

# **NEW ZEALAND TOUR**



**(28 October – 5 November 2013)**

## **A Personal Account**

***By Abid Khan***

### **Departure from Australia**

After a very blessed four-week stay in Australia, Huzoor and his Qafila departed from Australia on 28 October 2013 and travelled onwards to New Zealand for the third leg of Huzoor's tour. The departure to New Zealand was the one part of the tour where I felt a little bit sad and the reason was that on this one occasion, my flight was different to Huzoor's. I am not sure the reason but I think my ticket was booked a bit later and by that time the flight was fully booked. Nonetheless, in the scheme of things this was just a small issue and the flight I was on departed only a few minutes after Huzoor's.

I arrived at Sydney's airport at the same time as Majid Sahib and Sakawat Bajwa Sahib. As was their routine, they had come early to check-in the members of the Qafila and to board the entire luggage. Huzoor was travelling on Qantas Airlines so they went to the Qantas counter, whilst I headed to the Jetstar counter as I was travelling on that airline.

### **A final farewell for the Australia Jamaat**

I walked towards my departure gate and as I did so, I saw that Huzoor, Khala Saboohi and the rest of the Qafila had arrived and were about to board their plane from a nearby gate.

I stood on the side and watched as the Ameer Jamaat Australia and a Khadim by the name of Sohail, who worked at Qantas, waved goodbye to Huzoor.

Although I was stood on one side, I could see how emotional they were having to part from their beloved Khalifa. Seeing their emotions put into a better perspective my own sadness at being on a different flight. Whilst, I would, God-willing, see Huzoor in a few hours, the Australian Ahmadis had no idea when Huzoor would return to their country.

### **Time with MTA staff**

After seeing Huzoor off, I briskly walked towards my gate and after a few minutes boarded the plane. I was sat next to Attaul Awal Abbasi and Tawqeer Mirza who were part of the MTA team.

It was nice to spend the next few hours with them because on the tour my conversations with them had been mainly to do with work. Sometimes I needed their help for MTA News broadcasts, whilst occasionally they needed my help to draft or translate some scripts. But over the next few hours, we talked about our experiences on the tour and also our lives back in London. During that time I became even more aware of how dedicated and committed they were to their work.

### **Arrival in New Zealand**

During the three-hour flight, I was also praying that I would be able to join Huzoor and the Qafila at the Auckland airport, however I had serious doubts if that would be possible because Huzoor's flight was scheduled to arrive before ours.

However, to my pleasant surprise, as soon as we came out of the plane there was a member of the airport staff stood waiting and when he saw me he immediately asked if I was part of the Ahmadiyya group. When I said yes, he said: ***“His Holiness just arrived 5 minutes ago and so if we walk fast we can catch him up!”***

I was elated to hear this news and so I walked as fast as I could and even left the airport staff member trailing a few paces behind.

### **Seeing Huzoor at the Airport**

After a few minutes we passed through Immigration and we went down some steps and there from a distance I saw the back of Huzoor’s *paghri*. As soon as I saw it, I felt happy and content again. It might sound strange but just seeing Huzoor’s *paghri* made me feel completely at ease once again.

I walked those final few hundred yards very briskly and then quietly joined up with the Qafila again. After a few seconds, Huzoor turned his head and saw me and I think with an element of surprise he asked ***“Tum bhi ponch gay ho?”*** – that is ***“You have also arrived?”*** I did not say anything and just smiled as I looked towards Huzoor.

### **Personal Reflection of an Ahmadi**

One of the Ahmadis who had the honour to come and receive Huzoor was Mansoor Cheema, aged 29, from Auckland.

Afterwards he said to me:

***“When I heard Huzoor was coming to New Zealand it was something unbelievable. I felt I am the luckiest guy to see Khilafat so closely and that my dream had come true. When Huzoor appeared and I saw him for the first time at the airport he appeared like an angel - it was an unforgettable scene. Light was beaming from his face. I felt that New Zealand was blessed by his presence immediately.”***

### **Travel to Residence**

After a couple of minutes we exited the airport building and headed to our respective cars. As had been the case for the majority of the tour, I was seated in a car with Mubarak Zafar Sahib. We headed straight to the residence, which was a block of apartments and rooms called ‘Quest Service Apartments’ about 15 minutes from the airport.

As we drove, I was thrilled to be in New Zealand with Huzoor and thus have the opportunity to see another country that I could never have expected to visit.

The lush greenery of New Zealand’s land immediately struck me. I could tell instantly that the stories of New Zealand being a very beautiful country were very true.

We soon arrived at the residence - Huzoor and Khala Saboohi were residing on the fourth floor. I was staying in a room on the floor below.

### **Confusion over Namaz Location**

As we arrived we all went to our rooms to freshen up. I was told that someone would knock on our door to inform us when Zuhr and Asr prayers would be performed. However, after 20minutes nobody had knocked and so I went across to Mubarak Zafar Sahib's room. He too mentioned that nobody had knocked on his door.

It was very quiet and so we guessed that Namaz must have started and so we rushed to the lifts. However, we had no idea where Namaz was being performed and so we went on each floor looking to see if we could see some Ahmadis or security staff but to no avail.

We then decided to give up on the lift and search using the stairs but still we could not find the prayer room. After a few minutes of going up and down the stairs, we finally went outside the building and from there I could see a pile of shoes outside a room on an adjacent side of the building. The shoes were a clue and so me and Mubarak Sahib briskly walked in that direction and sure enough we saw that Huzoor was there leading Namaz.

We had missed Zuhr, which we then offered ourselves, but thankfully we were able to join in the congregational prayer for the end of Asr.

### **An example of Huzoor's love**

In the evening, Huzoor was going to lead the Maghreb and Isha prayers at the newly built Baitul Muqeet Mosque and so we gathered in the basement waiting for Huzoor to come down.

I stood with Majid Sahib and I could see from his face that he was very happy and in high spirits. He soon explained that whilst he was in his room, there was a knock on his door and when he opened the door he saw that it was Huzoor who had come to visit him. Majid Sahib said that Huzoor came and sat down and was in a very relaxed mood and was asking questions about the tour.

The happiness on Majid Sahib's face and in his voice was palpable. It reinforced yet again how special and unique Khilafat truly is. Majid Sahib has been going on tours since the 1980s and so will have been on dozens of tours with Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (ra) and Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) and no doubt he has seen Khilafat from a very close perspective over the past 25 years or more. Yet, still after all these years, being able to spend a few moments in Huzoor's company had given him so much happiness and joy.

From my own perspective, I could completely relate to Majid Sahib's feelings. On the tour I had seen Huzoor emerging from his car or from a lift dozens of times, yet each time my heart filled with a sense of excitement, joy and love for Huzoor. A glimpse of Huzoor's *paghri* or a glimpse of his radiant smile is enough to make any Ahmadi's day a happy and special one.

### **Huzoor's first visit to Baitul Muqeet**

After Huzoor came down we drove to the Mosque which was around 15 minutes away. Many Ahmadis had gathered to greet Huzoor and were reciting *Nazms* in happiness and excitement was etched upon their faces as they got their first glimpse of Huzoor.

