

Celebrating and giving thanks
for the work of



1987–2024

Report of a special event held on Tuesday 29 April 2025
at Goodenough College, London

Celebrating and giving thanks
for the work of



1987–2024

Report of a special event held on Tuesday 29 April 2025
at Goodenough College, London

Contents

Introduction 5

Welcome and introduction from the last Co-Chairs of IFN 8

IFN – An appreciation..... 10

IFN, faith communities and public life – blazing a trail and contributing to inter faith understanding and cooperation in the UK across four decades 11

Reading of the Act of Commitment by the Faith Communities of the UK 13

IFN, connection and cooperation 14

Musical interlude..... 15

IFN, linking and supporting local inter faith engagement..... 16

Religious and inter-religious literacy 18

Tribute to IFN and its member bodies, Trustees, honorary officers and staff who served it across its time of operation, and also to its Faith Communities Forum Moderators 22

Closing words 24

Presentations 24

A few images from the day 26



Participants at the event

Introduction

On Tuesday 29 April 2025 a special event took place to celebrate and give thanks for the work of the former Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) over the years between its founding in 1987 and the ending of its operations in 2024.¹

The event took place in London at Goodenough College, where IFN had held one of its earliest meetings and with which it had some further historic links.

Guests and presenters reflected IFN's activities and participation across its 37 years of operation. IFN's member bodies had been written to by its Co-Chairs ahead of the organisation's closure and

invited to express an interest in a possible closing event. Invitations had been sent to those who had done so, as well as to a range of others who had contributed to its work in particular ways.

The event was attended by just under a hundred people from a wide range of faiths, nations of the UK, English regions, categories of IFN membership and also from some institutions with which IFN had worked, such as Near Neighbours and Mitzvah Day. It was compèred by the last Co-Chairs of IFN, the Revd Canon Hilary Barber and Narendra Waghela, with the penultimate section compèred by young presenters Shalva Louise Hadari and Leo Taylor.

¹ The former Inter Faith Network for the UK operated as a company registered in England (number 3443823) and a registered charity (number 1068934). It was formally dissolved in January 2025.

The programme included reflections on different dimensions of IFN's work. It began with a video – 'From Launch to Legacy' – which highlighted aspects of IFN's contribution to inter faith relations in the UK. It also included a special performance on the Taus. The programme culminated with a reading and signing of a special Tribute to IFN.

Following presentations to recent past Officers and staff, there were refreshments over which the audience shared reminiscences of IFN and reflections about the future of inter faith relations. Guests were also invited to write their memories, reflections and hopes for the future on cards.

The remainder of this report summarises the content of the various sections of the event.

Photos in this report were taken by former IFN Assistant Director Paresh Solanki, who also created the video about IFN's development. His assistance was generously provided on a

pro bono basis. Participants were informed at the outset of the event that photographs would be taken to use in reporting and were given the option not to be included (which none requested). The event was arranged by the social enterprise Faith in Society Ltd (FiS), which was responsible for its holding and management.

FiS was assisted by a small volunteer Advisory Group of former Trustees of IFN: Jay Anderson, Minister David Bruton, Mohinder Singh Chana, Dr Peter Colwell, Esmond Rosen, Dr Susan Siegel, Narendra Waghela and Martin Weightman. Former IFN Executive Director, Dr Harriet Crabtree and colleagues Ashley Beck and Hannah Cassidy kindly provided some assistance as required.

Quakers in Britain kindly held, with their permission, the contact data of past IFN member body contacts interested in the closing event, between IFN's closure and FiS' work on the event, to ensure data protection compliance.

Participants from the inter faith bodies of the devolved nations





Minister David Bruton, Sabira Lakha, Trupti Patel, Brian Pearce OBE and Rabbi Mordechai Wollenberg



Former IFN Trustee Jyoti Mehta with the programme for the event

A generous donation from a benefactor made the occasion possible; and the refreshments and printing of materials, including this report, were supported by other kind donors, including Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe who sponsored the tea.

FiS is grateful to Chris Askew of Tattersall, Hammarling and Silk (THS), who designed the materials for the event and this report on behalf of THS, at a special charitable rate.

The event was organised on an environmentally conscious basis, with recyclable materials used where possible.

This short report has been produced by Warwick Hawkins MBE of FiS. The summaries of presentations were cleared with those who spoke.

The report will be posted on the IFN legacy website and also archived.

Welcome and introduction from the last Co-Chairs of IFN

Narendra Waghela began by welcoming the audience. He said he was delighted to see so many people present. He noted the fittingness of the venue, given that IFN had held one of its earliest consultative meetings and a subsequent national meeting at Goodenough College. The event was happening for both sad and positive reasons. Sad, because when IFN's government funding offer had been withdrawn the UK had lost its primary inter faith linking body and a hugely valuable resource. Positive, because everyone had come to celebrate and give thanks for the remarkable work of IFN and the legacy that it had left for others to build on.



