

FORWARD THINKING

Annual Report
2007/2008



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»FOREWORD

Our goal over the past year was to build upon the achievements of previous years and to extend our network of communities and individuals with whom we engage. The extent of the activities covered in this report demonstrates our success in realizing this goal. The main strength of our organization lies in our ability to facilitate real dialogue at multiple levels both in the UK and in the Middle East. The process of establishing dialogue rooted in trust demands extreme patience and a considerable investment of time and resources. It also requires the ability to respond to unexpected demands and opportunities as these arise.

In the UK we focused on building the capacity and confidence of grassroots community organizations in order to enable them to engage in an effective and meaningful dialogue with policy makers, civil servants, funders and the media. The gap in understanding that still exists between the government and the various diverse communities with whom we work remains substantial and in our judgement will require much more focus and resources if it is to be bridged. The fact that we are independently funded has enabled us to be frank in our assessment of the effectiveness of current policies aimed at promoting greater engagement with Muslim communities.

In the Middle East we continued to develop our network of partners and to engage in a number of multi track dialogues with Israeli and Palestinian political and faith-based leaders, as well as with other key stakeholders in the region. Our goal is to promote a political climate that will allow the core issues of this conflict to be examined more objectively.

We are extremely grateful to the Trusts and individual donors who supported us in our work over year and who enabled us to respond to the new and old challenges we encountered.



Oliver McTernan
Director



Youth conference with Oona King, Gordon Brown's Faith Adviser

Our aim is to help grassroots Muslim communities to engage with the Establishment and the wider British society without fearing the loss of their faith identity. We work in partnership with a large number of culturally and religiously diverse Muslim communities and groups across the UK. We do not claim to represent any particular group or community. We recognize the importance of Muslims retaining a strong faith identity whilst being engaged fully with the rest of British society.

To achieve these goals we provide capacity building support to a number of Muslim charitable organizations working at a local and national level. We regularly organize two day educational visits for senior government staff and policy makers to diverse grassroots communities. We hold regular meetings for young people and community leaders. We work in partnership with Muslim organizations in addressing issues of concern. We organize meetings for journalists and broadcasters to help create greater understanding of faith issues and community concerns.



Huda, Yusuf & Nosheen meeting with the Prime Minister's Office

“Engaging the Establishment’ aims to create better awareness of the cultural and religious diversity of Muslim communities and bring about honest dialogue that promotes a clearer understanding of these communities and their concerns.”

Maintaining and developing government contacts:

Forward Thinking has continued to meet with a variety of government departments at both ministerial and senior official levels, including the Cabinet Office, Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Home Office, Ministry of Defence (MOD), and 10 Downing Street. Meetings have also been held with the Defence Academy (the UK defence services’ education, training and research arm).

Dialogue with the Home Office:

A central part of our work this year has been our engagement with the Home Office. We were asked to assist its officials in reaching the various Muslim communities across Britain, and in developing meaningful dialogue with community leaders and members. We organized a number of visits that provided access to grassroots leaders, community members and interested parties in a variety of Muslim communities including Dewsbury, Batley, Bradford, West London, Bedford and Leicester.

These visits took place over a two day period, included both desk officers and senior Home Office officials. Each visit, which was attended by approximately 20 Home Office employees, focused on a particular community and included meetings with community leaders, community members, activists, local government officials and youth. To date, eight such visits have been carried out.

Political Islam Event:

Forward Thinking and the Conservative Middle East Council co-hosted a lively event titled ‘Understanding Political Islam: Its Emergence and Development’ around the origins and tenets of Political Islam. The event, which took place on December 6th 2007, included three presentations, by Dr. Azzam Tamimi on ‘The ideology and practice of Hamas’; Dr. Bashir Nafi on ‘The roots of Political Islam and the emergence of Islamic movements’; and Dr. Abdul Moniem Abdulfotooh on the subject of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

The meeting offered Members of both Houses an opportunity to examine many of the widespread misconceptions that shape Western political thinking on the subject of Political Islam. The participants agreed that such meetings are essential in today’s climate, and expressed interest in attending future events of this kind.



Youth on outward bound course in Cumbria

“Exploring Identity and Empowering Youth’ examines issues of being Muslim and being British and seeks to create a forum in which Muslim youth from various communities across the UK can explore their cultural, religious and civic identity within a safe, non-judgemental environment.”

