

## Some quotes about the Forum

Comments on the Forum by some of the young participants

My hopes for the future are for a peaceful society that is proud of its faith diversity and able to use this diversity to strengthen the community rather than divide it. The realisation of these hopes depends on ensuring that there is good quality teaching of religious education in the UK.

The inter faith forum has given me a fascinating and thoroughly rewarding insight into how young people of all the major UK faiths feel about issues that affect 21st century Britain. It has also taught me that open and frank discussion of faith issues can be achieved without descent into argument and dispute. Different faiths have a lot to learn from each other

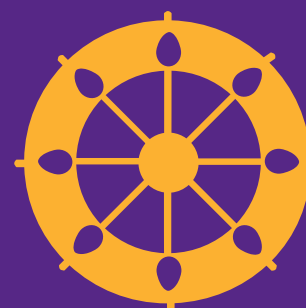
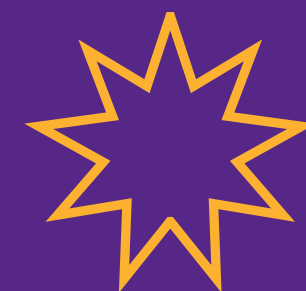
I hope that there will be more opportunities for dialogue, especially at the local level. Maybe schools and places of worship could host such events. It is important for young children to make contact with people of other faiths and where there are "mono-faith" schools, they should be encouraged to arrange exchange days with more mixed schools.

The Forum was a good opportunity to meet people of different faiths, especially faiths that I'd only read about. It was interesting to listen to people of other faiths expressing their views and to deal with their perception of your faith. I realised that although people of faith have many things in common, this does not undermine or dilute each person's commitment to their particular faith. You can be different, but still be genuine and show real understanding and respect for others

I hope that all the faiths can co-exist and get along the way we participants did over the two days. With all of us being of different faiths I was concerned that there was the potential for unpleasantness. However, my mind was quickly put to rest. I was very pleased with the way that despite the difference in our spiritual beliefs, the strength of the commonly held humanitarian aspects of all of our faiths was more than enough for us all to be friends and work together. I only hope that it is people with a tolerant outlook who are able to flourish and influence the thoughts of the coming generations, rather than those who seek to create divisions between people in the name of religion.

I am definitely much more optimistic about inter faith relations, and I can only hope that more events like the forum take place and that the kind of people willing to come to them with an open mind and a desire to co-operate will grow in number

The symbols on the cover represent, in clockwise order beginning to the right of the Golden Jubilee emblem, the Sikh, Bahá'í, Jain, Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Zoroastrian and Jewish religions.



# Golden Jubilee Young People's Faith Forum 10th June 2002

## Summary Report



## A Message of Support from Her Majesty The Queen



*Photo of HM the Queen courtesy of Tim Graham from the book "JUBILEE - A Celebration of 50 Years of the Reign of HM the Queen".*

Today's Forum brings together eighty young people of faith from across the United Kingdom in this special event to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of my Accession to the Throne.

I am pleased that you are exploring the practical dimensions of faith and service to the community, which is one of the central themes of the Golden Jubilee celebrations. Through this kind of dialogue, respect and understanding between different faiths can continue to grow.

I hope that you will learn much about each other's religious traditions. Your discussions today will signal to others the great importance of co-operation between people of different faiths.

I send my good wishes and encouragement to you all.

**ELIZABETH R**

Her Majesty's message as it appeared in the brochure for the Youth Forum.



## GOLDEN JUBILEE YOUNG PEOPLE'S FAITH FORUM

10th June 2002

### Summary Report

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\*A division of the Department for Culture,  
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## Messages from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the former Secretary of State for Education and Skills



I am delighted that my Department was able to contribute to The Queen's Golden Jubilee by organising the Young People's Faith Forum, and I am grateful to the staff of the Inter Faith Network for all the assistance they gave us in doing so.

The Jubilee gave us the opportunity to celebrate the diversity of modern society in the United Kingdom and the remarkable changes that have taken place during The Queen's 50 year reign.

