

THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE FAITH COMMUNITIES FORUM

at 2.30pm on Thursday 14 July 2022

by Zoom

Present: Ms Josephine Backus (Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)); the Revd Canon Hilary Barber (Co-Moderator); Mr John Bremner (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); Mr Peter Colwell (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland); Ms Siriol Davies (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland/Churches Together in England); Ms Elizabeth Harris-Sawczenko (Board of Deputies of British Jews); Ms Prudence Jones (Pagan Federation); Mr Hassan Joudi (Muslim Council of Britain); Mr Rajnish Kashyap (Hindu Council (UK)); Mr Paras Meisheri (Jain Network); Ms Smita Oza (BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha UK); the Revd Dr John Parry (United Reformed Church in the UK); Ms Trupti Patel (Hindu Forum of Britain); Mr Neil Pitchford (Druid Network and FCF Moderator); Ms Tracey Prior (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints); Lt Col Jonathan Roberts (Salvation Army); Ms Padideh Sabeti (Baha'i Community of the UK); Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala (Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB and FCF Moderator); Dr Vinaya Sharma (Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)); Mr Umesh Sharma (Hindu Council (UK)); Mr Kevin Snyman (United Reformed Church in the UK); Mr Elliot Vanstone (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales); and Lynda Williams (Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations)).

Observer: Mr Narendra Waghela (IFN Co-Chair).

Apologies: Institute of Jainology; Inter Faith Working Group of the Baptist Union of Great Britain; and Methodist Church in Britain.

Moderator apologies: Mr Malcolm Deboo (Co-Moderator); and Mr Vinay Shah.

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

Mr Colin Bloom (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) [for Agenda Item 3]

DI Jordan Ford and Mr Thamir Shah (National Counter Terrorism Security Office) [for Agenda Item 4]

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 Revd Canon Hilary Barber, in the chair, welcomed those present.
2. Apologies were noted. [Note: Mr Malcolm Deboo (Co-Moderator), had planned to attend the meeting, but was, in the event, unable to do so. The full meeting was therefore chaired by Canon Barber.]
3. A period of silence was observed, keeping in mind all those working for inter faith understanding and cooperation.
4. Canon Barber 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.
5. Anyone wishing not to be included in screenshots of the meeting should indicate. Posts about FCF meetings were usually put on social media by IFN. It would be good if FCF members could follow IFN on Twitter and Facebook.
6. The Chat function had been previously enabled for FCF meetings just for private messaging and for links to be added. However, across the last couple of meetings some had chosen to use it for their comments rather than these feeding into the main discussion. He and his fellow Co-Moderator had, after some reflection, asked that Chat not be enabled during this meeting. Where there were links to particular documents mentioned in discussion, participants could email them to ifnet@interfaith.org.uk to include with the minute or in an earlier follow up email. It was hoped that this would encourage more direct contribution to discussion. A view would be taken after the present meeting and the next on whether to return to use of Chat.
7. 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 on the IFN website. (unless the FCF requested a closed session). Minutes would follow the usual style.

Agenda Item 2: Impacts of recent Government changes

8. The FCF noted the information in the background note about recent Government changes.

Mr Colin Bloom joined the meeting.

