

THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE FAITH COMMUNITIES FORUM

at 2.15pm on Tuesday 6 July 2021

by Zoom

Co-Moderators: The Rt Revd Jonathan Clark; and Mr Malcolm Deboo.

Present: Mr Moin Azmi (Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board); Mrs Josephine Backus (Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)); the Revd Philip Brooks (United Reformed Church in the UK; Minister David Bruton (Spiritualists' National Union and FCF Moderator); Mr Mohinder Singh Chana (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK) and FCF Moderator); the Revd Peter Colwell (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland); Ms Sirioli Davies (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland/Churches Together in England); Major Samuel Edgar (Salvation Army); Major David Evans (Salvation Army); Mr Hassan Joudi (Muslim Council of Britain and FCF Moderator); Mr Rajnish Kashyap (Hindu Council (UK)); Ms Sabira Lakha (World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League); the Revd Dr Reynaldo Leao-Nato (Methodist Church in Britain); Mr Dapo Ogunrinde (Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)); Ms Smita Oza (BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha); Ms Trupti Patel (Hindu Forum of Britain); Ms Tracey Prior (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints); Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala (Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB and FCF Moderator); Mr Vinay Shah (Institute of Jainology and FCF Moderator); Dr Vinaya Sharma (Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK) and FCF Moderator); Mr Anthony Silkoff (Board of Deputies of British Jews); Mr Elliot Vanstone (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales); Professor Dr Paul Weller (Inter Faith Working Group of the Baptist Union of Great Britain); Lynda Williams (Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations); and Rabbi Mordechai Wollenberg (Board of Deputies of British Jews and FCF Moderator).

Observer: Mr Narendra Waghela (IFN Co-Chair, membership categories other than NFCRB).

Apologies: Druid Network; National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahai's of the UK; and Pagan Federation.

Moderator apologies: Mr Neil Pitchford.

In attendance: Mrs Hannah Cassidy; Dr Harriet Crabtree; and Dr David Hampshire (Inter Faith Network for the UK).

Mr Paul Hopkins (Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals) [for Agenda Item 4]

Mr James Jones (Advertising Standards Authority) [for Agenda Item 5]

FCF ToRs and nature of minutes

A copy of the Terms of Reference of the Faith Communities Forum of IFN (FCF) is at <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/about/governance>.

The minutes of the main sessions of the meeting of the FCF are made available beyond the FCF on the basis agreed by it in May 2017. The minutes follow FCF's agreed style:

namely, points made by individuals are noted in the minutes and have the status of views of the individual who is present on behalf of their member organisation; any points agreed by the meeting are clearly identified as such. Comments are unattributed except where from the Chair or where the Executive Director or another staff member has been asked to give input or to provide a point of information, or in particular contexts where the contributor has explicitly asked that their identity be noted. Within FCF meetings there is a chance for all bodies to contribute. Contributors carry responsibility for the accuracy of their contributions. Views expressed by contributors are not endorsed by IFN.

Agenda Item 1: Welcome and apologies

1. The Rt Revd Jonathan Clark, in the chair, welcomed those present.
2. Apologies were noted.
3. Bishop Clark said that IFN had recently learned of the death of Mr Satya Minhas, Co-Chair of the Hindu Council (UK) and a former Faith Communities Forum Vice-Moderator from the Hindu community. Many members would remember him through his contributions to the FCF. He would be much missed.
4. A period of silence was observed, keeping in mind Mr Satya Minhas and all those working for inter faith understanding and cooperation.
5. Bishop Clark explained, for the benefit of new members, that the FCF was a forum for member bodies of IFN in the category of national faith community representative body. It was a forum for discussion of current issues of interest and concern rather than a decision-making body. It enabled sharing of views and good practice and networking.
6. Anyone wishing not to be included in screenshots of the meeting should indicate. In keeping with the FCF's decision about the nature of minutes, apart from IFN matters, the relevant section of the minutes would be available to the public (unless the FCF request a closed session). Minutes would follow the usual style.

INTER FAITH NETWORK MATTERS SESSION

[Paragraphs 7 to 9]

Agenda Item 3: COVID-19 and faith communities

a) The vaccination roll out – faith community engagement

10. Bishop Clark drew attention to the information in the Background Note about the vaccination rollout. He had a particular concern that many of the people who had not been vaccinated were from UKME, poor backgrounds. There was certainly going to be an upsurge in serious illness among those who had not been vaccinated and they would be among the poorest in the community. He had been encouraging churches to reach out to people who had not been vaccinated.
11. In discussion the following points were made:
 - It was amazing how the definition of 'community' had extended from being just a single temple or faith community to encompassing the wider geographical area.

