



CELEBRATING FAITH

MCB

The Muslim Council of Britain
Inter Faith Relations Committee

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About The Muslim Council of Britain

The Muslim Council of Britain is a national representative Muslim umbrella body with over 500 affiliated national, regional and local organisations, mosques, charities and schools. The MCB is pledged to work for the common good of society as a whole; encouraging individual Muslims and Muslim organisations to play a full and participatory role in public life.



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MESSAGE FROM FAROOQ MURAD

Secretary General of the
Muslim Council of Britain



Human history is rich with moving accounts of how faith brought hope in the sea of despair: how it strengthened our resolve to rebuild our lives at times when we found ourselves alone and utterly helpless and how it brought people from diverse backgrounds, time and again, together.

That is why here, in the MCB, we value faith - all faiths - because faith provides the essential moorings to avoid drifting meaninglessly in the dark sea of doubt and disbelief. This is precisely why from its very inception MCB has attached enormous importance to inter faith work. The Preamble of the MCB Constitution consists of simply three verses of the holy Qur'an:

“ The members of the MCB are aspiring to be a community, ‘enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong and believing in God’. – (Ch3:110)

“ Hold fast, all together, to the bond with God and be not divided”. - (Ch3:103)

“ Help one another in virtue and God-consciousness and do not help one another in sin and transgression’. – (Ch3:110)

Guided by these principles, the MCB proactively engages in various inter faith organisations and

initiatives, taking steps to promote awareness and has always endeavoured to seek out the points that unite us, setting aside those that divide us. At the grassroots level, we encourage our affiliates to reach out to their neighbours in faith, take part in faith based social actions and promote respect and understanding. The fact that many of our affiliate mosques are holding open days/weekends and inviting others is an example of the success of such initiative. I am pleased to see some of these highlighted in this publication.

I commend and thank the Inter Faith Network for the UK for once again successfully leading the Inter Faith Week, providing a wonderful opportunity for us to celebrate faith. I would like to express my appreciation for MCB Inter Faith Relations Committee for their efforts to facilitate the Muslim community's participation in Inter Faith Week and publishing this excellent document to commemorate the week. Finally, we owe a special thanks to Lord Sheikh of Cornhill who has hosted a special event during this week to celebrate our community's inter faith activities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Farooq Murad'. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Farooq Murad
Secretary General, Muslim Council of Britain

MESSAGE FROM DR HARRIET CRABTREE

Director of the Inter Faith Network for the UK

Working together to ensure that the religious diversity of our society continues to be a source of mutual strength and enrichment is ever more vital.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) was founded in 1987 to promote good inter faith relations in the UK. It links, through membership, national faith community representative bodies; national, regional and local inter faith bodies; and educational and academic bodies with an interest in inter faith relations.

The MCB has been a member body, since its earliest days, of the IFN. Through its work with its affiliated organisations and through the contributions of individuals associated with it, the MCB has played a significant part in the building of good inter faith relations in this country as well as contributing to social wellbeing more generally in Britain. In recent years, it has strongly encouraged women and young people among its affiliates to play an even bigger part in this work and it is very good to see this reflected in the contributions to this booklet.

I thank the Secretary General of the MCB, Farooq Murad, and the Chair of its Inter Faith Relations Committee, Dr Manazir Ahsan, for the invitation to contribute a message to this booklet. Dr Ahsan is currently the Co-Chair of the IFN on behalf of the Muslim Community and also linked with the IFN's work through the Islamic Foundation of which he is Director General.

The occasion for the production of this booklet is



National Inter Faith Week (www.interfaithweek.org.uk). The Week provides an excellent opportunity for raising the profile of inter faith work and helping make better known the work of faith communities, singularly and together, for the well being of local communities. The Week is led by the IFN, working with its member bodies and in consultation with a range of partners.

National faith communities, inter faith bodies at all levels, local authorities, schools and many other institutions are marking Inter Faith Week with special events. It is most welcome that the Muslim Council of Britain is making a special contribution to the Week through an important event in the Houses of Parliament.

Of course, inter faith dialogue and cooperation are not only relevant during this high profile Week. They need to be carried forward day by day by all of us in our diverse but united UK: in the day to day dialogue in our workplaces, schools and other shared spaces; in the dialogues of scholars and of followers of different traditions; shoulder to shoulder with people of other faiths as we work together on projects to help society; and indeed, in all the contexts of our shared lives.

As the MCB's affiliates look to the shape of their continued contribution in this key area, I am sure that this booklet and the ongoing work of the MCB to support this will be a most valuable resource.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Harriet Crabtree".

Dr Harriet Crabtree
Director of the Inter Faith Network of the UK

FOREWORD

Dr Manazir Ahsan, Chair of the Inter Faith Relations Committee, Muslim Council of Britain



It is a pleasure for the MCB Inter Faith Relations Committee to participate in this year's National Inter Faith Week celebrations. Let me begin with a quotation from the Holy Qur'an:

"O mankind, We created you all from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another [*li-ta'arafu*]. The best among you in the sight of God is the most righteous and God-fearing. [Ch49:30]"

Islam, by its very meaning and essence, is a religion of peace and tolerance and urges its followers to co-operate with good causes and stand for justice, even when it goes against them and their families. Dialogue in Islam is one of the most important means of knowing and understanding each other. Ignorance is no defence as it generates misunderstanding and fear of each other and is likely to lead to suspicion and perceived threat. It is interesting to note that on 6th November 2007, in the historic inter faith meeting between Pope Benedict XVI and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, the official Vatican newspaper described the spirit of the talk in the following way "Know each other, know each other, know each other. Each one of us has always something to learn from someone else."

Inter faith work has been carried out for several decades but with the dawn of the new Millennium, it has gained tremendous impetus. We have witnessed the mushrooming of many initiatives on local, regional, national and international levels. Professor Kenneth Cragg was not wrong when he

said that now we are seeing the emergence of a new industry of dialogue.

