



british chapter of the
international association for

religious freedom
belief with integrity

Newsletter and IARF Peacemaking Commission News
June 2013

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Make your contribution now and be sure of
being heard throughout the world.

The Purpose

of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) is to work for freedom of belief because it is a precious human right that potentially enables the best within our religious lives, or our search for truth or enlightenment, to flourish. It requires work on three aspects, any of which may constitute the core objective for the IARF membership in any country or region.

- Freedom from oppressive interference or discrimination by the state, government or society's institutions on the grounds of religion or belief.
- Mutual understanding, respect and the promotion of harmony, or at least 'tolerance', between communities or individuals of different religions or beliefs.
- Essential accountability by religious communities to ensure that their own practices uphold the fundamental dignity and human rights of their members and others.



Announcing the

34th IARF WORLD CONGRESS

“Challenges for Religious Freedom in the Digital Age.”



The 34th World Congress will be hosted in the splendid setting of the leafy campus of the University of Birmingham, UK, 24th - 27th of August 2014. Much of the early development of the university was due to endowments and bequests from the well-known Quaker chocolate makers Cadbury and Sons. It is now one of the oldest and most progressive of Britain's 'Red-Brick' universities with many unique collections and facilities. Symbolic for the city's policy of commitment towards diversity, acceptance and religious freedom it is an ideal location for the International Association of Religious Freedom to congregate.

Why not take a virtual tour of what the campus has to offer at <http://virtualtour.bham.ac.uk/#> before you agree that this is a special place for a special event not to be missed.

Details of Congress events, call for papers, speakers, bookings and fees will be published at www.iarf.net, announced at Friends of IARF on FaceBook and in emails from the Hosting Committee.



**UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**

“Challenges for Religious Freedom in the digital age.”



The City of Birmingham has had an outstanding reputation for proactive interfaith and intercultural engagement, discourse and dialogue for many decades. It is a city that has faced many cultural, ethnic, and religious changes to population during two centuries in which it became a byword for heavy industry and with the wealth of industrialisation was transformed into a home for scholarship, high culture, commerce and tourism at the centre of the United Kingdom’s transport network. Many of the City’s early great industrialists were radical thinkers, religiously motivated and members of important intellectual societies like the Lunar Society. It has today also become the home for many important Churches, Mosques, Synagogues, Gurdwaras, Mandirs, Viharas and Shrines. In this process Birmingham’s vital civic identity has not been diluted or lost but redefined, broadened, invigorated and strengthened.

The Congress Theme fits well with the history and living experience of Birmingham. The perennial but necessary questions “What is Freedom?” and “What is Religion?” figure in the daily religious, social and commercial life of many metropolitan cities and especially so in those as welcoming to cultural diversity as Birmingham. Is digitalisation a new age or another phase of the information age that was ushered into existence by the printing press? Digital technology and the media changes it has spawned have affected how we communicate and who we communicate with. The authority that status, age and gender once claimed as their right is challenged by the egalitarianism which rules the avatars of the World Wide Web. So too is our confidence in the reliability of what we read and see, which leads us to question how we use digital technology and establish our credentials, and how others interpret what we are or should be trying to say.

It was something of a natural imperative that drove the late submission of a bid to host the Congress in Birmingham when the opportunity arose. Despite a well prepared bid on behalf of Geneva when asked if the British Chapter could make a viable alternative bid there was only one answer I could give. My Vice-Chair, Mr Jeff Teagle, and I are confident in the Hosting Committee, the city and the British Chapter IARF to deliver an outstanding Congress. With the authority granted by the IARF Council, the Congress Hosting Committee is now working alongside its partners, Birmingham City Council and the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham, with a host of enthusiastic co-workers and excited supporters representing religions, commerce, governance and academia to ensure that all delegates are able to concentrate on the Congress theme, electing a new Council and profiting from their time together in our European city.



Telling his Eminence Cardinal Tauran of our plans for 2014.
Picture - Marcin Mazur of CBCEW

Chair of Congress Hosting Committee

Al-Shaykh Al-Hajj Muhammad Amin Evans, BA (Hons), MA

Featured Articles (2)

Mosque-Busters and Mega-Masjids

Julian Bond



It's difficult having an image problem. Mud sticks, even undeserved mud. I think most of us would admit that Islam currently has an [image problem](#). But some of us

would say that that 'tarnished' image has nothing to do with real Islam.

