

THE HINDU MANIFESTO 2015



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Hindu Council UK - HCUK



info@hinducounciluk.org



@hinducounciluk

Registered Charity No: 1067682

Company Limited by Guarantee No: 3364710

Address all correspondence to:
Sanjay Jagatia
Director/Secretary General
Hindu Council UK (HCUK)

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British Hindu Manifesto for General Elections 2015

About Hindu Council UK:

Founded in 1994, the Hindu Council UK (HCUK) is one of the largest and established umbrella body representing Hindu Temples and Hindu Organisations in the UK, giving them an effective voice on policy matters with the Government & Statutory Bodies and enhancing mutual understanding among the major faiths in the UK.

Hindu Council UK acts as a resource centre and one of the main consultative & advisory bodies on the matters relating to the British Hindu community, culture and religion and regularly interacts with the Government, Statutory Departments, Schools, Colleges, Universities, Multi Faith Forums and City Councils.

Hindu Council UK also advises and consults on matters relating to interfaith dialogue, community consultations and capacity building within the Hindu Community, and advises and challenges legislation and policies that may affect the Hindu Community in the UK.

Emblematic of diversity and righteousness, Hinduism is one of the oldest recognised religions of the world. The Hindu Council UK embodies these virtues and believes that the United Kingdom has been at the vanguard for values that Hindus hold dear. Values such as Equality, the freedom of worship and the ideals of democracy.

However, as a sizable minority of 1.5% of the population (around 1 million Hindu's), Hindu representation and opinions and access to decision makers are noticeable by their absence despite being the 3rd largest religion in the UK. The revival of Hinduism (particularly among the younger generations) in the UK has increasingly led the Hindu community to question their stake and recognition in British society in regards to their ongoing contribution. This manifesto aims to put Hinduism on the agenda of Politicians and decision makers in the new Government (regardless of political party) and help the British Hindus have a distinct identity.

Objectives:

The manifesto is based on the Hindu Council UK's awareness of 'Local', 'UK-Wide' and 'International' issues that affect the Hindu Community in the UK, following consultations with our members and affiliates from across the UK.

We expect, as loyal citizens of the United Kingdom, for the next Government to recognize these issues as legitimate concerns that require both increased consultation and engagement with the UK Hindu Community.

The aims shall also help the new Government meet their Equality/Human Rights duties and objectives, these are:

1. Encourage the next government to address issues that concern and impact on Hindus and provide for Hindu representation locally and UK-wide. This will not only benefit the Hindu community, but also mark the UK Government as one with broader perspectives and cohesive ideas.
2. Encourage, create better relations and motivate disengaged and unrepresented Hindu community members to actively take part in the democratic process to make society a better place for all as per Hindu belief. We believe and wish to promote the integration of all the diverse groups within the broad paradigm of Hindus.
3. Put it to the new Government to actively pursue representation and engage with the Hindu community and commit to introducing measures that equitably include Hindus in the Government's decision making processes, including legislation (and foreign policy in reference to India and the Hindu Diaspora).

An Agenda for Action:

To ensure that there is true equality, accessibility and representation of the Hindu Community in the UK, we call on all Parties and the new Government to respond to, consult with, and perform the following Actions:

1. Democratic Inclusion

To pass into law Automatic Voter Registration of all citizens and compulsory voting to ensure that the disengaged have a voice within the society and understand the power and nature of the democratic process to do good for society. After all, we would be failing in our attempts to practice democracy in its vital essence, if we lack assimilating people from all backgrounds and incorporating their ideas into the social proceedings.

2. Funding for Social Cohesion and Integration

Provide proportionate funding to Hindu capacity building programmes and initiatives that encourage greater social cohesion and support for our Youth, Women and Elderly community members. Safety and health of these people should be a top priority for the upcoming Government and this is applicable to all communities across the UK. They are the torchbearers and the guardians of a society and we must ensure they receive their genuine rights. The well-being of these sections of the society are markers of quality of good life and thus we earnestly hope for initiatives that cater to the needs and the development of these people.



3. Temples

There is ample documented evidence that Hindu Temples act as a community hub and a platform for delivering, disseminating and encouraging public health, social care and community programmes for Hindu's and Non-Hindu's alike.

Unfortunately there has been a lack of political (both local and national) support for planning applications and access to grant funding for Temples. We ask the new Government to increase support in these matters.

4. Education

The new Government should address the lack of support for Hindu schools applications and investigate the potentially discriminatory impact of new regulations. For example, the Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014 that now forces schools to provide meat at lunchtime, which has an obvious and adverse impact for Hindu Schools or other schools who may wish to adopt a vegetarian ethos. The Hindu Council UK has in no uncertain terms highlighted our concerns to the Department of Education for not paying 'due regard' to the impact it has on Hindu schools, as Hindu schools will be forced to break the regulation or relinquish their Hindu ethos and practice. The statistics speak for themselves, at the start of September 2014 there were 6,848 state funded faith schools in England. The majority were primary schools; 6,210 or 37% of all state funded primaries. The 638 secondary faith schools made up 19% of all state funded mainstream secondaries.

