

Independent Inquiry into Conduct by Officials of the Inter Faith Network

Dear Colleagues

We Call for an Immediate Independent Inquiry into Alleged Misconduct by Officials of the Inter Faith Network

We are writing to you as a Member Body of the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom (IFN) in relation to matters of governance of the IFN which are of great concern to us and our colleagues from other faith and interfaith organisations.

The Director, Chairs and Executive Committee of the Inter Faith Network have presented us with a proposed "Code of Conduct" for IFN Member Bodies for passing at an AGM, which we and a number of our sister IFN Members see as potentially being used to restrict criticism of the IFN leadership - and in relation to which legal advice we have received indicates may in fact be unlawful.

We are particularly concerned that while the IFN Executive has created this Code of Conduct in relation to IFN Members who have made criticisms of the behaviour and activities of some IFN officers, the IFN Executive has to date been most unwilling to allow an independent investigation into alleged misconduct by the IFN Director and certain IFN Trustees.

We are therefore writing to request there now immediately takes place a wholly independent and impartial investigation into these allegations of wrongdoing by the IFN Director and certain IFN Trustees. We propose that the investigation be undertaken by:

- 1) An independent and neutral mediation body which is wholly unconnected to the Inter Faith Network, and is acceptable to the complainants as well as to the IFN. There are a number of well-respected mediators, and we know of highly respected parliamentary peers and legal professionals who would be very willing to chair such an independent investigation into the IFN at minimal or no cost. So no excuse about costs is applicable here.
- 2) The findings of the investigation are to be published in their entirety in the public domain
- 3) If wrongdoing is found to have taken place by any IFN official or Trustee, that appropriate sanctions are to be applied to those individuals, including removal from post

Allegation 1: The Questionable Statements by the IFN Director Concerning Minority Religions

For some 25 years, the current IFN Director, Harriet Crabtree, has stated both in writing and verbally that were the IFN to change its membership policy to allow Minority Religions like Druids, Mormons or Pagans to join, that there would be a risk that existing Faith Member Bodies of the IFN would withdraw.

These statements by the IFN Director have formed a significant basis for the opposition over years (until very recently) by the Inter Faith Network to changing its membership policy to admit hitherto excluded groups such as the Druid Network, Ahmadiyyas, or Pagans. The statements by the IFN Director have been taken with such seriousness that they have found their way into the legal statements of the IFN and its solicitors such as in relation to the controversial rejection by the IFN of the application by the Druid Network to join in 2012 - "Note on the Legality of the Inter Faith Network's Membership Arrangements" IFN, July 2012:

"The primary ground on which an inter faith organisation, such as IFN, may within this context, define its parameters of membership is according to the 'purpose of the organisation'. If an organisation, the purpose of which is to 'foster or maintain good relations between persons of different religions or beliefs', concludes that that work could be seriously affected by the acceptance into membership of a particular organisation (or individual)...a decision not to accept that membership application would be consistent with the relevant provisions in Schedule 23 [Equality Act 2010]. An example of this might be a decision by an inter faith organisation not to accept a membership application from a particular faith organisation if the admission to membership of that organisation could have the effect of leading to representative bodies of major faith communities withdrawing from membership of that inter faith organisation"

However, the truth of the matter is that the Christian Churches in membership of the IFN have clearly denied ever making such a suggestion of threatened withdrawal, and no other faith community in membership of the IFN has ever stated that they would potentially withdraw. With the new membership policy now in place which does allow potential admissions of Druids or Pagans, no IFN Faith Member Body is threatening to withdraw.

By contrast, Harriet Crabtree has to date repeatedly refused requests to her to provide written or other documentary evidence for the basis for her several written and verbal claims to the effect that major faith communities would withdraw from the IFN and that it is in her words "a simple statement of fact" that the IFN's 25 year membership policy was affected by the unwillingness of faith communities outside the nine to be in engagement with others. And yet these untrue claims about potential withdrawals, oft-repeated by the IFN Director and others, have for 25 years contributed to the religious discrimination and exclusion from membership of Minority Religions in the taxpayer-funded IFN.