Those reflecting on the reception of Muslims in England (and I can't help thinking that it is more of an English issue than a British issue, as things are different in Wales and Scotland) have compared their recent situation to that of Irish Catholics in the 19th and early 20th century. The unwelcoming signs of our recent history read 'No Blacks, No Irish'; it's a small step to imagine it saying 'no Muslims', 'no Asians' or 'no Pakistanis'.

Despite the worst efforts of the IRA in my youth in the 1970s and 80s, I don't recall people saying 'all Catholics are terrorists'. The level of distrust, fear and sense of threat from Muslims has (sadly) reached far greater heights. Recent survey data, [quoted](#) by Communities Minister Baroness Warsi, has indicated that three-quarters of Brits think that Islam is incompatible with being British. Related research gave virtually the same figure for ignorance of Islam.

Strikingly, about 80% of Muslims in this [survey](#) said that they were proud to be British. In fact, they were 'more proud' than non-Muslims – perhaps they felt that Britain is less British these days - I have come across this view personally and anecdotally; it also describes some of the outlook of far-right and Eurosceptic movements.

Anti-Muslim

Anti-Muslim negativity crystallises around a few issues:

Shari'ah – although, ironically, this is about being a good Muslim, shari'ah is another word for the way a Muslim lives their life, not the negative associations attached to it.

Oppression of women – a cultural projection and a cultural problem.

Terrorism – by a small majority who are terrorists, rather than 'Islamists' or Muslims
Halal meat – possibly ignoring a host of inhumane animal-rearing and slaughtering processes

Muslim presence – e.g. the threatening and dominating mega-mosque narrative



Baroness Warsi also had this to say: 'I don't need to give you story after story about the mosque that's

been attacked or the women who have had their headscarf ripped from their heads, or abused for wearing religious dress, or the discrimination in the job market or the online abuse.'

This negativity can extend to Christians. The mosque-friendly or Muslim-friendly Christian can be on the receiving end of abuse and hate mail from fellow-Christians because they have responded positively to a mosque development or have been welcoming of Muslims. As I write this, and publication may be some time later, I have been both encouraged and disheartened about news of Christian-Muslim relationships in Aberdeen. A great good news story was covered in the mainstream media of the minister who allowed local Muslims to pray in his church because the neighbouring mosque was too small and worshippers were having to pray outside in the cold and the rain. He was criticised for being a 'Good Samaritan' and called a traitor. My article is [here](#). I hope that the Christians who have shared their hatred of Muslims and their disapproval with the minister are a very small minority indeed. This links with reactions to mosque-building, including by Christians.

Opposition to mosque-building



The prospect of a mosque-development seems to provoke an almost visceral reaction, and opposition to mosque-building is getting stronger and more organised. The mosque has become an unwelcome presence and a focus, like women, for anti-Muslim negativity. The organisation '[Mosque-busters](#)', created in 2011 has become increasingly active and successful, 'winning' virtually all its campaigns against mosques around the country. It is a war against a phantom enemy, not rational objections to a development that has no place, relying on whipping up hatred and intolerance, so much for 'British values'!

These are some of the ways in which non-Muslims have responded to the prospect of a mosque being built locally:

Proposed mosque development in Bletchley – British National Party (BNP) [campaign](#), thankfully unsuccessful.

Leicester – pig's head left outside community centre being used for prayers with plans for development as an Islamic centre. The English Defence League (EDL) has been actively campaigning against this centre. There has also been a visit by Nick Griffin of the BNP. A disused church in Lancashire that was due to be developed into a mosque was subject to an arson attack.

Leicester – masjid is based in former council Portakabin, a non-Muslim passerby described it as a 'bomb factory' while I was standing outside with a local priest.

Sunderland – there was a long-running campaign against a mosque development
London – of course there is the infamous 'mega-mosque' which is no closer to getting planning permission, let alone being built, in Newham. Christians from an anti-Muslim network regularly gather to pray 'against' this development, surely an irritation to God whenever they meet to 'pray'! Perhaps one day I will make my way there and offer prayers of peace with a Muslim colleague ...

So what is the problem with a mosque?

I have been in many masjids around the country – Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi, Salafi – though as my colleague the imam says – 'no need for sectarian labels'. In some of them very little other than prayer goes on; in many there is an attached community centre with community projects. I wonder how many of the mosque-haters have been inside a mosque?

Reading an account of the lawyer who runs 'Mosque-busters' recently it is clear that he has rather different ideas about mosques: not as places of prayer and community centres but as centres of hate, promoters of violent jihad, bastions of an Islamic empire.