Many temples were providing food parcels and PPE kits. Members of the community were able to call the Sewa helpline which was able to make arrangements to help them to get to vaccination centres. The Hindu Forum of Britain had created, with a professional team, several videos to respond to questions about the vaccines

- There was often reference in the media to faith festivals that had suffered during COVID-19, such as Eid or Diwali, but the speaker had not hear anyone mention Vaisakhi, which was very significant for the Sikh community. This was often celebrated by processions, which could not now take place, which was very sad. The speaker was very proud of the Sikh community for having taken a leading role in distributing food, for example through Khalsa Aid, not just in the UK but all over the world, and for having opened up gurdwaras for people to attend and receive help.

12. Dr Crabtree said that the herculean efforts of volunteers from the Sikh community, and all faith communities, had been remarkable. This had been reflected in presentations at IFN's National Meeting and there had also been good coverage on social media and in a number of reports. There had been a certain amount of coverage of all the festivals that had been affected. One of the striking things was that a number of gurdwaras had chosen to celebrate Vaisakhi by wonderful efforts to provide food and so forth, so *sewa* was a way in which Vaisakhi was manifest, as service to others had also been in a number of other communities.

b) Places of worship and festivals at this and the next stage of easing of restrictions

13. Bishop Clark drew attention to the information in the Background Note to the Agenda. He noted the recent announcement about the planned changes in legal restrictions in England from 19 July. It was understood that for places of worship the 'clergy' or equivalent would now be 'event organisers' with responsibility for deciding on regulations in each particular setting.

14. In discussion the following points were made:

- Many rabbis had been thrust into forefront of health and safety. This was partly because lay leaders had been shielding or buildings had been closed and were reopening and the rabbis were there by virtue of their positions. Even where communities had appointed lay people to lead on COVID aspects, rabbis often had to lead on it, and this sometimes put them in a very difficult position. It was yet another matter to worry about.
- One local synagogue had 800 families in its membership. Before COVID-19 on an average shabbat about 10% attended, on Yom Kippur there were about 60-70%. The vast majority were not regular attendees. The synagogue had recently sent out a survey and done a lot of welfare work, visiting people in their homes, providing packages at the time of Jewish festivals and so forth. That seemed to have rejuvenated the community, which had enjoyed a period of growth. They had learned a lot about engagement through the period. It was the hope that when services resumed on a normal footing, they would not just expect people to come to synagogue, but also continue to reach out to people in their homes. It should no longer be taken for granted that people would come to the synagogue. Another synagogue called itself 'a shul without walls' because there were no boundaries. There had been many challenges during the period in not being able to have food and drink in the usual manner and not being able to sing, but it was positive that personal engagement had taken place within individual homes. It was to be

hoped that this personalised engagement would not be allowed to fall by the wayside.

- The Hindu Forum of Britain was putting together guidance for temples. In mandirs priests had very specific roles and could not be considered for other duties. This would require further thought.
- The Protect Duty, which was being consulted on, would be onerous for places of worship. The Hindu Forum of Britain had replied to the consultation and was very grateful to IFN for the special FCF session that it had held about that.
- It was unlikely that removing legal restrictions in terms of social distancing and face masks would make a real difference in temples as low attendance numbers were likely to continue. People needed reassurance. On the one hand, the Government was announcing a lifting of restrictions and, on the other hand, it was making daily announcements about the increasing number of COVID-19 cases. Responsibility had been passed to individual institutions to decide what was the right way to help people to remain COVID-19 free.
- The onus had been put on the organisations, or individuals taking the services. The Zoroastrian Centre had just begun, on 1 July this year, to open for private worship, having been closed since March 2020. It had agreed that a Zoroastrian family could use the Centre for an initiation ceremony at the end of July, with a limited number of guests. For the Zoroastrian Centre, August was the busiest time of the year, with 10 days of remembering the departed before the New Year. The Centre was awaiting the Government's final announcements before making decisions about what would be possible there. It was likely that the Centre might need to close again in the winter, if there were a rise in infections, hospitalisations and deaths. It was hoped that this would not happen.
- One Hindu temple in London was working with public health experts at its local authority. It was also fortunate to have a lot of experts within its congregation. It was important to work with the congregation so that they were on board. Local experts knew the local area demographics, so their guidance was helpful, as well as the Government guidance. There were many Hindu festivals from August to November.
- Until now places of worship had been following the Government's legal restrictions. The challenge was what to do now this was being lifted. Younger members of congregations might want to get back to normal and older members might want to keep some restrictions in place. The challenge was to find a balance – neither being too cautious nor being too restrictive.

