

# IFN Statements from 2013 and earlier

## IFN Press Release

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3 July 2013

The Inter Faith Network for the UK held its National Meeting and AGM at Aston University in Birmingham on Monday 1 July.

The Inter Faith Network works with its member bodies and other agencies to promote good inter faith relations in the UK. It links nearly two hundred member bodies including: national faith community representative bodies; national, regional, local and other inter faith organisations; and academic institutions and educational bodies concerned with inter faith issues.

### **AGM**

At the IFN AGM, the Committee for the forthcoming year was elected. Among the 35 members elected on Monday were its two Co-Chairs: the Revd Bob Fyffe (Christian community) and Mr Vivian Wineman (Jewish community). The Revd Bob Fyffe is General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and Mr Wineman is President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

Bob Fyffe said, "The IFN UK AGM and National Meeting were a success due to the courtesy and desire for faith communities to work together for peace and harmony. They were marked by the depth of listening and engagement, proving that inter faith is the glue that allows people of faith to stand together in building a better and more harmonious society. It is our job to move this agenda forward"

Vivian Wineman said "The Inter Faith Network was founded in 1987 to promote good relations between people of different faiths. In our present climate the importance of this work, and of inter faith work generally, cannot be overstated."

Four Vice-Chairs were also among Committee members elected: Mr Mohinder Singh Chana (Sikh community); Dr Kishan Manocha (Baha'i community); Dr Jagdish Sharma (Hindu community); and Maulana M Shahid Raza OBE (Muslim community). Mr Dorab Mistry OBE (who is from the Zoroastrian community) was elected as Honorary Treasurer.

Under discussion at the AGM and the National Meeting were the report and recommendations of a Strategic Review which has recently been carried out for the Inter Faith Network by a Working Group chaired by Ms Patricia Stoat. This has been looking at such areas as the pattern of IFN's membership and work; Inter Faith Week; its place in the wider social context; and sustainability. The Executive Committee will be taking forward further work in the Autumn responding to its recommendations.

## **National Meeting**

The National Meeting included a special session on inter faith solidarity in the face of hatred and violence which is motivated by, or claims a link to, religious identity.

In a statement issued on 23 May, the Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs of IFN said, "In the wake of this terrible attack, all who share a commitment to a peaceful, safe and just society have a vital role to play in strengthening community bonds and working for greater understanding and mutual support at times of difficulty." This message of solidarity has been reflected by faith communities and inter-faith organisations in many statements, vigils and cross-community events and visits across the last weeks - both in response to the original attack and in relation to subsequent attacks on some Muslim properties. The meeting was addressed on this topic by three speakers:

- Following the killing of Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich, in the London Borough of Greenwich, by men who associated their actions with Islam, faith leaders of different traditions responded together, alongside the local authority, to encourage a calm and effective cross-community response and to draw together the faith communities of Woolwich in a common expression of sorrow and solidarity. Mr Mike Leader, of *Greenwich Faith Leaders, Convenor of the Ecumenical Borough Deans and Chair of Trustees*,

*Greenwich Peninsula Multifaith Chaplaincy*, who was at the heart of this response, shared his reflections on the process and its effects.

- Mr Fiyaz Mughal OBE, *Director Faith Matters and of Muslims against Anti-Semitism* gave reflections on the situation following the Woolwich attack and subsequent incidents and attacks reported by the Muslim community and on the significance of cross-faith responses to violence and hatred. He also spoke about TELL MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) which is a national project of Faith Matters which supports and assists individuals affected by anti-Muslim prejudice or Islamophobia in all contexts and about the significance of learning from the Jewish community's work on community security. He underlined the importance of ensuring safety for all communities.
- Mrs Neelam Aggarwal-Singh, of Northampton Inter-Faith Forum, talked about the importance of a united local inter faith response at times of difficulty – but also underlined the vital importance of building strong relationships of understanding and cooperation more generally. It is at tough times that the existence of these already formed bonds is crucial.

**Note for Editors:**

- The Inter Faith Network for the UK, [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk), was founded in 1987 and links 200 member bodies including: national representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian faiths; national, regional, local and other inter faith bodies; and academic institutions and educational bodies concerned with inter faith issues. It works with members and other agencies to promote good inter faith relations in the UK. Further details, including of member bodies and Executive Committee can be found at its website: [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)
- IFN also leads on national Inter Faith Week in England, Northern Ireland and Wales: [www.interfaithweek.org.uk](http://www.interfaithweek.org.uk)

Press queries Tel 020 7730 0410 [ifnet@interfaith.org.uk](mailto:ifnet@interfaith.org.uk)

# Statement following murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby in 2013

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23 May 2013

## **Statement from the Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Inter Faith Network for the UK**

We learned with deep shock and great sadness of the murder of a young member of the armed forces in Woolwich yesterday afternoon. Such acts of violence and terror have no place in our society.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the victim's family.

The attackers linked their actions with the religion of Islam. Statements from major national Muslim bodies have, in the ensuing hours, condemned the act in the strongest terms and stressed its lack of connection to – and complete contradiction of – teachings of Islam. Even so, there have been attacks on two mosques over the course of the last 24 hours and concerns expressed about the possibility of further attack.

Our thoughts and prayers are also with any whose places of worship or personal safety are affected.