We need to tell better stories about places of worship – and there are plenty of them out there. I deliberately visited a London mosque on [21/7/05](#) after walking several miles across London due to transport outage. I did so to show solidarity with the Muslim community. It felt like a safe and spiritual place to be in, removed from actual or planned atrocities carried out in the name of 'Islam' and with the reality being that 'the Qur'an says no'. I told a friend later I had walked into a mosque. He was surprised. 'You mean you can just go in?' I later took another friend to the mosque across the road. Yet these are just places of prayer, no more threatening than that. Try it – go inside. In closing, I offer the example of the imam at Aylesbury Jamia Masjid. I took a group of Christians there and he warmly welcomed us into God's house, not his. As Christians and Muslims, we need to cool things and not fuel the flames of division and hostility. My vision is of people of both faiths speaking generously and graciously about each other. As a group of Christians and Muslims we produced this [statement](#) together which encourages us to be more open to each other.

Julian Bond, Director,
Christian Muslim Forum
www.christianmuslimforum.org

His Holiness Pope Francis and Inter Religious Dialogue

Bill Ozanne



The Catholic Church is fully involved in and committed to numerous Forums and Councils for dialogue between Faiths.. This would not have happened without the changes that John XXIII , Paul VI and John Paul II, and yes Benedict XVI, implemented and developed after the decisions of the Second Vatican Council and the resulting Vatican agency, the *Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue*. This mainly produces norms for behaviour and also thinking documents and resources to persuade and underpin Catholic lay and clergy in their relations with other religions, notably the Declaration “*Nostra Aetate*” These are more like guidelines than orders. The Popes supported these developments by word and example. In the case of Pope Benedict, his published guidelines tended to be cautionary, rather steering than restraining, strengthening the underlying principles and theology and correcting some of the enthusiasms in his inimitably rational style. By example, he continued to visit, host and talk with leaders of the major religions and to hold his own Peace Prayer meeting in Assisi with leaders of world religions.. The ease with which Catholics and their leaders in Britain meet and talk with ordinary and extraordinary members of differing faiths [even to some extent New Religious Movements] continues to develop. Pope Francis’ style and approach promises to be very proactive and adventurous, with new inspiration, energy and direction.

The religious matrix of Argentina, which still designates itself a Catholic country, is significant in understanding his experience : a survey in 2011 stated that 67 % of the population were Christian, “other religions” 7%, Muslims 1%, Buddhists 1%,non-religious 15% and not stated 9%. Argentina has the largest [Muslim](#) minority in Latin America. Although accurate statistics on religion are not available (because the national census does not solicit religious data) the actual size of [Argentina’s](#) Muslim community is estimated around 400,000 to 500,000 members according to the [International Religious](#)

[Freedom Report 2010](#). Argentina also has the largest Jewish population in Latin America with about 300,000. The community numbered about 400,000 after World War II, but the appeal of [Israel](#) and economic and cultural pressures at home led many to leave; recent instability in Israel has resulted in a modest reversal of the trend since 2003. Although [Jews](#) account for less than 1% of Argentina's population, [Buenos Aires](#) has the [second largest population of Jews](#) in the [Americas](#), second only to New York City, and is the seventh largest Jewish community in the world. From another source: there are approx 300 Sikhs in Argentina, mainly associated with the only Gurdwara in Latin America in the city of Rosario. The growth of Protestant Churches in Argentina has been met with more than mere respect by Pope Francis, then Cardinal. In [Christianity Today](#), 14 March 2013, Juan Pablo Bongarrá, president of the Argentine Bible Society, recounts that Bergoglio not only met with Evangelicals, and prayed with them—but he also asked them to pray for him. Bongarrá notes that Bergoglio would frequently end a conversation with the request, "Pastor, pray for me." At a weekly worship meeting of charismatic pastors in Buenos Aires, which Bergoglio attended: "He mounted the platform and called for pastors to pray for him. He knelt in front of nearly 6,000 people, and [the Protestant leaders there] laid hands on him and prayed." He has already made great fraternal openings for the Orthodox Churches and there is every hope that he will reach out to other denominations whose lives are dedicated to the worship of God.



To understand how Pope Francis responded to other religions it is only necessary to have a minimal knowledge of his track record in this area in Argentina; I refer to the recent article in the *Associated Press of Rio de Janeiro* which sees Jewish leaders, for example, in Argentina, predicting that Pope Francis will continue to foster warm relations and open dialogue between Catholicism and other faiths .As recently as December 2012 , Archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio lit the first candle on the menorah at Temple NCI-Emanu El during a Jewish Hanukkah ceremony and spoke of light as renovation, of the re-inauguration of

the temple of Jerusalem 2,200 years ago, and the need to carry light to the world. He installed a Holocaust Memorial in his cathedral. He declared healing divisions between religions a major part of the Catholic Church's mission and brought leaders of the Jewish, Muslim, evangelical and Orthodox Christian faiths into the Metropolitan Cathedral to pray for peace in the Middle East last November, with an interfaith liturgy. He said: "Everything is lost with war, everything is gained through peace," "With peace wins victory and respect."

