

HUZOOR'S TOUR OF THE UNITED STATES AND GUATEMALA

OCTOBER – NOVEMBER 2018

Part 2

A Personal Account

By Abid Khan

Introduction to Part 2

In part 1, I wrote about the first few days of the blessed visit of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) to the United States in late 2018, including his stay in Philadelphia, where Huzoor inaugurated the Baitul Aafiyyat Mosque. This second part will mention Huzoor's visits to Baltimore and Guatemala.

Arrival in Baltimore

On 20 October 2018, Huzoor and the members of his Qafila travelled from Philadelphia to Baltimore for the inauguration of the Baitus Samad Mosque.

As we approached the Mosque, I noticed a helicopter hovering above and learned afterwards that it was a police helicopter designated by the local authorities to help ensure security during Huzoor's visit.

In Canada in 2016, we had seen media helicopters circling above upon Huzoor's arrival in Peace Village but this was the first time I had seen a police helicopter patrolling the skies during Huzoor's travels.

The Qafila arrived at the new Mosque at 1.55pm, where Huzoor was greeted by hundreds of Ahmadi Muslims.

The weather was fair and pleasant upon arrival and had defied a much gloomier forecast that had predicted thunderstorms.

Shortly after arriving, Huzoor formally inaugurated the Mosque with a silent prayer and he also unveiled a plaque to mark the occasion.

Thereafter, Huzoor was escorted around the Mosque complex by Faheem Younus sahib.

As he showed Huzoor a pictorial exhibition at the Mosque, Faheem sahib said:

“Huzoor, we have made a presentation that shows the Khulafa and the Promised Messiah (as).”



Ever protective of the respect of the Promised Messiah (as), Huzoor said:

“It is an exhibition of the Promised Messiah (as) and the Khulafa. The name of the Promised Messiah (as) should always come before the Khulafa.”



As Huzoor continued to inspect the complex, a young Missionary stood outside and raised *naaray* (slogans), as Huzoor walked past.

Upon seeing him, Huzoor said:

“You should go to the Mosque and get ready for Namaz. At this time, Namaz is the priority not Naaray.”

Following Namaz, Huzoor walked past the two overflow marquees used for Salat. One was filled with men and the other with ladies.

As Huzoor walked past, Ahmadis from both sides raised *naaray* (slogans) and expressed their desire for Huzoor to grace them with his presence.

Hearing their requests, Huzoor said:

“Men get a lot of opportunities to see me.”

With that, Huzoor turned towards the ladies marquee and went inside to meet the Lajna members.

As Huzoor waved in their direction, many of the Lajna members, including many African-Americans, were moved to tears.

All were united in their intense joy that their beloved Khalifa had travelled across the world to be with them and to open their Mosque.

‘Our shepherd, our guide’

During a break for lunch, I met with a Ghanaian Ahmadi Muslim, *Abu Bakr bin Saeed (48)* who lived in Milwaukee and who was a member of the USA National Majlis-e-Amila.

As others continued to eat their lunch in the dining area, we sat together for a few minutes in an adjacent room.

Abu Bakr bin Saeed sahib had been a young boy when Huzoor lived in Ghana and had many memories of Huzoor which he shared with me.

Narrating his childhood memories of Huzoor from Ghana, Abu Bakr bin Saeed sahib said:

“Huzoor’s humility was incredible. He was a member of the family of the Promised Messiah (as) but he never acted superior. Instead, he always showed humility and treated the African people with great respect. Whenever the late Abdul Wahab Adam sahib (former Ameer Jamaat Ghana) would visit, Huzoor would give him his room to stay in and before Wahab sahib’s arrival, Huzoor would personally clean it and get the room ready himself.”

Abu Bakr bin Saeed sahib told me of how, as a child, he had personally experienced Huzoor’s care and consideration. He said:

“Once, as a child, I was coming home from school in Ghana when Huzoor saw me and noticed that I was not travelling in the direction of my home. He asked where I was going and so I told Huzoor I was going to see if my friend was ok as he had not been at school that day. Huzoor was very happy that I was making this effort and so he gave me a lift in his car and waited patiently outside for me and then took me to his home and fed me lunch. Then Huzoor took me for the Asr prayer at the Mosque. This is the way Huzoor cared for the African people and how he brought us close to the Jamaat.”

Abu Bakr bin Saeed sahib told me that when Huzoor was elected as Khalifatul Masih he went to tell his mother, who also remembered Huzoor from his time in Ghana.

Describing his mother's response, Abu Bakr bin Saeed sahib said:

“When Huzoor was in Ghana he was quite shy and quiet and so when he was elected as Khalifatul Masih my mother was surprised. She knew Huzoor from his days in Africa as ‘Masroor’ and so she said to me ‘Masroor is so quiet and not someone who speaks’. Yet now, years later, after seeing Huzoor deliver speeches across the world, she says with a sense of wonder that ‘Is he the same man?’ and considers it a sign of the truth of Khilafat.”

Abu Bakr bin Saeed sahib told me that, even after being elected Khalifatul Masih, Huzoor had not forgotten their old ties from Ghana.

Abu Bakr bin Saeed sahib said:

“Despite his schedule and his great responsibilities, Huzoor has never once forgotten us. For instance, in 2008, Huzoor came to the United States and I did not apply for Mulaqat as I wanted to give others a chance. After some days, Huzoor called me himself for Mulaqat and asked why I had not come to see him. Then, last year I met Huzoor in London and he asked me if I was well, as he noticed I had lost some weight. How special and how beautiful our Khalifa is.”

As he continued to recall the love of Khilafat he had himself witnessed and felt, Abu Bakr bin Saeed sahib became emotional. He said:

“In every sermon, Huzoor tells us the importance of Salat and how this is our most fundamental duty. Yet, when I go to Fajr at my local Mosque

there are just two or three people present on most days. We Ahmadis should realise that Allah has chosen us and he has chosen Khalifa-Waqt as our shepherd and guide. Huzoor is a Lion of Allah the Almighty. He is our captain and if we don't fall in line, we will suffer and others will come forward in our place. Thus, whenever I have the chance to pray behind Huzoor, I cry before Allah that may He enable me to stay on the right path."

By now Abu Bakr bin Saeed sahib could not hold back his tears any longer. It had been an emotional and captivating few minutes.

Press Conference in Baltimore

In early evening, the Qafila travelled to Baltimore's Hilton Hotel for an official reception to mark the opening of the *Baitus Samad Mosque*.

Shortly after arriving, Huzoor held a press conference with media outlets followed by meetings with dignitaries and guests.

During the Press Conference, Huzoor was asked by a journalist from the *Religion News Service* what his message for the United States was given that the US *mid-term elections* were fast approaching and whether he would instruct the members of the Jamaat to vote for a particular party or candidate.

In response, Huzoor said:

“I have never been overly curious about politics. Though, as a citizen, I do partake in the democratic process in the UK and vote. Anyway, my message is always that it is better to vote for the candidate who seems to be the most humble and is sincere in his or her desire to serve all the people in their constituencies.”



Huzoor continued:

“Indeed, this is not my message, rather this is the message of the Holy Quran that you should elect those people who can serve their people in the best way. The Holy Prophet of Islam (sa) said that a leader of a nation is actually the servant of the nation and so this is the guiding principle that we should follow.”

It was a beautiful answer. Sadly, in many nations, including the United States, the political leaders are often those who appear arrogant and who crave power.

Yet, without naming any individual or leader, Huzoor made it crystal clear that self-serving politicians harmed society and that Islam taught that the best of leaders were those who were humble, knew their limitations and sought to serve their communities without personal interest.

Another journalist asked Huzoor about the ‘*difference*’ between Ahmadi Muslims in the United States and those living in other countries.

In reply, Huzoor said:

“We, Ahmadi Muslims, are the same wherever we are – because we follow the true teachings of Islam. We believe it is our duty to worship God Almighty, to serve His Creation and be faithful and loyal citizens of our nations. We believe that Allah the Almighty is constantly watching over us and He knows what we are doing. This is who we are, whether here in the United States or anywhere else.”

Meeting with Senator Ben Cardin

Following the press conference, Huzoor held a meeting with US National Senator Ben Cardin from Maryland.

During the meeting, Senator Ben Cardin said:

“Your Holiness, we very much appreciate and respect your leadership in promoting international religious freedom in the world and building bridges between the people of different communities. The world stands in need of hearing your message.”

In response, Huzoor said:

“This is the major issue of our time. The world is fast approaching a horrific catastrophe and so instead of fostering peace, love and harmony in society we are heading in the opposite direction.”

Senator Cardin mentioned that conflicts were raging in countries such as Yemen, Venezuela and others.

In response, Huzoor said:

“Yes, conflicts continue in Iraq and Afghanistan and the situation in Yemen continues to be dire. Muslims are killing Muslims. Innocent children are suffering. To observe all of this is extremely painful. It is a great tragedy of our time.”

Huzoor continued:

“As one of the major powers of the world, the United States should strive to play its role in bringing peace and seeking to help those who are suffering. Serving humanity is the need of the time.”

After hearing Huzoor's words, Senator Cardin said:

"You Holiness, I agree with you one-thousand percent."



Senator Cardin further said:

"Your Holiness, we have not had a person of your stature visit Baltimore before and so we are extremely proud and grateful that you have come here. And I wish to say that we are proud of the new Ahmadiyya Mosque in this city."

The Senator then brought up the mid-term elections in the United States that were set to take place in early November.

Senator Cardin said:

“In the United States our politics has become extremely divisive. However, I hope that your presence can solve that and bridge the division amongst Democrats and Republicans.”

Responding very beautifully, Huzoor said:

“The way I can help is through prayer and so I pray that Allah the Almighty enables the people of this nation to unite and for all conflicts and rivalries to come to an end and for true peace to prevail.”

Meeting with dignitaries

Following the meeting with Senator Cardin, Huzoor was escorted to another room in the hotel where over a dozen dignitaries and guests were waiting to meet him, including the *Mayor of Baltimore*, Catherine Pugh.

Also, in attendance were State politicians, diplomats and members of the United States military.

Taking the opportunity to welcome Huzoor, the Mayor of Baltimore, Catherine Pugh said:

“Your Holiness, your presence in Baltimore is extremely important for us and we are deeply honoured by your presence. Our city is suffering from a lot of violence and so I consider your visit to be extremely important for our city, as we desperately need your message of peace.”

In reply, Huzoor said:

“The need of the day and of our time is to strive for peace in society and to live together in harmony. If this proves possible, what a wonderful world it will be. My message is that we need to recognise our Creator and understand that we are all part of His Creation and He desires for us to live together amicably.”



Also present in the meeting was *Baltimore's State Attorney (Chief Prosecutor)*, Marilyn Mosby.

