

HOUSE OF LORDS APPOINTMENTS COMMISSION

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Ms Chi Onwurah MP
Shadow Cabinet Office Minister
24, 7-15 Pink Lane
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 5DW

22 August 2014

Dear Ms Onwurah

Thank you for your letter of 14 August and your enquiry about the recent conferment of a party-political life peerage upon Ranbir Suri.

Personal information is provided to the Commission by the political parties and nominees themselves in confidence, and as a result it would not be appropriate to go into details of the Commission's consideration of any individual nominee. However, I can confirm that the vetting checks the Commission carried out in relation to the 22 individuals whose peerages were announced on 8 August did not reveal anything that would make them inappropriate for appointment on the grounds of propriety.

It may be helpful if I set out the Commission's role in more detail. The Commission was established on a non-statutory basis by the Government in 2000 to advise the Prime Minister on appointments to the House of Lords. Since that time, successive Prime Ministers have asked it to discharge two distinct functions.

The first is to make recommendations on the appointment of individuals as non-party-political cross bench peers on merit, based on a rigorous, multi-stage, assessment of their achievements and their ability to contribute effectively to the work of the House. The Commission publishes the criteria it uses to make this assessment and sets out, in the interests of openness and transparency, how the process is conducted and why an individual has been recommended for appointment.

The Commission's second role is to vet all nominees to the House, including those put forward by the political parties, advising the Prime Minister if it has any concerns about the propriety of a nominee. In this context, propriety means that the nominee is in good standing

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in the community in general and with the relevant public authorities in particular; and that the past conduct of the nominee would not reasonably be regarded as bringing the House into disrepute.

The Commission is not asked to comment on the suitability of those nominated by the political parties. This is a judgement for the parties alone.

The Commission carries out a range of checks with relevant Departments and Agencies before providing its advice. As part of those checks, the Commission requires the parties and nominees to provide details of any donations, loans or credit arrangements to or with a political party. Clearly, the making of a donation or loan to a political party cannot of itself be a reason for a peerage. On the other hand, nominees should not be prevented from receiving a peerage just because they have made donations or loans. The Commission addresses this issue by satisfying itself that a donor could have been a credible political nominee if he or she had made no financial contribution.

To help the Commission make this judgment, the parties provide a detailed citation from the party leader giving the reason for the nomination. I should stress that the Commission requires this citation to be far more comprehensive than the short description of those nominated for a peerage released by the Prime Minister's office on 8 August. The Commission is of the view that there would be merit in explaining in more detail the reasons why individuals have been appointed to the political benches – as the Commission does for those it recommends to the cross benches. However, this is a matter for the political parties.

I am grateful for this opportunity to clarify how the Commission works and, as the issues are of general interest, I propose to make this response available on the Commission's website.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kakkar', with a checkmark-like flourish at the end.

The Lord Kakkar

Chairman

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