In the wake of this terrible attack, all who share a commitment to a peaceful, safe and just society have a vital role to play in strengthening community bonds and working for greater understanding and mutual support at times of difficulty.

Dr Manazir Ahsan MBE (Co-Chair)

The Revd Bob Fyffe (Co-Chair)

Dr Girdari Lal Bhan (Vice-Chair)

Mr Mohinder Singh Chana (Vice-Chair)

Mr Dorab Mistry (Vice-Chair)

Mr Vivian Wineman (Vice-Chair)

## Note for Editors

- Press queries to Inter Faith Network: Tel 020 7730 0410 [ifnet@interfaith.org.uk](mailto:ifnet@interfaith.org.uk)
- The Inter Faith Network for the UK, [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk), was founded in 1987 and links 200 member bodies including: national representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian faiths; national, regional, local and other inter faith bodies; and academic institutions and educational bodies concerned with inter faith issues. It works with members and other agencies to promote good inter faith relations in the UK.
- The principles and practical suggestions in Looking After One Another: The Safety and Security of Our Communities have continuing relevance. This IFN publication can be found at: <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/lookingafteroneanother.pdf>

# DRAFT Circular Covering E-Bulletin

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Aug 2012

Dear Inter Faith Network contact,

I attach the latest issue of the e-bulletin.

Within this you will find information about a wide range of events, projects and consultations.

You will also find a piece about the distressing murder of Sikhs at Oak Creek in the USA and some of the responses to this.

The Oak Creek atrocity appears to have, like the actions in Norway last summer of Anders Behring Breivik, links with ultra extremist views as well as profound misunderstanding of the beliefs and practices of a community.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK works to promote inter faith understanding and cooperation. While IFN's work focuses on the UK and formal statements are rarely issued on overseas events, the Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs of IFN would like to express their concern about the underlying issues of extremism and prejudice which, sadly, cross all national boundaries and their sympathy to the Sikh community. This incident, like the murders in Toulouse last year – and others in different countries – are, together with examples from time to time of prejudice, hatred and even violence in our own country, a reminder of the need to work tirelessly for greater understanding about and between different faiths.

Best wishes, Harriet Crabtree

# Statement following attacks in Norway 2011

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25 July 2011

## **Statement by Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Inter Faith Network for the UK**

We are profoundly shocked and saddened by the tragic loss of life in Norway and the actions that led to this. We join with those around the world in offering to all affected our deepest sympathy and prayers.

The individual arrested in the wake of these terrorist acts has offered a rationale rooted in opposition to multiculturalism and to the presence of Islam in Europe. He has claimed a justification based, in part, on what he sees as Christian belief. The Prime Minister has today chaired a meeting of the National Security Council looking at what the implications of the attacker's actions may be for Britain. Security services are to examine whether 'adequate scrutiny' is being applied to far-Right extremists in this country.

Where terrorists justify their actions with reference to positions which they call religious, this reflects ignorance and breeds suspicion and mistrust. This has a direct relevance for all those working for good inter faith relations. We know that religious teachings – of any tradition – can be distorted and used as justification for brutal acts of violence that have no place in any society, nor any true foundation in any faith tradition. In the United Kingdom, people of different faiths coexist as part of one society. We are committed, as people of faith, to discerning our shared values and building on these – alongside all people of goodwill - to strengthen our society.

Dr Manazir Ahsan MBE, Co-Chair  
Rt Revd Dr Alastair Redfern, Co-Chair  
Dr Girdari Lal Bhan, Vice-Chair  
Dr Natubhai Shah, Vice-Chair  
Dr Indarjit Singh CBE, Vice-Chair  
Mr Vivian Wineman, Vice-Chair

## Notes

1. Press queries to Inter Faith Network: Tel 020 7730 0410 [ifnet@interfaith.org.uk](mailto:ifnet@interfaith.org.uk)
2. The Inter Faith Network for the UK, [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk), was founded in 1987 and links 200 member bodies including: national representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian faiths; national, regional, local and other inter faith bodies; and academic institutions and educational bodies concerned with inter faith issues. It works with members and other agencies to promote good inter faith relations in the UK.



# Statement by Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Inter Faith Network for the UK

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9 October 2009

Following discussion at a meeting of the Inter Faith Network's Executive Committee this week, its Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs have made the following statement:

"While inter faith relations in the UK are generally positive there are, from time to time, developments which seek to drive a wedge between our faith communities.

These range from demeaning rhetoric which claims that some faith communities are less truly British to demands for restrictions on freedom to worship or on other aspects of practising one's faith. While these views may be expressed in ways which remain just on the right side of the law they can still be deeply disturbing. There are also periodic reports of attacks on faith community property – from places of worship to cemeteries – and disruptive activities by extremist groups.

As we prepare for Inter Faith Week next month in different nations of the UK the importance of good inter faith relations is very much to the fore. As well as highlighting the positive aspects of working together, it is important that we continue to work, peacefully and effectively, to dispel negative stereotypes; counteract prejudice; prevent disagreement from leading to conflict; and work in mutually supportive ways to ensure that all our communities feel safe, secure and valued.