This work has continued to be led by our UK Programme Director Huda Jawad and our Regional Director Yusuf Desai, joined this year by Yusuf Tai, our Community Empowerment Officer. In addition, our Faith Advisers, Iftikhar Malik and Shaykh Michael Mumisa, assist us in leading an examination of dual identity through

the study of theological texts and the discussion of their relevance to current issues.

Over the past year, our work in this area has focused primarily on facilitating this exploration of dual identity among Muslim youth in communities across the UK. The aim of these activities is to offer a forum in which young people can explore their identities as British citizens, Muslims and individuals within a non-judgemental environment which is sanctioned by the community and respectful of traditional community values. In doing so, we hope to offer these young people the tools to become more active members of their communities and in mainstream British society.



Youth Identity seminar at The House of Commons

Youth Identity Report:

In recognition of the urgent need to engage with young people, Forward Thinking has conducted a number of activities aimed at speaking directly with young Muslims about their lives, perceptions and aspirations.

A key event this year was the implementation of a large scale peer identity review which sought to hear from young Muslims about a wide variety of issues including social isolation, faith identity, national identity, interfaith dialogue, community cohesion and others.

The research, which was generously supported by the City Parochial

Foundation, Esmee Fairbairn and in part the Bedford Charity (the Harpur Trust), consisted of 73 open-ended one-to-one interviews with young British Muslims from a variety of ethnic, denominational, educational and social backgrounds. The participants were aged 16 to 30 and came from Bedford, Blackburn, London, Nottingham and Manchester.

The individual interviews were followed by a focus group discussion and a subsequent analysis of the interviewees' attitudes, aspirations and convictions. The result of this research is an extensive report entitled 'Forgotten voices: Developing more effective engagement with Muslim youth and communities'.

The report was launched nationally on March 19th 2008 in Bradford at a conference organized by Forward Thinking. The keynote speech was given by Bill Rammell, Minister of State, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, and the conference brought together many young people including the researchers who participated in the study, representatives from the diverse Muslim communities mentioned in the report, national and local practitioners as well as politicians. The participants discussed the findings and recommendations put forward in the report, and we received very positive feedback from the different groups involved on the report and the event.

Alongside the national report, a separate report entitled 'Hopes and Aspirations: Young Muslims in Queens Park Bedford' was produced, focusing on the findings among interviewees in the Bedford area. The report, which was supported by the Bedford Charity (The Harpur Trust), included a presentation of the project findings, an analysis of the interviewees' responses, and recommendations on future efforts in this area. The report was launched in Bedford on February 13th 2008. The report has also since been adopted by Bedford City Council in their 'Youth strategy' work in the coming year.

Following the successful launch of the 'Forgotten Voices' report, we were asked to hold an additional event at the Houses of Parliament. The seminar, which took

place in the House of Commons on May 19th 2008, included a panel made up of Yusuf Tai (researcher and Forward Thinking's Community Empowerment Officer), Tafazal Mohammed (Managing Director, Muslim Youth Skills) and Ayshah Ismael, a teacher and activist based in Preston. The seminar offered an engaging and informative discussion on issues relating to the engagement with Muslim youth and communities, and participants expressed a strong interest in the report's findings and recommendations.

Finally, in line with our efforts to address women's issues, Forward Thinking organized a day of activities for a women's youth group in West London. The activity took place at the Guildford Barracks and was hosted and co-organized by the Army's Youth Engagement Division.

Youth Empowerment:

As part of our activities, we have also focused on organizing 'empowerment' workshops for young Muslims from diverse backgrounds. In these workshops young people are enabled to examine issues of faith, identity, lifestyle, gender and living in a pluralistic society in a safe and secure environment which respects their faith and traditions of the Holy Qur'an. To this end, Forward Thinking supported the Luqman Foundation in running fortnightly discussion workshops for young professional Muslims living in the London area.

Alongside this work, we have been

supporting and assisting the Luqman Foundation's efforts to create a Muslim community leadership course at Birkbeck College. The course is expected to be launched in the coming months, and will be open to Imams, community activists and civil servants, as well as the general public, Muslim or otherwise. The course is designed to cover a diverse range of issues, including dealing with government agencies, working with the media, establishing youth and women's groups, establishing effective governance systems within communities and mosques, as well as studying issues of theology and Islamic studies.

Exploring youth issues:

In addition to hands-on work within the community, Forward Thinking also participated in "Islam Expo" the largest event centred on Muslim issues to take place regularly in the UK. During the event, which took place on July 11-14th, Forward Thinking's Oliver McTernan chaired a session titled 'Who represents British Muslims', while Yusuf Desai participated in a panel discussion on 'Responding to the needs of young Muslims'. During the latter discussion, Yusuf Desai emphasised Forward Thinking's position of encouraging the exploration of spaces for engagement with young Muslims, understanding the importance of including both genders in such engagement, and creating role models and platforms which articulate and represent best practice.