As Cardinal he also welcomed Jews for a joint service on the 74th anniversary of Kristallnacht, the night in 1938 when nearly 200 synagogues were destroyed, Jewish shops were looted and tens of thousands of Jews were sent to be exterminated in Adolf Hitler's Germany and he initiated interfaith prayers after Pope Benedict XVI offended Muslims in 2006 by quoting a Byzantine emperor as saying some of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings were "evil and inhuman." This dialogue between religions "isn't just a photo op," Omar Abboud of the Islamic Center of the Argentine Republic said then. "It's a genuine and well-reasoned commitment under construction, because we know that we cannot get by without this dialogue."

Shortly after his election Pope Francis greeted those belonging to other religious traditions in a way that says it all, after the Jews, "first of all the Muslims who adore the one, living, and merciful God and who call upon Him in prayer." Then, addressing all those gathered, he said: "I really appreciate your presence. In it I see a tangible sign of the desire to grow in mutual respect and cooperation for the common good of humanity."

"The Catholic Church is aware of the importance of the promotion of friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions. I want to repeat this: the promotion of friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions." The Church, "is also aware of the responsibility that we all bear to this our world, to all of creation, which we should love and protect. And we can do much for the good of the poorest, of the weak and suffering, to promote justice and reconciliation, to build

peace. But, above all, we must keep alive the thirst for the Absolute in the world, not allowing a one-dimensional vision of the human person, in which humanity is reduced to that which it produces and consumes, to prevail. This is one of the most dangerous pitfalls of our times."

"We know how, in recent times, violence has produced an attempt to eliminate God and the divine from the horizon of humanity, and we feel the value of witnessing in our societies to the original openness to the transcendent that is inscribed in the human heart. In this, we also feel close to all men and women who, although not claiming to belong to any religious tradition, still feel themselves to be in search of truth, goodness, and beauty, God's Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, and who are our precious allies in the effort to defend human dignity, in building a peaceful coexistence between peoples, and in carefully protecting creation."

Bill Ozanne

Chairman, Archdiocese of Birmingham
Commission for Interreligious Dialogue

Dates to Remember

**Aug 19th Dr. Yehuda Stolov
'Building Peace in the Holy
Land-It Can Be Done.'
Interfaith Dialogue in Israel.
(WCF/IARF)**

The 'Younghusband Lecture'
starts at 18.30. The Montagu Centre,
21 Maple St. London W1T 4BE.

**August 20-23rd, Religious
Freedom and Responsibility
Conference, IARF/WCF**
with Horsham Interfaith Forum.

The event is hosted by the
Unitarian Church, Horsham and will be
a great opportunity to talk with IARF
Council Members and Peace
Commissioners.

British Chapter News

British Chapter and Congress 2014

Following the British Chapter's successful bid to host the 2014 Congress in Birmingham M A Evans was endorsed as chair of the Hosting Committee. Chair of the Chapter Richard Boeke has written a message of sympathy to the team that put together the strong but unsuccessful Lib-Ref bid.

Several IARF Council members and IALRW members are intending to make private visits to Birmingham during the next fourteen months in order to familiarise themselves with the City's facilities and to get to know the Hosting Committee team and their supporters.

Croydon AGM



Despite a poor attendance the return of the British Chapter's AGM to Croydon Unitarian Church was an enjoyable

and enlightening experience for everyone able to attend. Outstanding talks from Rev Chris Hudson, Charanjit and Kiran Bali, each followed by lively question and answer sessions, just what should be expected at an IARF event.

The reports were accepted and the standing committee and officers were re-elected without opposition which left ample time to discuss forthcoming events. Much of the business section of the AGM was taken up with the report of how the successful bid to host the 2014 IARF Congress in the UK came about and decisions were made.

However, what could not be fully explained by those at the AGM is why more members did not feel motivated to attend. The cancellation of the Worthing Retreat was also due to a lack of committed support. Has there been a failure in communication or have the events become out of step with the direction and expectations of British Chapter members? Only those who did not choose to attend events can answer those

questions. Your voices were needed at the AGM and they are now needed to be shared even more as the programme for the British Chapter 2013/2014 is planned and finalised.