She informed Huzoor about her role as State Attorney and that during the past year the number of youths charged with *murder* and *attempted murder* in Baltimore had more than doubled.

Upon hearing the grave statistic, Huzoor said that there must be '*underlying frustrations*' leading the city's youths towards violent crime.

In reply, Marilyn Mosby said:

“Yes, you are right. The frustration is economic, as there is rampant poverty and amongst African-Americans the rate of unemployment is very high.”

Mayor Catherine Pugh added:

“There has been a great deal of neglect in certain areas and it has caused a sense of hopelessness. Drugs are also a big issue. As a result, we have made community colleges free so all people have access to education.”

Expressing his views on the matter, Huzoor said:

“Apart from the issues you have raised, the issue of social media cannot be underestimated. It is also increasing frustrations and jealousies. Social media is also contributing to the breakdown of family life, as family members are no longer communicating with one another and instead spend all their time on their electronic devices.”

As the conversation progressed, a representative of the African-American Muslim community said:

“On behalf of the Islamic community, I welcome you as a fellow Muslim leader. Your motto of Love for All, Hatred for None is extremely important at this time. We need unity not division here in America.”

In response, Huzoor said:

“Not just here in America but across the world we need unity. Amongst Muslims, irrespective of which sect a person belongs to, the Muslim community should be united as we believe in Allah the Almighty, the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet (sa). Furthermore, the people of all religions and communities should respect one another and live amicably. We should want our future generations to remember us fondly, instead of saying, God forbid, that we destroyed their futures. To achieve this, we must strive and work together.”

Baitus Samad Mosque Reception

As the meeting drew to a close, Huzoor proceeded to a large hall at the Hotel, for the formal function. The event was attended by over 500 people, including 320 guests.

After Tilawat and a welcome address by the *National Umoor-e-Kharija Secretary USA*, Senator Ben Cardin, who had met Huzoor earlier, made a short speech, in which he again welcomed Huzoor to Baltimore.

Senator Ben Cardin said:

“Your Holiness we welcome you to Baltimore. You honour us with your presence and you inspire us by your leadership... Your message of peace and love are just what we need now more than ever before and you inspire us by your presence and your words here in Baltimore that we all can do better.”

Huzoor's address

After the brief remarks of another dignitary, Huzoor took to the podium and delivered the keynote address entitled '*Mosques – Centres of Love and Peace*'.

During his address, Huzoor addressed common fears and misconceptions about Islam prevalent in society and expounded upon the true purposes of Mosques. Huzoor also spoke about the lack of peace in the world at large.



Outlining the fears many people hold about Islam, Huzoor said:

“Undoubtedly, in much of the world, there is now an increasingly prevalent view that Muslims are to be feared. As a collective, Muslims have been branded as troublemakers who seek to divide society and desire to shatter the fabric of social cohesion and peace.”

Contrasting the widespread perception of Islam with the reality, Huzoor said:

“Nevertheless, the truth is, and will always remain, that Islam is completely opposed to all forms of extremism, terrorism or violence. It condemns in the strongest possible terms any attempts to violate freedom of belief and freedom of conscience... Thus, I firmly believe that the widespread and common perceptions of Islam amongst non-Muslims are actually misconceptions.”

Speaking about the commitment of Ahmadi Muslims to serve their communities, Huzoor said:

“We seek to build ties of friendship with non-Ahmadis and non-Muslims. We strive for inter-faith dialogue. We value and cherish our neighbours. We are ever ready to help those who are in need. We champion the rights of the weak and deprived. We are there to serve the community and to be loyal and faithful citizens. This is our faith and this is our teaching. This is why we build mosques.”

Regarding the new Mosque, Huzoor said:

“I am entirely confident that, God Willing, this mosque will prove to be a symbol of peace, radiating nothing but love, compassion and brotherhood throughout the city and far beyond. It will serve as a beacon illuminating its surroundings and spreading light in every direction.”

Huzoor continued:

“It will be a House of Peace in which the worshippers join together to serve their neighbours and to fulfil their rights. It will represent the enlightened teachings of Islam and dispel all fears and myths that exist about our religion. God Willing, any lingering fears that may remain in the hearts and minds of the local community will vanish altogether.”

Concluding his address with a warning to the world, Huzoor said:

“I truly believe that we are passing through a critical juncture in the history of the world where, both at a national and international level, the world is becoming increasingly polarised and divided. We stand upon the brink of disaster and so now is the time to take a step back and focus all of our energies on protecting the future of mankind. Now is the time to show our humanity and to spare no efforts in developing peace in our communities, in our nations and indeed throughout the world.”

Impact of Huzoor’s address

The event concluded with a silent prayer and shortly after I introduced myself to two Christian guests seated beside me, *Mr and Mrs Diamond*.

They were deeply moved by the fact Huzoor had travelled from London to present Islam’s true teachings to them.

Mrs Diamond said:

“Today’s event and the speech by His Holiness is a very big step towards changing the world for the better - I honestly believe this. There is so much bitterness, hatred and conflict in the world and division seems to be ever increasing. Yet, the unifying way His Holiness spoke starkly contrasted with the speeches of any other leaders I have heard before. His words were a means of healing for a broken world.”

Her husband, Mr Diamond told me that fear of Islam was rampant in the United States. He said:

“No doubt people here are scared of Muslims. I do not wish to be impolite but the fear is that there are Muslims who are ‘nut-jobs’ who will bomb us and do more 9/11 style attacks. To be honest, our nation has never recovered from the trauma of 9/11 but I think today’s speech has made a significant difference for the better for those people who are in attendance. So, I hope others will get to hear the serene, calm and wise message of the Caliph. Please thank him on our behalf for travelling across the world to put our minds at ease. We are indebted to him for this.”

I also met an African-American guest, who said:

“The speech of the Caliph was a reminder that people are all the same, we are all humans. We might be of different colours or speak different languages but ultimately we are part of one single human race. In a very

soft-spoken, non-confrontational way, the Caliph was able to break down barriers and eliminate long-existing fears.”

Another guest, a local Christian Priest, said:

“The most touching part of the speech was the end when the Caliph made a personal plea for peace in the world. It was emotional to hear him speak about the legacy we wish to leave for our children. His Holiness is completely right to be worried for the sake of mankind. I liked how he did not restrict his call to peace only to Muslims but it was an appeal to all of mankind to set aside our differences and to work together and to leave a better world for our children.”

Alhamdolillah, just a day after Huzoor had inaugurated the Baitul Aafiyat Mosque in Philadelphia, another blessed Mosque event had reached its conclusion in Baltimore.

Immediately after the conclusion of the reception, at 8.45pm, Huzoor and the Qafila members departed from the hotel and returned to the Baitur Rahman Mosque in Maryland.

A stormy night

After leading *Maghreb* and *Isha*, Huzoor returned to his residence and as he entered through the door the weather was calm and pleasant. Yet literally seconds later, the weather suddenly changed and winds started blowing extremely violently and heavy rained gushed down from the skies above. The marquees at the site shook, whilst some of the smaller canopies fell to

the ground. Rarely, if ever, have I seen weather change so drastically, so quickly.

I have heard people say on many occasions, how Allah the Almighty turns the weather in the favour of Khilafat and the Jamaat and I have personally seen several occasions where the weather has defied the forecast when Huzoor is present.

That evening in Maryland, I felt we experienced a similar manifestation of Allah's Protection, where the weather remained entirely calm until the moment Huzoor's activities for the day were complete and he was safely in his residence.

Subsequently the question arose how the rest of us should return to our own respective accommodations. Hundreds of people took shelter in the Mosque complex waiting for some respite in the weather. I also joined them and waited but after a few minutes it became apparent that the storm was unlikely to pass soon. So, armed with an umbrella that a kind Khadim handed me I decided to run as fast as I could to the building where I was staying.

It was a very brief journey but one that remains firmly imprinted in my mind. As I ran towards the house I felt myself swaying from side to side unable to control myself! I fought as best I could against the elements and whilst the umbrella helped to a small degree, by the time I reached the house I was completely soaked. Still, the feeling of relief upon entering the warm and dry building was a joy! I had made it in one piece!

The other members of the Qafila came later and more sensibly they waited until they were able to get a lift in a car. Nonetheless, I felt a hint of inner pride at having walked through the storm and prayed I did not suffer with a cold or fever the next day as a result. Thankfully, and with the Grace of Allah, I remained fine.

The mobile lounge

Our stay in Baitur Rahman was brief - just one night - as early the next morning, Huzoor was due to fly to Houston for his first ever visit to Texas.

Thus, on the morning of 21 October 2018, the Qafila left Baitur Rahman at 11.30am and travelled to Dulles airport.

The flight had been delayed a couple of hours due to the thunderstorms the night before.

Upon arriving at the airport at 12.30pm, Huzoor was taken to a private 'mobile lounge', which was essentially a small bus that took Huzoor and Khala Saboohi (*Huzoor's respected wife*) from the main airport terminal to a *United Airlines* lounge near the boarding gate.

During this period, Huzoor called me towards him and so I crouched down near where he was seated. Huzoor enquired about the Baltimore reception and asked if I had met any guests.

After hearing about some of the conversations I had with guests, Huzoor said:

“My speech in Baltimore included some general points about Islam’s peaceful teachings and the objectives of Mosques because amongst the local people there were a lot of reservations and misunderstandings about Islam. Hence, my primary objective was to alleviate the fears of the people and show them that Islam is a religion of peace.”

After arriving at the United Airlines lounge, I was able to spend a few more moments with Huzoor.

Whilst I was sitting near him, I observed something fall from his pocket. I immediately went to retrieve it for Huzoor and saw that it was a small wet tissue made by the German cologne company 4771.

As I returned the unopened tissue to Huzoor, he said:

“You keep it, you might need it later but be careful because sometimes airport scanners start beeping due to its packaging!”

An unnecessary welcome

Huzoor boarded the plane at 2pm local time and I soon realised I was seated, alongside Ahmad bhai, just behind Huzoor and Khala Saboohi (*Huzoor’s respected wife*). It was an incredible honour to be so close to Huzoor during the journey.

People often wonder what it is like to travel with Khalifa-Waqt and especially those journeys where Huzoor is not in his car but on a train or an aeroplane. Undoubtedly, the experience of travelling in such close proximity with Huzoor evokes feelings of awe and emotion.

Moments before take-off, the *Captain* of the plane made a special announcement to welcome Huzoor on board in which the Captain described Huzoor as a '*world ambassador for peace*'.

A similar welcome was made on Huzoor's next flight to Guatemala a day later. However, on both occasions, the reality was that the USA Jamaat had suggested to the *Captain* that he welcome Huzoor on board.

When Huzoor learned of this, he made it clear that he did not like the artificial nature of the Jamaat requesting the flight crew and captain to welcome him.

