

THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE FAITH COMMUNITIES FORUM

at 2.30pm on Tuesday 15 February 2022

by Zoom

Co-Moderators: The Revd Canon Hilary Barber and Mr Malcolm Deboo.

Present: Mrs Josephine Backus (Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)); Ervad Yazad Bhadha (Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe); Minister David Bruton (Spiritualists' National Union and FCF Moderator); Mr Mohinder Singh Chana (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK) and FCF Moderator); Ms Deesha Chadha (Hindu Forum of Britain); Mr Nemu Chandaria (Institute of Jainology); Mr Peter Colwell (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland); Ms Siriol Davies (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland/Churches Together in England); Major Samuel Edgar (Salvation Army); Mr Daniel Elton (Board of Deputies of British Jews); Mr Hassan Joudi (Muslim Council of Britain and FCF Moderator); Mr Rajnish Kashyap (Hindu Council (UK)); the Revd Dr Reynaldo Leao-Nato (Methodist Church in Britain); Ms Tracey Lewis (United Reformed Church in the UK); Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra (Muslim Council of Britain); Mr Dapo Ogunrinde (Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)); Mr Paras Meisheri (Jain Network); 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); Dr Natubhai Shah MBE (Jain Network); Mr Vinay Shah (Institute of Jainology and FCF Moderator); Mr Umesh Sharma (Hindu Council (UK)); Dr Vinaya Sharma (Vishwa Hindu Parisahd (UK)); Ms Trupti Patel (Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)); Mr Elliot Vanstone (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales); Mr Kirit Wadia (BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha); the Revd Andy Williams (Inter Faith Working Group of the Baptist Union of Great Britain); and Lynda Williams (Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations)).

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

Apologies: Druid Network; Inter Faith Council for Wales; and Pagan Federation.

Moderator apologies: Mr Neil Pitchford

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

Mr Stephen Woodward (Department for Work and Pensions) [for Agenda Item 4]
Mr Daniel Thorne (Department for Culture, Media and Sport) [for Agenda Item 6]

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. Mr Malcolm Deboo, in the chair, welcomed those present and, in particular, Canon Hilary Barber in his new role as Co-Moderator. Canon Barber had taken on the role of IFN Co-Chair on 1 January. In that role he was *ex officio* a Co-Moderator of the Faith Communities Forum (FCF). Canon Barber was known for his role as Vicar of Halifax Minster and on the inter faith front in Calderdale and West Yorkshire, among other commitments. However, he had taken on his role with IFN in his national capacity, which was reflected in his membership of the Task Group of the Church of England's Presence and Engagement programme.
2. Apologies were noted.
3. A period of silence was observed, keeping in mind all those working for inter faith understanding and cooperation.
4. Mr Deboo 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. 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 be in the agreed style.

Agenda Item 2: COVID-19 and faith communities

6. Canon Hilary Barber, taking the Chair, said that it was a joy to join everyone for the meeting and he looked forward to meeting everyone in person when able to do so.
7. He drew attention to the information updates in the background note about COVID-19 regulations. He noted the extraordinary positive contribution that faith communities across the UK had made in responding to the pandemic, providing care not only to their own communities but also to people of all faiths and none.
8. No points were raised.

