

# Truth Discovery in Divided Societies: 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2008

***A conference which explores how the lessons learned in these societies may be used to reduce the build up of conflict and ethnic tension in the United Kingdom.***

***10:00am at the St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. 78, Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG***

**The conference is intended for members of all faiths and all ethnic groups who are interested in or engaged in the work of reconciliation.**

## Programme

10:00 - 10:30 Registration/ Tea/Coffee or soft drinks  
10:30 - 10:35 Welcome and Introduction

### First Session

10:35 - 10:50 First Presentation: Experiences of the UK Muslim Community - Huda Jawad  
10:50 - 11:05 Second Presentation: Conflict Dynamics: Learning from the Northern Ireland Experience – David Stevens.  
11:05 - 11:20 Third Presentation: Spiritual and Social Dislocation in Conflict Situations: Learning from experiences in the Solomon Island: - Richard Carter.  
11:20 - 11:30 Discussion - General Questions.  
11:30 - 11:45 Tea/Coffee or soft drinks

### Second Session

11:45 - 12:00 Fourth Presentation: The roles of Truth and Justice in Reconciliation: Learning from South Africa and elsewhere: - Wilhelm Verwoerd.  
12:00 - 12:15 Fifth Presentation: Discrimination in Divided Societies: Development, Growth and Effects: - Inderjit Bhogal  
12:15 - 12:45 Discussion - General Questions  
12:45 – 14:00 Lunch

### Third Session

14:00 - 14:15 Sixth Presentation: Media Impact and Communication in Conflict Situations – Alf McCreary  
14:15 - 14:25 Discussion  
14:25 - 15:45 Workshops  
15:45 - 16:30 Final Plenary Session

Tea/Coffee and soft drinks will be available through the afternoon

16:30 Closure

# Speaker's Biographies and Topics

## Huda Jawad

Topic: Experiences of Minority Communities

Huda Jawad is a Shi'a Muslim. She is also Forward Thinking's UK director. She formerly worked at the Foreign Policy Centre, which is an independent left of centre think tank and she has worked as the Assistant to the Executive Director of the International Forum for Islamic Dialogue.

Forward Thinking was founded in 2004. It is a UK Charity which aims to empower and strengthen marginalised Muslim communities and to foster their confidence to engage with wider society and the British establishment without fearing the loss of faith identity. It works with grass roots organisations and leaders of the more orthodox communities as well as disaffected young people who feel marginalised by wider society and their own faith communities.

Forward Thinking was founded by writer, broadcaster and conflict resolution specialist Oliver McTernan. It recognises that Muslim communities in Britain are characterised by their ethnic, linguistic, religious and regional diversity.

Recent years have seen the reinforcement in the perception of a growing gap between what can be crudely termed 'the Muslim world' and 'the West', both within each society and in arenas of interaction. These tensions can be seen within Britain, where the sizeable and diverse Muslim communities have faced both external and internal challenges to their lives in the UK and have struggled to play a constructive role in mainstream British society while maintaining their distinct cultural and religious identity. Moreover, recent events in the UK and abroad have only served to highlight the various challenges and difficulties facing Muslim communities in Britain. Over the past several decades, the Muslim presence has grown substantially in the UK, while at the same time the obstacles to full participation in mainstream society have remained, if not multiplied.

More specifically, a gap has developed between first-generation Muslims and the generation of their children, who in the majority of cases have been born and brought up in the UK. The older generation had generally sought to avoid assimilation for fear of losing their traditions and values. In the context of alienation, the younger generation has experienced a growing frustration with their own position in society as British citizens and growing questions regarding their religious, cultural and national identities and loyalties.

At the conference on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, Huda is asked to discuss how this community is responding to perceived and real outside attacks on its integrity and identity. The response within the community will also be considered including the actions of some sections by asserting their identity through defiance instead of seeking relationships with the host and other communities in the United Kingdom.

