

‘Tough
to Talk?’

*The
Inter Faith
Network
for the
United Kingdom*



Report on the
2014 National
Meeting

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‘TOUGH TO TALK?’

Report of the 2014 National Meeting

held on Monday 29 September 2014
at the Priory Rooms, 40 Bull St, Birmingham B4 6AF

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Welcome and Introduction

Vivian Wineman

Co-Chair, Inter Faith Network for the UK

Mr Vivian Wineman, Co-Chair, Inter Faith Network, welcomed participants and a brief period of silence was observed, remembering in thanks the work of all those in this country and around the world who work for greater understanding and cooperation between faiths.

He explained that the meeting was taking place in a space which was both a dedicated conference centre and a Quaker place of meeting. The Quakers, or 'Society of Friends' were, through their relevant Committee, a longstanding member body of IFN. This was the 2014 National Meeting of the Inter Faith Network for the UK and people from around the UK and from the different types of IFN's member bodies were present.

The National Meeting offered a chance to explore a wide range of issues which could be difficult to tackle in inter faith contexts and to reflect on how these were being approached around the UK in different settings. Within the room was an enormous breadth of knowledge and good practice to bring to what was at any time a challenging agenda, but perhaps now particularly so.

Mr Wineman explained that Bishop Richard Atkinson, who had been appointed as IFN's Co-Chair from the Christian Community in July, would be joining the afternoon session; in his role as Bishop of Bedford he had a longstanding civic commitment that morning which he needed to honour.

The Co-Chairs had invited Vice-Chair colleagues to join them at the table and would be inviting their comment at various points. Dr Kishan Manocha, in his role as current Chair of the General Purposes Subcommittee would be facilitating the session with Michelle Russell of the Charity Commission.

He closed by saying that the day's topics were challenging and sometimes painful ones and it was particularly important that the way they were addressed together reflected the principles in IFN's document *Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs*. This was at the back of each National Meeting programme.

“Talking when it’s tough”

Ramesh Pattni

General Secretary, Hindu Forum of Britain and Co-Chair,
Hindu Christian Forum

Vivian Wineman: We have, this morning, three speakers who have a special contribution to make on this topic. Firstly, I’d like to introduce Ramesh Pattni who is the General Secretary of the Hindu Forum of Britain and Co-Chair of the Hindu Christian Forum, who will open the day with reflections on some of the contexts in which it can be ‘tough to talk’ and ways of approaching difficult issues.

Ramesh Pattni: Thank you, Chair. I shall be taking a broad approach to the question of “talking when it’s tough”. I will address the question of why it can be tough to talk and consider what are the approaches which people take in these situations and what are the things which can lead us onwards.

As many of you will know Hindus are celebrating, at the moment, the 9 day festival of Navaratri literally translated as the Nine Nights. And there is an interesting metaphor in this festival which may be worth considering; it represents a journey towards the triumph of goodness through the three major feminine powers representing the consorts of the trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. There is in this metaphor a sense of dynamic between creation, destruction, and sustenance personified in the divine goddess Durga – which dynamic in itself is a powerful moment towards a state of liberation.

Talking when it is tough is about having a dynamic where there is a potential for destruction of misconceptions, a creation of a

space in which new patterns can emerge and sustaining of that which is of essence.

I am talking about genuine dialogue – a dialogue which is at the same time a sustained dialogue that is carefully defined but also an open-ended process that focuses on changing relationships within a community that may be strained along ethnic, racial, religious or other lines.

These relationships are typically strained by deep rooted differences over identity, interest, power, misconceptions and destructive habits of interaction. Instead of just discussing surface issues sustained dialogue probes deep into the background and experiences of individuals in the group allowing them to understand one other’s behaviours and perceptions.

Dr Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, has said, “The conversation of interfaith dialogue is always one where we look eagerly and expectantly for enrichment. We’re not playing for victory, we’re seeking understanding from one another... by learning the depth of one another’s commitment and vision – dialogue and depth is what we all hope for.”¹

Dialogue is an ongoing process as with drawing a circle. One has to start the process at some point. A dialogue consists of three stages or has three periods: the period preceding the dialogue: the period during the dialogue itself: and the period after the dialogue and before the next dialogue. It is

1. <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2256/launch-of-hindu-christian-forum-an-opportunity-for-dialogue-and-depth#sthash.uqSj51az.dpuf> Address at launch of the Hindu Christian Forum

assumed that all who enter into a dialogue are doing so freely. There can be no coercion in dialogue; a dialogue cannot be a monologue, a lecture, or a sermon – a means to convert or force the other to change his views. A dialogue is a means of learning from the other and the ultimate dialogue, following the Hindu tradition, I think is a silent one where the participants have reached a high degree of sensitivity where words are no longer necessary.

It could be said that there are four answers to the question, “What is inter-religious dialogue?”

Firstly, it can be seen as about communication. From this perspective, one seeks to make inter faith dialogue productive by analysing and seeking to solve religious differences in terms, not of truth but of communication problems and dynamics.

Secondly, inter-religious dialogue can be approached as an intellectual strategy, with the idea that rational dialogue is the paradigm by which social systems can be effectively built in this pluralistic day and age.

Thirdly, dialogue can be seen as an end in itself. In a world where we cannot agree on ultimate religious principles, political philosophies, economic strategies, or anything else – because every attempt we make at such is constantly being changed by the cultural and historical forces – the only permanent stake in the ground is dialogue itself where truth is constantly unfolded and changed by ongoing conversation. This is a sustained dialogue where we need to keep on talking when it is tough.

Finally, inter-religious dialogue can be understood as an expression of a fundamental emotion or attitude toward people who believe differently on the most important aspects of life. It can be tough to talk with others who may have a substantially different frame of beliefs and attitude which governs their lives.

It may be helpful to consider what is entailed when we communicate about anything to anyone. Here we return to communication. Communication plays a critical role in any dialogue; without it social interaction is impossible. Humans are not like billiard balls whose tendency toward movement can be predicted by physical laws of motion, independent of any stimulation from within the ball itself. Instead, we actively seek information from our environment in order to decide how to act in response to the conditions in that environment.

Communication is critical to our ability to act purposefully on our social and material environment which in turn influences us. Communication is an interactive process between parties and it is critical to understand how information is received, how, when it is transmitted and how well it is received.

We can identify three interrelated ways of communication. Firstly, the ‘argumentation’ level, which consists of a set of moves designed to present a convincing discussion and which has a good chance of doing so if all parties to the conversation share the same basic communication rules and boundaries. Secondly, the ‘proclamation’ level, which is engaged when it becomes obvious that the topic of conversation leads the participants into areas where there is little or no agreement over the rules and the boundaries of communication. This is when worldviews differ sufficiently that arguments and presuppositions like gears unattached to one another do not mesh. It is clear at this point that the argumentation level of this cause is ineffective. The goal of this kind of communication is quite different from the argumentation level. It is not to verify an argument but, rather, to convert the conversation partner to looking at the world in a completely different way.

If conversion does not take place at the second level of proclamation then a third type of communication is engaged that allows for

a possible change of rules: that of 'disclosure'. For the purpose of conversation it does away with the boundaries and accepts all possibilities of transcendence. It can be even tougher at this point because it means disclosing the agendas behind what we are talking about.

What we have to try to do is to avoid what many do when faced with these three different kinds of discourse, that is choose one and say that it is the only one or, if not the only one, it is the only one we should practise. I believe that each one of these levels of discourse has its place for the purpose of inter-religious dialogue and needs to be included to broaden even the experience of dialogue itself.

Here we come to the heart of what I mean 'tough' in the talking. One of the main reasons why talking gets tough and there arise strong sentiments and emotions, in the process of talking, is, I think because there is conflict of values. Values communicate our principles and beliefs about how we think the world should be. These principles represent who we are as people and encountering people with different values may threaten our own sense of self-identity itself, thereby producing higher levels of distancing, intolerance and egocentrism which leads to more competitive rather than cooperative attitudes. Furthermore parties in a value conflict tend to be less desirous of seeking resolution.

In order to attain mutual understanding and communicating action effectively and pragmatically, all of three levels of communications are of importance in the whole process of dialogue. This approach takes the view that although talking is tough successful communication is still possible. It sees, underlying the whole process of dialogue, an important dimension of progressive relationship building through a coming together and deciding to engage in dialogue, mapping and naming problems and relationships, setting a direction for

change, building scenarios and acting together.

The building of relationships in this way is a key element in sustained dialogue. Another key ingredient is trust that takes us beyond fear and suspicion. Trust is a determinant of human behaviour. The level of trust between individuals and groups varies with context and the style of experience. Many feelings and attitudes, including the attitude of trust and mistrust, characterise whole groups of nations of people and affect their relations with each other. When groups of nations distrust each other they tend to interpret each other's actions, words, and policies in a negative way – just as individuals do when they distrust each other and are fearful and suspicious. They are ready to take offense and hesitant or unwilling to cooperate.

Talking when it's tough means a certain amount of trust is required even to start. Building relationships needs to be an ongoing process. Each meeting builds up from the previous one, allowing the group to develop a cumulative agenda with questions sharpened and carried from one meeting to the next, to build a common body of knowledge that participants can test between meetings and to learn to talk and work analytically together. Repeated gatherings allow us time to build relationships, better understand one another, realise growth, and develop a network through which one gets committed to change within the group or the community.

Mahatma Gandhi said that one must be the change that one wants and that it is in the minds of men that wars begin and that peace is established. Sustaining the dialogue when things are tough is the way to establish this change within and action in the world outside.

In talking when it's tough the idea of progressive relationships is essential and we can think in terms of some important elements which have a part to play in this. Firstly, identity defined in terms of the totality

of life experiences that has brought a person or a group to the present. Identity is a social construction; it is also a political formulation. Identity is reflective of an environment or culture imbued with particular values and reflective of our own emotions. Secondly, one's self interests – both concrete and psychological. These are what people really care about, what brings them into the same space and into a sense of their dependence on one another, interdependence to achieve their goals. Thirdly, power – defined not only as a control over superior resources and actions of others, but as a capacity of acting together. Fourthly, perceptions and stereotypes – which sometimes make it tough to move beyond. Finally, the patterns of interaction, distant and close, among those involved including respect for certain limits on behaviour in dealing with others. There needs to be an awareness of how these elements help or hinder the building of good relations.

Let me end with a prayer which is said to be the beginning of a dialogue between the guru and the disciple in the Hindu tradition and which I believe identifies key elements of deep learning of one another through an inner sensitivity and awareness. This is a very special relationship and has a potential of transformation of individuals within this context of teaching and learning. But it has also wisdom which can help when talking is tough. This prayer says: “May we be protected together. May we be nourished together. May we create strength in each other. May our study and conversation be filled with brilliance and light. And may there be no hostility between us.” *Om shanthi shanthi shanthi*

Bonds of trust and co-operation in tough times

The Revd Alan Bayes
Chair, Inter-faith Council for Wales

Vivian Wineman: We shall be hearing from two speakers on this topic and we shall take questions and comments after they have both spoken. The first is the Revd Alan Bayes, who is Chair of the Inter-faith Council for Wales and is also the Interfaith Officer for the Bishop of Swansea and Brecon.

The Revd Alan Bayes: Thank you. I have been asked to speak on polarisation in society and responding to this to mitigate the dangers, drawing on our experience in the Welsh context.

Recent geo-political events have fuelled a growth in extremism in British society and, indeed, across Europe – for example, the conflict between Israel and Palestine in Gaza; and the growth of terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria, such as ISIL with its evil genocide of innocent civilians including Christians and others. This has manifested itself in a number of movements – anti-Semitism across Europe with physical attacks on Jews and firebombs at synagogues; the radicalisation of young Muslims, over 3,000 across Europe who have joined groups such as ISIL; and the growth of far right groups, such as EDL, in the UK who have targeted mosques and members of the Muslim community.

It is vitally important in these troubled times that good inter faith relations are seen as the key to countering this destructive narrative and the work undertaken by many of the organisations represented here today are crucial in ensuring that the UK is a cohesive society.

In my talk I shall outline some recent UK Government responses to these issues and critique of this. I shall then examine some causes of radicalisation and how we are responding to these in Wales.

The Government issued a paper in 2013 called ‘Tackling extremism in the UK’ which made a number of key recommendations. It began by stating that “*The UK deplores and will fight terrorism of every kind, whether based on Islamist, extreme right-wing or any other extremist ideology. We will not tolerate extremist activity of any sort...*” It defines extremism as the following: “*vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs*” and the significance of that is part of the definition.

Some of the key recommendations of the report were to disrupt the work of extremists by making sure that organisations have the necessary support and advice to confront them; to counter extremist narratives and ideology by tackling propaganda on the web; to prevent radicalisation through schemes such as the ‘Prevent’ and ‘Channel’ programmes; and to create better integration and communities through supporting projects that bring communities together and stop extremism in institutions such as schools, universities and prisons.

This strategy sounds good on first reading, however, can sometimes appear to be biased

towards tackling Islamist extremists and not really tackling all forms of extremism in society today. In a recent report on the Today programme on BBC Radio 4, a senior adviser on right wing extremism warned that the Government is putting an emphasis on the global Jihadist agenda while ignoring the growth of the far right in the UK. He argued that Islamist extremism in the Middle East has led to an increase in membership of far right groups with increased abuse against Muslims in the UK. He believes that the Government has underestimated the threat posed by the far right. The organisation Tell Mama, which monitors anti-Islamic hatred, has received 219 reports of abusive incidents targeted against Muslims in England in the same month as the beheading of the US journalist James Foley.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue has argued that the Government must engage more with the far right. However, the Foreign Office still insists that the Prevent Strategy tackles all forms of extremism, including the far right.

In Wales we have recently set up a new Task Group to look at hate crimes which draws on representatives from right across the community and we hope this will help in dealing with some of the incidents that we have been seeing.

What causes people to be radicalised in the first place? Well, there are a number of causes to this deep problem in society.

Ed Husain and Maajid Nawaz, Co-Founders of the Quilliam counter-extremist think tank are former radicals. They believe that the combination of extremist political ideology, a warped view of Islam and anger at Western actions in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan is largely to blame. Nawaz believes it is vital to stop young people becoming radicalised. He has admitted that it is a very difficult process and requires many people from different parts of the community to be engaged in the kind of tough talking and

dialogue that we have already heard is necessary to address these issues.

Others believe the best way to tackle a problem is by building up good contact within local communities to identify young people who seem to be particularly angry and are prone to being radicalised and to expressing violence thoughts and start to challenge this in more positive ways.

A recent New Scientist article looked at the science behind what makes people become Jihadists. It suggests that those who study terrorist behaviour claim that the vast majority of such people from the West are radicalised at home, influenced by their own circle of friends and are not brainwashed or coerced into joining as is popularly believed. Other factors that are significant in this process are personal grievance, such as a crisis of identity that can open up a new religious or political ideology; a sense of their cultural in-group as being persecuted; moral outrage at injustice in society; and access to a politically active network. Some have been influenced by hard line preachers but that is not seen as the principal driving force.

Good community relations, good engagement by people locally through inter faith groups can again be a way of addressing some of these issues.

So, what then about the Welsh context? How are we responding to this in Wales? Over the last few years we have had a number of important Christian Muslim dialogues that have been initiated by the Revd Robin Morrison, who was the Archbishop's Adviser on Church and Society. We have also had a number of interesting lectures recently, including one that was organised by the chaplaincy at the University of Glamorgan in conjunction with local members of the Muslim community by Dr John Morrow who has written a book called *Six Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of his Time*. In this lecture he talked about the fact that the Prophet Muhammad had these

special covenants to protect Christian communities to allow freedom of religious expression. This is an important document which deserves wider reading and goes against the extremist ideology of groups such as ISIL.