The Mosque itself was very beautiful and of a very good size. Huzoor immediately went up the stairs to the Mosque area to lead Namaz. From the inside, the Mosque seemed quite similar to our Mosques in London. The dome had been constructed in a similar way to the dome at Baitul Futuh – although of course on a smaller scale and the colour scheme throughout the Mosque was also very similar.

### **Informal inspection by Huzoor**

After Namaz concluded, Huzoor decided to inspect part of the premises. When Huzoor arrived at the kitchen it was locked and so Huzoor asked for it to be opened. The Ziafat team had the keys but they had not yet returned from Namaz. However, this mere detail did not stop Huzoor from inspecting the kitchen!

Rather than simply walk away, Huzoor tilted his neck and looked through a small gap in the window. By doing this, Huzoor was able to assess the standard of the kitchen and then instructed the Sadr Jamaat, Muhammad Iqbal Sahib about certain improvements that needed to be made. Huzoor said that the kitchen seemed to have been designed in a rather rushed way and so it needed

improving. I was quite amazed at Huzoor's quick thinking and quick-assessment.

As Huzoor walked away, I could not resist tilting my own neck and looking into the kitchen. Unfortunately, being rather short in height, I could only see the ceiling inside the kitchen and not the rest!

### **A Memorable Day - 29 October 2013**

There are certain days in everyone's life which they believe they will never forget and I believe that our first full day in New Zealand, 29 October 2013, will be one of those days for me.

For various reasons, it was a day filled from morning to evening with God's blessings and for those of us who witnessed the day it was filled with a number of utterly unique experiences.

### **Departure for Maori Reception**

The day began with an early morning drive to the Mosque where Huzoor led the Fajr prayers. Upon return, we all got ready and had breakfast because the Qafila was departing just after 9am for a special Maori reception that was being held in Huzoor's honour.

The reception was being hosted by the Maori King, *Kingi Tuheitia*, at the headquarters of the Maori King Movement the *Turangawaewae Marae* which is located on their ancestral land.

### **A rather large car and feeling unwell**

The car that Mubarak Sahib and me shared had changed overnight and we were now placed in a very large van. Mubarak Sahib sat in the front with the driver and so I was in the back with six seats to myself.

The design of the seats was not in rows one behind each other, but rather there were two rows facing each other. Initially, I felt quite ridiculous having so much space to myself and indeed quite bored. There was so much distance between myself and the driver and Mubarak Sahib that I felt like I was in a separate car on my own altogether. Indeed, it felt like I was being chauffeured in a limousine!

Whilst I felt a little isolated it turned out to be a blessing in disguise because since Fajr time I had begun to feel unwell. I was rapidly developing a sore throat and I could feel my temperature rising.

Whenever, I get the flu or a cold the worst day for me is always the first because I can sense that the illness is starting and I know that it is, more than likely, going to get worse over the next couple of days. That sense of foreboding is often worse than the illness itself. And that is exactly how I felt during those few hours.

However, having the back of the huge van to myself meant that throughout the day, whenever we were driving, I was able to stretch my legs and close my eyes and catch up with some sleep.

I kept praying that the cold did not worsen and *Alhamdulillah* those couple of hours rest in the car really helped and with the Grace of Allah by the next day I was fine and fully recovered.

### **A truly unique welcome**

We arrived at the *Marae* in mid-morning and what followed was truly spectacular, truly unforgettable, and truly extraordinary.

We had been told before that Huzoor was going to receive a ‘traditional’ Maori welcome but I do not think any of us could have imagined or envisioned just how unique that welcome would be.



It was fascinating, enthralling and even intimidating all at the same time. When I say ‘intimidating’ I do not mean we are at any point in fear or concerned, rather simply that the type of welcome was very aggressive. It was however

conducted in the very best spirit and with the intention to offer Huzoor the greatest respect the Maoris could according to their traditions.

Including members of the local Jamaat and the Qafila, there must have been at least 50 or 60 Ahmadis and we all stood in a line with Huzoor and Khala Saboohi in the centre. The Maori King's son was also stood next to Huzoor.



On the opposite side were three Maori tribal people who were dressed like traditional warriors. Or perhaps a better description is that they were *undressed* as traditional warriors as their outfits consisted only of a traditional skirt-type covering, fastened by their custom-made belts.

With a large wooden staff in their hands, they began their warrior dance known as the *Haka*. Their every movement was powerful; they did not speak

but they roared in their tribal Maori tongue. Step by step they moved forward, closer to where we were. Each roar and each step more emphatic and more powerful than the last. They were sticking their tongues out, chanting and continuing to move forward.

Perhaps, I was imagining it but as they came within a yard or two of Huzoor I sensed some of our security guards beginning to sweat a little wondering if everything was well. Certainly, if we did not know it was a welcome then the warrior dance could easily be misconstrued as an act of aggression! Whilst, all of this was going on a few Maori ladies were also chanting in their own language in a loud and quite melodious fashion.

### **Gesture of friendship**

Finally, the Maoris ceased moving forward and instead placed a small dagger on the ground in front of where Huzoor was stood. Very slowly and very tentatively our Sadr Jamaat, Iqbal Sahib stepped forward, crouched down and picked it up.

I did not initially understand what this symbolised, but later I was told that the dagger was a symbol of extending friendship and a gesture to welcome a guest. Thus, by placing it in front of us, the Maoris were surrendering their aggression in favour of friendship. It was then left to the other party to accept the offer, by picking up the dagger, or to reject it, by leaving it on the ground. Upon learning this, I was very glad that Iqbal Sahib did pick it up!

The welcome did not conclude there but in fact it became even louder as a group of Maori children began singing as well, joined also by the Maori women and their elders.

I did not understand what was being said but in its own way their chants and songs were very powerful. As they sang, Huzoor walked towards a stage where he sat alongside the King's son. The King himself was sat with his Queen just to the right of the stage.

### **Formal Reception hosted by the Maoris**

Our group of Ahmadis were sat on one side, to the left of Huzoor, whilst the Maoris were sat to Huzoor's right.



During the formal session, there was further chanting and singing, whilst speeches were given in Maori. I also noticed that as a mark of respect the

Maoris had raised the *Liwa-e-Ahmadiyya* flag which I thought was a very generous and kind gesture on their part.

It was quite apparent that the Maoris were treating Huzoor's visit as an extremely sacred event. Whilst we could not understand the speeches, I saw that the Maoris were nodding in agreement as their elders spoke.

At certain points, a few elders would stand and would start reciting poems or songs and then be seated once again. It seemed as though they were praying in their own way and their style of reciting their prayers was very sombre and mournful.

Occasionally, those speaking would switch to the English language and so during one of these interludes one of the main speakers said:

***"Today, is a very auspicious occasion and we salute Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad and we offer him the highest form of respect in the presence of our King. Your Holiness, you are an inspirational and strong leader who advocates for peace.***

***In New Zealand and around the world the Muslim faith has been misconstrued but we know that to love people is a part of your faith and so we welcome you for this reason. We are holding this ceremony for you as the leader of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and so we welcome you to this special ancestral ground of ours."***

### **Translation of Quran into Maori**

After the Maoris had given their speeches, an elderly Ahmadi, Shakil Muneer Sahib, who had translated the Quran into the Maori language gave a short presentation.