Let me take you back a decade and narrate two very successful achievements which the Faith community attained with the active co-operation and leadership of the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN):

Firstly, some of you may recall the joint venture, initiated by the Government who invited the IFN to assist the Department for Culture, Media and Sport as part of the official Millennium celebrations. On 3rd January 2000, the UK's faith communities came together in the House of Lords and made a historic pledge – a Shared Act of Reflection and Commitment by the faith communities of the UK. This was held in the presence of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester and was attended by the then Prime Minister, Home Secretary and the then Speaker of the House of Commons, together with representatives of the faith communities.

At that time, as Co-Chair of the IFN and as a member of the Executive Committee of the MCB, I did play some role and I still vividly remember, towards the end of this event, the audience were invited to join together in the Act of Commitment. I would like to quote from the last closing sentence of this Act -

"In a world scarred by the evils of war, racism, injustice and poverty, we offer this joint Act of Commitment as we look



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

Secondly, in the last Census for England and Wales of 2001, with considerable efforts from the faith communities representing the IFN, including the MCB, the Office of National Statistics were convinced to include a section for religion on the Census form. This was indeed a great success for people of faith, who had been striving for this for many years. Although initially the then government was reluctant to accede to this request, they were gracious enough to cooperate. We are reassured that in the next Census, due to take place in 2011, this question will continue to appear on the Census form.

Good” by representatives and leaders of the faith communities was the manifestation of the powerful commitment made in January 2000 with a new pledge to work together for a harmonious, just and respectful society. That day was a defining moment and more history was made to be remembered in the annals of Inter Faith dialogue and engagement.

There are ever more signs of the manifestation of how faith can work together. In the Independent newspaper of 10th November this year, we were reminded of how this can be. Two schools, Tauheedul Islam Girls’ School in Blackburn and Blakewater College in another part of the city, the former ranked as outstanding by Ofsted, the latter showing poor results through behaviour and exam performance. For the first time, a Muslim school has been asked to help a non-faith state school and rescue it from its predicament. Already, dividends are being paid. In one of the lead articles entitled “An Example of how Faith can Work” the Independent wrote “Critics of faith schools will argue that this is only a single school and that not all the managements of these institutions are as progressive as Mr Patel. True, but what Tauheedul shows is that Muslim faith schools do not necessarily have a separatist mentality”. It is not a matter of faith only, it is a matter of collaboration and sharing for the common good.

In the context of the importance of faith to life in Britain, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, addressing the Bishops of the Church of England on 15th September this year commented that too often, intellectuals, journalists, commentators and, in particular the government, had been too quick to dismiss faith and its contribution to society. Quoting the Archbishop of Canterbury who last year said too many government initiatives about faith assumed ‘it is a problem, it’s an eccentricity and that it’s practised by oddities, foreigners and minorities’ – thus contriving to send the wrong signals about the relationship between state, faith and society. Amongst other things, the Baroness went on to discuss the faith-based contribution to



Photo courtesy of the Inter Faith Network of the UK

We have come a long way since 3rd January 2000. In November last year, England and Wales celebrated its first Faith Week. On November 16th, I was asked to speak as a Muslim representative to a gathering of faith communities at Lambeth Palace. The signing of a statement document entitled “In Co-operation for the Common



A gathering of faith community leaders and representatives at Lambeth Palace, November 2009. *Photo courtesy of Lambeth Palace*

society which is best demonstrated by the action of millions of British believers and the work of almost 30,000 faith-based charities. As the Baroness rightly said, overseas development would have been extremely limited without the input of faith charities such as Christian Aid, CAFOD, Islamic Relief, Jewish Care and Muslim Aid.

A similar yet powerful message was given in a conference held at the UN in November 2008 organised by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and attended by many heads of state and faith dignitaries. The conference looked at the concept of creating a new environment by promoting inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, understanding and co-operation for peace. The final declaration of this conference on the one hand rightly expressed concerns over “serious instances of intolerance, discrimination, expressions of hatred and harassment of religious communities of all faiths”, and on the other emphasised the “importance of promoting dialogue, understanding and tolerance as well as respect for all religions, cultures and beliefs”.

Our strength lies in unity in diversity just like the simile of a garden where flowers of various

kinds, colours and fragrances not only thrive side by side but beautify the garden and indeed the environment. As faith communities are united by a common bond of faith, it is quite natural that we make the UK a place marked by mutual understanding and respect between religions and empower all to practise their faith with freedom, honour and dignity. The great reservoir of spiritual wealth that the faith communities possess can be harnessed to uplift society and bring about proper justice and happiness everywhere. It can act as a powerful force to motivate us to work for the welfare of all in society and improve the quality of life of those who, for one reason or another, have not been able to draw upon such spiritual resources.

A meaningful dialogue and engagement is only possible when people have a deep conviction that their faith has something valuable to offer to the wider society in which they live. Similarly, in dialogue mutual understanding cannot be strengthened unless both convergence and divergence are held in a creative relationship. The culture of suspicion and mistrust has to be eliminated if any meaningful and constructive dialogue is to take place, let alone succeed. We



do not need a clash but a coalition and alliance of civilisations and people of faith and no faith.

Along with a mutual tolerance and respect, efforts have to be made to deepen the work of our inter faith, and intra faith, work in order to increase understanding between our faiths and to strengthen our co-operation in pursuit of social justice, human dignity and the common good of all citizens. There is no doubt that the roots of all global crises are in the human denial of the eternal principle of justice and compassion. Wounds of misunderstanding have to be healed and causes of concern have to be addressed with proper diligence and frankness. The framework for our partnerships should not be only face to face and side by side, but also heart to heart.

The challenges and difficulties which the human race is facing locally, nationally and internationally are many. They include, among others, the aftermath of a global financial crisis, the issue of climate change, preservation of the environment and the planet, cancellation of unfair debts, alleviation of poverty, elimination of ignorance, injustice, crime and violence, social fragmentation, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, as well as racial and religious hatred. In all these areas, the MCB as the umbrella body of the Muslim community has been active in seeking co-operation from all quarters.

Let me re-emphasise, not only an inter faith understanding but a constructive, meaningful dialogue and engagement is crucial to create a society where people of religious and non-religious belief can co-exist and demonstrate mutual respect and tolerance. Inter-religious dialogue and co-operation therefore increases awareness of the different communities and helps to demonstrate to wider society the contribution they make together for the common good and betterment of society. The approach to build a multi-cultural and multi-faith society and to live side-by-side in harmony is valued by all faiths and traditions. Islam is no exception.