The Forum enabled those who took part to express their views and share their experiences as young people of faith living in Britain in the 21st Century. Such dialogue between the different faith communities is important and I believe this event helped to foster even better understanding between them.

I hope that the significance of the occasion will inspire others to hold similar events in the future.

Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport



I believe that the Young People's Faith Forum offered an invaluable chance for young people to learn about one another's faiths and develop an understanding of communities which may be different from their own. This is an important part of religious education and supports citizenship education, which is now part of the curriculum in secondary schools, and through which pupils are learning about the origins and implications of the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom, and the need for mutual respect and understanding.

Rt Hon Estelle Morris MP, Secretary of State for Education and Skills at the time of the Youth Forum

## The Story of the Golden Jubilee Young People's Faith Forum

One of the official events to mark The Queen's Golden Jubilee was the Young People's Faith Forum, which took place in the State Apartments of St. James's Palace on Monday 10 June 2002. Eighty young people of different faiths from across the UK were invited to explore what it is to be a young person of faith living in this country at the beginning of the 21st Century, and to discuss the theme of "faith and service to the community".



HRH The Prince of Wales with Chair James Naughtie and the young participants

The Forum was an unique occasion which generated considerable enthusiasm and goodwill among those who took part and within the faith communities. We hope that it will have a lasting legacy through schools, youth organisations and other bodies holding their own "faith forums" around the UK. This short report gives a flavour of the 10 June event, and is aimed at those planning a forum or other inter faith event involving young participants from their area. A full report of the day, including transcripts of all the presentations and key points from syndicate discussions, is also available and is intended as a more comprehensive resource (see details at the back of this report).

<sup>1</sup> Bahá'í, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism

### Why was the Forum held?

During the planning of the Golden Jubilee celebrations Buckingham Palace and the Government were particularly keen that the diversity of faiths within UK society at the beginning of the 21st Century should be reflected in the celebrations. A consultative meeting was held at Buckingham Palace in September 2001 to discuss how this could be brought about, and senior representatives of the nine historic world faith communities present in the UK<sup>1</sup> were invited to this. The Golden Jubilee Office (GJO), The Prince of Wales's Office, Home Office, No.10, Lambeth Palace and the Inter Faith Network (IFN) were also represented at the meeting, which was chaired by The Queen's Private Secretary.

One of the suggestions that came out of this meeting and received warm support across all the faiths was that there should be an official Golden Jubilee event especially for young people from all nine historic faith traditions, and that this should focus on the Jubilee themes of service and community. No UK-wide inter faith event of this kind for young people had ever taken place: it was therefore to be a very significant first.

At the request of Buckingham Palace, with the assistance of the IFN and the faith communities and with the support of HRH The Prince of Wales, the GJO (a division of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) made the arrangements for the Forum to take place.

### The young participants

Forty young men and forty young women from the Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faith communities were identified with the help of schools and faith communities and invited to participate in the Forum. They included 64 lower-sixth formers aged between 16 and 18, nominated by state, independent and faith schools all over the UK and 16 sixteen older participants, aged between 19 and 24, nominated by the faith communities.

The 16 older participants had a mentoring role, helping their younger colleagues, and one of each faith made a presentation to the group about his or her faith and its teachings on service to the community. Short excerpts from their presentations are reproduced on Page 7 of this report.

### The evening before

At a briefing held on the evening before the Forum, the young people had the chance to meet the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP, and faith community leaders who had been consulted in planning the event. They also heard a presentation from Indarjit Singh OBE, Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations (UK), on the importance of shared values as a basis for inter faith dialogue and co-operation.



*The Secretary of State meets some of the participants*



*The Prince of Wales talks to participants*

### The day's programme

The Forum itself was chaired by James Naughtie of the BBC. The morning session focused on the theme of "faith" and the afternoon session on "service to the community". For much of the day, the participants were split into eight syndicate groups, so that everyone had the opportunity to contribute to discussion of the issues. Each group had ten participants - eight lower-sixth formers and two older participants - plus a facilitator and a (non-speaking) note taker. The facilitators were RE teachers and educationalists led by Lat Blaylock of the Professional Council for Religious Education. Young civil servants acted as note takers.