The Hindu Council UK seeks a supplementary school policy that ensures a non-discriminatory British valued teaching to children along the lines of local mainstream school teaching guidelines. The new Government should make provision and continue to fund primary/secondary schools with special EAL grants to raise achievements of the Hindu EM pupils and newly arrived youngsters from the sub-continent of India. This grant should be an additional funding for schools, ring fenced for the BME and newly arrived pupils only.

Restrictions on the number of overseas students (particularly from India) joining the British universities for further education are to be lifted and the review of the high tuition fees undertaken to allow more overseas students to enter the UK Educational Institutions. There are UK-wide protests in several universities to bring down the overseas fees to that of the UK/EU fee but most of it has gone unattended. We urge the new Government to kindly look into the matter and provide us with viable solutions.

Recently, the OCR said it would be dropping GCSEs and A-levels in Gujarati, Turkish, Portuguese, Persian, and Dutch languages and AQA have announced the end of A-levels in Punjabi, Bengali, Polish and Modern Hebrew languages. Many Hindu Temples and Community Centres across the UK offer Gujarati language classes and the decision will have a huge impact on the community. Hindu Council UK believes the importance of languages for UK's future economic growth and views the removal of lesser-studied languages as potentially short-sighted. The new Government should take urgent action to ensure that these languages are not lost from the curriculum.



5. Health

Support the NHS to make create better health outcomes and encourage a better patient experience through training and awareness, particularly in relation to being religiously sensitive to the needs of Hindu patients.

Consider Ayurveda treatment and invest in clinical trials. Numerous Case studies have shown the benefits of Yoga and Meditation in alleviating a number of physiological and mental ailments (curtailing blood pressure obesity, diabetes, cardiac and other illnesses). The new Government through the National Health Care system should create a framework where clinicians and medical practitioners recommend Yoga & Ayurveda as an alternative, drug free, cost effective treatment for patients who wish to have this choice.



6. Legislation

The Hindu Council UK seeks a repeal of the caste clause legislation to recognise the complete lack of evidence, wider consultation and politically motivated action that led to the Caste clause. The passing of the clause can and will have a more detrimental effect on inter-community relations and will create resentment where none existed before. This is acting as an impediment in social progress and we hope the new Government will probe into this matter.

7. The term “Asian”

To revise using the term ‘Asian’ to describe all the various races and ethnicities of the Continent as it is no longer ‘fit for purpose’ and has led to confusion in the media and negative outcomes for those who are ‘lumped’ together under a ‘Blanket’ term. Blanket terms also prevent the celebration of each religion, race and actually prevent a cohesive society.

8. Grooming and forced Conversions

Religious faiths are individualistic, but by no means should be imposed upon persons. There should be stronger legal actions against perpetrators of grooming and forced conversions. Hindus have historically been the victims and targets of grooming and forced conversion. These victims are often young, vulnerable Hindu females.



9. Representation

Ensure all Political Parties and the new Government actively encourages engagement with the British Hindu community to ensure proper Hindu representation at all levels of Politics, Public Appointments and Board Representation.

Current research shows that ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the workplace. Although ethnic minorities make up 12% of the working-age population, only 1 in 16 of current FTSE 100 board members is from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background. Even in the public arena, only 0.8% of local councillors in England are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic; only 4.1% of MPs are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (as of 2010) and only 6.9% of public appointments are held by BAME individuals.

10. Defence of the Nation

The new Government and the Ministry of Defence recognise the contribution of Hindu soldiers in the Defence of the Nation by setting aside ring fenced funding to encourage increased recruitment amongst the UK Hindu population to the various branches of the Armed Forces. Thus creating an equal playing field for British Hindus to show their patriotism for the country they live in and contribute their unique Hindu identity in the Defence of the UK.

The new Government to respect the religious observations of Hindu soldiers. In addition, the diet of our soldiers and a requirement for healthy, nutritious and balanced food is understood by the MoD. However, the request for Jhatka meat (meat from an animal that has been killed by a single strike of a sword or axe to sever the head or to kill instantly, as opposed to ritualistically slow slaughter) must be accorded the same rights as any other religiously observed food.



11. Foreign Policy

The Government must recognise and label the events of 1990 against the indigenous Kashmiri Pandit/Hindus that have been massacred and forcibly evicted from their own land in Jammu and Kashmir, as an act of “genocide” and make these representations to the European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations. The Government must work with the various stakeholders (both Nation States and Local Players) to ensure a further act of Genocide is not enacted against the indigenous Kashmiri Pandit/Hindu community.

The new Government and international community must take effective measures to prevent the further commission of genocide and crimes against humanity. As witnessed against the Hindu community not only in Kashmir but other countries that actively discriminate against Hindus such as Malaysia, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and within the UK itself.

In particular the Hindu Council UK seeks a British Government led UN investigation on the alleged war crimes committed by the Sri Lanka Government on the Tamil population following the end of the civil war.

We also encourage the new Government to support India to be a permanent member the United Nations Security Council. India has a strong case as the world’s largest democracy, a financial and major contributor of United Nations Peacekeeping troops and can negotiate in the Middle East.