Recently a letter was written by imams in Cardiff and elsewhere and signed by a number of key faith leaders in Wales to condemn the actions of ISIL and other groups and to assert good community relations between the faith communities in Wales in response. I know that a number of other statements of this kind have been made across the UK.

Concern also has been expressed in the Welsh media about certain mosques in Cardiff that have been linked to extremism. There is a particular place where the three young Cardiff people who left to join ISIL have been invited to speak at the mosque. A number of colleagues from the Muslim community across Wales talk about the importance of working with the mosques to ensure that the right speakers are invited and that speakers who can cause division within communities are not present within these constituencies.

Finally, we are looking at developing work in Wales particularly with young people to bring together Muslim and Christian youth groups in dialogue, both to discuss their faith, but particularly to engage in joint social action projects that will focus the energy in a more positive direction.

In conclusion, I believe that good grassroots engagement of this kind with members of inter faith communities working together will promote mutual trust and respect and the willingness to tackle tough issues is the key to countering the polarisation that we are witnessing in today's society.

Bonds of trust and co-operation in tough times

Moulana M Shahid Raza OBE

Vice-Chair, Inter Faith Network for the UK and British Muslim Forum

Vivian Wineman: Now we shall hear from Maulana Raza, Vice-Chair of the Inter Faith Network from the Muslim community, Trustee of the British Muslim Forum and Head Imam of the Leicester Mosque. He has been in the news particularly recently on this subject.

Moulana M Shahid Raza: B-ismi-llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīmi. I begin in the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind. Islam is an international religion and very soon, on 3 October, in the city of Mecca, it will be well demonstrated on the occasion of this year's Hajj when we are expecting over 2 million Muslims from all over the world visiting the city and some of the surrounding places.

Like all other international religions there are a variety of views on issues held by Muslim communities all over the world. In the present climate perhaps I do not need to explain this in detail as our colleagues and partners engaged in inter faith dialogue are at least reasonably aware of different Muslim groups having different interpretations and approaches. However the Islam I believe in, and I am determined to believe in, this is the same Islam believed by the vast majority of Muslims all over the world and indeed by the vast majority of British Muslims. This Islam guides me to establish and grow our relationship with other faith or non-faith communities.

The Quran, in chapter 5 Al Maidah, in verse number 2 instructs Muslims to cooperate with others in activities that aim for the

betterment of society (Al Maidah 5:2). There are many many sayings of Prophet Mohammad (SAW – Peace be upon him) outlining duties towards our neighbours, and these are applicable to both Muslims and others alike. Examples are: greeting them, exchanging gifts, sharing food, looking after the sick and attending funerals. These are all part of the Prophet's teachings.

In addition to that, our decision to live in a secular, democratic, multi-faith, multi-cultural and multi-racial British society makes it a social obligation for us to engage, interact and continue to have meaningful dialogue with all other faith or non-faith groups. Therefore, being in good relationship and discussing issues of concern is not a just a choice, instead it becomes a necessity in my opinion for Muslims.

Muslims, like any other global community, will be affected and influenced by overseas as well as local events and incidents. Unfortunately in the recent past the global Muslim community has suffered from events in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Syria and Nigeria, where huge bloodshed and conflict has been witnessed. To our sadness the political and religious radicalisation of these countries has severely affected Muslims as well as other religious minorities in these areas. The unresolved political future of Palestine has seen many tragedies and the recent hostilities in Gaza are still fresh in our minds.

The barbaric actions of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and of Boko Haram in Nigeria have definitely

without any doubt brought pain and discomfort to my community and their actions have helped in our opinion some individuals and organisations in their campaign to create hatred against Islam and fear of Muslims in the hearts and minds of many of our brothers and sisters of other faith communities or non-faith communities.

Naturally the shadow of such overseas events strains our relationships and makes the process of dialogue and mutual discussion on occasions extremely difficult. Personally I have felt a series of complex challenges in this respect. Can I just share four things with you:

- a. The slogan of “Not in my name” or “Not in the name of Islam” may be challenged by some within the Muslim community.
- b. Colleagues who feel threatened and have received advice from the well-wishers to avoid being seen at the forefront of issues.
- c. It can be difficult to objectively discuss events in a tense, emotionally charged environment.
- d. Occasions where some overseas events can lead to an avoidance of dialogue driven by our over-cautiousness.

However, I firmly believe that while we remain an integral part of our global Muslim community (the Ummah), overseas events should not hold our national dialogue hostage. Global challenges will remain, and they remain without any doubt out of our control. The future of British Muslims lies in Britain. The very definition of a good relationship is one that allows for issues of concerns to be discussed openly and honestly. Therefore I have held this opinion for a very long time; that our need for national, social cohesion and inter faith relations should be emphasised and prioritised. And let me finish my brief presentation with the phrase

perhaps we all need to think globally, but we all need to act locally.

Thank you.

Questions and comments

Dr Shiv Pande (Merseyside Council of Faiths): I have not only learned from, but very much enjoyed, all three talks. The bilateral process of communication is very important but we cannot have communication in a vacuum, when someone else is not conversing at all. Also, we are all here because we are at the same level. We have to communicate with the outside world as well. Have we invited media people to listen to our conversation today or these talks? The other thing I would like to ask all three colleagues: the role of the silent majority. In our communities 99% of people are of good will and law abiding citizens. Why have they been keeping quiet? Have they thought and can they reflect on my question? Thank you.

Dr Peter Rookes (Birmingham Council of Faiths): Jean and I work with a Muslim Scout group in Birmingham and our concern is that the very action that is very often to deal with and prevent extremism actually causes it. The majority of our leaders and our young people who are Scouts from the Muslim faith, all they want is to be treated as responsible citizens and we push them into extremism when we hear reports about ‘young Muslims did this’ and ‘young Muslims did that’. We don’t hear about ‘young Christians’ or ‘young Buddhists’. A distinction needs to be made between those who are expressing extremist views that need to be dealt with appropriately (which has not always been the case) and those who just want to be responsible citizens.

Nasr Moussa Emam (National Association of SACRES): A suggestion and question to Brother Shahid Raza. You mentioned the barbaric action and the Boko Haram. Just to make it clear: barbaric action is barbaric action. The Boko Haram interpret that anything belonging to the West is haram, ie

forbidden. To me this is not Islam. So please may we have a strategic approach to explain to the media: the 'Islamic State' is not Islamic and it is not a state.

Indrajit Bhogal (Dudley Borough Interfaith Network): In my mind there are two strands: one is radicalisation and the other is fascism. The Revd Alan Bayes ended his talk by saying that he was working on an inter faith project with young Muslims and young Christians. That I can understand. But the people we really need to engage are the young people who are hard to reach and I think the Government needs to address the structural inequalities. There are no youth groups; everything is being cut. So people really have nothing to do. We need to say to the Government "Can we have more money put into young people's services where they can engage in youth services?" Because that's been cut and Social Services are being cut, the teaching budgets are being cut. We need that so that we can actually educate young people, not just the Christians and the Muslims, but all young people – to stop them from joining far right groups and to stop them from joining religious right wing groups.

Ibrahim Kala (Bolton Interfaith Council): Just a quick question for the last two speakers. The Government's foreign policy to bomb Iraq and ISIS, do you think that's going to lead to an increase in the number of people being radicalised?

Dr Tania Porqueddu (Religions for Peace (UK)): My question would be: where are the youth here today in this discussion and why are we not having their voices included in this discussion as well? Because I really feel that what is missing is their voices and we really need them to be heard and be part of this.

The Revd Alan Bayes: Thank you very much. Can I particularly address the point that Indrajit Bhogal raised. I completely agree with you. The only reason why I was suggesting this was as a way forward, with a view to engaging in a much broader dialogue with all youths. It

wasn't meant to be restricted. But as members of faith communities this can be a step towards what I hope will be broader. It was simply to start somewhere, given that as members of different faith communities we have good relations fortunately with the Muslim community in Wales and it may be a small step but it's a step in the right direction and I hope it would broaden out. I completely agree with you and thank you very much for making that point.

Maulana M Shahid Raza: Brother, you have rightly mentioned that barbarity is unIslamic. We also do not consider ISIS an Islamic State. I have issued a statement with about 100 imams that there is nothing Islamic there; it is only a false claim. On the question about the foreign policy and the decision by Parliament to go into Iraq again – there is a risk that it may affect many, particularly young people, of the Muslim community, but it all depends upon how it is going to be conducted. I have always held the view that terrorism or radicalisation is a challenge which cannot be handled by one community alone. We all need to join our hands. Faith communities, politicians, law authorities, police, media – we all need to join our hands to handle this cancer. Thank you.

Charities and ‘due diligence’

Michelle Russell

Head of Investigations and Enforcement, The Charity Commission

Vivian Wineman: This is an environment where there is increasing concern about extremism globally and also in the UK, so Michelle Russell, Head of Investigations and Enforcement at the Charity Commission, will be talking to us about how charities can exercise best due diligence.

Michelle Russell: First of all, thank you very much for the invitation to come and speak to you today. I’m very honoured to do so. Hopefully many of you will know what the Charity Commission is, not just because of the status of the organisation, but many of you are from organisations that are registered as charities.

Religious organisations are a key and important part of the charitable infrastructure that we have. I should say, though, that we do struggle with actually identifying how many religious charities there are. We ask you to classify what your purposes are and from that information we know that at least 20% of the charities that are registered in England and Wales say that they have religious purposes. However, we have no accurate way of working out what religions there are underneath that and 20% may be an underestimation, although we do have all charities listed.

Let me say something about basic charity law duties – what charity law says about due diligence and dealing with the issues under discussion today. There is no mention in this of the terms ‘terrorism’, ‘radicalisation’ or ‘extremism’ as these are the general charity law duties that apply, and have applied, for

years. But they are the principles upon which we as regulator deal with issues when they come up in the context of extremism and radicalisation. The essential ingredient is that trustees of charities are custodians in terms of their work on behalf of others – and acting on behalf of the public – and their core duty is to act in the best interests of the charity in doing everything that they do from day to day.

Due diligence is an important way in which charities can show that they are carrying out their duties in the best interest of the charity and discharging their fiduciary duties. We’ve tried to describe that in a way that embodies: knowing your donors, knowing your beneficiaries and knowing your partners. In brief terms this means identifying and knowing with whom you are dealing, and where the risks are high taking further steps to verify with whom you’re dealing; knowing what your business is about; and, where there are problems that do arise, making sure that trustees know that they need to report that and act responsibly in doing so.

These are the rules. However, there is a great deal of flexibility for charities about how they apply those rules in different circumstances. One of the things we’ve been very keen to emphasise is a risk based approach, particularly because a charity that has millions of pounds is very different in its activities and status to a very small charity that is running a small local operation. We are very conscious of that in terms of what we expect trustees to do and how we expect trustees to act when issues arise.

Now we move onto the subject area that we have been talking about this morning which is in relation to the context of extremism. This is quite a delicate and sensitive area and it is coming up more and more – partly because of the context that charities operate in locally but also in international environments. We are seeing greater risks of non-compliance and problems in this area from our case work. There is not a magic answer. We are conscious of that and we hear that from the charities we engage with and speak with.

The media often focus on religious extremism in the context of what is going on internationally and this is what makes the headlines. What often gets lost is the message that charities like IFN and its member bodies are often doing a great job as part of their core day-to-day work in dealing with and challenging those areas. I am keen that the good work of charities should not get lost in this debate.

From a charity law perspective, charities' activities can only be in furtherance of their lawful charitable purposes and so the way that difficulties with extremism or promoting extremism or extremist views comes up is it is quite often in the context of charities giving platforms to those views either through their activities or through links charities may have. The key question is where along that spectrum does extremism or the support of extremist views actually breach charity law? At one end of the spectrum people can hold extremist views that are just very different from those of someone else. The problem arises when action gets nearer to the criminal threshold. Quite clearly, extremist views which would breach criminal law are not permissible for charities or anyone else to be promoting.

One of the things that we hear from charities is that they rely on the question of whether the law may be breached as the prompt for action and are not willing to do anything if something does not breach the criminal threshold. So they might say to us, "Well if

there was a problem here the police should be investigating and the police should actually take action. If they are not, there is nothing else that we can do." However, because of their charitable duties and responsibilities, it will be a problem for a charity to engage with or to be seen to promote extremist views. That is really difficult territory – both for both charities to operate in and for the Commission as regulator to know when that is and make sure we call that right.

Quite often it is in areas where it touches upon human rights issues and human rights abuses. We are also conscious of any suppression of people's views cutting across most of the human rights principles about freedom of speech. So again that is a pretty difficult area for us to engage with. Engaging with student unions, which are also charities, and universities is, instructive. They are telling us what the problems are and what they are doing to deal with it.

So we are in the general territory of controversial views that may not be appropriate for a charity to support under charity law.

I will also say something about political activities. Charities can carry out political activities but what they cannot undertake is party political activities. There can only be campaigning where it is in furtherance of the charity's objects.

As you will know, part of the core principles of charities is that they are operating for the public benefit. There are issues about public harm in terms of some of the views that may be promoted. For example, there may be allegations or concerns that donors have certain links with certain organisations or about how particular donors may be alleged to have influence over a charity's activities in an improper way. So we are seeing allegations and concerns in that area.

Risks can also come from within the activities of a charity. One area we come across is where charities which, as part of their activities, regularly run speaking events or invite speakers and we may have a concern about that. A second area is in relation to those charities that produce literature and we are concerned about whether or not some of the substance of that literature actually may be promoting extremist views. The third area, which is growing, is the use of social media and – with Twitter, YouTube, websites, blog accounts and so on – to what extent the charity can control comments. There can also be allegations that an individual trustee or an employee of a charity has certain connections with certain groups that are causing concern.

Some charities perhaps use overseas partners to deliver their aid or their objectives and we would have concerns where their partners are alleged to be connected with particular groups. And perhaps those groups are alleged to have influence over them, even if one hundred percent of the charity funds are going on legitimate charitable activities.

So these are some of the areas that we are seeing that some charities are struggling with.

We have guidance on our website which is both looking at extremism but also dealing with certain practical issues around links, such as, for example, can a charity use a partner that is on an overseas country's banned list for its activities? How does it deal with those sorts of issues?

Our guidance is very general, but it sets out the principles which we expect charities to follow where they undertaking activities in these high risk areas. For example, assessing the risk about proposed events, carrying out due diligence where they need to, setting policies and procedures, and being clear about how partners and speakers are selected and approved. Some charities provide written guidelines for their speakers in advance of inviting them, so they can be clear about where the parameters lie. Managing events

properly is one of the hardest areas. For example, for chairs knowing when to intervene or to set in context comments that might be made in the course of a meeting.

It is important to be clear about decisions that are made, and the factors considered in making these, and to keep appropriate paperwork. From a regulator's perspective, if we have a complaint about an event, we will ask to see all the paperwork that you have connected with it. I am often asked, "Can someone who is controversial be invited to speak at a charity event?" In most cases, the answer is 'Yes' but you need to manage how that is operated and you need to make sure that you are managing the risks associated with that. But there may be occasions where the risks are so high with a particular speaker, perhaps because of their track record, that the charity may have to take a decision not to invite that speaker.