If the Captain or the crew had themselves decided to welcome Huzoor, I am sure he would have appreciated the gesture, even though Huzoor's personal humility is such that he did not desire or need any such welcome. Yet, the idea that the welcome was arranged on request was something Huzoor did not approve of at all.

In fact, later, Huzoor told me:

"I have told the US Jamaat that contriving to arrange a 'welcome on board' is completely wrong and should not be done in future."

I was happy when I heard Huzoor had stopped this practice. Huzoor's status is such that there is never any need for the Jamaat to try to garner praise or honour for Khilafat, as Allah the Almighty has Himself bestowed great honour on Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya of which we see examples on a daily basis.

During the flight, we were served a beef salad which was very good and much better than most other experiences of plane-food I have had. Huzoor did not take a meal but he did take a slice of strawberry cheesecake.

At one point Huzoor stood up for a few seconds, perhaps just to stretch his legs, and he looked directly towards me. As Huzoor looked my way, I smiled nervously before looking down. A few seconds later, I looked up again and saw that Huzoor had returned to his seat.

Arrival in Houston

As we descended I looked out of the window and saw a host of oil rigs adorn the nearby coastal areas. It felt like we had arrived in Texas! And *Alhamdulillah*, a few minutes later, after just over 3 hours of flight time, the plane landed safely at Houston International Airport.

Given the one-hour time difference from Washington, the local time upon landing was 4.50pm.

As Huzoor disembarked from the aircraft and entered the main terminal he was welcomed by several members of the local Jamaat who were overjoyed to welcome Huzoor to their city and state for the very first time.

It was one of many moments during the tour, where it felt as though the history of our Jamaat was being written.

Thereafter, the Qafila proceeded immediately to the Baitus Samee Mosque in Houston.

As we drove towards the Mosque, one of Huzoor's security guards, Mahmood Khan, seemed happy. He said:

“My first impression of Houston is that it is clean, well maintained and has a good climate. This is a good place!”

Those who know Mahmood Khan sahib well know that he is not easily impressed and so it was a big compliment for Houston to get his early seal of approval!

Arrival at Baitus Samee Mosque, Houston

The Qafila reached the Mosque at 5.45pm and more than a thousand Ahmadis were present to welcome Huzoor. The distance from the gate to Huzoor's residence was a few hundred metres and Ahmadis had gathered along the route in anticipation that Huzoor would step out of his car and walk to his residence. However, Huzoor instructed that his car should go straight to the residence and that everyone should proceed to the Mosque.

The reason was that the time for the Zuhr and Asr prayers was almost ending. Normally, Huzoor does step out of his car when arriving in a new Jamaat and wave and walk amongst the local Ahmadis but here Huzoor made

it clear that such celebrations were to be placed on hold and remained secondary to the importance of fulfilling the rights of Allah the Almighty.

As Huzoor entered his residence, I noticed a journalist looking confused. I could tell she had expected Huzoor to walk amongst the crowd and was left wondering why he did not stop. Hence, I told the Jamaat representative hosting her to explain that Huzoor did not stop because it was time for prayer.

This was something the journalist, *Jenny Deam*, referred to in her article published by the famous *Houston Chronicle*.

The article, published online the same evening, stated:

“Twilight was starting to fall Sunday when Mirza Masroor Ahmad, a worldwide spiritual leader of Islam, at last stepped from his car at a Houston mosque and into the Texas history books... Instead of walking the red carpet to greet the crowd, Ahmad's car drove straight to a guest house where he prepared for the service.”

The article continued:

“Just before 6 p.m., he emerged again but headed briskly to the mosque, giving only a few quick waves to the crowd and accepting a bouquet of flowers from two children who had won the honor in a raffle. Once inside the mosque, he led the prayers in Arabic before scores of men and boys. The women worship separately. Then it was over. In the end, though, the

excitement was still high. No one seemed disappointed by the abbreviated welcoming ceremony.”

In Houston, Huzoor and his security team stayed at the Mosque complex, whilst Munir Javed sahib (Private Secretary), Abdul Majid Tahir sahib (Additional Wakil-ul-Tabshir) and I stayed at the nearby home of the local Jamaat Sadr.

We arrived at his house late in the evening and I went to bed eagerly anticipating the next part of Huzoor’s tour.

Hiding in a suitcase!

The next morning, after Fajr, I video-called home and spoke to my wife and two children Mahid and Moshahid. I mentioned to Mahid that we were about to leave for Guatemala. He was very excited, as he had heard a lot about Guatemala because his grandfather - my father-in-law - Majid Khan was closely involved in the project on behalf of Humanity First USA.

Mahid was also enamoured by Guatemala because its final four letters ‘*mala*’ matched his mother’s name!

Given the familiarity, Mahid asked if he could come to Guatemala and suggested that he hide in my suitcase! He said that upon arriving he would jump out and shout out ‘*Surprise!*’

When I broke the news that it was not possible, his next plan was for me to keep *FaceTime* on throughout the flight to Guatemala so he could watch all

the scenes live. I told him this was also not possible but I would send him some photos and videos of Guatemala whenever I could. Thankfully he was satisfied by the compromise option!

Our younger son, Moshahid, had other concerns. He kept showing me his jeans and sweater outfit and was not content until I told him he looked very smart!

Departure for Guatemala

At a personal level, the Guatemala part of the tour was the one I had most looked forward to. It felt like a dream to be part of that fortunate group who would accompany Huzoor on his first visit to Central America.

Some people were worried about security, as Guatemala has problems with violent crime, but I did not share such concerns. I knew Huzoor would only have made the decision to travel to Guatemala after a great deal of prayer.

At exactly 7.40am, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi (*Huzoor's respected wife*) came out of their residence and Huzoor led a silent prayer before departure. Even though it was early morning, many Ahmadis were present to see Huzoor off.

Normally when Huzoor leaves a place the local Jamaat is emotional and sad but the Houston Jamaat knew that Huzoor was due to return in a couple of days and would then stay in their city for a few days. Accordingly, I only saw people with smiles on their faces as they waved towards beloved Huzoor.

A delayed flight

The Qafila arrived at the airport at 8.05am and, after passing through security and a few minutes in an airport lounge, Huzoor entered the plane along with Khala Saboohi. Sitting in the same row, on the other side of the aisle was Ameer Sahib USA and his wife. I was again seated with Ahmad bhai a row behind.

After boarding the flight there was a delay. At first it was not clear why but eventually we were told that one of the flight attendants had suddenly become unwell so they had to call up a replacement.

After around 20minutes, another flight attendant entered the plane and she seemed to enjoy the moment.

Very exuberantly she said:

"I'm here to save the day! Now we can fly!"

Upon this, she received a round of applause from some of the passengers which she seemed to enjoy!

Despite her confidence, the flight was further delayed for another half an hour due to a 'paperwork' issue and so by the time we finally departed the flight had been delayed by an hour.

An inked tie

Later, during the flight itself, an Ahmadi friend came over to see me for a few moments. He complimented the tie I was wearing to such a degree that I felt a little awkward and embarrassed!

After giving the compliment he duly returned to his seat on the plane and no more than five seconds later, I took out a pen to fill in the landing card and as soon as I took off the lid, the pen, due to the cabin air pressure, furiously leaked all over my tie!

My hands were also covered black and so I spent much of the rest of the flight trying to scrub them clean. At first I used tissues but they were useless. Noticing my predicament, a flight attendant brought me a couple of hot hand towels which enabled me to clean off most of the ink from my hands.

The much complimented tie though seemed irrecoverable! Some people mention the concept of '*nazar*' – one aspect of which is that compliments can lead to misfortune. However, my personal view is that it was just an unlucky coincidence!

A moment in history

After just under 3-hours of flight time, the plane landed in Guatemala City at 12.09pm local time. As the flight came down, we were able to see some of the natural beauty for which Guatemala is famous. Magnificent volcanoes, mountains and forest areas were prominent.

However, above and beyond the terrain, it was the sense of history in the making which meant that as the plane touched down, I felt a combination of excitement, anticipation and joy.

Moments later, Huzoor exited the plane and I walked a few paces behind.

All of us present felt extremely privileged to be present when Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) stepped into Central America for the very first time.



As Huzoor entered the airport terminal he was welcomed by a member of the National Congress of Guatemala, Congresswoman Ileana Calles Dominguez and senior officials of the Guatemala Jamaat.

Also present was my father-in-law, Majid Khan, who I could tell was nervous and anxious that everything was smooth for Huzoor's arrival.

Meeting at the airport

After arriving, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi were escorted to a small private lounge where they waited for the members of the Qafila to clear through the immigration process.

Also present to receive and welcome Huzoor was a member of Guatemala's *National Congress*, Congresswoman Ileana Calles Dominguez.

She had previously travelled to London to attend the UK Jalsa Salana, during which she had invited Huzoor to her country.

Speaking in Spanish through a translator, Congresswoman Dominguez said:

"Your Holiness, it is a great blessing and honour for Guatemala that you travelled all this way. I am convinced your visit will be a source of blessings for our nation. Our people are sincerely grateful that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has built the Nasir Hospital in order to serve our people."

Huzoor's response reflected his great humility.

Huzoor said:

"I was extremely surprised to see you here to greet me here. I did not expect you to come but I greatly appreciate your gesture. Thank you very much for your kindness."

In reply, Congresswoman Dominguez said:

“How could I not come to receive you? It is my honour to be here. Today is a national holiday in Guatemala and so I am not here out of duty but out of a personal desire to receive you and welcome you to our nation. If there is anything I can do to make your stay more comfortable it will be my honour.”



As the conversation continued, Huzoor mentioned that as the plane came down he had looked out of his window and observed that Guatemala was a ‘very beautiful country’.

Thereafter, the Congresswoman said that she wished that Huzoor’s visit to Guatemala had been scheduled for longer than just two days.

In reply, Huzoor said:

“This time my programme was such that it was not possible to come for any longer, as we have a large community in the United States who wished to meet with me but I hope I can come again to Guatemala in future for a longer period.”

Whilst standing next to where Huzoor was seated it occurred to me that the other Qafila members were all outside getting their passports stamped and so I became worried that everyone’s immigration will be done except mine!

Hence, after a few moments, I discretely left the lounge and was told that the other Qafila members had all had their passports stamped and that the Qafila would be ready to depart any minute.

I frantically asked where I should get my immigration stamp and was pointed in the direction of the *Immigration* counter. Upon seeing it, I panicked because there was a very long queue that looked like it would take at least an hour to navigate!

Thankfully a local Jamaat member noticed my predicament and told me to come with him. From a distance he waved to the officer sitting at the immigration counter and to my pleasant surprise the officer gestured to us to come to the front of the line.

