and praying behind him at Namaz. I will never ever forget the love of Huzoor and the feeling I had when I was near him."

As Huzoor was about to sit in his car he saw respected *Mir Mahmood Ahmad Sahib* who was also stood in line to see him off.

Huzoor called him over and upon doing so Mir Sahib embraced Huzoor with great love and rested his head on Huzoor's chest in the way that a young child might rest his head on the chest of his mother or father. It was a very striking and emotional scene, where such an elder of the Jamaat, who was also Huzoor's uncle, became like a child in the presence of the *Khalifa-Waqt* seeking to garner every possible blessing from Huzoor.

After the silent prayer Huzoor and his Qafila departed from the Mosque at 2.45pm. Huzoor was not travelling directly to Ireland but rather our first night was to be spent in North Wales in the port town of Holyhead.

A 'coffee' break

Throughout the tour I was seated in the car directly in front of Huzoor's car. Our driver was Nadeem Amini Sahib, with Khawaja Qudoos Sahib sat alongside him in the front, whilst Omair Aleem and I were seated in the back.

After a couple of hours on the road we stopped at a *MOTO* service station. After a few minutes in the service station, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi returned to their car but we got the impression there was still some time as Ahmad bhai had just taken some coffee for Huzoor and Khala Saboohi.

Thus Omair and I decided to get ourselves coffee from the *Costa* coffee shop at the services. However, we were concerned that we would be late to return to our cars and so whilst Omair queued, I stood at the entrance keeping watch to see when the Qafila was ready to go.

There was just one lady who was working in the coffee shop and she was making the coffees extremely slowly. As the minutes passed, I kept looking outside and was getting increasingly concerned that we were getting late. At one point I said that we should leave it and return to the cars but eager for our coffees we decided to continue to wait.

Finally Omair's turn came and he ordered the coffees and paid the money. As soon as the waitress turned to make the coffees I saw the security staff calling me and telling me it was time to go. I grabbed Omair and we both ran to our cars *without* our hot drinks!

As we continued our journey for the next hour we laughed at how the waitress must have been confused to see someone queue for so long and then finally order and pay for the coffees and then when she turned around he had vanished!

Upon hearing this story, Nadeem said:

“The girl working in the coffee shop must think you guys are really stupid that you just go around coffee shops and make orders, pay for them and then walk out without your drinks!”

Arrival in Wales

The Qafila continued its journey and just before sunset we entered North Wales. As we drove we could see the vast *Irish Sea* on one side and very beautiful greenery and hills on the other. As the sun set it made for an extremely picturesque image of God's natural beauty.

We arrived at a bed and breakfast, called *Blackthorn Farm*, in *Holyhead* in *Anglesey* just after 8pm. As I came out of my car I suddenly felt the very cool coastal air. The temperature was much cooler than back in London.

Namaz on the outside terrace

There were 8 or 9 rooms in the bed and breakfast and we had booked them all. The staff was very accommodating and so they said we could offer *Namaz* in the restaurant or on a small terrace area adjacent.

It was decided that we would offer *Namaz* on the terrace and so we quickly laid out the prayer mats. After a few minutes Huzoor came and led *Namaz*. It was very dark and extremely cold. Perhaps, I feel the cold more than most because I was shivering throughout.

Despite the cold, it was a very beautiful scene whereby a few of us had the opportunity to pray behind *Khalifatul Masih* on the tip of Wales' coast. Nonetheless, I was happy to hear that *Fajr Namaz* would be offered inside!

After *Namaz*, as Huzoor walked back to his residence he spoke to the local *Regional Ameer* and a few other local Jamaat office bearers. The Regional Ameer Sahib informed Huzoor that the local Jamaat had recently purchased a large church, which they intended to convert into a Mosque. He requested Huzoor to visit it on the way back from Ireland to which Huzoor replied “*We will see.*”

The next day, Huzoor very kindly accepted the invitation and said he would visit the new building on his return.

Fish & Chips for dinner

After *Namaz* we went to the dining area, where the local Jamaat had ordered fish and chips for everyone. The fish was really well cooked with a light and crispy batter! On the side was the famous northern accompaniment of ‘mushy peas’.

After a long day everyone was hungry and so we ate the food quickly before going to bed.

Priceless moments in Huzoor’s company

The next morning was spent at the bed and breakfast. Our ferry was not until the afternoon and so during the morning we enjoyed the coastal view and walked around the nearby area. Having been extremely cold the night before the weather was now bright and warm.

After some time, I saw Huzoor and Khala Saboohi at the door of their residence. Upon being called over, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi both asked me how my night had been. I told them that the shower was very good and so I felt wide-awake and refreshed!



After a few minutes, Khala Saboohi returned inside but Huzoor walked out to meet the *Qafila* members and the local Jamaat members who were present.

We were all able to spend the next half an hour in Huzoor's company.

At first, Huzoor took some photos of the landscape and then upon learning that Omair had recently acquired the new *iPhone 6-plus*, Huzoor called him and looked at the handset. Huzoor took out his own personal *iPhone*, an earlier model, to compare the relative merits of the cameras.

It was a very affectionate scene, where Huzoor was taking a photo from his phone and next to him Omair took a photo with his new phone.



Thereafter Huzoor checked the results of both cameras and said:

“The screen on the new iPhone is bigger but apart from that there is not much difference!”



Some very humorous videos

We were all given a rare treat thereafter when Huzoor called the Qafila and Jamaat members towards him and he played some short videos that he had saved on his own phone.



One of the videos was of a man who had been gifted a new *iPad* from his daughter. Unfortunately the man had mistaken the *iPad* for a chopping board! Thus rather than use the iPad in the normal way, he was using it to chop vegetables before putting it in the dishwasher as his horrified daughter looked on! We all laughed as we saw this video.

All of the Qafila members enjoyed those moments greatly and I especially enjoyed seeing how Huzoor's face lit up and he too was laughing at various points.

Those moments in Huzoor's company were truly special for all those who had the privilege of being there.

It was amazing to see so close Huzoor's sense of humour and his joy at seeing others around him laugh and smile.



Ferry journey

After leading a silent prayer, Huzoor and his Qafila departed from *Blackthorn Farm* at 12.25pm and headed straight to the ferry terminal.

Huzoor was travelling on *Irish Ferries* and was treated with great respect, whereby the ferry officials escorted him both onto and off the ferry.

Upon entering the ferry, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi were escorted to a private room, whilst the rest of us went to the main lounge area where we spent the next few hours.

Mahmood Khan Sahib's detailed analysis

The ferry crossing took 3 and half-hours and so we also ate lunch whilst on-board. I was not very hungry and so I ate just some complimentary snacks and coffee, however other members of the Qafila were hungrier and so ordered main meals. The options on board were '*fish and chips*', '*baked salmon*' or '*grilled chicken tikka with chips*'.

After seeing the menu Mahmood Khan Sahib said he would take the chicken tikka but only if it was very '*very well done*' because he could not eat even slightly undercooked meat. Thus a message was passed onto the chef to make sure the chicken was very well cooked.

When it finally came I felt anticipation to see if it would pass Mahmood Khan Sahib's test. Watching him test the meat was quite an education in itself.

First of all he looked at the grilled chicken very slowly from top to bottom. He then took a small piece and picked at it with his fingers and looked intently at each strand as though he was a detective carrying out forensic analysis! Finally, he placed a small piece into his mouth and started to chew it very, very slowly.

I could take the suspense no longer and so I said "***Khan Sahib is it ok?***" –

He looked at me and with a smile said: "***It is cooked – but quality wise it is not the best!***"

An unforgettable *Salat*

After a couple of hours we received a message that it was time for *Namaz* and so we walked across the ferry to the room where *Namaz* was to be offered. As I was about to enter I saw that Huzoor was already in the room seated in a chair near the door.

Huzoor and Ahmad bhai were discussing the *Qibla* direction but due to the fact we were at sea the compasses were not giving a clear reading. Therefore, Ahmad bhai asked the *Captain* of the ferry and a few minutes later he called and told him the direction. It was the same direction in which the prayer mats had already been laid out.

The room was very small and so as we lined up it we were all joined together and extremely cramped. Upon seeing this, Huzoor said that somebody who was small could come and stand to his left where there was a little space.

After a second, Huzoor looked towards me and said: ***“You can come.”***

I moved forward and Huzoor held my arm and lined me up, a few inches behind him and to his left.

As I stood there I thought that there were not many benefits of being short but today my lack of height was the reason I was able to stand directly next to Huzoor during *Namaz*!

I was also reminded of Huzoor's last visit to America in 2013 when on the way back we offered *Namaz* in a similarly small room at Chicago Airport. At that time also, due to my smaller frame, I had the opportunity to stand next to Huzoor during *Salat*.

As we offered *Namaz*, I was conscious at all times that I did not disturb Huzoor's prayers in any way. A couple of times I felt my coat brush against Huzoor's *achkan* coat as we went into the *Sajdah* position. At those moments, without thought, I started to pray to Allah that may He enable me, my family and future generations to always remain close to Khilafat and to always attain its blessings.