I am drawing to a close now but I flagged earlier the issue of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. There are all sorts of ways in which publications and views on social media touch upon the work of a charity even if its core business isn't around producing publications or literature. There can be some difficult decisions about whether or not the charity needs to take items down or distance itself from views or to disengage with particular partners. These are areas which we are exploring and over which we are engaging with charities. I have put on the PowerPoint slides some steps to take in relation to that.

I would end with the comment that what is outlined is a common sense approach. Nothing in our guidance should be more than common sense. I have signposted some links particularly for those charities who deal with or come across material on a website that they are concerned about. There is actually a specialist group in the police that you can report to that will make the decision about whether or not something needs to be taken down and the link for this is included.

The Charity Commission is trying to be more engaged with the charitable sector that we regulate. We are trying to get out there and to hold outreach events, to have dialogue with young people in Students' Unions, to have dialogues with organisations such as IFN and its member bodies and the faith communities and with other types of charities, to actually debate and raise awareness of some of these issues and what charity duties are. We would much rather be in a position of preventing problems arising, than having to deal with them in an investigation, once they have arisen. We are also trying to publish more general alerts and warnings. Even if you are not a charity trustee, you can sign up on our website to receive both updates on our guidance and alerts that we are publishing.

We have produced a toolkit of 5 chapters with practical checklists and case examples. There is one specifically on due diligence, monitoring and verifying funds and there is also one dedicated to the issue of extremism and extremism purposes. We are all always happy to receive feedback on it and want to update it even though it is published. We hope that we can work with charities to ensure that they can avoid problematic situations wherever possible and that they do know how to deal with these sorts of issues when they arise.

Charity Commission for England and Wales

Charities and “due diligence”

29 September 2014
National Meeting of the Inter Faith Network for the UK

Michelle Russell
Head of Investigations and Enforcement

CHARITY
COMMISSION

Charities and “due diligence”

CHARITY
COMMISSION

- Legal duties of all trustees of all charities
- Context of growing concerns about extremism and charities' vulnerability to being abused for those purposes
- How charities can best exercise due diligence and what it means in practice
- The Commission's role as regulator, supporting them to do so and ensuring they do

The Charity Commission for England and Wales

CHARITY
COMMISSION

- Independent regulator, non-Ministerial government department
- Statutory objectives include to:
 - increase **public trust and confidence** in charities
 - enhance the **accountability of charities** to donors, beneficiaries and the general public
 - **promote compliance** by charity trustees with their legal obligations

Registered Charities in England and Wales

CHARITY
COMMISSION

- 164,345 registered main charities as at June 2014
- £64.44 billion income
- 32,617 (20%) say they carry out religious activities
 - 15,530 (48%) Christian
 - 2,086 (6%) Islamic
 - 2,136 (7%) Judaism
 - 259 (1%) Buddhist
 - 399 (1%) Hindu
 - 283 (1%) Sikh

Due Diligence – the legal duties



- Trustees are the custodians of their charities
- Trustees are publicly accountable, and have legal duties and responsibilities under charity law to safeguard their charity, its funds and property (reputation is an asset)
- **Trustees must take decisions in the best interests of their charity and its beneficiaries**

Growing Concerns about Extremism Risks



- Wider context charities are operating in the UK and internationally
- The risks of non compliance and being used and abused by others in this area
- Our casework experience – common areas
- This is not easy territory
- Not forgetting some charities through their core charitable work are involved in countering extremist narratives and providing support to those affected

Due diligence



- A significant aspect of a trustee's legal duty to protect charitable assets and to do so with care means carrying out proper **due diligence** on those individuals and organisations that give money to, receive money from, or work closely with the charity.
- Know your donors
- Know your beneficiaries
- Know your partners



Extremist and controversial views



A charity's activities can only be in pursuit of lawful charitable purposes

Concerns about a charity involved in promoting, supporting or giving a platform to inappropriate radical and extremist views, would call into question whether what it was doing was lawful under both the criminal law and charity law

Core elements of due diligence



involve trustees taking reasonable steps to ensure they:

- **Identify** – know who they are dealing with
- **Verify** – where reasonable and the risks are high, verify this
- **Know what the organisation's or individual's business is** and can be assured this is appropriate for the charity to be involved with
- **Know what their specific business is with the charity** and have confidence they will deliver what the charity wants them to
- **Watch out** for unusual or suspicious activities, conduct or requests

What is Extremism in this context?



- Where along the spectrum does extremism, its promotion or support breach trustees charity law fiduciary duties?

Risk-based due diligence



- The greater the risks, the more charities have to do to ensure and to demonstrate that they have discharged their duty of care and other legal duties
- Greater effort and stronger measures for higher risks
- For other risks, there is greater discretion and flexibility about what to do
- Risks vary depending on size, nature, complexity of activities, area of operation, scale of funds

Extremist and controversial views



- Extremist views which are criminal –never acceptable for charities to promote/support
- Human rights territory
- Other controversial views may not be appropriate for a charity to support under charity law, or may breach rules on political activities
- Such views may not further the charity's purposes, even if they are not illegal or violent
- Charities promoting extremist views and using radicalising materials will be in breach of charity law

Where are the risks and common difficulties?



- IN** Money from donors – provenance of funds; reputational risks due to links associations conduct; undue influence over decisions
- WITHIN** Risks from – activities; links and associations (trustees, employees, volunteers, fundraisers...); when conduct in personal capacity impacts
- OUT** use of partners (overseas); not just money – links, associations, control – reputational risks; beneficiary influence

Events and speakers



- Properly manage charity events to prevent inappropriate activities taking place and be ready to intervene / distance
- Prevent the charity's activities and views from being misinterpreted – consider public perceptions about the charity's independence
- Document and record decision making and the factors that were considered

How charities should manage the risks: Speakers and publications



Charity trustees and managers need to be careful of activities which may:

- break the law
- put the charity's reputation/assets at risk
- be otherwise inappropriate under charity law eg:
 - unlawful political activity or
 - breach of public benefit principles

Can someone with controversial views be invited to speak?



In some cases, no, the risks are too high

In some cases yes, but:

- A charity must not be used by someone to promote their own political, extremist or radicalising opinions
- Trustees need to be clear about how this will further the charity's objects and take active steps to manage the risks

Criminal issues:



- By inciting racial or religious hatred
- By inciting criminal acts or public order offences
- By encouraging or glorifying acts of terrorism
- Allowing charity premises, events, website or literature to support a proscribed organisation

Publications, websites and other media



- Charities use a wide range of media for communications and educational materials, e.g.
 - printed materials, including books and pamphlets
 - broadcast media, including TV and radio
 - social media, including [facebook](#), [tumblr](#) and [YouTube](#)
 - recordings, including memory cards, CDs and DVDs
 - Websites and blogs
- Trustees must assess the risks and take appropriate measures to mitigate them and take action where necessary
 - Take down? Distance from views? Disengage?

Events and Speakers - What do we expect trustees to do?



- Assess the risks for proposed events and meetings – take a risk-based approach
- Carry out due diligence checks on proposed speakers and close partners
- Set policies and procedures for risk assessment and decision making in relation to speakers
- Be clear about how speakers and partners are selected and approved
- Provide written guidelines for speakers setting out expectations and requirements

Publications - Steps to take



- Have a clear policy for risk assessment and decision making in relation to publications to be promoted
- Have criteria for deciding if an author or the content of any material is a cause for concern
- Carry out further checks (such as against HM Treasury list of designated entities)
- If concerns are identified – obtain copies for consideration prior to publication/dissemination
- Take a common sense approach

Signposting



- Refer concerns about online materials to the Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU) through the GOV.UK website

www.gov.uk/report-extremism

- Victims of hate crime/hate incidents can report them and get information and support via the True Vision website:

www.report-it.org.uk

Supporting Charities – what Commission is doing



- Outreach work with the sector on these issues to build knowledge, skills and confidence – such as our events for students unions, universities, faith-based charities
- Commission's published alerts and warnings:
 - advice for charities on convoys, moving cash out of the UK, due diligence and monitoring, distributing aid, people travelling to Syria
 - advice for the public on Safer giving for Syria – ongoing campaign
- Commission's published guidance for charities

Commission Guidance



Compliance Toolkit: **Protecting Charities from Harm**

- Chapter 2 – Due Diligence, Monitoring and Verification of End Use of Charitable Funds
- Chapter 5 – Protecting Charities from abuse for extremist purposes and managing the risks at events and in activities

Also:

- Charities and risk management (CC26)

Questions?



Questions and comments

Yann Lovelock (Buddhist Society): What I wanted to bring up was the difficulty when what is being said of an extremist nature is in a language which is difficult to access. I wondered whether you could comment on the difficulty when you are dealing with foreign languages and overseas connections of that kind.

George Barda (Interfaith Alliance): We are talking about extremism as if it is some sort of micro social phenomenon rather than response to incredible brutality and incredible institutionalised terrorism that has been going on for hundreds of years. If you want to start to look at Iraq we could start at 1919 where after the first World War the Iraqis were promised some independence for helping the British and then they were bombed from the sky with the first ever use of chemical weapons. We could go back to the support of Saddam Hussein for many, many years, he was gassing Kurds in Halabja and the reality that ISIS is a result most recently of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 of millions of people brutalised and without any kind of hope of employment and the first thing the Americans and the British did was destroy the Iraqi state and fire millions of workers. Serious analysis will tell you that these are social political phenomena. Every single religion represented in this room has people, has had manifestations of all sorts of violence depending on the political circumstance. I think of myself as a Christian and a Buddhist and both those religions as far as I am concerned are committed to absolute pacifism. But if you are not committed to absolute pacifism it seems a very difficult argument to make to angry young people that our armies should be able to bomb and kill hundreds of thousands of people but when they want to respond with violence they are defined as extreme. The way that relates to the Charity Commission is that I would like some comment from you on, the extreme politicisation of the Charity Commission and of the current Conservative government. You have had many complaints from hundreds if

not thousands of charities about how their legitimate work to challenge the issues that they are set up to challenge is being construed as political. The fact is that if you are a charity struggling against poverty and a party has a policy on poverty which is making matters far worse, you need to be able to campaign on that. So instead the situation we now have is that Rupert Murdoch can spend millions of his pounds creating a more and more brutal, unjust society but a charity that tries to stand up against that is now in contravention of the law. So as an agent of that supposedly independent regulator, I would love a comment from you.

Dr Shiv Pande (Merseyside Council of

Faiths): Firstly, what percentage of your workload is in relation to those community percentages which you showed in the very first slide? And secondly, are the present regulations effective enough to carry out your work or do you need them strengthening in the light of the activities happening in the country?

Michelle Russell: The first question on languages – you are absolutely right and we are a) very careful and sensitive to it and b) it is not an easy area particularly when some of the material might be in a different language. We have had occasions, on cases where we have sought translations of some of the material that we have seen, given the charity involved an opportunity to translate the materials themselves so that we can understand if there are some differences in interpretation from particular translators. On occasions, where the area is a sensitive one for us, we have had to pull in independent experts to make sure that we understand the context and potential different interpretations there.

As a general principle any member of the public is able to anonymously or otherwise report matters to the Commission about a charity. Employees of charities have special status under the public interest disclosure legislation that protects them when they

come to us and disclose and actually trustees of charities are under a duty to report certain serious incidents to us. We have taken a relaxed approach to enforcing that in the past because we do not want to increase the burden to lots of charities. However we suspect that serious issues are being under-reported and are reminding charities to report them and that there is a benefit to the charity to coming forward and discussing them with us. When we get the phone calls on a Friday night from a newspaper, we would much rather know about it beforehand and we will say to the newspaper, the charity has responsibly responded to the regulation by telling us about it.

On political activities, I think the first thing that I would like to say is the Commission is an independent regulator. It deliberately does not have a Minister and it is written into our legislation that we cannot be directed to take action by a Minister in relation to our work. So we take very seriously our independent ability to make decisions. The second thing to say is the rules on political activity have not changed. They are based on case law. There was a case called McGovern, years ago and those principles do allow charities to politically campaign if it is in furtherance of their objects. Where they cannot is where they head into party political sort of campaigning. That doesn't stop a charity in appropriate circumstances picking up an issue that might be associated with a particular party in their manifesto for example, and saying that if that is brought in that it would cause enormous damage to hundreds of children or cause enormous poverty, for instance. It is about linking it to their objects. It is true to say, though, that with the elections so close, we are expecting charities' activities to be scrutinised a lot more by the public and by their campaigners. So we are already gearing up for that now and for those charities that do want to campaign, we would suggest looking at the guidance before you do that. I would be concerned if anyone thought that the Commission was being politicised by

whatever government is in place. Those rules have not changed.

The third area is around two things: powers and also a percentage of our work. I think it is true and fair to say that a lot of the concerns that we get either directly from the media or from members of the public at the moment tend to be around or alleged against Muslim charities because of the context in which it is unfolding in a broader sense. In relation to the work in Syria, we warned charities that used aid convoys to try and get the aid out to Syria that they had to take much greater care in terms of how they were doing that. We warned them beforehand because of the high risks that were involved in running aid convoys that we were likely to scrutinise their activities a little bit more. We were very honest about that before we undertook that activity. But I would like to stress that this particular area of the Commission's work is only a small proportion of what we are doing although it tends to be the area that gets picked up by the media and people are interested in.

In relation to regulations and powers, last year the Office for Civil Society issued a public consultation on our powers. This concerns a wide range of gaps in our current powers. So for example, at the moment if a charity trustee officer resigns mid-way through the process whereby we are seeking to remove them, we have no power to just go ahead and remove them anyway. So they thwart our ability to actually take someone out of a charity. So there are some powers that will be helpful for us to have in a broad sense but they would be helpful in dealing tax frauds, normal frauds as well as in this territory. So we are not asking for or looking for specific powers in the context of dealing with issues of an extremist nature. That leads me back to where we were at the start of my presentation which is those principles that I talked about on due diligence – they don't mention 'terrorism' or 'extremism'; they are the general duties that all charities have to comply with as

part of their basic fiduciary duties. And they are, we hope, common sense.

Sheikh Muhammad Al-Hussaini (Scriptural Reasoning / William Campbell-Taylor (City of London Interfaith)): We sought advice from the Charity Commission in relation to the question of charity trustee independence, namely that third parties who are not empowered by Parliament, like the Inter Faith Network, have no authority to intervene or to interfere in the functioning of member bodies that are regulated as charities. We received advice from the Charity Commission that the Inter Faith Network is not a regulatory body like the General Medical Council or any other statutory body. Please could you confirm that the IFN is not a regulatory body and the Charity Commission is.

Michelle Russell: There are some umbrella bodies which do have specific powers in relation to actions to with respect to their member bodies. The relationship between each set of charities and their umbrella body is different in different circumstances. But I think the general principle of good governance is that umbrella bodies should be supporting their member bodies in relation to making sure that they comply with charity law and the principles within it. But in terms of who is the charity regulator, it is the Charity Commission and what we have said, and are trying to say, to the public and to charities that we have cases into, is that we have a duty to investigate serious concerns that come to our attention. Our role is about public assurance and sometimes we cannot let matters go even if it is probable that there may be nothing in it; providing that we do our work and that we are clear at the end of it that there is not substance to an allegation made. So we are very conscious of that and in our investigatory work we will make clear when we are publishing the results whether or not certain allegations were made. But our duty is ultimately to the public and we have that public assurance and responsibility role as well as making sure that charity trustees comply with their duties under law.