Once there, the Immigration officer had a quick glance at my passport and said, ‘*Welcome to Guatemala*’. He did not even stamp it but said I could go. With the paperwork done, I breathed a sigh of relief!

Drive to Porta Hotel

After a few minutes, Huzoor was informed that everything was in order and the Qafila could leave whenever Huzoor was ready.

Immediately, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi walked out of the terminal to the cars and with the Grace of Allah, Huzoor took his first step outside in Central America a few minutes after 1pm.

As soon as we went outside, there was a sudden burst of heat. The temperature was hotter and much more humid than the United States.

After a few moments, the Qafila proceeded towards the city of Antigua where Huzoor and the Qafila members were to stay at the *Porta Hotel*.

The journey to the hotel was memorable. We went through downtown Guatemala City, where we saw great natural beauty interspersed with sporadic Western influences, such as domineering billboards advertising McDonalds, Pepsi and other global brands. Sadly, widespread poverty and destitution was also apparent.

Initially, I did not put my seatbelt on, which in any circumstances is not a clever thing to do. However, a few minutes with our Guatemalan driver was more than enough for me to realise the error of my ways.

He drove at a rapid pace and sought to maintain his speed, no matter the density of traffic or road obstructions he encountered.

On a few occasions, he beeped indignantly at other drivers, even when the most biased of judges would have found the fault to be his! From what I could see this was considered 'normal' driving and most other drivers were driving in a similarly lawless fashion!

As we drove out of the city and towards Antigua, the nation's natural beauty became increasingly visible. Magnificent Ceiba trees ran parallel with the roads, whilst vivid bright colours were evident in all directions. The street sellers and locals also wore bright colours. In just a few minutes, I felt as though I had been immersed in Guatemala's culture and nature.

After 50 minutes, the main road ended and we approached the hotel on small cobbled roads. I kept looking from the car window for an entrance to the hotel or a sign that we had arrived but there were no obvious signs until suddenly we saw hundreds of Ahmadis waving towards Huzoor whilst standing on the edge of a fairly narrow nondescript cobbled road.

Some of the Ahmadis were local Guatemalans, whilst many were those who had travelled from the United States to be part of the historic visit. Amongst the crowd, I also saw Ahmadis from other countries, including familiar faces from the United Kingdom and Canada.

The cars parked on the road and as Huzoor came out of his car, he waved towards the Ahmadis who recited *Nazms* to welcome him.

Huzoor was then escorted through a side gate. I followed a few steps behind and was confused as there was no lobby area or main welcome area to be seen.

Instead, Huzoor entered directly into an outdoor square, which had a line of hotel rooms on either side. In between, was a beautiful small water area. It was tranquil and serene.

After entering the complex, Huzoor smiled and said:

“This is a very old style hotel!”

As Huzoor approached his room, I asked him if we could give a live MTA News report about Huzoor’s arrival and Huzoor graciously gave permission for us to broadcast it.

I was very pleased because I was sure that Ahmadis across the world would be very anxious to know Huzoor had arrived safely in Guatemala and to see a few clips of his arrival.

After Huzoor entered his room, the rest of us went to the main reception to get our room keys and it was then I realised that the entrance through which we had entered was not the main hotel entrance.

Rather it was a side entrance leading to just one part of the hotel and there were many other parts that were interlinked by a range of corridors and steps.

After retrieving our room keys, we were taken to the dining area of the hotel, via a series of underground stairs and passageways.

A local lunch

The buffet lunch was delicious. I took some roast beef, grilled fish and some grilled vegetables. As I started to eat, someone noticed that I had not taken any *mashed potato* and he insisted I take it.

He said that mashed potato was a local Guatemalan speciality and had to be tried. He was right – it was very good. In fact, without question, I enjoyed the food in Guatemala more than at any other part of the tour.

In the afternoon break, I also met my mother-in-law, who had the honour of being part of the small team who served food at Huzoor's residence in Guatemala. They had just completed serving lunch and so she was relieved that it had gone well and Huzoor seemed to like the food.

A walk through the hotel

Later in the afternoon, Huzoor led the Zuhr and Asr prayers in a large room at a different part of the hotel across the road from where Huzoor's room was.

In order to save Huzoor from the rush of the hotel, his security team escorted Huzoor in a way that meant he did not have to walk *through* the hotel, rather he walked out onto the road and from there walked a few hundred metres to the hall being used for Namaz.

I felt a little sad that Huzoor did not see the main part of the hotel, as it was not possible to appreciate the scale and atmosphere from only the private

area where Huzoor was staying. Hence, I was happy when after Namaz, Huzoor himself asked if there was a way back to his room through the hotel.

Upon this, I stepped forward and said:

“Huzoor, the route inside the hotel is good and there is a really nice swimming pool and other facilities here.”

As he entered the hotel and walked through the main area, Huzoor smiled and said:

“Did you go swimming?”

I laughed and confirmed that I had not.

A few seconds later, Huzoor approached a part of the hotel where there was a very small water area and upon seeing it, Huzoor asked me if that was the pool that I had claimed was so impressive!

I clarified that it was not and the pool I had mentioned was a few metres ahead.

I was beginning to sweat a little, thinking I had suggested Huzoor walk the longer route inside the hotel and had built up the view and was now worried that Huzoor might not like it.

After he had walked a few more metres, I pointed in the direction of the dining area and the swimming pool and said:

“Huzoor, this is the area I was referring to, if you would like to see it.”

Alhamdolillah, Huzoor seemed to appreciate the view and took a few seconds to enjoy it. As he did so, Huzoor asked me if I could swim. I replied that in school I had attained a '10-meter certificate'.

Smiling, Huzoor said:

“That’s good enough.”

I felt relieved that Huzoor’s time had not been wasted, as he seemed to have enjoyed seeing the hotel. However, for the rest of the visit, Huzoor continued to walk to Namaz using the quicker route suggested by his security team.

Lost in translation

Immediately after Namaz, Huzoor and the Qafila members departed from the hotel to travel to the Baitul-Awwal Mosque in Guatemala, which had been inaugurated by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV (rh) in 1989.

The journey to the Mosque took around 45 minutes and during the drive I was entertained by Mahmood Khan sahib (*Huzoor’s security team*) who shared various anecdotes and also passed commentary on what we saw of the country through the car window.

After a few minutes, Khan sahib asked the driver the cost of petrol in Guatemala. The driver did not speak any English and so he had no idea what Khan sahib was asking.

I had the bright idea of using '*Google Translate*' and so I typed in the words '*petrol*' and '*cost*' into my phone and Google translated the words into Spanish as '*gasolina*' and '*costo*'.

Upon this, Khan sahib said in his best Spanish accent:

"Gasolina... Costo?"

It was quite a surreal scene to hear Mahmood Khan sahib, a true Peshawari, trying to speak Spanish! I remember thinking that this is the first and possibly last time I would ever hear a Peshawari *pathaan* speaking Spanish!

Anyway, my bright idea had worked. The driver finally understood what Khan sahib was asking.

He replied in fluent Spanish and that was where the limits of my shrewd idea were exposed. We had conveyed the question but had no idea what the response meant!

Much to Khan sahib's relief, a few minutes later we passed a petrol station and it had the price displayed.

However, after finally learning how much the cost of petrol was, Khan sahib wanted to know if the price was displayed *per litre* or *per gallon*?

Again, Khan sahib affected his words with a slightly Spanish accent.

Instead of saying '*gallons*', Khan sahib asked '*Gallonas?*'. After a few seconds, the driver seemed to understand the question and responded affirmatively and so finally the mystery of the cost of petrol in Guatemala was solved.

For the rest of the journey, Mahmood Khan sahib, Mirza Laiq Ahmad sahib (security) and me could not stop laughing at our collective efforts to bridge the language barrier!

Arrival at Baitul Awwal Mosque

As we neared the Mosque, day had given way to darkness. The Mosque complex lay on a main road, however the Mosque itself was built at an elevation and so the cars drove up a windy road until we reached the beautiful Baitul Awwal Mosque, where Huzoor was welcomed by hundreds of Ahmadis, many of whom were converts from various Central American countries.



After arriving, Huzoor conducted an inspection of the entire complex, which, apart from the Mosque, included offices and a Missionary's residence.

Thereafter, Huzoor came out onto the main terrace from which you could see far into the distance. Huzoor asked further questions about the *langhar* (kitchen) facilities and about a guest house on the site.

It seemed as though Huzoor was pleased with the overall development of the complex.

An emotional meeting

Following the inspection, Huzoor proceeded to the Mosque, which was packed with Ahmadi Muslims from Guatemala and some other Central and South American countries. The vast majority were local converts to Ahmadiyyat.

Over the next hour, the converts had the opportunity to ask Huzoor questions and to meet him. It was an extremely emotional and faith inspiring meeting.

When I saw the converts, many of whom were quite new to Ahmadiyyat, I had a pre-conceived impression that they may not be fully versed yet in the teachings of Ahmadiyyat. However, as the meeting progressed, I realised that this was my own ignorance and that the converts were all extremely strong in faith and had a full appreciation and understanding of the claim of the Promised Messiah (as).

Their love for Khilafat was tangible. Many men and women had tears in their eyes as they spoke to *Khalifa-Waqt* for the first time in their lives. Children had permanent smiles on their faces throughout the meeting.



All the while, Huzoor expressed his deep love and concern for the converts. Huzoor smiled at them, asked them about their lives, answered their questions, offered them guidance regarding their faith and their personal issues and accepted their request to hold a Bai'at ceremony.

It was a truly wonderful experience and amongst the many blessed activities and events during Huzoor's tour, that one hour remains firmly imprinted upon my mind. In fact, if there was one hour of the tour I could replay, it would almost certainly be that special time in Guatemala.

Huzoor was very interested and worried about the welfare of the local Ahmadis and in particular the education of the Ahmadi children living in Guatemala and the nearby countries.

Huzoor enquired from the children directly whether they were attending school regularly and asked several of them what they wished to become when they became older.

Upon this, one young boy informed that he wished to become a doctor.

Hearing this, Huzoor smiled and very lovingly said:

“You want to be a doctor? Masha’Allah that is good!”

Thereafter, addressing all of the children present, as well as their parents, Huzoor said:

“All the Ahmadi children, even the little ones, should make it a habit to work hard in school and pay attention to their teachers. You should aim to be doctors, professors, teachers and other good professions. I do not want there to be even a single Ahmadi child here who is deprived of education.”

Huzoor particularly enquired about the standards of education of the Ahmadi girls in Guatemala and the other local countries.

Speaking to the Ahmadi girls present, Huzoor said:

“Normally within our Jamaat, our Ahmadi girls achieve better educational results than our boys and I want the same to be true here. You should have a competition and race between the boys and girls to see who gets the best results. If the girls are excelling then the boys will have to work hard to compete and vice versa and in this way both our Ahmadi girls and boys will excel and their educational standards will continue to improve.”

It was amazing to hear how much Huzoor valued the education of young children living in deprived parts of the world and how he particularly encouraged the young girls.

Often it is alleged in the media or by those ignorant of Islam’s teachings that Islam restricts girls, yet, in our Jamaat, Khalifatul Masih takes pride in the fact that girls are excelling boys and expressed his desire that this trend continues.

A local Ahmadi convert, *Dominguez sahib*, stood up and sought to speak to Huzoor. However, he was unable to control his emotions and tears poured from his eyes.

As he tried to gather himself, Huzoor invited the children present forward and distributed chocolates to each of them.

Huzoor also said that those who studied in school should come forward to take a pen from him. Upon this, everyone in the room began to laugh when a

very small toddler came rushing towards Huzoor to receive a pen! As the little boy reached him, Huzoor smiled extremely lovingly towards him and fulfilled his desire for a pen.

As the meeting continued, a Mexican lady asked Huzoor the best way to offer Namaz.

In reply, Huzoor said:

“In my sermons, I have said many times that when you do Namaz you should keep firmly in your mind the thought that you are standing before God Almighty and He is looking to see how you worship Him. The Holy Prophet (sa) said that when you pray, always think that you are looking at God and that He is looking at you. At the very least, if you think that Allah is looking at you it will enable you to concentrate more and to attain a humbler state and certainly the most important thing is to be completely humble during prayer.”

Huzoor asked the lady if she knew *Surah Fatiha*.

She nodded and upon this, Huzoor said:

“Keep repeating the words ‘eeyaaka na’bodhu, wa eeyaaka nastaeen’ that ‘Thee alone do we worship and Thee alone do we implore for help’. This prayer will enable you to form a close bond with God Almighty.”

A young Guatemalan Ahmadi lady asked Huzoor what name she should give to her unborn child.

In reply, Huzoor said:

“You can choose whatever name you like. If you want me to name it then if it is a boy call it Muhammad. More important than the name is to pray for your child that he or she grows to be a person who fulfils the rights of Allah the Almighty and is truthful and sincere in all matters and is an example of the highest standards of morality.”

Huzoor continued:

“In Guatemala, like in other countries, children can easily go onto the wrong path and get involved in gangs or immoral activities. Instead of being a source of joy for their parents, they can become a source of pain for them. Hence, you should pray every day that Allah the Almighty grants you righteous progeny – that is the most important thing.”

A local Ahmadi Khadim asked Huzoor if he would be permitted to join ***Jamia Ahmadiyya*** in the UK or Canada.

In reply, Huzoor said:

“If you wish to be a Missionary and to dedicate your life you must be determined and be sure that you will remain firm on your pledge. This is not a small thing but a lifelong commitment to serve Islam for the sake of Allah the Almighty. If you are certain then you can go to Jamia Ahmadiyya and I would send you to either Canada Jamia or to Jamia Ahmadiyya International in Ghana.”

The Ahmadi convert, Dominguez sahib, who had been unable to speak earlier due to his emotional state stood up again. As soon as he did, he became emotional once again.

However, this time, even as tears rolled down from his eyes, he was able to speak a few words. He said:

“Huzoor, please pray for us. Our nation and our people are mired in the darkness. Please pray they come towards the light.”

In reply, Huzoor said:

“Allah the Almighty has guided you to the light and so now it is your duty to spread it far and wide amongst your people. The Holy Prophet (sa) said to like for others what you like for your own self and so now you must share your faith because it is your most prized possession. I pray that Allah the Almighty enables you to fulfil this great task and to fulfil your responsibilities as a pioneer member of the Jamaat.”

A Guatemalan Ahmadi took the opportunity to express her gratitude to Huzoor regarding the construction of the *Nasir Hospital* and the medical camps run by *Humanity First* in Guatemala.

She said the local people were in desperate need and the services provided were helping people suffering from abject poverty.

In response, Huzoor said:

“This is our job because the Promised Messiah (as) said that service to humanity was his objective and his mission. The Promised Messiah (as) personally used to treat people with different ailments in Qadian. He never rejected anyone and worked tirelessly in order to alleviate the sufferings of mankind.”

Very movingly, Huzoor continued:

“Now it is our duty, as his followers, to continue to help those who are suffering, wherever in the world they may be, whether it be through medical treatment or providing education. We do not deserve or desire any credit for this because this is what Islam teaches us. It is my ardent hope that we are able to establish more schools and hospitals in the future, especially in those countries where there is a pressing need.”

As the meeting progressed, Huzoor noticed that the men and particularly women did not have much space and had maintained the same position sitting on the Mosque floor throughout.

Having observed this, very affectionately, Huzoor said:

“You should sit comfortably and easily. I do not want your legs to fall asleep because when you stand up there is a risk you could fall.”

It was a reflection of how Huzoor is ever concerned for the welfare of the members of the Jamaat and notices things that would pass most people by.

A female convert from a nearby country informed Huzoor that she had accepted Islam a few months earlier. She then asked:

“Huzoor, please give me a guideline of how I, as a woman, can live my life as a good Muslim.”

In reply, Huzoor gave a very detailed answer in which he spoke about the fundamental role of Muslim women to raise their children in a pious and moral way.

Huzoor said:

“The Holy Prophet (sa) said that Paradise lies under the feet of a mother and so the Holy Prophet (sa) has bestowed a great status and honour upon women. After all, a person’s mother is she who takes on the trials and tribulations of pregnancy and childbirth. Thereafter, it is the mother who feeds her child so it can grow and become stronger. Unquestionably, it is a mother who cares and nourishes her child more than any other person. In return, it is the duty of a child to love his mother and to serve her. If the child fulfils this duty and serves his mother and through her, the child love grows to be a good person, he will be rewarded by Allah the Almighty and so in this way a mother takes her child to heaven.”

Huzoor continued:

“According to Islam, a mother has the foremost duty to morally train her children and you have now accepted Islam and so it is your duty to train

your children and bring them towards God. Make them into true worshippers of Allah the Almighty and make them into good, moral people and loyal citizens of their nation.”

The very emotional and memorable meeting drew to a close. Though my hand was tired after taking notes non-stop for the best part of an hour, I felt energised and enthralled by what had transpired.

That meeting was proof of how the message of the Promised Messiah (as) had reached the corners of the world. It was proof of the unique nature of the spiritual bond between Ahmadi Muslims and their Khalifa.

Meeting with Belizean delegation

Following the meeting, Huzoor proceeded to an office at the Mosque premises, where he met with a delegation of Ahmadi converts from the neighbouring country of Belize.

One member of the Belize delegation was a recent convert to Ahmadiyyat, Sister Pamela.

Addressing Huzoor, Sister Pamela said:

“I accepted Ahmadiyyat after seeing how Islam motivates Muslims to serve other people and to help them. I fell in love with Islam, as I saw the service of Ahmadi Muslims to the local community in Belize. Since accepting it, I have acquired true peace in my heart and have learned

that I too can be of benefit to other people. I am also gaining knowledge of the Holy Quran, which is the most beautiful teaching.”

Upon hearing her sentiments, Huzoor said:

“Masha’Allah, May Allah bless you. I pray that may you become closer to your Creator.”

All of the converts amongst the delegation were Ahmadi women and girls and this was something Huzoor commented on.

Huzoor said:

“Only the Ahmadi women and girls are here from Belize. Is this because they are stronger in faith than the Ahmadi men?”

Upon this, the Belizean ladies, as one, responded affirmatively.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

“Then, you should all try to make your husbands and sons stronger in their faith and raise their standards. Be an example and role model for them. Bring them closer to their faith. This is the task I am giving you.”

A convert, who herself was now serving as Lajna Secretary Tabligh in Belize, mentioned that there were a myriad of social problems, such as gang culture, teenage pregnancy and illiteracy that were hurting the lives of the local people in her country.

She said that amongst those who were accepting Ahmadiyyat were people who had faced similar problems and sought Huzoor's guidance about how to train and guide such people.

In reply, Huzoor said:

"It is good that you are involved because you are a native of Belize. It is your country and they are your people. You understand them and you know better than outsiders what the local issues are. You can help the local Ahmadis integrate into the Jamaat just as you have done so. You should have a long and short term plan for this. In the long term, you should work towards helping the converts who come from broken homes or difficult backgrounds into formal education. Our Jamaat should assist and try to facilitate this."

Huzoor continued:

"In the short term, you should hold small classes for such converts in which you tell them about the true teachings of Islam, how they can get closer to God and the importance of morality. They were not raised in line with Islamic standards of morality and so you will have to show them the true moral code expected of a Muslim and the benefits of Islamic teachings. To be successful you will have to work extremely hard and pray for them sincerely. Even though you are the Tabligh Secretary, you must also do Tarbiyyat work. In countries like Belize, Tarbiyyat is even more difficult than Tabligh and brings even greater challenges."

As the meeting drew to a close, a few young Belizean Ahmadi girls expressed their desire to recite a poem in front of Huzoor.

Huzoor permitted them and so over the next few minutes the young girls recited '*Hai daste qiblah*' in a very melodious and sincere way and when they reached the chorus of '*La'illaha'illah*' everyone in the room joined in.



It was a memorable and emotional scene to see the children of Belize singing the famous poem of Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) to their Khalifa with such happiness.

As soon as the poem ended, Huzoor smiled and very affectionately said:

"I very much like the way you have recited it. May Allah bless you all and I hope that you also learn the meaning of these words because then you will enjoy it more and benefit from it."

Meeting with Latin American Ahmadis

Following the Belize delegation, Huzoor held a further meeting with Ahmadi converts from Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Ecuador and some other Latin American countries.

A young lady, who had recently converted to Ahmadiyyat, informed Huzoor that she was married and did not have children. She said that she wished to study and work professionally and sought Huzoor's advice in this regard.

In reply, Huzoor said:

“You are not yet a mother and so if you want to study and work it is ok but you should discuss it with your husband and ensure he is also happy so that your domestic relations are not strained.”

Upon this, the lady informed Huzoor that her husband desired for her to stay at home but she desired to be economically independent.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

“Of course, if a family is struggling and they cannot survive then it is ok for a woman to work to support her family financially.”

Huzoor continued:

“Generally speaking, Islam teaches that it is essential for a girl to gain a proper education so that she can train and educate her own children. Nonetheless, Islam has ascribed a division of labour, whereby Allah the

Almighty has assigned the primary role of a woman to raise her children and to look after the family home.

“On the other side, the husband has been given the duty of providing for his wife and children. If, however, you train in a profession such as medicine or teaching, through which you can serve humanity then you can certainly pursue it. The objective should not be that you make money, rather your objective should be to increase your service to humanity and to help others.”