We must continue to work, with energy and commitment, for a United Kingdom where all are free, within the law, to express their beliefs and convictions and practise their faith; where we handle differences well; and, while respecting the right of others to disagree with us, look always for points of commonality and shared values on which we can build together."

*Dr G L Bhan, Co-Chair*

*Rt Revd Tom Butler, Co-Chair*

*Dr Manazir Ahsan MBE, Vice-Chair*

*Hon Barnabas Leith, Vice-Chair*

*Dr Indarjit Singh CBE, Vice-Chair*

*Mr Vivian Wineman, Vice-Chair*

***Note for Editors:***

The Inter Faith Network for the UK [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk) was founded in 1987. It links in membership national representative organisations of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths in the UK; national, regional and local inter faith organisations; and educational and academic bodies with an interest in inter faith issues. It works with its member bodies and other agencies to promote good relations between the faith communities in the UK; to combat inter religious prejudice and intolerance; and to help make the UK a country marked by mutual understanding and respect between religions where all can practise their faith with integrity.

**Press enquiries:** Paresh Solanki Tel: 020 7931 7766 and 07976 825550

***Inter Faith Week:***

Inter Faith Week takes place from 15-21 November 2009 in England and Wales

[www.interfaithweek.org.uk](http://www.interfaithweek.org.uk)

Scottish Inter Faith Week takes place from 22-29 November 2009

[www.scottishinterfaithcouncil.org](http://www.scottishinterfaithcouncil.org)

# Statement from Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Inter Faith Network for the UK

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6 January 2009

The Inter Faith Network exists to promote understanding between people of different faiths in the UK and works to help create good inter-faith relations in this country. Violent events overseas of any nature can, inevitably, have repercussions here in Britain. As we have said in the past, at times of tension it is particularly important for the upholding and deepening of good inter faith relations that we seek ways to handle well the impact of overseas events of this kind and are able to talk together about them in ways which increase understanding rather than leading to suspicion and distrust or inter community tension. This seems very relevant to us at the present time of crisis in Gaza. While we – from different communities - pray for peace and work for justice, let us also hold firmly to the principle of maintaining bonds of trust between our communities even where these are strongly tested.

*Rt Rev Dr Tom Butler (Co-Chair)*  
*Dr Nawal K Prinja (Co-Chair)*  
*Dr Manazir Ahsan MBE (Vice-Chair)*  
*Mr Dorab Mistry (Vice-Chair)*  
*Dr Indarjit Singh CBE (Vice-Chair)*  
*Mr Vivian Wineman (Vice-Chair)*

## **Note for Editors:**

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987. It links in membership national representative organisations of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths in the UK; national, regional and local inter faith organisations; and educational and academic bodies with an interest in inter faith issues.

It works with its member bodies and other agencies to promote good relations between the faith communities in the UK; to combat inter religious prejudice and intolerance; and to help make the UK a country marked by mutual understanding and respect between religions where all can practise their faith with integrity.

For further information please see the Network's website at [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk) or contact the office on 020 7931 7766.

# Statement in wake of Mumbai and other recent terrorist attacks

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28 November 2008

The horrific attacks in Mumbai, like a number of recent overseas conflicts and attacks, have an impact on communities in the countries where they take place but also far beyond their shores – including people and communities in the UK with links of family and faith.

As the Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Inter Faith Network for the UK we wish to express our sympathy and offer our prayers for those injured or bereaved in the Mumbai attacks, as well as in others; to condemn terrorist violence; and to affirm the crucial importance of work to increase inter religious and inter community understanding in the UK as well as internationally.

Here in the UK, it is particularly important for the upholding and deepening of good inter faith relations that we seek ways to handle well the impact of overseas events of this kind and are able to talk together about these in ways which increase understanding rather than leading to suspicion and distrust or inter community tension.

*Rt Rev Dr Tom Butler (Co-Chair)*  
*Dr Nawal K Prinja (Co-Chair)*  
*Dr Manazir Ahsan MBE (Vice-Chair)*  
*Mr Dorab Mistry (Vice-Chair)*  
*Dr Indarjit Singh OBE (Vice-Chair)*  
*Mr Vivian Wineman (Vice-Chair)*

## **Note for Editors:**

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987. It links in membership national representative organisations of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths in the UK; national, regional and local inter faith organisations; and educational and academic bodies with an interest in inter faith issues.

It works with its member bodies and other agencies to promote good relations between the faith communities in the UK; to combat inter religious prejudice and intolerance; and to help make the UK a country marked by mutual understanding and respect between religions where all can practise their faith with integrity.

For further information please see the Network's website at [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk) or contact the office on 020 7931 7766.

# **News Release: STATEMENT BY NETWORK EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ON IRAQ**

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**20 March 2003**

War is a human tragedy, regardless of any justification there may be for it. As the present military action begins in Iraq, our first thoughts and prayers are for those who will become victims of this conflict. We urge our Government and all the other Governments involved to ensure that every possible step is taken to minimise loss of life on all sides and to alleviate the suffering which will inevitably arise.

The present conflict is not one between different faiths, but it could have an impact on inter faith relations here as in other countries. We must ensure that any strongly opposed views which there may be in the UK in this situation are not allowed to damage the relationships between people of different faiths and beliefs. We welcome the many initiatives that have been taken across the country in recent weeks to bring leading members of different faith communities together to declare their commitment to maintaining the good inter faith relations which characterise our society.