Agenda Item 3: Independent Faith Engagement Review

9. Canon Barber welcomed Mr Colin Bloom, Faith Engagement Adviser at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Mr Bloom would be sharing findings from the Independent Faith Engagement Review that he had led.
10. Mr Colin Bloom thanked IFN for inviting him to speak to the meeting. Points from his presentation are below.
 - He commended the excellent work that IFN and its members are doing and continue to do. It demonstrates the importance of inter faith work.
 - In 2019 the current Prime Minister appointed him as the Independent Faith Adviser and asked him to undertake a Review looking at three main areas:
 1. Is faith a good thing for society? It was overwhelmingly clear from the Review that faith, regardless of which faith, is a good thing for society and that places of worship are an overwhelmingly good thing for communities.
 2. How does the Government engage with people of faith and places of worship? The Review covers areas from faith literacy to approaches to faith in a range of public services, including lessons from COVID-19 (which interrupted the Review).
 3. Areas where harm might be caused through religious or faith-based practices and a review of the government's role in tackling them. The review does not cover: Antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred and Female Genital Mutilation, all three being under investigations from other ongoing independent reviews.
 - The review included a call for evidence, to which many FCF members responded. He is very grateful to everyone who did. There were 21,000 individual responses with over 1 million pieces of data, which is a very high rate of response. He is very grateful to the University of Birmingham for crunching the data.
 - The report will hopefully be published in Autumn 2022. It is currently in legal review, as is usual.
 - When it comes to inter faith, others have spoken about it passionately in the past. When she undertook a review a few years ago Dame Louise Casey criticised the lack of inter faith understanding of policy makers and some people have treated it rather superficially. There has been, particularly through the work of IFN and other organisations, an improvement in inter faith activities across the country. A lot has been done but more still needs to be done and the review makes clear that government needs to be the catalyst for that.
 - Alongside that, there are also intra faith elements. It is one thing understanding the main elements of faith groups and respecting those differences, but it is a much harder job to understand some of the intra faith issues. Sectarianism between faiths is very rare. IFN's members are all a great testament to that. Sectarianism within individual faith communities is much more prevalent and the government currently has very few tools and very little understanding of that. This is one area the review attempts to bring to light, making recommendations for a number of public sector agencies.
 - The report also builds on some of the thoughts and ideas in Danny Kruger's report ('Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant') for closer and more effective relationships between faith-based third sector organisations and government efforts. Through Covid-19, places of worship played an important role from testing and vaccination centres to promoting government Covid guidelines to their communities.

11. Canon Barber thanked Mr Bloom and invited any questions or comments.
12. In discussion the following points were made. Responses from Mr Bloom are in italics.
- Inadequacy of faith literacy in the Government and public sector was a great concern.
Yes, it was. This was strongly addressed in the report.
 - The Good Faith Partnership undertook six months of research with Dr Russell Rook on faith communities and Covid-19 recovery. This resulted in some very detailed recommendations, having interviewed faith communities. The local government element was the key area. Did that research feed into the report?
The Good Faith Partnership was a great organisation. Dr Rook and others had fed into the report.
 - It would be good to see the report and the learning it might provide. It would be helpful to know more about the reference to how inter faith had been treated superficially and the Government needing to be a catalyst for change.
Dame Louise Casey had leant into the idea that inter faith activity was treated superficially by Government and that more needed to be done, especially in very diverse areas. Some recommendations in the Bloom review will relate to faith literacy. The majority of policy makers were no different to the majority of the British public in being faith illiterate. For Government to be more effective and efficient it needed to have that understanding.
 - The East of England Faiths Agency did a lot of training in faith awareness, for example for the emergency services. It also had resources, including board games, books and tutors, that could be useful.
 - Was the nature of RE across schools considered as part of the Review? This was an important area for giving young people the tools to understand faith literacy.
The Review included spending a fair amount of time with different SACREs and with the RE Council. A number of useful reports fed into the Review. It will include strong recommendations around RE teaching in schools
 - There were certain terms that children found hard to understand, such as 'secular', 'inter faith' and 'Church of England'. Were definitions of those terms included in the report?
Those terms were not specifically investigated in the report. In his personal view, one of the challenges of working effectively across faiths and those with no faith was this commonly-held view that there's a leader at the top of each faith group and that by inviting them to a roundtable that provides adequate representation. In the same way that the Archbishop of Canterbury could not speak for all Christians, it would be impossible for the Chief Rabbi to speak for the whole Jewish community. It felt to him somewhat lazy and ill-informed to choose one person from each major world religion to consult. That was not wise, discerning, helpful or efficient. Government especially needed to be more nuanced, careful and discerning about who it spoke with and how it spoke to them. This was why the work of IFN was so important.
13. Canon Barber noted that the report related particularly to the position in England, and not to that in the devolved nations. IFN had a UK role.
14. He thanked Mr Bloom again for taking the time to come and present to the meeting.