On behalf of the MCB Inter Faith Relations Committee, I would like to offer my special thanks and appreciation to all those who have worked for the inter faith cause over the years and represented the MCB in many functions and seminars at home and abroad. In particular, I have no hesitation in saying Sheikh Ibrahim Mogra, the previous Chair of the Inter Faith Relations Committee, and Imam Dr Abdul Jalil Sajjid, the current Vice Chair are indeed true ambassadors of the MCB's inter faith activities worldwide. I am also deeply indebted to Dr Asad Khan, Dr Hojjat Ramzy, Chowdhury Mueenuddin, Ayesha Stout and Catherine Shaw for their tremendous support in producing this booklet and to all the contributors who have kindly agreed for their work to be included.

Dr Manazir Ahsan

ISLAMIC TEACHINGS ON INTER FAITH RELATIONS

Professor Tariq Ramadan

Professor Tariq Ramadan has written an exceedingly beautiful book on the life of the blessed Prophet, entitled *The Messenger: The Meanings of the Life of Muhammad*. Tariq Ramadan is very much a public figure, named one of *Time* magazine's most important innovators of the twenty-first century. He is among the leading Islamic thinkers in the West, with a large following around the world.

Through this work on the *Sirah*, Tariq Ramadan succeeds in exploring the Prophet's life and relates it to our times, elucidating how his message speaks to us today and how relevant and meaningful his teachings are in the contemporary world. Ramadan's message is loud and clear. Common ground with other faiths should be encouraged without any compromise of the Islamic articles of faith. Using the example of the Prophet's covenant with the Madinan Jews, Professor Ramadan seeks to develop an Islamic response to pluralism and co-existence. The covenant was based 'on the recognition of diverse affiliations and did not demand any conversion'. The principles of justice, equality, and equal dignity for all the signatories (whether Jewish or Muslim, Medina natives or immigrants from Mecca, Aws or Khazarj) were mentioned in it.

The following are extracts from the book and are examples of Islamic teaching on inter faith relations:

Facing the Negus

"As for Jafar and his community [in Abyssinia],



they had found a predominantly Christian country where, although they were exiles and did not share the population's faith, they were received, protected, and tolerated.

They had decided to say the truth: at the most hazardous moment of the encounter with the Negus, they had neither tried to evade the question nor lied about what the Prophet Muhammad said of Jesus, son of Mary. They indeed risked being sent back and extradited, but they were not in the same situation as Ammar, who under torture had verbally denied his faith to save his life. In this case, then, in spite of the dangers involved, there was no way out: the Muslims kept to their beliefs, which they expressed with sincerity and honesty. They had no other choice but to say the truth, and so they did.

Besides, it should be noted that Jafar had at first set forth the similarities between the two Revelations. The first verses he had recited clearly showed that the source of the message was the same and that Muslims, when accepting the new Revelation, worshiped the same God as Christians and recognised their prophet. It was the Meccan emissaries who had tried to point out the differences in order to make trouble, but Jafar was just as quick to staunchly explain the message of his faith with its distinctions and differences. The mere presence of the Muslims in Abyssinia basically sent the Christians another message: that the Muslims had recognised in the Negus a man of principle and justice, and this was why they had decided to seek refuge in his land. The Negus was not a Muslim, but he had perfectly heard



the twofold meaning, explicit and implicit, of the message brought by the Muslims: their God is the same, whatever the differences between their texts and our beliefs; their values, of respect and justice, are the same whatever the discrepancies between the religions' texts. The king heard and welcomed those believers of another faith."

With non-Muslims

"It was a similar attitude of trust that had made it possible for Muslims to emigrate to Abyssinia, under protection of a king whom the Prophet trusted even though he was not a Muslim. This attitude is to be found throughout the Prophet's life: he established his relationships in the name of trust and the respect of principles, and not exclusively on the basis of similar religious affiliation. His Companions had understood this as well, and they did not hesitate to develop solid ties with non-Muslims in the name of kinship or friendship, on the basis of mutual respect and trust, even in perilous situations.....

....The Prophet himself was a model of equity toward those who did not share his faith. Through all the years of his mission, he had continued to receive important deposits from non-Muslim traders who went on dealing with him and wholly trusted him. On the eve of his departure for Medina, Muhammad asked Ali to give back one by one to their respective owners the deposits he still held; he scrupulously applied the principles of honesty and justice that Islam had taught him, whomever he dealt with, be they Muslims or non-Muslims"

With the Jews

"He immediately drew up on a mutual assistance agreement between the Muslims and the Jews who lived in the oasis. The terms of the covenant were primarily based on the recognition of diverse affiliations and did not demand any conversion. The principles of justice, equality, and equal dignity for all the signatories (whether Jewish

or Muslim, Medina natives or immigrants from Mecca, Aws, or Khazraj) were mentioned in it. Referring to the Jews, the text stipulates: "They have the same rights and the same duties" (lahum ma lana wa alayhim ma alayna), which in effect implied that they fully and equally belonged to the local community (ummah). It stated that the rights of each person would be defended by all, and should a conflict with the polytheists break out, they were all to stand together and not enter into separate alliances or peace agreements. The text stipulated that in case of dispute, the Prophet would be answerable for the strict and equitable implementation of this agreement."

The Najran Christians

"This verse from the fifth surah (the last injunction to be revealed) states the terms of a privileged relationship between Muslims and Christians, based on two essential qualities: sincerity and humility. With Christians, as with all other spiritual or religious traditions, the invitation to meet, share, and live together fruitfully will always remain based on these three conditions: trying to get to know the other, remaining sincere (hence honest) during the encounter and the debates, and finally, learning humility in regard to one's claim to possess the truth. Such is the message the Prophet bore in his relationship with the faithful of other religions. As can be seen, he did not hesitate to question and even contradict the Christians' beliefs (such as the Trinity or the role of priests), but in the end his attitude was based on knowledge, sincerity, and humility, which are the three conditions of respect. They were free to leave, and the dialogue went on with the Prophet's envoy."