Narendra Waghela

Canon Hilary Barber said that IFN's last years had been challenging, not least in terms of the impacts of international issues on inter faith relations in the UK, and because of the regrettable manner in which its final government funding offer had been withdrawn. However, this afternoon was a chance to give thanks for the enormous amount that had been achieved by IFN across its time of operation. That was work of which he and Mr Waghela were personally very proud to have been part.

Canon Barber acknowledged with pleasure the presence at the event of many individuals from past member bodies of IFN, former Officers, chairs of key committees and other Trustees, Faith Community Forum Moderators, staff and volunteers. He gave a particular welcome to IFN's founding Director Brian Pearce OBE, who had made such a remarkable contribution to the development of inter faith relations in the UK. Lord Singh of Wimbledon CBE had also made a highly significant contribution, both as a founder Officer and through his work across the years. Sadly, although he had hoped to be present, he had been unable to attend.

The audience stood and joined the Co-Chairs in a round of applause for Brian Pearce, Lord Singh and other founding Trustees and bodies of IFN who had established IFN nearly 40 years before.



Canon Hilary Barber

Canon Barber also thanked the benefactors whose donations had made the event possible. He noted that IFN had been helped to continue as long as it did by particularly generous donations from three individuals. They had chosen to give anonymously, but he was aware that they were present, and he thanked them most warmly. IFN had also been helped by a generous emergency grant from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.



Narendra Waghela and Canon Hilary Barber



Brian Pearce OBE

He acknowledged the presence of Paul Parker, Recording Clerk (CEO) of Quakers in Britain, who was there on the Trust's behalf as well as on behalf of his own organisation. He also welcomed a number of individuals who had helped IFN's work across the years through donations.

Canon Barber went on to thank guests Philip Kirkpatrick of solicitors Bates Wells and Kathryn Tattersall of design company THS for their valuable service to IFN over many years. He thanked Warwick Hawkins of Faith in Society and the event Advisory Group, which had enabled the event to happen, and also past IFN Assistant Director Paresh Solanki for his pro bono work on the video and the event photography.

Canon Barber explained that, as noted at the end of the programme brochure, many aspects of IFN's work were celebrated in the programme. It was, of course, not feasible to include an input from a faith leader on behalf of every national faith community representative body, although many were present. Recognising the equal significance of all, the organisers and Advisory Group had not singled out particular faith leaders to speak but had, instead, invited IFN's Faith Communities Forum Moderators for all of the communities to stand together to lead the Act of Commitment. That symbolised the powerful joint commitment of the faith communities to IFN's work across the years and to continuing to work together across the years to come.



Event programme slide

IFN's founding resolution...

“We meet today as children of many traditions, inheritors of shared wisdom and tragic misunderstandings. We recognise our shared humanity and respect each other’s integrity in our differences. With the agreed purpose and hope of promoting greater understanding between the members of the different faith communities to which we belong and of encouraging the growth of our relationships of respect and trust and mutual enrichment in our life together, we hereby jointly resolve The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom should now be established...”

IFN – An appreciation

The short video commissioned from Paresh Solanki for the occasion was shown. It can be seen at <https://bit.ly/IFNLegacy>.

Within the video, a special message from the Government’s Minister for Faith and Communities, Lord Khan of Burnley, was included. The following section was highlighted: “I would like to thank everyone connected with the Inter Faith Network for your work over the years to promote good relations between people of different faiths and beliefs, and I am particularly appreciative of the IFN’s commitment to preserve its legacy, allowing others to build on its work in the future.”



A selection of images from the video, 'The Inter Faith Network for the UK: From launch to legacy'

IFN, faith communities and public life – blazing a trail and contributing to inter faith understanding and cooperation in the UK across four decades

Mr Waghela introduced Emeritus Professor Paul Weller, Visiting Professor at Coventry University Centre for Peace and Security, and Research Fellow in Religion and Society at Regent's Park College, University of Oxford. Dr Weller had been involved with IFN's work since its early days in various capacities. He was planning shortly to publish an article about IFN.

Dr Weller said he had felt privileged when, in 1988, the Director and Officers of IFN had appointed him as its first employee, working alongside Brian Pearce. For many present, such as himself, the story of the Network was interwoven with their own stories, so it was impossible to speak without a sense of personal connection to what had been built over nearly 40 years, and mourning for its end. But our traditions reminded us that nothing that is constructed by human agency is permanent. They also provided for marking endings. Endings brought not only recognition and gratitude, but also the opportunity to reflect both on shortcomings and what was done well.

He said that his reflections would focus especially on IFN's work on faith communities' relationships with one another and their engagement with public life. A number of the examples he would give would come more from the earlier days, which was not to prioritise those over the later days, but simply to bring to the fore some things that might have been forgotten and which were necessary for understanding the later days.