Mr Bloom left the meeting.

Agenda Item 4: Security of places of worship – the resource of NaCTSO

15. Canon Barber welcomed DI Jordan Ford, Head of Business Engagement at the National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO) and his colleague Mr Thamir Shah. DI Ford would be introducing some of NaCTSO's resources and, as noted in the paper, would welcome reflections on how NaCTSO might develop its engagement with national faith community bodies in the context of security of places of worship
16. DI Jordan Ford thanked IFN for inviting him to speak to the meeting. A copy of his PowerPoint slides accompanies these minutes. He offered the following points:
 - He has been in the police for 19 years, the past 10 of which have been in counter-terrorism policing.
 - The Engagement Unit at NaCTSO seeks to reduce the risk from terrorism by ensuring that approved and authoritative security advice reaches intended targets. He looks to work with business and industry, local government and other specific communities and organisations. The nuances spoken about by Mr Bloom are fundamental to the work of the Unit. There is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to advice and guidance on protecting locations, businesses and faith venues. The guidance is often standard but the way that it is delivered requires the feedback from bodies such as IFN.
 - IFN is an influential organisation and a voice of faith. It is very important to engage with IFN because the Unit needs help to amplify its message.
 - NaCTSO has a relationship with the Community Security Trust and has supported a MOPAC funded multi faith webinar series. It also has a relationship with the Cathedral Security Group, and insight into the Places of Worship Security Scheme. NaCTSO is not looking to replace or override any of those, but rather to see whether faith communities are interested in its guidance and advice and how the Unit could approach engagement with faith communities.

At this point in the presentation a video was due to be shown, but, for technical reasons, this was not possible. The video can be found at <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/about>.

- Engagement is about reaching out to influential organisations, bodies, businesses and communities. Although the Unit is the Business Engagement Unit, it does span communities as well.
- Engagement is broken down into three strands: Engage, Equip and Evaluate.
Engage
- The tragic events of 2017, in particular, focused policing minds on the fact that in the past guidance had been focused on large crowded places or iconic locations, but it has become clearer that the threat from terrorism can, sadly, be anytime, anywhere. The Manchester Arena enquiry had led those in counter-terrorism policing to the realisation that partnerships needed to be prioritised. They have spent a lot of time working alongside external partners to ensure that their messages are fit for purpose and well-tailored to the audience. This move away from the focus on crowded places is aligned, in a broad sense, to the Protect Duty, which the Government is currently exploring. Consultation has been taking place with the public and with businesses on this and there is widespread support for it.
- Counter-terrorism policing engagement is looked at across zones, sites, sectors and groups, some of which overlap. He has responsibility for sectors. He looks after 20 sectors, one of which is faith. Other sectors include retail, hospitality,

education and health. He has engagement staff who work with organisations in the different sectors.