We are deeply concerned by the IFN Director's unwillingness now to provide documentary evidence for the claims that she has made over more than two decades, which refusal by her raises strong question marks about issues of integrity, truthfulness and good governance in the Inter Faith Network.

Allegation 2: The Withholding by the IFN Director of Documents from the 2012 IFN AGM and Representation in AGM Papers

It has been repeatedly alleged by a number of IFN Member Bodies and individuals that the IFN Director made false representation in the papers for the IFN Annual General Meeting of 12 July 2012. The papers for the AGM which were prepared by Harriet Crabtree state clearly

that merely "two individuals", namely our colleagues, Phil Ryder and Muhammad Al-Hussaini, respectively of the Druid Network and Scriptural Reasoning, had raised concerns about the IFN's membership policy and issues of religious discrimination by the IFN.

In fact, it is evident that the IFN Director, Harriet Crabtree, had in fact received well in advance of the date of the AGM a number of formal resolutions and statements of strong concern by several Member Bodies of the IFN and their officers, which they had sent for the 2012 AGM and which she had clearly chosen to withhold from the AGM. These various missing documents all in Harriet Crabtree's possession before that AGM, were subsequently published by our colleagues, and may be downloaded from here:

http://www.theinterfaithnetwork.org.uk/missing_documents.pdf

Despite the fact that these various written resolutions and statements of concern from IFN Member Bodies were sent by IFN Member Bodies to the IFN Director, Harriet Crabtree, prior to the AGM, to date she has provided no explanation why she chose to withhold these documents and instead deliberately and untruthfully represent in the AGM papers which she prepared that merely "two individuals" had raised concerns about the IFN's policy. These facts for us raise strong question marks about issues of integrity, truthfulness and good governance in the Inter Faith Network.

Allegation 3: Alleged Pressure and Bullying Applied by Officials of the Inter Faith Network Upon Clergy and Scholars of Different Faiths Who Ask Questions and Raise Criticisms of the IFN

It has been alleged repeatedly in public by our colleagues that in response to statements by ourselves and other IFN Member Bodies raising public concerns about the discriminatory membership policy of the IFN, the IFN Director, Harriet Crabtree, drafted statements which the then IFN Vice Chair, now Co-Chair, Vivian Wineman, applied pressure upon certain Jewish clergy from those IFN Member Bodies to sign.

Vivian Wineman and Harriet Crabtree have claimed that these allegations are "*defamatory*", despite the fact that the allegations have been made repeatedly in public, and in fact made directly in writing to the IFN's solicitors, Bates Wells Braithwaite, as far back as March 2013, with no successful action forthcoming against any party making such allegations.

We place this history of responding to questions and criticism made of the IFN with behind-the-scenes bullying and pressure upon people's personal lives, in the context of similar examples of such behaviour against critics by senior interfaith leaders, namely of backroom bullying, political pressure and interference against the careers of those clergy and academics of different faiths who have exposed and criticised unethical conduct by those said senior interfaith leaders:

- It is widely in the public domain that the Emeritus Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal has alleged considerable bullying and unethical behaviour against him from Guy Wilkinson, a one-time IFN Trustee and Advisor to the Archbishop of Canterbury on interfaith relations, in the context of international

interfaith initiatives. This led to Bishop Riah's well-known reflection on such Lambeth Palace interfaith personalities and their political behaviours as being "*the cancer at the heart of Anglicanism*". Christian clergy and interfaith leaders of non-Anglican denominations, and Jewish clergy and academics have similarly recounted their experiences of bullying from the same Lambeth Palace/IFN individual.

- It is widely in the public domain that in response to questions asked over the years by various theologians and interfaith academics about the conduct of David Ford, head of the IFN Member Body the Cambridge Interfaith Programme, the Anglican Christian theologian and scholar, Dr Gareth Jones, experienced an adverse external intervention by David Ford with the internal interview panel at Birmingham University responsible for Dr Jones's academic promotion (David Ford was at that time not at Birmingham University, but applied the pressure from outside). Other Christian and non-Christian theologians and academics, both in the United Kingdom and the North America, report similar experiences of pressure applied externally by David Ford upon their academic lives in response to criticism made by them of the ethical conduct of Ford's activities in interfaith and elsewhere.
- On 20 December 2012, after several months of criminal harassment committed by Mehri Niknam, Director of the Joseph Interfaith Foundation, against an interfaith practitioner, the Metropolitan Police investigated Niknam's activities and pattern of behaviour and issued her with both a written and verbal warning under the Harassment Act 1997 (issued by DC Cordner, Metropolitan Police).

These, and various other examples appear to us to demonstrate that whereas modern British society embraces a culture of free speech, open academic critique, and democratic demands for transparency from leaders, by contrast, the closed world of religious/inter-religious leadership continues to respond to those who ask questions or shine a light upon instances of power abuse or corruption, by evasiveness and concealment of facts, and by applying behind-the-scenes pressure upon such whistle-blowers' personal lives, careers and livelihoods.

Like a typical Inter Faith Network AGM, high level national and international interfaith activity appears to present a glowing external theatrical appearance of pleasantries and mutual harmony in public meetings, while the abuse, bullying and political silencing of critics by causing destruction to their personal lives and careers continues behind the scenes. In this regard, we see parallels in political interfaith abuse to the covering up of violence against women, extremism and sexual abuse behind closed doors in different faith communities.

The unwillingness and evasiveness of the IFN to allow to date independent investigation into these allegations of abuse of power and pressure by the IFN Director and Co-Chair for us raise strong question marks about issues of integrity, truthfulness and good governance in the Inter Faith Network.

Allegation 4: We Call for a Public Apology from the IFN Director, Harriet Crabtree and the IFN Co-Chair, Vivian Wineman, to the IFN Christian Co-Chair, Revd Bob Fyffe, and Our Concerns About Deliberate Omission of Facts from the Minutes

We note with sadness the recent resignation by the IFN Christian Co-Chair, Revd Bob Fyffe from the Inter Faith Network, his doing so on a matter of principle relating to an IFN meeting and the presentation of documents and matters concerning IFN finance. We note similarly the spate of resignations in recent months of some other IFN Trustees.

In the light of this, we call for the IFN Director, Harriet Crabtree, and the IFN Co-Chair, Vivian Wineman, to have the honesty and common courtesy to apologise formally and on the record to Revd Fyffe, at the IFN Annual General Meeting on 29 September 2014 in Birmingham, for the circumstances which caused Revd Fyffe to feel obliged to resign as a matter of ethical principle.

We are also most disturbed that the remarks about Revd Bob Fyffe's resignation from the IFN made by one of our colleagues publicly at the IFN Extraordinary General Meeting on 20 May 2014 in London, have been deliberately omitted by the IFN Director and Executive Committee from the official Minutes of that EGM meeting. This has been done despite two written requests to the IFN Executive from our colleague that the Minutes truthfully represent and do not falsify what he said at the EGM concerning Revd Fyffe's resignation and other matters.

The failure of the IFN Director and Co-Chair to date to make such a formal apology, despite requests to them to do so, and likewise to truthfully record Minutes where comments made are critical of them, for us raises strong question marks about issues of integrity, truthfulness and good governance in the Inter Faith Network.

Allegation 5: Concerns About the Application of the New Membership Rules, Double Standards in Regard to "Genuine Ownership" and the IFN Project of Faith Community Representatives

One of the most consistent and widespread criticisms of the IFN made by academics of religious studies and human rights law at different universities and also by Christian and other faith clergy, being criticism directed by them at the Inter Faith Network project begun by Harriet Crabtree and Brian Pearce in 1987, is that part of the political agenda of the IFN from its inception has always been the manufacturing and promoting to power of unelected self-appointed IFN "Faith Community Representative Bodies", which so-called faith community leaders in certain cases do not in fact speak for the faith communities they purport to represent.

