

Religions for Peace United Kingdom 2008-2009 Annual Report

Overview

Despite the global recession heralding a period of financial constraint, Religions for Peace UK has emerged from 2008-2009 stronger than ever before.

Whilst government funding to help local multi-religious communities develop from face-to-face inter-faith dialogue to side-by-side multi-religious action ceased, we are now beginning to see the benefits of implementing a strong strategy, based upon relationships and partnerships, here in the United Kingdom, across Europe and throughout the world. There is still the need for a stronger structure, with the advocacy and guidance of a Council of Presidents, plus a proactive Executive and Secretariat, but the relationships and partnerships now forming with the Religions for Peace Network in Europe and internationally; St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace; and the University of Winchester, are the beginning of a new tripartite relationship for peace.



Rovereto Encounter 2008



The year started strongly, with a major multi-religious encounter in Rovereto, the Italian City of Peace, led by our Mr. Jehangir Sarosh, as President of Religions for Peace Europe. This brought together over 250 men, women and young people of different faiths from 33 countries across Europe. Religious leaders, peace practitioners, and academics shared time together, sharing experiences and building relationships.

16 people of seven different religions travelled from the United Kingdom to help develop ways to move from face-to-face dialogue to side-by-side action. Our project team of Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra; Ms. Cinde Lee; Miss Kiran Bali MBE; Miss Shazia Awan; and Dr Brian Walker led an exploration, sharing, reflecting, changing, choosing and creating multi-religious action for peace. Lacunae identified in Rovereto included a lack of knowledge and understanding of best practices for securing sustainable peace and

reconciliation; a paucity of research into effective ways to transform conflict from a potential source of violence into a resource for peace; and an inadequate use of information technology to share knowledge, experience, understanding, contacts and resources with all who are committed to working for peace and reconciliation. Since Rovereto, we have refocused our efforts on ways to fill these gaps through the strength of partnerships within the UK; in Europe; and across the world.

Partnerships for Peace

During the year, it has become increasingly clear that, whilst our strength is in the potential for religious communities of all faiths, and their leaders, to work together for justice and peace, we will not realise this potential alone. To be effective we need: a wide range of skills in reconciliation and peace; action research into more effective ways to transform conflict into durable peace; shared resources that will enable all who work for peace to be effective; and funding to help make it happen. For all of that, we need partners, and they need us. This is the foundation of a profound difference in working for peace.

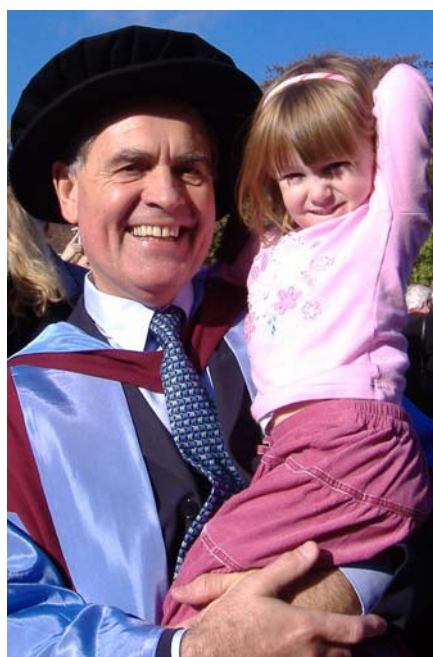
The Director of St Ethelburga's Centre of Reconciliation and Peace, in the City of London, having developed a range of skills and training over the last few years, approached Religions for Peace UK and International, seeking ways to take their own work out into the wider community here and across the world.

The Pro Vice Chancellor of the University of Winchester, a young, dynamic community, seeking distinctiveness in the provision of quality knowledge and understanding, approached Religions for Peace UK and International to explore ways of making a real contribution to reconciliation and peace in the world.

From these relationships has come a three-way partnership that has created Winchester Centre of Religions for Reconciliation and Peace.