I will never forget those few minutes praying directly besides beloved Huzoor. They were moments that I will treasure forever.

Arrival in Dublin and welcome by local Jamaat

The ferry arrived at Dublin's ferry port at exactly 5.30pm. The Qafila cars were the first out of the ferry and as we drove out we saw a number of Ireland's Jamaat officials waiting to receive Huzoor, including its *National President*, Dr Anwar Malik Sahib and *Missionary-in-charge*, Ibrahim Noonan Sahib.

We followed their car for the next 30 minutes as we drove to the *Castleknock Hotel & Country Club* where Huzoor would be staying for the next couple of days.

As we entered the hotel car park we drove past members of Khuddam and Atfal doing security duty in the hotel grounds and then at the hotel entrance many Ahmadi men, women and children were stood to greet Huzoor and welcome him to Ireland.



Huzoor waved at them and smiled before he and Khala Saboohi went up to their residence.

The rest of us went and waited in the hotel lobby for a few minutes before being taken to our respective rooms. I was sharing a room with Mubarak Zafar Sahib and our room was about 6 or 7 rooms further down the corridor from Huzoor's room.

Namaz in the hotel

As there is no Mosque in Dublin, Namaz used to be offered in the hotel. The Jamaat had booked 2 large rooms on the ground floor where all members of the Jamaat were able to come and offer their prayers behind Huzoor.

Reflections of local Ahmadis

On Tuesday 23 September, Huzoor spent most of the day meeting local Ahmadis in family Mulaqats. As the Mulaqats took place, I took the opportunity to meet and get to know some of the local members of the Jamaat.

The first person I met was a young Irish man called *Aidan McManamy* (28) who had converted to Ahmadiyyat in February this year. He told me that he had been brought up as a Catholic but he had never really practiced his faith. He said he was still learning new things about the Jamaat each day but he now felt as though he had *“found the right path”*.

He also said that the fact that Ireland’s Jamaat had a native Irish missionary was a great help to him. He said that if he had been surrounded only by Asian men then he would have felt out of place but seeing Ibrahim Noonan Sahib had made his transition much easier.

A few moments before his first ever Mulaqat with Huzoor, he said:

“I have learned about Huzoor and listened to some of his speeches and I can see that whatever he says guides a person to the right path... I have also read that Huzoor likes gardening and I found this very interesting – it shows that he is not just a spiritual leader but also a normal human being.”

I met *Major Kaleem Tahir Sahib* (42) from Dublin and his 9 year old son *Qasim*. Kaleem Sahib had moved from Pakistan to Ireland 3 years ago after retiring from the Pakistani army. He said that throughout childhood he had been unable to meet the *Khalifa-Waqt* and so he felt great pride and joy that his own son would be able to meet Huzoor.

His son Qasim said:

“I feel very excited and happy to meet Huzoor but also a little nervous. Meeting Huzoor will increase my knowledge of Islam and so after I will be able to tell other people, who have not met Huzoor, about him and about Islam.”

Khizar Hayat (36) had recently moved to Ireland from Italy. He was about to meet Huzoor for the first time in his life and was understandably very emotional. He said:

“Today for the first time in my life I will have the opportunity to meet the Khalifa-Waqt and so it can only be described as the best day of my life. What I am feeling is a very strange sensation that I have never felt before.

What I have desired all of my life and dreamed of every day is coming true, Alhamdulillah. When I will enter the Mulaqat room I will not need to say anything to Huzoor. All I need and want is to see his blessed face and to hear his blessed voice directly.”

That afternoon, I also met a very sincere Ahmadi lady from the Far East who had lived in Ireland for the past few years. She said:

“I am truly overwhelmed that Huzoor is here. I saw him from a distance of just 3 metres yesterday and could not believe how lucky I am. Seeing him makes me want to be better in every aspect of my life and to perform Salat with more sincerity.

I thought my Mulaqat was in the morning and so I came early but have just been told that it will take place in the evening. It is actually a blessing that it is delayed because now hopefully my husband can join me. He is no longer very active in the Jamaat and this causes me great pain. I hope he comes because I know seeing Huzoor will inspire him to improve.”

She did come back in the evening and afterwards told me the impact seeing Huzoor had on her and her husband. She said:

“My husband was astounded that a person of Huzoor's stature and position could find the time in his busy day to meet and greet all the members of the community and that he was open to any and all questions, concerns, or issues. The experience has left my husband with an overall impression of wonder and inspiration and genuine heartfelt warmth... As for me, meeting Huzoor has further strengthened my faith and gives me the drive to be better in my worship of God. It was really special for me and the real blessing is that my husband is now eager for us to attend the Jalsa in London.”

I met a young Ahmadi couple, *Salim-ur-Rehman Sethi (28) and Hibba-tul-Basit Saadia*, moments after their Mulaqat with Huzoor.

Both of them had met Huzoor for the very first time and the happiness and excitement on their faces was clearly palpable. It seemed as though they were struggling to even breathe because of their joy at seeing the *Khalifa-Waqt*.

Salim-ur-Rehman said:

“I cannot describe my feelings at this time. I cannot describe the happiness that I feel. However much I thank Allah it is not enough - it can never be enough.”

His wife, Hibba-tul-Basit Saadia, had tears in her eyes, as she recounted the Mulaqat. She said:

“As I sat in front of Huzoor I felt that there was something invisible that was connecting us to him. It was like an unseen bond or magnet. I have never felt this feeling before.

The way Huzoor speaks is so, so loving and therefore I could not control my emotions whilst in his presence. Having seen him I now wish to improve myself in all ways. I will try and correct all weaknesses that I bear. Truly, what I am feeling is indescribable.”

Impressions of an Irish policeman

Throughout Huzoor's visit, the Irish police, known as the 'Garda', showed great respect for Huzoor. They had a regular presence at the hotel to make sure all of the security arrangements were adequate.

One afternoon, I met with one of the officers, *Sergeant Vincent Connolly* and he explained his own thoughts and impressions about Huzoor's visit.

Sergeant Vincent Connolly said:

"We the 'Garda' consider ourselves to be 'guardians of the peace' here in Ireland and I have seen that His Holiness (Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad) preaches a message of peace at all times This is the reason we are providing assistance for the security of His Holiness because his visit is a very important visit for Ireland as a country."

More reflections of Ahmadis

Later in the day as Mulaqats resumed I continued to meet various Ahmadis. I met *Naeem Choudhry* who had travelled with his family from *Peace Village* in Canada to meet Huzoor.

Naeem Sahib said:

"We have travelled thousands of miles from Canada for only one reason – and that is to see Huzoor..."

The Canada Jamaat is very large and so when Huzoor visits it is not always possible to meet him and so I have brought my family here to Ireland to meet him.

Wherever Huzoor goes it leaves a lasting imprint and motivates the entire Jamaat. Even Ahmadis who were previously inactive become spiritually charged upon seeing their Khalifa. I know many people who completely changed their lives for the better after seeing Huzoor. I just pray that we are never deprived of the blessings of Khilafat and the protection it provides us.”

Naeem Sahib’s son, Hazeen (16) also spoke to me. He said:

“Seeing Huzoor is like being given a shield – a shield that protects you from doing bad things or committing sins. When I see Huzoor and hear him it makes me even more certain that there is a God. In fact I feel a connection with Allah that I have never felt before.”

During the tour I got to know *Dr Aleem-ud-Din Sahib*. He was Ireland Jamaat’s first *National President* and is currently *Sadr Ansarullah*. Through my work, I had known his brother, *Saleem-ud-Din Sahib*, who is *Nazir Umoor-Ama* in Rabwah for many years.

One afternoon I met Dr Aleem Sahib and his children moments after they had met Huzoor in Mulaqat. His daughter Fareeha Aleem (17) stood in front of me with tears streaming down her face. Every few moments she tried to compose herself but then would start to cry again.

As she wiped away tears from her eyes, Fareeha told me the reason she was so emotional was because she was overwhelmed at having met Huzoor. She kept apologising for crying and so I told her there was no need to be sorry. As she continued to wipe tears away from her eyes she said:

“We truly are so lucky to have Khilafat to guide us and I feel so sorry for those people who are deprived of this blessing.”

I then spoke to her younger brothers, Rizwan and Sabah-ud-din.

Rizwan (15) said:

“When you walk into the Mulaqat room and see Huzoor you become entirely speechless. I believe every word that Huzoor speaks is guided by God and so if he says anything to us it is our duty to listen.”

Sabah-ud-Din (12) was also very happy because he said that during the *Mulaqat* he had asked Huzoor if he could join *Jamia Ahmadiyya* when he was older and Huzoor had given him permission.

An historic visit to the Irish Parliament

On the morning of Wednesday, 24 September, Huzoor visited the Irish National Parliament, known as the ‘*Oireachtas*’ at *Leinster House* in Dublin.

Journey to the Parliament

The Irish police had arranged a full police escort for Huzoor for the entire journey and so just prior to the 10.20am departure, the lead police officer called all of the Qafila drivers, including Bashir Sahib, and gave them a briefing about the route.

