

THE INTERFAITH MANIFESTO

Initiated by



United Religions Initiative UK
Action for Peace & Prosperity

PREAMBLE

As the United Kingdom approaches the General Election, inter-faith dialogue in the country is facing a crisis. Global conflicts, rising online hate speech, the ageing profile of inter-faith activists, and the impact of the cost of living crisis on civic engagement are all contributing to community tension and division. It is deeply troubling to witness divisive narratives unfold, with some attempting to drive a wedge between communities. If left unchecked, this can pose significant dangers. Wars, conflicts, and sectarian differences abroad can spill over into the UK, as we see in the present tensions on university campuses between Muslim and Jewish students.

We see an increase in individual faith communities seeking to pursue their own agendas, at the expense of community cohesion and the pursuit of the common good. It is critical that as people of different faiths, we should stand together, celebrating our diversity and opposing hate in all its forms. That is why it is important that the Government should engage with the inter-faith sector as well as with individual faith communities. There are some 200 local, regional, national and international inter-faith bodies based in the UK, engaged not only in promoting dialogue but in hosting multi-faith social action projects in communities. The Inter Faith Network for the UK played a vital role in linking and resourcing these disparate groups, and its recent closure was a body blow to the sector.

The rich diversity of faiths, cultures, and beliefs in our country share many important values. (The Appendix contains a set of Universal Statements reflecting these values.) Political differences should not divide us; instead, people from different backgrounds need to speak together in the universal language of shared values, present a united front, and engage in constructive dialogue with those who lead our country.

Faith communities have always supported the most vulnerable and marginalised in our society, not least during the Covid-19 pandemic. Recent Governments have understood this, and it is hoped that this learning will not be forgotten by Ministers and officials. It is recognised that successive Governments have made considerable efforts to engage with faith communities in Britain, for instance by the appointment of a Faith Minister and Faith Envoys. Statements made by different Parties during the Election campaign to the effect that these efforts will be continued are welcome.

However, it is concerning that there remains reluctance among some in authority – locally and nationally – to engage with religion and the way that it motivates millions of believers to do good in our society. It is time for faith and community groups to lead the way in building cultures of peace, with the support of the government. We believe that the Government can do this without compromising the secular principle.

Against this background, the United Religions Initiative UK, in partnership with other inter-faith organisations (e.g. the Nishkam Centre in Birmingham), takes the opportunity of the General Election to make a number of recommendations to Government and to the UK's faith communities. These are set out in this Manifesto, which should be considered in parallel with the Open Letter from The Faith and Belief Policy Collective to incoming Ministers, and with the recent “interfaith hustings” in St Martin’s-in-the-Fields church.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The first set of recommendations is addressed to the incoming Government of whichever Party. The second set is addressed to faith communities themselves.

Recommendations to the Incoming Government

- We call upon new Ministers to make a commitment to create an infrastructure and essential resources for the inter-faith sector, filling the gap created by the closure of the Inter Faith Network for the UK.
- The incoming Government is invited to endorse national Inter Faith Week (November 2024), and Interfaith Harmony Week (February 2025), including through Ministerial attendance at events where appropriate.
- Teaching about the value of inter-faith activity as part of the Religious Education syllabus in state schools should be strengthened.
- Ministers should give consideration to the re-establishment of regional inter-faith bodies, which can engage better locally and share good practice with each other.
- Government should commit better resources, training and capacity for a higher level of faith literacy within the public sector, to meet the needs of people of all faith backgrounds.
- Wider use of existing tools for inter faith engagement, e.g. the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation (www.charterforforgiveness.org) and the Faith Covenant (<https://www.faihandssociety.org/covenant/>) to guide work by Government to end religiously motivated violence, promote a culture of peace, and engage productively with faith communities and inter-faith organisations.
- Develop an approach to bring together representatives of different faiths and non-theistic beliefs to discuss national and international matters of shared concern, and to agree on joint approaches and strategy.
- Find further ways to enhance the security of places of worship; paying as much attention to preventative approaches as to reactive measures.
- Give official recognition of the relevance to public life of the Universal Statements set out in this document, and publicly acknowledge the positive role of religious belief in UK society.
- We call upon political parties to show mutual respect and courtesy throughout the remainder of the General Election campaign – recognising that the great majority of politicians are motivated by the search for the common good.
- URI UK is ready to step up and be a critical friend of the government in moving forward. We invite new Ministers to meet with us and other inter-faith actors within the first 100 days of government.

