



Promoting mutual respect  
and understanding between  
the faith communities  
of the UK

The Editor  
The Sunday Telegraph  
111 Buckingham Palace Road  
London  
SW1W 0DT

3 January 2024

Dear Sir,

The Inter Faith Network for the UK has worked since 1987 to “advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain including awareness both of their distinctive features and their common ground and to promote good relations between persons of different faiths.”

These are difficult times for inter faith relations – in particular for Jewish-Muslim relations - as they are for the safety of the Jewish and Muslim communities. The Community Security Trust and Tell MAMA have regularly reported deeply concerning, sharply increased levels, respectively, of antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate crime incidents since the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October and during the subsequent Israel-Hamas war. During this period, IFN has worked to promote a strong response to hate crime, doing so through social media; member communications; a statement by IFN’s Board of Trustees on responding together on hate crime; fostering conversations where possible; and support to many organisations such as schools and workplaces which have sought advice about ways to handle the situation. It has also highlighted ways in which dialogue continues to be encouraged and relations of respect and trust maintained.

What IFN has not done is issue a statement condemning the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel. Your paper published, this weekend, the second of two articles by Will Hazell which claimed that there was disappointment in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities about ‘a failure to condemn Hamas’. As a UK charity whose purposes concern inter faith relations in the UK, and which must comply with the Charity Commission’s guidance on ‘political’ campaigning, IFN cannot make a simple statement of that kind. IFN has a longstanding policy on the making of statements which precludes direct comment on overseas events. Recent legal advice has confirmed the appropriateness of the policy.

Will Hazell's article of 30/31 December referred to two letters described as having been sent by two IFN members to DLUHC in April calling for withholding of funding - a time when many member bodies, faith leaders and MPs were writing to the Department in the strongest terms in support of IFN’s work and funding for that. As the Department is aware, and as was made clear to Mr Hazell, allegations made in the two letters were refuted when first raised several years ago.

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The article of 30/31 December has a particular focus on the Muslim Council of Britain and its membership of IFN. A number of Muslim organisations, including MCB, are members of IFN together with national faith community bodies of the UK's Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh and other communities and a broad spectrum of inter faith and educational and academic bodies. A list of IFN's member bodies can be seen on its website, as can its Membership Admission Policy.

MCB represents a significant number of Muslims in the UK, with whom IFN aims to promote good inter faith relations. It is not a proscribed body and IFN is not aware of any policy or activities of MCB supporting terrorism. IFN adheres to the guidance for charities on extremism published by the Charity Commission. MCB's membership has never been raised by DLUHC with IFN in connection with grant funding.

IFN shares the Government's concern for the safety and security of the UK and for a democratic society underpinned by key values. IFN regularly supports those principles through guidance and work with a focus on faith community security, such as the publication of *Looking after one another: the safety and security of our faith communities* (in partnership with DLUHC, the Home Office, CPS and National Police and Fire Chiefs Councils).

As we enter a New Year, it is our hope that people of all faiths and beliefs in the UK will play an active role in working together to combat the evils of antisemitism and hate crime affecting other faith communities; increase inter faith understanding and religious literacy; and foster ever greater cooperation between the UK's different faith communities, rooted in values held in common. It is at times like these that the work, and carefully considered approach, of IFN is most important.

Yours faithfully,

H. J. Barber



The Revd Canon Hilary Barber and Mr Narendra Waghela  
Co-Chairs, Inter Faith Network for the UK