Forward Thinking's Bradford conference, engagement between grassroots communities, youth and the Establishment

“Building confidence and empowering communities’ aims to establish genuine dialogue with community and faith leaders, empower communities and support community grassroots organizations.”

Community outreach:

We work with Muslim communities building confidence and using meetings and discussions to prepare community leaders and members for dialogue with social institutions and the Establishment. Forward Thinking identifies key community members who are in a position to influence from within. We work to empower these individuals by facilitating access to Establishment decision-makers such as government ministers and senior civil servants.

This recognition enables leaders to have greater influence within their own communities.

Our Regional Director, Yusuf Desai, leads our community outreach efforts, assisted by Yusuf Tai, Community Empowerment Officer. Their longstanding relationships with various British Muslim communities enable them to enter the community and initiate frank dialogue with community and faith leaders. Our approach is to tackle issues in a holistic way—educational, social, political—hand-in-hand with the faith dimension and to tease out the barriers and inhibitions perceived by the community. Over the past year, we have conducted meetings and workshops in Dewsbury, Bolton, Bedford, Nottingham, Leicester, Bradford, Batley and various communities in London.

An important feature of this year has been our work with the Queens Park Muslim community in Bedford. Following requests by both community leaders and Bedford Local Council, Yusuf Desai worked hard to engage with community members and local government representatives, increase access and facilitate constructive dialogue between the sides. This trust-building process is progressing well, and will hopefully lay the foundations for long-term engagement in the future.

Another notable event this year was a visit by our Director, Oliver McTernan, to Leicester, where he addressed a 1000-strong congregation within the Muslim community. He spoke about our work in the UK and the Middle East as well as his visit to Deoband Madrassa in Northern India.

Supporting grassroots organizations:

As part of our efforts, we have supported and empowered a number of grassroots organizations working within – and with – Muslim communities. Forward Thinking has assisted in the establishment of the National Muslim Chaplaincy Association, which provides a platform and forum for Muslim chaplains in universities and other educational institutions across the UK. Following our support, the association has been successfully established and held its inaugural conference in June of 2008.

We have also provided significant help to the Active Change Foundation based in Walthamstow, London, which works closely within the Muslim community. Forward Thinking was able to help the organization refine its existing structure, develop robust activities and seek funding for additional work.

We have also continued to provide support and expertise to the Listen Up Project, a council-sponsored initiative in Islington, London. Other organizations which we have engaged with and supported this year include Mecca2Medina and, The Platform Magazine in London, and El Ansar in Batley. Programme Director Huda Jawad also spoke at a youth conference organized by one of the student Islamic societies in Queen Mary University in London.



Former Editor of The Times, Charles Wilson and BBC World Affairs Correspondent Emily Buchanan at the press launch of Forward Thinking's report; Forgotten Voices: Developing more effective engagement with Muslim youth & communities

“‘Briefing the Media’ aims to engage with journalists in an effort to encourage a more balanced and genuine portrayal of British Muslim communities in the print and other media.”

Forward Thinking has continued its increased involvement in advising and briefing the media, particularly on issues related to government policy towards tackling extremism and radicalisation as well as the impact of anti-terror legislation on Muslim communities. As in past years, every effort is made to ensure that grassroots voices with a real

constituency behind them are heard by media organizations, so as to enable the development of an honest discussion in the media. During this period, Huda Jawad published a response to an article on ‘Britishness’ on the Open Democracy website. Huda was also interviewed in March on BBC Arabic radio, on issues relating to the Muslim community in Britain.

In addition we plan to launch our new website in early 2009, in an effort to enhance access to our activities and enable greater involvement of grassroots communities and actors.



European Diplomats, Israeli and Jordanian Politicians meet to discuss the Arab Peace Initiative

The Middle East Initiative is based on the belief that a durable peace agreement to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be achieved through the active participation of those who are regarded as political or religious hardliners. Over the past year, we sought to engage in – and promote – an inclusive dialogue with a variety of Israeli and Palestinian partners, as well as with opinion-shapers and key figures in neighbouring Middle East and EU countries. Our priorities over the year were to:

Consolidating the relationships previously established with key Israeli and Palestinian groups

Over the past year, we have continued to meet regularly with Israeli and Palestinian groups during repeated visits to the region, as well as hold round-table discussions on specific issues and organize meetings for Israeli and Palestinian leaders with British politicians and opinion-shapers in the UK. In addition to regular visits to the region throughout the year, Forward Thinking has arranged a number of events in the UK.

