

**OSCE High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
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Plenary Session 7

Intervention by the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is a country that has been built on successive waves of immigrants and has accepted people of different faiths and ethnicity. UK governments have initiated successful policies on interfaith dialogue as a consequence, and in order to reduce the inter-communal tensions that have afflicted other states, and our own country in times past.

The dialogue that we pursue is both between government and between faiths. These policies are promoted by dedicated units, for example the Faith Communities Consultative Council, The Religion and Beliefs Consultative Council and The Interfaith Network.

The UK government cooperates with civil society, interfaith organisations, and it funds specific interfaith education schemes. Examples include the Council of Christians and Jews and the Three Faiths Forum.

In the UK there is a statutory requirement to consult faith groups and minorities on prospective legislation and policy which might adversely impact these communities.

Community tensions are monitored by a range of statutory organisations including the police. The reports are collated centrally and disseminated, to allow agencies to seek early intervention to prevent any escalation into violence.

Community engagement by the police and local government are required under statute and their success is indicated by the confidence shown by communities. We have found from experience that at times of extreme tension, we are able to reduce conflict by utilising established relationships with community groups. This can not be done retrospectively and is why the development of relationships through effective long-term engagement is vital.

Knowledge and appreciation of all the main faiths is taught to all school children from the earliest age, accompanied by school visits to houses of worship.

The Jewish and some other faiths maintain travelling exhibitions which visit all state schools and public libraries to explain the essence of the faith's religious practice and customs.

In addition to the role of the state, it is imperative that those who have a leadership role in the community recognise their own responsibility to build inclusive communities which recognise and respect individuality. They too must build cooperative relationships which further our common aspirations. We have seen clear messages from some religious leaders that encourage cooperation and understanding. This is to be applauded for it is important that we all recognise our responsibility as leaders, and the impact our words and behaviour have on community relationships.

Preventing the spread of extremism and violent extremism is a major cross-government task and is pursued both by central and local government. These policies and initiatives work in parallel to, but are separate from, the promotion of community cohesion, and is designed to build a cohesive society that acknowledges difference but which recognises the common aim of building a safe and tolerant community.