Equip

- Within counter-terrorism policing they work with security service partners to produce evidence-based guidance that is tested and assured and provides the single place of public messaging when it comes to counter-terrorism advice on how to prepare for the unlikely event of a terrorist attack. The guidance comes from a number of research sources.
 - The main website where the guidance can be found was launched in April and is called Protect UK. <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/> There are also award winning, free, e-learning packages available to enable any individual to become more informed about the threat from terrorism and actions they can take to deal with those threats. There are a series of packages that have been developed in partnership with businesses that are designed to be actionable pieces of learning that anyone can take. There are versions of the training that can be delivered in person.
 - Nationally there are 11 Counter Terrorism Units across the UK. Each of them has relationships with faith communities and has specific site engagement. His role is not to cut across that, but to engage with organisations at a national level.
 - Within the Protect UK website there are webinars and forums on topics such as suspicious behaviour or weapons. People can ask questions and get responses from an authoritative body. You can also ask for tailored advice for your organisation.
 - There is also a Protect UK app which can be accessed via Apple or Android. The app is designed for those who have more of a public facing interaction. It includes quick-time actions, for example guidance on who to contact if you find a suspicious item; and also how to find a local counter-terrorism security adviser.
 - Within the app and the platform, there is up to date information on the terrorism threat level (which is currently at 'substantial', meaning that a terrorist attack is likely) and also bulletin messages provided in response to incidents that have occurred in the UK and internationally.
 - The ACT Awareness E-learning can be delivered into organisations either through learning management systems or independently through accessing the individual modules, each of which takes an hour or two to complete.
17. DI Ford finished his presentation with three suggestions for future engagement:
- Extended webinar sessions to talk about the website, the app and the e-learning package and how they might be integrated into places of worship.
 - A one-day ACT Corporate in-person event with expert speakers providing information about different types of threats from terrorism with bespoke and tailored advice for different communities.
 - Someone from IFN attending the quarterly board meeting of the NaCTSO Business Information Exchange (a group including organisations from across different sectors), to hear what is going on, share learning and discuss how advice and guidance might be tailored for faith communities.
18. Canon Barber thanked DI Ford for his presentation and invited any questions or comments.
19. Dr Crabtree said that, as FCF members might recall, the Government's Response to the Protect Duty consultation had been published in January. One of the major concerns of faith communities was whether their places of worship would be subject

to the same level of responsibility for security arrangements as other types of organisation. There had been no announcement from Government about next steps as yet (although it was understood that there might possibly be such in the next few weeks). Depending on the outcome, faith communities might find the resources of NaCTSO useful in different ways.

20. DI Ford said that the work on the Protect Duty was being led by the Home Office but his team at NaCTSO had a close working relationship with its Homeland Security group. His Unit was preparing by developing and rolling out the Protect UK platform because there was a need to provide a single authoritative voice of guidance. Any legislation that emerged would point people to that Protect UK guidance.
21. In discussion the following points were made. Responses from DI Ford are in italics.
 - It was difficult for places of worship to get a balance between providing information to the public and ensuring protection. For example, it might be helpful to put building layout plans on a website for fire safety purposes, but that could then provide information for people with malicious intent.
It would be best to contact a local counter terrorism security adviser about specifics. In general, it was important to show to a hostile person that there is security in place but without giving away too much information that could be exploited. He would like to hold a day event for faith communities, including issues such as security minded communications.
 - Alongside work with cathedrals, it would also be helpful to engage with the Association of Major Churches, which was for large churches which were often larger than cathedrals and operated in a similar manner.
22. Dr Crabtree referred back to the third of DI Ford's suggestions for future engagement (ie Someone from IFN attending the quarterly board meeting of the NaCTSO Business Information Exchange). It would be possible for the office to have some discussion with him about how that might be possible. Would the FCF be content with that kind of approach? No concerns were raised.
23. DI Ford said that he would very much like to offer more and work with faith communities to deliver more specific information and guidance in whatever format they thought would work best, online or in person. His Unit could also provide some digital assets to be cascaded to members. Dr Crabtree said that IFN usually put organisations in touch with its faith community member bodies so that they could contact them directly. A broader question about periodic conversation about strategy of engagement was a separate matter. The IFN office could provide him with a list of contact details for faith community bodies in IFN membership. DI Ford said that would be very helpful.
24. Canon Barber thanked DI Ford again for his presentation.
25. Dr Crabtree said that it had just been announced that the deadline for the Places of Worship Security funding scheme had been extended by 2 weeks, to 28 July.

Action: IFN office to provide DI Ford with list of contact details for faith community bodies in IFN membership.

Action: IFN office to speak with DI Ford about attending NaCTSO Business Information Exchange meetings.

DI Ford and Mr Shah left the meeting.

Agenda Item 5: Inter faith engagement of faith communities

26. Canon Barber invited FCF members to share news of any recent or forthcoming inter faith engagement, including plans for Inter Faith Week.
27. The following updates were provided:
- During the International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief, a series of events had been organised by Baha'is around the UK, including in Cambridge, Cardiff, Oxford and Scotland. In Cambridge and Oxford they had organised prayer sessions to pray for freedom of religion or belief and to gain a better understanding of this principle. It had proven so successful, that it was going to become a permanent feature, gathering to say prayers together and reflect on inter faith issues.
 - An FCF participant, who was also involved with local inter faith activity, said that during Inter Faith Week, Redbridge Faith Forum would be holding its annual peace walk. That would include visits to a synagogue, Buddhist vihara, church, Hindu temple, mosque and gurdwara in Ilford.
 - It was good that places of worship were now open and school children were able to visit again and learn about different faiths. There were a lot of Hindu festivals coming up from August onwards. Celebrations for these would involve people from other faiths.
 - An FCF participant, who was also involved with local inter faith activity, said that Calderdale Interfaith Council would be holding a conference in the Autumn about the 'moral economy', picking up on the cost of living crisis.
 - Now that the pandemic was abating, the Catholic Church was asking its inter faith coordinators in dioceses in England and Wales to visit places of worship. There had been a lot of new inter faith coordinators recruited. Hopefully this would be quite fruitful as it was a great opportunity to get out and meet people. An FCF participant from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) had recently met with an FCF participant from the Muslim Council of Britain to visit a mosque in Battersea, which had been fantastic.
 - During August, Hindus would be celebrating Janmashtami and also Raksha Bandan. Many temples were working with the Armed Forces and would be holding events to which all communities were invited. Raksha Bandan celebrated the bond between brothers and sisters. Sisters would tie a band around their brothers' wrists for protection.
 - Although the main focus of the recent International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief had been the persecution of minorities, it had also been a very good inter faith event with people brought together from communities all over the world.
 - Visit My Mosque, led by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), would be starting again this year. It was going to be held in the third weekend in September. MCB had enjoyed taking some CBCEW colleagues to a local London mosque recently and was looking forward to taking a small group of Muslims to a church later in the year. It was good to be able to meet in person again and bring new people into activities. It would be good to hear from any FCF members who would like to build on existing relationships.

- The Board of Deputies of British Jews was working with Lambeth Palace to introduce Presence and Engagement Advisers to the Rep Council leaders in the Jewish community.
- Members of the Spiritualist community in the South West of England had been helping to reinvigorate the Torbay Faith and Belief Forum. They had provided a venue for a recent meeting, which had had good attendance, and the Forum was planning for the future.
- A Jubilee Walk of Faith had taken place in early June to mark HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee. There were three routes. One FCF participant had taken part in the one from the Battersea Peace Pagoda to Westminster Abbey. Two Southall temples had held inter faith lunches for the Jubilee. They were so successful that they carried on the following week.
- It was good that different faith groups and children were happy to return to visiting places of worship. Covid-19 case numbers were on the rise again but people were taking precautions.
- The BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha held an event in June on Freedom of Religion and Belief. There were speakers from different Hindu bodies and some FCF members had attended. There had been engagement throughout the audience as well. The Neasden temple would be holding a 'Festival of Inspiration' event in July. BAPS was proposing to hold a peace walk for Inter Faith Week and, if not, would be engaging with inter faith communities to hold an event.

28. Dr Crabtree said that if any FCF members had newsletters or bulletins, the IFN office would be happy to provide brief information about Inter Faith Week for inclusion in those. IFN worked closely with Interfaith Scotland which led on Scottish Inter Faith Week and Interfaith Scotland was in touch with faith bodies that were Scotland-specific on that.

Agenda Item 6: Other issues of interest and concern

29. Canon Barber reminded members that this Agenda Item offered an opportunity to raise current issues of interest or concern to faith communities in the UK. Members had been asked to notify issues in advance. None had been raised.

INTER FAITH NETWORK MATTERS SESSION

[Paragraphs 30 to 35]

36. Canon Barber thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions; and the IFN staff for their work to enable the meeting to take place. He wished everyone a very good Summer and noted that the date for the next FCF meeting would be circulated in due course.

18 August 2022