The desire for a just and true peace is passionate and universal among all people. We join together in heartfelt prayer and yearning that it may come, and come soon.

For more information contact Brian Pearce Tel: 020 7388 0008

Email: [ifnet@interfaith.org.uk](mailto:ifnet@interfaith.org.uk)

The Inter Faith Network for the UK

5-7 Tavistock Place

London WC1H 9SN

#### Notes for Editors:

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 and links the main representative organisations of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths in the UK; national inter faith organisations; local inter faith groups; and educational and academic bodies. It works with its member bodies to promote good relations between the faith communities in the UK, to combat inter religious prejudice and intolerance and to help make the UK a country marked by mutual understanding and respect between religions where all can practise their faith with integrity. Web site: [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)

The Inter Faith Network for the UK is a registered charity no: 1068934 and a company limited by guarantee no: 3443823. Registered in England.

# *Press Release RE: Impact of September 11*

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*1 October 2001*

At today's meeting of the Executive Committee of the Inter Faith Network, members of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths remembered in silence all those who had died in, or had been bereaved through, the tragic events of 11 September and all those suffering in the aftermath.

The meeting was chaired by Network Co-Chairs, Rt Revd Tom Butler and Mrs Rosalind Preston, and also attended by the Network's Vice-Chairs, Dr Manazir Ahsan, Mrs Saraswati Dave, Mr Jehangir Sarosh and Mr Jagjiwan Singh. They said "In our United Kingdom, a small minority may try to spread disharmony. But an overwhelming majority believe in the common good and the virtues of tolerance, respect and peaceful co-existence. Together, drawing on the strength our individual faiths offer us, and in co-operation with others, we are building our shared future on a firm foundation. Out of tragedy we must find opportunity for new good".

Some of the comments on recent events have suggested that religion is a cause of them. In the view of the Network's Committee, we are not dealing in the present context with an inherent conflict between religions. In the last three weeks, however, in this country as well as elsewhere it has been a situation in which, because of ignorance and racist malice, some Muslims, Sikhs and others are being scapegoated because of their religion or their appearance. There have also been attacks on a number of places of worship. We deplore all harassment and attacks and we ask people of every faith and none to reach out the hand of friendship to one another at this time and to consider whether there are ways that they can offer to help make good the damage to the places of worship.

We are heartened by the strong commitment of local faith communities and others across our country to working together to help overcome the problems of their local areas and to stand firm against those who seek to undermine the harmony of our society. Britain is now a multi cultural, multi

racial and multi faith society, with many dimensions to its diversity. We can rightly celebrate this as a source of richness which provides us with resources which help us to understand both ourselves and our world and to deal with its problems. The clear commitment, evident again in recent weeks, of the political and religious leaders of this country to endorse the need to respect this diversity, while seeking unity within it, is much to be welcomed.

**For further information contact:** Director: Brian Pearce; Deputy Director: Harriet Crabtree; Information Officer: Bhupinder Singh

A longer document giving background to this release is available from the Network office.

# REFLECTIONS ON RECENT EVENTS

## (September 11)

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1 October 2001

1. The Inter Faith Network links over 90 member organisations with a commitment to building good relations between people of different faiths: representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths; national and local inter faith organisations; and educational and academic bodies specialising in inter faith relations. With them, it is working towards a Britain in which people of different faiths can draw on their own spiritual heritage, with integrity, to help create a society rooted in shared values and characterised by mutual respect and understanding.<sup>i</sup>
2. The world was stunned by the recent terrorist atrocities in the United States. We all feel profound sorrow at them. Sadly, we are all too familiar with scenes of carnage and violence and of the consequent human misery and suffering, sometimes as a result of natural disasters but often inflicted by humanity on itself. Too often we pass by other disasters because they are distant from us, less immediate and less visible to us here. But in its immediacy and intensity the humanly created horror of 11 September and concern over its awesome potential repercussions have evoked a particularly deep response from us all.
3. Inevitably, dramatic developments of this kind on the global scene have a major impact on every country, including our own. We are all increasingly aware of the interconnectedness and interdependence of human life on this fragile planet. In today's world, extensive and immediate communications systems and intertwined economic and social life mean that it is impossible for us to live in isolation from one another. We share a common future.



4. At various points in history, differences in religious allegiance have been linked to conflict. Some of the comments on recent events have suggested that religion is a root cause of them. Truly religious people work to ensure that their faith contributes to resolving conflicts and tensions, not to increasing them. At the same time nearly every faith finds that a small number of individuals misrepresent, betray and shame it, while claiming to follow it, and wickedness may hide behind a religious mask. But, in our view, we are not dealing in the present context with an inherent conflict between religions.
  
5. In our journey together within the Inter Faith Network over the last decade and more, we have learned that our different faiths hold in common simple, but profound, values: compassion, justice and mercy. They also have as common purposes the search for peace and the pursuit of truth and wisdom. The importance of this common ground is not to be underestimated in our damaged world, with its difficult legacies of past history. The application of these values to the problems we face requires discernment, wise judgement and clear vision. These problems, at every level, are deep and complex and we have to address their underlying causes. As people of faith, we know that lasting peace will not be secured without social and economic justice, which requires a fair distribution of the world's resources. There will be legitimate disagreements about what this entails in practice. But of this we are sure: religious people seek justice and peace without stooping to the depths of hatred and violence which destroy humanity itself.
  