Horsham Conference

IARF/WCF August 20-23, 2013. "Religious Freedom and Responsibility" This IARF conference in association with the World Congress of Faiths is also co-hosted by Horsham Interfaith Forum and the Unitarian Church in Horsham.

The impressive list of confirmed speakers includes-

Rev. Chris Hudson, MBE, Belfast.

Dr. Marcus Braybrooke, WCF President.

Rev. Istvan Kovacs, Romania.

Rt Rev. Kieran Conry, Bishop of Arundel and Brighton.

Dr. Shlomo Alon, and

Dr. Yehuda Stolov,

Israel.

Professor Hal French, University of South Carolina, and

Dr. Dan McKanan, Harvard, USA.

Shaykh M. Amin-Evans.

Charanjit and Ajit Singh MBE.

Rev. Dr. Richard Boeke

Dorothee Gehrman, Germany.

Rev. Dr. Doris Hunter, USA.

Annelies Trenning, The Netherlands.

Advocate Rengapashyam, India.



The availability of discounted conference fees has been extended thanks to generous donations. Current information may be

obtained from WCF and registration may be confirmed easily online through

bookings@worldfaiths.org

or www.worldfaiths.org/events.

Delegates wishing for 'Home Hospitality' or other details should contact Richard Boeke, r.boeke@virgin.net.

Peacemaking Commission Statements

The Commission discusses many peace building initiatives, threats to peace and conflicts at its regular meetings in order to advise the IARF Council or suggest the issuing of statements on behalf of IARF. Statements recommended by the Commission and approved by Council are published and

sometimes discussed in the blog at www.iarf.net.

The IARF has General Consultative Status with the UN's ECOSOC and the Commission works closely with our representatives in Geneva and New York.

Peace Building Stories

Another of the important functions assigned to the Peacemaking Commission by the IARF Council was to identify, encourage and report upon peace building projects undertaken by our members. These activities may be either as IARF initiatives or those of individuals involved with other organisations. New and proposed actions will be reported or announced by the Commission through this section of the Newsletter. However there are many mature and successful projects that should be shared with IARF members and supporters.

Using part of a very generous donation from the Konko Church of Izu, Japan, the Commission has begun to assemble a book of peace building stories. A number of wonderful and inspirational narratives have already been received to be edited by Boeke and Evans.

There are many more stories waiting, as they should, for the people who did the work to tell their stories and motivate others to build peace. These stories need to be told and heard whether they are 500 or 1500 words long. They are important because we all need to know that the principles we all support are making a difference to real people living real lives.

International Association for Religious Freedom (The IARF)

Founded 1900,
the world's first interfaith
organisation

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Article 18. (UDHR) , 1981

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International Association for Religious Freedom, British Chapter (IARF-BC)-Subscription form

I wish to apply for/renew my membership for 2013 and (if not already paid) either:

- (a) enclose a cheque to British Chapter IARF for my subscription of £15; or
- (b) have or will pay it directly to British Chapter IARF, sort code 40-09-18, account 02018268.

Payments which cannot be identified will be treated as anonymous donations.

or (please delete as appropriate)

I do not wish to be a member and ask you to remove my name from the membership list
name and signature _____ date _____ 2013

New Members please add address, email and phone number.

Gift Aid form (if not previously completed) details of giver

Dr, Revd, Mr, Mrs, Ms, Miss or other

forename(s):

surname:

address:

date:

signature:

I want the IARF, BC to treat all donations that I have made since 6 April 2000 and all donations I make from the date of this document until I notify you otherwise as Gift Aid donations. Donations include subscriptions.

Notes

- 1 You can cancel the declaration at any time by notifying the IARF- BC — it will then not apply to donations you make on or after the date of cancellation or such later date as you specify.
- 2 Please notify the IARF-BC if you change your name or address while the declaration is still in force.
- 3 You must pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the tax that the IARF-BC reclaims on your declaration in the tax year.
- 4 If in the future your circumstances change and you no longer pay tax on your income and capital gains equal to the tax that the IARF, BC reclaims, you can cancel your declaration (see note 1).
- 5 If you pay tax at the higher rate, you can claim further tax relief in your Self-Assessment tax returns.

Return by post to the Hon treasurer: Mr JJ Teagle, 15 Lordsfield Gardens, Overton, Basingstoke, RG25 3EW or confirm payment and member details to jeffteagle@btinternet.com

For more details of IARF download our leaflet at <http://iarf.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/IARF-Tri-fold>