### *Questions for Discussion Groups*

- 1. Perceptions play a significant part in determining the nature of dialogue and the interpretation of government policy. Being mindful of the mistakes of generalisation, what do you think are the perceptions of some Muslim communities in relation to the sudden 'discovery' of British Muslim in the UK and how does this impact on cohesion efforts? (HJ).*

2. *Is it better to treat and deal with faith, social or racial groups as citizens rather than 'special groups' in time of uncertainty and tension or would we miss understanding unique perceptions, opinions, practices etc? (HJ).*
3. *How do you think government and the media learn about Muslims in the UK and Islam? What is the impact of this on government action/rhetoric and media coverage? (HJ).*
4. *Is the debate concerning Muslims' feelings of their identity and faith something that non-Muslim individuals or organisations can contribute to? (HJ).*

## David Stevens

Topic: Conflict Development

David Stevens has held the post of Leader of the Corrymeela Community since January 2004. He was formerly General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches, a post he held since 1992. He is a member of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council and of the Faith and Politics Group. He chairs the CRC's Community Initiatives' Committee.

His most recent book "The Land of Unlikeness" draws on the experience of living in the society of Northern Ireland, which has undergone some level of political violence during the whole of the author's adult life. It is about Northern Ireland, but is also about more. It is about the many other societies experiencing violent conflict or coming out of violent conflict.

At the heart of the book is an examination of the vital question of dealing with the past, in particular how the complex and multi-stranded weave of forgiveness, justice, truth and repentance can overcome the past.

The book asks the questions: Can such societies make good again? What can Christian faith bring to the search for reconciliation? In exploring the answers to these questions, David Stevens looks at the meaning of reconciliation and offers biblical and theological perspectives.

At the conference on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, David is asked to examine current developments of conflict theory and research. He will use the experience gained in Northern Ireland to show how these theories can be used to explain the self sustaining nature of the conflict dynamics and will use this to identify the strategies required.

### *Questions for Discussion Groups*

1. *How do we deal with the claims of respect for diversity over and against the claims of social cohesion? And what about equality? (DS).*
2. *Is a more diverse society a less trusting society? How do we promote trust? (DS).*
3. *How do we police a more diverse society? (DS).*
4. *In a world of terrorism how do we deal with fear of the 'other'? (DS).*

## Richard Carter

Topic: Social and Spiritual Dislocation in Conflict Situations

From 1990-2005, Richard Carter, a British priest, was tutor, chaplain to the Melanesian Brotherhood, eventually becoming a brother himself. Currently he is a priest at St Martin-in-the-Fields in central London.

In 2003, a story shook the Anglican world in general and Anglican monastic life in particular. On August 8th, seven members of The Melanesian Brotherhood, an Anglican order of Christian brothers living a simple and prayerful life and known for their peace work throughout the South Pacific and beyond, were brutally murdered as a result of ethnic conflict in the Solomon Islands. They had been taken hostage five months earlier. The Melanesian Brotherhood is the largest Anglican religious community in the world with over 300 brothers and more than 300 novices and has received a United Nations award for its peace work.

Richard Carter's book "In search of the Lost" is based on his diaries from that agonizing time for the Community. It tells the harrowing story of the loss of seven good, young and holy lives and the aftermath of those deaths. It tells the story of individuals and a community trying to make sense of faith in the face of fierce conflict and tragedy. It recounts the challenge of living out the Christian faith when confronted by great fear and loss.

At the conference on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, Richard is asked to discuss the spiritual and social dislocation that takes place when violence occurs. This includes the empowerment of people that others in their communities rally to because they claim to provide their defence. Often these are people who previously had little power or status in their communities. A major change in power structure therefore occurs and the implications of this will be considered.

### *Questions for Discussion Groups*

1. *What role does "forgiveness" play in the discovery of truth? (RC).*
2. *How has your own faith directly influenced and been influenced by violent conflict? (RC).*
3. *What is your understanding of martyrdom? (RC).*
4. *Can our faith provide a language or a ritual deeper than words in our search for truth? (RC).*
5. *How can religious faith help in the process of healing? (RC).*

## Wilhelm Verwoerd

Topic: The Role of Justice in Conflict Situations

Wilhelm Verwoerd is a grandson of Hendrik Verwoerd, who is regarded by many as the architect of Apartheid. Disturbed by the injustices of Apartheid, Wilhelm however became a member of the ANC, and he has worked to address the legacy of suffering it has caused. For two years under Nelson Mandela's government of national unity he served as a researcher for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Later he became a lecturer at the University of Stellenbosch. He now serves as a program coordinator for the ex-combatants program at the Glenree Centre for Reconciliation in Ireland.