Recommendations to Faith Communities

- Active participation in the democratic process is crucial. We encourage all eligible community members to vote, prioritising issues that align with our shared values and promote the common good. Voting is a crucial part of civic participation, along with volunteering.
- Communications – between faith groups and with Government – should be peaceful, avoiding personal attacks and inflammatory language. This is particularly important when social media is being used. In times of political tension, fostering empathy and understanding is vital for an inclusive and harmonious community.
- We urge faith communities to focus on positive changes and promote constructive solutions, working together for a just and equitable society.
- Faith communities should hold politicians accountable, in a way that is respectful and offers support in promoting integrity and compassion in public life.

BENEFITS FOR SOCIETY

The following section is intended to remind incoming Ministers of the benefits that adherence to a faith community can bring to wider society; and are thus arguments in favour of productive engagement between Government and faith groups.

Encouraging civic engagement

Adherence to a faith community acts as a subtle yet powerful catalyst for individual behavioral change, often yielding invisible yet significant benefits. As communities become more cohesive and supportive, social dynamics shift and individuals become more likely to participate in civic life, for instance through voting and volunteering. There is also a reduction in the overall state welfare burden.

Crime Prevention

Increased community engagement and stronger social bonds can lead to reduced crime rates, potentially lowering law enforcement and judicial system costs. For instance, faith communities can play an important role in delivering the Health Model to preventing all forms of violence..

Mental Health Support

Faith communities often provide informal support networks, potentially decreasing the burden on state-funded mental health services.

Elderly Care

Stronger community ties can result in more informal care arrangements for the elderly, potentially reducing demand for state-funded care services.

Youth Development

Faith-based youth programmes can contribute to improved educational outcomes and reduced delinquency, potentially lowering costs in education and juvenile justice systems.

Addiction Support

Faith communities often offer addiction recovery support, potentially reducing the strain on state-funded rehabilitation programmes.

Unemployment Reduction

Faith networks can facilitate job connections and skills development, potentially decreasing reliance on unemployment benefits.

Improved Social Cohesion

Correct understanding of religious doctrines fosters understanding and respect between faith and non-faith communities, reducing tensions and enhancing inclusivity. This leads to community resilience and creates an environment conducive to building peace and harmony.

The above behavioral changes, while not always immediately visible or easily quantifiable, can accumulate over time to significantly reduce burdens on the state. The preventative nature of religious adherence thus creates a 'ripple effect' that has a positive impact across multiple sectors of government.

There are, in addition, some specific benefits to Government of working effectively with faith representatives:

Enhanced Policy Development

Incorporating insights from diverse faith perspectives at strategic and policy formulation levels results in more inclusive, effective policies and a transformative approach.

Better Crisis Management

Faith communities can assist Government in responding more quickly and effectively to crises such as natural disasters and health emergencies, as demonstrated during the pandemic.

Increased Civic Participation

Government can partner with faith community representatives to promote greater engagement in democratic processes, thus enhancing representation of diverse communities and building bridges between local authorities and communities. This fosters civic responsibility while protecting individual rights.

Effective Public Health Outreach

Working in partnership with faith groups enhances health communication and initiatives across diverse communities, aiding in infection control and health education, while acknowledging the evolving health demographics of the UK population.

SUGGESTED FIRST STEPS FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT

- Actively support inter-faith organisations including URI UK to deliver and promote Inter Faith Week 2024 in November, and encourage participation by local authorities.
- Support Interfaith Harmony Week in February, and actively promote activities during the week.
- Incoming Faith Minister to hold initial getting-to-know-you meetings with faith leaders, followed by regular consultations.
- Consult faith communities (through whatever machinery is deemed appropriate) in the formulation of “first 100 days” policies that are relevant to them.

THE UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE UK

With a presence in over 110 nations, URI (<https://www.uri.org/>) is the world’s largest grassroots inter-faith network. It cultivates peace and justice by engaging people to bridge religious and cultural differences and work together for the good of their communities and the world. It is a non-governmental organisation with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Its Charter can be viewed here: uri.org/what-we-do/charter .

United Religions Initiative UK (<https://uriuk.org>) is a registered charity that aims to advance the goals of the international URI in the UK context. It currently hosts seven UK-based URI Cooperation Circles.