Although, I did not know Shakil Sahib at all, I had developed much respect for him, having learned about the great efforts he had made to translate the Quran over a period of more than two decades. He had learnt the language from scratch in order to fulfil a desire of Hazrat Khalifa-tul Masih IV (ra) that the Quran should be translated into Maori.

No doubt Shakil Sahib had done a great service for the Jamaat and this was something Huzoor mentioned in his *Khutba Jumma* upon his return to London.

### **A very memorable *tirana***

After the songs and prayers had been recited by the Maoris, our local Jamaat had arranged for our Ahmadis to do a *tirana* in response and so members of the Jamaat would recite '*Hai dastay qibla*'. This too proved to be a very unique experience for us Qafila members from London!

If anybody knows me well they will know that I never publicly sing or recite because I do not have a good voice – and that is putting it very, very politely. However, on that day, the unthinkable happened and I was part of the group *tirana*!

Bashir Sahib was sat next to the New Zealand Ahmadis and when he saw that they had stood up to sing, I think he felt compelled to stand up. Thus, very hesitantly I saw him stand and start reciting the chorus of the *nazm*. Being seated next to him, my heart suddenly fluttered with panic as I realised that if I did not stand up it would not look at all good. And so slowly and very fearfully I stood up and started repeating the words as quietly as I could.

Upon my standing up, I saw Mubarak Zafar Sahib looking at me with the same sense of shock that I had felt a second before and seeing that I had stood, he then stood up and in this way our Qafila stood up one by one and joined in the *nazm*.

During that period I became extremely tense because I felt I would burst with laughter at any point at the prevailing situation. I pulled a tissue out of my pocket and pretended to wipe my nose repeatedly in an effort to cover my mouth so that people could not see that I was on the verge of laughter.

I did not want to disrespect the function in any way, but I could hardly contain myself thinking of how unbelievable the situation was, whereby I was stood in one of the most far-off places of the world, in a Maori ancestral home, and here, of all places, I was taking part in a *tirana* flanked by Bashir Sahib and Mubarak Sahib and with Huzoor only a few feet away!

I thought I had gotten away with it and that no one had noticed I had been close to laughing, however later in the day Khala Saboochi called me over and asked me why I had been laughing during the event! I felt so embarrassed! I

explained the reason whilst commenting that she had excellent vision to have noticed from such a distance!

Anyway, despite my fear, in the end I felt quite proud to have taken an active part in what proved to be a very historic function and in all honesty I should say that I do not think we sounded too bad! In particular, I would say credit should go to Mubarak Sahib as he sung using all of the power in his lungs!

### **Tour of the Marae**

After the formal function had concluded, Huzoor, Khala Saboohi and the Qafila members were taken into the King's personal reception area. It was a vast Hall filled with sofas and tables, whilst paintings and carvings adorned the walls.

The Maoris had very kindly arranged for some food and drink for all of us and during this period Huzoor sat and talked with the King, whilst Khala Saboohi sat with the Queen.

I was sat with a couple of the Maori elders who asked questions about Huzoor and about the Jamaat. I found them to be very friendly and hospitable.

After some time, Huzoor was given a tour of the hall and shown some of the many gifts that had been presented to the Maoris from all parts of the world including Egypt, India and the United Kingdom.

Huzoor then signed the guest book, writing his name, along with his title of 'Khalifatul Masih V' and date and thereafter Khala Saboohi also signed it.

### **Presentation of the Holy Quran translated into Maori**

We then moved outside where the official presentation of the Holy Quran took place. Huzoor presented the Maori King with the Maori translation of the Quran – the '*Kuranu Tapu*'.



After a few words from our Sadr Jamaat, Huzoor delivered a short address without notes and spoke very beautifully in English. Huzoor's words were very heartfelt and considerate.

Huzoor thanked the Maori people for their welcome which he called '*marvellous*' and then Huzoor explained how Muslims believed the Quran to be

the final law-bearing book and that it had been revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw).

Explaining the Quran's teachings, Huzoor said:

***“The Quran teaches people how to live together in peace and certainly today we need love, peace and reconciliation to spread far and wide - that is the message of the Quran.”***

Huzoor then introduced the Promised Messiah as the Founder of our Jamaat and said that he had come to revive Islam's true teachings after centuries of spiritual darkness.

Huzoor concluded by expressing his hope that the ties of friendship established between our Jamaat and the Maoris would last forever.

Thereafter, Huzoor led a silent prayer according to our tradition and then a Maori Christian priest led a prayer according to their beliefs.

### **Drive to Rotorua and arrival at Hotel**

We concluded the visit to the Maori reception at 12:45 and immediately left and headed to the town of Rotorua. The drive there was really something very special. Because I had been feeling unwell, I slept for much of the journey but every time I woke up I looked out of the window and saw breath-taking examples of the natural beauty that Allah had bestowed New Zealand's land.

Whether it was green rolling hills or pristine clear water, all around was natural beauty. Given this, I was slightly disappointed that as we entered the city of Rotorua, which is particularly famous for its natural beauty, the first thing we saw were commercial food-chains such as *Subway*, *Burger King* and *Dominoes*. Nevertheless, the town's reputation for beauty was richly deserved.

We arrived at the Rydges Hotel in Rotorua at 2.30pm where we would be spending the night and we had lunch delivered to our rooms. Everybody was given a box of fish and chips and I ate mine sat with Mubarak Zafar Sahib and Dr Nadeem Sahib. The fish batter and the chips were both quite greasy but also very tasty.

Soon after eating, we went to a large room booked in the hotel where Huzoor came to lead the Zuhra and Asr prayers.

### **Some sad news**

Hours earlier, the day had actually began very sadly because Mubarak Zafar Sahib, who had been my travel companion throughout the tour, came up to me as we were leaving for Fajr and mentioned that he had not slept that night because he had been busy making calls. He said the reason was that his eldest brother, who lived in Karachi, had just passed away.

I was truly shocked because I had no idea that any of Mubarak Sahib's family was unwell. He asked me how he should inform Huzoor. I said perhaps he could approach Huzoor after Fajr and inform him, but in the end I think, Mubarak Sahib asked Ahmad bhai to convey the message to Huzoor.

Throughout the morning and early afternoon Mubarak Sahib was understandably very quiet and of course naturally upset. By the time Huzoor led the Zuhr and Asr prayers in the hotel Huzoor had received the message and so as he was walking back to his room he called Mubarak Sahib and talked to him in the corridor outside his room for a few minutes.

As soon as the conversation was over, Mubarak Sahib came to where I was standing and was smiling and it seemed as though his spirits had been completely lifted. He said that Huzoor had very lovingly and kindly asked about his brother and the arrangements. It was amazing to see the instant impact of Huzoor's love, Masha'Allah.

