



**The Joseph Interfaith Foundation**

*United in a Vision for Truth*

**The Council of Imams and Rabbis**

**Terms of Reference**

**1. Purpose of the Council**

The Council of Imams and Rabbis (The Council) was established by the Joseph Interfaith Foundation (The Foundation) in November 2009. The Foundation had been in private discussion and consultation with various senior Imams and Rabbis since February 2009 and several meetings between the two groups had taken place during that year in order to make sure that the Council would be viable. The Council was officially launched at the House of Lords during National Inter Faith Week in November 2010.

The impetus to establish the Council was the noticeable regression of Muslim-Jewish relations in England following the war between Israel and Gaza in January 2009. It seemed that although there had been individual interfaith interactions between a few Imams and Rabbis as well as occasional grassroots meetings, there was an absence of an authoritative body of religious leaders who could communicate with each other directly not only to promote further positive interactions, but also cooperate at times of high tension between the two communities. There was a lack of an official body at the highest level of acting Imams and Rabbis at major congregations who could lead the congregations and inform them on issues that unite as well as those which divide the two communities. It was necessary to set up such a body to develop and promote sustainable interfaith relations and positive interactions between senior religious leadership and through them between the Muslim and Jewish communities. It seemed to the Foundation that this was not just a faith-based necessity but also a national necessity.

The Council is an important component of the Foundation's approach and commitment to improving interfaith dialogue and social interaction among religious leaders of the two communities through realistic, effective and sustainable projects. The Council is not intended as a substitute for the grassroots projects which take place on a much more general and non-representative basis. Rather, it is intended to be a two-way exchange of opinion between the influential religious leaders of the two communities regarding significant co-operations and spearheading developments and initiatives that need to be filtered down to the grassroots via respected and influential religious leadership.



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It is the Foundation's aim that the Council will enable religious leadership of both communities to be more involved in decision-making processes in Jewish-Muslim interfaith matters, while providing a clearer and closer understanding of the religious climate in the country. The Council will advise and encourage the communities to be appropriately responsive and better prepared for dealing with causes of tension between the two communities. Based on the Foundation's long term experience in close interactions with both communities, we believe that these aims and objectives are best achieved if these religious leaders are properly consulted in order to exchange relevant and correct information on a regular and timely basis.

It is through the Council that the Foundation engages in meaningful consultation and realistic discussion with senior religious leadership and their congregations with regard to key interfaith developments and co-operations for a variety of projects and social interactions. The Council also has the function of deliberating on interfaith issues of mutual concern for both communities that can be communicated to the government.

The Council and the Foundation would like to make it clear that the Council's work is to be complementary to the work carried out by national faith community representative bodies.

The Council's meetings involve a consultation process to jointly examine and discuss issues of mutual concern for both communities in good times as well as times of heightened tension. It involves seeking acceptable solutions to problems through a genuine and forthright exchange of views and commitment to understanding issues faced by both sides, and actively aiming to resolve them according to best practice and as realistically as possible. The meetings are also inclusive of deepening the religious and historical knowledge of both sides through presentations and discussion.



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### **2. Membership of the Council**

The Foundation in co-operation with the Council will arrange for further membership of the Council. The Council has agreed that:

- Invitation to join the Council is communicated personally and privately by members of the Council. No vacancy is advertised.
- Any Imam or Rabbi nominee should be supported by two members (same faith as the nominee) of the Council and Mehri Niknam who represents the Foundation.
- All Imams and Rabbis of the Council are senior religious leaders of a mosque or synagogue who deliver Jum'a Khutba or Shabbat Sermon on a regular or frequent basis.
- Council members may also be drawn from senior members of major influential faith related organisations
- The Council will decide the maximum number of members at each stage.
- The Council reserves the right to refuse a nominee.
- All decision are discussed and decided by the Council.
- Currently the Council only has London based Imams and Rabbis. It is the intention of the Foundation and the Council to make the Council national at a time jointly agreed by the Foundation and the Council.



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### **3. Management Members**

Management consists of Mehri Niknam, Executive Director of the Foundation and Dilowar Khan, Executive Director of East London Mosque. The Council has agreed that they jointly facilitate the meetings.

The Foundation's co-ordinator of the Council will be present in as many meetings as possible. The co-ordinators will change as their period of work with the Foundation will come to an end. A new co-ordinators will be appointed by the Foundation. The Council has agreed that:

- The Council is autonomous and reaches its decisions by discussion.
- There shall not be a President of the Council.
- There shall not be a Chair of the Council.
- It operates under the umbrella organisation of the Foundation.
- The role of the facilitators is to contribute positively to discussions, bring perspectives from other sources, communicate any relevant information, and ensure robustness in the process.

### **4. Duration of Membership**

- There is no specific duration of membership of the Council
- Should any member of the Council at any time become involved in any organisation, action or procedure, or make any statement which may bring the Council to disrepute or deviate from its aims and objectives, the Council reserves the right to ask the aforementioned member to leave with immediate effect. The decision of the Council is final.



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### **5. Meeting Co-ordinator**

The Foundation will be responsible for the co-ordination of and arranging the Council's meetings, distribution of agendas and all other documents as necessary.

### **6. Meetings**

- Meetings shall be held four times a year. These can be increased with agreement between the members of the Council and the Foundation to reflect the needs of either community or national issues.
- The venue for meetings will be rotated between mosques and synagogues of the Council members.
- The quorum for the Council shall be three Imams and three Rabbis as well as the facilitators.
- The Council's final agenda and associated papers will be circulated 2-3 weeks in advance of a meeting.
- Minutes of meetings will be circulated within 8 weeks of the meeting. However, in exceptional circumstances this may be adjusted as necessary.
- Members of the Council may communicate to the Foundation any item of agenda two weeks in advance of a meeting.
- The Council will review its performance on an annual basis.

### **7. Confidentiality**

- The Council's meeting are closed and all discussions are under Chatham House Rules.
- In exceptional circumstances, the Council may decide to invite specific individual or individuals for greater consultation. Such decisions are subject to prior discussion with the Council and their agreement.