

FAITH COMMUNITIES RESPONDING TO THE AUGUST 2011 RIOTS

[Note accompanying Inter Faith Network for the UK Circular 17/11]

The response of members of England's faith communities to the recent riots has been on a remarkable scale. Here are just a few of the stories:

Faith communities across the country have been opening the doors of their places of worship, offering food, drink and facilities to recharge mobile phones to those who have lost their homes; providing cups of tea to the Police, other emergency workers and clean up teams; and encouraging prayers for peace.

Faith community leaders in many local areas have issued statements appealing for calm, condemning acts of violence and vandalism, and encouraging members of their communities to get involved in community clean-up operations. They have also been drawing on their knowledge of local communities to initiate discussion about the causes of the riots and ways forward. National faith communities and their leaders have offered their reflections too.

In Tottenham in North London, a 'Vigil of Hope' was held on Monday at a local parish church, with members of many Christian communities in the area, as well as Jewish and Muslim representatives, in attendance. Tonight in Manchester, following consultation by Faith Network 4 Manchester (FN4M) with colleagues of all faiths and community representatives, a vigil is taking place in the city centre.

Following the tragic deaths of three young Muslim men in Birmingham on Tuesday, Tariq Jahan, the father of one of the young men, Haroon Jahan, said: "Today we stand here to plead with all the youth to remain calm, for our communities to stand united. As we stand here today, this is not a race issue. The family has received messages of sympathy and support from all parts of the community – all faiths, all colours and backgrounds. Please respect the memory of our sons and the grief of our family and loved ones by staying away from trouble and not going out tonight. Basically – I lost my son. Blacks, Asians, Whites - we all live in the same community. Why do we have to kill one another? What started these riots? What's escalated them? Why are we doing this? I lost my son. Step forward if you want to lose your sons. Otherwise, calm down and go home."

After the deaths of the young men in Birmingham, young members of the local Muslim and Sikh communities gathered for a silent vigil and prayers, before debating how to respond. Following a heated and emotional debate, in which a minority of those present called for revenge, both communities affirmed their solidarity with one another, and dispersed peacefully, determined not to risk further violence.

In London and Birmingham, Sikh communities gathered together to stand guard over their temples and local communities and, in Southall in London, also guarded a local mosque during evening prayers. In Birmingham, a tiny media operation run by four Sikh men called Sangat-TV kept people around the world informed about what was

happening in the city, with mainstream media outlets eventually re-broadcasting their coverage. In London, Muslims leaving evening prayers fended looters off from local amenities.

Today the Birmingham Faith Leaders' Group issued a statement urging all the city's communities to join together to rebuild a just, harmonious and peaceful city

In Leicester, some of the faith leaders gathered at short notice this morning – organised by the St Philip's Centre – to walk around the damaged sites and speak to shop traders and the Police and help clear up where required. Their presence was visible and appreciated, and was covered by BBC Radio Leicester and the Leicester Mercury.

Please find below a selection of links showing a cross-section of some of the coverage:

Catholic Herald: Archbishop of Westminster asks Christians to pray for all affected by the riots, and to help local communities to recover
<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2011/08/10/archbishop-says-he-is-shocked-by-riots/>

Archbishop of Canterbury: speech during House of Lords debate on riots
<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2152/archbishop-speaks-in-house-of-lords>

The Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board: statement condemning riots, and appealing for calm, giving practical advice
<http://www.minab.org.uk/projects/46-community-cohesion/182-disorderly-behaviour-witnessed-in-the-uk>

Board of Deputies of British Jews: calls for unity and concerted effort by communities in addressing problems they are facing
http://www.boardofdeputies.org.uk/page.php/Board_Comments_on_UK_Riots/456/103/3

Muslim Council of Britain: press release condemning riots and calling for members to assist with clean-up operations
http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=457

Telegraph: article arguing that Britain's many immigrant communities – most of which share a strong religious commitment – have been a shining example to the rest of British society <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/8693558/Immigrants-love-this-country-more-than-we-do.html>

Diocese of London: the Bishop of London reflects on the role churches have played in London in recent days

<http://communications.london.anglican.org/ministrymatters/2011/08/news-from-visits-to-affected-areas/>

PBUU: report on Croydon Mosque and Islamic Centre opening its doors, offering shelter and food to the displaced

<http://www.pbuu.net/News-Views-Details.aspx?nwID=14>

Ecumenical News International: reporting on the role faith communities have played in helping local communities affected by rioting. Focuses on Christian, Jewish and Muslim responses

<http://www.eni.ch/featured/article.php?id=5070>

Birmingham Faith Leaders' Group: a press statement affirming the need for people of all faiths to work together for peace

http://www.birmingham.anglican.org/content/content_yourchurch_news_story.asp?id=739

Anglican Journal: an Ecumenical vigil held in Tottenham, attended by Christians and by members of the Jewish and Muslim faiths

<http://www.anglicanjournal.com/nc/news-update-items/article/ecumenical-response-grows-to-london-riots-9957.html>

Independent Catholic News: further reporting on the vigil in Tottenham

<http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=18748>

ACNS: reporting on the vigil in Tottenham

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/digest/index.cfm/2011/8/8/Tottenhams-Faith-Leaders-to-Host-Vigil-of-Hope>

The Jewish Chronicle: reports on the vigil for peace in Tottenham

<http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/52935/interfaith-unity-tottenham-riots-continue>

Evangelical Alliance: report on prayer vigil held in Kilburn, and some practical advice for Christians wishing to help their local community

<http://www.eauk.org/articles/prayer-for-london.cfm>

East London Mosque: reports on rioting in the local area, and appealing for members of the community to stay at home and remain calm.

<http://www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk/news/338>

Church of England: produced a special 'Prayer for Peace in Our Communities'. This page also contains links to statements by the Archbishop of Canterbury and many other Bishops

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2011/08/a-prayer-for-peace-in-our-communities.aspx>

Churches Together in England: round-up of statements from member churches

http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/275438/Churches_Together_in/News_Events/News/The_Churches_respond.aspx

Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs Group of CTE: Press statement offering ideas for a way forward

<http://www.cte.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=76624>

Islamic Cultural Centre: press release condemning riots and urging support for local communities

<http://www.iccuk.org/images/Press%20release%20on%20riots.pdf>

Asia One: members of the Sikh community in Southall talk about why they are defending their community, and the Sikh commitment to only using reasonable force in cases of self defence

<http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/World/Story/A1Story20110811-293914.html>

Federation of Muslim Organisations: press release giving details of various Muslim responses to the riots, and about Sikhs in Southall guarding the Mosque during prayers

<http://www.fmo.org.uk/component/newsfeeds/56>

Guardian: reporting on the role of Sangat-TV in providing coverage of disturbances in Birmingham

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/aug/10/birmingham-riots-sangat-tv>

Guardian: Muslim and Sikh young people in Birmingham stand vigil following the tragic deaths of three young Muslim men in the area.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/aug/11/uk-riots-birmingham-muslim-sikhs>

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