### **Visit to Geothermal Geysers**

In the late afternoon, Huzoor went to visit the famous Rotorua geothermal hot pools and geysers. I think the booking had been made for 4pm but we did not leave until after 5.30pm and entry to the geothermal lakes closed at 6pm.



I could see that New Zealand's Sadr Jamaat was becoming tense thinking that the tour he had arranged would have to be cancelled. However, despite the delay we were able to visit and Huzoor was given a tour of the site.



Afterwards, Iqbal Sahib himself narrated his feelings about this incident to me:

***“At the Rydges hotel in Rotorua I mentioned to Huzoor how we were really late for the tour to see the geysers and hot pools. We had 15 minutes left before the park would shut for the day of which 5 minutes would have been spent in travel to the park and another 5 minutes in passing through the gates. I offered an alternative thinking the cart and guide would not be available. Huzoor declined my suggestion of the alternative and decided to stick to the plan and go the geothermal lakes.***

***Alhamdulillah, in the end Allah made His Khalifa's sightseeing tour run smooth. The tour guide was there, the cart was available and the sightseeing was extended until Huzoor was happy to leave the park. It so happened that***

*at that time the park was available to Huzoor only. And so on that day Huzoor taught me a beautiful lesson of Allah's Grace and how I should never fall short of full trust in Allah for His blessings."*



The geothermal ponds and geysers were very beautiful, whereby very hot sulphur waters bubbled to the surface of the land due to underground natural heating activity.



Huzoor walked around and inspected the site and took a video with his camera and while he was doing so Huzoor talked to members of his *qafila* and also a local tour guide.

### **Visit to Lake Rotorua**

After visiting the geysers, we drove to the nearby Lake Rotorua where we spent an hour or so. This was one of the most intimate and enjoyable parts of the entire tour.



After weeks of constant activity, Huzoor spent nearly an hour at the lake and it seemed that he was able to relax and take in Allah's natural beauty.

The lake was extremely beautiful and vast and after talking to the local Jamaat members and Khuddam, Huzoor went and sat on a bench on his own facing the lake. It seemed that Huzoor wished to quietly sit and reflect without the

normal crowd of people around him. Thus we all took a step back and Huzoor sat on his own facing the lake for quite a few minutes.

It was really wonderful to see Huzoor have this time to himself. I kept thinking how we all have our moments of seclusion, where we can relax and reflect on our own, but for Huzoor such moments are so rare because of the nature of the task that Allah has bestowed upon him.



Seeing Huzoor sat there I felt that it was a priceless moment and so I quietly took a few steps towards Huzoor and took a photo on my iPhone of Huzoor facing the vast lake.

### Coffee by the Lake

It had become quite chilly and cold. Personally, after weeks of heat in Singapore and Australia I was very much enjoying having to fasten the buttons of my coat.



Given the cold, it was an even nicer surprise when Huzoor asked the local Jamaat to arrange some coffee for everyone. And so after some time 4 or 5 Khadim emerged with cappuccinos from a coffee shop called 'Relish' which seemed like a local equivalent to Starbucks.

When the coffee was offered to Huzoor at first he declined, as he thought it was plain coffee but when Huzoor was told it was a cappuccino he accepted because occasionally Huzoor enjoys cappuccinos.

Thus, we all sat there drinking hot coffee and nibbling on biscuits and cakes and I know that I enjoyed every sip and every bite in the knowledge that we were so fortunate to spend that precious time in Huzoor's company, *Alhamdolillah*. Whilst, we were drinking coffee a number of birds came flying nearby and so some of our Qafila members started feeding them, upon which many more birds came flying en-masse to share in the spoils, whilst Huzoor took video with his personal video camera.

### **A personal moment**

As Huzoor stood up from the bench, he looked in my direction and called me over. For the next ten minutes or so I had the privilege of walking back and forth alongside the lake in Huzoor's company.



Huzoor asked me various questions about the Jamaat functions that had taken place so far and asked me about any feedback I had collected. Huzoor asked

how everyone in London was and also asked about my own personal reflections of the trip so far.

Those moments were truly precious, walking with Huzoor in such a perfect setting in such a far corner of the world.

### **Catching up on my work**

We returned to the hotel and had our evening meal and then Huzoor came to lead the Maghreb and Isha prayers. After that we all went to our rooms. I wanted to capture the day's events whilst they were fresh in my mind and so I immediately began drafting a Press Release about the Maori reception and another about the visit to Rotorua.

By the time I was finished it was very late but I felt happy that the day's events had been covered and pending Huzoor's approval I would send out the Press Releases the next day.

### **Rotorua – 'The Sulphur City'**

One interesting thing about Rotorua is it is known as the 'Sulphur City' because a slightly offensive smell permeates the air and the city due to the sulphur pools that we had visited earlier in the day.

The odour could be smelt throughout our hotel as well, particularly on the level where I was staying. Some locals describe the smell as 'rotten eggs' and whilst I would not say it was that bad, it was certainly a rather strong odour.

But over the course of the day and night I got used to it and so I imagine those who live in the city probably never even notice it and it is only tourists who complain!

### **Visit to Hamilton Gardens**

The next morning Huzoor left the hotel in Roturua just after 9:15am. We drove to the Hamilton Gardens, which were about an hour and a half away.

Huzoor very quickly walked through various gardens, including the Rose Garden, the Chinese Garden and certain others.



Unfortunately, and for whatever reason, our local Jamaat did not seem very sure of the route to take within the park. Thus, after just 20 or 25 minutes Huzoor returned to his car.

As we were leaving, the local Jamaat brought some *pakoray* and so Huzoor looked at us and said that we should grab a few quickly and eat them in our cars. Thus we all did grab a handful and enjoyed them on our drive back to Auckland.



### **Jalsa Flag Hoisting and Friday Sermon**

On 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013, the 25<sup>th</sup> Jalsa Salana of New Zealand Jamaat began at the newly built Baitul Muqeat Mosque. It was New Zealand's first ever three-day Jalsa.



Just before Jumma, Huzoor hoisted the *Liwa-e-Ahmadiyya* and then unveiled a plaque commemorating the inauguration of Baitul Muqet.



In his Friday Sermon, Huzoor spoke in detail about the new Mosque and commented that it was through Allah's Grace that a Jamaat of only 400 people had been able to build such a beautiful Mosque.

Huzoor said that many Ahmadis had worked day and night in an effort to bring the Mosque project to fruition. As I heard these words it reminded me of the unity of our Jamaat, because wherever we build Mosques it is the case that members of our Jamaat come together to volunteer their services until the Mosque is ready.



The Nasir Mosque in Hartlepool is very special to me as Hartlepool is my hometown and I remember back in 2005 when it was built that the entire night before the inauguration was spent in *waqar-e-amal* trying to ensure that the Mosque was ready.

Later in his Sermon, Huzoor said that by building a Mosque the Jamaat had presented a gift to God but that the Jamaat had taken a loan to pay for part of it and so it should not be that the gift to Allah is based on a loan. Huzoor said it could not be considered a complete gift until the loan was paid off.

