

**COMMUNITY COHESION:
A NEW AGENDA FOR
INTER FAITH RELATIONS?**

**Report on the
2002 National Meeting of
the Inter Faith Network
for the UK**

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FOR INTER FAITH RELATIONS?**

**2002 National Meeting
of
The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

**Held on 15 July 2002
at Park Crescent Conference Centre
299 Great Portland Street, London W1**

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PROCEEDINGS

The pursuit of social cohesion and harmony at both national and local level is of enormous importance and is the goal of all those working to increase positive relationships between various sectors of society, including the different faith communities. What has become known as the "community cohesion agenda" is currently being taken forward by both central and local government. This agenda was given added impetus in 2001 by the disturbances during the summer in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, as well as the impact of the later events of 11 September in the US and subsequent developments.

Reports on the disturbances in these Northern towns and cities were produced last year and each contained recommendations for action to improve the local situation. Another enquiry, by an independent group chaired by Mr Ted Cattle, produced a more general review of issues involved in the active promotion of "community cohesion" in the wider UK context. A report by an inter Ministerial group chaired by Mr John Denham MP offered reflections on all four of these reports. The recommendations of all these different reports have helped inform the community cohesion agenda as it has taken shape in the last year.

The Network's National Meeting provided an opportunity to hear from central and local government representatives about the nature and goals of the community cohesion agenda and to reflect on the role which faith communities and the development of local inter faith activity can play in contributing to it.

It was clear from the discussion during the day that faith communities and local inter faith initiatives are keen to contribute to the community cohesion agenda. At the same time some participants expressed a strong view that faith communities should not simply be co-opted to the agenda of central or local Government in ways that could undercut their integrity and their traditional role within society as a source of spiritual strength and values. Government and faith communities need to find appropriate ways of working together that honour the particular role of each.

Bishop Tom Butler, Network Co-Chair, introduced the National Meeting. He said that the work of building good inter faith relations has a vital part to play in developing community cohesion and that it is encouraging that both central and local government are now taking this dimension very seriously. He then invited **Alan Smith**, Team Leader, the Community Cohesion Unit of the Home Office, (in the absence of Lord Filkin who was involved in proceedings in the House of Lords relating to the Citizenship, Asylum and Immigration Bill) to outline the "community cohesion" agenda from a central Government perspective. The second speaker in the morning session was **Councillor Laura Willoughby**, Equalities Executive, Local Government Association (LGA), who offered an overview of the LGA's work, and that of local authorities, in taking forward the approach set out in *Faith and Community*, published earlier in the year and in developing guidance for local authorities on "community cohesion" issues.

There followed reflections and responses on these contributions and the role which faith communities in inter faith organisations can play by **Indarjit Singh OBE**, Director, Network of Sikh Organisations (UK) and a member of the Inner Cities Religious Council, and **Charu Ainscough**, of the Gujarat Hindu Centre, Preston and Equal Opportunities Officer (Race) for Lancashire County Council, who spoke in particular about the developing role of women.

After lunch, **Rosalind Preston OBE**, Network Co-Chair, welcomed **Rev Philip Sumner** and **Councillor Basit Shah**, Chair and Vice-Chair of the newly formed Oldham Inter Faith Forum, set up in the wake of the disturbances in Oldham this summer. **Alan Schwartz** of the Inter Faith Council for Wales / Cyngor Cyd-Ffydd Cymru, described the setting up of the Council following an initiative by the First Minister of the Welsh National Assembly in the aftermath of the events of 11 September the previous year.

There followed four workshops on government and faith communities - partners working towards greater social cohesion; local inter faith councils and groups and community cohesion; inter faith education and social cohesion; and young people and the inter faith dimension of social cohesion.

In the final plenary session chaired by **Rosalind Preston OBE** a number of contributors spoke from the floor of the meeting and closing reflections were offered by **Rev Baroness Richardson of Calow**, Moderator of the Churches' Commission on Inter Faith Relations.

SOCIAL COHESION: THE NATIONAL AGENDA

Alan Smith, Team Leader, the Community Cohesion Unit of the Home Office

I begin with two apologies: the first on behalf of Angela Eagle, who had earlier planned to be present for this meeting, but is now no longer a Home Office Minister following the recent reshuffle, and the second on behalf of Lord Filkin, her successor, who wanted very much to be here today but has to be in the House of Lords to deal with Government business there. So I am here instead to set out for you the Government's current agenda on community cohesion, in what is a developing policy area. I say that deliberately because it is not certain how policies will develop over the next couple of years. I am also here to listen and to learn and will be staying until I have to catch a train this afternoon. My presentation will be in two parts. The first part will be about community cohesion and the second about how faith communities can get involved in the present process of developing and applying policy. I hope that I can make it clear that there is an increasing role for faith communities in this.

There are three key messages with which I want to begin. The first is that the Government wants to work proactively with all stakeholders to integrate community cohesion principles and philosophy within national policy and local service delivery. The second is that implementation of community cohesion affects, and needs to involve, all parts of society, not just central and local Government and statutory agencies but also the private sector, the voluntary sector and the wider community. In other words, everyone. The third is that community cohesion is inextricably linked to issues of social inclusion/exclusion and race equality, but extends beyond these to encompass all the factors that can lead to our living "separate lives" in what have been called "fractured communities".

The Government's agenda is very much focused on a vision for civic renewal. The Government wants to see active, confident and self-reliant communities in control of their own lives and well-being. It sees a need to revitalise communities and to build social cohesion, so that everyone, regardless of race, culture, faith, age or upbringing has a shared sense of belonging and feels that their views matter. This involves local people (you and me) taking the lead on local problems because no one has a greater stake in solving them. The Government cannot do it alone. Community cohesion needs to come from within communities. Faith communities are uniquely placed to contribute to this process and have a history of doing so.

Linked to last summer's events in the northern towns, there have been five reports. The first three were on the individual experiences of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, of which the report by Lord Ouseley on Bradford was in fact prepared before the disturbances happened there. The reports by the teams led by David Ritchie on Oldham and Lord Clarke on Burnley were commissioned after the disturbances, together with the more general report produced by an independent review team led by Ted Cante. The Cante report made 67 recommendations. It is important to underline that this was an independent report, and is not a statement of Government policy which was contained in the separate report of the inter-Departmental Ministerial group chaired by John Denham. There has been some confusion caused by the fact that the Cante and Denham reports have very similar covers! The Denham report made it clear that the Government intends to mainstream community cohesion in its policy strategy, and that this includes local government, and that the Government would be responding to all the recommendations made in the other four reports.

So, what exactly is community cohesion? It is, as I have said, a developing agenda. It is about understanding and responding to the requirements of community. So it is necessarily a very broad agenda and it is easier to say what it is not than what it is! The draft joint guide produced in May by the Home Office, Local Government Association, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Department for Local Government, Transport and the Regions, offers a “working definition”. You may have seen this draft document on the LGA website inviting draft comments by mid-August, from local authorities but also from others. We have had a lot of comments already about what it does, and does not, include and how it could be improved.

The “working definition” of community cohesion on page 6 of the document speaks about a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities; the diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances being appreciated and positively valued; those from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities; and strong and positive relationships being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods. No doubt the definition could be improved but we realised in Government the need for some shared understanding of what “community cohesion” means, so this is offered as a starting point. This draft joint guide is the first document that offers a working framework from central Government and local government on the community cohesion agenda. But I would encourage you, when you read it, to bear in mind that it is very much a first draft. I was at a meeting last week of the Inner Cities Religious Council where it was criticised for not including enough references to faith. We need to take that on board. In another meeting it was argued that not enough is said about the place of young people in the community. No doubt there will be similar points from elsewhere.

Taking that working definition, it points to pursuing cross-culturalism and integration; understanding the negative impact of segregation (one of the key strands in the Cattle report); the need for fair and equal access to vital services, the importance of effective community leadership; reaching out and listening to young people, particularly the isolated and disaffected. Another key aspect of the Cattle report is the notion that community cohesion is about combating the fracturing of society by identifying shared values, linked to active citizenship and the role of “social capital”. The Cattle team found polarised and segregated communities, living “parallel lives” too often in ignorance and fear of one another: people literally living next door to each other and not knowing anything about each other. There is a link here to misconceptions about funding streams: the belief that “they” are getting more than “we” are. “We” are getting nothing; it all goes to “them”. The report pointed to a lack of honesty and openness from all sectors, including Government; a lack of leadership and clear shared values. It suggested that too many policy initiatives can add to the problem; that Government has launched a lot of initiatives which do not always “join up” as they should. So it touches on many points with which I am sure you would agree and to which you could no doubt add.

What is Government doing about all this? It is setting up the administrative infrastructure within Government to deal with community cohesion issues; and to work, not only with Bradford, Oldham and Burnley to take forward issues there, but also with other areas, some of which have already approached Government and asked for help too.

I am from the Home Office Community Cohesion Unit which was established in the early part of this year and now has a staff of about 20 people. It only became fully staffed in May. Our job is essentially to ensure that community cohesion is mainstreamed within

Government, which was one of the key points in the Denham Report. It is our job to say, “Well, how do we achieve that? What does it involve?” It involves us, as a cross-Departmental organisation, putting a lot of pressure on Government Departments, asking them to look at their policies to see how these help or hinder community cohesion; and discussing with them, and with their Ministers, how these can be changed in positive ways. It involves working with stakeholders, with those who do the groundwork, with local authorities and regional Government offices. We have four teams in the Unit: three of these are area facing teams interacting and visiting local areas and one is a unit wide strategy team. All four teams have responsibility for specific policy areas. One of the policy areas in my team is faith, which is why I am here today!

Linked with the Unit is the new Community Cohesion Programme Board which is an inter-departmental group of officials to underpin and support Ministers and to bring together the work on community cohesion of Government Departments. The Inter Departmental Ministerial Group which produced the Denham Report in December remains in being because the Government wants to keep community cohesion at the forefront of its policies. It is this Ministerial Group that has been fighting hard for resources in the 2002 spending review co-ordinated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. All this gives a very clear message: that the Government is concerned about these issues and does not want to lose sight of this agenda.

There is also an independent Community Cohesion Panel, which has thirteen members, including Ted Cante as its Chair. Its creation picks up the recommendation in his report on the Government’s need for external advice. The Panel’s first meeting took place in April and the second within the last few days. Its membership includes specialists in their different policy areas, coming together to act as critical friends of Government, linking both to officials on the Community Cohesion Programme Board and to Ministers on the Ministerial Group, and providing a “reality check” on the progress which Government is making in addressing the community cohesion agenda.

We are also establishing what we call “Practitioner Groups” in different policy areas: on housing, on regeneration, and one on faith as well, which will involve specialists from the areas actually involved in the process, to help officials and Ministers take forward this agenda. Central Government is very clear that it cannot achieve on its own what it wants in community cohesion. It wants to encourage partnership and the sharing of examples of good practice.

A key point in the draft community cohesion guidance is that local authorities should be looking to mainstream community cohesion in their community strategies. This is the heart of the process in which you can get involved. The role of community strategies is mentioned in the LGA’s document on *Faith and Community*, published earlier this year. Lord Ouseley in his report on Bradford, written before last summer’s disturbances there, said that “What is now desperately needed is a powerful, unifying vision, for the district [of Bradford]. The ultimate aim for the vision is to create a District where people are justifiably proud of where they live, learn, work and play”.

In achieving a vision of this kind, this apparently very nondescript document on creating a local strategy is a key document. The Government set down this guidance a few years ago, entitled *Preparing Community Strategies- Government guidance for local authorities*, but I find that many people are unaware of it. A community strategy is a means to creating a vision

for the future of the community. It is about agreeing the key priorities for action; setting down an action plan with targets for meeting those priorities; and performance indicators to measure progress.

Part I of The Local Government Act 2000 requires every local authority to prepare a strategy for promoting or improving the economic, social, environmental well-being of their area and for promoting sustainable development in the UK. They are to consult or seek consultation of “such persons as they consider appropriate” and must have regard for the guidance issued by the Secretary of State.” This not an option for local authorities. They must fulfil these statutory requirements.

When the Bill was going through Parliament, Hilary Armstrong, now the Chief Whip, said that “In the long term this is going to be more important than the rest of the Bill... and we are only beginning to recognise how important”. So the development of local community strategies was seen as being more important than the provisions on structures, mayors or executives which are dealt with in Part II of the Bill.

So what should it achieve, this very nondescript document on community strategy which is too often passed over and ignored? A community strategy is about articulating the needs of an area and its communities, their aspirations and priorities; providing a framework for the co-ordination of action by the public, private and voluntary community sectors at local level; and refocusing activity to meet community needs and aspirations. A community strategy is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

A colleague at the Audit Commission recognises the key role of community strategies as the foundational building block of local authority actions. He said to me, “I am only beginning to realise just how important this document on community strategy really is”. I need to mention too the role in this process of the Local Strategic Partnership which is designed to involve the public, private, voluntary and community sectors at the local level, providing a single over-arching framework of local co-ordination within which other partnerships can operate and to ensure a focus on improving the quality of life and governance in a particular locality. The role of Local Strategic Partnership is seen as vital in implementing the Government’s new commitment to neighbourhood renewal.