At the conference on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February Wilhelm is asked to consider the role of justice in conflict situations. Conflicts are often driven through the demand for justice by one side or another but the experience of Northern Ireland, South Africa, South America and elsewhere show that compromises with the pursuit of justice eventually have to be made to escape from conflict situations. This is seen in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and the Healing Through Remembering Project in Northern Ireland. The presentation will consider justice issues and discuss how reconciliation can proceed given the hurt and ill feeling that the compromises involve.

#### *Questions for discussion groups*

*Looking back at a core lesson learnt via the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it was stressed that at the heart of the search for Truth and the call for Justice is the need for wrongdoing/injustice/violation/hurt appropriately to be remembered. However, if this public remembrance is to contribute to reconciliation, it needs to be inclusive rather than selective, ethical rather than "ethnic".*

*Think about current political conflicts and ethnic tensions within the UK. Take a minute and in silence try to connect with the hurt/injustice associated with a conflict in which you (individually and/or collectively, directly or indirectly) have been wronged/harmed. Then please respond to the following questions:*

- 1. Can you give an example that demonstrates how extremely seductive the temptation is to remember only the wrong/hurt experienced by "us" and to forget the pain and even humanity of "them"? (WV).*
- 2. How can we practically counter this temptation towards "ethnic", selective, dehumanizing remembrance of "our" past injustice/pain? (WV).*
- 3. How can we remember not only the hurt on our side, but also the harm caused, directly or indirectly, by "us"? In other words, while respecting the need to hold individuals directly involved in violence to account, how can we avoid scapegoating those individuals, thus denying our shared responsibility for ethnic conflict? (WV).*

## **Inderjit Bhogal**

Topic: Discrimination and its Development

Inderjit Bhogal is a Methodist Minister and is a former President of the Methodist Conference. He is currently working as Director of the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum. He has a special concern for Asylum Seekers and is founder and Chair of City of Sanctuary, a movement to create a culture of welcome and hospitality for Asylum Seekers. He is also Chair of "Set All Free", the Churches Together in England project focussing on the abolition of slavery. Inderjit has been a friend and supporter of Corrymeela for 30 years. In 2005 he was awarded the OBE for his work in interfaith relations.

At the conference on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February Inderjit is asked to concentrate on the development of discrimination. For some people discrimination is unintentional since every step along the road to active discrimination can be taken by reasonable people taking rational acts which protect their own interests. Discrimination can therefore be practiced by people who do not intend to be unfair but who come to see a view of their opponents through the glasses that prejudice creates. Other people will seek to discriminate for purposes of personal gain or political advantage. Tribal identities are reinforced by discriminatory action. The speaker will draw on his wide multi-faith experience.

### *Questions for Discussion Groups*

1. *What are the motives which are driving any personal discrimination? How do they differ from reality? Do you recognise any of these driving forces in yourself?*
2. *Do you see the desire to identify with a particular group as a way of celebrating its common culture or as a means of protection or defence?*
3. *What roles do economic differences play in the development of discrimination?*
4. *How can or should you preserve your community identity while at the same time sharing its values with everyone else?*
5. *What steps should be taken to promote understanding and trust between different ethnic and community groups?*

## **Alf McCreary**

Topic: Media Impact and Patterns of Communication in Conflict Situations

Alf McCreary is the Religion Correspondent of the Belfast Telegraph, and also an award-winning journalist and author. He graduated from Queen's University, Belfast with an honours degree in Modern History, and he is a part-time tutor in writing at the Institute of Lifelong Learning at Queen's, and also at the Irish Writers' Centre in Dublin. The first of his 35 titles *Corrymeela – The search for peace* was published in 1975. His recent books include the acclaimed biographies of Senator Gordon Wilson, published by Harper Collins, and Archbishop Robin Eames, Published by Hodder and Stoughton. He was appointed MBE in the 2004 New Year Honours List.