Very beautifully, Huzoor added:

“Islam teaches that a person should have personal contentment with their circumstances and not be driven by materialism because once a person enters the race for material pursuits, the race never ends and it only leads to frustration. The first priority of a Muslim woman should be to raise her children so that they grow to be moral and loyal citizens of their nation.

“If Ahmadi mothers truly understand the heavy weight of responsibility placed upon their shoulders then, if not today, then in forty or fifty years countries like Guatemala will witness tremendous progress and advancement due to the efforts of Ahmadi women in raising the next generation of society. This is the great challenge for Ahmadi women that it is not enough for them to only live according to Islamic values but they must transfer these values into the next generation.”

The meeting continued as Ahmadi converts and guests from Mexico, Honduras and Panama asked further questions before the meeting ended with several Mexican lady converts singing a *Tirana* (poem), which was mostly in their local language.

In a very affectionate and emotional scene, Huzoor very lovingly embraced a young boy upon the request of his mother who was a recent convert to Ahmadiyyat.



That was one boy but all afternoon and evening, Huzoor showered his love and affection upon the converts.

Disregarding any fatigue from the long-distance travel he had endured during the past few days, Huzoor had spent the entire evening in the company of the converts.

Bait Ceremony

After leading Maghreb and Isha, a Bai'at ceremony took place, in which some of the converts had the opportunity to place their hand directly on Huzoor's hand.



The ceremony was extremely emotional, as local converts of all ages, from young children to the very elderly pledged their allegiance to Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya and to living their lives as true followers of the Promised Messiah (as).

Many people, who had grown up with no knowledge of Islam, never mind the teachings of Ahmadiyyat, were consumed by emotion, tears streaming down their faces as they attested to their belief in the truth of the Promised Messiah (as). It had been a truly memorable and faith inspiring end to what had been a very significant historic day in the history of the Jamaat.

Fajitas for breakfast

The next morning, on 3 October 2018, we went to the hotel dining area for breakfast. The weather was wonderful and the scenery was picturesque. Along with Dr. Tanvir sahib, who was my roommate, I ate breakfast outdoors at a table from which we could see the magnificent natural beauty of Guatemala.

The breakfast options were a mixture of the exotic and the mundane. A lot of Ahmadis were staying at the hotel and I saw many trying different interesting local dishes. My own choices were more familiar. I took waffles, French toast, fruit and some fresh juice.

Though, when I returned to the buffet for a second time, I also tried some 'morning-fajitas', which tasted quite similar to regular fajitas! They were small pancake shaped tortilla rolls, topped with beef strips and vegetables and tasted good but it felt odd eating them for breakfast!

Arrival at Nasir Hospital

After a morning spent catching up with work, Namaz and lunch were offered in the early afternoon. Then at 2.50pm, Huzoor departed from the hotel and travelled thirty minutes to nearby Sacatepéquez for the inauguration of the Nasir Hospital.

The historic nature of the event did not escape anyone. It was the very first time Huzoor had specially travelled to a country to inaugurate a project by

Humanity First. The primary purpose of Huzoor's first visit to Central America was to open the centre for serving humanity.

Upon arriving, Huzoor was welcomed by a delegation of Guatemala Jamaat and Humanity First. Many Ahmadis were also present, who raised *naaray* (slogans) in thanks to Allah the Almighty.

Apart from Jamaat members, also present were local doctors, nurses and other Guatemalan guests, some of whom were dressed in traditional Guatemalan attire.

Meeting with Guatemalan dignitaries

Before the formal opening and inspection, Huzoor proceeded to a marquee erected on the site where more than a dozen Guatemalan politicians and dignitaries had the opportunity to meet Huzoor.



They all sought to welcome Huzoor to their country and to offer congratulations on the building of the hospital and to express their gratitude that Huzoor had chosen their country for the humanitarian project.

One guest, representing the Ministry of Health of Guatemala, was the country's Vice Minister of Health, Miguel Figueroa.

Upon meeting Huzoor, the Vice Minister of Health said:

“From the very outset, when we learned of the Nasir Hospital project, our Government pledged to help and cooperate with this project and now it has been built we will consider it a full and integral part of our national health system. I have met the doctors and nurses working here and they are extremely competent and highly qualified. In fact, they could come and train the doctors and nurses in other hospitals and medical institutes.”

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

“The most important thing is to have a passion to serve humanity and to strive to alleviate the pain and suffering of others. Our faith teaches us this and so we will never rest in our efforts to help the people to the best of our abilities.”

A Guatemalan dignitary, local to the area where the hospital was based, expressed his emotions and gratitude. He said:

“I have been waiting for the past four years, ever since I first heard of the hospital project, for it to be completed. I can only thank God that He sent Humanity First here to build this institution which will serve thousands of people who are in desperate need. Merely in the nearby area there are 30,000 people who will directly benefit from this hospital and I am sure that many people from beyond this area will also come to be treated here.”

A representative of the *Church of Guatemala* said:

“On behalf of all the churches in our nation, I welcome Your Holiness to Guatemala. Our people are in desperate need of help and you have come here to help. Our people need urgent healthcare facilities and you have built this amazing hospital for the sake of our people. I cannot thank you enough.”

Upon hearing this, Huzoor said:

“Thank you for your kind words. This hospital has been built as a symbol of humanity and to show the world that, irrespective of our religion or beliefs, we must join together as human beings to serve mankind and to help those who are suffering. We must all uphold human values and fulfil each other’s rights.”

Meeting with USA and UK dignitaries

As the local dignitaries left the marquee, Huzoor remained seated and met with a delegation of political and diplomatic officials from the United States and the United Kingdom.

Amongst the US delegation was Congresswoman Norma Torres, originally from Guatemala, but now a member of the United States House of Representatives.



Upon meeting Huzoor, Congresswoman Torres said:

“Your Holiness, I have travelled here especially from the United States to attend this event and to meet with you. It is wonderful to see how your community is so committed to providing health care services to people in countries like Guatemala.”

After appreciating her thanks, Huzoor said:

“You are not only representing the United States but you are also representing Guatemala as this is the country of your birth.”

Thereafter, Congresswoman Torres informed Huzoor that around 350,000 Guatemalans lived in Los Angeles.

Hearing this, Huzoor said:

“If the needs of the local people are fulfilled here and they are given opportunities to progress and develop then less will seek to emigrate abroad.”

Inauguration of Nasir Hospital

As the second meeting concluded, Huzoor proceeded to raise a flag of Humanity First, before formally opening the hospital by unveiling a commemorative plaque and leading a silent prayer. I was later told that it was the first time that Huzoor has personally raised the flag of *Humanity First* anywhere in the world.

Subsequently, Huzoor was given a tour of the hospital in which he visited the various medical departments and inspected the facilities and equipment.

Huzoor visited the departments of *Outpatients, Ophthalmology, Diagnostics, Ultrasound, X-Ray, Pharmacy, Lab, Emergency, Neonatal and Paediatrics, Gynaecology, General Surgery* and *ICU* amongst others.

It was amazing to see how, with the Grace of Allah, such a beautiful and state of the art facility had been built in such an economically deprived and rural area.



Given that my father-in-law was closely involved in the project, I knew there had been many challenges in building a hospital from scratch in a developing country like Guatemala.

One major aspect was the cost of the project and raising the capital required to build a modern and high class facility.

Furthermore, identifying the right land, dealing with officials and ensuring that everything was in accordance with local laws and regulations were other major issues that arose.

Once the project got off the ground, they had to identify and attract professional staff – doctors, nurses and administration and plans had to be made to ensure that the hospital was sustainable in the long term.



These were just a few of the issues. Yet, through the constant prayers, guidance and inspiration of Khalifa-Waqt all of the many hurdles had been overcome. *Alhamdolillah.*

Nasir Hospital Reception

At 4.10pm, a formal reception to mark the opening of the Nasir Hospital took place in a large marquee on the site. The proceedings, which were attended by over 800 people from 20 countries, were conducted in both Spanish and English.

After Tilawat, a welcome address and introduction to the hospital was given by Munum Naeem sahib, *Executive Director* of Humanity First USA. He informed that the total cost of the hospital had been around \$3million dollars and gave examples of some of the financial sacrifices made by individuals for the sake of the hospital, including a widow of an Ahmadi martyr who had sold many personal possessions for sake of contributing to the hospital.

Short guest speeches were given by Congresswoman Norma Torres from the United States and Guatemalan Vice Minister of Health, Miguel Figueroa.

Congresswoman Norma Torres said:

“It is truly an honour to be here with His Holiness, Mirza Masroor Ahmad, World Head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. We are deeply moved by His Holiness’ leadership and by his deep commitment to service and tolerance. And so, it is fitting that he has come to Guatemala to open this hospital.”

Miguel Figueroa, Vice Minister of Health, Guatemala said:

“This hospital will help advance the health care in our country. This day is very special for our community and we desire to use this hospital as an example for other hospitals in the country. On behalf of the Ministry of Health, I thank the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. We look forward to utilising these services and to improving the health of the entire country.”

Huzoor's address

Subsequently, Huzoor delivered a thirty-minute keynote address during which he spoke about the reasons for building a hospital in Guatemala and repeatedly emphasised Islam's teachings of service to humanity.



Huzoor's words were extremely poignant and faith inspiring. He made it clear that the building of the Nasir Hospital was not a favour by our Jamaat or Humanity First, rather it was our duty.

During the early part of his address, Huzoor delivered his words at a slower pace than normal. It occurred to me that the lighting in the marquee was dim and so perhaps Huzoor was unable to view his notes and so I was relieved when I saw that MTA were adjusting the lighting on the stage.

After around seven minutes, Huzoor put on his glasses and the lighting was adjusted to some extent and thereafter Huzoor's normal style of delivery returned. I breathed a sigh of relief as it now appeared that Huzoor was well and could see his notes.

Later on, Huzoor mentioned to me that the it was not that the lighting on stage was too dim but rather the lighting had been positioned in a way that it was entering his eyes directly and due to that he was unable to see his notes clearly.

At the start of his address, Huzoor said:

“Undoubtedly, today is a source of great joy and delight for members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, as the very first hospital built by Humanity First, in either Central or South America, is being inaugurated. In this regard, we consider it to be an extremely significant and landmark occasion.”