So how does all this fit together? There has to be one over-arching community strategy for each local authority area and the preparation of this must be shared and owned by the Local Strategic Partnership, which involves all the local public agencies and all sections of the community. So, the framework is really quite simple, conceptually at least: one broad-based local partnership producing one overall local strategy with the development of local strategies for neighbourhood renewal as a subset of the overall local community strategy.

What is the relevance of all this to you and me? The guidance document on community strategies says (on page 48) that: “Specific efforts should be made to involve representatives of under-represented groups, for instance minorities, women, faith communities, older people, young people, and children and disabled people. Such groups need to be taken seriously as contributors to both the preparation and delivery of community strategy”. That is what central Government guidance says. The document underlines the need for “effective community engagement” as one of the most important aspects of the work of a Local Strategic Partnership, which will have failed if it does not deliver this.

Before I close, I want to make some points about faith communities. The sharing of core values around peace, tolerance and helping others are all essential elements in community cohesion. The work that faith communities do, for example with young people and in cross-cultural activities are very important. The inter faith work which you do, in creating contacts, avoiding misunderstandings and generating discussions around local issues are important in avoiding, or healing, “fractured communities”.

Some key messages for faith communities: Do not ignore the opportunities there now are for faith communities to get involved. First of all, get involved locally with work on community strategies, in Local Strategic Partnerships and with regional Government offices. Find out what the processes are in which you need to get involved locally. If you have an inter faith structure in your area, is it engaged in the Local Strategic Partnership process? Is it engaged with the preparation of the local community strategy? If not, then it should be. Do get involved nationally in sharing and spreading good practice. Today’s meeting is an example of good practice.

In the Community Cohesion Unit we want to hear from you about positive developments. Now that the Unit is fully staffed we want to be in touch with people more and to develop our contacts and work on different policy areas, including the place of faith. As I mentioned, I attended a meeting last week of the ICRC and gave a presentation there and I have been grateful to have the opportunity to meet with you today. We are keen to learn about what works on the ground. There is a great deal going on up and down the country and my team and I are very keen to link up with this and learn from it. My colleagues and I in the Unit are here to listen, to help and to talk with you. But do bear in mind there are only four of us in my team!

Session following Mr Alan Smith's presentation

In the subsequent question and answer session, the following points were made in response to Mr Alan Smith's presentation:

- (a) A new phase has begun in the relationship between faith communities and central Government. For some years faith communities have found it difficult to secure access and receive a hearing. The establishment in 1992 of the Inner Cities Religious Council some years ago was an important development, and signalled a growing willingness on the part of Government to listen to the voice of faith communities. Now Government Departments generally are seeking to engage much more with faith communities and there is a deluge of reports and initiatives. This poses a challenge for communities in finding the capacity to respond in a constructive and relevant way and to take advantage of the opportunities which are now presenting themselves.
- (b) An important difficulty for faith communities in responding positively to the opportunities for partnership with central and local Government is the absence of adequate resources to enable them to undertake this work effectively and to brief themselves properly for engagement with Government.
- (c) Many people understand themselves in terms of their faith identity rather than in terms of an ethnic identity or a link with their country of origin. There is a need to develop "religious literacy" with a better understanding of the role of faith and more knowledge of different faiths. Rather than involving people "regardless of race, culture and faith", central and local Government and public bodies need to be "regardful" of race, culture and faith.
- (d) Faith communities represent a significant resource for community building at both local and national level.
- (e) It seems that the label of "community cohesion" is now being applied to practically every aspect of national and local Government policy and service provision! There is a risk that people will become drowned in jargon.

In reply, Mr Smith acknowledged that the issue of resources to support their engagement with Government is an important one for faith communities and endorsed the need to develop increased "religious literacy" on the part of the public sector. He agreed that many strands of the community cohesion agenda are not new but are being reformulated in the context of a greater recognition of the significance of community cohesion and the need to work systematically for this and recognised the importance for both central and local government to ensure as much clarity as possible in their presentation of policies and processes on the community cohesion agenda. He hoped that faith communities would see this agenda as presenting them with an opportunity to engage more deeply with the task of creating, in partnership, a more cohesive and inclusive society at both national and local level.

SOCIAL COHESION: THE LOCAL AGENDA

Councillor Laura Willoughby, Equalities Executive, Local Government Association

I am very pleased to be with you today. Currently I am Deputy Chair of the Equalities Executive of the Local Government Association and take over as its new Chair in September. I am also just finishing a job as Parliamentary Officer for YMCA England, so I am familiar with some of the faith dimensions of service providers. I expect that by now you are feeling baffled by community plans, Public Service Agreements (PSA's) and a whole range of acronyms, and are concerned that if you get involved in all of this it will mean that you have no time to do any of the work you do normally! If so, I hope that in the LGA's new guidance on community cohesion we have a document that will be really useful for you and will not just be a tool for local authorities, but for all organisations that work with local government.

The chair mentioned the *Faith and Community* report that was launched at Local Government House on 4 February this year. It was produced by the LGA, the Inter Faith Network and central Government and is designed to be a good practice guide for local authorities in their dealings with faith communities. It is a key document and led into the draft community cohesion guidance that was developed later this year and about which I will say more in a moment. These two documents are important in looking at how faith communities can be linked into the community cohesion agenda and how that will develop. *Faith and Community* included lots of good examples from different authorities of where local faith groups have linked up to work together to overcome barriers and bringing about common understanding over time.

Local authorities deliver vital local services. Now we are bringing together the local strategic partnerships which draw up the local community strategy plan. All this activity should involve faith communities, ethnic communities, young people, indeed all members of the community. Hopefully we do not have to create a brand new strategy plan but to look at all the plans that have already been prepared and see how these fit with the community cohesion agenda and how local partnerships fit into it. Because all of these community plans and local strategic partnerships, are about partnerships and establishing good working relationships. *Faith and Community* provides good guidance on the funding of faith groups and community organisations and other issues such as planning applications that affect relationships between local authorities and faith communities.

I know from my work at the YMCA (which is a national organisation although every local YMCA is an independent charity) that there is a whole pattern of relationships that YMCAs have with their local authorities. Sometimes local councillors would not give any money to Christian organisations, so therefore there was no relationship between the YMCA and the local authority. In other local authority areas the local YMCA started to spearhead some of the inter faith work. There is a lot of good work going on in faith communities and their involvement in their local areas, but we need to share that and break down some of the myths and some of the barriers and be able to point to good practice in some authorities. Then people will have the knowledge to be able to say "Well, actually they have done this in that local authority. So we could do it here too and it could work really well". It is not just about whether anyone subscribes to one faith or another, but about how we relate as communities.

Faith and Community also identified the kind of local inter faith structures which could assist authorities in engaging with faith communities and addressing their needs. As I often point out when I speak to groups, I am a local councillor, I am white, I am 28 and I am not from any particular faith. So therefore there is a limit to what I know as an individual. But I will have a lot more knowledge if I can engage properly with the different communities in my local authority area and if they engage with me. To get this community cohesion agenda together involves everybody talking together and forming partnerships, getting rid of myths and breaking down some of the barriers. It involves a willingness to ask some of the awkward questions that everyone is frightened of asking, to make sure that we are all starting from the same point and moving forward rather than going round in circles, saying “Well, I’m not quite sure what community cohesion means but I’m sure somebody knows something about it somewhere in our local authority!”

This is what the LGA’s draft community cohesion guidance is about. The process that has led to its launch began last summer, obviously in response to the disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. The LGA met with local government leaders and senior officials throughout July of last year to formulate a joint central and local government response to address the community conflicts and tensions that were clearly present in those areas. That is quite key: central Government acknowledged that it could not tackle these issues without local government. This draft guidance has been through an intense process of roundtable discussions with 14 leaders of local authorities, not just from those areas where the disturbances took place. Ministers and civil servants from several Government Departments and other bodies met to identify the key issues that emerged from the events last summer. Why did they happen? What was the background to them? What was the local authority there doing or not doing? What could central Government do that it did not do? This moved on to a whole series of regional and local roundtables so that discussion was going on not just in a room in London but in different areas around the country, involving a lot more of the local and regional-based organisations, looking at issues in their specific areas and reporting back to a second big “roundtable”. This meeting took place a week after the delivery of the report on *Building Cohesive Communities*, produced by the independent group chaired by Ted Cante. This whole series of consultations led to a report prepared on behalf of central Government. Together with the Burnley and Oldham reports it was published on 11 December. On 18 December the LGA sat down with Ministers, civil servants, leaders and others, to work towards a joint response. That joint response is the LGA’s draft guidance on community cohesion.

The community cohesion guidance is rather exciting, as I hope to persuade you! Its main target audience is local authorities, but it is not just for local authorities. It is for you as well and for all the partner organisations. It is meant to be there as a working tool. It sets out what we mean by community cohesion. It has a quite useful long description of this at the front of the document. The series of bombs in London a couple of years ago targeted a black community in Brixton, a religious community in Brick Lane and a gay community in Soho. It became very clear then that there are a lot of problems that are very similar across different communities. By working together and looking at community cohesion and how communities can work together, we can start to solve some of these problems, and hopefully stop some of these unfortunate incident+s happening. The London experience was very different to what happened last summer in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford, but it highlights that when communities work together to solve problems, things may well change.

The draft community cohesion guidance sets out a joint approach by both central and local government and this is quite key. It is not just about what local government is going to run off and do in local areas and then report back on to central Government. It is about what central Government is going to bring to this process as well. More importantly, and I particularly like this about the guidance, it provides a useful and flexible toolkit. It has a whole list of actions which you could take as organisations and it encourages local authorities to pick up on good examples from elsewhere. It is a living document as well, because the intention is that it should develop and grow as examples come in which we can start using.

As you can see from this copy, the community cohesion guidance document must be a draft because it has not got a flashy cover! It is available on the LGA's website [at www.lga.org.uk]. It is in several parts. As I said, it starts with a definition (a rather long one) of community cohesion and how this links in with the local strategic partnerships, the community plan, and those actions which local authorities are already doing. It also explores the role of local authorities as community leaders. Again, this is part of the new thinking in local government. Local authorities have a leadership role to address. They will do this partly through co-ordinating work on their community strategy plan. But it is also intended that they should encourage partners to sign up to common visions and values. Your local authority will be failing in its role if it does not come and speak with you about the visions and values you share in the communities in which you are based, and how, as a local authority with partner organisations, it can take that vision forward and make it happen. So these processes are very much linked to the role of the local authority as community leader. Local assessment procedures mean that local authorities can look at where they are and where they should be going, how to measure what they are doing and whether the steps which are being taken are bringing about community cohesion. Are local authorities just looking at how to include people from different backgrounds, faiths or minorities? Or are they looking at how those faiths, minorities and excluded communities can be linked together? This is very different to just making sure that the local authority is providing services to those communities.

Local inter faith structures and community organisations need to ensure that they are engaged in these planning processes to produce community plans through the Local Strategic Partnerships. The draft guidance suggests that local authorities may wish to establish a post for assessing the cohesiveness of local communities. I am sure most authorities do not know where to start to look at whether their communities are working together, whether there are divisions between them, whether there is cross-cultural activity or not and to what extent different communities interact. Again, inter faith organisations are key to this. Particularly when local authorities are conducting their assessments, you should be saying, "The work that we do is key. We bring faith communities together. We need to be in your baseline assessment and we are very keen to have a target to work with you to reach in the community cohesion debate".

The draft guidance focuses on a variety of policy areas where local authorities have a lead role. So it covers employment, policing and the media, where the local authority's role is not exclusive by any means, and where it is more likely to be working with other agencies. It is also about how the public, private and voluntary sectors work together through Local Strategic Partnerships and the different services that the local authority does provide, in regeneration, leisure and culture, and housing. The draft guidance is a very practical document. I would like you all to go and look at it and identify practical ideas that have been missed out. It is after all a consultation document. In relation to regeneration, for example, it is partly about how a local authority can develop a communications strategy to counteract

false perceptions about resource distribution; how to counteract some of those myths such as the one that it is just refugees and Muslims that get council houses for example (a myth which comes up quite often in my own authority). The guidance looks at how the council can counter myths of this kind through its own paper which it puts out through each door in its area, but also in its work with local newspapers.

The guidance is also about how local authorities can develop long term agreements between agencies and funding partners to ensure that everybody contributes to community cohesion, although the local authority has the role of leader in this. It looks, for example, at how local authorities can work with youth organisations to make sure there is a voice for young people in their area and that voice includes young people from faith communities and not just the brightest kids from school sixth forms. It looks at how voluntary sector organisations can deliver culturally or religiously sensitive services and continue to have an important role to play in this. In leisure and culture, it suggests looking at the barriers there are to accessing facilities and thinking more strategically about community cohesion in this. For example, my local authority of Islington has a “women only” swimming night at the public pool which they think will suit Muslim women in the community. But it is no good if the pool has open windows around all its sides, since it then makes it impossible to involve all women in that “women only” swimming evening. That kind of situation does not make every woman comfortable and so it is not good in terms of community cohesion. Again, there are lots of ideas about how you communicate with people of different faiths to tell them what is going on in their area, to let them know that these services are available for everybody and to try to be sensitive to the needs of different groups.

In education there is a need to encourage schools to attract an intake which reflects their local community, to promote cross-cultural contact with the school through parent networks and to encourage pre-school activities involving parents from different communities (and you may well have come across some of the Sure Start work in your areas). The aim is to get the parents involved in a school community to come together to promote cross-cultural and community cohesion within that school. Housing, of course, is a very big area. There is a need to look at management issues and to work with registered social landlords to make sure that there are no tensions in their properties, that there is a dialogue with residents and that problems with racial or faith-based harassment are dealt with quickly and responsibly. I could go on. There are many examples and I hope that you will have lots of ideas on how faith-based communities can also take up some of the examples of good practice since this is a consultation to which you can add your own contributions and ideas. We hope it will be a “living” document, to which examples of good practice can be added as this develops over time.

So what is the role of faith communities and inter faith structures? You have a key role in assisting local authorities by looking at the draft guidance and thinking about the cross-cultural contacts and activities which you can add to this. You are also very important bodies for raising awareness and understanding. A lot of councillors (and officers) in your authority will know a lot about the area. Councillors will know the wards they represent. But they may not be as good as they should be on some of the faith dimensions to local life. Do not wait for them to come to you. You need to go to them and to say “These are the issues that people are talking about in my community and here are some people who would like to talk to you about them. Please speak to us about your plans and about our suggestions.” Find out who is the executive member in your local authority who has responsibility for community cohesion. It is likely to be whoever is responsible for the equalities, regeneration or community

involvement agendas. Make sure that you are advising them and keeping them in touch with the mood on the streets and in your places of worship. That way, there will always be somebody acting as your ambassador within your local council and you will develop relationships with different parts of the council.

This guidance is also about promoting greater integration, and you all have a role in doing that. Not only about telling us what your members are telling you, but having a look at solving some of the problems. Again, you may see indications in the guidance on where some of the solutions may be found and also about developing shared community values and objectives. This is the kind of ground covered by local strategic partnerships and other bodies of this kind. It is about talking together about shared aspirations and how we can work together. Is there an objective on which the council, voluntary organisations and faith communities can work together in your area? This is not all about hard cash at the end of the day. Sometimes it is about a small change in working practices, about opening up dialogue with other groups and organisations, and about opening a better dialogue with your local authority.

So let me just tell you where the future development of this guidance goes. We are currently in consultation and the deadline for responses is mid-August. If you do not have a copy of this, you can get it from the Local Government Association's website: www.lga.gov.uk. Final guidance will be issued in October, so make sure you get your hands on that. Make sure that the relevant people in your local authority have seen it so that it does not just go to your local authority's Chief Executive. The LGA will only be able to send a limited number of copies round to local authorities and the impact it would have coming from you would be really great.

Obviously, this guidance is being brought together by a number of organisations and quite when in October the final version will be issued is uncertain. It has to go first to various Ministers and various LGA members for approval, but we will make sure that your organisations know when it is ready and, as I have said, this guidance is seen as work in progress. The more we learn, the more we can add to it and the more good examples we can share. It is not just about examples coming from local authorities, but also those coming from partner organisations and groups such as yourselves. We need to find out what works best. Of course, what works best in Burnley might not work best in the Vale of White Horse or somewhere more rural. Best practice examples are needed from everywhere and there will be different ways of working for different authorities.

The Home Office is also setting up practitioner groups to look at different areas covered by the guidance, so we will be able to identify more specific good practice examples for housing or for regeneration or for other areas. So if you happen to work with an organisation that is involved in the delivery of particular services, good examples from those will be key as well. It is the detail as well as the broader brush that will matter. The LGA is looking too at ways in which local government can work more closely with the media. There is a section in the draft guidance that asks "How are we going to achieve this? How are we going to make the press and media listen to this and understand that they have a role and responsibility as well?" If anybody has the answer it would be worth a lot of money! But the LGA has taken initiatives to get different publications, newspapers and media together to talk about how they can foster good practice and think more responsibly as journalists about the effect the words they print may have in their local area.

This guidance is an ongoing process which will be constantly monitored and reviewed in good local government fashion, to ensure that the work actually carries on speedily, which I think is key. We do not want to see this guidance stuck on the shelf of any local government officer, or of any councillor for that matter. It needs to be a document with which they are working and about which they are thinking seriously. Finally, my key piece of advice is not to wait for your local authority to come to you. Take this guidance and go to them, and keep them informed about what is going on in the organisations with which you work, because that information will be invaluable to them. Do not ever assume that a local authority officer or member will necessarily know it already, just because these issues or developments are within their area. Taking the community cohesion agenda forward successfully will require communication between both sides.

Session following Councillor Willoughby's presentation

- (a) It was encouraging to hear that local government wanted to involve local faith communities more. For too long, faith has come at the bottom of the local authority agenda and often the encounter between a faith community and its local authority has been about problems over planning permission for a place of worship rather than over engagement in discussion on the needs of the local community. The way in which local authority funding is provided also presents difficulties. Often there is a reluctance to give funds to faith groups and local authority funding is often provided on a year by year basis which prevents long term planning and development.
- (b) It is important not to lose sight of the important document on *Faith and Community* and the guidance being prepared on community cohesion by the Local Government Association and others in consultation with central Government should include more substantial references to this and to the role of faith communities in the community cohesion agenda.
- (c) *Faith and Community* makes an important distinction between the equally important agendas of local authorities' work with individual faith communities, such as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, and local authorities working with councils of faith or local inter faith groups. As well as funding for community projects, it is important for local authorities to consider what help they can give in encouraging the development of local inter faith structures in their area.
- (d) It will be important for faith community representatives to find out from their local authority who carries its brief for community cohesion matters and then to initiate discussion with them, making use both of *Faith and Community* and the community cohesion guidance document. If local faith communities do this, then they should be able to enhance the role which they play in their local communities.

In reply, Councillor Willoughby acknowledged that local authorities have often had to make painful cuts in their budgets. This is because funding for local government from central government has been squeezed. She also recognised that a number of faith communities do not wish to apply for lottery funding and that it is important to take this into account in reviewing their access to funding. *Faith and Community* and the guidance on community cohesion, as had been recognised, should together create a context in which faith communities can engage with their local authorities and make sure they recognise the contribution that faith communities can make to the wider community through developing a partnership approach. The more concrete the suggestions which faith communities make the better. Faith communities can help by identifying examples of good practice which could be followed elsewhere. In revising the draft guidance on community cohesion, it will be possible to consider whether there can be more substantial reference to the faith community dimension.

REFLECTIONS AND RESPONSES

Indarjit Singh OBE, of the Network of Sikh Organisations and the Inner Cities Religious Council

To help me put my own comments in context, I would like to comment briefly on the two contributions we have had so far. I was very interested to hear from Laura Willoughby about the very real progress being made by the Local Government Association in carrying forward the work outlined in its document on *Faith and Community*. This recognised, for the first time in a local government publication, that partnership between local government and faith based organisations can help the cohesion, stability and sense of well-being of society. It has been good to hear from her of the many excellent initiatives that are being taken and also to hear of how the LGA are using good practice to show the way forward and help others learn from that good practice. I was also very encouraged to hear her reference to the work being done in schools because much more work is being done in schools towards community cohesion than is generally realised.

Respect for the beliefs and concerns of others leads us to the realisation that common values are the key to harmonious living. Furthering this respect is something that we should all be doing at all times. It is not something to which we should turn only when the absence of respect and understanding explodes into the sort of violence seen in our northern towns last summer. It is unfortunate that the emphasis on the need for social cohesion is constantly linked to, or seen as a reaction to, such disturbances. Hasty or knee-jerk reactions can lead to wrong diagnosis and the misdirection of effort and resources.

I found the earlier contribution of Alan Smith a little overwhelming. The danger lies in turning basic issues of human behaviour into national concerns. If that is done in an over-coordinated way, with all the might of committees of inquiry and complex, highly structured action programmes that seek to build good behaviour from the Government downwards, rather than supporting existing grass roots initiatives, we are going on a wrong course. The draft guidance on community cohesion, put out by Government Departments, the Local Government Association, and the Commission for Racial Equality is, in my view, an example of this tendency to build from the top down. The jargon alone can bury good intention. Let me give you an example from a paragraph interestingly headed 'Provide a Clear Lead': "Leaders must represent and communicate with their constituencies". This is rather paternalistic. We are also told of the need to remind the press about their responsibilities: we can dream on! I did find the document particularly patronising and almost imperialistic in some of its references to the need to help them get their act together. There is also an almost inevitable tendency to pepper such top down approaches with politically correct references to "stakeholders", "Islamaphobia", "vision", "deprivation", and so on, to give them academic credibility, thus fogging the real issue of how to turn bad human behaviour into better human behaviour.

It is important then to be clear what we are talking about and what are the real issues. We need to be clear as to what sort of cohesion we really want. Too much cohesion in a minority community can lead to a ghetto mentality. Too much cohesion in a majority community can lead to jingoistic attitudes. Hatred and prejudice are powerful binding factors, and we need to look carefully at those ideas and attitudes that we want to bind us.

Let me list some of these desirable binding factors. They are all found in the teachings of our different religions:

- Cohesion through knowledge of, and respect for, the way of life of our neighbour
- Cohesion through a recognition of our common human identity
- Cohesion through concern for the health, well-being and economic opportunity of our neighbour in a different religious community
- Cohesion through common service to help the weak and vulnerable in society
- Cohesion through a readiness to stand up and be counted for our adherence to these values

All the values and aspirations that I have just listed are those found in our different religions. In looking for positive social cohesion, it is important that we do not start re-inventing the wheel, but build on the many excellent faith based, and inter faith, initiatives that already exist.

We all know of many excellent faith based initiatives that are doing wonderful work in strengthening ties with the local community. A gurdwara in Hounslow, for example, helps to facilitate health checks for the local community, meals for the elderly of all communities, support for a local hospice, regular visits to the gurdwara by teachers and school children, and much more. I know that these sorts of initiatives are being taken not only by Sikhs but also by our different religions throughout the land. Anyone who has listened to the Sunday “Week’s Good Cause” appeal will know how rich this country is in the hundreds of charities working tirelessly to help others in need. They may not see themselves as religious, but they are clearly being true to the thrust of religious teaching.

In recent years, local inter faith dialogue, based on sharing of wisdom from different faiths and a respect for difference has done much to increase the understanding between different communities and in the process lessen prejudice: the tinder that gives rise to violence. On a national scale, it is important to recognise the tremendous contribution of the Inter Faith Network and to pause and reflect on its contribution to providing not only cohesion, but positive direction to national life. It was involved in helping establish the Inner Cities Religious Council, which from its shaky start is now doing very important work; is providing an interface between religious values and Government action. The Inter Faith Network is also working with the Commission for Racial Equality, and educational bodies and local authorities; is ensuring a religious presence of all communities at national events; and is providing literature and guidance on how we should conduct dialogue with sister faiths.

For me, a particular gain in working in this field of inter faith relations, is the confidence and respect found in engaging in dialogue at a national level on issues that might otherwise produce friction and distrust. It was this confidence that led to all faiths insisting on and achieving the recognition of religion in the 2001 census. It was a co-operative effort. It is this readiness to work with sister faiths that led to the high profile of different faiths in the Millennium celebrations. I am confident that our proven ability to work together will result in legislation for the protection of all religions from discrimination in employment and other areas of national life. It is my view that, but for the work of the Inter Faith Network, the Inner

Cities Religious Council, and those working to extend harmony, respect and understanding, the rioting in our Northern towns might have been much greater and less localised. Today, we have clear lines of communication that can help us diffuse the many potentially difficult situations that will occur again and again in our troubled world.

My plea then to the Government, local government and bodies like the Commission for Racial Equality, is that they should be wary of grandiose, all encompassing schemes for greater community cohesion, that can easily collapse under the weight of their own infrastructure, but instead redouble their support for the many faith-based and other initiatives, with a proven record in combating prejudice and working for greater communal harmony.

**Charu Ainscough, Gujarat Hindu Centre, Preston and Equal Opportunities Officer
(Race), Lancashire County Council**

My task in this presentation is to discuss the impact of the social cohesion agenda on faith communities and the response that needs to be made at a local level, including the developing role of women.

The questions I will be addressing are: What can we learn from the community and the voluntary sector and how can the public sector help them promote their learning and experience into the social cohesion agenda? I have chosen to talk about three organisations I know well who are delivering such work.

Before I do that, I wish to describe to you the background against which I have engaged in my work in community and race relations in community cohesion. I was born into a Hindu household in Uganda, where I learnt that my religion was about everything I did - a way of life, the essence of which was duty, as described by the *Bhagavad Gita*. This is duty to yourself, your family, your community, town and country. I was fortunate to attend boarding school in India where we celebrated religious and cultural diversity and all faiths were respected: Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Christians, both Catholics and Church of England. I am married to a Catholic man and we regularly have discourses about our faith positions and what it means to bring up children within that diversity.

I arrived in Britain in 1968 when the political climate for refugees and Asian people in particular was quite hostile. I can remember most vividly as a teenager being on the receiving end of much race hate and abuse not only from layabouts around town but, alas, from professional people as well. As an example I remember a doctor, with whom I wished to register, greeting me with a comment, "You Asians come to live off the state". At that moment I was a fee-paying overseas student! She thereafter proceeded to try to register me, but needless to say I found another doctor. Furthermore, the reporting in the media was equally racist, harsh and hostile, like it is today, about asylum-seekers, refugee and immigration issues and I read with fear as a teenager, Enoch Powell's rivers of blood speech.