Visit of Israeli Parliamentarians:

A group of nine Israeli Members of Parliament (Knesset) visited the UK as part of Forward Thinking's effort to promote dialogue with British parliamentarians. During their visit, which took place on January 24-27th 2008, the parliamentarians held a series of meetings with MPs, representatives of the international community, and senior policy-makers. The Israeli participants included members of the Likud, Labour, Shas, Kadima and Israel Beitenu parties. The visit was deemed a success by participants on both sides, and it was agreed that this dialogue should continue through additional such meetings.



Crispin Blunt MP in conversation with Members of Israeli Knesset

Visit of Palestinian political leader:

As part of our effort to promote dialogue between political stakeholders on all sides, Forward Thinking also organized a visit to the UK for Dr. Mustapha Bargouthi, a renowned politician and community leader. The visit, which took place on February 13-15th 2008, included meetings with MPs and peers, Chatham House members, the London Middle East Institute, the Foreign Office, Oxford University and members of the media.

London Seminar with Mustapha Bargouthi and David Glass:

In July 2008, Forward Thinking organized a seminar in which Dr. Mustapha Bargouthi - a Palestinian political leader - and Mr. David Glass - an advisor to the Shas party in Israel and a highly respected political figure - met with representatives of the British establishment and international community. The meeting offered an opportunity for an in-depth debated, and the resulting lively discussion raised important insights on the possible avenues for progress in future dialogue. A report of the proceedings was compiled and circulated to the participants, and Forward Thinking is planning on building on this event to create an ongoing trilateral dialogue of this kind in the coming year.

Regional Meeting:

Forward Thinking held meetings in Nablus on January 8-10th 2008 with local academics and former members of the Palestinian Legislative Council.



Dr. Mustafa Barghouthi, interview with BBC World Service

The Institute for the Study of Conflict Resolution and Governance in Gaza:

Over the past year, Forward Thinking has shepherded the establishment of the Institute for the Study of Conflict Resolution and Governance in Gaza, which is funded by the Swiss Government. The Think Tank, which is known in Arabic as the House of Wisdom, is based in Gaza City and will seek to provide an independent forum for academics and practitioners to study conflict-related issues as well as peace promotion, security, good governance and economic development. The Institute will organize a series of workshops, seminars and conferences, and will focus its efforts on promoting reconciliation by peaceful means between the various Palestinian factions.

In early 2008, the Institute's steering committee recruited and appointed a board of Trustees. The aim was to select people who had credibility in all sections of the local political and academic communities. This would ensure the independence of the centre in the eyes of the public and give other academics and politicians the confidence to join in the Centre's activities. Mr. Nahedh Al-Rayyes, the former Justice Minister, was named head of the board of Trustees. The other board members are: Dr. Husam Odwan, who is Chairman of the "Palestinian University Teachers Society and a Lecturer at Al Aqsa University, Dr. Yousef Saleh, former Political Advisor to the Prime Minister and the current Political Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Dr. Asad Abu Sharekh, a lecturer at Al-Azhar University.



A meeting at House of Wisdom, Gaza

On May 15th, Forward Thinking attended a meeting between representatives of the Olaf Palme International Centre from Sweden and the staff of the 'House of Wisdom' Institute. Two additional workshops, entitled 'Introducing the Institute and Discussing the Policies and Goals it will work on' and 'Discussing the current situation – the division between Gaza and the West Bank' were held on June 1st and 5th respectively, and were each attended by 15-20 analysts, academics and journalists.

International Conference 'Peace Prospects – Chances and Obstacles':



Speakers at Gaza conference

A conference was held to mark the formal opening of the Institute in Gaza City on July 30th 2008.

The conference brought together 170 participants, including representatives of the various Palestinian factions and journalists. The conference was broadcast on the Aljazeera Mubasher Satellite Channel. The international participants included Sir Jeremy Greenstock, Yves de la Messuziere, Lord Hylton, Chris Donnelly, Mitchell McLaughlin, William Sieghart and Oliver McTernan.

Broadening our network of contacts in the region, including Israelis, Palestinians and relevant third parties

We continued to expand our network of contacts both within the Israeli and Palestinian polities and beyond their borders. These efforts were made in order to gain a more comprehensive insight to the problems and concerns besetting the region as a whole and can have a direct impact on Israeli-Palestinian relationships.