6. In our struggle for the greater well-being of our own communities and of society in the UK and the wider world, we cannot hope to be successful unless we base our thoughts, words and actions on the need for mutual understanding and respect, with a determination to pursue the common good. Even when it is most difficult to do so, it is important to remember that we are all part of one common humanity and to hold fast to the values we share.
  
7. The barrier to mutual understanding and respect is often not only a preoccupation with our own self-interest, whether as an individual or as a community, but fear of the 'other'. This can create

suspicion, or even hatred because of a lack of knowledge of other cultures and other faiths. Education, at all ages, is vital here, so that we know and understand more about one another and do not fall prey to false judgements.

8. In various parts of the country there may be only a limited degree of religious diversity. In some other places, where there is greater diversity, different communities live in distinct areas within a town or city. In both cases, this may mean only limited contact with other faiths in their day to day life, with little chance for mutual understanding to develop between them. Pupils in some schools do not have the chance to mix with children from other backgrounds. There is therefore a need to encourage more encounter in a variety of ways. It is important to take steps to maximise the links and bridges within the wider community both locally and nationally which bring together people from different groups and to provide opportunities for encounter and discussion of issues of common concern. National and local inter faith organisations have a vital role to play in this.
  
9. The mutual understanding which is vital to the trust which we need to develop depends on an open dialogue. This is a truthful encounter where there is honest willingness to seek to understand the causes of another's pain and anxiety and at the same time to express to one another our own concerns and fears. It is based on a readiness to be self-critical and on respect for one another's identity and self-understanding, upholding and honouring the identity of different participants. At the same time, it is rooted in the conviction that there are basic principles held in common which are fundamental to our shared journey as fellow citizens of this country and of the wider world.
  
10. Britain is now a multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi faith society, with many dimensions to its diversity. We can rightly celebrate this as a source of richness which provides us with resources which help us to understand both ourselves and our world and to deal with its problems. The clear commitment, evident again in recent weeks, of the political and religious leaders of this country to

endorse the need to respect this diversity, while seeking unity within it, is much to be welcomed.

11. We deplore the attacks and harassment which some Muslims and members of other communities in this country have suffered in the aftermath of the events of 11 September. We are also distressed to learn of damage to a number of places of worship. In this climate it is particularly important that the media is thoughtful in the use of its language. The automatic use of the words "Islamic terrorist" is, for example, extremely unhelpful, as terrorism has no faith.
  
12. For the most part, community relations in this country are good and this is a matter for well-founded pride in what has been achieved here so far. Patient work in recent years means that leaders of our different faith communities at both national and local level now know one another and have good working relations and that a web of links and friendships at grassroots exist locally in many areas. This is an important asset. But there is more to do and there can be no room for complacency. We need to work constantly to develop inter faith relations in constructive ways:
  - to promote better mutual understanding between the faiths
  - to ensure that in words and actions we do not undermine the progress we are making in building better inter faith relationships
  - to strive constantly within individual faith communities and more widely to dispel stereotyping and misrepresentation of others.
  
13. International, national and local events do not necessarily have their roots in inter faith conflict. So, in most cases, working for good inter faith relations is not in itself a sufficient response. But to promote co-operation and mutual understanding across our different faith communities in itself makes a valuable contribution towards social cohesion within civic society and also offers an example for others to follow.

14. We need to work unremittingly for social justice within our society. Faith communities have an important role to play in contributing to the formation and implementation of public policy and to the regeneration of socially and economically deprived and disadvantaged communities. They can also help to ensure that local people are engaged, as they need to be, in the process of our national and local communities finding a way forward to a better future. It is vital that we create among all our citizens, of all faiths and none, a sense of co-ownership of the society which we share and we need to make this co-ownership a genuine reality.
15. Of particular concern to faith communities is the need to eliminate the scourge of religious, as well as racial, discrimination in our society's institutions and practices. The Network welcomes the commitment of the Government, supported by other political parties, to tackle this. Faith communities will play their full part in discussions to ensure that the specific legal and other measures which are taken are adequate and appropriate for their purpose. In the wake of recent events, there is a need to consider the case for legislation against incitement to religious, as distinct from racial, hatred.
16. As was noted at the outset of these reflections, there is an inter connectedness between events overseas and life in Britain. All this country's faith communities have significant ties of kinship and particular sympathy with communities overseas. Links with other countries can help us understand overseas events better and encourage us to develop a more internationally compassionate spirit.
17. There have recently been attempts by racist groups to exploit international events and local situations for their own ends and to divide our different communities one from another. None of our communities is willing to work with these groups, which seek to spread poison within our society, playing on prejudices and fears and legitimate concerns. We are heartened by the strong commitment of local faith communities across our country to work together to help overcome the problems of their local areas and to stand firm against those who seek to undermine the harmony of our society.