c) Other COVID-19 related matters

15. Bishop Clark drew attention to the helpful reflections in the Background Note about the pandemic and inter faith relations.
16. Dr Crabtree said that people had found themselves working with each other in an extraordinarily wide range of ways. This had been one of the positives from the pandemic. For example, the Sikh foodbank in Scotland had people from a range of faiths engaging with their work; as did Sewa Day, the Salvation Army and many others. Some initiatives, such as Mitzvah Day, had carried out activities on an inter faith basis in the past and built on these during the pandemic. People had also come together around consultation tables. There had often not been much time to plan because of the nature of the pandemic but it had borne fruit. The question was how it was built on, and how those links were used to go further.

17. One participant noted that, sadly, it did not look as though the pandemic was yet coming to an end. Zoroastrian community members abroad, especially those in the Far East and India, had said that it was likely to carry on for some time. There was already talk of having third vaccinations six months after the second. It was not clear whether the UK would be doing this. COVID-19 was not going to go away. People living in the UK were very fortunate with the vaccination programme, as some countries had not yet rolled out the first dose. It was important to be cautious and vigilant.
18. No other issues were raised. [Note: An email was received following the meeting with an update from BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, whose representative had not been able to attend for this Agenda Item. This is included in the Annex to these minutes.]

Mr Paul Hopkins joined the meeting.

Agenda Item 4: Religious festivals

19. Mr Malcolm Deboo, taking the Chair, welcomed Mr Paul Hopkins, Senior Editor and Co-Chair of the widely used Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals. He explained that Mr Hopkins was joining the meeting in the midst of being the technical host for the conference of the Association of RE Inspectors and Consultants and thanked him for making the time available to speak with the FCF. He had, since his university days, found the Shap Calendar very beneficial and was pleased now to be a contributor to it.
20. At the invitation of the Chair, Dr David Hampshire, IFN's Assistant Director, offered some brief opening reflections:
 - The most visited page on IFN's website is the festivals calendar, which is drawn from the Shap Calendar, with permission.
 - The calendars are very important. Schools use them to assist in planning for their collective worship and assembly programmes. Examining bodies use them for scheduling exams. Businesses use them for planning events, so as not to put major events or meetings during times of religious festivals. Statutory bodies, such as the police and fire and rescue services use them to plan for when there may be larger than usual gatherings. The Religion and Belief Subgroup of the National Police Chiefs' Council (which Dr Hampshire is invited to join as an observer) looks at each quarterly meeting at the religious festivals for the forthcoming period. The calendars also have an educative use, sometimes highlighted on staff intranets. This promotes greater religious literacy and provides an opportunity for people to exchange greetings with people on their festivals.
 - Accuracy and detail are very important. Calendars are often produced well in advance and this can cause issues, for example when festivals whose timing is linked to sighting of the moon in a particular phase are given a definite date. So there is need to have some form of flexibility and caveats.
 - It is also important to recognise the difference between major and minor religious festivals. Some years ago an examining body in England put a GCSE exam on the festival of Shavuot not realising that this would have a significant impact, because although they saw the festival listed, they did not think it was an important one because they did not know about it. Another example would be the importance of knowing when Ramadan falls and the impact that it might have on pupils.

- It is also important to be aware that not all groups within communities celebrate the same festivals on the same date.
- Festival calendars have an important educational purpose, not only for planning but also for enriching our culture generally. They need to be accurate and also to reflect the nuances within communities, not those imposed externally by editors.

