



NEWS RELEASE

29 March 2016

Promoting mutual respect
and understanding between
the faith communities
of the UK

Religious Freedom: Statement from the Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Inter Faith Network for the UK

Religious freedom is an increasingly significant issue for the UK, as for other countries around the world.

The eve of the Easter Bank Holiday weekend saw the murder of a shopkeeper in Glasgow, Asad Shah from the Ahmaddiya Muslim Community, which police have said appears linked to his religious beliefs as expressed on social media in Easter greetings to customers. Glasgow's community has stood together in the face of that attack, rallying through the #that'snotwhoweare campaign. The murder, by a Muslim, has been described as sectarian. It has been condemned by bodies such as the Muslim Council of Britain and others.

National faith communities in the UK seek to respond to incidents here and also to support those around the world whose religious freedom is truncated, often brutally, including through murders and terrorist attacks, such as, most recently, the appalling Easter day attacks in Lahore, and atrocities in other parts of the world.

Attacks on, or intimidation of, groups and individuals of other beliefs is an extreme form of restriction of the religious freedom of others. We deplore these in the strongest terms.

A number of Inter Faith Network for the UK member inter faith bodies have as a key aim the raising of awareness of the importance of religious freedom. All the member bodies of the Inter Faith Network for the UK, through their work to promote inter faith understanding and cooperation, make an important contribution to that.

One of the key principles of the Inter Faith Network is of respecting other people's freedom within the law to express their beliefs and convictions <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/code>. We must be free to disagree, including in relation to matters of religious belief, but, as the Inter Faith Network code also says, we should work to prevent disagreement leading to conflict and to avoid violence in our relationships.

Let us stand firm by these values, speak out against extreme voices and violent actions, encouraging education and dialogue, and working together on the basis of our common values for increased understanding, cooperation and harmonious coexistence.

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The Rt Revd Richard Atkinson OBE
Mr Vivian Wineman

Vice-Chairs:

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Notes for editors

1. Press queries to Inter Faith Network: tel 020 7730 0410; email ifnet@interfaith.org.uk
2. The Inter Faith Network for the UK www.interfaith.org.uk was founded in 1987 to advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain and to promote good relations between people of different faiths in this country. It works with its member bodies and others to carry out these aims.
3. Member bodies of the Inter Faith Network include: national faith community representative bodies; national, regional and local inter faith bodies; and academic institutions and educational bodies concerned with inter faith issues. A list of member bodies can be found at <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/members>.
4. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has a particular role in relation to the UK and religious freedom globally and last year produced a special toolkit relating to that: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/35443/freedom-toolkit.pdf
5. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Freedom, has as its particular role to raise awareness and profile of international freedom of religion or belief as a human right among Parliamentarians, media, government and the general public in the UK, and to increase the effectiveness of the UK's contribution to international institutions charged with enforcing this human right. <https://freedomdeclared.org/about/>
6. Brief background information about the history of the Ahmadiyya community can be found at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/8711026.stm
7. A copy of this statement by the Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs and of the Inter Faith Network's policy on The Making of Network Statements can be found at <http://interfaith.org.uk/resources/statements-and-messages>.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK

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