Extracts from *The Messenger: The Meanings of the Life of Muhammad*, Penguin: London (2007), pp. 61-117

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THE MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN'S INTER FAITH WORK

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) is a national representative Muslim umbrella body with over 500 affiliated national, regional and local organisations, mosques, charities and schools. The MCB is pledged to work for the common good of society as a whole; encouraging individual Muslims and Muslim organisations to play a full and participatory role in public life.



MCB is committed to working with other faith communities for the common good of society. For example, in July 2010, Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, then the Assistant Secretary General of MCB, met with twenty senior faith European Leaders, from fourteen member states, to discuss poverty and social exclusion.

In May 2010, Dr Muhammad Abdul Bari, the then Secretary General, travelled to Vienna to meet with over 300 faith leaders from forty European countries. Dr Bari chaired a session on Muslim contribution, communication and interaction in a pluralistic society.

In December 2007, Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra – then Chair of MCB's Inter Faith Relations Committee, took part in an Edinburgh's inter faith week event with the Episcopal Bishop of Edinburgh, Brian Smith. The event involved a dialogue between the speakers and audience members. Mr Smith commented that "Muslim leadership throughout

the world has recently made an unprecedented and united call for a meeting of minds, and a working together for peace, with Christian leaders throughout the world. This must be celebrated, taken to heart, and considered by us all at our meetings during the week."



Imam Abdul Jalil Sajid, Vice Chair, MCB Inter Faith Relations Committee, has participated in a number of seminars and conferences on inter faith dialogue both in this country and abroad. Imam Sajid chairs and is a member of a number of faith-related organisations. In 2008, on behalf of the MCB, he was one of the speakers in a public debate in Brussels on bridging inter-religious divides.

In July 2007, the Muslim Council of Britain worked in partnership with Thursday's Child to organise an ambitious weekend of exploration and celebration of faith held at West Ham Memorial Recreation Ground. The event attempted to give voice to the silent majority of the peace loving people and foster community cohesion in the wake of 7/7. It involved prayer, inter faith seminars, talks, storytelling and some performances.

The celebration gained an Early Day Motion in the Parliament and received endorsement from twenty MPs, then Mayor Ken Livingston and Number 10 Downing Street as well as many faith groups. Dr Abdul Bari, then Secretary General of MCB, spoke at the opening along with leaders from other faith groups.



Former MCB Secretary General Sir Iqbal Sacranie with Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor at an inter faith social justice action organised by London Citizens

Diocese of Bristol Welcomes MCB Books for Schools Project

Books for Schools is a project, set up by MCB to help address the need of teachers around the country for accurate educational resources about Islam and improve inter faith. The project has been launched regionally in several areas of the country, including Bristol where Ms Katy Staples, Schools Adviser, Diocese of Bristol said: "The importance of Religious Education being taught in schools is well recognised, being seen as a tool for developing appreciation and respect between different sections of our society. We are grateful that these new teaching resources will allow children to learn more about Islam, increasing their understanding in an ever changing world."

MCB Representatives Visit Schools to Promote Inter Faith Understanding

In October 2010, the Vice Chair of the MCB's Social and Family Affairs committee, Mr Bulbul Ali, visited St Bonaventure's School in Forest Gate, London. Miss Walker, Deputy Head, said "We are an all boys Catholic School and were doing a project for the day with Year 8 boys where they would be able to compare similarities and differences of our Church with a Jewish and Muslim place of worship. This was a great opportunity for community cohesion and was a great success. The boys were able to have a lot of their questions answered. In November 2010, representatives from MCB attended Marlborough Primary School, West London, to provide inset day training for over thirty staff. With over 50% of the school's pupils coming from Muslim families, the staff were keen to learn more about Islam. The headteacher, Jessica Finer, said – "The day was both interesting and informative. Staff were able to ask questions about issues that they face regularly in school which gave a personalised element to the training."





Farooq Murad, MCB Secretary General, at an inter faith event in 2010 honouring the contribution of Commonwealth soldiers in the First and Second World Wars.

Inter faith Iftar Gathering

During Ramadan 2010, MCB held an Inter Faith Iftar gathering. The main objective of this event was to share the concepts of fasting in different religions. Invited guests represented a wide range of religions, including Jainism, Judaism, Baha'ism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity (from Church of England, United reform Church and Methodist Church). The event was appreciated and enjoyed.

United in Sport

MCB's former Assistant Secretary General (and now head of the Mosques and Community Affairs Committee), Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, met with Canon Michael Ainsworth (rector from the St-George-in-the-East Church) and Rabbi Lionel



Rosenfeld (Western Marble Arch synagogue) to show their collective support for the England Football Team as the much awaited World Cup campaign in South Africa drew closer. Shaykh Mogra commented "Football and sport in general have real power to bring together people of different faiths and communities and is an excellent opportunity to illustrate that there is much in common between us".

Inter faith forum exchange – Bosnia and Tower Hamlets

In July 2009, Mr Farrukh Hassan, representative of MCB, joined the Tower Hamlets inter faith forum, which took a group of people from different faiths and backgrounds on an exchange trip to Bosnia. Mr Hassan commented that "This journey surely reaffirmed my belief that the survival of humanity is in respecting each others' culture and faith. Prior to my Bosnia visit, I was involved in inter faith activities but I am adamant to speed up my input in community cohesion by meeting people from different faiths and arranging meetings where people can express and share their true feelings and experiences with each other"

MCB Conducts Inter Faith Survey

In 2008, MCB urged all its affiliates to complete a questionnaire on their inter faith activities.



The results were used to inform MCB's response to an important consultation conducted by the government called 'Face-to-face and Side-by-side', a framework for inter faith dialogue and social action. Findings from this survey show a genuine desire to participate in inter faith work is to be found in all types of Muslim religious and civil society organisations. It also found that inter faith activities are proceeding in both formal and informal setting and that the two Eid celebrations have proved a positive, popular opportunity for bridge building. The survey also emphasised the importance of maintaining a balanced, shared dialogue and proactive interaction.

Multi Faith Group for Healthcare Chaplaincy (MFGHC)



The Muslim Council of Britain has played a proactive role in the development of inter faith work in healthcare chaplaincy since 1997. The Multi Faith Joint National Working Party (MFJNWP) was formed in 1998 and included representatives of MCB.