18. At times such as this we look for signs of hope. In the traumatic period after the events of 11 September, we see these signs in the commitment of those responding with compassion and determination to the tragedy and its consequences. We see them in the personal courage here and elsewhere of those who have confronted those who have harassed and intimidated them and in those who have come to their aid and support. We see these signs in the new initiatives that have sprung into being in a number of areas to bring different faith communities closer together. And we see them in the responses of all those working to create opportunities for deeper understanding across barriers of ignorance and misunderstanding.
  
19. In our United Kingdom, a small minority may try to spread disharmony. But an overwhelming majority believe in the common good and the virtues of tolerance, respect and peaceful co-existence. Together, drawing on the strength our individual faiths offer us, and in co-operation with others, we will be able to build our shared future on a firm foundation.

1 October 2001

The Inter Faith Network for the UK

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# STATEMENT ON INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS IN BRITAIN

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March 1991

## Introduction

We live in challenging times, with new opportunities for the development of inter-religious relations in the United Kingdom. At the level of local communities, in education, and through the dedicated work of committed organisations and individuals, an extensive pattern of positive inter-religious activity has developed within our society.

This statement is one outcome of that activity. It represents what we, as organisations affiliated to The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom, are now able to affirm together.

A statement of this kind cannot fully reflect the complex realities of our situation, and it points to the need for further work in building mutual understanding between our different communities. However, we offer this statement as the fruit of our experience so far and as an encouragement and a challenge, both to ourselves and to others.

## 1. **The United Kingdom is a religiously diverse society:**

We believe that it is only when we recognise and accept our diversity that positive inter-religious relations can be built. Christianity has been rooted in Britain for many centuries and has been the religious tradition which has principally shaped the country's legal and cultural heritage. In the past, it was often assumed that to be British was to be Christian. However, the Jewish community has had a longstanding presence in our national life and there have always been individuals here from other religious traditions. In contemporary Britain, along with British Christians and Jews, there are now significant numbers of British Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, along with Baha'is, Jains and others. Within every major tradition there is also a considerable degree of diversity of belief and practice. In addition, there are people who live by values which do not involve commitment to a religious tradition. Such wide diversity need not be a barrier to our sharing together in common social and political life. It does represent a challenge but one

which offers our society and our religious communities exciting opportunities for mutual enrichment.

**2. Differences in terms of ethnicity, class, gender and language also affect our inter-religious relationships, as do the bonds of history, religion and kinship between communities here and overseas:**

Our religious affiliation may be the determining factor in our self-understanding. But our identities are complex and derive from many other factors which also have a bearing upon relationships within and between our religious communities. Our ethnic background can mean that we encounter racism. Our difficulties in communicating with confidence across language barriers may create or reinforce misunderstandings. Our social class will influence our priorities and perspectives. Our gender will affect the roles we can play within our communities and in inter-religious relations. Nevertheless, when one or more of these factors are shared by people of different religious traditions then they can also become bridges of understanding. As a society we are not insulated from events beyond our national boundaries. In varying ways, all our communities in Britain have overseas links. Situations abroad can as a result have a significant, and sometimes disruptive, effect on inter-religious relationships here. But in the context of a growing awareness of our global interdependence these links can also be a source of greater understanding of the wider world in which we live.

**3. We need to find ways of more adequately reflecting our common citizenship in the full range of our national life:**

The social and political context shapes the content and development of our inter-religious relations in significant ways. By contrast with the position in some countries of the European Community, in the United Kingdom the majority of members of our different faith communities share a common citizenship. This contributes a basic legal and psychological security which is important for the development of good inter-religious relations. However, racism and religious discrimination create a gap between this formal position and the actual experience of minority religious communities. In addition, the historical position of Christianity means that the rhythm of daily and weekly life and the calendar by which our society is regulated reflect only the observances and festivals of the Christian religion. Moreover, the traditional

Churches have degrees of access to many of our social and political institutions which are not available on comparable terms to representatives of other religious traditions. As our life together develops, we need to examine how our religious diversity can be more fully expressed in the framework of our society.

**4. Society is impoverished when religious perspectives on life are excluded or marginalised:**

Our religious traditions offer values and insights of great worth to society, and provide a framework of meaning within which individuals can interpret their experience. Our traditions make different claims about the sources of their values and ethical principles. But in their varied ways they all point to the value of human, animal and natural life, and to a Reality which infinitely transcends all that we can see, touch, smell, taste, and hear. We hold in common ideals of compassion, service, justice, peace, and concern for the environment. We also believe that popularity, money and power should never be accepted as the sole determining factors in individual or social life. We acknowledge that many of those who are without a religious commitment also uphold these ideals. Both within and between our communities there are significant differences in the ways in which we translate these values and ideals into ethical judgements concerning specific personal and social issues. But a recognition of the extent to which we share a range of common values and ideals can contribute to a wider sense of community in our society.

**5. Religious people have too often brought suffering, discord and distrust to one another and to the wider community:**

At the centre of all our traditions is a concern for the establishment of peace. However, we cannot honestly affirm the positive potential of inter-religious relations without at the same time recognising the pain and conflict which our religious communities have brought, and sometimes still bring, to each other and to the wider world. Sometimes these conflicts result from the distortion and manipulation of religion in the service of a political ideology or the pursuit of personal power. In some cases, however, conflicts have also been caused by the actions of sincere members of our communities. Such conflicts have damaged our communities and the relationships between and within them. They



have also contributed to a cynicism in the wider world about religious belief and practice.

