

My Lords, Honourable Members, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my privilege this evening to read the award citation for the 2017 Institute of Jainology Ahimsa Award.

When we see images, and hear stories on the evening news of people around the world suffering as a result of poverty, conflict or natural disaster, we sympathise for a few moments, consider ourselves fortunate not to be suffering the same way, and then carry on with our evening's entertainment, oblivious again.

Some of us will respond to a relief donation drive by dropping some coins into boxes, texting a few pounds on our phones, and then feeling contented again.

Ravinder Singh is *not* that type of person. The end of the news item is *not* the end of the *story* for him; it is just the start. He does not expect that someone else is going to be there to help those people; he goes to help them. He travels out to where help is needed and brings hope to those that have all but lost it.

Ravinder Singh, a British Sikh, is a remarkable and inspirational leader. He arrived in the UK in 1981 at the age of 11 from India, and adapted to a western life, leaving his religious roots behind him. At the age of 25 he re-awakened his Sikh faith and found a calling within him to live the values of Sikhism, in particular the principle of *sewa* - serving humanity for the common good of all. He also embraced the words of Guru Nanak: "Accept all humans as your equals, and let them be your only sect". He made it his life's mission to put his faith into action and help those suffering, no matter who they are, where they are or what religion they follow.

In 1999, Ravinder Ji founded Khalsa Aid with the objective of relieving people in need or distress because of disaster, or social and economic circumstances. Working *directly* with those affected or through the agency of other charities, Khalsa Aid is active across the world, with over 25 International Emergency Relief missions launched in under 16 years.

It was present in the Andamans after the tsunami in 2004, in Haiti in 2010 and Nepal in 2015 after the devastating earthquakes, and in Kashmir after the floods of 2014. It has worked with Yazidi survivors of ISIS persecution in Iraq since 2014, providing a lifeline to

over 400 families. It has helped refugees fleeing the violence of the Syrian civil war in Lebanon, and victims of Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria. More recently, Khalsa Aid responded to the plight of Rohingya Muslim refugees in Bangladesh, providing a daily food service for up to 50,000.

In 2016, the BBC created a touching World News documentary about his work in Iraq titled “The selfless Sikh: Faith on the frontlines”. The documentary is testament to the commitment, compassion and humanity that Ravinder Singh embodies as he works in some of the most dangerous places on earth to bring some relief and hope to the forgotten Yazidi survivors.

Ravinder Ji’s direct approach to seva is refreshingly unorthodox. His journey began when he and a few friends led a small convoy of vans from Southall in West London to the war-ravaged heart of Yugoslavia after seeing the suffering of people in Kosovo on television. Driven only by a desire to help, they set out with no experience or insurance.

In 2014 after seeing the news about the plight of residents of Burrowbridge in Somerset, after heavy rain had caused extensive flooding, Ravinder Ji phoned a local publican he’d seen on the news and asked him what they needed. The next day Ravinder Ji and his team arrived in the village and worked non-stop to help residents protect their properties and livelihood, to their great surprise and enduring gratitude.

Ravinder Singh is a truly inspirational humanitarian worker who has reminded the world that selfless service and universal love are the pillars of the world’s great faiths. He has shown that we should go beyond allegiance and words, let our universal spirit feel the suffering of others and our let our humanity drive us to help them; a message the world dearly needs to listen to.

On behalf of the Institute of Jainology and the Jain community of the UK, I am pleased to announce that Ravinder Singh Sidhu is the recipient of the 2017 Institute of Jainology Ahimsa Award for his Outstanding Humanitarian Service.