Such experiences, and my experiences of living in Uganda in a multicultural society and becoming a refugee with my family in 1972, enticed me into working in the field of community and race relations. I started working full time as an Assistant Community Relations Officer covering Preston and Western Lancashire. I can recall various developing stages of community and race relations work from 1975. I was also a founder member of the North West SCIFDE (Standing Conference of Inter Faith Dialogue in Education) and made a contribution to building bridges between education, faith and diverse communities. At that time Government policy appeared to be based on a view that minority ethnic communities should be geographically dispersed. It also appeared that society expected the newcomers to explain themselves and their way of life and to become assimilated and absorbed into society so that we would be invisible. There was a view that wearing saris, eating samosas and listening to steel bands was going to make us co-exist in harmony. Furthermore, promoting Britain as a multifaith, multicultural community and delivering and promoting an anti-racist curriculum in our schools and colleges was seen as the way forward. Here we go again: isn't this what the community cohesion agenda is recommending? It appeared to me in my work that this was a remit of the voluntary sector and also of a few quasi-autonomous organisations like our councils working on race at that time. Even though section 71 of the Race Relations

Act, 1976 was on the statute book, this duty of local authorities to promote, deliver and monitor, did not appear to be put into practice in any way. Then followed the Brixton, Bristol and Liverpool disorders in the 1980's and Lord Swann's report on education within which was promoted the idea of "Pluralism, the Way Forward" based on the American model of celebrating unity in diversity.

The summer disturbances of 2001 in our Northern towns and the many reports which have followed have, through their recommendations, attempted once again to remind the public sector of what they ought to be doing within the context of now, at long last, some cross-cutting themes around, for example, employment and service-delivery. A number of reports have been produced on community cohesion: the Denham report on *Building Cohesive Communities* and the Cattle report on *Community Cohesion*. What I have noticed, and I did hear Alan Smith mention, was that there was not much reference to the role of women. I say this because it is primarily women in our society who take on the caring and nurturing role, both of the physical and the spiritual person, and therefore women are able to make a major contribution to the social cohesion agenda. This is an important comment that I wish to make to local Government and to central Government and needs to be acknowledged in addressing the way forward.

I feel that Lancashire and Preston in particular can offer some excellent models for study and to draw guidance of good practice from. The Gujarat Hindu Society in Preston is a shining example of how a small community promotes social and community cohesion. The organisation has been in existence since 1965 and in 2000 achieved its Millennium Vision which was to create a focal point for the community and provide social, cultural, educational and recreational activities in a new purpose built centre. Their mission was to cater for and service the needs of all sections of our local community and to promote better community and race relations between people of different backgrounds and to work towards a just and fair society. The vision was achieved with the Millennium Commission funding 50% of the £3.6 million cost and the new Centre opened for prayers and community activities about two years ago. Its mission is being achieved each and every day because it is used not only by the Hindu community but by various communities and age groups. It offers an excellent training venue for many organisations, including statutory organisations. Their use helps many more British citizens, apart from Hindus, experience a different environment. The Centre has recently gained Learn Direct status. It offers numerous activities and events for all sections of the local communities including youth club activities each evening, a luncheon club for the elderly, yoga, aerobics, and access to Indian dance, music and drama amongst others, open to all. The success of this small group of people in Preston has been achieved through the hard endeavours of many very committed, dedicated and wonderful people who are driven by a sense of duty, spiritual purpose and public spirit. They are the visionaries who are working instinctively in promoting better community relations.

I will now describe the work of three initiatives involving women. I am a member of a Hindu ladies group which has taken a proactive role in cementing better community relations. To quote one example: the ladies group were invited by the Grimsargh Village Parish group to join with them in celebrating the Millennium year. We jointly organised a fundraising event which would benefit both the groups. The Hindu ladies cooked and served a dinner for 100 guests, organised a fashion show with some of our teenage daughters modelling Indian garments and demonstrated how to cook a few of the items we were serving for dinner. More than 100 white people came along and talked with us about our background and their background. Many benefits flowed from such a social event. We offered to run cookery

classes for them. We have just completed one session and in September we are going to offer another session.

Nine Indian women and eight teenagers participated in a multicultural event marking an important event in the Christian calendar. Many English men and women shared and ate an Indian vegetarian meal served by us during which time we engaged in discussions about each other's way of life, cooking, music, dance and our religions, our beliefs and practices. Just as importantly, a good time was had by all and the bonus was that both groups were able to fundraise for their individual organisations. The ladies group has grown in confidence and is organising many more such events for schools and other groups. We have been invited to address and join organisations like Business and Professional Women and the Soroptimists in doing similar work to break down barriers, encourage debate and joint working to our mutual benefit.

The second group I am going to talk about is an organisation in Preston known as "Sahara". As a volunteer I am also Chairperson of Sahara. Sahara - not the desert - means "support" in many Indic languages. The organisation's aims and objectives embrace many areas of disadvantage, poverty and discrimination. We are unique in that we are the only black minority ethnic organisation in Lancashire managed and run by black women for black women. Only last week volunteers, staff and board members revisited our aim and decided that our aim was well represented by "Women for Justice and Change". We are lots of different women from different backgrounds, including white women, black women, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. At Sahara we support women in gaining confidence, making informed choices, challenging disadvantage and we help to create opportunities for women to achieve their full potential with a view to them actively participating in the economic, social, political and cultural life of Preston and District.

Since the early 1990s, Sahara has been successful in securing monies from different sources to deliver a range of services to meet the gaps in service provision not provided by the statutory sector. So what do we offer which is different? Sahara, we believe, is different because we are a group of women directors and staff from diverse backgrounds united in a shared purpose to challenge poverty, oppression, lack of opportunity, prejudice and discrimination that we as women experience. We offer a welcoming environment and by developing trust and confidence in the individual and the organisation, we are able to engage with individual women to help them rise to their potential. Having built trust we offer access to any learning that the women identify.

With different funding streams, we have delivered many services. To mention a few:

- (a) We have employed, trained and developed in the past ten years over 20 black and Asian women in community work. Many have progressed into enhanced employment positions in the public and private sector. Sahara achieved IIP [Investors in People] status last summer and I believe we are the first black and ethnic minority organisation to have received this award in Lancashire.
- (b) We have delivered numerous training courses from confidence building to English language courses to DIY and motor car maintenance which starts this summer. We have provided individual support and assistance, through advocacy and casework, including translation and interpretation.
- (c) We have offered a "drop in" facility to women to meet and share ideas, worries, concerns and to receive support.

- (d) We offer assistance with domestic violence issues/cases. We were the first Asian and black organisation in Lancashire to organise a conference on domestic violence and openly address the issue. We have worked in partnership with the statutory agencies to enhance and improve their practice and provision in the area of domestic violence. We also linked with a Lancashire-wide network for minority ethnic women to organise a multi faith conference in Lancashire in October last year where we had people from Hindu, Sikh, Christian and Muslim bodies come together to talk publicly for the first time in Lancashire about what their faith position was on domestic violence, and how they were going to engage in working with the Home Office and the Women's Unit in Government to look at domestic violence and forced marriages.
- (f) We also direct and accompany women, if there is a language barrier, to other agencies and organisations who are better able to provide specialist advice.

In a period of three years, over 1000 women have sought our support and assistance spanning various areas of work, including health, housing, welfare, immigration, training, and domestic violence. Sahara's confidentiality policy ensures the privacy of each service user, who is assured of a sensitive, secure, comfortable and caring environment in the context of their cultural, religious and linguistic needs. Our vocational and non-vocational training courses have been very successful because we have won the trust and confidence of the women and their families. The work we do actually shatters the myth about Asian women, and Muslim women in particular, that they do not engage and they will not come out or be allowed to come out. How you meet and address that issue determines how successful you are in tackling it. We have therefore seen many Muslim women progress from becoming volunteers and move into further training. Last year alone 37 (33 were from an Islamic background) women started employment following support provided by Sahara. All our social educational trips are supported by a mix of women from different social, religious and cultural backgrounds and hugely successful both in terms of learning and promoting harmonious community relations.

I could say more about Sahara's work, yet I am sorry to say that our future is very insecure. I am going to say this unashamedly. Without adequate recognition and support, this kind of community cohesion work from the faith groups and from others will not continue if the Government does not recognise, and the Home Office do not take on board, how important resources are. It is not about having two or three years funding. It is about having a long term strategy so that with local Government and with national Government, we can succeed in building a slightly more secure place.

Having started with Urban Programme funding in the early 1990s, Sahara moved on to about six years of Community Fund monies and four or more years of Single Regeneration Budget Programme monies to pay for our running costs. Yet again we are having great difficulty finding the hours to keep putting in applications, many of which get rejected. It is possible that at the end of this year Sahara may go out of existence. Recently we found that our application to the Learning and Skills Council under the LIF (Learning Initiatives Fund) was not approved, nor was an application submitted to the ACU (Active Community Unit). We are actively engaging with the local authorities to consider entering into partnership arrangements with organisations like ourselves to help them meet their service and employment obligations to women, particularly within their newly developed Racial Equality Schemes (RES's) and Action Plans. I know that the work that Sahara does will be sorely missed by women in our communities, and the gaps in provision will also continue.

I will now refer to the third organisation which is the Lancashire-Wide Network of Ethnic Minority Women (LWNMEW) and my particular role through local Government as a local Government employee. After a career break to raise my two daughters, I changed sides and decided to work from within local Government to help it address the inequalities I had witnessed working for the community relations side. As a Senior Equal Opportunities Officer with a race brief, I found my work challenging, interesting and rewarding. We developed policies and practices on fair selection and trained managers on the equal opportunities way of selecting candidates for employment. What I found was that the authority did not have people recognising how important race was in service delivery terms. Therefore, rather than doing employment work, I found myself being sent to work with all these departments, advising them on their policies to do with service delivery.

We also began to inform the black and ethnic minority groups about employment opportunities within the Local Authority. We developed our links with the minority communities, ensuring their knowledge of and access to our services. Much of this work was done through supporting Racial Equality Councils and Section 11 appointed staff. Lancashire was a major recipient of such support. However, the political, social and economic climate was not right for more challenging types of work such as setting employment targets and more creative positive action strategies. The organisation was also developing many women and family friendly policies and work on disability issues and its strategy on race would evolve in time. Like other organisations we started to add on to existing policies and practices rather than mainstream such work.

With regard to women's work, in the mid 1990s, the Leader of the Council, Mrs Louise Ellman, did recognise that more than 70% of our workforce was women. She supported the Government's "Fair Play for Women Initiative" and also the "Zero Tolerance against Domestic Violence Campaign" which we started to promote heavily within Lancashire. Meetings were held with many women's groups and representatives from the public, private and voluntary sector, to discuss policy issues affecting women. I attended a meeting organised under the Fair Play for Women Initiative. The public, private and voluntary sector were debating and asking questions as to why Asian and black women were not present and participating. There was consensus that our women were not represented at a senior enough level in organisations to be able to have the opportunity and privilege to attend and contribute during office hours to the debate, and therefore inform public policy development.

This led to a group of women from the Lancashire County Council being asked to organise two separate seminars targeting over 200 Asian and black women. The seminars would engage them in identifying the barriers and their needs in the areas of employment, education, training, economic development, health and politics as well as in their homes and in their communities. Participants were asked whether they wished to contribute to the debate and influence public policy. They did, and asked that a networking group be established to continue information sharing to gain knowledge and a better understanding about the public sector. Many women were working in the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector and said that they wished to develop and progress in their careers but did not have access to training and development opportunities.

The Lancashire County Council supported the meeting of this countywide group, once every two months. We continued to network and agreed terms of reference for this group. As the group evolved we submitted an application for European Social Fund funding to offer a capacity building programme for training and development of Asian and black women in

particular. The application was successful. We have set up a charity that is managed by Asian and black women which is Lancashire wide, providing a programme developing and training women. During the 15 month programme we applied to the National Lottery Charities Board and were successful in securing a three year lottery bid to continue this capacity building programme. Two weeks ago our fourth residential was held over a weekend. This time the residential was organised on the subject of multiculturalism and diversity. It was, I am told, a very lively event with much sharing of each other's culture, differences and common values. Furthermore it was enjoyed by all the mixed group of women.

I mention this work because this is the kind of mechanism we need to be engaged in to help black women come through the network. What I have also found in the last couple of years is that a number of recent events, including the disturbances of last summer, have led to a slight change, and I am becoming a lot more positive about the future. We have seen the public sector has been set some challenges since the Stephen Lawrence case and the Macpherson report. Through public debate a clearer definition of racism and institutional racism has led to a better understanding of racial equality and diversity work.

The requirements placed on public bodies by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, to produce a Race Equality Scheme, with an action plan over three years to cover all their functions and to support the general duty of elimination of race discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity and to create harmonious community relations between people of different racial groups, is a major shift in support of a multicultural, multifaith Britain.

Earlier this year Lord Parekh initiated a debate in the House of Lords on the benefits of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity in the UK. The idea he promotes of a "community of communities" is very pertinent to the current debate about social cohesion and identity. It also says that policy makers, employers and all organisations have a duty to promote a strong pluralist society in which cultural differences are seen as a benefit to communities. I wish that more national and local organisations would debate and thereafter adopt some or all of the recommendations and in particular the seven fundamental principles set out in the report on "The Future Of Multi-Ethnic Britain" produced by the Commission which he chaired. This report has helped to define a vision and to identify issues common to some and also all our communities which affect harmonious community relations between people of different racial groups. It places in the public domain an analysis of the current state of multi-ethnic Britain, and proposes ways of countering racial discrimination and disadvantage towards making Britain a confident, vibrant, multicultural society.

The report proposed seven fundamental principles:

- (1) People must be treated equally but also with regard to real differences of experience, background and perception and to the need for common values and social cohesion.
- (2) The concepts of equality and diversity must be driven through the government machinery through national and regional levels to secure demonstrable change at all levels.
- (3) In addressing racism, there must be a sustained and fearless attack on all forms of racial injustice.
- (4) Disadvantage must be tackled because street racism and violent racism arise and flourish in situations of economic disadvantage and inequality.
- (5) Colour blind approaches do not work and there must be a commitment to go beyond the racism and culture-blind strategies of social inclusion. Programmes such

as New Deal for Communities are essential. They must, however, have an explicit focus on race equality and cultural diversity.

(6) To empower and enfranchise, there must be vigorous commitment to recognising cultural diversity through, for example, the systematic representation of black, Asian and Irish communities on public bodies [and my plea is to make sure that women are adequately represented].

(7) There is a need for a pluralist culture of human rights. The human rights standards provide both an ethical and a legal basis for the changes required, but must include respect for cultural difference.

In conclusion, for me there are three main issues that need to be considered and accepted to further community cohesion:

(1) The agenda of Government, which is leading on the policy of community cohesion, must recognise women and the issues that affect them and we must become part of the mainstream agenda. It needs to be mentioned that empowering and enfranchising the black and Asian communities must explicitly include black and Asian women.

(2) The audit and inspection role of national, regional and local Government and all public sector work must embrace the seven “Parekh” principles I have just mentioned.

(3) I feel that the timing is right for organisations like the Gujarat Hindu Society, Sahara in Preston and LWNMEW to receive recognition from national, regional and local government and for funding organisations to showcase, champion and provide financial backing to organisations which are already successfully engaged in developing cohesive communities.

I should like to conclude with Lord Parekh’s assertion that we all need to cultivate a common sense of belonging among our citizens and in our communities: a basic feeling that we all belong together, share a common fate and are bound by the ties of loyalty to each other and to certain common institutions and values. He goes on to say it is a glory of this country that we can be British in many different ways and that we do not have to conform to a single mould, as in France or in the US. We can take different views of our history and our political and economic institutions and yet remain as British as the next person.

TWO NEW INTER FAITH INITIATIVES CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIAL COHESION

Councillor Basit Shah, Vice-Chair Oldham Inter Faith Forum and Rev Philip Sumner, Chair, Oldham Inter Faith Forum

Councillor Basit Shah

I would like to thank the Inter Faith Network for inviting us to talk about Oldham. Oldham has two very different images. The first is the media image that you know about, of the “bad” Oldham, and the second is the one you probably do not know about, which is good news, but of which you will never become aware unless someone comes and talks to you about it.

In Oldham, we do have difficulties and we do have problems. We do have issues to face, not just one sector of the community but all of us. Those issues have been around for many years, but some of them were hidden. Since last year’s riots, we are more aware of some of those issues and people in this room and around the UK are now aware of the problems. There are very positive initiatives that have taken place in Oldham with very positive impacts and that is what we need to share with you today.

Glodwick is the area where the riots first started in Oldham. In 1996 organisations from around Glodwick and Clarksfield, which are next to one another, came together from different backgrounds, different races, different faiths and different groups, to sit together and to discuss the loss of resources that we had until a few years before: various youth and community activities. That was because different communities had started fighting amongst themselves, wanting to work in their own corners and their own boxes, not sharing with others. So in Glodwick and Clarksfield those organisations came together to set the groundwork for people to work together and not against one another. We brought to the table all kinds of issues including the loss of local resources and opportunities. This new organisation actually took the initiative to try to bring those resources back. But as we all know, when you lose something you cannot bring it back easily or quickly. So it took us some time.

Then last year with the riots, our problems became obvious. You will all be aware how they started, but probably you have heard something different from what we know, because we live there. People start blaming each other: youth services, the local Council, the police. Everyone, including myself, is guilty of that. We start blaming each other. Whose fault is it? Why did it start? But we don’t look for a solution. Just after the riots a friend of mine who is the Minister of one of the local churches in that area approached me. He felt saddened, as we all did, by what had happened. He approached me about the need for us to get together and to send a positive message to the whole of the community in the Borough, not just in the Glodwick and Clarksfield area, but to the Borough as a whole, that we are saddened by what happened, that we condemn the troubles that took place and that we offer sympathy to those who have been affected by the disturbances.

So he started working with his Christian friends and colleagues, and I started working with the Muslims in the Glodwick area and Clarksfield. We started to work to come together to make a positive joint statement to reduce the tension and calm the situation. So the ball started rolling from there. We have had several meetings since then. Then the Ritchie enquiry

came along. One of the points it made in its report was that an inter faith forum is needed in Oldham. He invited representatives from the Christian Churches, from the Hindus, and the Muslims in Oldham, to start a dialogue. From that beginning we have taken the initiative to create and establish the Oldham Inter Faith Forum.

Last year's disturbances were not only in Oldham, but also in Burnley and in Bradford and in other parts of North-West England. We felt that if these problems were not stopped quickly, they would get out of control. So we needed to start an initiative in Oldham and then perhaps other boroughs would learn from our experience. We are trying to build bridges between our communities because we never have done this. There were two motives behind it; not only to calm the situation in Oldham, but also to build friendship, to learn from each other, to understand each other, and what other faiths are about. People have had their own images of different groups, which are often myths and misconceptions. We wanted to find a way forward by bringing different groups together. So the aim of the Forum is to build bridges between different faiths, to foster mutual understanding, facilitate co-operative action, to be a representative voice for faith communities in Oldham, and to relate to other inter faith initiatives. It will be independent and non-party political. We do have individuals involved in it who may be involved in one political party or another, but when they come to the Inter Faith Forum, we expect them to leave their political hats at home.

What tasks have we implemented? We have had inter faith training in Coppice where we have invited a group of people from around the Manchester area and taken them for a visit to one of the local mosques, trying to introduce them to what mosques are about, how we practise our prayers and giving them a talk about Islam. About 70 people came to that training, which included a number of workshops. We have had a faith lunch for members of the Forum, an opportunity to get to know each other, rather than tackling specific items of business, coming to a lunch to sit and talk with one another about our ideas and dreams. A murder took place this year in the Glodwick area and again the media came in and put Oldham under a microscope. So we felt we needed to offer a more positive image. The Oldham Inter Faith Forum, together with the Oldham Council of Mosques, made a joint statement which was well received, because it showed that we are creating a partnership with each other. The statement encouraged people from the communities to come forward to help the police.

The Oldham Inter Faith Forum was only established last September and we are still working on a constitution to adopt for it. We have already started to build a network of links with other groups. One called the Building Bridges Project, is working in Oldham with people from different backgrounds, not just from faith communities. They are working at the grassroots level with young people, as well as with the rest of the community and have been encouraged to join with the Oldham Inter Faith Forum. The Peacemaker Project is also working with young people and we are making links with them. We have started networking with schools, about which my colleague Phil will talk and are working with the police, Oldham Borough Council and the Local Strategic Partnership and Oldham Council of Mosques. We have made sure that all faith group representatives that are based in Oldham are equally represented on the board of the Forum. We have representation from the Christian, Hindu and Muslim communities. There are different groups with each of the communities and we need to make sure that everyone is represented in the Forum. We are still developing it but if you look back over the past year, we have come a long way. We have further to go to ensure that everyone recognises the Oldham Inter Faith Forum and is aware of what we are doing. But we have made a good start.

Rev Phil Sumner

My friend Basit Shah has dealt with what the Forum has done so far. I am going to deal with what we are beginning to develop. The Ritchie report suggested two major areas on which to focus. One was facilitating exchange visits between places of worship to build up a sense of shared community, so we have taken that on board, trying to facilitate these at both adult and school level. The Ritchie report also talked about being involved with the local Council in working in education, which is one of the major ways to change peoples' ideas and opinions. Unfortunately it focused too much, I believe, on desegregation. You can have schools, as I am sure you have all seen, where pupils who are in the same school still play separately in the playground. So we need to think more deeply about working in education with race and inter faith issues so that we actually create and nurture respect for one another.

At present we are involved in the work of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) which is only just beginning to develop. Members of it are still at the stage of getting to know each other, and not yet at the stage of making decisions on where to go. But the Forum has been asked to work very closely with those involved in this and several Forum members are members of the LSP. We have, only last week, been involved in discussions on a corporate governance inspection. The local authority itself is being inspected yet again, and we have been involved in the process as inter faith leaders.

It was on 11 September last year that I arrived in Oldham. An inauspicious day! I have been involved in education for many years. I spent 25 years in Moss Side in Manchester and learned a lot there from the black community about race issues. I have worked at how we can make the school curriculum less Eurocentric and less Christian based and how we can begin to nurture respect for different faiths and for people of other races and other ethnic groupings, within the curriculum itself.

I use what I call the "I's of Inclusion". Inculturation is the first of these. It means learning to get out of my own shoes if I am teaching a particular subject and to stand in somebody else's shoes and begin to teach it from that other person's perspective, so that I am actually, in the way I teach, showing that I value that other person's perspective. That is hard for me as a white European Christian. I have got to be able to rub shoulders with other people and to find out how other people feel, how other people would do it, so that I can begin to get involved in that process myself.

You perhaps know the story of *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens and what happened to Pip when he goes off to London to become a student. There is a sad exchange that takes place later when Jo Gargery comes to visit him and Pip just cannot talk to him because he has moved on; his education has made him middle class and he has moved on from his earlier background. That is so often what education does to people, because teachers in the main are white and middle class. Education can so often make you separate from who you are. I am talking here about finding a way to get teachers to nurture a sense of pride in people wherever they come from, whether it is what could be called the white social benefits class, of which we have a very large section in Oldham, and who need to feel proud of who they are and to learn what people from their background have achieved, or people from other ethnic and faith backgrounds who also need to be proud of who they are. There needs to be an interplay going on between the culture that I have and other peoples' cultures, brought into the way we develop education. Chamoiseau[?], a Martiniquan writer, writes in *School Days*, of a young child being brought up as a Creole speaker, then going to school full of curiosity and interest

for learning, going into a French colonial system in Martinique and having his Creole speaking battered out of him, being told “Don’t speak that Creole rubbish in this school.” As time goes on, he begins to lose his interest, his curiosity, in education. Because it is as if who he is is being criticised and is not being valued. It is a recognition of the importance of this factor within education that I am talking about in using the term “inculturation”.

Moving on to “I for Identity”, Carl Rogers, an American clinical psychologist, talks about the importance of the self-concept in education. *Bluest Eye*, the first book by Toni Morrison, an African/American woman writer, is a story of a young black girl who was a friend of hers in school who basically just wanted to have blue eyes and look like Shirley Temple, because that was the sort of person who was valued. It is a sad story of self hate. In our area of Prestwich, there was a head teacher who was trying to deal with racism in his school and he taught the children a song about racism, that used racist language in it. There was only one black child in that school and all the song did was actually give ammunition to the other children in the school to use against that one black child, who went home and tried literally to rub the blackness out of his skin. That same story of self hate. What about the way that we put across Africa in the context of teaching European history from 1700 to the present day? I know that it is changing, but where does a black person see themselves in that history except in terms of slavery? When you do have the choice of studying another culture it tends to be something like that of the Native Americans. How do we bring into the curriculum, for example, the influence Islam had in the development of trigonometry, science and engineering? Reference could easily be made to the fact that we use 60 minutes in the hour and 60 degrees (180 degrees or 360 degrees) because of Islamic influences? If a mathematics teacher knows that, he can begin to use those examples to give children a different perspective. Over a period of 20 years I have been a Chair of Governors of three schools and have interviewed hundreds of teachers applying for jobs. Being in Moss Side at the time, I asked every single teacher, “How would you use your role in the school to respond to the particular needs of a child of African descent?” I have had about five decent answers in all of that time. Mathematicians and scientists tend to say “Well, that’s for Religion or PSHE, that’s not for us.” If you read something like *Crest of the Peacock* by George Joseph you see a tremendous awareness there of how Islam and the Asian communities have helped the progress of science and mathematics. All that can be brought so easily into teaching mathematics and science so that teachers nurture the identity of their pupils of Asian descent and encourage respect for them among their European counterparts.

At the moment in Oldham we are going to be working with practitioners. Up to now the work which has been done by others is, in the main, to give the basic philosophy, but not actually to get together with a maths teacher or a science teacher to explore how they can deliver the curriculum in a way that nurtures respect for other people’s faith, respect for other people’s ethnic backgrounds, having somebody to sit with them and go through a module and show them how to do this. So we are going to be working with the local authority actually to get down to this at a very detailed level, to help the practitioners themselves, so that it does not just remain an abstract philosophy which nobody implements. The local authority has asked the Inter Faith Forum to be involved in monitoring the diversity curriculum in local schools. So we will not just be offering a philosophy, but actually getting down to work in great detail and then monitoring and evaluating actual performance afterwards, giving marks for good quality practice.

Alan Schwartz, Inter Faith Council for Wales/ Cyngor Cyd-Ffydd Cymru

One of the great advantages of living in Wales is that we don't have to talk about David Beckham all the time. We also don't have the disappointment of not performing well in the World Cup or at Wimbledon because we know in our heart of hearts that Wales excels at Welsh male voice choirs and giving artists to the world such as Dylan Thomas, Richard Burton, Shirley Bassey, Sir Anthony Hopkins and Sooty!

Wales has also had the advantage of having an unpronounceable language which has given us the delightful town of Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychrwyndrobwylllantisiliogogoch.

To be able to understand why the Inter Faith Council for Wales came about, one has to look at the country. It has a population of about 3 million, most of which live along the South Wales coast and along the North Wales coastline. The major city by far is Cardiff with a population of 300,000 with Swansea and Newport and Port Talbot nearby and in North Wales, Rhyl, Colwyn Bay, Llandudno and Bangor. Much of the population lives in the Valleys to the north of Cardiff but most of Wales between north and south is thinly populated. As we know, ethnic minorities usually, but not always, congregate together in towns and cities and if not now, they eventually migrate to the larger urban centres.

Communications between north and south are poor. There are coastal motorways across north Wales (A55) and across south Wales (M4) but nothing much from north to south so you have to go into England along the M5 and M6 to get from one to the other quickly. And if communication is slow, you can see that the ethnic minorities are almost isolated from each other. Thus the north Wales groups have closer connections with Liverpool and Manchester than with the south Wales groups.

The Government of Wales was set up a few years ago in a referendum which was only won by 6000 votes - a tiny majority. You are probably looking at the only Jewish person in Wales - at least that I know - who voted for the Assembly. And you can understand the reluctance of ethnic communities to go into something that they thought would be dominated by Welsh nationalists and would not be to their advantage. Nationalism is probably something that many couldn't wait to get away from yet conversely they bring their own nationalism with them. Certainly there is a Welsh Nationalist voice in the Assembly but the party system is dominated by Labour and Liberal Democrat, and the Conservatives have representation, which is more than can be said for the Welsh Conservative representation at Westminster which is zero.

I know that most English people regard what goes on beyond Offa's Dyke with some bemusement, not fully understanding why Wales would want to have its own Assembly, and its own Welsh radio and TV channels. From the Welsh perspective, Offa's Dyke in its heyday would ensure that the English were isolated on the other side. So there is some self sufficiency in the Welsh. And the Welsh Assembly supports that idea of self sufficiency. The Welsh Assembly is not a proper Parliament in that it cannot raise taxes nor pass laws. So what good is it? Even in Wales, that's what many people ask. Let me illustrate this by concentrating on the Inter Faith Council for Wales.

Do you know how much all the voluntary work done in Wales is worth to the Welsh economy? The unpaid work of 1.86 million volunteers is worth £3.4 billion. As a perspective, the total budget of the Welsh National assembly is £8 billion. Without the voluntary work,

the economy would grind to a standstill. A great deal of thought has been given to this issue and in November 1998 a compact was agreed between the Welsh Office and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action to set out the framework for the relationship between the Government and the voluntary sector. The Government gave a commitment to developing policies and procedures on working in partnership, volunteering, community development, consultation and grants administration. Of importance to the Churches in Wales in particular were the efforts to establish local and regional compacts to feed into the national Assembly's regional committees.

There are three words which are ingrained in everybody's memories. They are - September the eleventh. I'm sure that in 50 years time, the date will be in the history books as is 1066 but I doubt whether anyone will be able to put a year to the date of September 11th. Not to put too fine a point on it, September 11th galvanised the whole world. A meeting was called by the First Minister of the Welsh National Assembly, Rhodri Morgan, at the Assembly offices on October 4th which included members of five religious faiths (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Sikh) and four political parties. Why five? I suspect that the meeting was called so fast that they couldn't find more than five.

I have known the First Minister Rhodri Morgan for about 30 years, long before he entered the political arena. Rhodri understands the media better than most politicians and somewhat better than most media men. It could seem to some in Wales who were cynical, that Rhodri called this meeting to ingratiate himself and the Assembly with the Muslim community of south Wales and this might have appeared to be the case on the basis of the two photographs chosen by *The Western Mail* (the national newspaper of Wales). But Rhodri was extremely serious. He called it the most satisfactory meeting he had ever been involved with. To use his own words, he attacked the "brain-dead" for their attacks on Muslims and on individuals because of the colour of their skin. The Muslim community up to that point had been rather insular and it was difficult for other religions and the social services to make links with this large community. But here was a beleaguered community, fearful because Muslim extremists had been associated with them but in reality that couldn't be farther from the truth. Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus were being confused with the perpetrators of the attack on the Twin Towers in New York because some people in Wales couldn't tell the difference between ethnic cultural groups.

From my own experience, it is not just those at the bottom of the educational social strata who exhibited this behaviour. It goes all the way to the top, by which I mean university lecturers who were just as misinformed and exhibited xenophobic attitudes. Yet as shown only last week in Cardiff, the vast majority of Muslims are hard working decent citizens who want to be accepted as Welsh Muslims. Their spokesman in Cardiff last week on radio and TV deplored the proposed visit of Sheikh Bakri Mohammed from the Finsbury Park Mosque to speak at a Cardiff mosque. The invitation was cancelled although he did speak at a private venue.

The main message from that first "all faith" (well "five faiths") meeting was that all of Wales' minority faith communities need the Welsh Assembly and the Welsh political establishment to stand up for them when violence and abuse against them is increasing. So the first meeting of the Inter Faith Council for Wales was held and was hailed as a major step towards a more tolerant and multicultural Wales.

The Welsh Inter Faith Council became a subcommittee of the Welsh National Assembly, albeit voluntary and without any apparent financial resources though eventually there seemed to be a sum of £4,000 available. The first meeting in March 2002 was attended by the First Minister, all political leaders, Under-Secretaries of State, PPS's and members of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh faiths.

The first meeting focused on the programme of work and operation of the new Council. There was some preliminary discussion on issues such as faith schools and religious holidays. There was a paper presented by the Archbishop of Wales, Rowan Williams. If he gets the job as Archbishop of Canterbury, I hope Tony Blair knows that all church services will in future start with Welsh. Rowan Williams is clearly in favour of faith schools - but there again he would be, wouldn't he? The issues of faith schools and religious holidays for observant members of religions in schools and industry will be considered in detail at the next Council meeting in the autumn.

So what has this meeting so far accomplished? Well, it was a lively and constructive first step and the amount of goodwill between all members was apparent as well as enthusiasm for working together on issues of common interest. At that meeting the foundations were laid down for a modern, culturally diverse and more tolerant Wales. The Inter Faith Council of Wales was set up to build bridges between the world of politics and faith communities and it is clear from the first meeting that this can be achieved.

As a side issue and emanating from this fruitful meeting, there have been several occasions where members of the faiths have been represented at national functions including that of the Queen's visit to Wales, police functions and also public meetings involving the Presiding Officer of the Assembly, Lord Dafydd Elis Thomas, and too many others to name. This would not have happened prior to the setting up of the Welsh Inter Faith Council though it is not necessarily a direct result of it. In fact, the faith communities' representatives are very much members of a club where we greet each other as old friends. Indeed the relationships are such that I have begun inviting my opposite numbers from other faiths around for dinner.

Following the advent of the Inter Faith Council, just a few weeks later, there was a call from the First Minister. Rhodri Morgan now wanted the Holocaust Memorial Day on January 28th, which previously has been low key in Cardiff, though attended by all faith representatives, elevated to a national event and I am in the middle of organising a service for the whole of Wales with the assistance of all the faiths. The Inter Faith Council has been the spur to getting an all faith representation at many events which would not have occurred before. Two weeks ago, a Masonic multi faith service was held and last week a multi faith service at Cardiff Bay for the Merchant Navy.

According to Dafydd Elis Thomas, the Assembly's Presiding Officer, Wales is a haven of linguistic diversity. Like it or not, there is immigration and emigration via electronic means, daily. Culture flows in and out and is celebrated. Each culture is equally well respected - or should be. So why bother with a Welsh identity? If we do not concede that every truth is valid, what claims do the Welsh have? Unfortunately we all see change as a threat. We are defensive and wish to stop it. But there is no way back to a simple society and frankly, would we want to go there? The small Celtic language of Welsh has survived. The new cultures of new communities can only add to the culture of Wales.

The problems concerning multi faith relationships in Wales will be faced at the twice yearly meetings, with the work done between meetings. We have the advantage that the Wales Inter Faith Council is run and organised by civil servants who never forget! Their summons has the clout and authority of Government, as does the venue of the meeting held at the Welsh Office or Assembly and the work accomplished has the stamp of Welsh Government approval. It would seem that on the evidence of the interest shown in it so far, the Welsh Inter Faith Council will prove an active body in the life of Wales.

WORKSHOP 1

GOVERNMENT AND FAITH COMMUNITIES – PARTNERS WORKING TOWARDS GREATER SOCIAL COHESION

Facilitator: Smita Shah, Policy Officer, Chief Executive’s Office, Leicester City Council and member of Leicester Council of Faiths

Hon Barnabas Leith, Secretary General, Baha’i Community of the UK, described the establishment of the Institute for Social Cohesion by the Baha’i community as a forum for research and dialogue focusing on the question “What makes a society cohesive?” Three Parliamentary seminars had been held and there had been useful meetings with a variety of Government departments and relevant NGO’s. In each case the aim was to explain the purposes and philosophy of the Institute and to explore the possibilities of partnership building. The Institute’s first annual colloquium, attended by around 130 people, had been held in May in Westminster Central Hall and a report would be available in the autumn. He mentioned the presentation which the Institute has been invited to give to the Home Office’s Community Cohesion Panel and a planned meeting with a Home Office Minister.

Baha’is believe that the evolution of human society has brought us to a turbulent and chaotic point in history: the foundations on which the cohesion of our communities were built have largely crumbled and the landmarks upon which we relied have vanished or become reminders of the past rather than signposts for the future. Two fundamental processes are operating simultaneously: disintegration on the one hand and growth and integration to a new level of order on the other. Central to the Institute’s work is the belief that religion can and should contribute towards positive and enduring change through the development and transformation of human capacity and its release for service to all. The Institute’s purpose is not to promote the Baha’i faith as such, but rather to put concepts and practices that Bahai’s find valuable into the public arena, including the principle of unity in diversity and the practice of consultation in pursuit of consensus. Its work is based on the understanding that all of humanity are members of one family, with each the responsibility of all. Diversity adds beauty to the world. The multiplicity of flowers is what makes a garden interesting and sustainable, but there is only one human garden and it is the garden which gives meaning to our diversity. Humanity needs to move beyond mere tolerance and rhetoric to a genuinely shared vision of community life that recognises, values and balances the duties and rights of both the individual and the community. There is a need to disseminate and understanding of the techniques for consensus building.

The Institute looks forward to continuing its work in partnership with organisations from all sectors of the community, not least from other faith communities.

Mr Deepak Naik MBE, Development Officer for the West Midlands Regional Faiths Forum, referred to his involvement in inter faith work which had been an important aspect of his life over the past 15 years. In recent years he had been doing work in which he was paid to undertake inter faith activity and this was a sign of the way in which inter faith work had now become mainstream. Inter faith activity has now moved into a new phase, in which both local authorities and central Government are interested to find ways in which faith communities can be involved more directly, on a partnership basis, in taking decisions about the future of the cities and regions in which they live. How are the faith communities to respond to this new situation and to the ‘professionalising’ of inter faith activity? Over the last three years he

had been working for Birmingham City Council in charting the way forward for establishing a Birmingham Faiths Forum. Now he was exploring ways in which a West Midlands Regional Faiths Forum might be developed.

A report on the work in Birmingham had been launched recently. The project had been carried forward in close consultation with the existing Birmingham Council of Faiths but it had also drawn in a wider range of people. The report pointed to ways forward in developing a more broadly based Birmingham Faiths Forum within which a partnership relationship could be developed between the City Council and other public agencies and faith communities.

Alongside devolution to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales the Government had set up nine regional assemblies in England, including a West Midlands Regional Assembly. The West Midlands region contained 5 million people and included Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton as well as rural areas. The aspiration is to draw in a variety of “stakeholders” with an interest in the region to be involved in the process of taking decisions about its future. The West Midlands Regional Assembly has 100 members including two faith community representatives as well as local authority representatives and representatives from business and commerce. Unlike those from business and commerce which have behind them the infrastructure of local Chambers of Commerce, the faith community representatives have no inter faith structure to underpin their participation.

Mr Naik acknowledged that there would be other members of the Regional Assembly who have a faith commitment of their own even though they do not formally ‘represent’ their faith communities in it. He went on to explore whether any inter faith structure designed to support patterns of representation should focus only on the more established faith communities. The question of what constitutes a faith for this purpose is a quagmire. Is it the “Network nine”? What about Pagans, Rastafarians, humanists and those with a less structured spirituality such as adherents to New Age philosophies? Should the approach rather be to explore the drawing up of a “charter” of values on the basis that all those who accepted this could legitimately participate in the multi faith process? There are deep questions here about how the inter faith community wants to define its boundaries and what role it can play on that basis.