The MFJNWP was tasked by the Department of Health to draft a guidance document on Multi Faith Healthcare Chaplaincy which it concluded in 2002. A number of other MCB members played important role in this work. The MFJNWP was wound up and a new organisation, Multi Faith Group for Healthcare Chaplaincy, was formed to take over the co-ordination work from MFJNWP and it was formally launched at an event in the Palace of Westminster on Wednesday 25th June 2003. MFGHC includes representatives of the nine World Faiths: Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian Faiths.

Mr Chowdhury Mueen Uddin has been elected Chairman of the MFGHC for a two year term starting from January 2011.

The Multi-Faith Group for Healthcare Chaplaincy was launched formally at a small event in the Palace of Westminster on Wednesday 25th June 2003.



INTER FAITH IN THE COMMUNITY

Selected highlights of the inter faith work carried out by organisations affiliated to the MCB.

Northern Ireland Muslim Family Association and the Belfast Islamic Centre

The **Northern Ireland Muslim Family Association and the Belfast Islamic Centre** have been working alongside colleagues from other faith communities in Northern Ireland to lobby for changes to the Northern Ireland Assembly's plans for promoting good relations. The government's plans were published in the consultation document "Cohesion, Sharing and Integration" and included no reference to the need to develop inter faith activities. There has been a very active campaign to highlight the need to include support for inter faith activities. This campaign culminated in a submission by the Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum. The submission is available at www.niinterfaithforum.org/. Both the Northern Ireland Muslim Family Association and the Belfast Islamic Centre have played a very active part in the campaign and are represented on the Executive Committee of the Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum.

Balham Mosque and Tooting Islamic Centre

Both **Balham Mosque and Tooting Islamic Centre** have been playing a pivotal role in ensuring strong inter faith relations are upheld in South London and surrounding areas. We recognise the importance of contributing to society in a proactive manner thereby ensuring that the Islamic ethos of maintaining peaceful relations with all members of community, regardless of race and religion are upheld.

This year we have participated in various activities of inter faith relations and both the Mosques continue to actively take part in Wandsworth Borough

Council's multi-faith meetings. This ensures the diverse needs of all communities can be discussed and any matter that requires further attention may be dealt with honourably.

In early October this year, Balham Mosque was represented at the Putney Vale Cemetery and Crematorium's annual multi faith memorial service to commemorate family, friends and loved ones who have passed away. The ceremony was well attended and included representatives of the Jewish, Christian and Hindu religions. Later in the year we will also be playing an active role in Faith Direct, a Wandsworth Council initiative that encourages strong inter faith relations. Additionally both Mosques have also welcomed visitors of various faiths and non-faiths thereby allowing them to gain an insight of our place of worship.

Bolton Council of Mosques

At the **Bolton Council of Mosques** we have many inter faith projects that we lead on: from our Bolton inter faith trail; to an annual Spirit of Bolton event in the town centre square; to our annual Inter faith football competition for young people; to the country's first (we believe) inter faith Chaplaincy Development Programme; as well as something that we would love to share with others... our Interfaith Leadership Development Programme.





The Inter Faith Leadership Development Programme is based on the Muslim Council of Britain's Leadership Development Programme (LDP) model, using the same trainers and the same content. The only difference is that we ran it for an inter faith group, to help develop leadership across the faith communities in Bolton and to allow faith leaders to learn and come together over a period of four months.

It was hugely successful, with participants -- both male and female, from various backgrounds, and all of whom were in leadership roles -- coming together for a better society. It is a testimony to the excellent work of MCB in developing the Leadership Development Programme.

It allowed us to remind participants of the fundamental and core values that we all share as humanity, whatever our faith beliefs and backgrounds may be. The LDP was a clear example of Big Society in action, through leadership development the group was able to identify

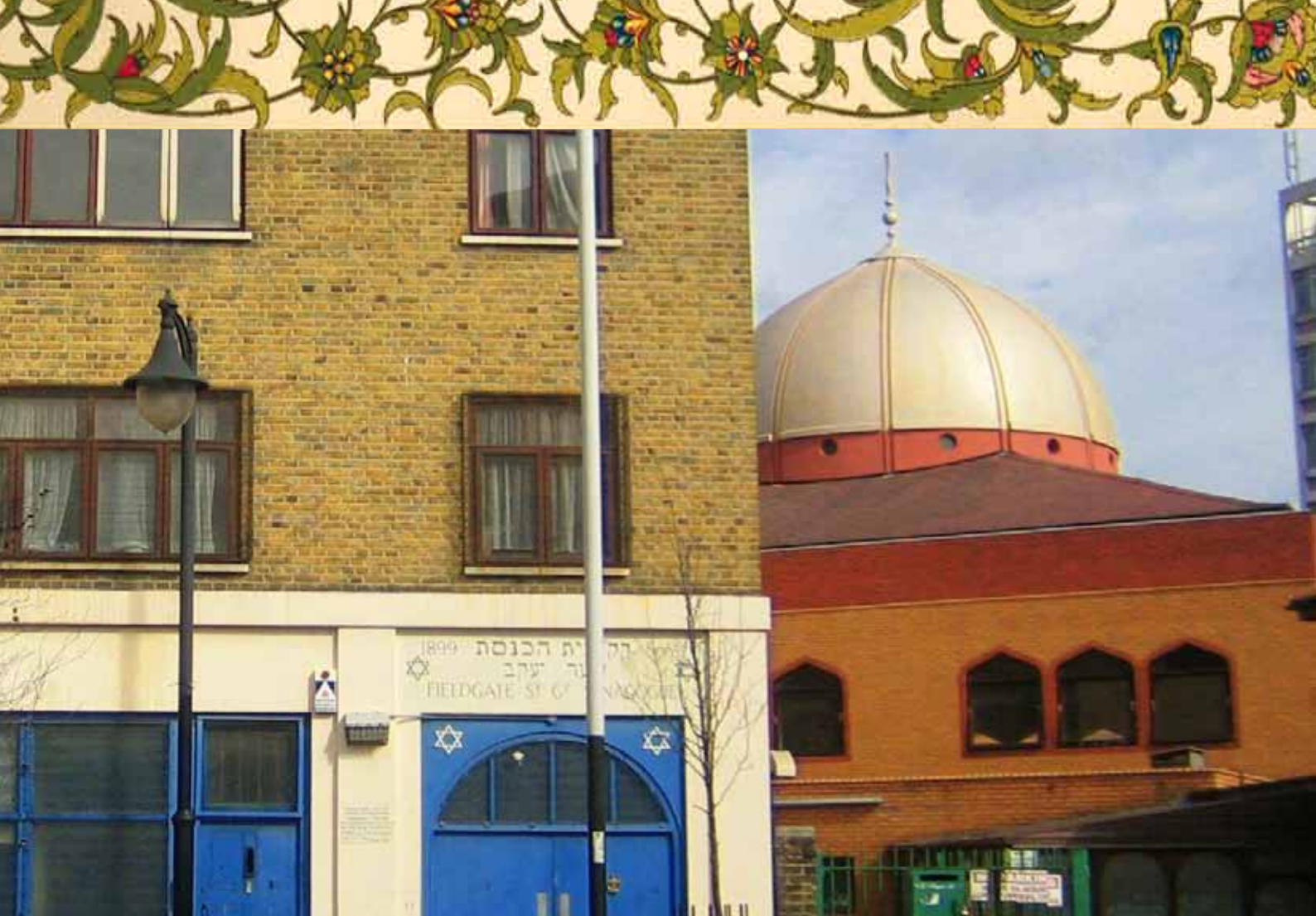
approaches to the challenges we all face.

MADE in Europe

When the world leaders came to an agreement to cut carbon emissions at the UN Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen, **MADE in Europe** launched a project to keep climate change on the agenda. The War on Climate Change project offered young Christians and Muslims the chance to develop their own climate change campaigns. Those selected were given training on climate change issues and offered placements at leading NGOs. They then carried out their own mini climate change campaigns to inspire local people in their communities to take action. Volunteers came up with creative campaigns such as the "Think Local" campaign which aimed to raise awareness among school children about how transport emissions contribute to climate change.

One of the young Christian participants said: "I was excited about the prospect of young Christians and





Muslims being an example to others and showing people what can be done when faith is put into action.”

East London Mosque

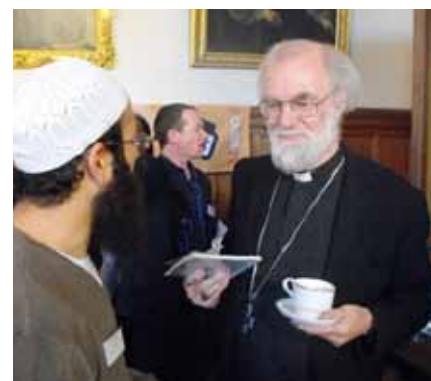
The **East London Mosque** has a proud history of working with people of other faiths. Many non-Muslims were actively involved in establishing the Mosque and worked hand in hand with the then small Muslim community in London. The Mosque enjoyed good neighbourly relations with the Jewish community, particularly with The Great Fieldgate Street Synagogue (established in 1899), which stands next to the rear entrance of the Mosque.

The East London Mosque is a member of the Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum (THIFF) and has jointly organised a number of inter faith events to facilitate dialogue and improve mutual respect. One of the most significant contributions of Inter faith work was in the immediate aftermath of the 7th July 2005 London Bombing. The East London Mosque along with various faith leaders came together and issued a joint statement condemning the bombing as well as urging all that this horrific

incident should not divide our communities. Furthermore, on following day a press conference was organised with local faith leaders and a vigil was held outside the Aldgate underground station where seven people had died. It was crucial to show our solidarity as responsible citizens of London and to maintain community relations in those difficult times.

The East London Mosque is also proud to be a founding member of The East London Citizens Organisation (TELCO) which is part of London Citizens. Through TELCO, the Mosque has had the opportunity to work with the wider society on many issues of concern to the citizens of London. Over the last 15 years the Mosque has contributed to many campaigns and activities such as the Living Wage and the City Safe Campaign. Members and volunteers of the Mosque have also benefited immensely through the leadership training provided by TELCO which improved their confidence to play an active role in strengthening civil society.

TELCO’s contribution in acquiring the car park land from a private developer on which the London



A selection of interfaith and outreach activities conducted by Al-Muntada and Discover Islam

Muslim Centre is built is very much appreciated by the Muslim community of London. TELCO brought together clergy from across East London together with community leaders from many different traditions to campaign for the land to be made available to enhance the excellent community work of the Mosque. This successful campaign not only won the land for the community at a discounted price from the developer but also strengthened relations and understanding across faith communities.

More recently, The East London Mosque has been involved in the formation of Faiths Forum for London and is currently playing an active role in fulfilling the objectives of this new body.

Al-Muntada Al-Islami

Al-Muntada Al-Islami Trust was established in 1986 as an independent organisation to cater for the London Muslim Community.

As part of its objectives to promote the common good, Al-Muntada initiated, **Discover Islam** is an educational organisation based in London dedicated to peace, harmony and goodwill through a holistic knowledge of Islam.

Discover Islam promotes a better understanding about Islam among the close and wider community through organisation of various activities.

Since 2008, we have organised various inter faith and outreach activities including communal Eid and Ramadan celebrations, participating in inter faith panels for secondary schools and private organisations, organising meet your Muslim neighbour events, organising Islamic Awareness Weeks and holding our 'Discover Islam' open days.

Discover Islam's 'Meet Your Muslim Neighbour' events aims to clear the misconceptions about Islam and promote a better understanding among the community.

These events are organised in a Local Library, Townhall or a Mosque and local residents are invited to learn more about Islam. Events showcase Audio and video presentations, Exhibitions, Free Food, Gifts, Childrens activities and one-to-one dialogue.



NARRATIVES

British Muslims share their inter faith experience

Dr Asad Khan

I am currently the Secretary of the MCB’S Inter Faith Relations Committee and am founder of Ark2Ark, a self development consultancy based on Islamic principles.

For me, nothing really beats diversity – I love it. I can’t begin to imagine what the world would be like if we were all the same? However, we have to help each other to bring our shared ideals and principles into a living reality. Words and statements are as good as they are practised. I want to be amongst those who are striving to put the principles and higher moral values into action with a genuine concern for the well-being and welfare of all. My only hope, prayer and ambition is that the interactions are sincere and mutually beneficial so that the tide of good can rise to overcome the corruption and injustices that pervade our societies, and we can seek to enjoy the smile on each other’s faces.

