

Unmesh Desai AM

London Assembly Member for City and East



**City Hall
More London Estate
London
SE1 2AA**

Rt Hon Sajid Javid
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

11th April 2019

Dear Home Secretary,

I am writing to you with regards to the Government's hate crime policy and the places of worship security fund. I am aware that Kate Green MP has written to you to ask for a meeting on this issue and I have co-signed this letter. However, I am writing to set out my thoughts as the elected representative for my London Assembly constituencies of Barking and Dagenham, Newham, Tower Hamlets and the City of London.

The murder of 50 worshipers at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand has served as a tragic reminder of the dangers faced by those who simply wish to practice their faith at their local place of worship. In the aftermath of the attack, myself and other East London politicians attended vigils at mosques in the community. We also held extensive discussions with local Imams and other community leaders, listening to their concerns around what more they feel could be done here in London.

This included a security briefing organised by the Mayor of London at City Hall where different faith groups came together to share best practice. The Community Security Trust provided their expert advice on the measures they take to protect the Jewish community and police leaders provided practical guidance about security infrastructure.

I welcome the funding increase you have made for this year's places of worship fund. This is a positive step forward. However, myself and faith leaders across my constituency still hold concerns with regards to the current fund's accessibility. It has been reported¹ that in the first year of the fund being in place (2016/17), less than half of the £800,000 available for faith organisations to bid for was used, and that there was a similarly low take-up in the fund's second year.

I have heard first-hand that groups find the process for bidding for the funding difficult. However, I have noted that in the measures announced to coincide with the increase in this year's funding, you have stated that you will be working on measures to make improvements in this area.

¹ <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/8702/low-take-up-on-anti-hate-crime-fund-for-places-of-worship>

Please can you outline what these measures are and how you are going to better promote the scheme to increase awareness of it for faith groups?

Can you also provide assurances that any wastage from the scheme will be ringfenced, so that any funds that are not allocated due to low take-up remain available for the purposes of protecting places of worship and faith organisations?

Another proposal that has arisen from discussions with organisations in my constituency is the need for risk assessments to be carried out by the police at prominent faith organisations in the capital. This will help faith groups to understand what level of security and funding they require. In addition, there is a perception that the current system pits groups seeking funding against one another and local faith leaders have expressed to me their concerns with this.

A risk assessment of all faith groups would help to determine how much funding they are eligible for. This would also help to alleviate the accessibility and wastage issues with the current fund. I hope you can consider including this proposal as part of your work on the places of worship scheme.

Finally, I note that the Government has confirmed that it is “opening a consultation with faith representatives and organisations including the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, Tell MAMA, the Independent Advisory Group and other faith representatives and organisations, on improvements to existing policy to protect faith communities”.

I fully support this course of action and believe that we need to hear directly from faith representatives and communities to develop an improved approach to existing policy. In the aftermath of the Christchurch attacks, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has commendably pledged to fast track the hate crime law review currently taking place in New Zealand.

I would appreciate your assurances that the consultation and improvements to the UK’s existing policy that you have previously mentioned will be made with the same sense of urgency. Could you also please provide a timescale for how long you anticipate this process to take.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'U Desai', with a horizontal line underneath.

Unmesh Desai AM
Assembly Member for City & East London