The day opened with a video message from HRH The Prince of Wales, who also met all the participants at the close of the Forum. There were presentations from Rt Revd Dr Tom Butler, Bishop of Southwark and Co-Chair of the IFN, Priya Lukka (Institute for Volunteering Research), Andrew Ball (The De Paul Trust, a Roman Catholic homelessness charity), Khalid Almulad (Islamic Relief) and Rosalind Preston OBE (Chair of Nightingale, a Jewish residential and nursing home and also an IFN Co-Chair).

The young people went on, at the end of the Forum, to a special Golden Jubilee Reception at Buckingham Palace hosted by HM The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh for over 700 men and women of different faiths.

### Some of the young people's thoughts

A number of the ideas and personal opinions expressed by individual participants during the day are reproduced below. These comments are not intended to represent the views of the Forum organisers, the Government or the faith communities.

#### Faith

- Faith gives strength and support, especially in times of need.
- It gives meaning and structure to individuals' lives and a sense of something beyond the self.
- It is a complete way of life which does not restrict freedom.
- Faith and worship can teach us a way of life and embody a framework of right and wrong, and scriptural teachings and the advice of leaders/other followers of our faiths are important in helping to inform life decisions.
- Most people follow moral codes even if they are not religious. It is important to work with people with no faith for the common good. Some felt that atheists and agnostics should therefore have been invited to the Forum.

#### Faith and Community

- The values and beliefs of secular society, some of which can challenge faith-based values. Being religious can be isolating in the UK's increasingly materialistic society.
- Society emphasises rights over obligations but most religions emphasise obligations.
- In a faith community there are always people who can support you, wherever you are.
- Faith gives us a way of changing society for the better and serving the community.
- Some faiths are missionary faiths, and this can lead to internal conflict between the requirement to spread one's faith and the wish to respect other faiths.
- In the UK everyone can follow the faith of their choosing although lack of facilities sometimes makes this difficult.
- Sometimes people are asked to compromise their faiths, for example by not taking days from school/work to celebrate religious festivals, or by working on the Sabbath. Although most participants had never been put in this position, most said they would not compromise.

- Religion is often misunderstood and foreign conflicts have had a detrimental effect on attitudes to certain faiths here in the UK.
- Muslim participants talked about having encountered particular ignorance and intolerance since 11 September, though some had been asked questions by people genuinely wanting to know about their faith. This had given them the opportunity to explain the true nature of Islam.
- People who use faith as an excuse for violence scar the whole religion by causing prejudice about it.
- A young person who grows up surrounded by violence rooted in prejudice and hatred can end up becoming part of the cycle of violence.

#### Faith in Schools

- Schools should work at being inclusive. A school of mixed faiths promotes understanding, tolerance and respect.
- Faith-based schools can encourage spiritual and metaphysical thinking which can lead to a better understanding of faith in general.
- Education can help people to live together in a diverse society, break down barriers and tackle ignorance. Young people can learn tolerance and respect for difference.
- Interactive RE is very helpful: e.g. visiting places of worship, bringing religion visually into the classroom and encouraging faith communities to come in and talk about their faith.
- The wearing of traditional dress can create difficulties with school uniforms.
- Joining in Christian prayers is problematic for some pupils of other faiths. Solutions that already exist are withdrawing from worship or, in some schools, separate assemblies. However, these can make members of small minorities in schools feel isolated.
- Other solutions could include inclusive prayers or themed assemblies which educate everyone about other issues and faiths.

#### Service to the Community

- Service to the community and goals like eradicating poverty are a key part of all faiths, e.g. the Good Samaritan for Christians, 'Good thoughts, Good words, Good deeds' for Zoroastrians and 'In the joy of others rests our own' from the Hindu scriptures.
- It is important to stand up for what you believe in and speak out against injustice and persecution. Most of the faiths agree that evils like racism should be condemned.
- Service to community means giving of all of your resources: time and effort as well as money. It means putting other people before yourself.
- A powerful way to engender service to others is to put yourself through empathetic experiences, e.g. fasting can make you empathise with those who are short of food.
- Volunteering and charity are ways of serving God. Many faiths encourage their members to give a portion of their earnings. Faith gives you more practical options for service.
- Charitable deeds should be done in the name of God, not for personal benefit, although some believe it leads to rewards in the afterlife.
- Faith-based aid organisations can offer spiritual help as well as economic assistance. They can also be a mobilising force in encouraging charitable giving. Multi-faith aid organisations are also important.
- It can be difficult to find time to volunteer but charity can range from a smile to financial support. Ways to serve the community can include:
  - small local projects, e.g. cleaning up the environment. These have a great impact as the wider community sees religion taking action to help make things better.
  - being part of a voluntary organisation such as St. John Ambulance.
  - being a good citizen: though this is not proactive you are still serving your community.
  - co-operating with other faiths on charitable and humanitarian work, e.g. disaster relief, medical research. This avoids the problem of

#### Relations between Faiths

- The different faiths are distinct but all people of faith are unified by the fact that they have faith, and we can learn and gain strength from other faiths.
- Many values and principles such as compassion and tolerance are shared by different faiths.
- We should explain our faiths to each other, to help break down barriers of prejudice, misunderstanding and fear. Acknowledging our differences and so eliminating the fear of them is vital. We should also push our communities/elders to explain our faith to others.
- Knowing people of different faiths helps dispel negative media images.
- It is important to work with other faiths but not in ways which compromise religious principles.
- Inter faith worship can cause difficulties if people are expected to join in the same prayers and these express or imply beliefs which they do not share.
- Many participants felt that their own religion was the supreme religion which is why they practiced it. They still, however respected others' choices and think it is up to each individual to find their own spiritual path.
- People of faith need to learn to be open-minded with each other despite disagreeing on certain fundamental issues. If you have strong roots you do not need to put up fences.
- In most religions there are some people who, because of the way they interpret or misinterpret their religion or for political reasons, oppose working with other faiths.
- Practical suggestions to bring together faiths included further conferences and outdoor pursuits, e.g. football matches such as have taken place in Northern Ireland and between Jewish and Muslim teams.

## How faith motivates service

The Forum included presentations by nine older participants on their experiences as young people of faith growing up in the UK. The following are excerpts from these presentations.

It is said that to be a Bahá'í is to "serve mankind". To me this doesn't just mean to become a doctor, or a social worker, as admirable as that is. Bahá'ís believe that any work done in a spirit of service is worshipping God.

**Danielle Pee, Bahá'í participant from Bristol**

Quoting the Buddha, 'To cease from all evil, to do what is good and to cleanse one's mind' is the essence of the Buddhist way of life. Personally, I would like to be known as a Buddhist because of my actions and conduct as opposed to any other quality.

**Manil Subasinghe, Buddhist participant from London**

My experience today as a follower of Jesus Christ is of a life of purpose and hope and it is because of this continuing experience of God that I now work for a Welsh language church in Aberystwyth, visiting the elderly, hospitalised and dying and working alongside families and young people. I choose to serve because Jesus first served me.

**Meryl Walters, Christian participant from Aberystwyth**

Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa said that 'Service to Humanity is Service to God'...Hindus believe strongly that we have a duty to respect and care for our parents and grandparents, our local community, our nation, and the wider world, including animals and this is one reason why many Hindus are vegetarian.

**Gaurav Prinja, Hindu participant from Cambridge**

The cornerstone of Jain belief is Ahimsa, or 'non-violence and reverence for all life'. This means trying not to harm any living thing through action, speech and even thought, and also friendship to all.... Charity plays a major role in every Jain's life – charity not only with your wealth, but also with your time, actions and feelings.

**Viren Mehta, Jain participant from Leicester**

There is a story that a famous rabbi called Hillel was challenged to explain the Torah (the five books of Moses) while standing on one foot. Hillel replied simply, 'Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour: this is the whole Law; the rest is mere commentary'. For me, this value is at the heart of my religion. To love and care for others as you would expect to be treated by them.