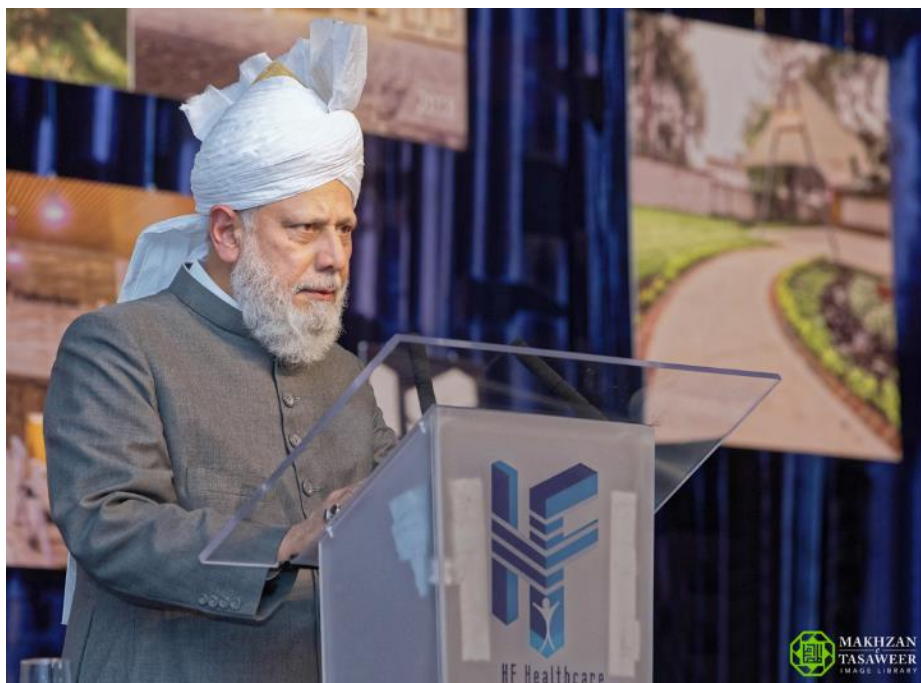
Explaining why the hospital had been built, Huzoor said:

“You may well be wondering why we have built this hospital. The answer is very simple. It has been built with purely one intention, and that is, quite simply, to serve humanity, by providing high quality healthcare to the people of this nation.”

Huzoor continued:

“Also, I wish to clarify at the outset that having built this institute, this will not be the end of our services to this country; rather, it is my prayer that this proves to be the first of many humanitarian projects established by Humanity First in this region. Indeed, I hope and pray that the opening of the hospital serves as a launch pad, propelling Humanity First towards

furthering their mission of providing relief, support and opportunities to people throughout the world.”



After giving some examples of other humanitarian projects established by the Jamaat, Huzoor said:

“We seek no praise and no reward for such efforts, because we are merely doing what our religion has taught us to do. Our motivation and our desire to serve others is driven entirely by the teachings of Islam. The guiding light for any true Muslim is the Holy Quran, which was revealed to Islam’s Founder, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa). Time and again, the Holy Quran has instructed Muslims to serve mankind and to fulfil the needs of those who are suffering or are deprived in any way. It requires Muslims to be selfless and consumed by a love for others.”

Later, Huzoor quoted various verses of the Holy Quran which instructed Muslims to fulfil the needs of others and particularly to care for vulnerable members of society, such as orphans or those living in poverty and destitution.

Very movingly, Huzoor said:

“Muslims are taught to be the ones who comfort and love those people who have been failed by society and to carry the weight of their burdens on their own shoulders. Muslims are duty-bound to help underprivileged people, so that they can stand upon their own two feet, live with dignity and be freed from their desperate circumstances.”

Presenting the unparalleled example of the Holy Prophet (sa), Huzoor said:

“The Prophet of Islam (sa) championed the rights of all people, of all races and of all beliefs and was a source of unparalleled mercy and grace for all mankind. From every pore and fibre of his being gushed forth an eternal spring of love and compassion for humanity. For example, on one occasion, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) said: I am with the weak because aiding the weak and poor is the means of reaching Allah the Almighty.”

Later in his address, Huzoor focused on the Nasir Hospital itself and his hopes for it.

Huzoor said:

“With all my heart, I hope and pray that the Nasir Hospital fulfils its mandate and proves an exceptional means of alleviating the suffering of people, regardless of their religious beliefs, regardless of their age and regardless of their ethnic or social backgrounds.”

Huzoor continued:

“I am confident it will now be clear to all of you that we have not constructed this hospital in order to profit, or to gain favourable publicity; rather, our only objective is to serve the people of your nation, by providing high-quality healthcare to the people of this land.”

Huzoor then spoke of how any money earned from the hospital would be reinvested within Guatemala to further the humanitarian work of the Jamaat.

Huzoor said:

“Rest assured, any funds generated by the hospital will be used to further serve the people of Guatemala and not a penny will be sent abroad. Whatever income is received through patient fees will be reinvested to ensure that those who cannot afford treatment can receive it at a subsidised rate or, if feasible, for free. Apart from this, any additional income will be used to maintain and improve the hospital facilities or to fund new ways to serve humanity. Our previous humanitarian projects testify to the truth of what I have said.”

As he concluded his address, Huzoor prayed:

“May Allah the Almighty bless the work of the doctors and medical staff and enable them to heal and cure through His grace. It is my prayer that the administration manages the hospital in a way that the poorest people, who cannot otherwise afford treatment, are offered heavily subsidised care and, wherever possible, free treatment.”

The event concluded with a silent prayer led by Huzoor.

Impact of Huzoor’s address

Alhamdolillah the formal proceedings of the Nasir Hospital inauguration had reached a successful conclusion.

Helped by a Spanish translator, I met some of the guests who all spoke of their gratitude that Humanity First had established such large scale humanitarian project in their country. It was also clear that the guests had been strongly affected by Huzoor’s words and his personality and demeanour.

After listening to Huzoor’s address, a local Guatemalan lady, *Deborah Yarhi* said:

“I loved and appreciated how the Caliph said that Islam says to give without expectation of return. This was emotional and is very important for people in the Third World because when others give us anything they

invariably also take... The Caliph is warm, softly spoken and very appealing."

A young Guatemalan man, *Miguel Ignacio Diego*, who lived near the hospital and who had been part of the *Humanity First* team told me that he felt pride at seeing the hospital built in his hometown. He said:

"It was wonderful how the Caliph made it clear that any money generated by the hospital will be used in Guatemala and will not be spent on profits or sent outside. Personally, I feel blessed to be part of this experience because I have worked with Humanity First for five years and it has been a very emotional journey to see this hospital come to life. Lots of hard work went into the hospital - all for the service of mankind."

A local Christian Priest, *Pastor Cesar Vasquez Miranda* said:

"Building a hospital here means so much to me. It is something that Guatemala desperately needs. Our people are suffering and your Community has taken action. As a pastor, I learned today that the Holy Qur'an has the service of humanity deeply ingrained in its teachings. I see His Holiness as a selfless leader who has a genuine desire to help others and to remove the pain of people."

A young Guatemalan lady, *Leslie Gonzalez* said:

"Where the Guatemalan Government ignores the situation of the poor, His Holiness has travelled across the world to be here and he has instructed his Community to serve us and he has given us this amazing

facility. It was also very important to me to learn from His Holiness that this project is to help the people and is not a publicity stunt. We are deprived people and so I cannot express our gratitude enough."

Maria Rosario Belasques, from a women's association that helps orphans and widows, said:

"Thank you to His Holiness for bringing this hospital to Guatemala. You are helping our nation and especially those women who are deprived of healthcare, such as widows who cannot afford healthcare for their children. We belong to a women's association that helps orphans and widows and will be bringing our community to this hospital for treatment."

Another guest, Giovanni Zamora said:

"It was the first time I ever listened to His Holiness and I felt as though humanity drips out of his body. I felt humanity come out of the Caliph and it made the speech extremely powerful and moving – because I believed every word was sincere... And the amazing thing is that your Caliph doesn't want anything back in return for giving us this hospital. He seeks no reward and has left behind a beautiful gift for our nation."

Press Conference

Following a short break, during which some refreshments were served to the guests, Huzoor returned to the marquee, where he had met dignitaries before the event, for a Press Conference.

The journalists present were local to Guatemala or from other Central or South American countries.



During the Press Conference, a journalist asked:

“Your Holiness, in your speech you gave the ‘other’ viewpoint of Islam and it is different to the non-peaceful Islam that we normally hear of. What is the reason for this?”

In reply, Huzoor said:

“Islam is not what you think – rather Islam is what the Holy Quran states and what the Holy Prophet of Islam (sa) practiced. That is the true Islam. Hence, I did not present anything new – what I presented were the real teachings of Islam, whereas what the media often portrays is a completely distorted version of Islam. The portrayal of Islam by extremists is completely wrong. We the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

are showing the true picture of Islam and this is why each year hundreds of thousands of people are joining our community and it is spreading far and wide across the globe.”

Another journalist asked Huzoor if the Jamaat had plans for further humanitarian projects in Guatemala and also why Humanity First had chosen Sacatepéquez as the location for the Nasir Hospital.

In reply, Huzoor said:

“This is the first hospital we have made here and it is possible that we may set up clinics in different locations, as we do in Africa. The right to healthcare is a basic human right and so we try to provide it to those who otherwise are deprived of it. As for why we chose this place, the reason is that the cities generally have relatively better services and so the people living in rural or less populated areas are in greater need. Service to humanity and caring for others is our objective and our mission.”

A journalist from Paraguay mentioned that dozens of people had accepted Ahmadiyyat recently in his country. He asked Huzoor about his expectations for the future spread of Ahmadiyyat in Latin America.

In response, Huzoor said:

“We are spreading the message of true Islam and those who like it can join us. The basic principle of Islam is that there is no compulsion in religion and so each person is at liberty to choose his path. In Paraguay and other countries people are joining us as they are attracted by the

message of peace, love and harmony that we practice and preach. I am confident and hopeful that one day will come when large numbers of people in Paraguay accept Ahmadiyyat – if not today, then tomorrow! We will never give up our mission, in Paraguay or in the rest of the world.”

Clarifying a point regarding the Jamaat’s service to humanity, Huzoor added:

“Our humanitarian efforts are not motivated out of a desire to convert people to Islam. Serving others selflessly is part of our faith and so this hospital project and other humanitarian services are rendered simply for the sake of alleviating the suffering of those in need. For the propagation of our faith we have a completely separate system, which is called ‘Tabligh’, through which we convey the teachings of Islam. Hence, whether it is Guatemala, Belize, Paraguay or any other country our service to humanity will continue irrespective of whether the local people have any interest in Islam or not.”

The Press Conference and Hospital opening received widespread national and local media coverage in Guatemala. It was incredible to witness how the message of Ahmadiyyat had truly spread to all parts of the nation through the blessed presence of Khalifatul Masih.

Launch of Review of Religions Spanish Edition

Before leaving the marquee, Huzoor launched the first ever Spanish edition of the Review of Religions magazine. It was a fitting location and another historic moment.

The concept of a Spanish language *Review of Religions* was Huzoor's own idea and vision and all aspects of that first edition were prepared under Huzoor's direct guidance and supervision.