In some parts of the country it is likely that in the next few years there will be referenda on moving to elected assemblies, probably in North East England first of all, and perhaps with the West Midlands not far behind. The Government’s recent White Paper on regional government suggested elected assemblies of between 25 and 30 people. On this model there would be no room for any formal faith representation. In many ways this made it even more important to develop regional inter faith “networks”. In conclusion, he drew out the new contrasts to be found between paid and unpaid inter faith work; between the involvement of those with lengthy experience of inter faith work and those coming new to it; and between ‘official’ representation and ‘unofficial’ patterns of values and spirituality.

Hon. Barnabas Leith said that it is important for faith communities to remember their essential purpose and not to allow themselves to be co-opted in an unreflective way to the agenda of local or central Government, even though it is desirable to explore models of partnership between them.

In subsequent discussion the following points were made:-

(a) While faith communities have much to contribute to wider society, it will be to their detriment if they become politicised in the process and it is important for them to avoid becoming drawn into party politics. Faith communities must not allow themselves to be used as 'tools' by either central or local government. The model needs to be one of partnership rather than co-option. There is a need for faith communities to ensure that they hold fast to the spiritual values which are at their root.

(b) There are issues about how far structures aiming at social cohesion are to be constructed "bottom up" or "top down". Is the conceptual framework a managerial one or one of voluntary association and participation? It would be tragic if faith communities find themselves sucked into a struggle to gain political power through participation in a process based on "representation".

(c) There is a need to learn from experience outside the UK. Other countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, have seen the establishment of multi faith institutions sponsored by their Governments in the interest of social cohesion. The situation in the European Union is even more complicated, with different patterns of relationship between government and faith communities. It is interesting that it is as a result of decisions in Europe that there is now to be protection in the UK against religious discrimination in the field of employment.

Summing up the discussion Ms Smita Shah said that it is clear that strong tension is being experienced in faith communities between, on the one hand, responding to the opportunities for greater participation in Government structures at various levels and, on the other, an anxiety not to find their values and integrity compromised in the process.

WORKSHOP 2

LOCAL INTER FAITH COUNCILS AND GROUPS AND COMMUNITY COHESION

Facilitator: Dr Harriet Crabtree, Deputy Director, Inter Faith Network (as Mr Jehangir Sarosh, Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe, was unable to be present).

Mr Resham Singh Sandhu MBE, Co-Chair, Leicester Council of Faiths said that:

- In setting out on a journey it is vital to begin with self assessment. This is true in the context of service provision for the local community. Do you know who your community is? Do you have evidence that you are genuinely taking the community's views into account? Do you monitor take up of services?
- Leicester Council of Faiths (LCF) started in 1986 and is now a registered charity. The faiths involved are: Baha'i (with 2 Committee representatives), Hindu (4 representatives), Buddhist (2 representatives), Christians (4 representatives), Jain (2 representatives), Jews (4 representatives), Muslim (4 representatives), Sikh (4 representatives), Swaminaryans (who opted to be members separately from the Hindu community and have 2 representatives) as well as other nominated representatives. In answer to a question, Mr Sandhu explained that numbers of representatives - which had been arrived at by mutual agreement - reflect very roughly the size of the various communities in Leicester, except for Christians.
- LCF now receives nearly £20,000 per annum from Leicester City Council. It has a part-time employee and an office and a kitchen at its Welcome Centre which opened in 1999. It publishes a quarterly newsletter, including a calendar of events, and a directory of places of worship; and has regular contact with national and local media.
- LCF has representatives on the Leicester Partnership Board, the local SACRE, the Education Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee, the Police Advisory Board, and the NHS Trust - Health and Faith Forum.
- LCF advises the local authority on faith issues and assists in ensuring appropriate balance of faith representation at civic events. It runs faith awareness seminars for companies and advises on multi faith prayer rooms as well as giving advice to the University chaplaincies and to Leicester Promotions.
- Last year LCF co-sponsored, with the World Congress of Faiths, a conference in Leicester on Multi-Ethnic Britain. It is a co-organiser of Holocaust Memorial Day in Leicester and has also been involved in organising a seminar on religious discrimination; a Gujarat earthquake remembrance service; an 11 September remembrance service; meetings of faith leaders about overseas events; work with the Foreign Office in receiving and briefing visitors to Leicester; and discussions with Ted Cattle and his review team colleagues on community cohesion.

Revd David Randolph Horn, Secretary, Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum.

- Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum (LFCLF) is a "new kid on the block". The process which led to it began four years ago with a series of open forum style meetings. It differs from the Leeds Concord Inter Faith Fellowship in its agenda and goals, having a strong focus on public issues such as regeneration and faith based social action and its membership is open to faith groups faith people & not individuals.

- LFCLF is a forum steered by a seven faith council. The Forum's Council was launched in March 2001. It includes Baha'is, Buddhists (from the Leeds Buddhist Council), Christians (Anglican, Catholic, Free Church, and the Black-led Churches), Hindus (from the main temple), Jews (from the Leeds Jewish Representative Council), Muslims (through the Leeds Muslim Forum), and Sikhs (through the Council of Sikh Gurdwaras (Leeds)). Leeds City Council is represented by a Councillor.
- LFCLF Council members serve on the Leeds Economy Strategy Group and on the Neighbourhood Strategy Group (of the Local Strategic Partnership).
- LFCLF has held training conferences: on Regeneration, on Participation with the New Economics Foundation, and on Islamic Social Action (a published report is available). It is planning a training session for faith communities on the media. In October 2001 a vigil was held in the wake of the events of 11 September. A special broadcast by BBC Radio Leeds will mark the forthcoming anniversary, (a tape is available).
- There has been much concern in the Leeds area about the activities of the British National Party, particularly at the time of the recent local elections. LFCLF has been helping to monitor BNP activity and has been liaising with the Civic authorities over this and also with the police regarding the more general issues of civil unrest.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

a) Local inter faith initiatives often find it difficult to secure funding or even to persuade their members to pay their dues! To secure local authority funding it is important that a local inter faith initiative can demonstrate that it has good links with faith groups in the area.

(b) LCF only received support from its local authority after it had proved how usefully it could contribute to Leicester City Council's work with the community. The LFCLF was able to draw support from VOICE which is funded by the Capacity Building monies and received grants from the Church of England the Roman Catholic Church and the United Reformed Church as well as from the local authority small grants fund. Membership is £10 per year.

(c) Luton Council of Faiths benefited from finding out from LCF how it had set about securing local authority support. In Luton there had initially been apprehension among local authority councillors about funding a faith based organisation, but the idea of a partnership between the local authority and the Luton Council of Faiths was attractive to them. Luton Council of Faiths is determined to maintain its independence and has made a point of asking its local authority for no more than 50% of its budget.

(d) Suffolk Inter Faith Resource has a hundred members who pay £10 a year each, as well as fifty member organisations who pay £20 a year. They also do tutoring and work with schools and the health service, billing them at £17.50 per hour.

(e) An issue faced by all local inter faith initiatives is which faiths to include. In the case of LFCLF the pattern of participation emerged as a result of an open public meetings. Pagans and Humanists have not so far expressed any interest in joining the Forum and therefore are not on its Council. For a new faith group to join the Council of LFCLF there has to be agreement amongst existing members.

(f) Some local inter faith initiatives (including the recently established inter faith forum in Northampton) are being invited to nominate representatives to sit on Local Strategic Partnerships. Participation in the work of an LSP involves attendance at a number of

meetings, studying the flow of documents and indeed helping to draft some of them! It is important for any representative nominated to take part in the work of a LSP to ensure that in its discussions they reflect views of the different faith communities and that they report back regularly on the work of the LSP. Inevitably there is a risk of becoming overburdened with the work involved. (Since the meeting LFCLF is being asked to provide two members for the Board of the LSP)

(f) Inter faith initiatives like Gloucester Inter Faith Action can be valuable in areas which are relatively mono-cultural in raising awareness locally of other faiths and of issues relating to religious diversity within our society as a whole.

WORKSHOP 3

INTER FAITH EDUCATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

Facilitator: Dr Ataullah Siddiqui, Head of Inter Faith Unit, Islamic Foundation, Leicester

Mrs Jane Clements, Education Officer of the Council of Christians and Jews, said that its work has always been to promote reconciliation and education between faiths, but this year a new project has been developed which focuses directly on promoting cohesion within secondary schools. In celebration of the Diamond anniversary of the Council this new initiative, entitled “The Diamond Schools Award”, hopes to identify, celebrate and reinforce good practice by encouraging schools to send posters on ways to promote cohesion. Schools are highly important in developing moral guidance. While children often have a strong sense as to what is right and what is wrong, schools can often be the places where individuals are told “no” for the first time. She referred to her own background as an RE teacher and looked to the way in which the moral language used in schools could be built upon and developed. The active facilitation of practical tolerance and understanding within the education system can ensure that society has the right foundations for future cohesion.

Ramona Kauth, Buddhist Trustee, Birmingham Council of Faiths and Counsellor, St Philip's Sixth Form College, spoke of her teaching background and her involvement in inter faith education on the Birmingham Inter Faith Council. It is important to focus on what we mean by community cohesion: is it a new way of focussing on issues? What exactly is the problem we are meant to address? Schools need a clearer agenda in order to convey tolerance to younger generations. They need to be careful not to introduce problems which do not in practice affect their pupils, such as creating an “other” in an already integrated school. The question needs to be asked “How do we deal with difference?” There is also a need to link education to the wider faith communities in the area, so that children can be taught through local examples and be encouraged to see themselves as part of a community. She cited a local inter faith project in Birmingham as an example of good practice. The project involves Buddhists, Christians and Jews in providing faith teaching to primary schools. This programme was developed with RE co-ordinators in accordance with the national curriculum, and all involved have experience of teaching. Children visit different places of worship and dance and drama are also incorporated.

In the subsequent discussions, the following points were made:

- (a) There is no national curriculum for religious education. Syllabuses are agreed locally. Christianity is usually taught at every key stage and also one or two other religions, but the pattern varies. However, every child following an agreed syllabus should have learned about all the major faiths by the age of 14.
- (b) There is a case for having agreement at national level on what is taught about each faith.
- (c) It is important to look for opportunities in schools to explore links between religious education and other areas of education, such as citizenship.

- (d) The Government needs to address the issue of creating jobs in the sphere of faith education.
- (e) It is important to challenge how faith schools are dealing with the education of their pupils about other faiths. Bolton Interfaith Council decided to do this by sending questionnaires to schools in order to assess how much interaction they have with local faith communities.
- (f) We need examine to what extent religious education has an impact on young people. Some may be able to better identify with the subject when it is placed in the broader context of spirituality. Perhaps this is something that the Government should look at as a way of promoting religious education.
- (e) Often there is very little religious framework given inside the home, and we need to be aware of the effect this may have and the important role of schools in providing this.
- (f) Meetings between young people of different faiths is very much a social as well as a spiritual matter. The unknown creates a barrier and encouraging people to meet each other breaks this down.
- (g) It is also important to address the issue that those of a particular faith are sometimes reluctant to allow their children to be taught other faith traditions. Parents may not be aware of what is actually being taught to their children and they need to have a better knowledge of this so that they can deal with questions their children may raise.
- (h) In the US there is no religious education. Instead pupils have citizenship education and visit places of worship to learn about faiths in this context. But arguably this is not enough because in the absence of any formal education about other faiths there is a risk that children do not hear enough about them. It was noted that after 11 September in the US many Sikhs were mistaken for Muslims.

In summing up:

Jane Clements said that she felt that the discussion had made it clear that RE syllabus has an important role. The majority of pupils will not know what it means to have a faith perspective as it will not have been part of their life in the secular world. It is important for schools to try to provide an understanding of this. There is a need to distinguish between moral and religious values. The home is also crucial, as it is difficult to encourage children in school if their home life teaches them something different.

Ramona Kauth said that she noted that many children do have a faith perspective but this is often from learning solely about their own faith. It is important that they are provided with the opportunity to access awareness of other faiths too. If children of different faiths attend the same school they should be able to identify better with each other.

WORKSHOP 4

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE INTER FAITH DIMENSION OF SOCIAL COHESION

This is a shorter record than of the other workshops because its main content was an audio-visual presentation.

Facilitator: Rev Tony Aris, New Testament Church of God

Presentation on the Unity and Diversity Project

Yasmine Chaudhry and Karamjeet Singh Bhogal from the Glasgow Unity and Diversity Project said that the project began in summer 2001 to update a mobile exhibition called Unity and Diversity. This is one of the exhibitions of the Glasgow Open Museum, which loans the exhibitions for display in community venues in and around Glasgow. The original exhibit was a series of boxes each containing artefacts and pictures about different faiths. However, many artefacts had gone missing or had deteriorated over the years. The project brought together a group of young people from Glasgow's different faith communities so that they could work together to bring the exhibition up to date using new technology. The young people involved in it have been learning about web design and have also been visiting one another's places of worship to learn more about the different faiths practiced in Glasgow.

Workshop participants were able to see a multimedia presentation about the project which featured screen shots of the new web site which is in development and video clips that had been taken in the places of worship the group has visited. The new web based exhibition will be launched later this year and, if funds permit, an interactive CD-Rom will be produced for free distribution to faith communities and public bodies.

