

POLICY ON MAKING OF STATEMENTS UNDER NEW GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

IFN provides a forum for the discussion of issues of mutual concern to its member organisations.

Only in limited circumstances will statements be made.

General statements about inter faith relations or aspects of life together in multi faith Britain

When a general "Inter Faith Network" statement is made this will only be done with the agreement of all member organisations after consultation with them on its text.

Trustee Board statements

The Board may issue statements on its behalf or delegate this responsibility as outlined below.

Statements on urgent matters

In an urgent situation a joint statement may, be made by a subcommittee of the Co-Chairs of the Board and the 5/6 Moderators from the largest faiths (5 if the current Board Co-Chair is from one of the largest 6 communities, or 6, if they are not) plus 1 Moderator in total drawn from the other religious groups from within Group 7 (holding that role in rotation).

Such a statement will be made in the name of the Board and of the Moderators of the FCF and will not commit member organisations of the FCF or the wider membership of the Inter Faith Network for the UK.

The Board shall designate alternates to undertake the statement making role in place of each Co-Chair at times when a Co-Chair is unavailable. At times when the Co-Chairs are available, the alternates will not take a role in the process.

In the case of the Co-Chair from the category of National Faith Community Representative Bodies, the designated alternate shall normally be the Trustee who serves on the Board on behalf of the Co-Chair's own faith community. The bodies in that category, for whom the Co-Chair also serves as Moderator, will be informed. In the case of the Co-Chair drawn from a different category, the designated alternate shall normally be another Trustee who serves on the Board as a result of nomination from within that category.

National Faith Community Representative Body Moderators with a role of statement making who anticipate a period of absence that may affect availability for statement making may designate an alternate from within their community, from a body represented on the Faith Communities Forum, to carry out this role on their behalf

during any such period of absence they have notified to the Secretariat, having consulted with all such bodies on the person who shall play this role.

Statements on overseas events are only made when these are directly affecting relations between different faith communities in this country or deemed to have a very strong likelihood of doing so.

Statements on public life issues

The Moderators of the Faith Communities Forum may also, from time to time, develop and agree statements on behalf of the Faith Communities Council on faith and public life issues with a clear link to the aims of IFN, on the basis of consultation with the members of the Faith Communities Forum. These are subject to clearance by the Co-Chairs of the Board of Trustees and one other designated Trustee, and there will be consultation with the Co-Chairs and the Director ahead of the statement process. The statement making process will be serviced by the IFN office.

Statements made by the Moderators shall be made in the name of “the Faith Communities Forum of IFN” and not in the name of either IFN itself or any of the faith community representative bodies themselves.

BACKGROUND AND EXPLANATION OF POLICY

1. Since the time when the Inter Faith Network was in the process of being formed reservations have been expressed about IFN pronouncing on issues of current policy and, in so doing, claiming to speak on behalf of its member organisations. Partly this has been because of a belief that it would be inappropriate for the Network to do so, and partly because of concern that attempts to adopt particular policy positions on specific issues could prove damagingly divisive to it and jeopardise its wider role.
2. IFN does serve as a forum for discussion by representatives of its member organisations of both general and specific issues in the course of its regular meetings and special meetings held on particular topics of concern. The existence of IFN has been of value in making it easier for individual faith communities to seek the support of other communities on matters of special concern to them and it is hoped that more use will be made of Network links in this way.
3. Every so often the question arises of whether a particular situation calls for a statement from IFN. There can be a natural desire to respond to events with a public statement: statements show that people care and that an organisation is aware of an issue and is not indifferent to it. Where there is a situation of general concern to its member bodies a joint statement by faith communities reflecting a united stand can be seen as a valuable step and there can be advantage in showing that different faith communities are of common mind.

4. However, on any controversial issue it is likely that there will be differences of view between and within member organisations. There is limited value in statements which do not address the difficulties involved in an issue and are confined to platitudes. If the Board, or the Co-Chairs, designated Trustees and Moderators of the FCF were to make frequent statements on current issues an expectation would develop that it will always do so. Its failure to issue a statement in a particular context might then itself become more contentious. There is a risk too that its agenda would become dictated by the media.
5. For these reasons statements are only made rarely and where they can be expected to make a positive and distinctive contribution to a situation affecting inter faith relations in the UK and to have a beneficial effect. The absence of a statement on a particular issue does not therefore mean that there is a lack of concern about it among the faith communities represented in IFN and where necessary this will be made clear to the media.
6. Statements prompted by overseas events are made only where an issue is directly affecting relations between different faith communities in this country, or potentially will do so. Sadly, there are all too many distressing situations overseas as a result of war, famine or natural disaster. All Britain's faith communities have links of some kind with communities overseas and are naturally concerned about such situations. However, overseas events are not the direct concern of IFN, although situations can arise where there is a need to respond to their impact on inter faith relations in the UK.
7. Where possible, the Network's member organisations will be consulted on the text of any wide ranging statement before it is made. There will always be consultation before any statement of a Network position is issued. For example, the Network's "Statement on Inter-Religious Relations in Britain" and its "code of conduct" on "Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs" were published after careful consultation to make sure that these documents were acceptable to IFN's member organisations and adequately reflected their views.
8. Where urgent issues arise it is unlikely to be practicable to consult all IFN's member organisations before any sufficiently timely statement is made. The 1989 Network AGM agreed that in such circumstances the Officers of the Network might issue collective statements in their capacity as Officers, in keeping with IFN general ethos and aims. The present Board policy reflects this approach.

28 April 2016

(Updated by Board December 2017)