Welcome to the afternoon session

The Rt Revd Richard Atkinson OBE
Co-Chair, Inter Faith Network for the UK

Bishop Richard Atkinson: It is a great pleasure to be here and to be part of this annual National Meeting. The topic today is a very important one. There will be a fuller note of the key points from this morning's discussion groups included in the report of this National Meeting, but at this point each group has a chance to highlight one key point.

Feedback from discussion groups

Discussion Group 1 – Addressing difficult issues sensitively in local inter faith contexts

Prudence Jones: Our discussion centred mostly on the theme of ‘person to person’ dialogue. We talked about the value of creating a safe and relaxed space perhaps with drinks or a meal and doing so perhaps over many months. This can enable people engaging in a dialogue to express their hopes and also deepest fears without fear of censure – being able to air these, get a hearing and then discuss them, critique and develop them. It helps if this is focused on practical action where everybody concerned has a heartfelt passion about doing something – about putting something right. This is a way of bringing people together in joint action and fellowship. Finally, this process, it was said very firmly, should be started in schools. It is important to get school children and sixth form pupils, to engage in this kind of dialogue and constructive practical planning.

Discussion Group 2 – ‘Conflict resilience’: skills for engagement with challenging issues

Angharad Thain: Our workshop looked at skills for engaging with challenging issues. One of the key points that we looked at was how we can view conflict as an opportunity for growth and for learning, both individually and collectively in our faith communities and

in our lives. We discussed the importance of active listening to other points of view – not just listening for the sake of it but really engaging with what the other person has to say. We also talked about accepting that we need to look at how we respond personally. Conflict is not just something ‘out there’ in the world but it is in our own selves and our local communities. That can be very a good place to start in the process of how we respond effectively to conflict.

Discussion Group 3 – Motivations and agendas in inter faith contexts

Mark Cosens: Our discussion was about motivations and agendas. We looked at what puts people off from engaging in inter faith dialogue. We noted the worry that some might have that they might need to compromise their deeply held beliefs by going into such a setting; and also the worries and concerns about other participant’s motivations and agendas. The first presentation highlighted that there are often stereotypes about faiths bandied around. A function of inter faith work is to look beyond those stereotypes. An issue was raised about whether public authorities sometimes sought to impose an external agenda on inter faith groups, using these as an extension of their agency to get their message out but without necessarily giving sufficient consideration to the nature of the message and whether or not it was the role of the inter faith forum to actually be delivering messages of that kind. We did not come to any firm conclusions on

that but thought that there would be different approaches in different groups.

We considered whether or not finding commonality was the overarching goal of dialogue or whether diversity and the focus on distinctiveness and authentic voice of those representing their faiths was what we were there to learn about. Some of us felt that we were looking to break down barriers by, in a sense, looking past the difference; others thought those differences were interesting and important, and that engaging well with them enabled better understanding. There was some talk about intra-faith dynamics: very often there are conversations to be had and peace-making to be done within our own faith traditions which call for our action separately from an inter faith setting, and sometimes ahead of engaging inter faith dialogue.

Discussion Group 4 – ‘Include me in, include me out’

Dr Peter Rookes: We had two very different presentations. The first one was a very practical approach from Plymouth and the second one was a more philosophical one based on the reflection from Goethe which goes something along the lines of “*None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free*”. We had a very lively discussion and we agreed that we are on a journey from what psychologists might define as the immature behaviour of a child, believing that we are right when everyone else is wrong, towards the more mature adult behaviour of treating everyone with dignity and respect and seeing people beyond their labels.

Discussion Group 5: Inter faith engagement and extremism

Shahda Khan: We had two presentations from opposite ends of the country – one from Luton and one from Blackburn – really fantastic in terms of the diversity in the ways that they tackled the issues that they were facing. We had a wide ranging discussion but the key point that kept coming up, and I think it has come up on a number of occasions throughout the day, was the use of language and the impact of that and the importance of incorporating care about it into the work that we do on an everyday basis. This is true both in the context of Government policies and also at a local level when we are engaging in terms of inter faith dialogue. We need to have some real honest conversations – both between faiths and also within our own faith communities. There is a need to challenge ourselves. It is so easy to say that the challenges we experience are the media’s fault or so-and-so’s fault, but we all need to look within and see how we can work more widely and more effectively.

Discussion Group 6: Engaging well with difficult issues: learning from schools and youth inter faith work

Dr Norman Richardson: We had a very engaging, very positive, very participative and interactive session, opening with two thoughtful and challenging presentations, first from Dr Joyce Miller of the RE Council for England and Wales and the second from Tamanda Walker from 3FF. The main focus was on schools and how high quality Religious Education, combined with a positive and inclusive ethos, could contribute to what was described as ‘opening hearts and minds’ and to avoiding exchanges of ‘mutual ignorance’. This was seen as a task for RE but

also as a task beyond RE. It involved, it was suggested, supporting and equipping teachers but also involving parents and local communities and keeping schools in touch with local faith communities. All of this, it was felt, requires mutual awareness and mutual support. There were many good ideas, many case studies – all very positive – and examples of websites and other resources and we would like to share information through an information sheet combining the good ideas and suggestions and then possibly exploring how this could be extended to the Inter Faith Network website and perhaps also to Inter Faith Week.

Discussion Group 7 – Difficult issues: faith communities responding on social challenges

Celia Blackden: Our discussion about faith communities and social action/social issues was opened by Phil Rosenberg from the Board of Deputies talking about the relevant work of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and a Jewish Manifesto linked to the General Election. He also talked about whether and when faith communities choose to work together. This can be on an issue about which a community feels passionately and then seeks to involve others; or it can begin with faith communities choosing to work together. Ranveer Singh from Khalsa Aid then spoke about its various projects and more broadly about various activities of the Sikh community in coming to the aid of people in need. We then had a very comprehensive conversation. A word that kept coming up was ‘trust’. We touched on trust in a number of contexts: between the faith communities who are seeking to work together; between faith communities and local authorities where there might be misconceptions or bad experiences on both sides which can affect the relationship if not well addressed. Working to enable trust and understanding to grow seemed to us to be very important where faith communities are working to

respond to social needs. Other words that came up were ‘acceptance’, ‘tolerance’, and ‘education’.

We felt it was good to campaign and to speak clearly, and hopefully charitably but with truth, about any flaws in Government policies and also about the ‘pain of history’. But our main focus was on recognising that we have got a role to play to meet needs on the ground and that we can learn from each other and can do that and do it better. Finally, we thought that what we do together needs to be much more public and known about and understood by people at large.

Bishop Richard Atkinson: Thank you to everybody who has reported back. A number of common themes have emerged. For example, more than one group spoke of the need to look within ourselves as well as looking at others and about looking beyond labels and stereotypes. There was an emphasis on schools and there were important themes of trust and sharing good practice.

We have just a few minutes. Does anyone want to emphasise or highlight some point from their group or pick up on any of the things we’ve just heard?

George Barda (Interfaith Alliance): There was a lot of interest in our group in engaging with difficult issues. In an inter faith context there is often a tendency to want to be as uncontroversial as possible, to keep a conversation open. But, especially in light of an increasingly brutal and unequal and undemocratic dispensation, the role of faith groups in terms of standing up against that reality is very important. When people come together motivated by challenging injustice then the trust between different groups emerges much more naturally than when one sees the activity as specifically an inter faith exercise. I think that it is in the fight against injustice and for a compassionate world people from different faith groups find their commonality in diversity.

Acharya Modgala Duguid (Network of Buddhist Organisations): I was fascinated and impressed to learn, in the presentation in group 1, how Bishop Tony Robinson actually went to speak with the EDL, rather than avoiding the issue. On the wearing of the veil (which is an issue which has also been discussed in Islington), I was very interested to hear how Fakhra Rehman has brought together young Muslim women, veiled and not, with women of the Christian faith and produced a report called Beyond the Veil. This is a good example of fruitful tackling of issues in a local inter faith context.

Dr Shuja Shafi (Muslim Council of Britain): As a general rule we have all discussed difficulties and how to solve those problems. People talked this morning as well about the silent majority. I think what we do not express is the immense amount of good work, positive work, that takes place at grassroots level which never gets either into the news or is adequately talked about. I think that as an inter faith network we need to see how we can publicise that positive aspect.

Jayde Russell (Islamic Cultural Centre): I was in the group that was talking about social action and something that came to my mind is the significance of reflecting on our humanity and our humility. If we are part of a faith group we can reach out to other groups rather than holding on to our own successes and not sharing it with the other. We should also not be too proud to ask for assistance from other faith groups in the fear that they might think that they are better or that you might think that you're in any way lower. That way we can all learn from each other and support and strengthen each other.

Some reflections on the themes of the day

Hilary Patel

Faith Engagement Team Leader, Integration and Faith,
Department for Communities and Local Government

Bishop Richard Atkinson: We now have two slightly longer reflections on today and its themes. The first is from Hilary Patel, who took over from Warwick Hawkins as the Faith Engagement Team Leader at the Department for Communities and Local Government in August.

Note: A summary of Ms Patel's reflections is included at her request.

Hilary Patel noted that:

There was much inter faith work that went on at the grassroots level and also at the national level. There was great importance to that – and also to pushing the boundaries about what can be done.

Engaging with issues relating to faith formed part of the integration work of DCLG and the Home Office. Faith would always be an important issue to Ministers. Faith and social action was an area of great interest to the Government.

The current economic context meant an even greater need for groups to deploy effectively any funding.

The Inter Faith Network had a long history. In its thinking about ways forward, the challenges facing communities were important to consider, as was action in local communities.

Everybody had a right to their beliefs and that was important. So too was engaging together well in a society with shared values – British values.

It was important to tackle perceptions of those members of the general public who did not come to inter faith events or even know that they were happening. Faith groups needed to come together and champion all faith groups, just as when one was attacked all should respond.

‘Professionalising’ the sector was also important. Faith groups and inter faith bodies could harness the skills of members with business backgrounds. As well as the outward facing activities of organisations, robust management, including audit processes, was vital. So too was handling social media well.

Some reflections on the themes of the day

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar

Religions for Peace (UK) and Scottish Sikh Community

Bishop Richard Atkinson: And now we have our second reflection from Ravinder Kaur Nijjar. Ravinder is a longstanding inter faith practitioner. She is involved through Religions for Peace (UK) in work both in the UK and Europe and also globally. Her reflections today are offered particularly in the Scottish and UK dimension.

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar: Brothers and sisters it is an honour and privilege to share some personal reflection of the themes of the day. Some phrases I have heard that resonate with my own reflection are ‘sustainable dialogue’, ‘message from the founders of the religions’, ‘different faiths, common social actions’, ‘young people and youth’, and ‘education’.

It has been one hundred years since the First World War. Many commemorations are taking place around the world. But it seems we have not learnt anything because one hundred years later there is still conflict and everyday it seems to be increasing. To me it has become so distressing that I now don’t want to watch the news. Perhaps that is a coward’s way out: What you don’t know can’t affect you. But then I ask what kind of a human being that makes me – where is my strength and courage to face the challenges of today, to help resolve conflict, to ensure that I leave behind the legacy of a peaceful world for my children and grandchildren?

My strength has to come firstly from prayer, connecting to the Divine so that I can find

inner peace before I can be an agent of peace outside. And there I think is the crux of the matter. Religious people have to look to their roots to see how the founders of their respective religions tackled the challenging issues that they were faced with: how they brought communities together; how through dialogue and example they advocated for social reform; challenged those who used religion to enhance their own agendas; and through discourse and dialogue with those who perpetrated violence sought to bring about a peaceful era.

Today religion is perceived again to be the cause of all conflict, the news verifies this everyday, but what people don’t realise is that everything that is good is also due to religion and that there are thousands of people of faith who do wonderful work in helping humanity. In fact eight in ten of the world’s people identify themselves as members of religious communities. That’s a big percentage.

Today we have a stark choice, are we going to continue to allow a small percentage of the population to wreak havoc or are the majority going to stand up and say that we have had enough and are not going to allow a few misguided, egocentric individuals to dictate to the majority. These are individuals who have not truly understood the essence of the message of the Founders of the religions of the world, to uphold righteousness, to protect the poor and the weak, to honour women, to

protect mother Earth, to share, to love and treat the whole human race as one.

It is imperative that we all reabsorb the wisdom given to us by our Founders and use it as a template to deal with the issues that we face today. People of faith need to begin to show the world the good of all religions by working together to make a difference to people's lives.

An example of an organisation that harnesses the power of multi-religious cooperation is one with which I have been involved for many years: Religions for Peace. Religious communities possess enormous capacity to build a peaceful future. In every country on this planet, faith communities are involved in efforts to improve the human condition. Each religious group makes its own vital contribution to human well-being. When religious communities cooperate, their effectiveness and value grows exponentially.

Religions for Peace, creates and manages inter faith networks in different parts of the world that enable religious communities to cooperate and solve critical global problems. Inter-religious Councils, women of faith networks and youth networks span 90 countries on five continents.

The Religions for Peace Global Women of Faith Network of which I am on the Coordinating Committee helped to co-found the Women, Faith and Development Alliance, which focuses on achieving the Millennium Development goal 3 – Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women. The Alliance works to bolster the political will of governments, multilateral institutions, corporations, and non-governmental organisations to put women and girls at the centre of global poverty alleviation efforts. This has resulted in \$1.4 billion in new commitments for women and girls from more than 90 partners worldwide. \$1.4 billion – a lot of good work.

In November it will be Inter Faith Week in the UK, and it is heartening to see that the Week that we started in Scotland in 2004 has had the impetus to start many interreligious projects and advance common action. But every week should be an inter faith week, not just this Week... How many of us connect with all the different places of worship in our local area and work together to help alleviate poverty, to visit the sick in hospitals, to help the elderly, to collect food for food banks. Please connect together. Slowly we need to turn the tide that sees religion as the cause of all conflict by doing practical things that jointly help humanity.

Last week was International Peace Day. We all talk of peace as something that will happen one day. But I'm afraid that will be too late for me so I want it now, peace today, peace now. The finite amount of time that we have left on this Earth is very small. Let us all commit to start a stream of joint work, showing the good that religious communities can do, within our areas, which becomes a large tidal wave that spreads throughout the UK. By working together to ensure that every person on the planet has enough to eat, has a safe place to sleep and is loved and cared for as we show that we all belong to the one human family.

Closing reflections from the Co-Chairs

Vivian Wineman: Our inter faith work is always important but perhaps particularly crucial at this time. Listening to the groups' feedback and to Hilary Patel's reflections about the Government's interest in faith and social action and Ravinder Kaur Nijjar's call for people of religion to take a stand on behalf of the vulnerable I think that IFN's work is more vital than ever. The fact that we have chosen as the theme of the National Meeting this year confronting tough issues shows we are right on the button as far as the task that faces us. There have been some very enlightening sessions today and let us hope that the future fulfils the promise that this has shown.

Bishop Richard Atkinson: I would like to echo that. I was just thinking about the tough questions and remembering the inter faith conversations that have stayed with me over time. They are not the many friendly, gentle conversations which sometimes do not touch on anything particularly significant. They are the more tricky conversations about difficult things which matter to us or to our world. We have been in the right territory today and we must not lose the courage to go forward.

As we bring the National Meeting to a close it is a time to say thank you to everybody who has contributed; those who have spoken, facilitated workshops, taken notes in workshops, and reported back on workshops; the Officers and Trustees of the Inter Faith Network for all the work that they have put in; everybody who's taken part today and those who have made the arrangements here at the Priory Rooms. Finally, thank you to our own staff for all the hard work they do and have done to make this National Meeting possible.