Nadeem Javaid

Over the last year I have been involved in many

different inter faith activities. I am one of the inaugural Faiths Act Fellows, a programme of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation (TBFF) and the Inter Faith Youth Core (IFYC). The Faiths Act campaign is about bringing together young people of different faiths to work towards achieving the millennium development goals. I was based in London with my host organisation, the Christian Muslim Forum. The campaign hosted many multi faith events and service projects and raised over £200,000 for charities working in Africa to help combat malaria. As a member of the Young Muslim Advisory Group (YMAG) I brought in an inter faith agenda and always advocated the importance of multi faith action when meeting and advising government ministers. This also led me to travel to the United States and meet with the Department of Homeland Security to talk about the importance of inter faith action when engaging with American Muslims. I am also part of the Waltham Forest Faith Forum co-opted as a youth representative.

Bilal Hassam

Born and raised in Leicester, one of the most diverse cities in the UK, I have always lived





alongside and interacted with people from all walks of life. However it was only upon reaching university that I truly began to explore what faith meant to me and what it meant to people outside my faith tradition.

After numerous inter-religious encounters I could see the real potential this line of work has to build genuine relationships and understanding across faith lines. I subsequently suspended my Medical Studies to spend a year working as one of thirty worldwide Faiths Act Fellows for the Tony Blair Faith Foundation and the Interfaith Youth Core (Chicago.) Serving as an inter-religious ambassador for the UN Millennium Development Goals, I worked to mobilise the faith communities in the UK to join forces in tackling global poverty issues. I'm currently studying an MA in Inter-Religious Relations and have been nominated a contributing scholar to the 'State of Formation,' a forum for emerging religious leaders founded by the Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Parliament of the World Religions. In addition, I serve as a Trustee for the Muslim Community Fund, an advisor for the Muslim Youth Helpline and am involved in various organisations and initiatives within the British Muslim and European community.

As a Faiths Act Fellow Alum I continue to work as a freelance consultant, trainer and speaker around multi-faith engagement and issues pertaining to young British Muslims.

Furqan Naem

Born and raised in Manchester and having friends from different types of background and faiths,

I wanted to get involved in inter faith work as a means to find out what binds us together. Faith plays an important part in my life and I wanted to share that experience with others whilst learning what impact faith plays in other people's lives. I have always believed in working together to make this world a better place and I believe faith has a massive part to play. For me, inter faith is about sitting around tables and discuss similarities and differences. But we should take it one step further and focus around the common good to noble acts that make a difference to people's lives and the society that we live in.

My first inter faith conference was in 2009 when I was invited to Chicago as a young faith leader from the UK. I was connected with hundreds of other young leaders from around the world as we heard inspiring messages from the likes of Eboo Patel. I came back energised and after seeing the great strides the Americans have taken in the inter faith movement I wanted to embody the same passion and vision in the UK. To date, I have been involved in the National NUS Inter faith forum – a body of young student faith leaders trying to adopt more inter faith works and action across campuses in the UK. Currently we are all gearing up for the inter faith week and I am helping the NUS to facilitate





the week and organising events. Last year in my capacity as Head of Services for the Federation of Students Islamic Societies, I attended a number of meetings with other national faith based student organisations to see how we can work better together.

From my work in inter faith over the last two years I have found that religious pluralism goes beyond mere tolerance for diversity and requires that we build positive relationships and work with one another. It should be an area where we respect one another's religious identity, develop mutually enriching relationships with each other and work together through our common values and goals to make this world a better place.

Abdulla-al-Mulla

The reason I am involved in inter faith is firstly thanks to God alone, He guided me to be where I am today, as I did not plan to be in this position, but He chose me, so thanks be to God, Lord of the worlds. Secondly, to build bridges within the larger community in Cardiff, so we may work for the benefit of us all by the willingness of God.

An important issue I found during inter faith activities is the amount of misinformation that exists, from a Muslim perspective on what is thought to be known of Christianity for instance, and what non-Muslims think they know of Islam.

Hence it is important to engage, exchange and learn each others faith, not in the sake of converting one to the other faith, but to fulfill the Prophetic legacy, instructed by God, when he engaged with the People of the Book:

“Say, ‘People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us take others beside God as lords.’ If they turn away, say, ‘Witness our devotion to Him.’”[3:64]

Recently, I was invited to attend the inter faith youth conference in the U.S.A. There they made great emphasis on social action via inter faith work, and I was not convinced until I heard the tale of the civil rights movement in America. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a Christian minister who was influenced by Ghandi's approach of non-violent activism and his Hindu faith. Alongside him was Rabbi Heschel who is known for his quote after one march with Dr. King: “For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying.” Among those activists was Malcolm X, a man who converted to Islam, and who was bold and frank in his activism for the rights of others. After he performed the Muslim Pilgrimage in Mecca, he wrote: “They asked me what about the Hajj[Pilgrimage] had impressed me the most. ... I said, ‘The brotherhood! The people of all races, colour, from all over the world coming together as one!’ It has proved to me the power of the One God.”

This all proved to me that the great civil rights movement was an inter faith movement, motivated by God and faith. I do not see why such leaders cannot exist today.

Raheema Caratella

Youth Engagement Worker

The Leicester Inter faith Youth Hub was launched in January 2010 with the support of the St. Philip's Centre, Leicester, and the Faiths Act Fellows from the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. The Hub's aim is to encourage intercultural and inter faith interactions by supporting young people through informal education, sporting activities, and creative arts.





At our events we also endeavour to bridge the generation gap between young and old. We invite faith and community leaders to showcase the positive work hub members are involved in. These range from community service, active citizenship, inter faith dialogue and social action initiatives. The hub host's monthly events; a few include The Big Tidy Up, A Multi Faith Leadership Residential, A World Malaria Day Dinner, A World Environment Day event and the STAND UP against POVERTY campaign.

