

Warning for British Pilgrims – No Medical Hajj Delegation this year

United Kingdom – Monday 4th October, 2010

The Council of British Hajjis (the CBH) has warned of the dangers posed by confidence tricksters and con men for pilgrims intending Hajj “British Muslims planning to travel to Makkah this year for Hajj have been targeted by conmen in the past and there's no reason to think this year will be any different.” All accredited tour operators must have an ATOL licence which means that, even if the airline is bankrupt, the traveller's rights are protected.

This year the Foreign Office will not be sending the British Hajj Delegation of medical doctors to Makkah, which could see British pilgrims put at a greater risk of not having help on demand. For the past 10 years Lord Adam Patel has chaired and led a delegation of 8 doctors who work round the clock to assist British pilgrims and provide consular support.

Lord Patel said “I am disappointed to see that this Government has opted not to send the Hajj delegation but instead to offer consular support from Jeddah. It is clear from the FCO's own research that the benefit the British Hajj Delegation provides is far greater than the costs to the NHS if a pilgrim returns ill and other costs associated with treatments, costs in terms of sickness leave to businesses and risk to family of friends of contracting any illnesses bought back and the associated costs in treating them too”.

Between 3 - 5,000 consultations are carried out by dedicated volunteer GP's from the UK over a 3 week period.

Dr Mohammed Jiva who has been on the past 5 delegation raised his concerns “It is a shame that in the current financial climate the government has opted for a short sighted approach of cost saving which could ultimately cost the NHS much more when pilgrims return with a new or exacerbation of pre existing illnesses. The doctors over the past decade have taken holidays or privately funded other doctors to cover their work at their surgeries so they could undertake a role in the British Hajj Delegation in a voluntary charitable manner. Although the Saudi authorities provide healthcare facilities during the Hajj period we have been aware of concerns related to access to healthcare as all the pilgrims from throughout the world would rely on the Saudi facilities. There is no home visiting service equivalent to what the British Hajj Delegation provided for those pilgrims too ill to travel and reflecting on a major incident few years ago which resulted in mortalities as well as amputations and severe

injuries, the Saudi facilities did not have the manpower or facilities to look after these pilgrims in the community, the delegation undertook clinic and home visits to support and change dressings whilst the pilgrims completed their Hajj. Ultimately the British Pilgrims will be losing out.

Rashid Mogradia, CEO of the CBH added to these concerns, "For a number of years we have been working closely with the FCO's British Hajj Delegation, Department of Business and the CAA to raise awareness of rogue and unscrupulous tour operators exploiting travellers and deliberately targeting the Muslim community by claiming they specialise in Hajj travel. They often do not have an Air Tours Operators License and are therefore breaking UK law and not providing legal protection for travelers.

News that the Hajj delegation will not be there will only encourage these people to exploit Hajj travelers once again, putting back the hard work already undertaken in cleaning this mess up.

We have written to the Foreign Secretary, Baroness Warsi and other key cabinet members and MP's urging the need to send the Hajj delegation to assist British citizens abroad, we have yet to receive a response.

In the meantime we will continue to educate pilgrims on health and safety issues, to book via reputable ATOL protected tour operators and raising awareness through our seminars and website".

Ends.

--

Notes to Editors

The CBH is a not-for-profit charity working for the welfare of British Pilgrims and Hajj & Umrah service providers. It is the only Hajj & Umrah specific charity working at grass roots with local and national partners, the NHS, and government departments to raise health and safety awareness and was the first in the country to offer free hajj clinics and vaccinations.

The CBH will be exhibiting at the Global Peace and Unity Event at the Excel, London 23rd-24th October, 2010 at the first ever Hajj and Islamic Tourism Expo. For more info visit www.the-cbh.org.uk or www.facebook.com/cbhuk or call 0845 833 4145 with any concerns, help or advice.