It should not be underestimated how innovative the Network had been in this respect. Inter faith initiatives had existed prior to IFN but, for all their achievements, most had been formed on

an individual basis by 'inter faith enthusiasts'. IFN had been remarkable in that it had from the outset deliberately included at the heart of its membership structure the category of organisations representing world religious traditions with substantial communities in the UK. This meant that the Network was able, on the basis of a sufficient (not perfect, but sufficient) level of mutual trust and growing sense of shared responsibility, to create a relational space, within which individual leaders from faith traditions could meet and organisational connections through which IFN could carry on its work. As time went on, the Network had been challenged over the degree of its inclusivity, but it had risen to that challenge and evolved further.



Emeritus Professor Dr Paul Weller

To take just one example of its work on sensitive issues, the Network had helped the faith communities in a shared way to address some of the very sensitive issues that had arisen in the context of the Christian Churches of Britain and Ireland, when they designated the 1990s as a 'decade of evangelisation and evangelism', in the context of which many of those communities had concerns about the potential implications for their

adherents. The Network had proactively initiated a process of developing what led to the booklet 'Mission, Dialogue and Interreligious Encounter', and the even more widely disseminated and used, and important to this day, code of practice, 'Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs'.

Dr Weller said that always, from the beginning and going on, there had been substantial and ongoing tensions and challenges, especially in the context of the overlap between international and national dimensions, and the concerns of faith communities. What was noteworthy and remarkable was that the Network had been able to find ways to navigate them for so long. He suggested that this was because the Network was not an office of employed people sitting atop of a structure of an artificially created organisation, but rather a network of networks that did not take up its own positions in relation to issues beyond its core remit, but, rather, sought to promote wider understanding of the perspectives of its faith community member bodies and, where possible, to develop shared understandings.

The Network had also played an important role in facilitating the interface between faith community bodies and national government, and had contributed significantly to the extent and the nature of that. In the early 1980s and 1990s, generally speaking, governments had framed matters in terms of culture and ethnicity more than of religion and belief. He did not think it an overstatement to say that the very existence of the Network at that time offered a timely resource to help the government and its personnel to navigate what was for them in many ways an unfamiliar territory, beyond the boundaries of the historic Christian traditions of these islands.

When a body like the Inter Cities Religious Council (ICRC) was formed out of some of the work that the Church of England did in the wake of urban disturbances, the Network had worked with the ICRC and with the government to extend the range of faith communities that were involved in

those kinds of initiatives, beyond the narrower original basis of membership of the ICRC. On a strategic level, the Network had played a significant role in facilitating UK Government Home Office consultation with groups other than Christian; this had led to the production of the Working Together report, out of which eventually emerged the foundation of the Faith Communities Consultative Council in 2006. Examples could, of course, be given from later years.

He had recently been involved in an EU project on protection of places of worship. In the context of that he had been able to share something that he did not believe had been created anywhere else in the continent of Europe, and that was the statements and practical guidance developed by the Network which helped to facilitate and give expression to important solidarity of faith communities standing together when one or the other was under threat.

Concluding, Dr Weller said that the Network had played a very important role with – not in place of – the faith community representative organisations, and for that we all had a debt of gratitude. This important occasion was taking place in a college that has the name 'Goodenough'. At the very least, all needed to recognise that the Network had made a good enough contribution; he believed that it was very much more than that.

Reading of the Act of Commitment by the Faith Communities of the UK



Leading the Act of Commitment

Mr Waghela introduced the Act of Commitment, which had been created by faith community representatives with IFN at the time of Millennium. The audience would be led in reciting the Act by the last IFN Faith Communities Forum Moderators from each community², the last Co-Chairs, and representatives of Interfaith Scotland, the Interfaith Council for Wales and the Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum. They would be joined by the Rt Revd Colin Fletcher OBE, who, as Chaplain to the then Archbishop of Canterbury, had chaired the body that had advised the then government on the religious aspects of the Millennium celebrations, including the holding of a Shared Act of Commitment by the faith communities of the UK. The shared values in the Act of Commitment had been selected and agreed by the faith communities; they remained as relevant as ever.

The leaders of the Act of Commitment were then called forward. They recited the first paragraph together, and then led the audience in reciting the main section of the Act:

In a world scarred by the evils of war, racism, injustice and poverty, we offer this joint Act of Commitment as we look to our shared future.

We commit ourselves, as people of many faiths, to work together for the common good, uniting to build a better society, grounded in values and ideals we share:

*community,
personal integrity,
a sense of right and wrong,
learning, wisdom and love of truth,
care and compassion,
justice and peace,
respect for one another,
for the earth and its creatures.*

We commit ourselves, in a spirit of friendship and co-operation, to work together alongside all who share our values and ideals, to help bring about a better world now and for generations to come.

² Those called forward to read the opening section of the Act were former FCF Co-Moderators the Revd Canon Hilary Barber (Christian community; also former Co-Chair) and Rabbi Mordechai Wollenberg (Jewish community); former IFN Co-Chair, Mr Narendra Waghela; former FCF Vice-Moderators Dr Desmond Biddulph CBE (Buddhist community), Minister David Bruton (Spiritualists), Malcolm Deboo (Zoroastrian community), Sabira Lakha (Muslim community), Trupti Patel (Hindu community), Satnam Singh Poonian (Sikh community), Neil Pitchford (Druid and Pagan community), Tracey Prior (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), Dr Riaz Sanatian (Baha'i community) and Dr Mehool Sanghrajka MBE (Jain community); Kate McColgan, Inter Faith Council for Wales; Dr Norman Richardson MBE, Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum; Dr Maureen Sier, Interfaith Scotland; and Bishop Colin Fletcher OBE. Minister Bruton and Dr Sanghrajka represented the former Moderators for their communities, who could not be present.

IFN, connection and cooperation

Mr Waghela said that the recitation of the Act of Commitment was a powerful reminder of shared values.

He then introduced the next section, on the power of connection and cooperation. The two contributions in this highlighted the particularly important role that IFN had had in offering opportunities for people and organisations to learn from each other, access helpful advice, and make connections enabling cooperation between their communities and with wider society.



Deepak Naik MBE

Deepak Naik MBE, Chair, United Religions Initiative UK

Mr Naik celebrated the proactive way in which IFN had interacted with its local and regional members. It cared; it engaged; it wanted to make sure that members across the regions in England knew each other and worked together. This had made a big difference to people who did not live in London, but in the Midlands, the North and other parts of England. IFN had not just organised conferences and activities, but it had enabled new partnerships, collaborations and friendships to form at the local level.

He said that we had a bigger impact in our neighbourhoods, in our schools, in our universities, in our homes if we came together.

IFN had enabled trust to deepen, thereby enabling activities to happen. He thanked IFN sincerely for its work. He reflected on the essential ingredients for work in pursuit of equality, justice, harmony and fairness.



Dr Maureen Sier

Dr Maureen Sier, Director, Interfaith Scotland

Dr Sier began by thanking the IFN staff for their work over the years: she had experienced this when coming to Trustee meetings and in the course of her work over many years. They were always there to pick up the phone when advice was needed, to assist with publications, or help people in other ways. She asked the audience to join her in a round of applause for IFN staff, past and present.

From the very beginning of Interfaith Scotland, IFN had been involved. She said it had been wonderful that IFN had had the wisdom to bring together annually Interfaith Scotland, the Inter Faith Council for Wales, the Northern Ireland InterFaith Forum and IFN. This had enabled conversations on common issues and on the practicalities of addressing connection and cooperation that faced the whole UK. It had helped them explore how they could help make all of the UK somewhere where faith and diversity of faith were not feared, but celebrated. An example of these meetings

had been one in Belfast, when they had jointly visited the Clonard monastery in Northern Ireland. This was where secret meetings had been held between different groupings to explore how the Good Friday Agreement could come into being.

Dr Sier said that so much of the work of inter faith was about creating safe spaces for dialogue, including for young people to explore what it meant to have a faith in modern Britain. In 2004 Scottish Interfaith Week had been launched for this purpose, and they had felt so honoured that IFN had picked it up and made it a national festival of faith. Since then, Scottish Interfaith Week and the national Inter Faith Week had collaborated in many ways. It was welcome that the UK Government had commissioned a report on the future of Inter Faith Week, because it recognised that inter faith activity was so important for the whole of the UK.



Avtar Singh, playing the Taus

Musical interlude

Mr Waghela thanked Dr Sier, then welcomed special guest, Avtar Singh of the Khalsa Jatha in London, who would be playing a rare stringed instrument called the Taus.

He was grateful to past IFN staff member Bhupinder Singh Bhasin for making the introduction. Avtar Singh was increasingly well known for his musicianship, and was coming to the event ahead of an engagement later in the week at the House of Commons.

Mr Singh said he was honoured to share with the audience sacred sounds which had survived for centuries. The Taus was a very rare instrument. It was shaped like a peacock and its name meant 'peacock' in Persian. It was a variation of the sitar and it was an important part in Sikh faith. To share this rich heritage with the audience was a great privilege. He then played the Taus.

Programme description of Avtar Singh's contribution

Avtar is part of a distinctive community that has preserved traditional Sikhi musical heritage. Taught by one of the most renowned musicians of that tradition, Ustad Surjeet Singh, Avtar started his instrumental training on the Indian bowed instrument the Dillruba before beginning to play the Taus, a majestic instrument that has been somewhat hidden in the last decades. Avtar is among a handful of artists playing this instrument in the world.

IFN, linking and supporting local inter faith engagement

Introducing the next section, Canon Barber said that supporting and encouraging local inter faith engagement had been a key role of IFN since it began. IFN had also gained greatly from the input of local inter faith organisations. He noted that he himself played an active part in his own local inter faith organisation, Calderdale Interfaith. Grassroots inter faith understanding and cooperation was vital in our society. It was fitting that that the Network's last publication had been the excellent guide to local inter faith organisations, featuring examples drawn from around the UK, including many from groups represented at the present event. (This can be seen at <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/local-inter-faith-organisations-a-guide>.)

He welcomed two contributors from local inter faith organisations, both of whom were known for their work in their own localities, but who had also found time to share their wisdom and experience through IFN.

Rabbi Warren Elf MBE, Faith Network for Manchester and Greater Manchester Faith and Belief Advisory Panel

Rabbi Elf said that he had been involved in the Faith Network for Manchester since its inception in 2004, but had known about IFN for a long time before that. Dialogue between people of different faiths at the local level was so important and could lead to much good work being done together. Supporting local inter faith activity had been a key element of IFN's role, but local groups had also fed into, and indeed led, some of IFN's work.

IFN regional meetings and day conferences had been a great way for inter faith groups to establish good connections, in the North West and elsewhere. The annual IFN National Meetings had provided further opportunities,



Rabbi Warren Elf MBE

bringing together people with different faiths and beliefs from different regions, different types of organisations, and offering different ways of exploring inter faith relations.

Rabbi Elf said that IFN's written guides had been an invaluable resource for local inter faith organisations. Some of these had been written in the 1980s but were just as relevant today, as were its recent ones. So, too, was the multi-faith calendar. He was glad to see these were still up on the website. The Network's work with central and local government had been a really important strand of its work. He was pleased to say that the Greater Manchester authorities were acting on the advice of its Faith and Belief Advisory Panel. This would not have happened without IFN setting the ball rolling many years ago.

He noted that IFN's strong advocacy of faith groups standing together in solidarity against hatred and prejudice had borne fruit, for instance following the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017. Responding to critical issues as they arose had been so important, as had been IFN's research into the causes of such events. Other bodies had been active in the same area, but they had complemented IFN's work. IFN had held it all

together as the umbrella organisation: working through the issues, spearheading the research, and sharing best practice. He concluded by giving warm thanks to the staff of IFN over the years.



Mehru Fitter MBE

Mehru Fitter MBE, Coventry Multi Faith Forum

Ms Fitter noted that Coventry Multi Faith Forum (CMFF) had had a very cordial relationship with IFN, and had been badly hit by the news of its closure. As an attendee of IFN's national and regional meetings, she had found these gatherings to be informative and stimulating. They had been opportunities for renewing old contacts, forging new links, and gathering new ideas and good practice. CMFF had always felt honoured when invited by IFN to share its experience. She said that IFN's publications had been much valued. The newsletters had kept her Forum informed about faith matters and events, and IFN's statements during turbulent times had had a calming influence and helped to maintain good inter faith relations.

CMFF had been so happy when Inter Faith Week was launched. Events held during the Week brought diverse communities together and were fertilisers of inter faith harmony. The Week was also a time when smaller and lesser known faith communities were able to raise their profile. At Inter Faith Week events, strangers became friends, and friends became members of the wider family of faiths. It had been wonderful for her and

others at CMFF to see different faith communities in Coventry think as one and act as one.

Ms Fitter concluded by saying that her group was sad to see IFN wind up. She thanked the Network for its sterling work and unfailing support. It had left behind an enduring legacy through its publications. Through its events and communications, it had passed on a message loud and clear that religious diversity is a cause for celebration. She was sure that its outstanding legacy would be upheld with determination, diligence and dynamism.



Religious and inter-religious literacy

Canon Barber then introduced the penultimate section of the programme, on religious and inter-religious literacy. He noted that one of IFN's most powerful contributions to religious literacy had been made through Inter Faith Week every November. He welcomed to the lectern former IFN Intern and Project Assistant Leo Taylor and former IFN Intern Shalva Louisa Hadari, to talk about their experience of working on the Week, and why they saw it as so important for religious and inter-religious literacy. They would also be compèring the remainder of the section.



Leo Taylor

Leo Taylor

Mr Taylor said that he had been with IFN as an Intern and Project Assistant from 2023 until April 2024. One of the most valuable parts of his role had been working on Inter Faith Week. This Week had started in 2009 following a proposal from IFN to the then government, inspired by Scottish Interfaith Week. It had grown significantly in the last few years, especially in schools. During the 2023 Week, he had helped draft funding applications, put events on the website, helped publicise it through MailChimp and social media, and attended many events. It had been a long but enjoyable week, taking him to places including Birmingham, Brighton, and London.

Inter Faith Week was valuable because it provided a focal point for inter faith activity. It engaged new constituencies that would otherwise not have been involved, in organisations such as schools, HE and FE institutions, workplaces and local authorities. It thus also promoted and extended understanding between people of faith and those with non-religious world views. For organisations already regularly involved in inter faith activity, it provided a window of time during which they could focus and advertise their activities. At a time when funding for inter faith initiatives was limited, groups could concentrate their efforts into a single week, which made their work and inter faith activity in general more visible.



Shalva Louisa Hadari

Shalva Louisa Hadari

Ms Hadari said that she had been the last IFN Intern, and also the youngest ever. She had taken on a number of jobs in the run-up to the Week, notably listing events happening across the country. These had been posted on one centralised map, and she had vivid memories of an Excel spreadsheet which had kept getting longer and longer! She had also promoted events on Twitter. It had been good to see the list in the run-up to the Week, because it gave a real sense of how many organisations across the country were going to run events and how diverse they

were. A number were jointly held with Mitzvah Day (she acknowledged, at this point, Laura Marks CBE of Mitzvah Day, who was present).

She had attended many events. Ones that remained in her memory were an intergenerational event run by Nottingham Trent University and an environmental event hosted by Walthamstow Wetlands. All the events had been very different in structure and style, but at every one she had got the sense that everyone was there with an open willingness to engage in inter faith dialogue. Inter Faith Week offered a chance to increase religious literacy and for everyone also to learn more about their own faiths. She had had a fantastic experience during the Week, and was grateful for the support of the other IFN staff – every staff member had contributed to making her experience as Intern so worthwhile. She was deeply sad that IFN had been closed, but she felt so privileged to work with IFN in its final year.

She then introduced Gopal Singh Bhachu, Chair of Harrow Interfaith, which was one of the local inter faith organisations which runs an extensive programme of activities for Inter Faith Week.



Gopal Singh Bhachu

Gopal Singh Bhachu

Mr Bhachu began by observing that IFN had worked to promote understanding, cooperation and good relations between organisations and persons of different faiths in the UK. There was now no organisation offering advice and

information covering the same areas as IFN had. The audience had gathered here today to celebrate and mark the work of IFN. There also needed to be thought about how to initiate new ways of taking forward inter faith activity.

He said Inter Faith Week had always been led by IFN, so it was really welcome to those who were passionate about inter faith activity that a number of national inter faith bodies had cooperated to enable Inter Faith Week 2024 to go ahead. He pledged that he would do all in his power to ensure that the Week would continue in future years, since inter faith dialogue was much needed across the world.

The Week, stretching from Remembrance Sunday in November through to the following Sunday, represented eight beautiful days of community cohesion and the opportunity to meet people of different faiths. It was the one week in the year when inter faith groups could put themselves on the map. The IFN team would start the planning process for the Week months before, by sending out badges, flyers and links to resources. The Week could encompass everything from coffee mornings to major inter faith conferences, such as he had run for the last three years in Harrow.

Mr Bhachu said that since he had become Chair of Harrow Interfaith, Inter Faith Week had become the centre of activity to promote community cohesion in Harrow and neighbouring boroughs. His own borough had seen as many as 20 to 25 events over the eight days, including peace walks to various places of worship, talks in schools, an event with the Metropolitan Police, and an inter faith breakfast. There had been productive partnerships for the Week with local food banks, police and community groups. The various events had attracted such good feedback that the membership of his group had doubled and now included thirteen different faith communities.

Mr Bhachu concluded by announcing that Harrow Faith would be working with its equivalent inter faith bodies in Barnet and Brent as part

of a 'covenant' to help ensure that Inter Faith Week would continue into the future in North West London. He would continue to promote inter faith activity by all methods, including through his role as Vice Chair of the Faith and Belief Sector Panel for London Resilience, his membership of the Faiths Forum for London, and as an advisor to City Sikhs. He thanked the IFN team for all they had done over the years.

Ms Hadari then welcomed Zara Achhodi, a pupil at Plashet School, Newham Pupil Parliament member and student RE Matters, SACRE of London Borough of Newham



Zara Achhodi

Zara Achhodi

Ms Achhodi said that she had been honoured, as a young South Asian Muslim girl, to stand as a Youth MP for Newham. She was passionate about breaking down cultural and religious barriers. She recognised the transformative power of inter faith dialogue, especially during Inter Faith Week. Newham was often described as 'underprivileged', but it was truly rich and strong in its cultural and religious diversity. Newham SACRE played a vital role in celebrating that. Each year, it organised events during the Week that brought together people of different faiths and beliefs to learn from one another and challenge harmful stereotypes.

She said that in 2024 she had taken part in a conference organised by the SACRE. This had created a space where young people could speak

openly about their beliefs and experiences. They had tackled difficult questions, explored common traditions, and, most importantly, listened to each other. The event had helped them see that no matter what the differences were, they shared many values and hopes.

She had witnessed first-hand how impactful it could be when young people took part in such discussions. She gave the example of a fellow student from a non-religious background who had shared with a Muslim friend of hers how he had never really considered the significance of growing up wearing the hijab or fasting during Ramadan. After the conference he had expressed a profound shift not only in his attitude towards her religion, but also in his assumptions about religious faith. This showed how these conversations could go beyond challenging stereotypical assumptions to opening doors to empathy, curiosity and respect.

Ms Achhodi said that this work mattered deeply to her personally. Since becoming a Youth MP, she had travelled to towns and cities all over the country, where young people often knew very little about cultural traditions or religious practices different to their own. This was not because they did not care, but, rather, because they had never been given the chance to learn. That was why Inter Faith Week was so important: it sparked conversations that did not just educate but also helped people to connect. It could rewrite narratives, building a future where every young person, no matter their background, felt seen, heard and valued.

Mr Taylor thanked Zara Achhodi for her contribution, and introduced Deborah Weston from the Religious Education Council of England and Wales.



Deborah Weston OBE

Deborah Weston OBE

Ms Weston began by saying that hearing Zara Achhodi made her feel confident about the future.

She said that it was a privilege to be given the opportunity to reflect on IFN's extraordinary contribution to education and understanding in the UK. From its inception, IFN had recognised the vital role of Religious Education (RE) in fostering respectful, informed dialogue among and within diverse communities. Education had been a core component of IFN's work, including a strong and sustained partnership with the RE Council of England and Wales (REC).

This relationship had enabled collaboration on numerous projects, such as the non-statutory National Framework for RE in 2004. That milestone document had for the first time presented RE in the format of a National Curriculum programme of study, helping syllabus writers to ensure that young people received a well-rounded understanding of religion and belief in society. The collaboration between IFN and the REC had ensured that inter faith education remained a priority, for instance being included in the current GCSE exam in Religious Studies. IFN had also made an important contribution to the REC's Resilience project, which aimed to equip teachers to handle contentious issues in the classroom.

She said that Inter Faith Week had become a cornerstone of IFN's education engagement, with growing numbers of schools participating each year. It was a time when young minds were encouraged to explore diversity of faith and belief in their locality, the UK and the world at large, thus fostering respect and dialogue.

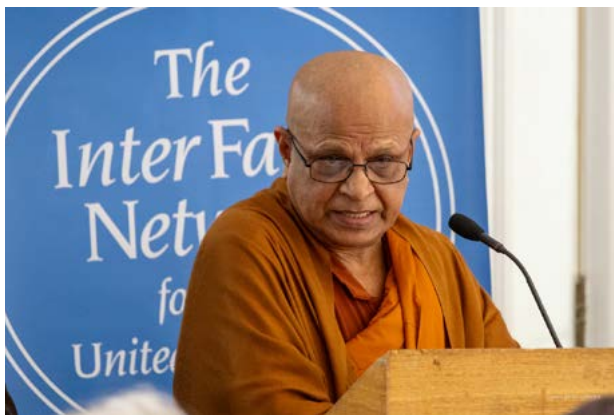
Ms Weston said that there were too many names to thank, but that she would like to pay special tribute to Professor Brian Gates MBE, who had been a leading figure in RE for many years. He had been involved in IFN since its inception, had been a Trustee of it for a number of years, and had helped develop and strengthen links between the two bodies. She also mentioned former IFN Trustee Malcolm Deboo, who had played an important role in the REC's working party on Religions in Education; IFN's former Executive Director Harriet Crabtree, who had given time to support many REC projects; and Dr David Hampshire, who had brought his expertise in the RE field to his role as IFN Assistant Director.

IFN collaborations with the National Association of SACREs, the Welsh Association of SACREs, and the former Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education – as well as with bodies such as the National Association of Teachers of RE and Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants – to support the development of resources for the classroom had also profoundly enriched resources for RE and had strengthened inter faith and belief dialogue.

Looking ahead, she hoped that RE would continue to be championed, not just as an academic subject but as a vital tool for fostering understanding, respect and unity in our diverse society.

Tribute to IFN and its member bodies, Trustees, honorary officers and staff who served it across its time of operation, and also to its Faith Communities Forum Moderators

The Co-Chairs then invited the Most Ven Bogoda Seelawimala and Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra to come to the lectern to introduce the final element of the programme, the signing of the Tribute to IFN.



Most Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala

Most Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala

The Most Venerable Seelawimala expressed his deepest appreciation for the tremendous and selfless service rendered by IFN. It had been a beacon of unity and cooperation in our richly diverse society. Among its visionary founders had been Brian Pearce, whose leadership laid the foundation of this noble initiative. On behalf of those present he also paid tribute to Dr Harriet Crabtree, whose long-standing commitment and tireless dedication had further advanced the Network's mission.

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra

Shaykh Mogra added his sincere thanks and greetings to IFN, which had developed such good friendships with different faith communities. He had found its work to be of

immense importance and benefit, not only to faith communities and various government departments but to all of British society. It was imperative to put on record thanks and appreciation to Brian Pearce, Dr Harriet Crabtree, the trustees, member organisations, staff, volunteers and so many others. The Prophet Muhammad had said that he who does not thank people has certainly not thanked God.

He invited Penny Coppin Siddall of York Interfaith to read out the Tribute.



Penny Coppin Siddall and Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra

Penny Coppin Siddall

Mrs Coppin Siddall said that the Tribute set out for posterity an expression of gratitude and appreciation. She read out from the tribute scroll the following text:

We place on record our respect and gratitude for the work of the Inter Faith Network for the UK for inter faith understanding and cooperation across nearly four decades.