The police officer said:

“My objective is to get His Holiness to and from the Parliament in the most secure way. That means our cars should not stop even once during the journey. If we have to stop even for a second then it means that I have failed in my duty to His Holiness.”

The drive to the Parliament made for a really amazing scene where, apart from the police motorbikes at the front and rear of the Qafila, there were police stationed throughout the route to block traffic so that Huzoor’s car would travel without delay.

At one point the police even stopped a local tram in motion so that Huzoor’s car could continue.

Later, Ahmad bhai told me that upon noticing this Huzoor commented:

“Here in Ireland the police do not only stop the normal traffic but also trams!”

We drove through the heart of Dublin and in this way got to see some of the city.

Particularly beautiful was the famous *Phoenix Park*. As we drove through it, Ibrahim Noonan Sahib, who was seated next to me in the car, pointed out a part of the park where in 1979 *Pope John Paul II* delivered an open air mass in front of more than 1million people. Noonan Sahib related how when Huzoor visited Ireland in 2010 he asked Huzoor if he would like to visit the park and see where the Pope had delivered this speech.

Noonan Sahib said Huzoor responded by saying:

“First get me a million Ahmadis in Ireland then I will go and visit it!”

Huzoor arrived at the Parliament at exactly 11am and was taken through the Presidential entrance.

Sometimes I have heard some people say that it does not matter if Huzoor gets a police escort or not and we, as Ahmadis, should not be bothered about these things.

The answer I personally give to such people is that Huzoor is the most humble person and does not care if he is given an escort or any form of protocol. However, as Ahmadis, we are pleased if a host country pays respect to *Khalifatul Masih* because we believe it will be a source of blessings for the country, for its people and a means of pleasing Allah.

Certainly, on that day, the Irish police did all they could to make Huzoor's journey as safe and secure as possible.

Regarding the escort, Ibrahim Noonan Sahib said:

“Today, I feel proud and blessed because my country – Ireland – has received the Khalifa in a befitting way and in a way that will bring blessings to this nation.”

Noonan Sahib's preaching

During the journey to Parliament, Noonan Sahib also told me about how he was trying to convey Islam's teachings to the public in Ireland. As I listened to him, I found his love for Islam and *Khilafat* to be truly inspiring.

Noonan Sahib spoke of how he regularly travels to Dublin city centre and does 'open-air preaching' where he stands on a box and refutes the false allegations made by hardline Christians.

Very emotionally Noonan Sahib said:

“When they speak ill of the Holy Prophet (saw) I cannot stand by and remain silent. It is impossible! Impossible! There is something inside me that forces me to defend the honour of the Holy Prophet (saw) and so on those occasions I stand on a box or table and refute each allegation

and defend the noble character of the Founder of Islam (peace be upon him).

He told me how just a couple of weeks before he entered into a public debate with a Christian missionary and a crowd of more than 100 people gathered around them.

After a lengthy debate the Christian missionary admitted that he had been wrong about Islam and this caused the crowd to cheer and applaud.

At the end of the journey, Noonan Sahib also recounted how many of his old and close friends had not accepted the fact that he had become a Muslim and so had not spoken to him for 23 years.

Noonan Sahib said it was “*heartbreaking*” but that he had to choose between “*Allah and the world*” and he could only ever choose Allah.

Huzoor’s meeting with the Speaker

Upon being received by John Flaherty, the *Captain of the Guard of Parliament*, Huzoor was escorted to the personal office of Sean Barrett TD, Ireland’s Parliament Speaker – known as *Ceann Comhairle*.

The meeting was scheduled to last only for a few minutes and so after the allocated time the Speaker’s secretary came in to subtly let the *Speaker* know it was time for his next appointment.

However, having been touched by the presence of Huzoor, the *Speaker* ushered his secretary away and his meeting with Huzoor continued for around 40minutes.



The *Speaker* was very complimentary about the contribution of the Jamaat to Ireland. Huzoor informed him that the Ahmadiyya Community was engaged in humanitarian projects throughout the world and particularly in Africa. Huzoor told him about his own experiences of having lived in Ghana during the 1970s and 1980s.

The *Speaker* seemed particularly impressed when Huzoor narrated how balanced and impartial the education provided by Ahmadi schools was – wherein it was not only Islam that was taught in religious study but other religions were also taught to the students.

Huzoor's emerald green achkan coat

As Huzoor walked to his next engagement I noticed the colour of Huzoor's *achkan* coat. It was a beautiful shade of emerald green and matched exactly the national colour of the Irish Republic.

I wondered if Huzoor had purposely worn the colour or if it had been a coincidence. Later on, I asked Huzoor and he said:

"It was a coincidence that I wore green during the visit to the Parliament and I only realised the link when you mentioned it to me."

Although it was a coincidence, perhaps this coincidence was inspired by God, because seeing Huzoor wearing emerald green was a very beautiful sight and I am sure will have been noticed by the local politicians and people.

Huzoor's meeting with Parliamentarians

Following, Huzoor's meeting with the *Speaker* he was escorted by the *Captain of the Guard* to large meeting room known as 'Room 2' to meet a group of Irish Parliamentarians – both TDs and Senators.

In the minutes preceding Huzoor's arrival in the room, the local *Umoor-e-Kharija Secretary*, Ansar Jamil Sahib, became extremely anxious because he had found out that it was a particularly busy day in the *Irish Parliament* and so he was worried that perhaps no politicians would attend.

However, in the moments before Huzoor arrived the situation entirely changed. Suddenly, many *TDs* and *Senators* arrived so that not a single chair in the lengthy room was left empty.



Huzoor was seated in the centre with various politicians either side of him and in front of him.

During the course of the 30minute meeting a few Parliamentarians excused themselves as they had to go and vote but as soon as they left others would enter and fill their seats.

In the end well over 20 Parliamentarians came to welcome Huzoor to Ireland and to congratulate the Jamaat upon the forthcoming inauguration of the *Maryam Mosque* in Galway.

An Irish Parliamentarian said to Huzoor that he wished the Jamaat's first Mosque in Ireland had been built in Dublin where he was based and represented.

Huzoor smiled and said:

“We will, God Willing, soon build a Mosque here in Dublin as well.”

Thereafter, Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív, TD, who was hosting the event, requested Huzoor to give a brief introduction to the Jamaat.



And so very eloquently and gracefully Huzoor informed the audience about how the advent of the Promised Messiah (as) and the establishment of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* were in accordance with the prophecies of the Holy Prophet (saw).

Huzoor also explained the Jamaat’s beliefs about *Jihad*. Huzoor said:

“We do not believe in the violent Jihad that is being portrayed by terrorists and militants. We do not believe in the Jihad of terrorism or extremism. Such hateful activities are to be absolutely condemned...”

Rather, we believe only in the Jihad of self-reformation and improvement; we believe in the Jihad of peacefully preaching Islam's true teachings and we believe in the Jihad of preaching peace itself."

Huzoor answered various questions posed by the Parliamentarians about Islamic teachings. His language was persuasive, logical and extremely attractive.



For example when a female politician asked Huzoor about women's rights in Islam, Huzoor pointed to two female Irish Ahmadi converts who were stood a few metres away. He said they had of their own volition come to accept Islam's teachings and felt dignity in observing Hijab.

Many of the Parliamentarians commented to our Jamaat members afterwards how impressed they were by Huzoor's countenance and personality.

As I stood on the side, I felt so proud and fortunate to be an Ahmadi Muslim, knowing that our Khalifa was portraying Islam's teachings in the most beautiful manner and in the way that was intended and taught by the Holy Prophet of Islam (saw).

It was yet another moment where I saw first-hand how fortunate our Jamaat is to have the divine institution of Khilafat. *Alhamdolillah*.

Huzoor observing the Parliamentary proceedings

I will never forget Huzoor's next engagement at the Irish Parliament. As a guest of the Speaker, Huzoor was invited to observe the live Parliamentary proceedings from the VIP gallery.

There was very limited seating and so only a few of us were able to join Huzoor in the gallery. Huzoor was escorted to the front row, whilst the few of us able to also enter sat in the two rows behind.

I consider it a great blessing of Allah that I was able to be seated directly behind Huzoor as he observed *Leaders Questions* taking place.

The actual proceedings were quite entertaining as a heated debate took place. It was genuinely interesting to see Western style democracy in action from such a close vantage point.

The *Opposition* continually criticised and questioned the *Government* policies and in response the *Government Minister* kept seeking to refute the criticisms and defend the policies.



In between observing the proceedings, I found myself looking at the seat in front of me and observing how graceful Huzoor looked as he too observed the proceedings.

Seated to my left was Ibrahim Noonan Sahib and afterwards he also told me how his eyes were fixated on Huzoor throughout. Noonan Sahib said:

“In the House of Parliament I was observing every movement of Huzoor, as he examined the proceedings of Parliament. I watched and saw how attentive Huzoor was to what was being discussed.

I also saw how when Huzoor entered the chamber all of the Parliamentarians and members of public in the normal gallery looked in his direction.

I am quite sure that it will be talked about for decades how the Khalifa of Islam honoured the Parliament on that day.”