Discussion group notes

Note: The discussion points listed in each of these notes are not conclusions agreed by the discussion group as a whole, but points and suggestions made by individual participants during the sessions.

Discussion Group 1 – Addressing difficult issues sensitively in local inter faith contexts

Facilitator: Acharya Modgala Duguid,
Network of Buddhist Organisations and
Islington Faiths Forum

Presenters: Fakhra Rehman, Community
Faiths Coordinator, Kirklees Faiths Forum, and
the Rt Revd Tony Robinson, Bishop of
Wakefield, Chair, Kirklees Faith Forum

Opening with a formal presentation giving an insight into how Kirklees Faiths Forum in West Yorkshire works – alongside its work with schools and such programmes as Inter Faith Week – with local communities, offering a common platform for responding to a range of ‘difficult issues’ from extremist voices and the impact of overseas conflicts, to disagreements for religious reasons over issues such as over the use of music at events.

Followed by sharing of experiences of responding to challenging issues in other local areas.

Acharya Modgala Duguid welcomed participants and invited those present to observe a few moments of silence. She invited

Ms Fakhra Rehman and the Rt Revd Tony Robinson to offer their brief presentation.

Ms Rehman began by telling the group about Kirklees Faith Forum and the work it undertakes, about which more could be found at <http://www.kirkleesfaithsforum.org.uk/>.

She then spoke about the importance of building relationships with people. Getting to know each other well, she said, enabled difficult subjects to be handled. Meeting over food always helps!

She mentioned that North Kirklees Interfaith Council had published a report after an incident in a school regarding a teacher wearing a niqab. The report was entitled Looking Beyond the Veil. Following this case Ms Rehman had arranged a meeting of the Local Residents Association, giving them a safe space where their concerns could be expressed without fear of offending. The attendees expressed concerns about women who wore the niqab. They had said things like “Women in niqabs separate themselves from the rest of society.” Ms Rehman had invited Muslim women who wore a variety of dress including the niqab to a meeting with the group. The residents were given the opportunity to listen to different perspectives, share conversation and ask questions in a safe and neutral space. The session had not only resulted in myths being busted, but also enabled ordinary people from different faith backgrounds to come together, listen to each other and realise that ignorance, misinformation and media misrepresentation can create barriers that needed to be removed. Rather than feel a separation

between the ladies who wore the niqab, many of the attendees were pleasantly surprised to see how much they all had in common, and, in fact, commented afterwards that they couldn't see the ladies' faces but could see they were smiling.

Bishop Robinson spoke of meetings he had had with members of the English Defence League (EDL), again building relationships of trust with them. He spoke of the fear there was over a planned rally in Batley but how, by talking to the EDL in advance and encouraging them to police themselves, it had passed off peacefully. He spoke of the fear of the unknown which people had. Dialogue with EDL members continued even though it was thought they would never change their views on Muslims.

Modgala Duguid invited general reflections and observations. The following is a summary of points made by individual participants in the discussion which followed.

- It could be difficult to engage with Muslim groups locally.
- There was a need to proceed slowly and get to know people well before trying to engage in dialogue of a sensitive nature.
- There was a need to be open to those with whom one might disagree – examples of this included the work with the EDL in Leicester and also a protest meeting outside the Islamic Foundation when the Inter Faith Group had invited the protestors in to defuse the situation.
- There was a need for more information when new migrants came into an area so that people were prepared and understanding rather than treating them as undesirables.
- Faith groups could organise many non-threatening activities which build up trust, such as:
 - walks
 - inter faith knitting groups
 - training groups for RE teachers
 - archery
 - exchange events
 - promotion and support of faith celebrations
 - inter faith book club meeting in a library
 - days out at a garden centre
 - working together on Holocaust Memorial events
 - moving round faith venues for meetings or using a neutral space
 - choirs
 - picnics
 - annual parties
 - pilgrimages
 - scriptural reasoning groups
 - talks on end of life care and facing death
- Other suggestions to make people feel included were: using Mail Merge for publicity so it was more personal, sharing a building (as in Leeds where they demolished two Church Halls and built a new facility for Christians and Muslims to share) and knocking on people's doors and asking if they could help new people in the community.
- Difficulties expressed included:
 - Bristol Council wanting one Muslim to speak for the Community when there were so many different mosques whose worshippers did not necessarily communicate.
 - Welwyn Hatfield, not being a very diverse area and with a rather 'cosy' inter faith style had found that the only way to get people to engage was to book speakers who they thought might 'stir things up' – for example a speaker from the Israeli Embassy and one from the Palestinian Centre.
 - There was a lack of young people in many groups and a need for understanding to start in schools.

Discussion Group 2: ‘Conflict resilience’: skills for engagement with challenging issues

Facilitator: Smita Shah, Leicester Council of Faiths and Jain Samaj Europe

Presenters: Angharad Thain, Programme Coordinator, St Ethelburga’s Centre for Reconciliation and Peace in London and Jon Dal Din, Director, Westminster Interfaith

Angharad Thain will be offering an opening presentation on the concept of Conflict Resilience, and a number of skills that can be used to enhance confidence when tackling challenging issues. She will ask how these learnings can have relevance at both a local level, and for broader conflict situations.

Followed by some responding reflections from Jon Dal Din and general discussion.

Ms Smita Shah welcomed participants to the discussion group and invited Ms Angharad Thain to offer her presentation.

Ms Thain used PowerPoint slides for her presentation. A copy of these is at the end of this note. Her presentation began with a history of the St Ethelburga’s Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. She then went on to give a brief introduction to ‘conflict resilience’ and the philosophy used by St Ethelburga’s in this work. She noted that conflict was a natural phenomenon and should be treated as a window, not a problem. It was important for faith communities to develop a continuous and active response to conflict.

She then spoke of the following five ‘capacities’:

1. Seeing presenting issues as a window to see the underlying causes
2. Integrating multiple time frames – both short and long term

3. Posing the energies of conflict as dilemmas – What can I learn? Why does it challenge me? What are the creative responses?
4. Making complexity a friend, not a foe – new ways of looking at old patterns
5. Hearing and engaging the voices of identity and relationship – being aware that identity is linked to power

And the need to develop these skills:

- Active Listening
- Courageous conversations
- Analysing conflict through identity, power, emotion and opportunity
- What faith teaches about conflict
- Growing/learning through challenging issues
- Practice of the active listening technique – in pairs, speaking for two minutes each
- Examples of conflict shared included:
 - Kashmir
 - Scottish Independence
 - Contrasting gendered approach

Ms Shah invited general reflections and observations. The following is a summary of points made by individual participants in the discussion which followed.

- Conflict could be seen as an opportunity for change.
- Ways could be found to challenge/respond to entrenched attitudes; it was always helpful to build alliances beforehand.
- ‘We’re all in conflict’ – it should not be denied.

- Sometimes one had to resist the urge to help/intervene and provide a short-term solution. Rather, one must listen.
- It was important to focus on identifying the cause of the conflict.
- It was important to develop the ability to recognise oneself as the cause of conflict.
- One should not think one understands a conflict better because one is 'outside' it.



Conflict Resilience

Skills for engaging with challenging issues



A bit of history

- St Ethelburga's destroyed by IRA Bishopsgate bomb in 1993
- Bishop of London asked what could be made from this destruction
- Out of this came our mandate for bringing groups together and engaging across divisions of faith, culture, ideology, geography, politics
- Focus on collaborative working and our projects evolve organically based on need
 - workshops
 - public events
 - training programmes



Conflict Resilience

- Opening a dialogue around conflict within faith communities
- Exploring how faith can be used more actively in our responses to conflict
- Sharing stories and building relationships
- Skilling people up to respond more effectively and confidently in future

Our capacities

- **Seeing presenting issues as a window:** looking at the relational context and underlying causes
- **Integrating multiple timeframes:** looking at short-term responses and keeping in mind the need for long-term change; different changes need different responses
- **Posing the energies of conflict as dilemmas:** not allowing our framing to be limited and seeing both/and options
- **Making complexity a friend, not a foe:** recognizing the potential within complexity for building change; seeing numerous options for change and new ways of looking at old patterns
- **Hearing and engaging the voices of identity and relationship:** maintaining an awareness that identity is linked to power, and acknowledging both identities and relationships as challenges

Our capacities

- **Seeing presenting issues as a window:** looking at the relational context and underlying causes
- **Integrating multiple timeframes:** looking at short-term responses and keeping in mind the need for long-term change; different changes need different responses
- **Posing the energies of conflict as dilemmas:** not allowing our framing to be limited and seeing both/and options
- **Making complexity a friend, not a foe:** recognizing the potential within complexity for building change; seeing numerous options for change and new ways of looking at old patterns
- **Hearing and engaging the voices of identity and relationship:** maintaining an awareness that identity is linked to power, and acknowledging both identities and relationships as challenges

Skills

- Active listening
- Courageous Conversations
- Analysing conflict through the lenses of *Identity, Power, Emotion and Opportunity*
- What can our faith teach us about conflict?
- Where can we grow and learn through challenging issues?
- angharad@stethelburgas.org

'When we experience conflict we try to reduce anxiety and pain by looking for a solution without seeing the bigger map of the conflict itself. We view it as a series of challenges and failures – peaks and valleys – without a real sense of the underlying causes and forces in the conflict'

Where is the opportunity?

Discussion Group 3 – Motivations and agendas in inter faith contexts

Facilitator: Jimmy Suratia, Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe and Birmingham Council of Faiths

Presenters: The Revd Daniel Otieno-Ndale, Baptist Union GB, Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs Reference Group of Churches Together in England and Hillingdon Inter Faith Network (unable to attend on the day), and Jay Anderson, Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship

People can sometimes be put off from getting involved in inter faith discussion or multi faith social action because of worries about the possible motivations and agendas of other participants or the fear that there will be a need to compromise deeply held beliefs.

This discussion group will be considering some of the ways in which inter faith organisations and initiatives address these issues.

Mr Jimmy Suratia invited participants to the discussion group. He said that the workshop was considering two issues: What puts people off from engaging in inter faith dialogue; and the worry that some might have that they might need to compromise their deeply held beliefs by going into such a setting – and also the worries and concerns about other participants' motivations and agendas.

He noted that, regrettably, the Revd Daniel Otieno-Ndale was, at the last moment, unable to be present and that Mr Duncan Struthers of Hillingdon Interfaith Network would be reading out a presentation on his behalf. A copy of this is annexed at the end of this note. Jay Anderson underlined the importance of appropriate and inclusive dialogue.

Some points made by individuals in discussion:

- The first presentation highlighted that there are often stereotypes about faiths bandied around. A function of inter faith work is to look beyond those stereotypes.
- Did public authorities seek to impose an external agenda on inter faith groups – using these as an extension of their agency to get their message out but without necessarily giving sufficient consideration to the nature of the message and whether or not it was the role of the inter faith forum to actually be delivering messages of that kind.
- There were likely to be a range of different approaches the issues in different groups. Is commonality was the overarching goal of dialogue or is diversity and the focus on distinctiveness and authentic voice of those representing their faiths was what people were there to learn about?
- People were looking to break down barriers by, in a sense, looking past the difference.
- Differences were interesting and important, and engaging well with them enabled better understanding.
- Very often there were conversations to be had and peace-making to be done within faith traditions which called for action separately from an inter faith setting, and sometimes ahead of engaging inter faith dialogue.

Presentation by the Revd Daniel Otieno-Ndale (given in his absence by Mr Duncan Struthers).

Key points were:

- *The Revd Otieno-Ndale belonged to Hillingdon Inter Faith Network in West London which met primarily to consider issues of concern to the local community.*

- *Some faith groups which had had little interest in inter faith dialogue in the past now saw the value of participation.*
- *Local inter faith groups can be seen by some as forums for expressing particular views or advancing particular agendas.*
- *From time to time, disputes between faith groups locally had an impact on its work, including requests for support.*

Two possible areas of concern for potential participants

a) possible motivations and agendas

- *Most of the time, questions over possible motivations and agendas may not arise.*
 - *However, some have experienced cases where religious groups which were not formally engaged in inter faith activity at national level had wished to be involved at local level.*
 - *In some cases, this could be off-putting and create tension in inter faith groups where there was a perception that these groups were primarily concerned with pushing a recognition agenda rather than building good relations.*
 - *When groups are self-defining and regard themselves as belonging to a particular world religion but are not recognised as such internally within that faith, the local inter faith context may become the place for seeking to address that issue. This can leave local groups in an awkward position, as they may feel they are being set up as arbiters in what might be seen as an 'intra-faith' dispute.*
 - *In Hillingdon, the executive of the inter faith group had taken the initiative in situations where there was unclarity over motivations and agendas by inviting leaders of the groups in question to a conversation.*
- b) the fear that there will be a need to compromise deeply held beliefs**
- *From their experience, if faith communities are to contribute to community cohesion,*
- then contexts in which they talk to one another are potentially valuable discursive spaces that can have an important part to play in a pluralistic public sphere.*
- *At the local level, the religious dimension of community cohesion has been seen as important, giving key attention to the place of inter-religious dialogue and encounter in contributing to good community relations.*
 - *However, participants fear that engaging in inter faith activity may lead to compromising deeply held beliefs; this can be off-putting for them.*
 - *One way that Hillingdon Inter Faith has acted to address this fear is by spreading community activities across the faith groups involved. For example, during the introduction to the local community of the new police corporals an event was held at a local mosque with all other faith groups invited, and each group present was given space to talk about activities and events in their own faith community.*
 - *As part of an Inter Faith Week event, different faith groups were given particular tasks they wished to take on. One group took on providing refreshments, others wished to speak to particular local issues from their faith perspective. The most recent event was Hillingdon Dementia Awareness, a programme offered by the local health authority to local groups. This time the event was held at a Christian church, at which all the faith groups in Hillingdon were welcomed and given an opportunity to notify participants of any events of interest in their own faith group gatherings.*
 - *Hillingdon Inter Faith also provides a single space for all faith groups when it comes to events like the local Uxbridge carnival or the Hayes carnival celebrations. All faith groups are given space at the inter faith stand to display their own activities and literature. This creates a feeling of even-handedness.*
 - *A key value underpinning inter faith events is to respect others, particularly those who tend to feel or are actually marginalised.*

Concluding points:

- *In order to be able to encourage people to participate in faith discussions and multi faith social actions, there is a need to dispel the two fears mentioned above.*
- *From their experience in Hillingdon Inter Faith, bi-lateral dialogue was concerned with building good relationships and exploring particular areas of common ground. Participants often spoke of their spiritual transformation in sharing their faith with someone of a different faith. On-going bi-lateral dialogue consequently assumes recognition of a degree of 'value', even 'truth' in 'the other'. It may also include efforts to correct misunderstandings of the faith of the other.*
- *Important to note is the fact that bi-lateral dialogues tend to take place in a different 'space' to the multi-faith dialogues that are in the 'public domain'.*
- *This 'public domain' is where people of all faiths and none engage with one another – the multi-lateral local inter faith organisation is clearly an aspect of the 'public square' where different religions encounter one another.*
- *When taking part in multi-lateral inter faith initiatives, it is not expected that participants will recognise each other's own self-understanding, nor to accept that they necessarily hold beliefs that should be accepted or approved of.*
- *The multilateral inter faith body is merely the space in which different faiths and belief systems engage with one another in the public domain.*
- *In their experience in Hillingdon Inter Faith Group, the bi-lateral conversation takes what were multi-lateral conversations beyond that public domain into a deeper form of engagement where the value of the other is recognised.*

Discussion Group 4: 'Include me in, include me out'

Facilitator: Derek McAuley, International Association for Religious Freedom and Chief Officer, General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Presenters: Pandit Satish Sharma, General Secretary, National Council of Hindu Temples (UK) and Bev Smerdon, Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity Inter Faith Dialogue Group

How do we handle questions of identity and inclusion in ways which respect the dignity of the individual and enable an equitable and positive engagement? Sometimes people may try to define us other than how we would define ourselves. This can be difficult and painful – whether it is in day to day encounter or 'writ large' in the media. How, too, do we engage with and involve others whose self-definitions or aspects of whose identity may not fit comfortably with our own?