PATRONS



Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh Ji is the Chairman of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ), an international Sikh organisation focused on selfless service, spiritual upliftment, and interfaith harmony. Under his leadership, GNNSJ has expanded globally, emphasising education, healthcare, social welfare, and environmental sustainability. Renowned for his spiritual insight, he promotes interfaith dialogue and sustainable living, inspiring individuals worldwide to live with service, integrity, and compassion.



Julie Siddiqui MBE is a British activist and community leader known for promoting interfaith dialogue, social justice, and women's empowerment. As co-founder of Nisa-Nashim, she fosters Jewish-Muslim cooperation in the UK. Awarded an MBE for her interfaith work, she addresses poverty, discrimination, and gender inequality. Through grassroots activism, speaking engagements, and mentoring, Julie empowers women and strengthens social cohesion, inspiring a more harmonious and equitable society.



Rabbi Michael Hilton is a respected rabbi, author, and interfaith leader known for his contributions to Jewish scholarship and community relations. As Rabbi of Kol Chai Hatch End Jewish Community, he leads with compassion and commitment to Jewish education. An accomplished author, he has written extensively on Jewish history and tradition. Rabbi Hilton advocates for interfaith dialogue, fostering understanding and respect among diverse faith groups. His work promotes social justice and community cohesion.

TRUSTEES



Deepak Naik MBE (Chair), has over 40 years of experience in the community and voluntary sector. He leads the Together in Action charity, focusing on interfaith work, community cohesion and youth engagement. As an advocate for diversity and inclusion, he collaborates with stakeholders to enhance community representation and develop inclusive policies. His entrepreneurial approach combines innovative solutions with practical action, making him a recognised thought leader in social entrepreneurship and community development.



Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, Associate Professor at Coventry University, chairs the Muslims in Britain Research Network. As a feminist sociologist of religion, she employs collaborative methodologies to amplify underrepresented voices. Her research focuses on Muslim women, Islamic education, and religion in Britain, using feminist and decolonising approaches. Sariya has authored several books and articles, contributing significantly to the understanding of Islam in contemporary British society.



Warwick Hawkins MBE, former head of Faith Communities Engagement at the Department for Communities and Local Government, had 18 years of experience in faith engagement as a senior civil servant. He continues to work on interfaith projects in various capacities, including through his social enterprise, Faith in Society. Warwick's expertise spans community empowerment, multicultural engagement, and promoting equality. His work focuses on fostering interfaith dialogue and supporting faith-based social action initiatives.

TRUSTEES



Mandip Singh Sohal, former Chair of URI UK (2005-2018), is a prominent figure in social welfare and interfaith cooperation. As cofounder of Gurdwara Aid and trustee of Khalsa Jatha British Isles, he supports UK Gurdwaras and preserves Sikh heritage. Mandip's work with URI UK promotes interfaith dialogue. His leadership in various charitable initiatives reflects a deep commitment to service, equality, and community cohesion across Sikh and broader multicultural contexts.



Shahin Akhtar is Faith Sector and Inclusion Health Development Officer at Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, and Convenor of the Sandwell Faith Sector Network. She collaborates with faith-based organisations to address unique health needs. Shahin advocates for health equity, contributes to policy development, and engages in community outreach. Her background in public health and cultural competency supports Sandwell's efforts in creating a healthier, more inclusive community.

CONTACT DETAILS

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APPENDIX: UNIVERSAL STATEMENTS

We believe in:

Fundamental Harmony

At their core, all faiths contain truth and are valid means to worshipping God and promoting human flourishing. All deserve mutual respect, without any exclusive claims to truth or superiority.

One God, Many Paths

One God is worshipped in various forms, names, and practices across all faiths. Even non-theistic beliefs pursue the greater good, realised through human existence and behaviour. At their core, belief systems are fundamentally harmonious when practised in the spirit of their guiding scriptures.

Universal Human Values

All faiths promote shared virtues including prayer, contemplation, forgiveness, compassion, humility, honesty, fairness, kindness, equality, respect, charity, industriousness, and care for the Earth and its creatures.

The Human Family

All humanity is one family. All faiths advocate for equality, fraternity, and siblinghood across different divides such as religion, tribe, country, caste, race, gender and culture.

Diversity in Religion

Religious practices, however they may be shaped by culture, history, and geography, are acceptable when they promote human dignity, equality and fraternity. Religious diversity presents a beautiful display of universal human values presented in a myriad ways, and should be preserved and celebrated.

Mutual Understanding

Whilst practising their own faith or none, each person should strive to understand other beliefs from a perspective that fosters harmony and peace, and inspires a greater belief in the divine or higher purpose for all humanity.