Alhamdulillah those moments in the Parliament will live with me a lifetime. No matter how I try and explain it, I cannot do justice to how beautiful and how graceful Huzoor appeared as he looked down at the Parliamentary proceedings.

Removing our *topis* in Parliament

There was a photo that was later included in a Press Release that showed Huzoor observing the Parliamentary session.

The rest of us who were inside the gallery had taken our *topis* off and this was something that many Ahmadis who saw the photo noticed. I

think many were shocked to see us so close to Huzoor with our heads uncovered!

The simple reason was that when we entered the main chamber, the *Captain of the Guard*, informed us that in Parliament it was required that the general public uncovered their heads as a mark of respect.

Effect of Huzoor on Captain of the Guard

After attending the main chamber, Huzoor also visited and observed the Senate proceedings and signed the official guest book.

The Captain then escorted Huzoor to another room where refreshments had been arranged for Huzoor. For the next few minutes, Huzoor took some tea and stood in conversation with the Captain before being escorted back to his car.

At the end the *Captain* spoke of how it had been his 'privilege' and a 'great honour' for him to host Huzoor.

Later, the local *Kharija Secretary* narrated how when he had first met the *Captain*, he had found him to be a little aloof and even reluctant to talk to the local Ahmadis. However, upon meeting Huzoor his attitude changed completely

Ansar Jamil, Umoor-e-Kharija Secretary said:

“After meeting Huzoor, the Captain was a completely different person! He immediately said how very much impressed he was by Huzoor and overwhelmed about his presence. Thereafter he became extremely co-operative in all respects.”



With the *Grace of Allah*, in every respect, Huzoor’s visit to the Irish National Parliament was blessed in every respect and was a truly historic day in the history of the Ahmadiyya Jamaat in Ireland. *Alhamdolillah*.

A conversation with an Irish convert

We returned to the hotel for *Namaz* and lunch. Following lunch the Qafila was travelling onwards to Galway where we would spend the night 4 nights.

As we got ready to leave, I saw an Irish lady stood in the corridor waiting to wave goodbye to Huzoor. I recognised her as having attended the Parliament function earlier in the morning and so I approached her and introduced myself. Her name was *Emma McDonald* and she had accepted Ahmadiyyat a few years ago and was now married to an Ahmadi doctor from Pakistan.

She was very softly spoken and very enthusiastic about the Jamaat. She told me how everyone she met in the Jamaat had welcomed her with open arms.

As soon as I started talking to her I realised that her personality seemed very familiar. I later realised that the reason she seemed familiar was because her enthusiasm and manner of speaking she was very similar to English Ahmadi lady converts that my mother, *Sajidah Hameed*, had done *Tabligh* to in the 1980s and 1990s when I was a young child.

Her personality reminded me of the Ahmadi ladies such as *auntie Pam*, *auntie Christine*, the late *auntie Marian* and *auntie Vivienne* – who had all converted to Ahmadiyyat in Hartlepool many years ago.

Emma Sahiba told me that she really appreciated the fact that Huzoor had come for a full week to Ireland to meet the Jamaat. She said that Huzoor could have flown from London on Friday morning and returned on Friday evening but instead he had decided to spend the entire week with the Jamaat. She said this in itself proved how much Huzoor loved *all* members of the Jamaat.

She told me how she had been struck by the love of Ahmadi since she had converted and how when her own father passed away, many Khuddam attended the funeral and did duty in the same way that they would when an Ahmadi passes away. She said that the Khuddam, who had never met her father, were so very eager to carry his coffin.

Speaking about her life as an Ahmadi, Emma Sahiba said:

“I have been Ahmadi for a few years now and I can say with total honesty that I do not have a single regret. My life as an Ahmadi Muslim is so much more peaceful and content than my previous life.”

Travel to Galway

We departed from Dublin at 3.50pm and after leading the silent prayer I saw Huzoor call me over. In his hand Huzoor had a copy of *TIME* magazine. Huzoor handed it to me and very affectionately said:

“You will have something to read on the journey to Galway now.”

The drive to Galway took around 2 hours. Huzoor and the Qafila were staying at the *Clayton Hotel* in Galway, which was about a 5 minute walk from the new *Maryam Mosque*.

Huzoor's first visit to the Maryam Mosque

At 8pm, Huzoor visited the *Maryam Mosque* for the first time to lead the *Maghreb* and *Isha* prayers. From both the outside and inside the Mosque was very beautiful.



After *Namaz*, Huzoor asked the *Sadr Jamaat* some questions about the Mosque and over the next few days Huzoor further inspected the Mosque on various occasions. I think Huzoor noticed some aspects that needed improving and so was giving instructions for the future.

From my own perspective, I noticed that the space for *Lajna* seemed very limited and also there was hardly any office space or meeting area.

My introduction to an Irish specialty

On the morning of Thursday, 25 September I woke up early and went downstairs to have breakfast in the hotel. There were many, many choices in the buffet but I stuck to my normal routine of toast and coffee.

In Ireland, I had discovered '*soda bread*' for the first time. It is bread in which instead of yeast, baking soda is used to leaven the bread. I personally found it to be very delicious and so every morning in Ireland I would eat 2 slices and would then look forward to my next serving!

My liking for soda bread meant that upon return to London, I especially searched in *Tesco* and found '*Irish soda bread*' which I immediately bought. Although it was good it was not the same quality as the bread I had eaten in Ireland.

Clothes shopping for Mahid

For the next couple of hours after breakfast I caught up with some work and drafted some Press Releases about Huzoor's tour.

Thereafter, Omair and I walked across to a large department store a few hundred metres from the hotel.

I spent the next half an hour looking for clothes for my toddler son Mahid and was able to find some good quality clothes for him.

I have always seen first-hand how despite being so busy, Huzoor takes a keen interest in the smallest aspects of our lives. And so later I mentioned to Huzoor that I had bought Mahid some clothes and I showed Huzoor a photo I had taken of the various items.

Huzoor asked if I had found the shopping in Ireland to be more or less expensive than in the UK. I responded by saying that the clothes I had bought were very reasonable and cheaper than in England.

Huzoor's Mulaqats in Galway

Later that day, Huzoor met dozens of Ahmadi families in Mulaqat. As in Dublin, the Mulaqats took place in the hotel. One room was used as Huzoor's office; another room was used as the Private Secretary's office and a third room was used as a room for Lajna.

In the Lajna room the ladies and girls were also able to meet and spend time with Khala Saboohi.

As I walked across the corridor I noticed some young boys who seemed very excited and happy. They told me that they had just met Huzoor with their parents. The eldest boy, Naqi Ahmad (16) was very emotional and said:

"When I was in the Mulaqat I felt tears falling from my eyes. I felt as though I was being spiritually healed whilst in front of Huzoor..."

What I understand about Khilafat is that the Khalifa is our father who guides us towards the right path and he is not just for me or for you, but he is for everyone."

Huzoor's guidance on the lack of space

One of the problems faced by the Ireland Jamaat was that the new Mosque was relatively small and at *Jumma* Ahmadiis were expected not only from Ireland but also quite a number were expected from the UK. Thus the *Sadr Jamaat* was quite concerned about how everyone would be accommodated.

After *Namaz*, Huzoor stayed behind at the Mosque for a few minutes and personally assessed where prayers could be held and gave instructions to the *Sadr*.

Huzoor said that all possible space should be utilised but wherever people were saying *Namaz* it should be made sure that they were facing the proper *Qibla* direction.

I was also told that Huzoor had passed on an instruction that those guests who were travelling from the UK should let the local Irish members of the Jamaat take priority in entering the Mosque at *Jumma*.

Huzoor said that the people from UK had the opportunity to see him on a daily basis and so it was the right of the members of the Irish Jamaat to be given priority in their own Mosque.

Comments of the hotel manager

On Friday, I met the hotel manager, an Irish man called *Frank Doherty*, and out of natural curiosity he asked me about the Mosque and about the Jamaat.

He said that although he lived very nearby he had not visited the *Maryam Mosque* because he did not wish to ‘trespass’ and so I told him that guests were always welcome in our Mosques and especially our neighbours.

He was genuinely surprised to hear this and said that we should communicate this to more people. I said that we did try and communicate it as much as possible and that wherever Huzoor opened Mosques he always made it very clear that guests were welcome.

Frank said that he was a devout Catholic and so he always carried with him a small figure depicting *Mary* in his pocket. He said that he believed that by having *Mary* in his pocket she was always protecting him.

He said:

“I have to admit that I was shocked and fascinated by the fact that your community has named the new Mosque the ‘Mary Mosque’. I had no idea that Mary was so respected by Islam and just this single thing has made me appreciate Islam.”

Inauguration of the Maryam Mosque

Friday, 26 September 2014, proved to be a very blessed and historic day in the history of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community* in Ireland.

On that day not only did Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (aba) inaugurate the *Maryam Mosque* with his *Friday Sermon* but later in the day Huzoor also addressed a special reception attended by more than 100 Irish guests and dignitaries.

The pride and joy on the faces of the local Jamaat members was quite apparent. They all seemed so excited and delighted that their Mosque was finally being inaugurated and that the eyes of Ahmadis across the world watching on *MTA* were fixed on their Mosque that day.



