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Massoud Shadjareh
Islamic Human Rights Commission
202 Preston Road
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29 March 2019

Dear Mr Shadjareh,

Thank you for your letter of 18 March addressed to the Home Secretary about the horrific attack on the Muslim Community in New Zealand and the protection of Muslims and other vulnerable groups in the UK. I have been asked by the Home Secretary to reply on his behalf.

Our thoughts and prayers are with all of those affected by this tragedy and the Government wants to reassure communities of all faiths across the UK who may feel worried about their own safety following this dreadful attack, that their security remains the highest priority.

The Government takes the issue of hate crime very seriously and the legislation in place protects those of all faiths and none. We recognise the concerns in communities at this very difficult time. The Home Secretary has undertaken calls with the Police and religious leaders to discuss further measures we can take to protect our mosques and communities from any threats here in the UK. The police have already put in place additional patrolling and security measures around mosques and other places of worship to enhance safety and reassure the public.

The Government is committed to working with faith groups and consulting them on existing measures that fund and protect all places of worship. We will be working with groups including the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, Tell MAMA and those representing other faiths to review what more can and should be done to protect faith institutions, and we will be consulting on this immediately.

Alongside the advice that is available through the National Counter Terrorism Security Office and the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure, we are also providing practical support to mosques. We have just announced an uplift of funding for the next year of the Places of Worship Protective Security Fund to £1.6 million. The fund will provide financial support to places of worship for the purchase of physical protective security measures such as fencing, lighting and access control. We will make it easier for Places of Worship to apply, reducing the administrative burden whilst widening the criteria so places no longer need to show they have already experienced hate crime. Our focus will be on helping those who are vulnerable to hate fuelled attacks.

We also recognise that physical security measures are only part of the solution. That is why the Government is committing £5 million over 3 years to provide security training for Places of Worship. We will be working closely with communities and faith leaders to develop this new scheme and will, as soon as possible, be opening up a competitive process.

With regards to the protection of protesters, the Police have a range of powers to deal with threatening and intimidating behaviour. How these powers are used, and the management of demonstrations are both operational matters for the police and matters I will not be able to comment on. However, the police have a positive duty to facilitate protest in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

I hope this goes some way to addressing your points and to reassure you that the Government is taking the security and safety of all its citizens seriously.

Kind regards,

J FANSHAWE

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