21. Mr Deboo thanked Dr Hampshire for his reflections. He drew attention to the Shap Calendar material at Annex A and invited Mr Paul Hopkins to make his presentation. Mr Paul Hopkins thanked IFN for inviting him to speak and offered the following points:

- Dr Hampshire's reflections have helpfully outlined many of the challenges involved in putting together a calendar.
- The Shap Working Party began in 1969. When it celebrated its 50th anniversary the intention was to then close down entirely. But it was found that there was still a strong need for the calendar itself, so this has continued.
- The Shap Calendar is purchased by many including the police, the fire service, prisons, the Home Office, schools, universities, and others internationally as well.
- There is a panel of about 12 people from different faith backgrounds who advise on the Calendar.
- One of the main decisions is which traditions to include in the Calendar. For example, at the moment, consideration is being given to whether Japanese festivals are pertinent and relevant within communities in the UK.
- Following on from that, there are decisions to be made about which festivals to include. That can be tricky because there are different emphases on different festivals even within communities.
- There also needs to be some balance. Not all religions have the same emphasis on festivals. Some religions have more festivals on the Calendar, some have fewer.
- Another question to consider is: What is a festival? For example, should Israeli Independence Day be counted as festival? The Jewish representative on the Panel advised that it should be. As the Editor, Mr Hopkins draws on the expertise on the Panel.
- It would be very good to hear, during or after the meeting, any reflections on the Calendar, including what should be included, how the Calendar could grow and develop and, indeed, if it should carry on.
- The 2022 Calendar will be available in the next 2 to 3 weeks.
- In putting together the Calendar, multiple religious timescales and also solar calendars, lunar calendars and lunisolar calendars have to be taken into account. The Buddhist tradition is one of the most complicated because of the variations between the traditions, including for example, Chinese, Tibetan, Thai, Sri Lankan, and in Hong Kong.

22. In discussion the following points were made. Responses from Mr Hopkins are in italics.

- In case it is helpful to know, for the Jain community, in 2021 Paryushan is from 3 to 10 September and Diwali is on 4 November. *There is a Jain representative on the Panel who has advised on dates. The dates will be checked. There are faith community representatives on the Panel for all the traditions included in the Calendar. There are very few Jain festivals on the Calendar but it is understood that in the Jain tradition there is a not a lot of emphasis on festivals. There are*

three main Jain festivals that are marked: Mahavir Jayanti (March or April), Paryushan and Diwali.

- The different nations of the UK have become very diverse with communities from all over the world in their origins. Equity needs to be considered. For example, if national days are listed as festivals, should national days of all different countries with communities in the UK be listed as festivals? Also, many festivals are listed for the Christian tradition, and it might be, for example, that people feel more should be included within different strands of Hinduism.

It is difficult to judge equitably how many festivals should be included per religion. One of the limitations of the printed calendar is the space available. It is true that the Christians have more festivals listed than others. Conversation is already underway for the 2023 Calendar about the inclusion of national days. There are differing opinions within the Panel on this.

- Interestingly, the Japanese festivals (particularly the dolls festival) are among the most popular IFN posts on social media.
- The Hindu calendar is a lunisolar calendar. It is important for the Shap Calendar to include the festivals celebrated by Dharmic communities including Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists. There has been a campaign for some time for Diwali to become a national holiday. Some local authorities give their staff the day off as flexi time. It would be good if more of the pictures on the Calendar were of festivals rather than places of worship, for example Janmashtami or Diwali celebrations. *It seems unreasonable that Eid and Diwali are not national holidays in the UK.*
- The Shap Calendar makes a tremendous contribution to this field. Is the Shap Working Group still operating and, if so, does it have any funding? *The Shap Working Group formally ended in 2019. Its main work was from the 1980s to the early 2000s. It nearly collapsed financially about 12 years ago. The approach is now mainly volunteer-led. The calendars are sold. Currently it costs £10 for a copy of the e-calendar plus wallchart. Consideration is being given to producing an app (ShApp!) for smart devices. Each year there is an income of about £4,000-£5,000 which pays for very small honorariums for Panel members and the photographer, David Rose, and for printing and postage costs.*
- A few years ago IFN had asked faith communities to highlight two prominent festivals from their community to include in a document. For the Hindu community Raksha Bandan is included as well as Diwali. However, Janmashtami is more prominent than Raksha Bandan, so that should perhaps be included instead. Dr Crabtree said that the FCF had been consulted as part of IFN's printed guidance on festivals for sending greetings. (<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/faith-festivals-guidance-on-sending-greetings>) This was reviewed each year. It was challenging for faith communities to choose the two festivals on which they would most welcome greetings from others.