The depiction of the Crabtree-Pearce IFN project as a "*colonialist mechanism of control*", "*the IFN is not interfaith but intercommunal politics*" and "*take-me-to-your-leader*", is exemplified in such examples of IFN "Faith Community Representative Bodies":

- The two surveys by the Policy Exchange and Channel 4 in 2006/7 demonstrated that a mere 4% to 6% of British Muslims surveyed considered the IFN "Faith Community Representative Body", the Muslim Council of Britain, to speak for Muslims in any way
- Sikh community groups have objected to the fact that the IFN "Faith Community Representative Bodies" for the Sikh community seem linked to one particular IFN Sikh peer with whom other parts of the Sikh community disagree and do not accept
- Zoroastrian colleagues have expressed strong condemnation of two Zoroastrian personalities who are vocal "IFN loyalists" in the Inter Faith Network including one office bearer in the IFN and one former IFN Executive Committee member, criticising the claim of these individuals to speak for the Zoroastrian community. Part of the criticism related to the surprising role of IFN-loyalist Zoroastrian leaders in arguing against the opening up of the IFN membership policy to include other faiths (such as Pagans, Druids and Mormons, which are numerically larger than Zoroastrians in representation in the UK) while they still arguing for preserving the inclusion in the IFN of membership of the small Zoroastrian community. While the Zoroastrians in the IFN did eventually vote in favour of inclusion of other faiths, our own Zoroastrian colleagues have expressed their shame and disappointment at what they consider an unfair and unethical counter-inclusive political position taken by those who purport to speak for their faith community.
- Readers of the Jewish national and international press will be aware of the demands published recently by various parts of the UK Jewish community calling for the resignation of the IFN Co-Chair, Vivian Wineman, in his role in the Board of Deputies of British Jews, and the criticism that such leaders do not any longer speak for many ordinary British Jews

The Inter Faith Network on 20 May 2014 passed a new Membership Admission Policy under criterion ii) of which a bilateral inter faith body applying for national category membership needs to show:

"Genuine ownership by all the faith communities involved in its work, with representation in its governance structure...of the faiths involved"

To an innocent eye, this stated criterion about *"genuine ownership"* would seem to indicate that if an interfaith organisation were to be set up to promote dialogue between any two given faiths, A and B, best efforts should be made to ensure that the charity has a balanced representation between people of faith A and people of faith B on the Board of Trustees or Executive Committee, with people of the two faiths A and B concerned holding equal power and say in the control and financing of the organisation, maybe rotating the Chair between those two faiths. This would all appear to be a perfectly fair and just ethical principle of parity and equality in interfaith bodies - contrasting sharply with the position of some Church of England leaders (rejected by our own Anglican colleagues) of wishing to be the "host" established church in leadership of interfaith, with other faiths and denominations set up as "guests".

In fact, running contradictory to this interpretation of the Membership Admission Policy wording, Harriet Crabtree and the Inter Faith Network Membership Sub-committee have applied the Membership Admission Policy in such an astonishing and to our mind, perverse way that certain applicant interfaith organisations are now being required to show that the people holding Trustee or leadership positions in those interfaith organisations "represent"

their respective faith communities according to the definition of the IFN - such as for example, acting on behalf of IFN "Faith Community Representative Bodies". Therefore, what appeared initially to be a "*genuine ownership*" clause to do with ensuring parity, equality and fairness of control been faiths within the internal governance of interfaith organisations, has been twisted instead to make the discourse to the effect that interfaith groups in the category of national interfaith organisation, be led by self-appointed IFN faith community representatives.

There is a particularly galling double standard in the Inter Faith Network Membership Subcommittee's language about "*genuine ownership*", in that for some 25 years, the Christian Co-Chair of the IFN has always been a bishop of the Church of England (not any other denomination), with the sole brief exception of Revd Bob Fyffe from the Scottish Episcopal Church. If the IFN were applying for membership of itself, it would fail the "*genuine ownership*" test.

The Inter Faith Network has likewise supported and collaborated with the "Near Neighbours" funding programme for interfaith engagement, which hands over millions of pounds of taxpayers' money for interfaith funding solely into the hands of one group, namely the Church of England - without any "*genuine ownership*" by any other faith or non-Anglican Christian denomination. Major IFN Members like the Christian Muslim Forum are funded and strongly linked to Church of England-led Near Neighbours.