Agenda Item 3: Inter faith engagement of faith communities

9. Canon Barber explained that in the light of members' interest in hearing more about different faith perspectives, the FCF Agenda usually included a short reflection, relating to an Agenda theme, from a representative of a different faith community member body about its bases for engaging with that theme.
10. He invited Dr Natubhai Shah MBE of the Jain Network to offer a reflection about how Jain values of care for the wellbeing of all and its principle of 'Anekantavada' underpinned its inter faith engagement and then to offer a short introduction to the planned Multi Faith Space at the Jain Centre that would shortly be opening in London. Opening reflections were not usually combined with a presentation but in this instance it had seemed particularly appropriate that they be so.
11. Dr Natubhai Shah began his presentation by greeting everyone in a traditional Jain way with '*Jai Jinendra*', which he explained meant 'Honour to the people who have conquered themselves'. A copy of his PowerPoint slides is annexed to these minutes. The presentation gave an overview of the Jain tradition and then showed plans for the new Jain Centre and the Multi Faith Space. A video 'walkthrough' of the new Centre is at <https://youtu.be/ALpaB2xllzg>.
12. He made one additional point to the slides. In talking about the origins of Jainism, he said that there were two traditions in India; Shramana tradition and Vedic tradition. Modern Hindusim developed from the Vedic tradition.
13. Dr Shah said that the Multi Faith Space would have displays on nine faiths. The Centre would like advice from faith communities to assist with this. The idea was to include descriptions for each faith, information to create pamphlets and the names of one or two books of each faith for the library. The Space would need to be authentic. It would be used as a resource centre for schools, colleges, institutions and visitors. They would like to put into practice all that he had learned from IFN across a very long period of time.
14. Canon Barber thanked Dr Shah for his presentation.
15. Dr Crabtree said that it was wonderful to have a presentation from Dr Shah after all the years that he had been involved in inter faith engagement through IFN and many other routes. The presentation had necessarily been short but the material would be made available to FCF members.
16. The Sikh FCF Moderator congratulated the Jain community on its wonderful project. The fact that space was being made available for other faiths was very commendable and showed the inter faith spirit. Canon Barber wished Dr Shah and the whole Jain community well in the delivery of their vision and of their project.
17. The following update, notified in advance, was then provided by Ms Tracey Prior of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints about a forthcoming Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). Last year, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss had announced that the UK would host a global summit to promote 'freedom of religion or belief for all' this year. The summit would be held on the 5 and 6 July. This year's Conference followed on from previous FoRB events hosted

by the US and Poland, and would boost global efforts to tackle persecution. Fiona Bruce MP, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief had referred to the summit as 'FoRB Ministerial 2022'.

18. NGOs, civil society organisations, faith groups, and constituents were being invited to host events to educate, advocate and encourage action on freedom of religion or belief. This would form a set of 100 fringe events around the main conference and was known as 'FoRB Fringe'. These events could be organised by faith groups, charities and those working with FoRB issues around the world from the UK, or by those who were involved in helping with integration and settling persecuted people who came to the UK. The goals, among others, for the FoRB Fringe campaign were to galvanise, engage and educate in the UK: to galvanise the next generation, particularly, to champion FoRB as a key policy issue and human right; to capture the need for all young people to advocate for FoRB and end persecution; to engage with people from across the faith and belief spectrum to champion FoRB for all, as a non-exclusive right for all people; and to build on efforts to educate people on this foundational human right. The scope for events was wide and organisations were already engaging in FoRB Fringe. Fringe events around the main conference venues might be visited by ministers and attendees but these event locations were getting booked up quickly. Events held around the country were just as important to galvanise, engage and educate.
19. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, on behalf of which Ms Prior attended FCF meetings, would be taking part in FoRB Fringe this year and looking to partner with other faiths and organisations as it did so. Fiona Bruce who was also a Vice-Chair of the APPG on International Freedom of Religion and Belief had created a website with more information about 'FoRB Fringe' called endthepersécution.uk. Those wishing to register an interest in hosting an event, were asked to contact the APPG on International Freedom of Religion and Belief at web@appgforb.org.
20. No other updates on inter faith engagement were offered.

Mr Stephen Woodward joined the meeting.

Agenda Item 4: Reducing Parental Conflict Programme – engaging with faith communities

21. Canon Barber welcomed Mr Stephen Woodward, Regional Integration Lead (South East) for the Department for Work and Pensions' Reducing Parental Conflict Programme.
22. Mr Woodward thanked IFN for inviting him to speak to the meeting. A copy of his PowerPoint slides accompanies these minutes. He offered the following points:
 - There are six regional Integration Leads for the Reducing Parental Conflict Programme (RPCP) in England. Their main role is to offer advice and support to local authorities who have received grant money from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to spend on supporting families which have relationship difficulties.
 - He is also the Lead for faith groups which means that he will be supporting collaboration between faith groups and local authorities on the basis of a shared desire to see parents communicate better and create more harmony in the home

for the sake of children, ie reducing parental conflict. This new role is an indication of an awareness within the national programme of the important role that faith communities play around family life and helping the most vulnerable in society. A lot of Government Departments have learned during the pandemic the crucial role that faith groups have.