23. Mr Hopkins said that he was very keen to receive comments and ideas for the Calendar and to draw on the expertise within faith communities.

24. Dr Crabtree formally thanked Shap for allowing IFN to use its Calendar dates.

25. Mr Deboo thanked Mr Hopkins again for his presentation. The Calendar was one of the ways that faith communities were empowered to celebrate their festivals in multicultural Britain. He thanked all those involved at Shap, including the faith representatives on the Panel.

Mr Hopkins left the meeting. Mr James Jones joined the meeting.

Agenda Item 5: Advertising Standards Authority call for evidence about racial and ethnic stereotyping in advertising

26. Mr Malcolm Deboo, taking the Chair, welcomed Mr James Jones, Complaints Executive at the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). He would be speaking about the ASA's call for evidence about racial and ethnic stereotyping in advertising and also giving some background to the ASA's work, with the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP), in the area of advertisers and religious symbols. He drew attention to note at Annex B, which the ASA had provided in case useful to members. This included links to existing guidance provided on sensitive use of religious symbols.
27. Mr Jones thanked IFN for inviting him to speak to the meeting. He offered the following points:
- The ASA is the regulator for advertising in the UK. It is funded by a levy on advertising. Along with its sister organisation CAP, it helps to ensure that adverts are not misleading, harmful, offensive or irresponsible. CAP writes the advertising rules and the ASA enforces them through a range of measures, which can include bans on adverts which are found to breach the Code.
 - As part of its work, the ASA assesses complaints received from members of the public and from businesses about advertising. If the advert is in remit, it will be assessed against the Advertising Codes to determine if there's a potential breach. If there is, steps are taken to address the issue, whether informally with the advertiser or referring the matter for a ruling by the ASA Council which is the final arbiter of complaints.
 - The ASA is currently undertaking a project examining racial and ethnic stereotyping in adverts.
 - Following last year's high-profile events, including the death of George Floyd, the ASA, like many other organisations, is asking what more it could do to address factors that cause racial and ethnic minorities to experience disproportionately adverse outcomes in different aspects of their lives.
 - It is keen to reflect on whether its decision-making on issues that touch on race and ethnicity is in the right place, and last year it undertook a review of its previous casework decisions made in the past seven years. On the whole, it concluded that its decisions are in the right place, but the review did reveal some areas for further exploration. This significant project has therefore been launched to better understand the topic.
 - As well as the call for evidence, the overall project is also looking at the issue from a policy perspective. CAP is consulting on the introduction of rules explicitly relating to harm and protected characteristics, which it is hoped will send a clear message to stakeholders, to society and to advertisers, about the standards that the ASA system already applies in its regulatory decision-making.
 - The Advertising Codes have long contained rules which prohibit depictions of race and ethnicity that are offensive or harmful. However, given the importance of the issue, the ASA would like to look at this in more detail.
 - The ASA has also conducted a major piece of consumer research looking into public attitudes towards racial and ethnic stereotyping in adverts, with a particular focus on the perspectives of groups that those adverts portray.
 - Finally, the ASA is working on Advertiser Awareness and Engagement. It wants to work with advertisers and agencies, to share insights from its research or from

the call for evidence, to help the industry as well as the regulator to tackle any harmful racial and ethnic stereotypes in adverts.

- The ASA is keen to hear from stakeholders, through its call for evidence, about racial and ethnic stereotyping in adverts and the impacts of such advertising more generally. The ASA is aiming to uncover and to prevent the real world harms that such stereotypes might cause or play a role in maintaining.
- Importantly for the work of the Inter Faith Network, the ASA is keen to hear how racial and ethnic groups with particular religious affiliations are portrayed in advertising. This is a very important area and the ASA would like to understand more about the issues involved.
- The call for evidence closes on 14 July, and the ASA would be really pleased to receive any thoughts, or pieces of existing research, or examples or reports that FCF members might have on the issue of this interplay between religion and race or ethnicity as it exists in advertising.
- More information about the call for evidence can be found on the ASA website at <https://www.asa.org.uk/news/our-call-for-evidence-racial-and-ethnic-stereotyping-in-advertising.html>.

28. Mr Deboo thanked Mr Jones for his presentation and invited questions and comments. In discussion the following points were made. Responses from Mr Jones are in italics.