After unveiling a commemorative plaque, Huzoor proceeded to the Mosque at 1pm and delivered a very beautiful sermon about the true purpose of Mosques.

Huzoor spoke of how the Quran had made it the duty of true Muslims to protect *all* religions. He said that this was the example of the Holy Prophet (saw) and it was this teaching that the Promised Messiah (as) came to re-establish.



Huzoor said that it was not enough to tell the local people that the Jamaat has named its first Mosque in Ireland after Hazrat Maryam. Rather, he said that all Ahmadis should seek to follow her noble and virtuous example and seek to adopt Islam's true teachings.

Huzoor's media interviews

A couple of days before Jumma, I asked Ireland's *Sadr Jamaat*, Dr Anwar Malik Sahib, if there were any media outlets who wished to interview Huzoor. He responded by saying that there was a lot of interest but he was not sure if Huzoor would have time or permit interviews.

I said that, generally speaking, Huzoor gives times for interviews because it is a good means of spreading the Jamaat's message. Upon hearing this, Sadr Sahib said he would request Huzoor at the next opportunity and later in the day he mentioned that Huzoor had accepted his request.

Therefore, immediately after Jumma, Huzoor returned to the hotel and conducted interviews with *RTE*, Ireland's national broadcaster and *The Irish Times*, which is Ireland's biggest national newspaper.

The first interview was with Mike McCarthy from *RTE National Radio*.



The journalist asked Huzoor about the conflict and violence prevalent in much of the Muslim world today. He asked Huzoor how he felt about the turmoil.

Huzoor responded by saying:

“Of course the current situation upsets me because whatever is happening has nothing to do with Islam... The Quran says that the Holy Prophet (saw) was sent as a ‘mercy for all of mankind’ and so how is it possible for any true Muslim to commit such atrocities?”

After the RTE interview, Huzoor was then interviewed by Lorna Higgins from *The Irish Times*. The journalist had listened to Huzoor’s entire sermon and based her questions around what she had heard during the sermon.



She asked Huzoor why some Muslims were being radicalised. Huzoor responded by saying:

“Those people who are becoming radicalised are frustrated and misguided people.”

Huzoor said Allah had sent the Promised Messiah to rejuvenate the true Islam.

Huzoor said:

“Today, we the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community are following the true teachings of Islam and each year hundreds of thousands of people are joining our Jamaat.”

At the end of the interview the journalist asked Huzoor about how the Jamaat spread its message of peace.

Huzoor said that some people considered Ireland to be a ‘*corner of the world*’ and so we were preaching our message to every corner and every part of the world.

The journalist responded by saying that Irish people considered Ireland to be the ‘*centre of the world*’ and not a ‘corner’.

Upon hearing this Huzoor very beautifully responded by saying:

“It does not matter whether it is a ‘centre’ or a ‘corner’ because we will preach Islam’s true message of peace, love and justice from the centre of the world to the corners of the world and from the corners of the world to the centre.”

Visit to KFC

On Friday afternoon I was not hungry and so I decided to skip lunch. However, a few moments after going back to my room, Mubarak Zafar Sahib told me that the Qafila members were going to walk across to the nearby *KFC* and so I should come. I did not wish to be rude and so I put on my coat and walked across with them.

The consensus was that most people were interested in *KFC*'s well-known chicken wings and so Omair placed an order for lots of wings and fries. There were also some normal chicken pieces and 2 'salads' that did not seem particularly healthy as they also contained big portions of fried chicken!

When the order was ready I was shocked to see how huge the wings were. I mentioned it to Omair and he said that the reason they were so big was due to his special order! Proving himself to be a chicken wing expert, Omair said that you should always specify that you want '*one-bone*' wings at *KFC* as they are much bigger than '*two-bone*' wings.

I was quite amazed by his intimate knowledge of chicken wings and wondered if I would be bold enough to request '*one-bone wings*' on my next trip to *KFC*!

After lunch as we walked back to the hotel I chatted with Mahmood Khan Sahib. Khan Sahib has a very engaging manner of speaking and just listening to him invariably brings a smile to my face.

As we walked back he narrated how that morning he had asked the waitress at breakfast if he could order some boiled eggs. She responded by saying ***“Yes of course – would you like 1 or 2 eggs?”***

Khan Sahib said he looked at her and said ***“No not 1 or 2 - I would like to order 6!”*** He said the look of shock on her face was very clear!

However he said that eating 6 eggs was normal for him, especially considering that he had been to the gym before breakfast.

An Irish convert’s love for Khilafat

During the tour, I met *Fiona O’Keeffe Ahmed Sahiba*, an Irish lady who had converted to Ahmadiyyat a few years ago. After becoming Ahmadi she married an Ahmadi living in the United States.

Like many converts she had faced difficulties, whereby her family had found it difficult to accept her decision to become a Muslim.

Despite such trials, she was resolute in her conviction that Ahmadiyyat was the true path. Recently, she had also been elected as the *Lajna Sadr* of Boston Jamaat in the US.

On one occasion, I asked her about Khilafat and from her response it was clear how much impact Khilafat had made on her and the way it changed her life.

Fiona Sahiba said:

“Every time I see our beloved Huzoor it is as captivating, mesmerizing and awe-inspiring as though I was seeing him for the very first time.

Our beloved Huzoor’s personal and character draws one completely towards him, so much so that one never wants to be away from him; he emanates nothing but beauty, grace and light upon light that illuminates everything around him.

It was these very feelings that flooded my heart the first time I met Huzoor and from then came an instant love for Khalifatul Masih.

This unconditional love for Huzoor changed the course of my life forever and guided me to accept the truth and recognise the beauty of Islam Ahmadiyyat.”

Maryam Mosque Reception

On the evening of 26 September 2014, Huzoor addressed a special reception to celebrate the inauguration of the *Maryam Mosque*. It proved to be a very blessed event where Huzoor delivered Islam’s true teachings to an audience of non-Ahmadi guests.

Generally speaking, previously, such receptions have not been shown live on *MTA* but have been shown at later date, however, on this occasion the reception was broadcast live.

Thankfully, I remembered to put my phone on ‘*silent*’ because during the reception I received a number of text messages from friends in different countries saying they were watching it live and were really happy that they could feel part of Huzoor’s tour in this way.

After *Tilawat* and an introduction by the *Sadr Jamaat*, various guest speakers took to the stage to welcome Huzoor to Ireland and to congratulate the Jamaat on the opening of the Mosque.

Throughout the tour I noticed a kindness in the Irish people and that was also reflected in the guest speeches. Politicians are not necessarily known for their sincerity but it certainly felt as though their positive sentiments were sincere.

The first speaker was Garry O’Halloran, an Irish Barrister who had been in contact with the Jamaat for a number of years.

Speaking in a very strong Irish accent he said:

“I met His Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad at the European Parliament a couple of years ago. I was awestruck by his historic address that day. I have borne witness to the fact that His Holiness is waging a Jihad of love.”

Various other dignitaries also spoke very well before Huzoor took to the stage to deliver his keynote address.

Huzoor's address

Huzoor's language was very simple and yet extremely eloquent. His speech addressed the key concerns that many non-Muslims hold about Islam.

Huzoor also spoke in depth about the objectives with which Ahmadiis build Mosques and also explained the status of Hazrat Maryam in Islam.



I found the way Huzoor described Islam's teachings and the blessed character of the Holy Prophet (saw) to be extremely emotional.

At one point, describing Islam's teachings, Huzoor said:

“The Islam that I follow and believe in, is neither cruel nor vengeful and nor does it advocate any form of violence, oppression or injustice. And nor was the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) sent to spread cruelty or hatred. Rather, he was sent only as a fountain of mercy, flowing with everlasting and universal compassion for mankind.”

Huzoor also explained the advent of the Promised Messiah and the mission with which was sent by Allah. Huzoor said:

“The Promised Messiah came to enlighten the world about the true beauty of Islam. He came to do a Jihad against every single form of cruelty, oppression and all forms of compulsion. He came to teach mankind the need to fulfil each other’s due rights. He came to spread love and compassion and to transform the world into a haven of peace, unity and mutual brotherhood. This was his mission and this was his message.”



Speaking about Hazrat Maryam, Huzoor said:

“Mary’s elevated status is reflected by the fact that the Quran says that true Muslims should develop the qualities of Mary and if they do so then they will be those who never cause harm or suffering to anyone. Every Ahmadi Muslim therefore seeks to instil within themselves the purity, nobility and piety of Mary herself.”

Feedback from guests

I spoke to a number of guests after the event and it was clear how much they had appreciated Huzoor's speech.

I met a lady called *Bernadette* who was a senior official at an educational foundation in Dublin. She had travelled especially from the capital to attend the reception. She said that she the only way to describe Huzoor's speech was to call it a '*message of peace*' and that she was leaving with a very positive impression of Islam.

The guest continued by saying:

"I love the fact that this Mosque has been named the 'Mary Mosque' and I learned from the speech given by His Holiness how much Islam values Mary and that even the Quran has praised her. This was extremely fascinating and I feel that all Christians who speak against Islam should be informed of this."

