

ENGLAND TO HAVE FIRST-EVER 'INTER FAITH WEEK'

A football match involving people from different faiths is just one of the activities that could take place in England's first-ever 'Inter Faith Week', Communities and Local Government Secretary Hazel Blears announced today.

'Inter Faith Week' will run from 15 to 21 November with a launch the preceding week. Its aims are:

- to strengthen good inter faith relations at all levels;
- to increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, in particular celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society; and
- to increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious belief.

The Week is being facilitated by the Inter Faith Network for the UK and the Department for Communities and Local Government but will be community-led, with local people and groups of different backgrounds holding their own events and to highlight work going on to promote understanding between people of different faiths and beliefs.

Communities Secretary Hazel Blears said:

"People from different faiths are working at the heart of their communities to help disadvantaged people, including those whose jobs, homes or businesses may be at risk during these challenging economic times. It's arguably more important than ever that people of different faiths and beliefs come together and are able to explore what

they have in common. I hope that 'Inter Faith Week' will help to strengthen these relationships and build stronger bonds of understanding and cooperation.

"I'm encouraging faith groups and communities to reach out to each other during 'Inter Faith Week' and local authorities, schools, and others to host and encourage inter faith events. England's first-ever 'Inter Faith Week' can provide a wonderful focus for increasing understanding between people and help to shape the new economy that we build together."

Inter Faith Network for the UK Co-Chairs Rt Revd Tom Butler and Dr Nawal Prinja said:

"We welcome this important opportunity to increase understanding about and between people of different faiths."

During 'Inter Faith Week' typical activities designed to encourage the development of new partnerships within local communities could include:

- a church and a mosque organising exchange visits for their congregations;
- a local inter faith group organising a 'faith trail' to different places of worship;
- a temple, synagogue or gurdwara arranging a special open day event;
- a school or college arranging an inter faith debate on the environment;
- a football match involving young people from different faith communities

The possibility of the Week being marked in Wales as well as in England is under consideration. An annual 'Inter Faith Week' already takes place in Scotland.

Notes for Editors

1. In July last year CLG published *Face to Face and Side by Side: a framework for partnership in our multi faith society*. This report (at www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/898668.pdf) set out for the first time the Department's vision for greater local activity to bring people from different religions and beliefs together, and provided a programme of investment and support to help local communities make this happen. Among the support offered is a £4m small grants programme *Faiths in Action* to help local communities get inter faith projects off the ground. CLG expects to announce first tranche of funding from the Faiths in Action programme next month.

2. The Inter Faith Network links national faith community representative bodies; national, regional and local inter faith bodies and educational and academic bodies with an interest in inter faith issues. The involvement of the Inter Faith Network (www.interfaith.org.uk) springs from the aims, shared by over 160 member bodies - including national faith community representative bodies (Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian); inter faith organisations and educational and academic bodies - of promoting greater understanding between people of different faiths in the UK. In its response to the consultation for *Face to Face and Side by Side* it proposed an 'Inter Faith Week', drawing from experience of a successful Week of this kind held in Scotland.
3. The Week is being held on a 'one off' basis, although options for holding a similar Week in future years will be considered after this year's Week has taken place. Regional Faith Forums are being invited to carry information on their websites about 'Inter Faith Week' linked events and projects in their regions. A website to support the week is being developed to provide information and ideas for events and projects: www.interfaithweek.org.uk.
4. Over 75% of people who answered a question about religion in the 2001 Census said they belonged to a particular religious tradition.

Christian	41,014,811
Muslim	1,588,890
Hindu	558,342
Sikh	336,179
Jewish	267,373
Buddhist	149,157
Any other religion	159,167

Population of Great Britain by religions, Census April 2001
www.statistics.gov.uk

5. The Department for Children Schools and Families, the Local Government Association and the Equality and Human Rights Commission are also assisting in developing plans for the Week. CLG is also liaising, as appropriate, with other public agencies and helping facilitate publicity.

The UN International Day of Tolerance (16 November) falls during the Week. The Week overlaps with the longstanding and widely marked Islam Awareness Week and the two weeks will be complementary in theme.

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