- For years in the UK there has been a constant battle about the misuse of Hindu deities. The Hindu Forum of Britain has worked through many channels and tried to educate. It produced a book some years ago with the Department of Work and Pensions on Working with the Hindu Ethos. Only a few weeks ago there was a problem with an advertisement for slippers with images of Lord Ganesha on them. More work needs to be done. The Hindu community is very tolerant but there are limits. There are issues relating to sex, drinks, drugs and using images of deities. Often when a complaint is made to an organisation, the response is just “This is just modern-day life”. These matters have to be taken seriously. There is a play planned for the Edinburgh Festival in which there are human avatars for Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and the Goddess Lakshmi, drinking and using foul language. This is not acceptable. The play needs rewriting. Hopefully other faith communities will support Hindus in this. There is no desire to curb freedom of expression or creativity but a line must be drawn. The Hindu Forum of Britain has made a strong representation about this. There is a right way to utilise faith symbols. *The use of religious imagery in adverts is very sensitive. Within the Advertising Code there is a specific section about faith, religion and equivalent systems of belief. Those rules aim to reduce the social harm that can result from damage to inter faith relations if religious imagery is used in adverts in a way that mocks or denigrates religious belief. When the ASA receives a complaint about an advert which concerns those issues, it is assessed on a case by case basis. References to all religions need to be handled sensitively and the ASA is very aware of that. Those rules are longstanding. As part of the review of racial and ethnic stereotyping more broadly, the ASA is trying to incorporate those issues and the use of religion in the context of racial and ethnic stereotyping to really understand not only where the line is but how the ASA can better support advertisers to make better decisions about what they include in their adverts to ensure that they do not mock, denigrate or cause serious offence to the communities that might be featured in the advert. The ASA’s remit does not extend to plays.*

- The Hindu Council (UK) is an umbrella organisation and there is an expectation that it should be aware of what is going on. It receives emails from unknown people on a daily basis. Major brands in UK and internationally have completely ignored what is right and what is wrong. Millions of pounds is spent on developing items and on advertising them. Within a few days of them being launched, people will complain and the products will be withdrawn. It would be much better if these companies looked at how to use the imagery correctly in the first place. It is more than just a lack of knowledge. The images are often used for commercial reasons. It is a big problem for the Hindu community. *This is another important point. The ASA's remit is to look at the end result of the conversations that companies or advertising agencies have about how to sell a product – ie how it is marketed to the public, not the nature of the product itself. Again, this is looked at on a case by case basis. It is not for the ASA to say how the advertising industry should best represent diversity. However, the ASA is hoping, following this project, to be able to go back to the industry with what it has found and give them more context and better tools to improve the way in which they market products or services. This project in particular will hopefully allow the ASA to give pointers to big companies and advertising agencies to help them to improve the status quo.*
- In the 1980s there were BT adverts with Maureen Lipman playing a Jewish mother. At the time they were considered quite amusing but now would probably be considered very stereotyped. Sometimes when religious communities make complaints there is pushback to say that anything is fair game. Has there been any push back to say that it is ok to portray images that some people might find offensive? *There are specialists at the ASA who are familiar with the case history of adverts on religion. To take one example, there were complaints about the Atheist Bus Campaign where there were adverts on buses saying 'There's probably no god'. The ASA had not investigated this because it considered that the tone of the advertising was upbeat rather than hostile and it did not tell people to take action that would impinge on their beliefs or freedoms. The ASA tries to take into account all perspectives when considering complaints. It is not possible to please everyone but the ASA strives to be fair and its decision-making is supported with evidence. This call for evidence is partly about finding evidence so we can better understand how particular racial or ethnic groups with particular religious affiliations are portrayed in advertising.*
- If a company or advertiser has committed an offence, is it within the ASA's remit to 'punish' that offence? *The ASA is a non-statutory regulator so it cannot impose financial penalties. However, it has the power to ban adverts, for example to stop them from airing on television. The ASA has a compliance department and if the advertiser does not comply with a ruling, there are sanctions available. Trading Standards act as our legal backstop, if there are legal or criminal issues involved. So there are various avenues that can be used to ensure compliance.*

29. Mr Deboo thanked Mr Jones for his presentation and explaining the role of the ASA. It had provided the FCF with more understanding of the fine line that the ASA had to take on matters of advertising. There were many sensitivities around religion and, even more so, in the UK, which was coming more diverse and multi faith. Religion mattered in people's lives and this needed to be taken into account. Mr Jones thanked IFN again for inviting him to speak. The ASA would be pleased to hear from FCF members through the call for evidence.