This movement has enabled young people to lead a grassroots multi faith social action movement; working towards the betterment of a united Leicester. Celebrating our diversity and respecting our differences, the "Hub" promotes action using the shared values at the core of our faith traditions. By focussing on shared values like service to our community and helping those in need we have been able to sustain the movement. This year's signature campaign has been malaria, Africa's biggest killer. This global focus was one that young people of different faiths could relate to and our motto soon became 'Think Global.....Act Local'.

The work of the Leicester Inter faith Youth Hub is crucial in challenging stereotypes and breaking down the barriers between faith groups. The hub's main focus is to strengthen relationships between communities by bringing together young people of different faiths to volunteer their time in the various community events and projects on offer. This provides the common ground to engage and explore issues of faith in the context of working together towards a big society.



Hub members are making a positive contribution to the community they live in, they are developing their confidence and skills. These young people are reporting an increased confidence in engaging and contributing to wider society.

Karem Issa

I was employed as a Faiths Act Fellow in the inaugural year of the programme (June 2009-Jun 2010), run by the Tony Blair Faith Foundation/ Inter faith Youth Core (USA). I was based at Blackburn Cathedral and worked to encourage inter faith cooperation around the common goal of eradicating deaths due to malaria around the world. Blackburn is one of the most segregated towns in England, and some of my activities in Blackburn and the wider Lancashire region included:

- Recruiting and training a multi-faith team of volunteers who organised a range of fundraising and awareness events about malaria.
- Giving the Sunday sermon at Blackburn Cathedral with a Catholic colleague on multi-faith action and global poverty.
- Leading a group of young British Muslims to the Jewish Christian Muslim (JCP) Inter faith Conference March 2009, in Wuppertal, Germany.
- Active participation with the Christian-Muslim Youth Statement on Climate Change, drawn up by Lambeth Palace.
- Conducted a speaker tour of six Bosnian towns in March 2010, organised by the Islamic Leadership in BiH, presenting on the topic of "Muslims in the UK and Multi-faith Cooperation".
- Involved in drawing up the Muslim-Christian Local Encounter Letter to imams and priests at Lambeth Palace, July 2010.
- Currently planning an inter faith trip to Ghana for community leaders in the UK.

Alaa Elaydi

Over the past years, I have been intensely involved with inter faith work, especially through the IF As-



sociation. The IF Association is planning on hosting many dialogue forums that will help to increase students' awareness and knowledge on different faith perspectives on particular topics. We have weekly coffee afternoons, where anyone from the university community is welcome to attend and can join the conversation.

The IF Association is also part of an inter faith volunteer project, which will host many students inspired by their different faiths to work on a community project. We have collaborated with The Three Faiths Forum to host a volunteering programme in a children's care home, and mentoring refugee children.

Alongside all the events and speaker discussions we plan to host, the IF Association also views itself as a liberation forum, that will work to change people's attitudes and outlooks on other faiths, and on inter faith as a concept.

Hena Ahsan

Growing up in Leicester and the Islamic Foundation as my second home, I always felt intrigued by the role of faith on both the individual and the wider world around me. Through centuries the importance of faith has always been a huge part of society. Its contribution has been felt for years and it is through learning about our past that we make

a brighter future. I personally think of the past or religious heritage as a precious jewel that if it is lost, the future becomes difficult to understand and enrich. Inter faith work helps to bridge an understanding and respect between others bringing together the past and the present. It creates a continuity of beliefs and hope for positive developments for the future.

Having participated in inter faith residential and courses, I have felt inspired by the many amazing people I've met over the years. Everyone comes from different backgrounds and have walked different journeys through life yet we all held commonalities which bound us together along with a greater understanding of our differences. With the increasing notion of secularisation the world of faith has become increasingly strained along with those who follow it. To these people the world can seem like a dimming light, like the wick of a candle struggling to stay alight. Inter faith work rekindles that flame, that belief and that light that many young people draw their identity and belonging from.

I believe that everyone, no matter who they are, carries a light just by living together on this earth. It is this light that helps to brighten the light of others and uplift others to believe. Believe in themselves and in the common good of others because together we are that light and we are that



faith for a better future. As God says in the Qur'an that Allah has made us into nations and tribes so that we may know one another, whilst its nice living for ourselves, life means so much more when we open our hearts and minds and share our lives with others.

Zeenat Azmi

I have taken part in some innovative inter faith projects in Manchester, bridging the gap in communication between Muslim and Jewish communities through creative means. I was a member of the Muslim Jewish Youth Theatre at the Royal Exchange theatre as part of the 'In Place of War' project, in which we spent weekly drama workshop sessions learning to trust and understand each other and examine new perspectives.

From this platform we went on to learn more about our faiths, inviting each other for religious gatherings and developing new creative projects - from a Muslim Jewish Theatre Project to collaborating on artwork and running craft markets for other causes, from environmental awareness campaigns to raising funds for the Artsbridge institute, which aimed to create dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian children through art. I have also collaborated in many ways with a Jewish artist to help engage people - for example, in artwork for the Manchester Cathedral Anne Frank project which traced our migrant communities' heritage

and histories.

This year, I began work with a Ghanaian pastor for an adult education centre in his village for women of all faiths- so both local Muslim and Christian women are given space to study with him at the church and no distinction is made between them. I have had the privilege of seeing the different attitudes to inter faith interaction in Ghana and the common spirit of brotherhood that prevails there that I hope it can be an inspiring example for us here in the UK.



THE MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN

“To empower the Muslim community to contribute towards achieving a cohesive, just and successful British society”

The Muslim Council of Britain is a national representative Muslim umbrella body with over 500 affiliated national, regional and local organisations, mosques, charities and schools.

Established in 1997, the MCB is pledged to work for the common good of society as a whole; encouraging individual Muslims and Muslim organisations to play a full and participatory role in public life.

Aims and Objectives

- 1.** To promote cooperation, consensus and unity on Muslim affairs in the UK.
- 2.** To encourage and strengthen all existing efforts being made for the benefit of the Muslim community.
- 3.** To work for a more enlightened appreciation of Islam and Muslims in the wider society.
- 4.** To establish a position for the Muslim community within British society that is fair and based on due rights.
- 5.** To work for the eradication of disadvantages and forms of discrimination faced by Muslims.
- 6.** To foster better community relations and work for the good of society as a whole.