A chance to hear how some of these issues are currently being approached and to consider areas where more needs to be done.

Mr Derek McAuley welcomed participants to the discussion group and invited Ms Bev Smerdon and Pandit Satish Sharma to offer their presentations.

Ms Smerdon offered the following reflections:

- Dialogue was about talking together.
- Many faith communities were either experiencing, or were aligned with those who were experiencing, tough times.
- Faith communities needed to be part of general global change.
- It takes imagination to see a different world; people needed to imagine outside of the box in order to create a better world – this was attainable.

- Science fiction was often used to portray a different world. Militarists employed science fiction writers to help them think of new ideas.
- In the early 1900s a silent film, when London was the centre of the economic world which pictured an aerial battle which destroyed the city.
- Metaphors were useful in dialogue.
- Faith communities needed to bring their spiritual views into reality:
 - They were part of a bigger picture
 - Some might see them as a drop in the ocean but one drop in a still ocean creates ripples
 - One drop in a churning ocean would not be noticed – faith communities should not be afraid to get into the ocean

Pandit Sharma offered his presentation with some PowerPoint slides. A copy of these is at the end of this note. He offered the following reflections:

- Identity had a dual aspect – your own view of yourself; and others' views of you – it was interesting to ask others to outline their views and then compare them to your own.
- There was a battle of identities in all cultures; as part of this one needed to interrogate identity structures.
- Identity had the quality of a mental virus – it was said that up until the age of 8 children accepted all that they were taught.
- There were two general world views:
 1. All humanity is one family; or

2. There is an 'in-group' and an 'out-group'

- Child soldiers being trained to fight against the out-group was an example of the second world view.
- In this second world view only the leaders of the in-group benefited – everyone else lost.
- Reason was the best cure for ignorance – this required confronting all dogmas
- There was a need to reject/abandon all in-groups.
"The great religions are the ships, poets the lifeboats. Every sane person I know has jumped overboard. That is good for business." Hafiz

Mr McAuley invited general reflections and observations. The following is a summary of points made by individual participants in the discussion which followed. They are grouped by general theme.

Dignity and respect

- People should look beyond labels and treat all with dignity and respect.
- In his book called *Games people play* Eric Berne said that in all interaction people either played the parent, the child or the adult – it was only through behaving like adults that everyone could be treated with respect and dignity.

Dialogue

- It was helpful to be in conversation with one another.
- It was also helpful to have tranquillity sometimes, rather than talking.
- If dialogue was essential then it had to include dialogue with religious extremists.

- For dialogue to take place required recognition and shared space.

Factors encouraging people to come together

- There were instances of a lack of social cohesion which had been dealt with by faith leaders coming together.
- Sometimes social pressures, such as a place of worship closing down, brought faith communities together to help one another.

‘Group identity’

- In-groups were negative if they defined out-groups.
- We all have prejudices.
- Humans needed belonging; it was in human nature to belong to groups and not all groups were bad.
- In-groups included family and friends.
- Any group should have a responsibility to the wider community.
- There were external manifestations of practising a faith which suggested identity and belonging to a particular group.
- There was a difference between people from particular groups with a shared aspect of identity – such as people with disabilities or migrant communities – being proud of their identity and, on the other hand, being lumped together by others.
- Sub-identities within groups could have their own dangerous dimensions
- In an open group people could come together to be strengthened in community without the need to sign up to a set of

beliefs – in that way it would be harder to have the stereotype of an ‘outsider’.

- An inclusive mindset was helpful.
- Shared experience or shared genes often meant that people were able to accept someone regardless of other differences.
- People belonged to multiple groups – there was not always consistency between these different groups and there could be conflict between them.
- There was a wide spectrum of groups among faith communities: some were groups from which people could easily move in and out; and others exerted sanctions on those who sought to leave.
- The realities of identity were very important. Faith communities at grassroots level, for example, could have difficulties with some other protected characteristics.
- Some groups were denying the human rights of other groups.
- Identity based groups needed to be scrutinised if they were causing a denial of human rights.
- Groups needed to be respected (for example, some groups were sacrificing their lives to look after other groups, such as Ebola victims).

Other points about identity and influence

- The journey to a utopia was more important than the destination.
- In his poem *The Kingdom* the Welsh clergyman RS Thomas described a world turned upside down as his vision of the kingdom/utopia.

- Rumi spoke of man's need to shake free from all identity.
- Mystics' visions were sometimes abused by those who misled, by miscreants
- Although many people saw their identity as Hindu, the word 'Hindu' was not in scriptures (the word mainly used in scriptures to refer, for example to the dharma, was 'sanatan').
- Clerics had the capacity to influence.
- There were many influences on children, for example grandparents. What attracted them to a certain identity or persuaded them [as in the PowerPoint presentation of Pandit Sharma], to fight?
- All children had the same emotions of fear and love and a desire to be loved. If guilt and fear was embedded in children's minds, it undercut their ability to use reason.
- Those who believed that they were tolerant – such as liberals – were sometimes the most intolerant.
- An inclusive mindset would be helpful.
- Everyone needed to gain greater spiritual maturity.

Other

- There was a danger that people had become so politically correct that they did not challenge evil – for example, in the Rotherham abuse cases.
- A sacred space was only sacred if it had no literal or virtual walls and was open to all.

And finally:

"A grandmother asked her grandson whether his friend was a Sikh. He replied 'Yes, he's 6 like me'!

Safety Guidelines

- Please do not believe a word I say – its not required.
- Feel free to reject everything I present
- I am NOT responsible for your thoughts – you are
- ..now to the unreal...

"Include me in- include me out"

Satish K Sharma
General Secretary – NCHTUK
Chair – British Board of Hindu Scholars

The Identity Duality

- How you Identify yourself ?
 - How do you "experience" yourself
 - How do you recall what you have been told by yourself?
- How others Identify you
 - What do "others" tell you about you
 - What do others tell other "others" about you

The Identity game..

- How "I" am identified at this moment in history – by "others"
 - Hindu
 - Heathen
 - Infidel
 - Kafir
 - Non Believer
 - Idol Worshipper
 - And most recently by Lord Harries – Caste racist Brahmin

How I experience myself..

– Hindu ?	No
– Heathen?	No
– Infidel/Non Believer?	No
– Kafir ?	No
– Idol Worshipper	No
– Caste racist Brahmin	No

Identity view 1 “All of Humanity is one..”

- Created Mankind in His image...
 - ALL of us..
 - Inclusive
 - Interdependent
 - Inter-responsible
 - Experiential

How I identify myself..

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| – Hindu | ? |
| – Heathen | ? |
| – Infidel/Non Believer? | ? |
| – Kafir ? | ? |
| – Idol Worshipper | ? |
| – Caste racist Brahmin | ? |
- Later..... Perhaps....

In-Group/Out-Group view

- In-Group features-
 - Elitist ideology
 - Sense of entitlement
 - Sense of separation
 - Sense of fear
 - Sense of expansionism
- Out-Group
 - Denigration, vilification, assault, extermination

Identity – Mental Virus?

- “Unless you become as Children, you can not enter the kingdom of heaven”
- Until the age of 8, a child is in a hypnogogic state – the filter of reasoning hasnt yet formed
 - Whatever is presented is accepted without question no matter how preposterous or absurd..
- Whatever identity ideas are presented are accepted and become the foundation of the “personality”

Identity – Mental Virus?

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- Whatever identity ideas are presented are accepted and become the foundation of the “personality”

Two world views..

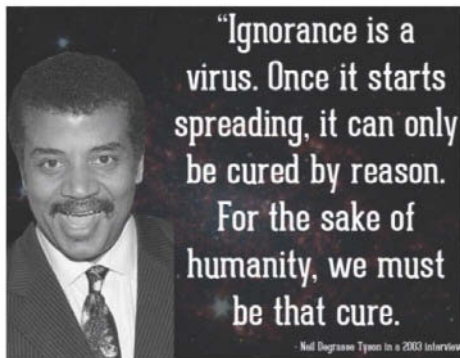
- Each based upon one of two Identity perspectives...
 - “All of Humanity is one family ...”, the vedic “VasuDeva Kutumbakum” declaration..
 - The “In-Group Morality – Out-Group Hostility” phenomem.. (Seen in playgrounds, gangs, football hooligans, feature of post 325AD religions and evident in many other arenas)

What have they been listening to?



In Group/Out Group Dynamics

- Who benefits?
 - Group leaders
 - ?
- Who loses?
 - Who doesn't?



Who teaches the children?

- At birth – no identity
 - Someone injects ideas of “in group morality” and “out group hostility” ?
 - The person becomes less than a member of humanity and becomes a member of an “in-group” and a lifelong struggle between groups begins.
 - Can members of an in-group EVER find tranquility for all in-groups?
-
- What are the options?
 - Eternal competition between in-groups?
 - Movement from in-group to no-group?
 - ?
 - "The great religions are the ships, poets the lifeboats. Every sane person I know has jumped overboard. That is good for business." Hafiz



Discussion Group 5: Inter faith engagement and extremism

Facilitator: Catriona Robertson, Wandsworth Multi-Faith Network and London Boroughs Faiths Network

Presenters: Peter Adams, Churches Together in Luton and Luton Council of Faiths and Anjum Anwar, Christian Muslim Forum and Dialogue Development Officer, Blackburn Cathedral and Chair of Woman's Voice

A discussion group looking at engagement with extreme points of view, opening with examples from local areas where faith groups have been responding together to stand up to far right extremism and also including reflections on other experiences of responding to extreme views, including on the internet.

Ms Catriona Robertson welcomed participants. She invited them in turn to offer any opening observations before the presentations and then invited further discussion after these. In this note, the points of participants from the two different rounds of input have been combined and grouped by general theme.

Mr Peter Adams gave an opening presentation based on the PowerPoint slides. A summary of these slides is at the end of this note.

In his presentation he made the following points:

- Luton has a population of around 205,000, 55% of which are of non-British ethnic origin.
- The people of Luton came from 110 nations and speak 140 languages. 35% of them are from non-Christian religious backgrounds.
- A number of incidents had taken place in Luton relating to extremism; and the Stockholm bomber was found to live in Luton.
- When soldiers returned from Iraq they were met by angry protestors.
- Many English Defence League marches had taken place in Luton. A large one took place in February 2011. 3 months of preparation had taken place to ensure everyone's safety and there was a multi faith observer group.
- In May 2009 Muslims and Christians in Luton issued a joint statement on 'Working Together for Peace and Unity'.
- The 'Living with Extremism: Living under the Media Focus' campaign had the following components:
 1. Holding the town together
 2. Understanding the issues
 3. Getting religious leaders to stand together and build trust in each other
 4. Peacekeeping before, during and after a demonstration
 5. Identifying and seeing to dialogue with protest groups
 6. Challenging the narrative of extremism

7. Addressing the fears of community
 8. Getting the right message in the media
 9. Working with the police
 10. Consistently challenging the poison of hate speech
 11. Building resilience of community to resist violence and hatred and to identify and address issues that divide
- Mr Adams was a 'passionate' and 'radical' Christian; not a 'moderate'.

Ms Anjum Anwar made a presentation which included the following points:

- Beware of demonisation through semantics – for example, there is regularly inaccurate use of terms like 'jihadist'.
- Beware also alarmism. Boris Johnson had suggested that people be careful about travelling on London Transport and this caused unnecessary alarm.
- She and Canon Chris Chivers (a former canon at Blackburn Cathedral) had used an exercise with discussion groups called "Will the real terrorist please stand up" to tackle some prevailing stereotypes. The first time they had run this was with around 85 people, only 7 or 8 of whom were non-white. It had been very illuminating.
- Extremism was not all about foreign policy but there was a link between foreign policy and extremism and this should not be discounted. Support by Government of corrupt governments in other parts of the world had an impact.
- Anjem Choudhry had been arrested the previous day. Some had seen the timing of the arrest as having a political motivation.

- The Government Prevent programme was a policy with some problematic aspects. These needed discussion.
- Media was very important. She was a regular broadcaster and used interviews to explore difficult issues which need to be addressed.
- Recently she had spoken with two young men from Hizb ut-Tahrir. She had also talked with a British National Party member. Two intelligent and peaceful conversations where she found the views misguided but thought that it was very important to have the discussion.
- Dialogue had made – and continued to make – a very big difference to the community in Blackburn Diocese, and the communities within it.
- It was vital not to give up on dialogue and the idea that we can learn from each other and work through issues.

Ms Robertson invited general reflections and observations. The following is a summary of points made by individual participants in the discussion which followed. They are grouped by general theme.

Extremism, Anti-Semitism and Racism

- Concerns about terrorism and extremism were genuine and had a real basis.
- The way in which counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism was approached could bring with it stereotyping of groups and seeing Muslims, in particular, through this lens. Cohesion work was affected by that.
- The actions of ISIL were having a strong effect on how Muslims were perceived in this country and this was not helped by the Government talking about Muslims as though they were ‘other’ and a ‘blame’

dimension noticeable in community cohesion contexts.

- The speaker (a Muslim woman from the North East) said that she had grown up with a loud level of racism; in 2009 she had been attacked twice.
- Extreme right wing groups were affecting other groups, including in the North East.
- The rise of anti-Semitism in UK and Europe was a serious concern.
- Sikhs were also affected and had a strong commitment to working with other communities on issues like tackling extremism and racism.
- All communities should be involved in responding to racism, extremism and Anti-Semitism.
- In Bolton, Britain First and NW Infidels appeared whenever there was a new mosque application and had also been at a charity football match.
- In some areas there was increasing polarisation of communities.
- Some politicians were fanning the flames of extremism.
- The presence of Prevent Officers at meetings could be challenging for some.

Dialogue and working together

- If only talking with people who already agreed, what was the point?
- We need to be able to speak with those who disagree.
- Issues of identity and justice aroused strong emotions.
- Engaging with people needed also to take place outside the kind of communities we

traditionally thought of. Many of the people needing to be engaging with each other were not in 'communities' of that kind.

- There was sometimes a lack of leadership in faith communities on these issues.
- Jewish–Muslim engagement was very important, including between clergy.
- The Joseph Interfaith Foundation had a Council of Imams and Rabbis.
- Simplistic and binary approaches should be avoided.
- Terrorism called for a joint response.
- Unity and diversity required cultural diplomacy sometimes for harmony.
- Local authorities had an important role in engaging with these issues.

Local inter faith

- Altrincham had developed a successful, tolerant inter faith group. As well as its meetings, it had friendship circles in people's homes. When in these and sharing food (which was all very carefully labelled) people developed friendships and recognised common cause.
- Manchester was proud to have a Muslim-Jewish Association. It had been going for a number of years and made a real impact.
- Faith communities needed to be more active on the local inter front.
- Grassroots upward engagement was needed.
- Working together as faith communities locally was vital.
- The North East Regional Faith Network had had their central Government funding

terminated in 2011. This had an impact of work that was badly needed.