At the conference on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February Alf is asked to examine media influences, including how reporting may promote a victim/victor mentality and the consequences that can arise from the way in which the protagonists then become labelled in the fight. Consideration will also be given to how rumour and communication can lead to the scapegoating of individual communities should these create the impression that the typical is represented by the extreme. Alf may also consider how this can be avoided and how the media and reporting may be used to promote reconciliation instead.

### *Questions for Discussion Groups*

1. *How do you define a "victim". (AMc).*
2. *Is there a hierarchy of victims? (AMc).*
3. *Does a victim construct an all-enveloping identity, without which he or she does not function properly? (AMc).*
4. *In a conflict situation is everybody a victim? (AMc).*

## **Output**

### **Workshops**

A series of workshops will be held during the afternoon session. These will discuss how the information from the presentations impact on their own situations and identify the actions that need to be taken to ameliorate their effects. A set of prepared questions have been provided to facilitate the discussions and speakers have been asked to provide advance copies of the questions to be discussed. These questions are given below the speaker's biographies. The discussions will be written up and published with the proceedings of the event.

### **Final Plenary Session**

A final Plenary Session will be held during which points for future action will be discussed. This will be chaired by the conference facilitator who will be asked to draw the conclusions of the conference together and produce a subsequent paper on the conference which will be published with the proceedings

## **Bringing Reconciliation Home**

"Bringing Reconciliation Home" is the theme which joins together the work of St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace and St Martin-in-the-Fields in London with the Corrymeela Community from Northern Ireland. These events are intended for members of all faiths and all ethnic groups who are interested in or engaged in the work of reconciliation. This programme examines the experiences gained by ourselves and by others in reconciling the sources of conflict and division in our own lives and throughout the world, so that we may be better able to apply this learning to our own situations

Other events in this series have been:

Love Your Enemy?  
St Martin-in-the-Fields Autumn Education Series  
Tuesdays at 7:00 pm in St Martin-in-the-Fields  
Trafalgar Square London WC2N 4JJ

The Gift of the Stranger  
Friday November 2nd to Sunday November 4th 2007  
A Corrymeela Friend's Weekend at Barnes Close near Birmingham.

Understanding Reconciliation: Bringing reconciliation home.  
Thursday 22 Nov 10am – 4pm.  
Workshop at the St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace.  
78, Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG

## **Further Information**

If you require any more information on this event or on the programme of events in the series "Bringing Reconciliation Home" please email Ian Gilchrist on [rec@crestcons.org.uk](mailto:rec@crestcons.org.uk) or telephone him on +44(0)7092 264 642.

## **Publication of the Proceedings**

The proceedings of this and of the previous events will be or are published on the website [www.rec.crestcons.org.uk](http://www.rec.crestcons.org.uk)

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### **Discussion Group Briefs**

There are a total of six presentations in this conference. Those by David Stevens, Richard Carter, Wilhelm Verwoerd and Inderjit Bhogal have an emphasis on conflict growth and dynamics. Those by Alf McCreary and Huda Jawad reflect the interactions encountered in conflict situations.

There are four discussion groups and questions have been provided by each of the presenters. ***Do not try to answer all of the questions. Use them instead as a guide.*** In order to provide even coverage the following is suggested

**Group A** should initially consider the presentation by David Stevens before continuing to the others and concluding with the presentations by Alf McCreary and Huda Jawad.

**Group B** should initially consider the presentation by Richard Carter before continuing to the others and concluding with the presentations by Alf McCreary and Huda Jawad.

**Group C** should initially consider the presentation by Wilhelm Verwoerd before continuing to the others and concluding with the presentations by Alf McCreary and Huda Jawad.

**Group D** should initially consider the presentation by Inderjit Bhogal before continuing to the others and concluding with the presentations by Alf McCreary and Huda Jawad.

### **Reporting Back**

A brief report back to the plenary session will be requested. This should only be about conclusions reached. Each group is also asked to identify three specific actions which they would recommend and/or aim to take to promote reconciliation and avoid the build up of tension

### **Writing up**

Reports from the discussion groups will be included in the proceedings. Please provide a note taker for each group, who can provide me with a write-up of the discussions, preferably in electronic form, after the event.

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