**6. Constructive inter-religious relations are vitally important to the well-being of our society:**

Some religious people are hesitant to enter consciously into inter-religious relations. However, many come into contact with people of other traditions in their neighbourhoods, at work, or in school. On these occasions little thought may be given to any religious dimension. Nevertheless, these encounters are part of the fabric of much contemporary British life. Even for those who live in areas which do not have a wide religious diversity, the increasing mobility of modern life makes such contacts more likely. Superficial encounters may sometimes lead to the reinforcement of existing prejudices. But they can also provide opportunities for learning about one another. Shared human events such as birth, marriage and death can provide a context for the development of deeper relationships.

**7. In overcoming religious prejudice and stereotypes the education system, the media, and our own communities all have important responsibilities:**

The ability to inquire and reflect, and the opportunity to acquire accurate knowledge about one another's religious traditions, concerns and values are important in the development of constructive inter-religious relations. The education system has an important role in challenging prejudice and providing accurate information. We affirm the special part which religious education and religious studies, at all levels, can play in this. There is also a need for sensitivity on the part of the media in dealing with issues involving questions of religious conviction and identity. There has been serious concern about the way in which inadequate and inaccurate, and at times sensationalist, reporting has reinforced prejudice and the tensions which can arise in particular situations. By contrast, a balanced presentation of the background to unfamiliar issues can be of great value in increasing understanding of them. Our communities themselves need to play their part in helping the media to appreciate their particular concerns.

We also recognise our own important responsibilities to represent accurately the traditions of others in the teaching, practice and publications of our communities.

**8. Meeting together is essential for building relationships of trust through mutual understanding:**

It is only by meeting with those who live another religious tradition and by listening to their beliefs, stories, insights, and experiences that we can learn from others as well as about them. We need to meet in a variety of ways: both formally and informally; in structured discussion and in shared social occasions; among neighbours and friends; and through community representatives meeting at local and national gatherings. Although some issues are common to all and need to be explored together, there are others which are of special concern in the relationship between particular religions.

**9. Our sense of community is deepened when we take common action towards agreed social goals:**

Whilst affirming the value of meeting and listening, it is also our belief that common action, grounded in our religious commitments, adds a valuable dimension to our relationships. The process of seeking agreement about which issues to tackle and how to proceed may well reveal a wide diversity of perspectives. Truly common action therefore requires sensitive consultation at all stages and needs to be planned, undertaken and reviewed together.

**10. We cannot demand that others engage in inter-religious relations only on our own terms:**

In human relations a variety of motivations will always be at work. Some will see the impulse towards inter-religious relations as springing from the imperatives of their religion; some understand these relations primarily as a means towards social harmony; some as a route for securing greater social and religious acceptance; some as a means through which they can share their faith; and some in order to gain a better understanding and appreciation of another religious tradition. On particular occasions we can expect that mutually agreed ground rules about the purpose of an event will be respected by all involved. But in general we have to be ready to deal with a diversity of motivation

as an unavoidable element in our meeting with others as they really are.

**11. We recognise the need to respect the integrity of each other's inherited and chosen religious identities, beliefs and practices:**

Committed people of all religious traditions treasure the vision by which they live. Many of us also desire to share this with others. For some this entails inviting others to accept a belief or practice as their own. To be able to live by our traditions, share our convictions, and act according to our consciences are freedoms which we all affirm and which we wish the framework of our society to uphold. But these freedoms must never be abused in order to pressurise others into changing their religious identities, beliefs or practices. In this context we are especially sensitive to the concerns which exist within our communities about the particular vulnerabilities of the young, the elderly, the ill and the isolated. We also recognise the damage which has been done to inter-religious relations in the past by forced conversions and the use of unfair inducements to change religion, and we acknowledge the pain which this has caused.

**12. Openness to one another and honest self-criticism are essential to a maturing of inter-religious relations:**

We live with the wounds of history and we need to recognise their effects on contemporary inter-religious relations. If we are to transform and enrich our relationships we need to avoid demeaning or disparaging another person's religious tradition. We must always beware of comparing the practice of another tradition with the ideals of our own. There will, however, be occasions when we need to express convictions which differ from those of people of other religious traditions. At the same time, we need to learn what causes offence to each other and to avoid this wherever we can do so without compromising our integrity. Where criticism is offered, an invitation and an opportunity should also be given to respond. To share openly with one another can be painful and sometimes threatening, but a willingness to be self-critical, to listen carefully, and to make clear what we really feel and think is necessary if we are truly to deepen our relationships.

### **13. Sharing our religious traditions in an atmosphere of respect leads to mutual enrichment and transformation:**

When people are secure in their own religious tradition and are able to open themselves up to “the other” and to try to “stand in the other’s shoes”, they often find that their own attitudes, perspectives and understandings are expanded. This can be a personally challenging process. But it can contribute significantly to our understanding of the depth and seriousness of the affirmations of others. It can also open our eyes to aspects of our own tradition which we had not fully appreciated. It is engaging in this process that will lead us to find ways in which we can together build a better society.