We also place on record our gratitude to the Trustees and staff of the Inter Faith Network for the UK and its Faith Communities Forum Moderators, past and present, for the committed service they gave to the United Kingdom during the years of the Network's existence.

The achievements of IFN, including those of IFN's member bodies, working in cooperation through IFN, are all around us; they cannot be over-estimated.

The Inter Faith Network's legacy of resources and publications has been carefully preserved and made available. Its living legacy is even more important: the skills, the increase in inter faith understanding, the commitment to stand in solidarity, the friendships, the hope – all carried forward by thousands of people who have benefitted from its work.

That legacy is now entrusted to others: the growing number of people who are working for inter faith understanding and cooperation for the common good.

Signed on 29 April 2025 at the event to celebrate and give thanks for IFN's work.



Liz Slade, General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, signing the tribute, and Warwick Hawkins MBE and Deepak Naik MBE



Yvonne Brown MBE signing the tribute, with Anna Dimdore

Closing words

Canon Hilary Barber thanked Mrs Coppin Siddall, and said that the signing of the Tribute was a wonderful way to end this programme of celebration and thanks for the work of the Inter Faith Network for the UK.

Canon Barber invited Brian Pearce to offer a final personal reflection if he would like to do so.

Brian Pearce offered some brief words, responding to the afternoon's event. He expressed his gratitude to all who had arranged it and taken part. It had been a privilege for him to play a role in establishing and helping IFN develop and to work with so many remarkable people along the way. He was amazed by what had come out of what had been started all those years ago.

Canon Barber explained that the audience would shortly be having tea and refreshments, graciously sponsored by Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe, which would be served in the adjacent room. Ahead of that, however, the Advisory Group had arranged for some presentations to be made. He thanked the audience for being part of this special event, and handed over to former IFN Co-Chair Bishop Richard Atkinson OBE to introduce the presentations.



Ashley Beck receives his presentation from Padideh Sabeti

Presentations

The presentations were overseen by former IFN Co-Chair Bishop Richard Atkinson OBE. Presentations were made to the former Co-Chairs, the FCF Co-Moderators, Company Secretary and Finance and General Purposes Subcommittee Chair and staff who had been in role at the time of IFN's closure.³

The presenters and recipients were as follows:

- Dr Ed Kessler MBE: to Co-Chair Canon Hilary Barber
- Bishop Richard Atkinson OBE: to Co-Chair Narendra Waghela
- Kate McColgan: to Mohinder Singh Chana, Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and to Mike Stygal, Company Secretary
- Rajnish Kashyap: to Rabbi Mordechai Wollenberg, Co-Moderator of the Faith Communities Forum (the other Co-Moderator had been Canon Hilary Barber)
- Charanjit AjitSingh: to Hannah Cassidy, Senior Administrator and PA to the Executive Director
- Padideh Sabeti: to Ashley Beck, Project Director
- Dr Norman Richardson MBE: to Dr Harriet Crabtree OBE, Executive Director



Mohinder Singh Chana receives his presentation from Kate McColgan

³ For technical reasons, photographs were not available of all presentations. Those included are illustrative.



Narendra Waghela receives his presentation from Bishop Richard Atkinson OBE



Dr Harriet Crabtree OBE receives her presentation from Dr Norman Richardson MBE

As part of the event organisers' commitment to sustainability, living plants given as presentations after the event, rather than cut flower bouquets.

The audience responded with warm applause to each presentation and a standing ovation for its last Executive Director.

Sharing memories over tea

The audience then moved into the next room for refreshments. The refreshments were sponsored by Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe. The event concluded at 5pm.



Hannah Cassidy receives her presentation from Charanjit AjitSingh



Malcolm Deboo of Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (centre) with Mustafa Field OBE (l) and Prof Brian Gates MBE (r)

A few images from the day



Most Revd Father Abiola OBE



*Dr David Hampshire, Mike Stygal
and Deborah Weston OBE*



Dr Peter Colwell, Padideh Sabeti and MHCLG official



Gopal Singh Bhachu and Judith Baker



Dr Peter Rookes and Esmond Rosen



*Anna Dimdore (FiS), Hannah Cassidy, Jay
Anderson and Canon Guy Wilkinson CBE*



Former IFN Executive Directors Dr Harriet Crabtree OBE (fourth left) and Brian Pearce OBE (seated) with some past IFN staff colleagues, L to R: Bhupinder Singh Bhasin; Leo Taylor; Ziya Adilov; Dr David Hampshire; Stella Opoku-Owusu; Ashley Beck; Hannah Cassidy; Paresh Solanki; Augustine Booth-Clibborn and Shalva Louisa Hadari



Further information about the work of the former Inter Faith Network for the UK, and links to its publications (which are now under Creative Commons licence), can be found on its legacy website: www.interfaith.org.uk. IFN's final Review https://www.interfaith.org.uk/uploads/IFN_Review_2021-24.pdf gives details about its work from 2021 and 2024 and about the context of the organisation's closure.

