

Bohra imam's visit puts British girls at risk of mutilation, warn FGM campaigners

From the [Guardian](#)

Mufaddal Saifuddin who is the *syedna*, or leader, of the Dawoodi Bohra community, a sect of Shia Islam with 1.2 million followers worldwide, will give sermons in front of tens of thousands of people at Northolt mosque in London between 29 July and 7 August.



📷 Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin, leader of Dawoodi Bohra Muslims, in 2019. UK immigration policy

Saifuddin, who has publicly stated his support for FGM, was granted a visa despite UK immigration policy prohibiting supporters of the practice from visiting the UK. It is an

offence in England and Wales for any person to perform FGM, punishable by up to 14 years in prison and/or a fine.

A group of anti-FGM activists and survivor-led organisations has written to Liz Truss and Priti Patel, as well as Andy Burnham, mayor of Manchester, and Sadiq Khan, mayor of London, calling on the UK government to revoke Saifuddin's visa unless he publicly denounces FGM.

In 2015, Saifuddin's office issued letters to his followers in

countries where FGM is illegal, including the UK, informing members not to perform the practice. However, in [a public sermon](#) a year later, he stated: "It must be done." Supporters of Saifuddin claimed his remarks had been misinterpreted.

In an open letter in 2016, an anti-FGM organisation within the Bohra community criticised his comments, noting that: "His declaration that Bohras must continue the act [of FGM], irrespective of opposition from various quarters, indicates that Bohra authorities were not being sincere" when they publicly urged congregations to stop the practice.

Masooma Ranalvi, who is part of the Dawoodi Bohra community in India, a survivor of FGM, and founder of WeSpeakOut, a survivor-led organisation, said: "It's important for the UK government to take note of the fact that this is a man who is openly perpetuating and propagating a practice which is illegal in the UK. [His visit] will lead to a resurgence in [FGM]."

WeSpeakOut is planning a protest outside the mosque in north-west London on Friday 5 August.

FGM is inflicted on girls from the Bohra community usually between the ages of six and nine years old. It usually takes the form of Type 1 FGM (partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and/or the clitoral hood) or Type 4 FGM (pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterising the female genitals), as classified by the World Health Organization.

According to one survey, about 75% of girls in the Dawoodi Bohra community in India have undergone FGM, according to Ranalvi, who said she had anecdotal evidence that the practice continues in the UK, despite being illegal. Saifuddin's visit coincides with the school summer holidays, when many British girls are sent abroad to be cut.