In discussion the following points were made:

- a) It has been difficult to arrange times when all the young people are available to meet and to use the computer resources at the college where the project is based.
- b) It was encouraging to see two young people of different faiths being willing to come from Glasgow to London to make a presentation on the project.
- c) The project has only received limited funding. It seems that it is easier to raise funds for a cultural project than a project involving faith.
- d) Glasgow is a multi-cultural city, where young people have the opportunity to meet people from many different background, especially at the four universities in and around the city which attract many foreign students.

Presentation on the "respect" project

Carmel Heaney, Project Manager of "respect", said that the "respect" initiative was launched in April by Prince Charles. It is a two year initiative aiming to encourage young people of different faiths to do voluntary work for another faith community, thus helping to build understanding and tolerance between communities. "respect" is working with faith groups, youth groups, schools and sports clubs throughout the UK.

In the three months since its launch the “respect” team has identified 120 inter faith youth projects, ranging from organising local festivals to building web sites with an inter faith theme. The team is always open to receiving new ideas and is keen to get in touch with individuals and group who want to get involved with the project.

Further information about the Unity and Diversity Project can be obtained from Morag Macpherson, Acting Manager, the Open Museum, Glasgow at morag.macpherson@cls.glasgow.gov.uk or tel 0141 552 2356

CONCLUDING PLENARY SESSION

In the closing plenary session, the following comments were made:

(a) Mr Shabbir Lakha (World Ahl-ul-Bayt Islamic League) noted the absence in the presentation by Mr Alan Smith on the national agenda of any reference to the role of the media. Unfortunately there were sections of the media which engaged in irresponsible, and on occasion malevolent journalism, for example in displaying anti-semitism and islamophobia. It was important to consider in the coming year how the Network could best address this issue. While it was important for the Network not to become a tool of the Government, at the same time it should take advantage of situations in which roles of the Network and the Government coincide.

(b) Mr Michael Harris (Board of Deputies of British Jews) underlined the need to involve more young people in inter faith work, not simply in schools but also in universities and more generally.

(c) Imam Dr Abduljalil Sajid (Brighton and Hove Inter Faith Contact Group) pointed to the need for good practice in local inter faith activities to be disseminated; supported the need to involve more young people in inter faith work and endorsed the concern that inter faith organisations should not become bogged down in agendas set by central Government, leaving them without time to pursue their own priorities.

(d) Mr Resham Singh Sandhu MBE (Leicester Council of Faiths) welcomed the opportunity for representatives of different organisations to meet together at a national level and suggested that it would be helpful to arrange regional inter faith gatherings on a regular basis which more people would be able to attend. He mentioned the work which the Leicester Council of Faiths had done in building its relationships with local, national and international media.

(e) Rev Anthony Aris (New Testament Church of God) referred to his participation in the recent Golden Jubilee Young People's Faith Forum. He said that there are important issues of religious and political extremism which need to be tackled. It is important for inter faith organisations to tackle conflict and for faith communities to help in finding ways to deal with differences of opinion without resorting to violence, the negative stereotyping of other people or setting them up as scapegoats. It is important to learn how to disagree with maturity and to maintain possibilities of co-operation despite this. Inter faith organisations can offer an important witness to faith communities and to wider society on the possibility of living together harmoniously with equal respect and dignity, containing the tensions which flow from differences.

(f) Moulana Farooq (Bolton Inter Faith Council) said it was the first occasion on which he had attended a national meeting of this kind. In his view, some of the reports which had been produced on the disturbances in northern towns and cities had not provided a full and accurate picture of what was happening on the ground. However, it was clear from the day's presentations that central Government was taking seriously the issues which needed to be addressed. This must lead to action and to provision of the funding which was needed locally. He had been struck by the determination of the young people from Glasgow who had given a presentation in one of the workshops and who had, through their persistence, managed to secure some funding for their work.

(g) Rev Canon Dr Andrew Wingate (Leicester Council of Faiths) said that in many ways the most serious threat to community cohesion is the impact of external events in the rest of the world on relations between communities here in Britain. The Faith Leaders' Forum, convened by the Bishop of Leicester, has on a number of occasions prepared statements together on international issues and their potential impact on Leicester, and these have received considerable local publicity. Currently there is great concern about the plans apparently being made by the United States for an attack on Iraq and the possibility that Britain would join in this. It is important to look ahead to difficulties of this kind on the horizon and not simply react when events like those of 11 September occur and I ask the Inter Faith Network to address this issue urgently."

(h) Mr Ratilal Chohan (Hindu Council UK) expressed his gratitude for the day's meeting and its value. He came from Oldham and had been saddened by the damage which had been done there by a small number of people who had created last summer's disturbances, as a result of which the whole town had now got a bad name. All faith communities in the UK share responsibility for building a new community together based on love, peace and harmony. He hoped that everyone could work together for this, regardless of class, creed or culture, as all of us are children of ? [the gods] or [God].

(i) Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra (Muslim Council of Britain) mentioned the initiative put forward by the Anglican Bishop of Leicester, Rt. Rev. Timothy Stevens, for a multi faith "rapid reaction force" ready to respond to any negative events involving any faith community there, on the basis that an attack on any one faith community should be regarded as an attack on all of them. This had led to discussions in Leicester about how to respond if a place of worship of any faith community was violated and to agreement that steps would in those circumstances be taken to bring people together immediately to demonstrate their solidarity in condemning it.

(j) Rev David Randolph Horn (Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum) said that the experience of the Inner Cities Religious Council suggested that there is insufficient co-ordination between the Home Office and the Foreign Office in situations where there is a risk of civil disorder in local communities in the UK as a result of the impact of international conflicts. There is a real need for the Community Cohesion Unit of the Home Office to make effective links with the Foreign Office. Perhaps the Government would be less willing to contemplate war with Iraq if it realised the impact which this could produce on the streets of Britain.

(k) Mr Zia Hassan (Peterborough Inter Faith Council) offered his congratulations on the organisation of the meeting, at which he had learned a great deal. He hoped that on future occasions there would be more time provided for group discussion, which was of great value. He hoped that it would be possible for stronger links to be developed between the Peterborough Inter Faith Council and the Councils of Faith in Leicester and in Luton. The inter faith movement was extremely important at the national, regional and local level. In his view it was necessary to be in touch with central Government in order to influence its policies and to be actively involved in promoting steps to create a better society. As in Leicester, there is an understanding in Peterborough between members of all faiths that in the event of an attack on any place of worship, or members of any faith community then all faiths will respond to this.

(1) Mrs Ravinder Kaur Nijjar (Scottish Inter Faith Council) said that every participant was present because they believe that inter faith dialogue is important. But she posed the question of how we put across to the ordinary “person in the street” that this dialogue is essential.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

Revd Baroness Richardson of Calow, Moderator of the Churches Commission on Inter Faith Relations

It has been a pleasure to be part of this conference today. Thank you for all the contributions to which I have listened. Like many of you, I also speculate on the kind of glue that is likely to hold us together. As I was coming here, I was thinking of the kinds of glue that I know. There is that kind of glue that my grandchildren have, which is sticky fingers, and they make their mark wherever they go. There are those people who have such sticky fingers that they collect individuals, projects and helpers to gather together, and we have had examples of that kind of stickiness already today. Then there is that kind of glue of which I am absolutely terrified which once you have got it on your fingers, whatever you then next touch, sticks there and you can't get it off. Again, there are those people who get stuck on one project and can't lift their eyes beyond it. The best kind of glue is that which is evenly spread on the two surfaces that you want to join together. You then hold them in place without putting too much stress on them until the time that they are so bonded together that you can actually rely on the join not to break apart when the stress is applied. This is the kind of image that we need because of the tensions and the conflicts that do arise because our global networks are obviously involved around the world, as has just been pointed out to us. In our contacts together, and particularly through the Inter Faith Network and through local inter faith groups, we are learning to bond in such a way that we feel ourselves to be part of each other. And I heard Indarjit Singh also give us some recipes for the glue that will hold us together.

You heard about the role of national Government. Unfortunately I was not here in time to hear Alan Smith and I don't know if he spoke about a matter which is close to my own heart at the moment? I am a member of the Select Committee in the House of Lords which is looking at religious offences and how we can use the law to make a level playing field for all religious people, so that there is proper protection for them and a challenge to all of us to behave properly within communities. I do hope that anybody who has evidence to offer to that Committee will send it in. All of us read every piece of paper that comes and I have to say that we have had hundreds of pieces of paper that reflect a very poor understanding of what the law presently is. So I would be very glad to have evidence from faith communities expressing a different point of view. So that is one way you can help the Government do its job better.

Then we heard the representative of local government. The understanding shown in this contribution was very positive, so hopeful and helpful. One of the key points that Laura Willoughby made was, "If we haven't contacted you, you contact us". It seemed to me that she was particularly addressing the faith communities of the so-called minority groups in local areas. This is a challenge to Christians. We might not think of ourselves as faith groups. If we can go together with other faiths to local authorities so we can "translate" for each other (and I need some of this local and social services jargon translated for me) we are more likely to be successful in challenging local authorities to put their resources where we think they are needed. We have heard a lot about resources. The most immense resources are in individuals working together and this has been so evident in a positive way today: commitment and a willingness to face the issues together.

One last reflection: I sat at the back of the hall and I hope those who were involved in this little incident will forgive me for mentioning it. During this morning, somebody got up to go

out and he left his seat and went out. Two people came in, saw two seats together, one of which was his, and they sat down. He came back in, was discomforted to find that the place that he had expected to be free for him was not and he had nowhere to sit. As he stood, looking uncomfortable, the two people who were sitting in those seats immediately stood up because they had been made to feel uncomfortable. So they then stood to one side and didn't know where to sit themselves. Then somebody else brought two chairs and put them in the same place and they sat on them. That to me is an example of being aware of somebody else's discomfort, which is the act of sticking our communities together in such a way that we shall never be able to separate them out ever again.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 to link inter faith initiatives and to develop good relations between people of different faiths in this country. Its members include the 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. It is run by Trustees of all the faiths whose representative bodies it links.

As we enter the 21st century, greater awareness about the faith of others in the UK is crucial. Ignorance can lead to prejudice and even to conflict. With its member bodies, the Network works to “advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain, including an awareness both of their distinctive features and of their common ground” and “to promote good relations between persons of different religious faiths”. It does this by:

- 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
- Fostering inter faith co-operation on social issues
- Running an information and advice service
- Publishing materials to help people working in the religious and inter faith sectors
- In consultation with member bodies, helping to provide contacts and participants for inter faith events and projects and for television and radio programmes

Further information about the Inter Faith Network can be found on its website: www.interfaith.org.uk or obtained by writing to the Network office.

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Member organisations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK 2002-03

Faith Community 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
Churches Agency for Inter Faith Relations
in Scotland
Churches' Commission for Inter-Faith
Relations (Churches Together in
Britain and Ireland)
Council of African & Afro-Caribbean
Churches (UK)
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order
Hindu Council (UK)
Imams and Mosques Council (UK)
Islamic Cultural Centre, Regents Park, London
Jain Samaj Europe
Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain (Association of
Muslim Scholars)
Muslim Council of Britain
National Council of Hindu Temples
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)
Quaker Committee for Christian and
Interfaith Relations
Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths,
Bishops' Conference of England &
Wales
Sikh Missionary Society (UK)
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of G.B
Swaminarayan Hindu Mission
Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
Interfaith Subcommittee
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League
World Islamic Mission (UK)
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

Inter Faith Organisations

Inter Faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Cymru
Ffydd Cymru
Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum
Scottish Inter Faith Council

Calamus Foundation
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme
Council of Christians and Jews
International Association for Religious
Freedom (British Chapter)
International Interfaith Centre
London Society of Jews and Christians
Maimonides Foundation
The Interfaith Foundation
Three Faiths Forum
United Religions Initiative (Britain and
Ireland)
Westminster Interfaith
World Conference on Religion & Peace (UK
Chapter)
World Congress of Faiths

Local Inter Faith Groups

Bedford Council of Faiths
Birmingham Council of Faiths
Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Council
Bolton Interfaith Council
Bradford Concord Interfaith Society
Brent Inter Faith
Brighton & Hove Inter Faith Contact Group
Bristol Inter Faith Group
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group
Cardiff Interfaith Association
Cleveland Interfaith Group
Coventry Inter Faith Group
Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group
Dudley Council of Faiths
Gloucestershire Inter Faith Action
Harrow Inter Faith Council
Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)
Kirklees & Calderdale Interfaith Fellowship
Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship
Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum
Leicester Council of Faiths
Loughborough Council of Faiths
Luton Council of Faiths
Manchester Interfaith Forum
Merseyside Council of Faiths
Merseyside Inter-Faith Group
Newham Association of Faiths
Nottingham Inter-Faith Council
Oxford Round Table of Religions
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council
Reading Inter-Faith Group
Redbridge Council of Faiths
Richmond Interfaith Group
Rochdale Interfaith Action
Sheffield Interfaith
South London Inter Faith Group
Southampton Council of Faiths
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource
Tyne and Wear Racial Equality Council Inter
Faith Panel
Watford Inter Faith Association
Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group
Whalley Range (Manchester) Inter Faith Group
Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths

Educational and Academic Bodies

Centre for the Study of Islam & Christian-Muslim
Relations
Community Religions Project, University of Leeds
Institute of Jainology
Islamic Foundation
Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby
National Association of SACRE's
Religious Education Council for England and
Wales
Shap Working Party on World Religions in
Education
Study Centre for Christian-Jewish Relations
(Sisters of Sion)