- Conflict between parents is normal. It only becomes a concern when it is frequent, intense and poorly resolved. When there is conflict this is most likely to have an impact on children.
- The impacts on children can be:
 - Mental health – for example, a child caught in a custody battle and worried about where they are going to live.
 - Achievement and attendance at school - for example, a child struggling to concentrate in class because they are anxious and reluctant to go home because they are living in a house which is very tense
 - Behaviour – for example, a child hearing and seeing conflict at home and replicating that behaviour in their relationships with their friends.
- About 1 in 5 couples are classed as having a 'distressed' relationship. This is often due to transition points, such as the arrival of a new baby, health issues or a change in job or redundancy.
- As a response to the research, the UK Government has decided to put some funding towards supporting relationships. This is very new, particularly for local authorities. Local authorities have traditionally offered parenting programmes and parenting help and often support where a relationship is abusive or violent, but not helped with general good communication between parents.
- This is a preventative programme. Children's Services in local authorities tend to be made up of an Early Help Service (optional and voluntary advice and support) and Social Care.
- Phase 1 of the programme started in 2019 and local authorities were given £20,000 to £30,000 to spend on training staff in this area. Phase 2, the current phase, includes widening that training to other teams, including housing and health visitors, and includes funding for relationship courses. Phase 3 has recently announced. This includes a recommendation to reach out more into communities to offer training and particularly to faith groups. There is going to be some guidance that accompanies the grant and some recommendations on how to engage with faith groups and consider some collaborative work.
- An example of the scheme in action is Brighton and Hove City Council using some of its grant funding to create 'getting on better' cards on different topics, such as arguing, with different types and also tips on how to improve. It also created, with an organisation called Amity, a course for families with a family support worker. It also created a website section on managing conflict in parental relationships.
- A report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society notes that *"...in Britain in 2020, faith groups have vital resources which are crucial for community wellbeing, and which cannot be found anywhere else."*

23. Mr Woodward asked for assistance from FCF members on two items:

- He is currently drafting guidance for local authorities on engaging faith groups. For example, when approaching faith groups about offering training for their staff and volunteers in understanding more about relationships and how to offer parents support or any other collaborative projects, such as family hubs. He would be keen to have feedback on the draft guidance.

- He is hoping to set up a volunteer advisory board for local authorities who are interested to engage with local faith groups in their areas. He would be keen to hear from those who would be willing to shape and attend this.

24. Canon Barber thanked Mr Woodward and invited any questions or comments.

25. In discussion the following points were made. Responses from Mr Woodward are italics.

- Redbridge Faith Forum was set up by its local authority and included members of all faith groups in the area. When any problems arose, they all worked together. *This was a good example of faith communities working with local authorities at a local level. The RPCP was at a national level.*
- Church leaders and other faith leaders were already engaged in pastoral care and family support. They could be well placed to refer certain families.
- Parents were often bombarded with well-meaning offers of help which could be anxiety-inducing. It would be helpful to have some reassurances that this was not a 'creeping nanny state'.
The support was voluntary for parents to access. It was about the impact that a home filled with conflict and tension was having on children. Often parents felt stuck and wanted help on the way forward.
- The programme sounded like a step in the right direction and money well spent. Helping families would be a great service to society. Was the programme already in operation in London?
The programme was available across England.
- Faith leaders were often the first people that parents would turn to in difficult times. It was to be hoped that some funding would be allocated to training them to provide the proper advice and guidance in those situations.
Faith leaders had a great deal of expertise in providing pastoral support. It would be important for training to be available, particularly for volunteers in faith groups. Part of his role would be facilitating that.
- It was important to have child safety procedures set up in institutions before people came forward for training. It was important to implement all the guidance that had been set out by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.
- The programme would perhaps connect with Child Contact Centres which were often connected with faith communities?

Action: Mr Woodward's presentation to be circulated to FCF members for them to respond on his requests for assistance.

Mr Woodward left the meeting.

Agenda Item 5: Issues of current interest and concern

26. Mr Deboo, taking the Chair, 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 they wished to raise. The representative of the Methodist Church would be speaking about the concerns of the Joint Public Issues Team of the Free Churches (JPIT) about the Nationality and Borders Bill. Following that, a representative from the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations would be speaking about the joint faiths and beliefs letter to MPs about the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

27. The Revd Dr Leao-Neto said that Nationality and Borders Bill was currently going through Parliament and many issues on this had been debated. JPIT was running a campaign for faith leaders to sign a letter to the Prime Minister about one of these issues. This was about the proposal for a two-tier level of rights for immigrants/refugees based on how they had accessed the UK, whether through an official regular route of travel, or, as might be expected for refugees, through other routes. The letter had been circulated to faith leaders and JPIT was grateful to those who had signed it. It had now achieved over 1,000 signatures representing 30 different denominations and faiths across the UK, showing the breadth of support for these issues among faith communities. The letter would be sent by the end of the month. The Bill was due to be discussed by the House of Lords on 1 March and it was hoped that, with some pressure through the media, this letter might have an impact. This was a political issue but it was also about faith values of treating each other well. The text of the letter could be found at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScUHZuCI_WlwwkUkozah_UN2Av4RX_PtgSnNh40gvg5cUh5dkw/viewform. A representative of the Inter Faith Working Group of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, which was another member of JPIT, commended the importance of the letter and encouraged faith leaders to sign it.
28. Lynda Williams said that the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) was convening a joint faiths and beliefs letter to MPs about the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. This followed the success of the joint letter to Peers on 12 January which had been signed by about 30 different faith representatives. The main concerns were: the proposed truncation of the right to be able to protest, which was particularly important for minority groups; and the measures that could be enacted which would criminalise the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities. The Quakers were also trying to engage with MPs locally. Any FCF members interested in engaging, could contact Grace DeCosta at GraceD@quaker.org.uk.
29. No other issues were raised.

Mr Daniel Thorne joined the meeting.

Agenda Item 6: The Platinum Jubilee and faith communities

30. Mr Deboo welcomed Mr Daniel Thorne of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). He would be speaking about plans for the Platinum Jubilee and how faith communities could get involved. Due to an unexpected change in plans at DCMS, Mr Nick Cady was not able to attend.
31. Mr Daniel Thorne thanked IFN for inviting him to speak to the meeting. A copy of his PowerPoint slides accompanies these minutes. He offered the following points.
- This is a historic moment as it is the first time that a British Monarch has reached 70 years on the throne.
 - DCMS is supporting the Royal Household and a number of partners to deliver the events over the long Bank Holiday weekend from Thursday 2 to Sunday 5 June.
 - DCMS is also the lead Government Department for the Jubilee and is coordinating and encouraging responses from Government Departments and their networks to complement the central weekend of events. DCMS will also be coordinating with bodies such as the Imperial War Museum and Historic Royal Palaces (including the Tower of London) and encouraging a wide response from across the nation.

- DCMS is not resourced to engage all these sectors. The Platinum Jubilee team is small (around 6 people) and is focused on supporting and encouraging people to take part.
- The Platinum Jubilee emblem was designed by 19 year-old Edward Roberts as part of a competition run by the V&A, with DCMS funding. The emblem is free to use and there is guidance on the Royal Household website about how it can be used. It would be good to see it used for as many events and activities as possible. <https://www.royal.uk/resources-platinum-jubilee>
- A set of key objectives for marking the Jubilee have been agreed with Buckingham Palace from thanksgiving for Her Majesty The Queen's service to building unity across the UK.
- The events across the central extended Thursday to Sunday weekend, led by Buckingham Palace (<https://www.royal.uk/platinum-jubilee-central-weekend>), include:
 - Trooping of the Colour on Thursday
 - The lighting of beacons (including, for first time, across the Commonwealth)
 - A Thanksgiving Service at St Paul's Cathedral on Friday
 - A Party at the Palace on Saturday evening being broadcast by the BBC, with the ability to watch it in the Mall
 - A Platinum Pageant on Sunday, being led by the Platinum Pageant Company
 - Street parties, encouraged by the Big Lunch, particularly on Sunday
- However, events are not just being held in London and not just in June. There is a desire for everyone to come together across the UK and more widely across the Commonwealth. This is very much part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda. There is a map on the DCMS Platinum Jubilee website showing events taking place throughout the year across the UK. <https://platinumjubilee.gov.uk/events/> It would be good to see as many events taking place as possible.
- Other Government Departments and partners are also running projects to mark the Jubilee. The Cabinet Office has been running a City Status competition. Over 100,000 trees have already been planted for the Queen's Green Canopy. And the British Council is organising some international projects.

32. Mr Deboo thanked Mr Thorne for his presentation and invited any questions or comments.

33. In discussion the following points were made:

- In Calderdale, plans were well advanced, centred around Beacon Hill, the Minister and the Piece Hall. Community parties were planned and a civic service with all the faith communities and the Lord Lieutenant on Sunday afternoon, together with lighting of three beacons on Thursday evening.
- The Hindu Council (UK) would be suggesting that temples hold lunches to mark the occasion, especially on the Sunday. It would be happy to arrange a community lunch for faith leaders from its base in Southall.
- The Hindu Forum of Britain had already identified sites for tree planting for the Queen's Green Canopy during the Autumn and would be working in partnership with other organisations on this.
- BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha would be encouraging its mandirs to get involved in the Big Lunch. They would also be getting involved with the beacons project and tree planting.
- Sunday 5 June was both Shavuot and Pentecost. There were some complexities around timing but it was a good opportunity for people to reach out and build links.

- Street parties involving all faith communities were being organised in Colindale in London.
 - When the Jubilee beacons were being lit on Thursday evening, the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe's resident priest, Ervad Yazad Bhadha, would be performing the litany to fire in the prayer room at the Zoroastrian Centre. ZTFE would also be celebrating the Big Jubilee Lunch on the Sunday.
 - Not many monarchs had reigned for 70 years. In around 300CE, during the Sasanian Dynasty, which was the last Zoroastrian dynasty in Iran, the longest serving king, King Shapur II, had served for just over 70 years – but he had been coronated when he was born!
34. Mr Thorne said that it was very good to hear about the planned activities. The Lord Lieutenants were also promoting lots of community activities, so it would be good for faith communities to engage with them on events being held. Events did not just have to be street parties. They could be talks or screenings of the BBC party or anything bringing communities together. He encouraged everyone to add their activities to the events map.
35. Dr Crabtree said that 'Thank You Day' would be taking place again this year. It would be on Sunday 5 June. Last year the main focus of the day had been thanking each other for all that had been done during the pandemic. This year it was encouraging people to thank Her Majesty The Queen as well as each other. She had had some conversations with those organising it and IFN would keep FCF members in touch.
36. Mr Thorne said that DCMS had only latterly become aware of the date for Thank You Day, thanks to IFN. There was clear water between what Thank You Day was and what the Big Lunch was. Thank You Day was not one of the central events.
37. Mr Deboo thanked Mr Thorne for attending. He was sure that the Platinum Jubilee would be a success as other jubilees had been, bringing people together across the UK and Commonwealth. Many people from the Commonwealth had come and settled in the UK during the Queen's reign.

Mr Thorne left the meeting.

INTER FAITH NETWORK MATTERS SESSION

[Paragraphs 38 to 49]

Close of meeting

50. Dr Crabtree said that IFN's National Meeting was being held on Tuesday 22 March. The theme would be 'Working in Partnership for the Common Good'. The IFN office would be pleased to hear during the week from any faith organisations with interesting projects, either nationally or locally, involving working effectively in partnership with another agency, for example, the emergency services, schools or hospices.

Action: FCF members to contact the Executive Director during the week with any examples of partnership working.

51. Mr Deboo thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions; and also the IFN staff for the arrangements. The date for the next FCF meeting would be circulated by the IFN office in due course.
52. Canon Barber thanked Mr Deboo for making him feel so welcome at his first meeting as a Co-Moderator. It had been very good to see everyone and he looked forward to meeting them in person and to sharing the journey of inter faith life and community life across the UK together.

18 March 2022