## SUMMARY

We, the affiliated organisations of The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom affirm that:

- The United Kingdom is a religiously diverse society: it is only when we recognise and accept this that positive inter-religious relations can be built.
- Differences in terms of ethnicity, class, gender and language also affect our inter-religious relationships, as do the bonds of history, religion and kinship between communities here and overseas.
- We need to find ways of more adequately reflecting both our common citizenship and our religious diversity in the framework of our national life.
- Society is impoverished when religious perspectives on life are excluded or marginalized. A recognition of the extent to which we share a range of common values and ideals can contribute to a wider sense of community.
- At the centre of all our traditions is a concern for peace but religious people have too often brought suffering, discord and distrust to one another and to the wider community. Constructive inter-religious relations are vitally important to the well-being of our society.
- In overcoming religious prejudice and stereotypes the education system, the media, and our own communities all have important responsibilities. We recognise the need for us to represent accurately the traditions of others within our own religious communities.
- It is only by meeting with those who live another religious tradition and by listening to their beliefs, stories, insights, and experiences that we can learn from others as well as about them, and build relationships of trust through mutual understanding.

- Our sense of community is deepened when we take common action towards agreed social goals, with sensitive consultation at all stages.
- We cannot demand that others engage in inter-religious relations only on our own terms but have to meet with others as they really are.
- We recognise the need to respect the integrity of each other's inherited and chosen religious identities, beliefs and practices. To be able to live by our traditions, share our convictions, and act according to our consciences are freedoms which we all affirm and which we wish the framework of our society to uphold. But these freedoms must never be abused in order to pressurise others into changing their religious identities, beliefs or practices.
- Openness to one another and honest self-criticism are essential to a maturing of inter-religious relations. If we are to transform and enrich our relationships we need to avoid demeaning or disparaging another person's religious tradition. We must always beware of comparing the practice of another tradition with the ideals of our own.
- Sharing our religious traditions in an atmosphere of respect leads to mutual enrichment and transformation. It will lead us to find ways in which we can together build a better society.

**THE INTER FAITH NETWORK  
FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM  
List of Affiliated Organisations**

**Representative Bodies**

Afro West Indian United Council of Churches  
Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (UK)  
Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom  
Board of Deputies of British Jews  
Buddhist Society  
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)  
Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland Committee on Relations with People of Other Faiths  
Council of Mosques: UK and Eire  
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order  
Imams and Mosques Council (UK)  
Islamic Cultural Centre, Regents Park, London  
Jain Samaj Europe  
Maha Bodhi Society of Sri Lanka (UK)  
National Council of Hindu Temples  
Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales  
Sikh Council for Interfaith Relations (UK)  
Sikh Missionary Society  
Swaminarayan Hindu Mission  
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)  
World Ahl ul-Bayt (AS) Islamic League  
World Islamic Mission (UK)

**Inter Faith Organisations**

Council of Christians and Jews  
International Association for Religious Freedom (British Members' Group)  
London Society of Jews and Christians  
Standing Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Europe  
World Conference on Religion and Peace (UK and Ireland Chapter)  
World Congress of Faiths

**Local Inter Faith Groups**

Birmingham Fellowship of Faiths  
Birmingham Inter-Faiths Council  
Bradford Concord Inter Faith Society  
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group

Cardiff Interfaith Association  
Coventry Inter Faith Group  
Edinburgh Interfaith Association  
Glasgow Sharing of Faiths Group  
Harrow Inter-Faith Council  
Kirklees and Calderdale Inter-Faith Fellowship  
Leeds Concord Inter-Faith Fellowship  
Leicester Council of Faiths  
Manchester Inter Faith Group  
Medway Inter-Faith Group  
Merseyside Inter Faith Group  
Newham Association of Faiths  
Nottingham Inter-Faith Group  
Oxford Round Table of Religions  
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council  
Reading Inter-Faith Group  
Redbridge Council of Faiths  
Richmond Inter-Faith Group  
Rochdale Interfaith Action  
Tyne and Wear Community Relations Council Inter Faith Panel  
Walsall Inter Faith Group  
Waltham Forest All Faiths Group  
Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group  
Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group

**Educational and Academic Bodies**

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan  
Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Selly Oak, Birmingham  
Centre for the Study of Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations, Selly Oak, Birmingham  
Community Religions Project, University of Leeds  
Islamic Foundation, Leicester  
Multi Faith Centre, Birmingham  
Religious Education Council  
SHAP Working Party on World Religions in Education  
Standing Conference on Inter-Faith Dialogue in Education  
Study Centre for Christian-Jewish Relations, (Sisters of Sion)

<sup>1</sup> The release of this document was authorised by the Executive Committee of the Inter Faith Network which hopes that it will be of use for reflection and discussion within its member organisations and also more widely. The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom was founded in 1987. It is a registered charity. It carries out its work through: running an information and advice service; in consultation with member bodies, helping to provide contacts and participants for inter faith events and projects and for television and radio programmes; publishing materials to help people working in the religious and inter faith sectors; fostering inter faith co-operation on social issues; holding meetings of its member bodies where social and religious questions of concern to the different faith communities can be examined together; setting up multi faith working groups, seminars and conferences to pursue particular issues in greater depth; proceeding by consensus wherever possible and not making statements on behalf of member bodies except after full consultation. Further information about the Network and its work can be found on its website: [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk).