



## **Sarbat statement on the UK Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill**

We at Sarbat are delighted to see the second reading of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill overwhelmingly voted in favour by a majority of MPs (400 to 175).

The Bill will extend the legal form of marriage to lesbian, gay and bisexual couples and permit religious groups to perform such marriages should they wish.

This is an important step towards equality for same sex couples. An overwhelming majority of the public now favour allowing same sex couples to marry, and support has increased rapidly. Most people now agree that it will strengthen, and not weaken the institution of marriage.

Sarbat actively promotes the rights of LGBT Sikhs. The Sikh faith enshrines equality for all and it does not discriminate against gay men or women who wish to make a life-long commitment to each other.

We believe that there is no room for discrimination within our community for being who we are. Indeed, Sikhism being a progressive religion, built upon the fundamental principle of "all being equal" – any such discrimination would be going against Sikhi itself.

There is no reason why a committed Sikh couple should not be allowed to get married in a Gurdwara. The Lavan (Sikh Wedding Hymns) are also non-gender specific, and so same-sex marriage is possible within the Sikh Dharam. However, most Gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship) in the current time would be reluctant to conduct a same-sex marriage because of an edict made by the Jathedar (Leader) of the Akal Takht in 2005 which banned same sex marriages.

Sarbat's view is that this guidance is flawed. It is based more on cultural and personal bias, rather than on a view of Gurbani (holy scriptures). Furthermore, the guidance issued is contrary to Sikh teachings.

This statement is not in the spirit of his appointment, which is to promote Sikhi values and principles and to issue guidance and statements that are rooted in Sikhi. We invite the Jathedar Sahib to issue a clarification of his original statement, explaining what Sikh principles and teachings he draws on to reach his conclusion.

The Jathedar has been heavily criticised in the past for making ill-judged comments. The case of the Delhi rape victim in December 2012, being one such example.

We remain optimistic that, this most basic of human rights, will be recognised by the larger Sikh community.

*Sarbat is a social and support group for and by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered Sikhs. We offer a platform for like-minded Sikhs from all walks of life, and aim to promote the LGBT Sikh cause in a fair and courteous manner.*

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