

Honorable Mayor and City Council Members,

Namaste from Chinmaya Mission London.

Chinmaya Mission London, is a registered Hindu religious organization, founded in 2011 and a registered charity in Canada. We are part of a worldwide mission with over 350 centres around the world, engaging in imparting Hindu education to children and adults. In London we run classes on Sunday for children and classes for adults through the week in addition to organizing special events, retreats, summer and spring camps etc. To learn more about us please visit <https://www.chinmayalondon.org/>

We have over 150 students at our centre in London, who study Hinduism and its scriptures every weekend. As a Hindu religious organization in London, promoting and teaching Hinduism to preserve its traditions and culture is integral to our existence.

We recently learned of a poll published by the City with 2 options to ban fireworks in a backyard setting. Option B essentially eliminates or denies the rights to Hindus in London to their religious freedom. This is very easy to do with a vote, at the behest of lobby groups while ironically we talk about preserving traditions and culture. We were disappointed by this attempt to erase a very important ritual from our Diwali traditions, in a family setting. Diwali is the largest Hindu festival that brings together friends and families. Fireworks that typically include sparklers, spinning wheels etc are something that our children associate with Diwali and eagerly look forward to this day each year. Banning backyard fireworks takes away this 800 year old tradition that symbolizes light over darkness, triumph of good over evil.

We see this as

- Infringement on the religious rights and freedom of Hindus in London
- Denial of an important ritual from a family centric ancient festival
- Denial of joy, vibrancy from one of the most festive celebrations
- Loss of an opportunity for our future generations to learn our traditions in an authentic manner

Hinduism is one of the only surviving ancient civilizations and it has gone through its share of attempts to erase its traditions. It is rooted in the tenets of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" meaning the world is one family. We are a peaceful community contributing significantly to the growth of London in all ways.

We appreciate the City's concerns regarding noise and air pollution amongst others. Our group will be representing the public participation meeting on Aug 15 when these concerns will be addressed. We are fully committed to upholding the well-being of our city and its inhabitants and to this end, offer to educate our community about responsible and safe firework usage and participate in the cleanup efforts after the celebrations.

We are confident that the City will take our concerns seriously and honour the City's commitment to preserve cultural traditions and diversity in London.

I also give consent to publish this letter as required for the public hearing

Sincerely,

Chinmaya Mission London

Sreelatha Varapravan
On behalf of the Board of Directors