### **Huzoor stresses importance of Tabligh**

Huzoor went on to speak about the importance of Tabligh. Throughout the tour, I noticed that Huzoor focused very strongly on Tabligh and as the tour progressed it was something that I felt Huzoor was emphasising ever more. I would not presume to know the reasons underlying this, but perhaps Huzoor noted that particularly in this part of the world there was a need for the Jamaat to increase its efforts in spreading the message of Ahmadiyyat.

### **Interview with National Television**

After the Sermon and Friday Prayers, Huzoor was taken to the entrance area of the Mosque where New Zealand's National Television, 'NZTV-1' had come to interview Huzoor.

They had set up their cameras, whilst MTA had also set up theirs. Whenever, Huzoor has an interview with external media, it is standard practice to have the MTA cameras there also. This is so they can record for Jamaat records and also in case, God forbid, Huzoor is ever misquoted.

The interview commenced as the journalist and Huzoor sat on chairs facing each other, whilst the rest of us were stood on the side listening.



The journalist, a lady called Nicole Bremner, asked various questions, including the purpose of the new Mosque.

Huzoor explained that all religious people required places of worship and Ahmadis were no different and so we required a Mosque to worship five times a day. However, Huzoor made it clear that our Mosques were open to all people and Huzoor cited the example of the Christians of Najran who were allowed by the Holy Prophet (saw) to worship in his Mosque in Medina.

The journalist seemed very curious about whether the Jamaat hoped to increase in size and whether it wished to build more Mosques. Huzoor was

very clear that certainly Ahmadis propagated their faith and hoped that more New Zealanders would join our community and that we would hope to build many more Mosques in the country.

The journalist asked various other questions focusing on the persecution of the Jamaat.



In one of her questions she seemed to imply that any success the Jamaat had was because others felt sympathy for the Jamaat due to the persecution it faced.

Huzoor was very clear that whilst Allah would never allow patience in the face of persecution to go unrewarded, the reason Ahmadis were successful was

because they conveyed Islam's true teachings which were to worship God and to show love to God's Creation.

Huzoor's said it was because of these two fundamental objectives that Ahmadis were proving successful in winning the hearts of others.

That question in particular, I felt that Huzoor answered so wisely. It seemed clear to me that the journalist wished to portray Ahmadis as a small-group whose any success was based on public sympathy – but Huzoor very clearly said it was because of its beliefs and teachings that the Ahmadiyya Community was spreading far and wide.

### **Baitul Muqees Reception**

Whilst the Baitul Muqees Mosque had been inaugurated the day before with the Friday Sermon, it was on the morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> November that the Jamaat hosted a formal Reception in which various non-Ahmadi guests came to listen to Huzoor's keynote address.

The guests included the Maori King and Queen who had hosted Huzoor days before, New Zealand's Minister of Ethnic Affairs, Judith Collins and the Chief Human Rights Commissioner, David Rutherford.

Some of the dignitaries took to the stage and they all praised the Jamaat's contribution to New Zealand and congratulated the Jamaat on the building of the new Mosque.

Thereafter, Huzoor addressed the audience about the true purpose of Mosques. Huzoor reassured the locals that the new Mosque would prove to be a place of sanctuary and peace for *all* people, not just for Muslims.



Huzoor also explained how religion was a matter of the heart by saying:

***“It is a universal truth that religion is a matter of the heart and no-one’s heart can be forced to believe in a particular religion. It is for this very reason that the Holy Quran says that there should be no compulsion in matters of religion.”***

Huzoor went onto give very touching and practical examples of Islam’s compassionate teachings. Huzoor spoke of how Islam teaches Muslims to treat their parents with love and affection. Huzoor spoke about how Islam teaches

that those who are hungry should be fed and cared for and so too should orphans and indeed all people who are in any kind of need.

As Huzoor gave these examples, I could see some of the guests nodding their heads in appreciation. Perhaps for the first time they were hearing the real teachings of Islam, rather than the propaganda and false allegations widely perpetrated in today's world.

### **Interviews with non-Ahmadi guests**

After Huzoor's speech I took the opportunity to interview a few of the guests.

A few of the comments were as follows:

#### **A Christian clergyman, Reverend Bruce Keeley said:**

***"A truly wonderful speech by His Holiness – it was very pertinent. His Holiness said religions should live together without friction. He also said that Islam is given a 'bad press' – and that is absolutely true.***

***Whenever there is a terrorist attack the media always ends by showing a Mosque or Muslims praying – which associates terrorism in the minds of non-Muslims. The truth though, and His Holiness proved it, is that Islam has nothing to do with violence or terror."***

**Professor Ray Harlow said:**

***“A privilege to hear His Holiness speak. As a Christian I listened intently to his message and his message is of serving humanity and leaving aside differences for the common good - this point truly resonated with me. I had seen him on YouTube in the past and had researched him thoroughly so I had an idea of his approach – but to hear His Holiness live is a real privilege and honour.”***

**Ropata Davies, a member of the Bahai community:**

***“I had a very bad impression of Islam until today. I believed what I saw in the media and so I thought it was a religion of violence. My view has now completely changed after listening to His Holiness because he spoke so much about peace. If I am honest I am very shocked to learn Islam’s true message. I am proud I got to have a photo with His Holiness.”***

**Mrs Shawn Pearce, Member of Local Council:**

***“What an honour to be here at this event! This is the first time I have ever been to a Mosque. You are all so open and loving. His Holiness is such an interesting man.***

***His message is what we need in the world – to set aside our differences and to respect each other. I am a Catholic and I found it truly wonderful to spend time with Muslims today.”***

I particularly remember interviewing the *Bahai*. He was so open about how his views had completely changed in the space of a few minutes. He kept repeating that until today he felt Islam was (God forbid) a religion of terror and a religion of hatred.

He said he had believed everything he had seen in the media about Islam and yet within a few minutes of seeing and listening to Huzoor his entire outlook had changed.

He very proudly showed me the photo he had been able to take with Huzoor on his phone and he said he believed Huzoor to be a ‘*Man of God*’.

### **Traditional Maori greeting**

As the formal event came to an end, Huzoor went to see the Maori King off to his car. But before doing so, Huzoor met the Maori King in accordance in the traditional Maori way of greeting one another by touching each other nose-to-nose.

Although in the wider scheme of things this was a very brief moment, I felt it illustrated that Huzoor practiced what he preached perfectly.

Greeting nose-to-nose in this way is something completely alien to our culture and norms, yet out of respect for the Maori traditions Huzoor met the King in this way.



Where Huzoor constantly says that Islam teaches Muslims to respect the people of all religions - he proves it with his acts and gestures.

Of course, Huzoor would never countenance doing anything that conflicted with Islam's teachings but where practices do not conflict with Islam, Huzoor is ever ready to partake if it is a means of promoting peace, harmony and accord with the people of other beliefs.

### **Media Interview**

After the event, Huzoor went to his office, where had been conducting Mulaqats with Ahmadis throughout the week, for a hastily arranged media interview with a national Sunday newspaper.