I met a lady called *Josephine Vahy* who said that she ***"could listen to Huzoor speak all night"*** and that his message was ***"extremely important"***. She said that she prayed that Huzoor was granted a long life and that he was able to live ***"forever in peace and harmony"***.

Another lady who was from the education sector was *Colette Kavanagh* who had personally met Huzoor after the conclusion of his address.

After meeting Huzoor, she said:

“I expected that His Holiness would be very formal but when I approached him he was extremely kind and displayed a very good sense of humour. He was warm and engaging. And earlier I listened to every single word of his speech and I found it to be exactly what today’s world stands in need of.”

Another person whom I met was *Father Martin Whelan* who had been one of the guest speakers earlier in the evening. He was very open in his positive analysis about the effect of Huzoor’s speech.

Father Whelan said:

“The message given by the Khalifa was extremely important because it was a message of bringing people together. His Holiness has given the world a ‘vision’ and it is a ‘vision of peace’. He has shown that Islam truly is a great religion and he has promoted inter-faith dialogue wonderfully well. I was also very struck by his personality because despite being a leader to millions he remains so humble and so gracious.”

I spoke to various other people as well, including 2 ladies who were seated at the same table as me. They both made the same comment that previously they had been very ignorant of Islam and only knew what they saw on the news.

They both said that listening to Huzoor had completely changed their opinion and they now realised that Islam's teachings had been distorted by extremists.

Food at the reception

After the formal proceedings concluded we were served a three-course meal. The starter was soup; the main course was a large piece of grilled chicken with vegetables and the dessert was trifle.

For me the best part of the meal was definitely the soup. However, far more important than my own opinion, it seemed that the guests enjoyed the meal.

An interesting conversation

Seated to my right was an Irish gentleman who I had seen before but had not personally met. His name was *David Coyle* and he was an Ahmadi convert who lived in Germany.

It so happened that he had read the diaries I had written about some of Huzoor's previous tours. It was quite strange and unnerving to meet someone for the first time who knew so much about me. For example, having read the diaries, he knew I had a young son, he knew I liked fast-food and he knew that I had fallen from the stage in Australia last year!

I decided to redress the balance of information and so I set upon asking him various questions about how he had come to accept Ahmadiyyat and his life as an Ahmadi. It was extremely faith inspiring to hear him speak.

I asked him if he had changed since becoming an Ahmadi and he responded by saying that previously he had considered himself to be an *'angry person'* but since becoming Ahmadi he had become patient and calm. Certainly, as I sat with him, it was very apparent how softly spoken he was and I could never have imagined him ever being *'angry'*.

He also told me about some of the difficulties he faced. He said:

"Since becoming an Ahmadi I have lost a lot of family and friends. I have faced difficulties but having seen the light and the truth I can never ever leave the Holy Prophet (saw)."

"My bond with him is eternal. I can never leave the teachings of the Promised Messiah and I will forever be attached to Khilafat. I know that this is the truth and so I am ready for any sacrifice for my faith."

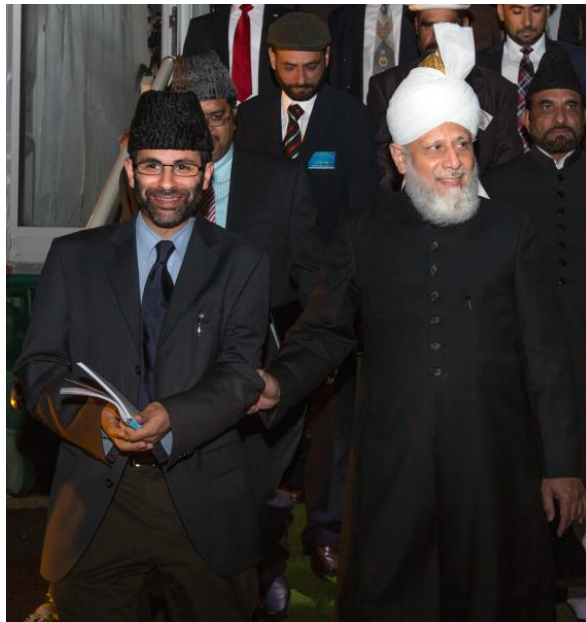
David also narrated his own feelings about Huzoor. He said:

"I have found Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad to be a true man of God who has devoted his entire life to Allah and to teaching the true Islam... I have always felt that he can feel and read my mind and heart. One can only shed tears of love for such a man of God."

After everyone had finished their meal, Huzoor went and visited each and every table individually to meet with the guests. The guests were extremely appreciative of this opportunity to meet Huzoor personally.

Huzoor inspecting the Mosque

After having met with all of the guests, Huzoor left the marquee and as he approached the steps he grabbed my arm quite tightly and continued to hold it as he walked down the steps.



Huzoor smiled his very beautiful smile and asked me about the event.

Huzoor then met some of the non-Ahmadi contractors who had been involved in the building of the Mosque and also *Akram Ahmedi Sahib* and members of his team who were involved in its construction.

Huzoor asked the non-Ahmadi contractors about the type of stone used to build the Mosque. The contractors informed Huzoor how they had chosen a type of stone that darkened in colour over time.

Personally, I was confused and did not understand the benefit of a stone that darkened over time but that was most probably due to my own ignorance and lack of knowledge of such matters!

Children's classes with Huzoor

The next morning Huzoor returned to the *Maryam Mosque* for two separate classes. The first class was with *Atfal* and young *Khuddam* and the second class was with *Nasirat* and young *Lajna*.

In both classes the children had the opportunity to ask Huzoor questions.

One boy mentioned that “*Friday the 13th*” was considered a day of ‘*bad luck*’ by certain Christians.

In response Huzoor narrated how the verse of the Quran “***...This day have I perfected your religion for you...***” (Chapter 5, Verse 4) was revealed on a Friday. He said that once a Jewish man said to Hazrat Umar (ra) that the day on which this verse was revealed should be commemorated as a day of celebration like ‘*Eid*’. To this, Hazrat Umar (ra) responded by saying that the verse was revealed on a ‘Friday’ and every Friday is an ‘Eid’ for Muslims anyway.

Huzoor added:

“Others might consider it to be a day of bad luck but we do not. The Promised Messiah (as) said that Jumma is a holy and special day for us and even said that Jumma is more important and blessed than Eid. Thus, every single Friday is good for us.”

One of the older boys asked Huzoor what books of the Promised Messiah children should read. Huzoor responded by saying that if they can read Urdu then *Haqeeqatul Wahi* and the later volumes of *Malfuzat* were a good place to start.

Huzoor said that if children could not read Urdu then they should read *The Essence of Islam* in which various topics were covered.

Another boy asked Huzoor what prayer Muslim children should pray in order to help the spread of Islam.

Huzoor said that they should repeat *Durood Sharif* as much as possible because it was a comprehensive prayer seeking all forms of blessings for the Holy Prophet (saw) and his followers.

Towards the end of the class one boy asked Huzoor if he had any idea as a child that he would one day become Khalifa.

In response, Huzoor said:

“Never ever did I think I would become Khalifa. Even at the moment I was elected I thought that it must be another person named ‘Masroor’ who has been elected. If a person thinks in advance of becoming Khalifa then that person is a liar.”

Impressions of a non-Ahmadi

Later that morning, I had the opportunity to meet *Fintan Higgins* (40), an Irish man who had spent the past week working as an audio-visual contractor at the Mosque.

He had been extremely affected by what he had seen at the Mosque and in particular upon seeing Huzoor during the past few days.

Speaking about his experiences that week, Fintan said:

“Spending time with Ahmadis for the past few days has been an amazing experience for me. I have seen how Ahmadis treat each other as though they are part of one family.

In particular, I have been so impressed by His Holiness (Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad). As a Catholic I believe him to be a representative of not just Allah and Muhammad (saw) but also a representative of Jesus Christ...

I am 40 years old and for the past 35 years I have been searching for direction and now I feel that after 35 years of search I have finally found it. We Christians are deprived of it and so you Ahmadis are so fortunate to have the Khilafat to guide you. I even found myself praying behind the Khalifa during the prayer times. There was something inside of me that urged me to pray with him."

Later, Huzoor personally met Fintan and gave him a book about the *Conference of World Religions* as a gift. Fintan also requested to have a photo with Huzoor which Huzoor accepted.

Meeting Fintan was a great experience for me proving yet again just how strong the impact of Khilafat is. It is something we Ahmadis are surely guilty of taking for granted at times and it is only when you see how others respond to Huzoor and to his message that you are reminded of how fortunate we are to have Khilafat.

As Fintan said he had been searching for a '*direction*' for 35 years and it was only having seen Huzoor that he finally felt he had found it.

A few moments with Huzoor

On Saturday evening after Huzoor had concluded family Mulaqats he called me to his office. With a smile Huzoor asked me where I had been and I responded by saying "*Huzoor I have been here.*"

Huzoor asked how the past few days in Ireland had been and in particular the Parliament event and Friday's Reception. Huzoor informed me of certain things that I had missed or been unaware about.