- From a North West perspective, more investment in this vital area of work was needed.
- There was a need to be much more proactive and not to be blindsided when new problems arose.

Universities

- Simplistic language was often used in universities in dealing with issues to do with extremism.
- If you talked to the students the words 'extremist' and 'radical' did not mean anything. They had to be defined clearly.
- There were often moves to counteract extremism on campus by bringing in religious leaders but these generally had little or no standing in the eyes of students.
- The Joseph Interfaith Foundations had learnt that you had to prove to students that you were an 'honest broker'; you had no agenda beyond enabling dialogue and that you provided a safe space for that. When students spoke they did not usually have a vocabulary for the discussions they wanted and needed to have. You had to take care over language and how you heard the language and who you brought in as discussants.

Other

- The deployment in Birmingham a few years earlier of spy cameras in some strongly Muslim areas had raised concern.
- There was a great deal of negative media.

Working for the Peace of Luton 2009-2014

*Working for Peace in our City
Extending Peace to our "Enemies"*

Living with Extremism: The Demonstrations

Luton

- Officially 205,000, probably 215,000
- Very high population density
- 55% of non-British ethnic origin -- Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, African Caribbean, African, Eastern European, Irish.
- Over 65% of children under 15 Non British Ethnic
- People from 110 nations, 140 language
- 35% of non-Christian religious background.
- Over 25% are Muslims.
- Last ten years has seen new communities of Poles, Turks, Congolese, Somalians, Ghanaians, Nigerians, Zimbabweans.
- A superdiverse society.

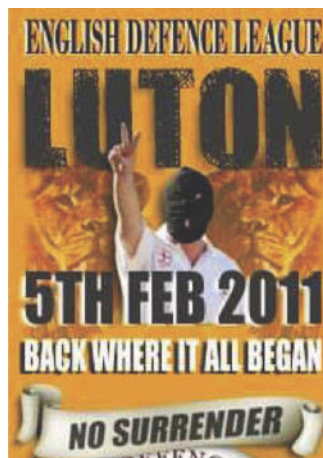
Luton Council of Faiths

Luton Council of Faiths

"We dialogue NOT to mix all religions into one. We dialogue simply to make friends. We are NOT about diluting our faith. We are about affirming and sharing our faith and religious identities.

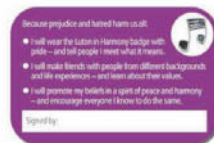
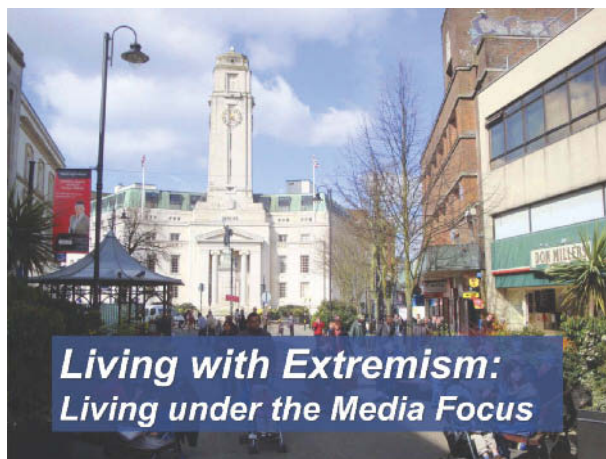
We, from different faith communities in Luton, inspired by our own faith, express confidence in ourselves and in one another to spread the way of peace and dialogue for resolving any conflict situations that may arise from time to time, due to what may happen locally or globally.

We commit ourselves to be the eyes, ears and conscience of our communities in Luton. And therefore, offer ourselves as instruments of healing where there is pain, reconciliation where there is confrontation, calm where there is anger, sharing divine love where there is hatred."



Preparation for 5th Feb 2011.

- 3 months preparation
- Hundreds of planning meetings
- 2000 police from across the nation
- 200 yards of 9 foot steel barriers
- Church and Muslim community
 - A place of safety
 - 25 Christian leaders on the streets
 - 12 Christians & 12 Muslims in mixed community mediation teams
 - 70 Muslim stewards
- Multifaith observer group



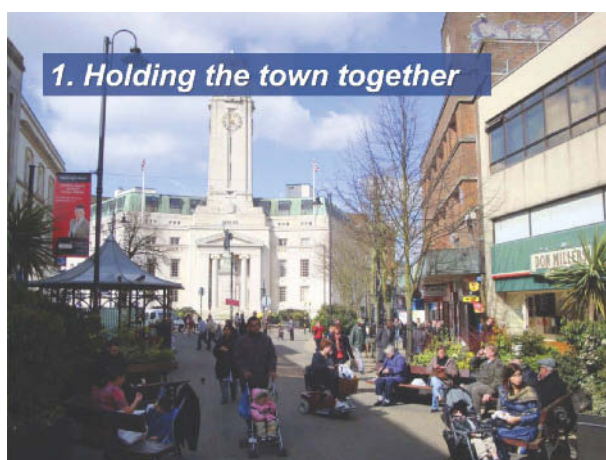
I will wear the Luton in Harmony badge with pride and tell people I meet what it means



Dealing with extremists

Because prejudice & hatred harm us all:

- I will make friends with people from different backgrounds & life experiences and learn about their values
- I will promote my beliefs in a spirit of peace & harmony & encourage everyone I know to do the same



Luton in Harmony
Many Voices, One Town





4. Peacekeeping before, during and after a demonstration



8. Getting right message in the media

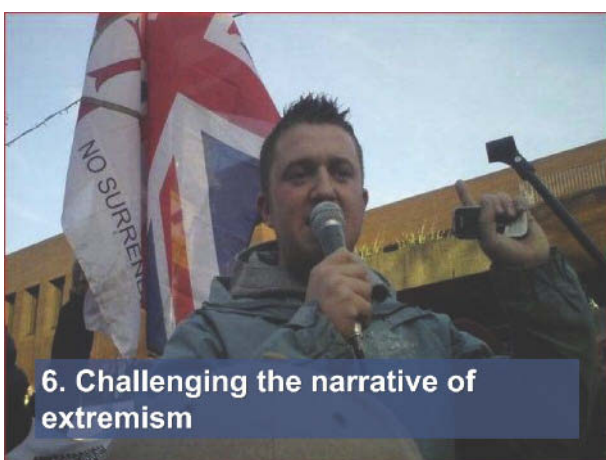


5. Identify and seek to dialogue with protest groups, eg UAF.

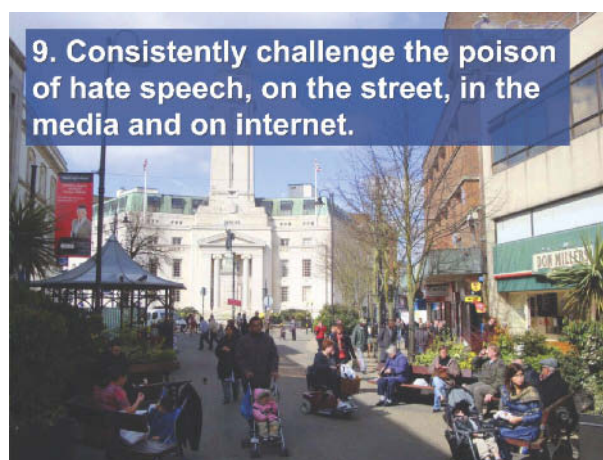


8. Working with the Police

- Ensure they don't give ground for an easy demonstration
- Community cohesion first, law and order policing when necessary.
- When they trust you and your voice in community life is much easier!
- Don't be afraid to question strategies & action



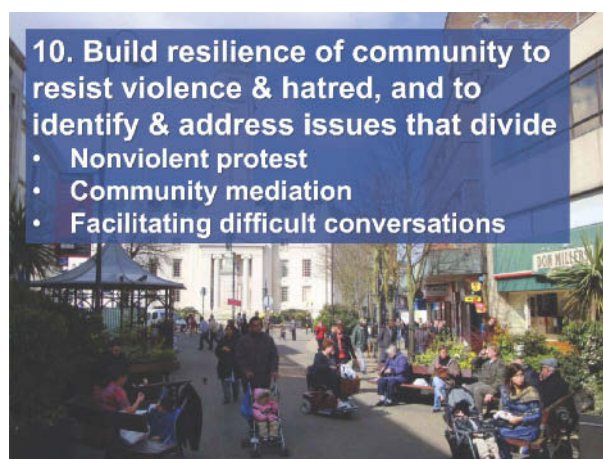
6. Challenging the narrative of extremism



9. Consistently challenge the poison of hate speech, on the street, in the media and on internet.



7. Addressing the fears of community



10. Build resilience of community to resist violence & hatred, and to identify & address issues that divide

- Nonviolent protest
- Community mediation
- Facilitating difficult conversations

Discussion Group 6: Engaging well with difficult issues: learning from schools and youth inter faith work

Facilitator: Dr Norman Richardson MBE, Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum

Presenters: Dr Joyce Miller, Chair, Religious Education Council of England and Wales and Tamanda Walker, Training & Partnerships Manager, 3FF

Opening presentation about what can be learned from the RE classroom about engaging well with controversial and sensitive issues.

Followed by sharing of experiences of positive work with and by young people of inter faith engagement.

Dr Norman Richardson welcomed participants and invited those present to observe a few moments of silent reflection and introduced the themes of the discussion.

Dr Joyce Miller explained that she had begun her career as a Religious Education teacher before becoming involved with Initial Teacher Training in Wolverhampton. She had gone on to become an RE inspector in Bradford. Bradford was the first area to establish a youth SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) and was where the Schools Linking Network had begun.

She said that the aims and purposes of RE need constant re-visiting, but she would structure her presentation around three phrases linked to these.

The first phrase was that RE was about “helping young people to have open hearts and open minds”. This involved encouraging young people (and RE teachers) to be willing to challenge their own preconceptions and prejudices, both about their own faiths and those of others (open minds). It also involved developing empathy (open hearts). Curiosity and love of learning should be core to the ethos of all schools, and in this way the school

could help RE to thrive and RE could help a school to thrive.

The second phrase was “avoid an exchange of ignorance”. This had to do with methodology. It took skilled teachers to channel open minds and hearts into authentic enquiry. The study of religions could be thought of as a ‘hermeneutic spiral’ – it kept adding ideas and questions. It also required critical engagement – the ability to ask oneself “Why do I think that?” No one wanted their core values to be criticised, but fostering genuine enquiry required encouraging self-reflection. Participative learning was also important, creating environments in which pupils can engage with and learn from one another, and in which the teacher is willing to learn from the pupils.

The third phrase was “avoiding sanitisation and satanisation” of religions. There was a tendency toward a Manichean worldview with simple dualities between light and dark, positive and negative. Religions were complex and did not fit neatly into either category.

Ms Tamanda Walker included PowerPoint slides in her presentation. A copy of these is at the end of this note.

She said that 3FF worked to build trust and understanding between people of all faiths and beliefs, building on its history of working with the three Abrahamic faiths. It worked programmatically, and aimed to do so practically and in ways which reached into the grassroots. It ran a ‘schools linking programme’, which it had inherited from the Schools Linking Network, through which schools are paired with one of a different faith ethos for a year. This enabled pupils and staff to encounter difference. In practice, the engagement between the schools did not always focus specifically on faith, and might involve cultural, ethnic and other aspects of difference.

3FF ran workshops on learning from and about other faiths. This involved the creation

of safe spaces, and deliberate use of 'I' statements. It was important to make clear that people speaking did so as individuals rather than as representatives of faiths more widely. Speaking in terms of 'I believe...' or 'my family does...' helped to avoid giving that impression.

3FF was always clear that the purpose of these programmes was to encourage dialogue rather than debate. To help with this, participants were encouraged to use the 'Oops/Ouch' tool. This meant that participants in discussion were asked to say "Oops!" if they realised they had said something they didn't mean, or which they realised could be interpreted in ways they didn't mean. They were encouraged to say "Ouch!" if they found something said by another participant was problematic or was a misconception/misunderstanding of their own faith or practice. This then enabled the discussion to stop, and participants could talk about why there was a sticking point and what the issues were. The tool had been helpful with both young people and adults.

3FF ran two companion workshops called the 'Art of Empathy' and the 'Art of Asking'. The Art of Empathy workshop enabled students to reflect on their own identities, and those of others, and identified practical skills for empathising with others. The Art of Asking workshop explored different ways of asking questions to encourage more engaged forms of response exploring how to ask questions about faiths and beliefs more sensitively, confidently and effectively.

3FF's flagship workshop, 'Encountering Faiths and Beliefs', brought together a panel of three trained speakers from different faith or non-religious belief backgrounds and an expert facilitator. Speakers shared their personal stories and responded to questions. Students were enabled to practice dialogue skills, whilst also experiencing positive dialogue and encounter being modelled by the panel.

3FF worked with Teach First. Some of the methods and tools outlined were also used by Amnesty International in their dialogue work with adults.

Dr Richardson invited general reflections and observations. The following is a summary of points made by individual participants in the discussion which followed. They are grouped by general theme.

Importance of Religious Education and making the case for this

- RE was extremely important in a multi faith society.
- RE had been under increasing challenge. There was a need for parents of all faiths to put pressure on the Government to support RE, and for adult faith and inter faith structures to do this.
- 78% of people had the some kind of religion.
- RE was in some ways a study of society and how to live together.
- Many areas within the UK could be described as multi-faith, multi-cultural and so forth. In this context, surely RE was self-evidently important.
- There was a need to make RE attractive and 'fashionable'.
- RE could also be used to tackle bullying.
- Good RE often led to a better school ethos overall.
- Faith communities needed to enlighten their flocks about RE and its benefits.
- Some parents feared children's faith being diluted by exposure to other views in RE. It was important to teach children to learn about and respect other faiths, and to convey that this is what RE is about.

- There was a need to reach out to parents so that they could see how well pupils got on across faiths; sometimes parents lived in more isolated and less integrated environments and seeing this was important.

Training for RE teaching

- RE teachers play a very important role.
- Continuing changes within the education system have not helped with teacher confidence.
- Teacher ability and capacity in RE was an issue, particularly with many non-specialists teaching the subject.
- RE was an essential tool for young people to be successful in the world.
- A survey of schools in a participant's local area had found that some RE teachers had appropriate experience and training, but some had none and taught RE as an add-on to their other work. How might those without training be brought together to increase their skills?
- Teachers with confidence and competence were essential – there were RE teacher Hubs.
- The National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) was there to support teachers of RE.
- Some non-specialist teachers were very good.
- There was a need to focus training on the socio-political dimensions of religion.

Developing RE

- *The Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* (Produced by the Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe's

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) were very helpful, as were those from the Council of Europe.

- Books by John Keast and Bob Jackson were very helpful.
- The *Beyond RE* report drew on work in Slovakia, Finland and Sweden. There would be benefit in much more cross-learning between different countries.
- There was a need for more interdisciplinary working.
- PSHE was often linked with RE in schools.
- There was value in what we learnt from each other and a need for more sharing of good practice.
- Could IFN help develop case studies in good practice to help support teachers and local inter faith organisations?
- Context was very important, there was no 'one-size fits all' approach.