The journalist asked Huzoor various questions about Islam. He also asked Huzoor if there was anything 'sinful' in translating the Quran from Arabic, given that the Jamaat had just translated it into the Maori language.

Huzoor responded by saying:

***“There is nothing sinful or wrong with translating the Quran, in fact it is an essential duty for Muslims to spread the word of God. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) was sent by Allah as a ‘Messenger for all of Mankind’ and so how could it be correct to deprive some people of his message?”***

### **Jalsa Addresses**

Huzoor delivered two further speeches at New Zealand's Jalsa Salana, one to Lajna Imaillah on 2<sup>nd</sup> November and also the Concluding address on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> November. Both of these addresses were given in English.

In this way, New Zealand's Jalsa was blessed with four speeches delivered by Huzoor if the Friday Sermon was included.

In both the Lajna address and the Concluding address, Huzoor reminded the Ahmadi of their responsibilities.

I particularly loved some of Huzoor's words whilst addressing the Lajna.

Huzoor said:

***“Our success and our progress is not linked to us reaching any worldly heights. Our success is not linked to attaining wealth or riches. Our success is not based on any worldly achievement. Our success is not realised by following the latest fashions and trends.***

***Rather, our success is associated with developing a close relationship with Allah the Almighty. Our success is associated with understanding the true teachings of the Holy Quran. Our success is gained through following the practice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw). And so we must always strive to achieve these true means of success and progress.”***

Then in the Concluding Session, Huzoor said:

***“At every moment, you must keep in mind that we, Ahmadi Muslims, are part of Allah's Jamaat and that our Jamaat been established for the sake of serving and benefitting mankind. We are the Jamaat who must spread virtue in the world. And we are the Jamaat who must banish all forms of evil and wrongdoing.”***

The Jalsa had been very intimate yet extremely blessed. The total attendance was 464, which is a fraction of our Jalsas in countries like India, the UK or Germany, yet so many historic events had taken place during the three days.

I am quite sure that in years or even decades to come, New Zealand's Jamaat will look back at their 2013 Jalsa Salana as truly historic and given that Huzoor spent so much time with the members of the Jamaat, it will prove to be a spring-board for the spread of our Jamaat in the country.

### **Visit to Auckland City**

One evening towards the end of our stay in New Zealand, the Sadr Jamaat informed that he had requested Huzoor's permission to take the Qafila members out on a drive of Auckland City after the conclusion of the day's events.

Huzoor kindly permitted this and so at around 10pm one evening I was told to get ready. As I did not know in advance about the plan I had eaten my evening meal as normal, however other members of the Qafila had not because Sadr Sahib said we would eat from a restaurant.

Anyway, we drove and to my surprise Auckland proved to be quite an attractive city. It had been my impression that whilst as a country New Zealand was very beautiful, the city of Auckland was relatively small in comparison to other leading cities in the world. Whilst, this may be true, the drive around the city centre was very enjoyable.

We stopped a couple of times to take photos but with each stop I could sense that our Qafila members were becoming hungrier and hungrier! As the minutes passed by I became glad that I had already eaten!



Finally, Sadr Jamaat said we would go to get some food and we parked at a place in the city centre. We stood for some minutes waiting and then Sadr Sahib returned to inform that all the suitable restaurants were now closed for the evening! I could see the faces of some of our Qafila member drop as it was now very late and they had not eaten properly for hours.

Sadr Sahib said we would find something to eat elsewhere but I think the rest of us were becoming a little doubtful. As the minutes passed by our doubt gradually increased but then suddenly, and to the delight of our hungry companions, the cars stopped at a small café-type restaurant outside of which it had clearly marked the words '*Open 24 hours*'.

We got out of our cars and went inside and Sadr Sahib ordered some pizzas and Turkish kebabs. Although, I had eaten I managed to find room for a little and we all greatly enjoyed our late night dinner.

I remember as we sat there my mind wandered and I thought of how even being sat in this restaurant was a blessing of Khilafat. It was only because of Huzoor that we were all in New Zealand and it was only because of him that we were not only able to see constant spiritual blessings but we were also able to see new cities and towns along the way.

### **Day Trip to Wellington**

4<sup>th</sup> November 2013 would prove to be our final full day in New Zealand, however in no way was it to be a day of rest or packing but it actually proved to be perhaps the busiest day of the entire tour.

The reason was that Huzoor was flying to Wellington for a day-trip to deliver an historic address at New Zealand's National Parliament.

### **Delay at Airport**

The Qafila left the residence at 8.15am and arrived at the airport by 9am. Our flight was delayed by about half an hour and so we reached the gate at least 30 minutes prior to boarding.

On one side Huzoor and Khala Saboohi were sat down on some chairs, whilst a few metres away the rest of us Qafila members were seated.

I sat and watched the non-Ahmadis going about their business or routines. Some walked past Huzoor, whilst others were seated near where he was. I thought how they were entirely oblivious to the fact that they were in the

presence of the Khalifa, who was Allah's chosen person. I hoped that one day they would come to realise and understand the status of Khilafat and the its infinite blessings.

### **Confusion over seats**

As we entered the plane, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi were seated towards the front of the plane, whilst the majority of Qafila members were near the back.

For some reason I saw that my seat number was 11-A which was a few seats ahead of the other Qafila members. As Bashir Sahib walked past me I offered him my seat because normally at the end of flights he has to rush out and as his seat was 20-A he gladly swapped.

Unfortunately, when I went to sit in his seat I saw that another person, a non-Ahmadi, was already seated there. I felt embarrassed asking him to leave his seat as he was an elderly person and so I stood there utterly confused about where to sit.

As far as I could tell every seat on the plane was being utilised. Ahmad bhai, saw my confusion, and rather helpfully suggested that I could go and sit in the plane toilet! Just as I was considering that that may be my only option, an air-hostess came up to me and said that she had found a seat right at the back of the plane in the corner. I breathed a sigh of relief and went and sat down.

I was seated next to two rather large New Zealanders who were very intrigued about where we had come from and who Huzoor was. I spent the next fifteen

to twenty minutes explaining to them about our Jamaat and they were truly astounded as I explained Huzoor's status and that he was flying to Wellington to make an address in their National Parliament.

With the Grace of God, those few minutes proved quite fruitful and the two gentlemen both wished our Jamaat well and said they hoped every aspect of Huzoor's tour would prove successful.

### **Natural beauty in Wellington**

As the plane started to descend I looked out of the window and I was further amazed by New Zealand's natural beauty.



As we landed it seemed that in every direction there were beautiful hills and the most clear, pristine water. Without a shadow of doubt it was the most scenic airport I have ever seen.

We drove from the airport to the Intercontinental Hotel and that short drive was itself spectacular, each moment filled with very distinctive scenery.

### **New Zealand Parliament Event**

After a short stay at the hotel, Huzoor and the Qafila departed for the National Parliament which was located just a couple of minutes away. The Parliament was quite distinctive in its shape and in fact it is known as the 'beehive' because of its unique shape.