Huzoor said he had found the Irish people to be sincere and to speak the truth. He said that what they liked they said openly and if they did not like something that too they stated plainly.

Huzoor also mentioned how during this tour the local Jamaat had proposed some time to be set aside for Huzoor to do some sightseeing but Huzoor had said that he did not have time.

It was another display of how Huzoor's only priority was to serve the Jamaat and to spend time spreading Islam's true message to Ahmadis and non-Ahmadis alike.

With a smile, Huzoor said that because he had rejected the opportunity to do sightseeing, I too would not have the opportunity to visit the local landmarks.

I responded by saying:

"Huzoor, I just want to stay with you and anyway you have already shown me North Wales during the first day of the tour!"

Huzoor smiled and said perhaps I would see a little more of Wales on our return journey.

Love for Khilafat

That evening, I also met *Yusuf Christopher Pender* (33), who became an Ahmadi in 2005. With the *Grace of Allah*, Yusuf is very active in the Jamaat and is a member of the *National Amila*.

Speaking about Huzoor, Yusuf said:

“I feel so overwhelmed and emotional whenever I see Huzoor. He is so majestic and eloquent and when you meet him it makes you immediately aware of your own weaknesses.

When you are with Huzoor you forget the rest of the world entirely and you become like a little child sat before his father. The connection I have with Huzoor and the love I feel for him is such that I know only Allah could have put this love in my heart. When I think that Huzoor is leaving in a couple of days it fills me with trepidation and I feel like crying.”

Yusuf said that during *Mulaqat* he had said to Huzoor that it felt as though Galway had become like *Masjid Fazl* in London for that week. He said that everyone was spiritually charged and everything revolved around the Mosque.

He said that Huzoor replied by saying that the Jamaat must seek to maintain and continue this spirit and energy even after he returned to London.

A greeting in the hotel lobby

In the early evening, I saw 3 Irish ladies stood in a line in the hotel lobby and it appeared as though they were waiting for someone. Omair told me that they were Irish professionals of very senior rank who were also staying in the hotel to attend a business conference.

They had seen Huzoor on TV and upon noticing that he was staying in the hotel they had expressed their desire to meet him. One of our security team informed them that as Huzoor was in his office it would be quite some time before they are able to meet him but they said they did not care and wished to wait. Thus for quite a long period of time, they stood patiently waiting.

When Huzoor came from his office the ladies met him and offered congratulations to Huzoor about the new Mosque.

Huzoor, smiled and thanked them for their gesture and also said that they should visit the Mosque. They also requested Huzoor for a photo.

After standing for the photo, Huzoor said goodbye to them and walked to his car as he was going back to the Mosque to lead *Namaz*. I looked back and saw the women and they each had huge smiles on their faces and were talking to each other about their experience at meeting Huzoor. One of the ladies, *Michele Kerrigan*, asked Omair if he would provide the photo and said it had been a “*huge honour and privilege*” to have met Huzoor.

Evening visit to Galway city centre

That evening after *Namaz* and dinner, as I was doing some packing in my room I got a knock on my door from Ahmad bhai. He said that a few members of the Qafila were going to visit Galway's city centre and so I should also come.

Thus, Munir Javed Sahib, Ahmad bhai, Nadeem, Omair and me went on the short drive to the city centre. Our tour guide was the local *Sadr* of Galway Jamaat.

Delicious ice-cream!

We parked on the side of the road and walked into the city centre which was very busy. We saw an ice cream *gelato* shop and so me, Omair and Nadeem went in.

There were many different flavours and the man at the counter offered us some free samples, which we gladly tried. The ice cream was absolutely delicious! It was so smooth and creamy that it felt like we were no longer in Galway but in a café in Italy!

We called the other members of our group and they too started trying the ice cream and as each person tasted it they could not hold back how much they were enjoying it!

Ahmad bhai was reluctant to try it at first but I persuaded him and when he did he immediately gave it his seal of approval. Having tried countless free samples, I said that we were now morally obliged to *buy* some ice cream and so all of us then made our orders.

Some took their ice cream in cones, others took theirs in tubs. I wanted mine in a cone but for some reason he put it in a tub! Anyway, I took coffee flavour and chocolate brownie flavour and they were both delicious!

We took our ice cream and continued to walk along the city centre when suddenly we saw a group of familiar faces and realised that it was the *MTA* team who had also come to see the city centre. We talked to them for a while and then continued onwards.

A moment of personal reflection

One thing I could not help but notice was how many pubs and bars there were in this fairly small city. Coming out of them were men and women, both young and old, many of whom were clearly drunk.

As I saw them I kept thinking to myself how fortunate we Ahmadis were, to have been taught the true Islam by the Promised Messiah so that we were able to find true contentment in our lives through our faith, rather than through alcohol or other wrong means.

As we walked along I thought of all the Irish converts I had met during the visit – *Noonan Sahib, Yusuf Pender, David Coyle, Emma McDonald, Fiona O’Keeffe* and others and thought of the contentment and peace they said that Ahmadiyyat had given them.

As we returned to our cars I hoped and prayed that others would quickly come to realise the truth of Islam.

Amila meetings with Huzoor

On Sunday morning, Huzoor conducted Amila meetings with *Khuddam, Ansar* and Ireland’s *National Amila*. It was a privilege to watch these meetings from the side and observe the way Huzoor guided each of the office bearers in their respective duties.

During all three meetings, Huzoor spoke of the importance for *Amila* members to take personal responsibility. He said that they should not be those who only give ‘orders’ or ‘targets’ to other Ahmadis but should become the best examples themselves and in this way be a means for others to learn and follow.

In terms of *Tabligh*, Huzoor gave every *Amila* member a personal target and said that they should seek to fulfil their own personal targets in terms of spreading the message of Islam. Huzoor said it was important to be ‘determined’ to fulfil the plans that the Jamaat sets out. He said that if there was determination then the *Amila* would soon see the fruits of their labour.

Huzoor noted that the Khuddam were wearing matching *shalwar kameez* and *topis* and said that if they showed a similar effort in their *Tabligh* as they did in making sure their clothes matched then they would surely have success!

In the *National Amila* meeting, Huzoor also spoke about the importance of *Tabligh* and the need for each person to make personal contacts.

Huzoor said:

“You should plant a seed for Tabligh, water it and care for it. You should nourish it and then watch it flourish.”

Huzoor continued by saying:

“You should consider the media coverage of the Mosque opening to be a breakthrough for the Jamaat in Ireland. Do not waste this opportunity or let the interest in the Mosque die away but seek to further increase the interest across this country.”

A few precious moments

As the final *Amila* meeting concluded and the *Amila* members filed out of the room, Majid Sahib, Mubarak Sahib and me were able to spend a few precious moments in Huzoor’s company.

The evening before I had informed Huzoor that *RTE National Radio* had played a lengthy excerpt from their interview with Huzoor on their *Drivetime* radio programme.

Huzoor asked me if I had played the report to Majid Sahib and Mubarak Sahib. I said I had not and so Huzoor said I should play it for them to hear.

I pressed play and handed Mubarak Sahib my phone and so he and Majid Sahib listened for the next few minutes, whilst I went and stood beside Huzoor.

As I did, Huzoor mentioned a recent video from Pakistan in which it showed anti-Ahmadi extremists attacking one of our Mosques and repeatedly placing their feet on a photo of Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) and stamping on it.

I could feel the sadness and pain in Huzoor's voice as he said:

“This is the way of the so-called Muslims that they are stamping on the photo of Hazrat Musleh Maud.”

I felt great sadness as I thought of the vulgarity and absolute lack of decency and respect of those who oppose us in Pakistan. I felt even more sadness as I thought of how such acts must grieve and pain Huzoor on a daily basis.

As the news report concluded, both Mubarak Sahib and Majid Sahib looked up and expressed their appreciation that *RTE* had played almost the entire interview without any form of edit and so had allowed Huzoor's message to reach all parts of Ireland uninterrupted.

A unique Aameen ceremony

Before *Zuhr* and *Asr*, Huzoor conducted an *Aameen* ceremony with a number of Ahmadi children. This particular *Aameen* ceremony was quite unique because the final person having their *Aameen* was not a child but a man in his 30s. It was actually, *Yusuf Pender* Sahib, who having converted to Ahmadiyyat in 2005 had completed reading the Quran in Arabic a couple of years ago.

Huzoor was pleased to see that Yusuf Sahib had completed the Quran and so very lovingly said '*Masha'Allah*' upon seeing him.

A nervous photographer

After *Namaz*, Huzoor walked outside of the Mosque to have a photo with *MTA* staff and to inspect a new production van recently purchased by *MTA*.

Omair Aleem had set the photo in a way that he was standing on stepladder whilst taking the photo so that he could make sure that the *Maryam Mosque* was visible in the photo.

Munir Odeh Sahib requested Huzoor if Omair could also join the photo as he worked for many years in *MTA Production* also. As Huzoor gave permission I was shocked to see Omair hand me the camera and told me to get on the stepladder and take the photos!

The stepladder looked quite unstable and I thought that this was a pure recipe for disaster whereby I was going to stand on an unstable ladder, holding an expensive camera, in front of Huzoor and dozens of other people watching from all sides!

Initially, I took just one step up the ladder and took a photo but I could hear Omair telling me to go to the top of ladder to get a better picture!

As I took the final couple of steps up the ladder I kept repeating the prayer “*Rabbay qullo shai-in khaadimo ka*” and thankfully Allah helped me maintain my balance and I took the photos safely and without incident!

The scene that I had imagined of me falling to the ground in front of everybody and the camera smashing to pieces had thankfully been averted, *Alhamdolillah!*

An example of Huzoor’s love for the Jamaat

After the *MTA* photo, other groups such as the local *Amila* and the National missionaries also requested Huzoor for photos.

As so often happens on these occasions, as people saw the opportunity more and more groups emerged and requested photos with Huzoor and to each group Huzoor gave his time.

Later a friend said to me that he could not imagine any other world leader giving so much time to his people as Huzoor does and certainly I could only agree with this sentiment.

An unwise lunch choice

We ate lunch at the hotel which consisted of *biryani* and *roast chicken*. I first ate some *biryani* before taking a piece of the roast chicken. After taking a few bites, it occurred to me that the chicken seemed very undercooked!

I looked at the plates of the Qafila members around me and most of them had not taken any of the chicken. When I asked why they said they had not taken because it seemed raw! I panicked and said “*I wish you had warned me!*”

Anyway, for the next 24 hours I waited to see if I would be struck down by illness. It felt like I was waiting for a bomb to go off and was witnessing the countdown extremely slowly! I was particularly worried as the next day we were travelling back to London on the ferry and I knew that getting sea-sick was quite normal even without the help of raw chicken! Anyway, I prayed a lot for the rest of the day and thankfully I was ok and suffered no adverse reaction! *Alhamdolillah*.

Huzoor's love for a bereaved family

Huzoor departed from Galway at 3.45pm to return to the Dublin hotel where we had spent our first two nights in Ireland.

Upon arrival at the hotel, I saw an Ahmadi family waiting at the entrance with tears in their eyes. As Huzoor came out of his car, he met each of the family members, including two young children, one by one and embraced them all extremely lovingly and tenderly.

Seeing this scene I guessed that the family must have suffered bereavement and so it transpired that a well known *Lajna* member of the Ireland Jamaat had passed away the day before after a long battle with cancer.

I later learned that despite being so unwell, she had come to the hotel a few days before in a wheelchair to meet Huzoor.

This incident was a prime example of the two-way bond of love between Ahmadis and Khilafat. A very sick woman, who had only 2 or 3 days to live, came especially to greet her Khalifa and to request his prayers for her children.

Then, when news of her passing reached the Khalifa, he met those left bereaved with so much love and compassion. Indeed, upon return to London, Huzoor led her funeral prayers after Jumma at *Baitul Futuh* and spoke very kindly of her services to the Jamaat.

Huzoor sitting in the hotel lobby

Later, after leading the *Maghreb* and *Isha* prayers, Huzoor walked to the lobby of the hotel but rather than head to the lift as he normally did to return to his room, Huzoor went and took a seat on a sofa.

Huzoor also invited the *Sadr Jamaat*, Dr Anwar Malik Sahib and the *Missionary-in-Charge*, Ibrahim Noonan Sahib to sit with him. At first, I have to admit that I thought that perhaps Huzoor had not been satisfied by something and so had called Sadr Sahib and Murrabi Sahib to discuss the issue. However, this was my ignorant mistake, because Huzoor had called them as a great expression of love.



Huzoor individually signed a number of books writing '*With prayers, Mirza Masroor Ahmad*' before giving them as gifts to Sadr Sahib, Murrabi Sahib and a few other members of the Jamaat.

The look of happiness on the faces of Sadr Sahib and the other recipients was apparent for all to see.

It was a really wonderful and touching moment for them but also for all of us to observe Huzoor relaxed in the hotel lobby for those few moments.

Sampling a local specialty

That final evening the local Jamaat had organised a traditional '*Irish stew*' for dinner. I had heard a lot about Irish stew throughout the tour from both Ahmad bhai and Omair who said that they had tried it on Huzoor's previous tour to Ireland in 2010. I was looking forward to finally trying it for myself.

Irish stew is a mixture of small pieces of lamb that have been slow-cooked for hours, mixed with potatoes and vegetables and cooked in a flavourful broth. Perhaps one way to describe it is as an *Anglicised*, less spicy version, of *aloo ghosht*. I did enjoy it but more than the meat, I enjoyed the broth and vegetables.

I wondered if any of the Irish stew had been sent to Huzoor and Khala Saboohi. I found out the answer to this a few days later when Huzoor mentioned that they had tried the stew. Huzoor said it was ok but he preferred the grilled salmon that was also served that evening. I was not surprised to hear Huzoor preferred the salmon because Huzoor has mentioned in the past how he likes most types of seafood.

Getting ready half asleep

The next day, Monday 29 September, was to be the day of Huzoor's return to London. It was going to be a long journey - as first the Qafila would travel by ferry from Dublin to North Wales and from there they would drive back to London.

Departure therefore was scheduled for immediately after Fajr which was offered at 6am. Thus Mubarak Zafar Sahib and I, who were sharing a room, woke up before 5am to get ready.

If truth be told I was still half asleep as I walked into the bathroom to take a shower. Just as I was about to get ready, I noticed that my white shirt which I was about to wear had grown a few inches.

It was then that I realised that in my tired state I had picked up Mubarak Sahib's *kameez* instead of my shirt! I went back into the room embarrassed and apologised to Mubarak Sahib and handed him back his shirt.

Departure from Ireland

We departed from the hotel at exactly 6.30am. Even though it was early morning, many Ahmadis had gathered at the hotel to wave Huzoor off. I saw many men, women and even children who had tears in their eyes and were desperately sad to wave goodbye to Huzoor.

We went straight to the ferry and, as on the journey to Ireland, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi, went to a private room, whilst the rest of us went to the main ferry lounge where we spent the next few hours.

Visit to Jamaat centre in Wales

The ferry arrived back at *Holyhead* in Wales at 11.30am and from there we drove for just over an hour to the seaside town of *Rihyl* which lies on the north-east coast of Wales. The local Jamaat had recently purchased an old Church and Huzoor had accepted their invitation to visit it.



The church was known previously as the '*Salem Centre*'. I was told by locals that '*salem*' was an old Welsh word that meant '*peace*' and so in this way the name was quite apt.

Munir Javed Sahib pointed out that '*salem*' was very close to the Arabic word '*salaam*' and so it showed how the Welsh language had its roots in Arabic.

Upon arrival, Huzoor inspected the building. It was very large and clearly had a lot of potential but it was also clear that it required a lot of renovation and re-decoration.

Huzoor led the *Zuhr* and *Asr* prayers in the main hall. The local Jamaat members seemed very delighted and happy. I am sure when they purchased the building earlier in the year they did not expect that Huzoor would visit it so soon and lead *Namaz* there.

A personal lesson for me

After, *Namaz* we were served lunch before getting ready for the final part of our journey back to London. I finished my lunch quite quickly and so went and stood on the street outside the Mosque.

I immediately noticed a well-built Welshman with a skinhead and heavily tattooed arms approaching. The thought immediately came to my mind that perhaps he was coming to cause trouble. I was quite taken aback therefore when I saw him smile in my direction before saying: "*Assalamo Alaikum*". He then continued walking happily down the road.

I felt quite upset with myself that just from his appearance I had assumed that he would be there to cause trouble, when in fact he had gone to the trouble to learn our Islamic greeting. It reminded me of primary school where one of my teachers used to regularly remind us to "*not judge a book by its cover*".

Huzoor's affection and care

Despite being so busy, Huzoor continues somehow to find the time to make sure that those around him are well. And so on that final afternoon, Huzoor asked me how my lunch had been and then said:

"I hope you enjoyed Ireland"

I responded by saying that being with Huzoor, wherever it is, is always the best time of my life and the week in Ireland had been the same. Every moment in Huzoor's company truly is a privilege and an unparalleled honour.

Return to Masjid Fazl

We left Wales at 2.40pm and drove straight back to *Masjid Fazl* where the Qafila arrived at 7.10pm.

Huzoor and Khala Saboohi were welcomed by hundreds of local Ahmadis and after waving towards them Huzoor went up to his residence for a few moments before returning to lead the *Maghreb* prayer in the Mosque.

Conclusion

Huzoor's tour of Ireland had been a relatively short tour – comprising just 8 days – yet every moment, of every day, had been filled with blessings.

Huzoor had inaugurated our Jamaat's first Mosque in Ireland and had spread Islam's true teachings to the Irish people through his speeches and media interviews.

Huzoor had visited the Irish National Parliament and answered the questions of the local politicians directly.

Huzoor had met virtually all of the members of the Irish Jamaat and showered them with his love and grace.

Truly, it had been an historic week for the Irish Jamaat - I felt humbled and privileged to be a bystander and witness once again. *Alhamdolillah.*

May Allah grant Huzoor a long, healthy and forever prosperous life. *Ameen.*