Handling challenging issues in the classroom

- Back in 1998 a participant had experienced pupils bringing inter-religious tensions into the classroom in a particular local area. Having confident teachers was essential to handling this well; confidence comes from expertise.
- The pupils mentioned earlier above were, in the participant's view, often largely echoing their parents' concerns.
- Handling conflict well required further study – it was bigger than RE alone.
- The RE Council ran the RE-Silence programme which included background for teachers on handling controversial issues.

- Sometimes it was better to bring in outsiders if an area had particular tensions.

Community links and other routes for learning about religion

- There was a need to work with faith communities to help them to work with schools – both were civil society institutions which should look after one another.
- Mutual support was hugely important – parents, teachers and faith communities should work together. Perhaps a website could be used to enable networking and joint working.
- Faith and inter faith groups could also support RE lessons through making available their places of worship for visits, providing good quality, trained speakers etc.
- The faith trails in Bolton saw over 4,500 pupils a year take part. This was one strand of Bolton Inter Faith Council's work with schools. Some pupils came prepared with questions to ask and it was clear that their teachers had briefed them well in advance.
- The Bolton Inter Faith Young Ambassadors programme had been running for 7 years. This had led to members becoming involved in all aspects of life in Bolton. The Programme enjoyed huge support from the parents of those involved.
- The Peace Mala project was developed by the head of RE in Llanelli working with pupils. It involved making bracelets featuring a double rainbow of beads – each bead representing the Golden Rule in a particular faith. The project had taken off nationally. Peace Mala also ran accreditation of schools linked to the project.
- Government could help, but inter faith groups should lead.

School make up and ethos

- Many schools did not have a clear programme for engaging with diversity. This needed to begin with recognising difference – then being comfortable with the other, then respecting the other.
- Schools varied – they were not all very diverse.
- In Bradford, some schools had pupils who were nearly all of the same ethnic background (white British or Pakistani British). This was because parents of these backgrounds seemed to apply to the same schools.
- Schools were capable of being hubs of the community.
- Primary schools often had better community links than secondary schools.

SACREs

- It was sometimes difficult to get inter faith engagement onto the SACRE agenda.
- Could SACREs and local inter faith groups work more together? If so, how?

Other

- There was a need for higher levels of religious literacy among media professionals.

Engaging well with controversial and sensitive issues:

What can we learn from the RE classroom?



Tamanda Walker
Training & Partnerships Manager

Who We Are

3FF works to build understanding and lasting relationships between people of all faiths and beliefs



Our Work in Schools

- School Linking
- Workshops
 - 'Art of Empathy'
 - 'Art of Asking'
 - 'Encountering Faiths & Beliefs'



Oops! Ouch! Questions

Why is an Atheist on a panel talking about religion?

Do you ever feel oppressed as a Muslim woman?

Is it true that not as many Jews died in the Holocaust as they say?

Why are Jews always trying to conquer Muslims?
(Jewish) (Muslim)

Why do Christians think they're superior to everyone else?

Why do your religious people always think you know best? (Hindu)

If God loves you then why does he always tell you what to do? (Sikh)

Why do Jewish men dress funny and have curly hair?

Don't you think it's unfair that Muslim girls have to cover their hair?

Why do Christians hate gay people?

Don't you think it's stupid to follow books that were written hundreds of years ago by uncivilised people? (Hindu)

As an Atheist how can you be so sure that God doesn't exist?

To Helpful Qs →



So what can we learn...?

From classrooms, to workplaces, to local communities...

...There is a real need to make sense of diversity and talk about it *meaningfully* and *productively*



Keep In Touch...

www.3ff.org.uk

tamanda@3ff.org.uk

Or follow us on social media...



Discussion Group 7 – Difficult issues: faith communities responding on social challenges

Facilitator: Ms Padideh Sabeti, Office of Public Affairs, Baha'i Community of the UK

Presenters: Philip Rosenberg, Director of Public Affairs, Board of Deputies of British Jews and Ranveer Singh, Khalsa Aid

The range of tough social challenges with which faith communities engage, singly and together and with non-religious bodies, is broad. How are people engaging together to make a difference on particular issues? A chance to hear about some national and local examples and also to share experiences of some of the practical aspects of joint working.

Ms Padideh Sabeti welcomed participants and noted that she was facilitating the workshop in place of Rosanna Smith who had been unable to attend due to illness. She invited Mr Phil Rosenberg and Mr Ranveer Singh (who was standing in for Mr Ravinder Singh, CEO of Khalsa Aid) to offer their brief presentations.

Mr Philip Rosenberg began by sharing some copies of the Jewish Election Manifesto prepared by the Board of Deputies of British Jews (<http://www.bod.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/BoD-Manifesto.pdf>). He offered the following reflections:

- The Manifesto set out Ten Commitments on which the Jewish community would like the support of MPs and their political parties. One of these commitments related to social action.
- Faith communities could consider what their faiths taught about issues such as slavery and poverty and then campaign on those issues.
- It was important to connect with the political scene and the General Election in order to leverage change.
- The Manifesto document used language that was true to the Jewish tradition but it was intended to be accessible to everyone.
- Many faith communities only constituted a small percentage of the UK population so communities working together would have more impact. The Board of Deputies would be interested to hear from any other faith communities interested in working on social action projects together.
- Should faith communities choose to work together on an issue or should one faith community start with an issue on which it felt passionately and then involve other communities? This was up to communities to decide.
- The Church of England had invited other faith communities to look with it at the issue of modern day slavery.
- Social action events, such as inter faith work on food poverty, were a good way to get the attention of the media.

Mr Ranveer Singh offered a brief overview of the work of Khalsa Aid, noting the following points:

- It began in 1999 and was the first aid organisation based on the Sikh faith and principles. It had 3 paid employees.
- It focused on five issues: poverty; hunger; disease; injustice; and exploitation.
- It worked with a 'hands-on' approach.
- It worked in Haiti, Africa, Asia and Europe and recently in the Middle East.
- Its CEO had flown out to see Kurdish refugees in Iraq and Syria. He had spoken with a Swedish specialist hospital with

which Khalsa Aid were now working at the camp.

- It had helped build a bakery on the Iraq/Syria border which was benefitting 16,000 refugees each day – changing people's lives for the better.
- It had played a key role in helping communities affected by the major floods in the UK. This was an example of working together locally even when the local council had not been proactive in engaging its services.

Ms Sabeti invited general reflections and observations. The following is a summary of points made by individual participants in the discussion which followed.

Examples of social action

- One participant said that their local group had also helped communities in flooded areas by collecting food and blankets.
- One participant's group did a lot of campaigning and social action in local communities. The local church was open until 10pm and youth groups and groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous were encouraged to make use of it. All faith communities were on a journey to promote good in society.
- Food banks run by faith communities were feeding thousands of people each week.
- 12 *gurdwaras* in Leicester had held a drive for food and clothing. There had been discussion about whether these items should be distributed to a homeless centre which was used by drug addicts and alcoholics. It was agreed that they should. Thousands of people received free meals each week from Sikh langars.
- A recent faith and food event in North Yorkshire had been very successful.

Working together

- Working on common causes created trust.
- Humanitarian aid could be very complex to coordinate, but there were many positive local examples of communities responding together to situations. For example, the North London synagogue was working with refused asylum seekers and had teamed up with local churches to provide help to homeless people. Jews and Muslims were also working together in Willesden and Cricklewood.
- In one area six groups were working together to respond to need.
- Joint social action, such as humanitarian aid, required trust between communities.
- Joint positive reactions to situations were very helpful.
- It was often difficult in rural communities, such as North Yorkshire, to meet people from other faiths.
- Building trust was a prerequisite to collaborating and cooperating. The Baha'i community in the UK had been lobbying about the persecution of Baha'is but had made it clear that it was not Islam doing this to the Baha'i community. Faith communities should not feed into what the media wanted. Communities should seek justice and bring unity by avoiding creating fractures.
- Birmingham Council of Faiths was established over 35 years ago and encouraged cooperative thinking on issues.
- Faith communities should promote the work of their organisations such as Khalsa Aid to show the charitable work done out of faith conviction and to show communities working together.

- The Church of England was promoting joint working of faith communities through the Near Neighbours programme.
- Religions for Peace UK sometimes found it difficult to encourage faith groups to work together. Unless there was a benefit to them, they did not get involved. Everyone, including national faith communities, needed educating. It was essential to build trust and to work together on the root causes of the problems.
- The Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Muslim Council of Britain had made joint statements and were committed to the common cause. This had been a bright light in an otherwise difficult summer.

State and faith communities

- Faith communities were picking up the Government's agenda. It was not possible to get away from politics but this must not detract from the real work on the ground. In Lancashire phrases such as 'voluntary, community and social enterprise' were often used in the community sector and references to faith were omitted. That was regrettable. Churches nowadays were often only open for a few hours a day. Churches and faith groups were a vital part of the overall pattern of the UK, alongside Parliament and the monarchy. They had an important role to play and clergy should be at the heart of the action to help people.

Responding to negative images or attack

- People often asked what the problem was between Jews and Muslims. There was no problem. The core values of religions were the same. This should be emphasised.
- It sometimes appeared that if the Muslim community promoted a campaign, it became a target for criticism. The Charity Commission had investigated some Muslim charities.
- Perceptions of Muslims and Muslim organisations were affected by negative media and misunderstanding of linked to overseas events. At the moment the actions of 'IS' had this affect. The media needed to understand that IS was neither Islamic nor a state. Other countries around the world were not giving the group that name.
- Faith communities should respond when people from other faiths were vilified. The Ten Commitments in the Jewish Election Manifesto explicitly opposed racism in all forms, including Antisemitism and Islamophobia.
- A campaign called 'Occupy Democracy' would be taking place in October. Faith communities could get involved in this together.

Need for support

- Communities needed support to integrate properly.
- When the state withdrew funding, charities had to look for more resources from elsewhere.
- Faith communities were increasing their efforts to help people in need but most of their members were working as volunteers and this had limitations.
- The Woolf Institute was currently researching charities such as Rumi's Kitchen, a kitchen for the homeless and vulnerable in North London, which were assisting people. Their work was excellent, but all such charities were competing for resources.
- It was difficult when groups had to compete for resources.

- In these times of austerity it seemed that when the state stepped away, the faith communities stepped forward.

Other

- Campaigning and social action were not separate; there was no need for them to be described as if there were a dichotomy.
- Special 'Days' to draw attention to issues were helpful.
- Social action could break down social barriers.
- Faiths within the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector were sometimes seen by people who did not have a faith as competing for glory. Jesus taught that giving to the poor should be done in secret. There was sometimes a mismatch of motives.
- The British National Party had suggested that children should be withdrawn from lessons about Islam. The Muslim community needed the support of inter faith organisations.
- The Islamic Society of Britain had a focus on social action. It was projecting a confident relaxed voice for British Muslims.

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The Inter Faith Network for the UK

Inter faith understanding, respect and cooperation is ever more important in the UK today.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) links and works with national faith community representative bodies, inter faith organisations, academic and educational organisations with an interest in inter faith relations, as well as with other organisations including Government and other public agencies, to strengthen inter faith understanding and cooperation in the UK. IFN is unique in its scope and role both within the UK and in Europe. It has been bringing organisations and people together for over 25 years and its work is always evolving to meet fresh needs.

IFN carries out its work of strengthening good inter faith relations through:

- providing advice and support to inter faith organisations around the country to add value to their work
- running a helpline which each year assists hundreds of people with their inter faith projects or issues
- advocating for support of local inter faith groups and national and regional inter faith initiatives
- producing resources, in cooperation with its members, on issues of common concern such as faith based dietary practice
- bringing its member bodies and others together regularly to meet and discuss issues of common concern
- other programmes of work including Faith and Public Life and Inter Faith Week

For more information about IFN, visit www.interfaith.org.uk.

The work of IFN is supported by faith communities, trusts, other donors, and the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Member Organisations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK 2014–15

Faith Community Representative Bodies

Baha'i Community of the UK
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha
Board of Deputies of British Jews
British Muslim Forum
Buddhist Society
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
Churches Together in England
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)
Druid Network
General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
Hindu Council (UK)
Hindu Forum of Britain
Islamic Cultural Centre
Jain Network
Jain Samaj Europe
Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain (Association of Muslim Scholars)
Methodist Church in Britain
Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board
Muslim Council of Britain
National Council of Hindu Temples (UK)
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)
Pagan Federation
Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations
Spiritualists' National Union
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League
World Islamic Mission (UK)
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Educational and Academic Bodies

Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme
Community Religions Project, University of Leeds
Institute of Jainology
Islamic Foundation
National Association of SACREs
Religious Education Council of England and Wales
Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education
Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter
Wales Association of SACREs
Woolf Institute

National and Regional Inter Faith Organisations

Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum
Interfaith Scotland
Inter-faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Cyd-Ffydd Cymru
Faiths Forum for London
North East Regional Faiths Network
Northwest Forum of Faiths
South East England Faith Forum
West Midlands Faiths Forum
Children of Abraham (Imams and Rabbis Council of the United Kingdom)
Christian Muslim Forum
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme
Coexist Foundation
Council of Christians and Jews
Council of Dharmic Faiths
East of England Faiths Agency
Hindu Christian Forum
Interfaith Action (INTERACT)
Interfaith Alliance UK
International Association for Religious Freedom (British Chapter)
International Interfaith Centre
Joseph Interfaith Foundation
Lokahi Foundation

London Society of Jews and Christians
Maimonides Interfaith Foundation
Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby
Religions for Peace (UK)
Scriptural Reasoning
Society for Dialogue and Action
St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace
St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society
Three Faiths Forum
Tony Blair Faith Foundation
United Religions Initiative (UK)
Westminster Interfaith
Women's Interfaith Network
World Congress of Faiths

Local Inter Faith Groups

Altrincham Inter Faith Group
Learning Together, Living in Harmony (Aylesbury)
Barking and Dagenham Faith Forum
Barnet Multi-Faith Forum
Bedford Council of Faiths
Birmingham Council of Faiths
Blackpool Faith Forum
Bolton Interfaith Council
Bradford Concord Interfaith Society
Brent Interfaith
Brent Multi-Faith Forum
Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact Group
Bristol Inter Faith Group
Bristol Multi-Faith Forum
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Muslim-Christian Forum (Bury)
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Cambridge Inter-Faith Group
Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action
Cheltenham Inter Faith
Cleveland and Tees Valley Inter Faith Group
Coventry Multi-Faith Forum
Crawley Interfaith Network
Faiths Together in Croydon
Cumbria Interfaith Forum
Forum of Faiths for Derby
Devon Faith and Belief Forum
Doncaster Interfaith
Dudley Borough Interfaith Network
Eastbourne Faiths Forum
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Horsham Interfaith Forum
Hounslow Friends of Faith
Huddersfield Inter Faith Council
Inter Faith Isle of Man
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Islington Faiths Forum
Keighley Interfaith Group
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Kirklees Faiths Forum
Faiths Together in Lambeth
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Faith in Lancaster
Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship
Leeds Faiths Forum
Leicester Council of Faiths
Interfaith Forum for Leicestershire
Loughborough Council of Faiths
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Newcastle Council of Faiths
Newham Association of Faiths
North Herts Faith Forum
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North Lincolnshire Multi Faith Partnership
North Staffordshire Forum of Faiths
Northampton Inter Faith Forum
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Nottingham Inter Faith Council
Oldham Inter Faith Forum
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William Campbell-Taylor (City of London
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Wisbech Interfaith Forum
Wolverhampton Inter Faith and Regeneration
Network
Worcestershire Inter-Faith Forum
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths
York Interfaith Group

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