Huzoor was immediately escorted to the main hall where the reception was taking place. It was extremely beautiful. Huzoor was received by Mr Kanwaljeet Singh, a Sikh MP and it was clear that he had a great, heartfelt respect for Huzoor.

Our Sadr Jamaat, Iqbal Sahib, gave a short introduction to our Jamaat. Initially he spoke in Maori and I had come to notice throughout the week that the Maori language was very smooth and soft to listen to. It seemed as though every word rolled off the tongue.



It was quite interesting that the Maori language was so soft, given that their traditional welcomes were so loud and aggressive as we had witnessed a few days earlier!

### **Huzoor's Address in Parliament**

After a few minutes, Huzoor was invited to deliver his address. Huzoor spoke for about 25 minutes and he began by thanking the Parliamentarians for inviting him. Huzoor noted that rarely, if ever, will the Parliament have been addressed by a Muslim leader.

Whenever, Huzoor addresses non-Ahmadis, he always begins by thanking them and Huzoor always links his gratitude to the true teachings of Islam and

so from the very outset, the guests begin to see that Islam's teachings are actually friendly and welcoming.



Huzoor went on to speak to the audience, who apart from Parliamentarians, also included Ambassadors-of-State, representatives of think-tanks, representatives of the media, religious figures and academics, about his fears that the world was moving towards a nuclear war.

Huzoor spoke very movingly about the annihilation caused by the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War. Huzoor described the experiences of the Second World War as "*heart-wrenching*" and so called on all political figures to learn from the mistakes of the past and to avoid wars and unnecessary conflicts.

In very bold language, Huzoor deemed it “*pathetic*” that in today’s world many people claimed to pursue peace, yet in truth were more motivated by selfish goals than for the common good of mankind.

Huzoor called on world leaders to pursue diplomacy to resolve their issues. Huzoor said:

***“If a conflict can be resolved in a cordial or peaceful way through negotiations and diplomacy then one should not needlessly invite death and killings... the Quran teaches that as far as possible, any enmities or grudges should be reconciled and solved by opening the channels of communication and through dialogue.”***



Huzoor concluded by urging all parties to play their roles towards peace and as he concluded all members of the audience heartily applauded his message.

It was clear that they had all been impressed by his message and the truth is that it was impossible not to be impressed as all of Huzoor's points were based on common sense, logic and a love for mankind.

Following Huzoor's address, a couple of the MPs took to the stage to thank Huzoor for his words.

Kanwaljit Singh Bakshi, MP, said:

***"It is our privilege to have His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad here in New Zealand's Parliament and to listen to have his words of wisdom."***

Dr Rajen Prasad, MP, said:

***"It is a pleasure to welcome His Holiness to the New Zealand Parliament. I have always been very impressed at how Ahmadis live their lives as citizens of the nation and practice their message of peace."***

### **Huzoor Meeting Guests and an Informal Lunch**

The formal event was followed by a buffet lunch. It was thought that Huzoor would remain seated at his table and he would be served food whilst the rest of us would stand and take our food from the buffet.

However, Huzoor immediately said that there was no need for such formality and he would stand and meet the guests whilst eating.

Thus, Huzoor spent the next 20minutes meeting with various guests and answering their questions in a very dignified and friendly manner.



During this period many of the guests thanked Huzoor for his speech and said that his words had been extremely wise and beneficial.

### **Serving Huzoor Lunch**

Whilst, Huzoor was meeting the guests, I suddenly saw Huzoor point towards me and he gestured for me to come forward. Huzoor pointed to the buffet area and asked me to make a plate for him. I was very nervous but also deeply honoured to have this opportunity to serve Huzoor.

Immediately, I began to think what I should put in the plate but as I was doing so Huzoor himself said that I should put two pieces of fish and one brown-bread sandwich in his plate and that was all.

We were stood at distance from the buffet and so I was not even sure if there was fish and as far as I could tell the sandwiches were made of white bread. But as I walked to the buffet I was relieved as there was one dish filled with small fish pieces and amongst the white-bread sandwiches there were some brown-bread ones as well.

I made the plate up as Huzoor had instructed and as I was about to return to Huzoor one of the Qafila members suggested I put some pieces of battered chicken in Huzoor's plate also. I responded by saying that Huzoor had been very specific and so I should take only what Huzoor asked for.

I presented the plate to Huzoor and thankfully I think it was ok as Huzoor ate both pieces of fish and also the sandwich.

Whilst Huzoor was eating, he continued to meet with the guests. Huzoor did not require any formal pretence or formality, rather he was more than happy to stand there casually with the guests.

### **An example of rare unity**

One particularly interesting thing about the event was that both the Israeli Ambassador and the Iranian Ambassador attended the event and were seated very close to one another. Both of them met with Huzoor after the event and in particular the Iranian ambassador spent quite a few minutes in Huzoor's company.

I could not help note the fact that on this day the Israeli and Iranian ambassadors had come together to listen to the words of the Khalifa-Waqt.

Certainly, their coming together for the event symbolised how Khilafat truly is a source of peace for all people and all nations and is a means of bringing together even those amongst who exists extreme and entrenched hatred.

### **Tour of Parliament**

Huzoor was given a tour of Parliament by the host MP after lunch. There were a lot of very historic rooms within the Parliament, including the main House of Commons.

At one point during the tour, Huzoor went into a very small lift along with the MP. As Huzoor's security, Ahmad bhai also got in the lift and there was room for one more person and I was ushered in.

I have only been in a lift with Huzoor on a few occasions but each time I have found it to be a very nerve-wracking experience. I never know in which direction to look but generally I look either downwards or towards the exit!

### **Namaz in New Zealand's Parliament**

One of the most historic rooms was a grand hall which was formerly used as the Second Chamber of Parliament. It was this room that had been given to us for Huzoor to lead the Zuhr and Asr prayers and as Huzoor led the Salat in that room it did feel like something quite historic and certainly something very memorable.



Huzoor had led the prayers at the European Parliament last year however they were offered in a normal side room, but the room allocated here was one that was steeped in New Zealand's history.

I remember speaking to other Ahmadis afterwards and we all expressed our belief that because the Khalifatul Masih had led the prayers in the centre of New Zealand's Parliament it would, Insha'Allah, prove to be a very blessed day for all of New Zealand.



Indeed, the entire event, from start to finish, was very blessed and memorable. As we left the Parliament, the Sadr Jamaat requested Huzoor for a group photo outside of Parliament which Huzoor kindly agreed to.



### **Souvenir shopping**

Thereafter, we went back to the hotel for just under two hours. Huzoor and Khala Saboohi went up to their room, whilst the rest of us took the opportunity to visit some souvenir shops across the road from the hotel.

A number of our Qafila members decided it would be a good time to purchase something for their wives or daughters and for some reason they requested my advice and counsel. I am not sure why my opinion was sought but I tried my best to help them purchase appropriate gifts!

### **Briefing Huzoor at the airport**

Just before 4pm, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi came down to the lobby and from there we drove immediately to the airport and straight to our gate for the flight back to Auckland.