Winchester Centre of Religions for Reconciliation and Peace



Out of this partnership, a new centre for reconciliation and peace has emerged, which brings together religious communities and their leaders; research and pedagogic academics; reconciliation and peace practitioners. The aims of the Centre are: to develop knowledge and understanding through action research into issues of reconciliation and peace; to nurture and scale up reconciliation and peace work, by identifying and sharing best practice; and to create a network of relationships and partnerships for reconciliation and peace

The Centre is based in the Master's Lodge, West Down Campus of the University of Winchester. Mr Jehangir Sarosh sits on the Management Committee, with Dr Brian Walker as Director and Dr Mark Owen as Projects Officer. The Centre is due to be launched during 2010, meanwhile plans are underway for action research to support reconciliation and peace in the Horn of Africa,

where Somalia is the epicentre of violent conflict and Kenya hosts over 300,000 refugees. This project has been planned in partnership with the African Council of Religious Leaders and Religions for Peace International. Funding is also being

sought for a youth project engaging young people, from the Poland, Tanzania, Sierra Leone and the UK, who will experience post-conflict reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation work. This will be in partnership with Religions for Peace Europe and the Europe Youth Interfaith Network. A DIFD initiative to increase development awareness here in the UK is also being actively considered.

Other initiatives being planned include a reconciliation and peace portal; publication of a reader and a journal; plus PhD student researchers; a taught Masters Degree; and foundation modules. Events already underway include multi-culture, multi-religious film and dialogue workshops by Amy and Rabbi Ron Kronish, from Jerusalem, and a series of autumn talks, in partnership with Winchester Cathedral, on 'Reconciliation', which will include the Revd David Porter, Director of the International Centre for Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral.



Inter Religious Councils

Progress on the planned Irish Inter Religious Council is slow, but the recent violence displayed in Northern Ireland emphasises the need to continue efforts that will support the reconciliation of communities that still live parallel lives. David Stevens, Leader in the Corrymeela Community of Northern Ireland will be engaged in a workshop with us later this year.

We also continued to work with the Inter Religious Councils of Albania and Sierra Leone, with whom we are planning a joint project on the global challenges of maintaining shared security and sustainable development.

Thanks once more to the support of trustee Mr. Jehangir Sarosh, we are furthermore currently working on a peace and development programme, in partnership with the Inter Religious Council of Sierra Leone, from where I returned this morning. There we are empowering religious leaders, leading women of faith, plus future leaders – young women and men – through a Christian Aid SAVE training programme designed to save the lives of thousands of people living with the threat of HIV. This programme, employing Mrs. Valerie Turner as an experienced facilitator, has commenced in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, which is still the least developed country in the world. We are training 200 leaders, who help will scale up the impact of this project by taking their new knowledge and skills back into their communities and training people there on how to prevent the transmission of HIV to the next generation.



Council of Presidents

During the year, following lengthy consultations with the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom, we confirmed our intention of creating a Council of Presidents for Religions for Peace UK and secured our esteemed leader, Imam Dr Abduljalil Sajid as one of those presidents, along with the much valued Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh.

Over the coming months we hope to invite other significant leaders to take an active role in the new Council, providing guidance and advice, whilst also advocating on issues affecting durable peace to their communities and to the government. Your suggestions for the most effective leaders to invite onto the Council will be most welcome.

We believe that this Council will strengthen our capacity to achieve our strategic objectives and to delivery a lasting contribution to the work of reconciliation and peace in the United Kingdom; in Europe; and in Africa.



Summary

2008-2009 was a difficult and yet successful year in terms of our structure and programmes development. These have delivered benefits that have:

- a) Advanced the role of religious communities, in the United Kingdom and Europe, in delivering common action for reconciliation and peace
- b) Advanced the education of the public in the subject of peace, through our partnership with the University of Winchester
- c) Promoted human rights, through our continuing work with the Inter Religious Councils of Sierra Leone

During 2009-2010, we will continue our work for peace, building on the new relationships and partnerships now being forged.

Finally, I would like to record my thanks to all those volunteers, members, staff, contractors, trustees and all in the Religions for Peace worldwide network who have helped to make 2007/2008 a year of progress in our striving for a more peaceful world.