In relation to these demands applied by the IFN around "*genuine ownership*", leading existing IFN Member Bodies such as the Lambeth Palace-founded project, the Christian Muslim Forum, have also never had a non-Christian Director of equal status and equal salary to the Christian Director, while the IFN itself has never had a person of a non-Christian religious faith in the position of IFN Director. There have in fact been bitter disputes in the UK interfaith arena around the question of some Church of England leaders acting as a controlling host and notoriously intervening or interfering in inter-religious projects which were led entirely by people of other faiths or denominations (eg. in 2010, Guy Wilkinson, the Church of England interfaith advisor and IFN Executive Committee member famously intervened against a parliamentary meeting between Jewish and Muslim clergy, nothing to do with the Church of England). We and our own Anglican and non-Anglican colleagues are called to ask where is the equal and "*genuine ownership*" here?

We are particularly concerned to see that the Harriet Crabtree and the IFN Membership Subcommittee have now taken it upon themselves to question the charitable objects of certain applicant interfaith organisations for IFN membership, despite the fact that these charities are already registered with the Charity Commission using the official model charitable objects of the Charity Commission. For example, Harriet Crabtree and the IFN Membership Subcommittee questioned the charitable objects of one applicant interfaith organisation, despite the fact that these charitable objects were word-for-word the exact model form of words approved by the Charity Commission for interfaith organisations, and furthermore were, word-for-word, the exact charitable objects of several existing bilateral and multi-lateral interfaith dialogue bodies already in membership of the IFN.

We have considered the common thread behind these very visible and arbitrary inconsistencies in the handling by the IFN of membership applications in relation to these questions of:

- 1) the IFN questioning " *genuine ownership*"
- 2) the IFN questioning official Charity Commission model wording in the objects of applicant member bodies

and we note a clear common thread of political manoeuvring by the IFN against its critics, namely that Mr Satish Sharma, the Hindu correspondent with the IFN in relation to one membership application that has been rejected by the IFN has been a vocal critic of unethical conduct in the Inter Faith Network, while Mr Martin Weightman, the correspondent in relation to another membership application that has been delayed by the IFN leads an organisation which exposed in Parliament the prior unfair IFN membership policy and also exposed other issues of corruption and linkage to extremist groups in the Inter Faith Network.

Timetable for an Independent and Impartial Investigation

We believe that these allegations - correct or otherwise - are most serious and are vital to address in as transparent and impartial and independent way as possible, as the allegations strongly represent a picture of an IFN whose organisational culture in one of dishonesty and evasiveness, obstructiveness, arrogant lack of transparency and backroom bullying against those who criticise or ask questions.

It is clear that there has been a breakdown of trust by some IFN Member Bodies in the governance of the IFN leadership and loss of confidence in certain of the IFN's officers. This breakdown of trust is now strongly compounded by the IFN's project of a "Code of Conduct" for IFN Members without any willingness by it to date to investigate allegations of misconduct by those who hold positions of leadership in the charity.

It is therefore our view and that of our sister IFN Member Bodies that there must most urgently now take place a wholly unrestricted discussion and shedding of light upon these allegations that is moderated by an entirely neutral and independent mediation body. No excuse can be presented by the IFN or any party relative to costs, since these will be nominal as we know respected legal and parliamentary colleagues who would be more than happy to chair such an investigation.

Moreover, we assert that the timetable for such an independent investigation must precede any attempt to apply a "Code of Conduct" upon IFN Member Bodies which have raised allegations, when there is the strong suspicion that this Code of Conduct has been created in part to silence such allegations and cover up wrongdoing within the IFN.

Yours sincerely

The Board of Trustees of the Interfaith Alliance UK*
Member Body of the Inter Faith Network

23 September 2014

*The Board of Trustees of the Interfaith Alliance UK are:

Danny Diskin (Chair)
Alan Bolwell
George Barda
Kit Klarenberg