Huzoor was sat on some chairs with Khala Saboohi at the gate and he called me over. Huzoor always takes a keen interest in hearing the comments of guests and seeing how they found the event and so Huzoor asked me my own thoughts about the Parliament event and the remarks of any of the guests who I had spoken to.

### **An example of Huzoor's simplicity**

After giving my briefing, Huzoor affectionately asked what I had had for breakfast on that day. I said that I had kept my normal routine of toast with butter and jam and a coffee. Huzoor smiled and said that it was not much. I responded by saying that my lunch of fish and chips had more than made up for it as they had been very heavy.

Huzoor said that all he had ate for lunch were the two small pieces of fish and the sandwich I had put in a plate for him at the Parliament. I said to Huzoor that I could not believe the Jamaat did not send him some fish and chips. Huzoor smiled and gestured as though it did not matter at all. Although, this was an example of Huzoor's simplicity and humility, I myself felt very sad that I and others had had such a lovely lunch and yet Huzoor and Khala Saboohi had not been offered any.

## **Return to Auckland**

We returned to Auckland in the late afternoon. In the evening we went to the Mosque for the Maghreb and Isha prayers.

I could sense the sadness in the faces of the local Ahmadis as they knew Huzoor's tour of New Zealand was now in its final few hours.

### **Reflections on Huzoor's trip from the Local Jamaat**

I asked some of the Ahmadis about their reflections on Huzoor's tour. One Ahmadi, Mahmood Ahmed Sahib (41) from Auckland spoke of how he felt Huzoor's tour would lead to spiritual improvements in him and that he now felt closer to the Jamaat. He said the Jamaat now felt more like '*family*' than ever before and that this was a direct result of the unity instilled by Huzoor's visit.

Imran Malik Sahib, (29) from Auckland said that after Huzoor's tour he felt as though there was much more enjoyment in his *Salat*. He said his passion to serve the Jamaat had increased due to Huzoor's presence.

One boy, with whom I became friends, was a Waqf-e-Nau, Mohsin Iqbal, aged 16 and regularly throughout the tour I would ask him how he was feeling and each time he would say that he felt so happy and emotional that Huzoor was there. Each time I saw him, he was doing a different duty and once I asked him why this was and he said that he just wanted to serve the Jamaat and he did

not care where he was asked to help. Thus, wherever he was asked to help out, even if it was not his official duty, he used to happily assist.

About Huzoor he said:

***“I am very grateful to Allah and to Huzoor for deciding to come to New Zealand. I am also very thankful to Allah for the opportunity to serve Huzoor. Huzoor’s visit has given me the motivation to be the best Ahmadi I can be and to do Tabligh to my friends. I want to dedicate my life to Ahmadiyyat. I want to do whatever I can to serve Ahmadiyyat.”***

Another young Ahmadi, Anas Sirajur Raheem (23) said he was ‘heart-broken’ that Huzoor was leaving. He said he hoped Huzoor would return ‘tomorrow’ to New Zealand. He added that Huzoor’s tour had made him self-reflect and now he had a desire to serve the Jamaat and be the best Ahmadi he could be.

Another Ahmadi said that previously he had been weak in offering prayers but now because of Huzoor’s visit he was now regular. He said he understood his responsibilities as an Ahmadi much better now.

I also took the opportunity to speak to Mohammed Iqbal Sahib, our National Sadr Jamaat in New Zealand. He said that having the opportunity to serve Huzoor during the week and to spend time with him was a “once in a lifetime opportunity”.

Sadr Sahib added:

***“Seeing Huzoor has made me feel how weak a person I am. All goodness comes from Allah and His Khalifa... Huzoor’s departure leaves me speechless and sad. When I say very little, it is because my heart is heavy and weeping as I struggle to utter the words. I want to ask Huzoor for forgiveness and prayers for all my shortfalls and inconveniences he may have experienced due to my oversights.”***

### **Reflections from Lajna & Nasirat**

Through email, I was also able to collect some of the feelings of Lajna and Nasirat members about Huzoor’s tour to New Zealand. Just like the men, their comments were filled with love for Huzoor and for Khilafat.

Mehpara Malik Sahiba, (Waqfat-e-Nau) wrote:

***“We were really excited and filled with anticipation when we heard Huzoor was coming to New Zealand. And when Huzoor arrived it felt like my soul, body and mind were electrified. The entire atmosphere was electric, like anything could happen at any moment. For the duration of Huzoor’s arrival, and the week before, I was functioning on very little sleep, but the amazing thing was, I didn’t feel tired. It was a very unique and invigorating experience...”***

*Huzoor's visit really changed my life. It filled me with a passion for everything. I very much felt changed after Huzoor's visit with a new perspective on life and my responsibilities. If it was in my control Huzoor and Appa Jaan would never have left New Zealand. I wish they could be here now. When they are here, I feel like I have a true purpose."*

Dania Shafiq, aged 13, wrote:

*"Huzoor's visit made me so excited like it was a dream come true. Huzoor's visit is a cause of blessings to our Jamaat, it helped us in a lot of ways and personally I feel better than I did before. I have stopped watching cartoons and I have more knowledge from watching MTA, as I now watch Huzoor's Friday Sermons. Everything that happened during Huzoor's tour will stay in my memory."*

Lajna member, Humda Mubarak, wrote:

*"I had not met Huzoor before so was very excited as in Pakistan we did not have the opportunity to meet him. I thought Allah's angels were with him. To have Huzoor in our country brought tears to all of our eyes, we just couldn't believe Huzoor was here – it was very emotional..."*

*The entire tour was a highlight, but the best thing was when we used to run to catch a glimpse of Huzoor and wait for Huzoor to pass by where we were standing... Huzoor's visit has improved me personally because now whenever I do something I always think will Huzoor like this? I also give closer attention to the taleem and tarbiyyat of my children and I feel more responsible."*

### **Farewell at the Mosque**

Huzoor departed from New Zealand on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2013. The final farewell took place at Fajr time when Ahmadis had gathered at the Mosque to see Huzoor off. I remember it being a very emotional atmosphere and all four *sajday* (prostrations) that were offered in Fajr prayer were much longer than usual.

After, completing Fajr, Huzoor led the Jamaat members in a silent prayer before heading back to his residence as the Ahmadis waved goodbye to Huzoor for the last time on the tour.

### **Departure for Japan**

After a couple of hours, Huzoor left his residence and drove to the airport. The Sadr Jamaat, Iqbal Sahib, came to fulfil his final duty dressed from head to toe in his official naval uniform and as he offered Huzoor a final salute at the airport I saw tears streaming down his eyes. He and the other Ahmadis who had come to the airport waved goodbye to Huzoor with great emotion. Very lovingly, Huzoor waved back at them one last time. Finally, Huzoor and his Qafila set off for the final leg of Huzoor's tour which was to be a week in Japan.

Huzoor was travelling on an Air New Zealand flight direct from Auckland to Tokyo's Narita International Airport. I was sad to leave New Zealand, which I had grown very, very fond of but also extremely excited and happy at the prospect of being able to travel with Huzoor to Japan.

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