**Ruth Cohen, Jewish participant from London**

Every action, no matter how small becomes sacred if done with the view to seek the pleasure of Allah, the Arabic name of God. Harming or despising others is impossible as we all come from God and are His creatures. The Quran also says 'Do good and forbid evil' and that means we must help our fellow beings in every way we can.

**Hafiz Mohammed Naveed, Muslim participant from Halifax**

Sikhs have a great tradition of serving the community and there are many examples of people helping others in need throughout Sikh history. As Sikhs we are taught from an early age that we are to remember God's name, to work hard and to share what we earn.

**Dr Munveen (Mona) Kaur Dhariwal, Sikh participant from Leicester**

Humakta, Hukta, Hurvesta, Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds. These three words are the backbone of the Zoroastrian faith...Charity is one of the highest virtues and is commanded by Ahura Mazda, the creator God. One of our important prayers tells us that Ahura Mazda's kingdom is for the person who nourishes the poor.

**Farmeen Sorab, Zoroastrian participant from London**

## Organising similar events

It is hoped that schools, colleges or local communities will be interested in arranging similar forums around the country. Each will be unique in its mix of faiths and traditions. Each forum can be a different but exciting opportunity to bring together various perspectives, debate tough issues and seek out the common values that underpin shared citizenship in this multi-faith United Kingdom. These events could also generate ideas which will make a practical and very significant contribution to local inter faith relations.

If you are planning a youth faith forum, organisations that may be able to offer advice include the Inter Faith Network for the UK\* (020 7388 0008; ifnet@interfaith.org.uk); the National Association of SACREs (Secretary Geoffrey Teece, 0121 415 2258, g.m.teece@bham.ac.uk); the Scottish Inter Faith Council (Secretary Sister Isabel Smyth, 0141 429 4012, sifc@interfaithscotland.org); the Inter Faith Council for Wales (Secretary David Rich, 029 2089 8462, david.rich@wales.gsi.gov.uk); and the Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum (Secretary Norman Richardson, 028 9038 4328, n.richardson@stran.ac.uk).

Respect is a national TimeBank initiative, with The Prince's Trust. Its objective is to inspire and engage people of different faiths and none to give time to one another, encouraging tolerance and understanding. You may wish to register your initiative with Respect to make it better known (call Carmel Heaney on 0845 601 4008).

You can also contact the Alma Royalton-Kisch Trust (020 7359 3084) for information on applying for small grants to help with youth inter faith projects.

Ten special standing panels were created for the Forum: one for each faith, with photographs originally commissioned for the New Millennium Experience, and one featuring the Act of Commitment by representatives of the faith communities of the UK at the House of Lords in January 2000. To enquire about use of these panels for events, write to Warwick Hawkins at the Home Office Race Equality Unit, Allington Towers, 19 Allington Street, London SW1E 5EB or email warwick.hawkins@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

\* The Inter Faith Network for the UK is a body founded in 1987 to link inter faith initiatives and develop good relations between people of different faiths living in this country.

## Full report

A full report of the 10 June event is available free of charge from the Home Office Race Equality Unit (address and email as above). The report includes:

- a break-down of syndicates by faith background, gender and geographical region;
- a full transcript of points made in the syndicate sessions;
- background information on consultative arrangements, and names and of faith community representatives consulted;
- details of the composition of participants and how they were identified;
- a fuller description of the daytime event and the introductory session on the previous evening;
- the paper sent in advance to participants, containing questions they were required to consider in advance of the Forum;
- guidance notes for facilitators;
- transcripts of presentations given during the morning session by older participants from the faith communities about their experience of growing up as a person of faith in the UK and their faith perspectives on service to the community;
- transcripts of talks given during the afternoon session by individuals engaged in voluntary work with a faith dimension;
- an article on inter-faith activity in the UK by the Inter Faith Network which appeared in the official brochure;
- list of participating schools;
- whys, wherefores and lessons learnt.