

The Aims of the Three Faiths Forum • To encourage friendship, goodwill and understanding amongst people of the three monotheistic faiths in the UK and elsewhere • To promote support for and public recognition of the importance of groups where people of the Muslim, Christian and Jewish faiths meet and share common interests and experiences • To encourage respect for religious differences between the three faiths on a basis of equality and exploring and enjoying those differences where appropriate • To promote training of ministers of religion of the three faiths in their common roots, understanding of their differences and encourage respect for each other on a basis of equality.

Forum hosts the Iraqi Institute of Peace

Fadel Alfatlawi, Dr Hamid Al-Sherifi, Sheikh Maher Al-Hamra, and Jamal Al-Baddri, representative leaders of the Iraqi Institute for Peace, came to London in November at the invitation of the Three Faiths Forum to discuss interfaith dialogue and relations in Iraq.

The Iraqi Institute of Peace (IIP) was the outcome of the Baghdad Religious Accord agreed in February 2004, at the initiative of Canon Andrew White, Co-Director of the International Centre for Reconciliation of Coventry Cathedral. Leading Shi'ite and Sunni clerics and representatives of all of Iraq's other religious groupings formed the IIP, and its first association with an outside body was with the Three Faiths Forum.

The four leaders met with Baroness Symons, Secretary of State for International Development at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; William Chapman, advisor to the Prime Minister at Downing Street; Godfrey Stadlin and Maqsood Ahmed of the Faith Communities Unit of the Home Office; David Johnston, the Chargé d'Affaires at the US Embassy; Sir Evelyn de Rothschild of the Interfaith Foundation; Ian McCartney, Chair of the Labour Party; and Alex Goldberg and Priya Lukka of the Commission for Racial Equality.

A meeting followed at Ambassadors Court, St James's Palace, hosted by HM Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps, Sir Anthony Figgis, and chaired by Sir Sigmund Sternberg. Eighty ambassadors and diplomatic representatives heard the four Iraqi visitors discuss dialogue and interfaith relations in Iraq. The visit concluded with a press conference, held appropriately at St. Ethelberga's, Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, before the representatives returned to Iraq. A ceremonial sword was presented by the IIP to the Three Faiths Forum.

Dr. Hamid Al-Sharifi, a member of the delegation, thanked the Three Faiths Forum for enabling them to make the voice of the Iraqi people heard all around the world. *"We learnt a lot from the British experience represented by the Three Faiths Forum, and we promise the free world that we are going to work even harder towards the interfaith dialogue and tolerance program and to create a solid foundation for democracy in Iraq,"* he said.

"We promise the free world that we are going to work even harder to create a solid foundation for democracy in Iraq."

About Ourselves



Sir Sigmund Sternberg
KCSG

Sir Sigmund Sternberg has a deep

commitment to dialogue between Jews and other faiths. He is a member of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. He is President of The Reform Synagogues of Great Britain and The Patron of the International Council of Christians and Jews.



Sheikh Dr M A Zaki Badawi
KBE

Sheikh Dr Mohamed About Al-Khair

Zaki Badawi is currently Principal of the Muslim College, Chairman of the Imams and Mosques Council UK, Chairman of the Muslim Law (Shariah) Council UK, Vice Chairman of the World Congress of Faiths and a Director and Trustee of UNICEF UK.



Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke
DD MA MPhil

Marcus Braybrooke, Church of

England vicar of the Baldons with Nuneham Courtenay near Oxford, has been involved with interfaith work for over thirty-five years. He is President of the World Congress of Faiths, Patron of the International Interfaith Centre, a Peace Councillor and on the CPWR International Advisory Committee.



Sidney L Shipton OBE

Sidney Shipton has been the Co-ordinator of the Three

Faiths Forum since its inception in January 1997. He served on the Board of Deputies of British Jews, as well as the Executive of the Council of Christians and Jews. He serves on numerous committees and is a regular delegate and participant in National and International conferences.

Religious Zionist and Hamas founder talk peace

"We have come to London in the cause of peace and to help develop a wider understanding and knowledge of the Alexandria Process," said Sheikh Talal al Sidr (founder and former member of Hamas) when he visited the Three Faiths Forum in December.

Rabbi Melchior, a former Deputy Foreign Minister in the Government of Israel and member of the Knesset, together with Sheikh Talal, Advisor on Religious Affairs to the President of the Palestinian Authority and a Minister in the Palestinian Authority, came on what has proved to be a successful mission to the UK at the invitation of Canon Andrew White of the International Centre for Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral.

The Sheikh, who lives in Hebron and is a key figure among Palestinian religious leaders

involved in the Peace Process, met with Lord Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, Afif Safieh, the Palestinian General Delegate to the UK and the Holy See, Baroness Symons of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Sir Sigmund Sternberg.

Both the Rabbi and the Sheikh pressed for a new peace process with input from the religious leadership to lead to a viable Palestinian state co-existing with the State of Israel. Rabbi Melchior, a religious Zionist believes in the creation of a Palestinian state and Sheikh Talal rejects all violence.

Working as a team, Rabbi Melchior and Sheikh Al Sidr have put forward their proposal for a peaceful settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict and continued to do so at the First World Congress of Imams and Rabbis.

"We have come to London in the cause of peace..."

We cannot allow our young Muslims to drift

Extract from a letter by Sir Sigmund to the Financial Times in response to the articles on 'Ethnic diversity of UK boards under scrutiny' and 'Cultural diversity makes business sense'.

"Sheikh Zaki Badawi and I had a meeting recently with George Cox, the retiring director-general of the Institute of Directors and his staff, urging the IoD to inform its members of the necessity of employing members of minority communities, in particular the growing Muslim community.

"According to recent statistics and a poll taken by the British Council, British Muslims feel a strong sense of exclusion, with 69 percent saying they felt the rest of society did not regard them as an integral part of life in Britain.

"It is disturbing to read that the unemployment rate of young Muslims is more than three times that of the general population and is the highest of all faith groups. Sixteen percent of Muslims have never worked or are long-term unemployed – more than five times the national average.

"We know what happens in non-Muslim society where youngsters have neither work nor hope – they drift into drugs or crime or drug-related crime. Therefore we must not be surprised if unemployed Muslim young people heed the call to the fundamentalist equivalent of crime and drugs: the call of Hamas, Hizbolla, al-Qaeda.

"That is why my friend Sheikh Zaki Badawi and I, in our capacity as members of the Institute of Business Ethics, are calling on British employers to make every effort to create job opportunities for young Muslims.

"We at the Three Faiths Forum believe that, just as British company boardrooms must become more diverse to accord with our multicultural society, so too must jobs become available for Muslims and other faiths, both young and old."

In brief

Over 200 people packed into the United Church in Jury Street, Winchester, to join Rabbi David Soetendorp of the Reform Synagogue, Imam Sr. Abduljalil Sajid of the Muslim Council of Great Britain and Rt Rev'd Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Basingstoke, in exploring issues of dialogue between the three faiths.

"It is especially important at this time that we rediscover what unites rather than divides the three great faiths in the UK and what inhibits greater understanding," said the invitation. Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke, Imam Mohamed Ovaisi and Sidney Shipton all participated in the joint seminar entitled 'Concepts of Interfaith British Citizenship and Religious Discrimination' held at the Chelsea Methodist Church in November.

The next event of the Three Faiths Forum in Southern England will take place at Bournemouth University under the direction of the Anglican Chaplain, Dr David Hart, during the week beginning Monday 18th April. A Three Faiths evening of workshops will take place on Tuesday 19th April on a range of subjects including human rights, family, education and the environment.

The Three Faiths Forum continues to form new committees and in 2005 these will include Surrey, Ealing, Herefordshire and South West London.

Sidney Shipton has developed interfaith relations with Webster University, North London University of the Third Age, Jewish Association of Cultural Societies (JACS), Keeble Church, Candifa and Eton College.



Fadel Alfatlawi, Dr Hamid Al-Sherifi, Sheikh Maher Al-Hamra and Jamal Al-Baddri, representative leaders of the Iraqi Institute for Peace, outside 10 Downing Street during their visit to London in November.

Preservation of life sacred in all religions

"The Ethics of Organ Transplants" was the topic of a presentation by Sheikh Dr. Zaki Badawi, when he spoke at a joint meeting at the Royal Society of Medicine in November.

In his presentation, Sheikh Dr Badawi said that the preservation of life is sacred in all religions and he stressed that the quality of life was similarly of great importance. To him, he said, Islam is dynamic and although there could be different interpretations of the Koran, organ transplantation was acceptable if it led to a preservation of human life.

He explained the problems of defining death and safeguards that were necessary to prevent

a situation which could arise where the poor sell organs as 'spare parts' for the rich.

In the discussion that followed many of the points raised by Dr Badawi were underlined and indeed one doctor said categorically that those doctors who trade in organs were criminals. The problem of brainstem death was also considered and it was pointed out that there was indeed a margin of error that could not be overlooked.

Mosque construction work stops for Synagogue services

"The East London Mosque is a prime example of the work of the Three Faiths Forum which is why we are here today," said Sir Sigmund Sternberg when he opened a meeting of the Advisory Board of the Three Faiths Forum.

The Director of the Mosque, Dr Dilowar Khan, spoke of the good relations they have always had with the Fieldgate Street Synagogue at the rear of the Mosque (which has been there since the time when the East End of London was home to a large number of Jews).

His sentiments were echoed by the Vice President of the Synagogue, Mr N Roos, who

told the meeting what happened a year ago when building works for the construction of the Centre adjoining the Mosque were under way. He asked whether the works could be kept to a minimum and as far as away as possible from the Synagogue area during the Jewish High Holy Days.

Mr Dilowar Kahn not only immediately agreed to this request but went further and said that they would stop all building works until the end of the High Holy Days so as not to interfere with the Synagogue's services.

Lord Mayor meets the Three Faiths Forum

The Lord Mayor of London, Michael Savory, together with the City Marshall, Anthony Billy King-Harman, and David Cobb CBE, Sheriff of the City of London, visited the St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace on 11 January, where they met and were welcomed by the newly appointed Director, Simon Keyes, and one of the trustees of St Ethelburga's, Richard Millar.

Sir Sigmund Sternberg, Sheikh Dr Zaki Badawi and Sidney Shipton OBE were present.

Sir Sigmund expressed his pleasure at being at St Ethelburga's with which he and The Three Faiths Forum had been associated since the rebuilding had begun on the initiative of the Bishop of London. *"The Three Faiths Forum,"* he said, *"was founded on the basis of promoting good relations between the three Abrahamic Monotheistic faiths of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam and is happy to be associated with St. Ethelburga's."*

"Promoting harmony and understanding is at the core of peacemaking in the modern world..."

Simon Keyes, Director of St Ethelburga's said: *"Promoting harmony and understanding between different faiths is at the core of peacemaking in the modern world, and we were delighted to be able to discuss with the Lord Mayor how to engage individuals and institutions in the City of London in this work."*

St Ethelburga's is one of the oldest churches in the City of London which was virtually destroyed by the 1993 Bishopsgate bomb. It was rebuilt as a Centre for Reconciliation and Peace with funds provided by many institutions and individuals in the City of London. It now hosts a wide range of events concerned with promoting inter-faith harmony and the transformation of conflict

Amongst others present were Lucy Chapman, City Interfaith Partnership Co-ordinator, and Ruth Weyl, consultant to the International Council of Christians and Jews.

Tunisian Interfaith group becomes a reality

An interfaith dialogue group in Tunisia, involving the three Abrahamic faiths, is becoming a reality after a second visit to Tunisia by Sir Sigmund Sternberg, at the invitation of the former Tunisian Ambassador in London, Mr M Khemaies Jhinaou.

The visit was the outcome of a conference, 'The Abrahamic faiths and a vision of peace and tolerance', held under the auspices of the Tunisian President, Mr Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, at El Manar university, together with Ezzaitouna University.

The occupant of the Ben Ali Chair in Interreligious Dialogue, Professor Mohammed Hassine Fantar, discussed with Sir Sigmund, the possibility of holding future conferences jointly with UK groups. Sir Sigmund, who is Patron of the International Conference of Christians and

Jews, invited Professor Fantar to participate in the forthcoming ICCJ annual conference which will be held this year in Chicago.

Sir Sigmund also met Mr Oussama Romdhani, the director-general of the Tunisian External Communications Agency, who accepted an invitation to participate in a conference to be held at the British Embassy in Paris at the end of February on strategies for tackling areas of religious tension in Britain and France.

Britain's Ambassador in Tunis, Mr Alan Goult, CMG, hosted a working dinner for Tunisians engaged in the interfaith arena at which Sir Sigmund distributed the Queen's Christmas message, which was built upon the concept that diversity in British society today is indeed a strength and not a threat.

Queen urges interfaith respect

Extract from The Queen's Christmas Message 2004

Religion and culture are much in the news these days, usually as sources of difference and conflict, rather than bringing people together. But the irony is that every religion has something to say about tolerance and respecting others.

Most of us have learned to acknowledge and respect the ways of other cultures and religions, but what matters even more is the way in which those from different backgrounds behave towards each other in everyday life.

It is vitally important that we should all participate and cooperate for the sake of the wellbeing of the whole community. We have only to look around to recognise the benefits of this positive approach in business or local government, in sport, music and the arts.

There is certainly much more to be done and many challenges to be overcome. Discrimination

still exists. Some people feel that their own beliefs are being threatened. Some are unhappy about unfamiliar cultures. They all need to be reassured that there is so much to be gained by reaching out to others; that diversity is indeed a strength and not a threat.

We need also to realise that peaceful and steady progress in our society of differing cultures and heritage can be threatened at any moment by the actions of extremists at home or by events abroad. We can certainly never be complacent.

But there is every reason to be hopeful about the future. I certainly recognise that much has been achieved in my lifetime. I believe tolerance and fair play remain strong British values and we have so much to build on for the future.

“...diversity is indeed a strength and not a threat”

Faith group leaders hail royal plea for accord

Extract from an article in *The Times* (Monday 27th December 2004) by Ruth Gledhill

The Queen led members of the Royal Family in worship for the second day in a row at St Marys Magdalene Church on the Sandringham estate in Norfolk as leaders of Britain's faith groups gave a warm welcome to her Christmas Day plea for cultural and religious tolerance.

Faith leaders praised the Queen's speech as heralding a breakthrough in its advocacy of the messages of tolerance and respect preached by all the religions. Her message of tolerance helped alleviate the despondency that has arisen in religious circles after a year of unrest and sometimes conflict among members of Britain's minority faiths.

Recently there have been growing concerns in the Jewish community about a rise in anti-Semitism parading under the banner of anti-Zionist sentiment. Muslim groups have clashed over the war in Iraq. Last week, the Sikh

community was enraged and forced the Birmingham Repertory Theatre to cancel a play that had caused offence by its depictions of rape and murder in a temple.

Sir Sigmund Sternberg, a founder of the Three Faiths Forum, a group working to achieve harmony and understanding between Christian, Muslim and Jewish organisations across the world, said: “The Queen's message will be a great help to us, particularly at our forthcoming meeting in Paris.

“It represents a lesson to the world in how to deal with some of the differences between the faiths. We have got to respect those differences.

“Extremism is a threat to a peaceful society. We are very grateful to the Queen that she devoted her whole Christmas message to these important issues. All faiths will benefit from her speech.”

Islam meets Shakespeare

The Globe Theatre was the unusual venue for the Three Faiths Forum to lead a discussion on Shakespeare and Islam.

The meeting was chaired by Sidney Shipton who said that Shakespeare and Islam was not such a strange subject as might be felt at first sight.

“Whilst there was no truth in the suggestion that Sheikh Spear was an Arab, Shakespeare refers to Muslims in four of his plays namely Othello who is referred to as the Moor, the Prince of Morocco in the Merchant of Venice, Aaron in Titus Andronicus, and possibly Caliban in the Tempest.”

“It’s a curious fact,” said Sir Sigmund Sternberg, “that while Shakespeare built one of his most famous plays around the character of a Jew and has passing mention of Jews in at least six other of his plays, it is quite unlikely he ever met a Jew. On the other hand Shakespeare

probably knew of, if he was not acquainted with, many of the Muslim faith. Although Elizabethan England knew little of the Jew it is improbable that Jews and Muslims ever met each other in Britain.”

Sir Sigmund went on to say, *“Mahmoud Hamdi Zaqzuk said that Islam had no place for those who taught hatred and destruction. Declarations such as this are the pillars on which we seek to build relations within our society and to which Shakespeare’s Globe is making so major a contribution by hosting this festival. I have no doubt at all that, were the Bard among us today, he would salute and celebrate this enterprise.”*

Time to come out against the extremists

Extracts from a speech by Sidney Shipton addressing the Northwood and Stanmore JACS.

“It is time that moderates and the silent majority within the three Abrahamic faiths come out loud and clear against the extremists within their ranks who pervert and abuse their religion... Extremists is a term I prefer to use, rather than fundamentalists or as the BBC puts in, militants. No religion can justify the use of terror in its name... People of the three Abrahamic faiths must work together and understand and respect each other for the good of humanity.”

Fforwm y Tair Ffydd yng Nghymru (the Three Faiths Forum in Wales)

The inaugural meeting of the Three Faiths Forum in Wales was held in October at the Thistle (Park) Hotel, Cardiff, in association with the Welsh Centre for International Affairs.

“This is the first Three Faiths Forum group in Wales,” said Lord Elis-Thomas, Presiding Officer of the National Assembly of Wales.

Lord Elis-Thomas introduced the Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke, Imam Mohamed Ovaisi, Imam at Heathrow Airport and formerly of the Wembley Mosque, Member of the Council of Imams and Mosques of the United Kingdom

and Associate of the Islamic College, as well as Sidney Shipton.

Sidney Shipton spoke on the necessity to encourage friendship and goodwill between peoples of the Muslim, Christian and Jewish faiths. Lord Elis-Thomas moved from the Chair that the Three Faiths Forum be established and this was unanimously approved.

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