Describing the moment Huzoor gave the instruction for a Spanish edition, the *Chief Editor of Review of Religions*, Amer Safir told me later:

“We had a Mulaqat with Huzoor a year before the launch and Huzoor was guiding us about a wide range of issues when, at one point, Huzoor said ‘You will have to have a Spanish edition of Review in future as there are 40 million people in Spain and 400 million in USA and Latin America who speak Spanish’. That was a seminal moment in the history of the Review of Religions as it seemed like Allah the Almighty must have put something in Huzoor’s mind that sparked the idea.”

Tears of sadness to tears of joy

As the event concluded, hundreds of people gathered in the courtyard to see Huzoor off. Before leaving, Huzoor returned inside the hospital for a few minutes and during that period an Ahmadi lady doctor, serving in one of the hospital's departments came up to me. She was extremely distressed and upset.

She told me that whilst the inspection of the hospital had taken place earlier she was waiting eagerly to see Huzoor but when Huzoor came there were so many men present on either side she had been unable to see him.

She said it was the moment she had waited for ever since she had become involved in the hospital project but because there was so much rush she had missed that precious moment.

The doctor was also angry that some of the men who had been walking near Huzoor had not proceeded in an orderly way. The doctor was with another female colleague who also expressed her frustration.

I knew what they meant because when the inspection was taking place there were some small corridors or passageways where dozens of people tried to get as close to Huzoor as possible. It is something that occasionally happens that out of their love and desire to be as close to Huzoor as possible, sometimes people, whether it is staff members, security or local Jamaat members, can push and shove and it had certainly happened during the inspection.

I felt very sorry and apologised to them on behalf of anyone who may have contributed to the situation which they had experienced. Above all, I felt sorry that they had missed the opportunity they had deeply craved to meet Huzoor. As I stood with them, the lady doctor repeated her sadness at not being able to meet Huzoor and became very emotional.

It was at that point, where I did not know what to say, I saw that Huzoor was walking nearby. Rarely do I introduce people to Huzoor without prior permission but on this occasion I approached Huzoor and informed him that these two ladies had wanted to meet him earlier but had been unable to do so.

Most graciously, Huzoor met with them both and the doctor was able to express her frustrations directly to Huzoor. Thereafter, she was able to have the meeting which she had missed earlier and explained her role in the hospital and spoke to Huzoor for a few minutes.

It was amazing how within seconds, the tears and sadness on her face and of her colleague was completely transformed into tears of joy and happiness. If I, or any other person, had spent the rest of the day apologising and reassuring her it could not have had even a fraction of the impact those few moments with Huzoor. Only Khalifa-Waqt can impart such delight and transform a person's emotions and feelings in such a way.

Alhamdolillah, Huzoor's visit to the Nasir Hospital concluded and the day had proceeded successfully. Indeed, it had been an historic and extremely blessed day. Huzoor waved goodbye to those waiting to see him off and then sat in his car and the Qafila departed.

Return to Baitul Awwal

It had been expected that Huzoor would return directly to his hotel and lead the Maghreb and Isha prayers there, as to go to the Baitul Awwal Mosque would require a lengthy detour.

However, earlier in the afternoon, Huzoor told Ameer Sahib Guatemala that he would in fact travel to the Mosque to lead Maghreb and Isha. Huzoor instructed Ameer Sahib to ensure that there was food available for all those who came to offer their prayers, as many of them were not local.

It was another example of how, wherever possible, even during travel, Huzoor seeks to offer his prayers in the Mosque so that as many people as possible can join.

Due to the fact that the prayers were offered in the Mosque instead of the hotel, at least 90 minutes extra of Huzoor's precious time were taken up.

In every way, Huzoor sets an example for Ahmadis that we must always prioritise the worship of Allah the Almighty and be willing for personal sacrifices in this regard.

Upon arriving at the Mosque, Huzoor waited for some time so that others, who were still at the hospital, could arrive.

During that period, Huzoor visited the home of Ameer Sahib Guatemala and also met with the Missionaries posted in Central and Southern America. Finally, after leading Namaz, Huzoor returned to the hotel.

A night walk

The Qafila members ate their evening meal in the hotel restaurant and, as we ate, I felt sadness that the visit to Guatemala was already almost over. It seemed as though we had only just arrived and now it was time to return to the United States.

After dinner, I went for a walk along nearby streets with a few other people and just in those few minutes was able to get a glimpse of the rich culture and history of Guatemala.

There was a beautiful and historical yellow coloured church just a few hundred metres from where we stayed. Also nearby was a picturesque local square decorated by beautiful trees, lighting and a water fountain.

Even though it was late, there were some local Guatemalan people who remained outside and asked us where we were from and why suddenly there were so many Muslims in their town. We told them about Huzoor and about the Nasir Hospital and they were extremely surprised that a Muslim community had come to their nation to build a hospital and to help the local people.

As we walked around, I felt sadness that though Huzoor had been in Guatemala he had not been able to see any of the local sites or even had the opportunity to take a brief stroll into the city as we were doing.

I asked Ahmad bhai about this and he said that in the early years of Huzoor's Khilafat, he used to occasionally take some time to see local sites or to relax

for a few minutes but in recent years such outings had become rarer and rarer.

He said he had thought that on this trip, as it was Huzoor's first visit to Central America, Huzoor might take the opportunity to go out for some sightseeing but it had not been the case.

In fact, Ahmad bhai had even asked Huzoor if he would like to go on a short drive through the town for ten or fifteen minutes on the way back from the Mosque but Huzoor had declined.

It was true, even during the period that I have been travelling with Huzoor, I have seen that such outings have become increasingly infrequent. All possible time is given to the Jamaat and to Huzoor's work.

As we returned to our rooms, I wished that, if nothing else, Huzoor could see the volcano that was visible from within the hotel complex and just a few metres outside Huzoor's room. It was a beautiful view and so I decided that I would try to mention it to Huzoor in the morning.

Observing the view

The next morning, 24 October 2018, I did mention to Huzoor that perhaps he would take a few moments to see the volcano.

At the time, Huzoor did not say anything and so I was not sure if he was considering my suggestion or not!

Anyway, a few minutes later, most graciously, Huzoor came out of his residence and asked me what it was I wished for him to see.

Upon this, I walked ahead and took Huzoor to the point from where the view of the volcano was visible. *Alhamdolillah*, Huzoor liked the view and continued to look at it for a few moments. At that moment, not knowing if I would ever have the chance to be in the company of Huzoor in Guatemala again, I felt a strong desire to ask Huzoor if I could have a photo with him.

However, it occurred that if I asked Huzoor then others might come forward as well and Huzoor's time would be wasted because of me. Instead, I took a photo of Huzoor looking in the direction of the volcano.



And whenever I look at the photo it takes me back to those cherished moments in Huzoor's company on the other side of the world.

An affectionate moment

A few moments later, Huzoor walked out of the complex onto the main road, where the cars were ready for departure. Hundreds of Ahmadis had gathered to see Huzoor off. Many were waving flags and reciting poems.

At that moment, Huzoor took out his own phone and took a video and photos of the Ahmadis and smiled and waved in their direction. They were all delighted that Huzoor was filming them! Everyone was emotional, all joined in their love for Khilafat.

As I observed those scenes, it seemed to me as though Huzoor himself had enjoyed his visit to Guatemala and liked the country. *Alhamdolillah.*



After a silent prayer the Qafila departed from the hotel at 10.35am and proceeded to Guatemala's national airport for the return flight to Houston.

At the start, the drivers took a very slight detour, which meant that Huzoor and Khala Saboohi were able to see the main square of Antigua and to drive past some of the local buildings.

Stay at Guatemala Airport

According to the schedule, Huzoor was due to offer the Zuhr and Asr prayers combined at our Mosque in Houston. However, given the delay to the flight from Guatemala, the USA Jamaat were unsure if the Qafila would arrive at the Mosque in time to offer the Zuhr and Asr prayers.

Thus, after arriving at the Guatemalan airport, Huzoor's guidance was sought on this issue.

In reply, Huzoor said:

“We will make every effort to offer our prayers in Houston at the Mosque. If we can make it to the Mosque by 6pm it will still be daylight and we will be able to do Namaz in congregation. However, if it becomes impossible for us to arrive on time then you can inform the Houston Jamaat that they should do their Namaz.”

It was another example of how, even during travel, Huzoor makes every possible effort to offer congregational prayers in the Mosque.

It so happened that upon arriving in Houston, due to the delays, it became clear that we would not arrive at the Mosque in time and so, in the end, there was no choice other than to offer the Zuhr and Asr prayers en-route.

Upon arriving at the airport in Guatemala City, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi spent almost one hour in a *United Airlines* lounge at the airport, as they waited for the flight.

An unexpected posting!

During that period, Huzoor sat with Ameer Sahib USA and later Huzoor also called Munum Naeem sahib and my father-in-law, Mamu Majid to sit with them. I was very pleased Mamu Majid had the chance to spend some precious time in the company of Huzoor during which Huzoor asked further details about the hospital and gave instructions regarding its future development and management.

However, just as Huzoor was informed that the plane was ready to board, he gave one instruction that I was not at all prepared for!

Speaking to my father-in-law as he was leaving the lounge, Huzoor said:

“You should ensure that there is a proper handover in terms of the management of the hospital. It means you will have to stay on for some time and ensure everything is running smoothly before your duty is over. And if you need some help, I can send Abid here to Guatemala and he can assist you!”

As he said the last line, Huzoor smiled and I was fairly sure he was joking but regardless, I could not help but respond by saying:

“Huzoor, Guatemala is good but it is not that good that I should move here!”

Huzoor and the other people nearby laughed. Of course, my comment was not serious. As a Waqf-e-Zindighi we can be sent anywhere by Huzoor and it is our job to listen and obey.

Return to Houston

As Huzoor walked across the terminal, suddenly and quite unexpectedly a man came running towards him. The man introduced himself as a Government Minister of Guatemala before saying:

“Your Holiness, I am also taking a flight and I just happened to see you and so I had to come over to meet you and thank you for the hospital that you have built here.”



Thereafter, Huzoor continued to walk across the terminal and dozens of Ahmadis lined both sides of the airport waving to Huzoor. Many were on the same flight as Huzoor, whilst others were due to fly to other destinations but had waited at the terminal in the hope of having the chance to see off Huzoor.

The flight back to the United States departed at 1.35pm and landed in Houston at 5.10pm.

I was certain I would never forget the opportunity I had to be with Huzoor in Guatemala.

Even now, many months later, I find myself remembering the amazing scenes and the memorable landscape. I hope and pray that Huzoor is able to return there once again in the coming years, Insha'Allah.

As we arrived back in Houston, I looked forward to the next few days in Texas and then the rest of the tour back in Maryland.

End of Part 2

Any comments or feedback: abid.khan@pressahmadiyya.com