Mr Jones left the meeting.

Agenda Item 6: Inter faith engagement and issues of current interest or concern

30. Mr Deboo explained that these two agenda items were often taken together and they had been combined on this occasion. Members were invited to submit information in advance. None was submitted. He drew attention to the material in the Background Note about the consultation being carried out by the Financial Conduct Authority on 'The regulation of funeral plans'.
31. In discussion the following issues were raised:
- Make COP Count was encouraging faith communities to take part in events on 6 October about faith and the environment. Hindu Forum of Britain had started planning for this with Hindu Climate Action and others. It was hoped that there would be inter faith events, booklets and so forth.
 - EcoSynagogue was a project that carried out audits of synagogues and made recommendations to make them more environmentally friendly. Some synagogues were listed buildings so it was difficult, for instance, to install double glazing, but they were able to provide suggestions on recycling, using less plastic and so forth. Rabbi David Mason had been leading on this. It was difficult to use less plastic at the moment because of COVID-19, but the project was inspiring, interesting and diverting. Mr Deboo noted that Rabbi David Mason had made a presentation to the FCF about EcoSynagogue.
 - One participant, who was a rabbi, said that recent events in Israel and Gaza earlier this year, had led to the greatest tensions they had ever seen. The identification of British Jews with the Israeli state had been felt more acutely over the last few months. Good relationships between faiths had been stretched. This had highlighted how, when there was a conflict, different communities saw this in different ways. What seemed reasonable to one faith community was extremely uncomfortable for another. An example was given of a Pro Palestinian rally had been held in a London borough that where some of the things said would have violated the IHRA definition of antisemitism and yet were seen by participants as being quite moderate. The participant had spoken with the Chief Rabbi about how the Jewish community navigated its relationship with Israel and how others did not have that same relationship and what happened when there were flashpoints. There had been a spike in antisemitic incidents and the Jewish community had felt very uncomfortable. On the positive side, there was an example of people from other faiths responding swiftly and helpfully to someone who had been attacked in an antisemitic incident.
 - It was important to maintain dialogue and trust one another. There would always be peaks and troughs. It was good that people rallied together across all divides.
 - A practical example of communities coming together was given, of a swimming school for Orthodox observant females, including Muslims and Jewish women, and women from other religions. The pool hall had flags hung up from all nations. There might have been tensions in light of the events in the Middle East, but there had not been any issues about the fact that there were Palestinian flags and Israeli flags. In fact there were open and honest conversations. This was a good example of how far inter faith relations in this country had come.
 - An example was given of an incident during Ramadan during which the occupants of a car threw stones and eggs at devotees coming out of a mosque in a London borough. The mosque was near a Hindu temple, a synagogue, a gurdwara and a number of churches. The local inter faith group brought these communities together and a demonstration of solidarity was held to show that this type of action would not be tolerated. After the solidarity gathering, the culprits were identified

and came to apologise. This was just one example of how important it was to build good relationships locally.

32. Dr Crabtree said that it had been a turbulent period. The statement issued by IFN's Co-Chairs and Moderators had said more than statements sometimes said in terms of including examples but that had felt important to the Co-Chairs and Moderators.. It was not just the inter faith impact of the most recent conflict that had been referred to in the statement. There had been statements on the impact of other overseas events in the past. The emphasis in the statement was on finding ways to engage and working through and tackling disagreement peacefully and respectfully. There were many different ways to do this.

INTER FAITH NETWORK MATTERS SESSION

[Paragraphs 33 to 35]

Agenda Item 8: Date of next meeting

36. Bishop Clark thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions.
37. The date for the next meeting would be circulated in due course.

5 August 2021

COVID-19 and faith communities – Email update received from BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha:

BAPS has done a lot to bring aware of Covid-19 in the Indian community across the UK. BAPS has set up Covid test centres, vaccine drive, vaccination centre, awareness via webcast. Our medical volunteers have been participating in webinars on vaccine drive with local authorities. Videos and flyers have been produced to bring greater awareness. BAPS have been helping vulnerable in the community by supplying meals and other essentials etc.

In addition our work on helping India via Cycle Challenge raised over £600,000 in 6 days for India's Covid-19 Relief Work to provide oxygen concentrators and emergency medical equipment etc. We have also provided assistance to Nepal.