In March 2008, Lord Hylton and Oliver McTernan held meetings in Cairo with members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

At the invitation of Prince Turki of Saudi Arabia the Director, Oliver McTernan made a visit to the King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies in Saudi Arabia to discuss Forward Thinking's work both in the UK and the Middle East.

Briefing governments and other influential interested parties on our activities and providing expert analysis of the conflict



Forward Thinking's delegation meeting with Eli Yishai, Israeli Deputy Prime Minister

We participated in the course of the year in a number of high level events on Middle East issues. The director attended the Alliance of Civilisations meeting in Madrid in January 2008, where he moderated a working session entitled 'Conflict prevention and politics at the community level. Alongside such public meetings, Forward Thinking meets regularly with senior British politicians and policy leaders, including meetings with Downing St., the Foreign Office, Ministers, Members of Parliament and Peers. In addition, regular meetings were held throughout the year with Chatham House and the UK Defence Academy. Meetings were also held with UN officials in Jerusalem and New York, EU officials in Brussels, Members of the US Congress and Administration in Washington, as well as representatives of the Norwegian, Swiss and French governments.

Muslim Brotherhood London meeting:

In addition to these meetings, Forward Thinking has sought to assist officials and interested parties in the UK to better understand the approaches and perceptions of various relevant groups in the Middle East. To this end, Forward Thinking hosted a meeting in February 26th 2008 between representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and Egypt and the international diplomatic community. The meeting, which was held in London, aimed to give members of the international community an opportunity to learn more about the opinions and positions of the Muslim brotherhood. The panel included Naser Al-Sheikh Abdullah Al-Fadala- Member of Bahrain Parliament; Abdul Moniem Abdulfotooh – a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt; and Anas Altikriti – a writer and commentator on Political Islam. The event was well-attended, and the participants were able to engage in a lively debate on a variety of key issues.

Deepening our understanding of the central issues which are seen as obstacles to reaching a solution to the conflict

We are committed to deepening our understanding of the central issues which are seen as obstacles to reaching a solution to the conflict, and learning from other conflicts and their resolution. To this end, in November 2007 Forward Thinking staff participated in a meeting in Belfast to discuss lessons to be learnt from the similarities in the peace process in Northern Ireland and the Middle East. In addition, Forward Thinking participated in conferences held in Berlin and Paris on Middle East issues. More generally, we are convinced of the continued importance and overlap that exists between our two programmes, both in terms of better understanding of the underlying tensions and perceptions of the conflict, and with regard to our credibility. We enjoy greater credibility with the Muslim communities in the UK because of our efforts to create a more inclusive dialogue in the Middle East, as well as gaining credibility with our Middle East partners for our work with Muslim communities in the UK.

The Global Dialogue Initiative



Revd Bob Roberts, President Jorge Sampaio, Prince Turki and Oliver McTernan

In partnership with the UN Alliance of Civilizations, the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, the Turkish Institute SETA and the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Forward Thinking took the lead in launching this new initiative which is based on the belief that the resolution of some political conflicts that fuel Islamic-Western polarization may be impossible without a greater engagement of religious social and political movements by more secular political leaders and policy-makers. We seek to foster deeper understanding, respect, and relationships of trust – which may subsequently form the basis for cooperative action - amongst leaders and activists from four sectors:

- European political leaders and policy-makers;
- American political leaders and policy-makers;
- Influential Muslim faith-based and faith-motivated social and political activists;
- Influential Christian faith-based and faith-motivated social and political activists (esp. American Evangelicals).

Forward Thinking organized the inaugural meeting which was hosted by the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs and took place in Nyon, Switzerland on July 10-11. The Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish governments have agreed to host future meetings.

»ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

STAFF

- »Director and Co-Founder Oliver McTernan
- »UK Programme Director Huda Jawad
- »Regional Director Yusuf Desai
- »Administrator Nosheen Karim Özcan
- »Community Empowerment Officer Yusuf Tai
- »Middle East Initiative Consultant Yael Banaji
- »Faith Adviser Iftikhar Malik
- »Faith Adviser Shaykh Michael Mumisa

TRUSTEES

- »William Sieghart: Chairman and Co-Founder, founder of Forward Ltd whose other roles include a Governor of the British Institute of Human Rights
- »Chris Donnelly: Former Senior Political Adviser to four successive NATO Secretary-Generals, Co-Founder and Co-Director of Institute for Statecraft and Governance (ISG).
- »Lord Hylton: Life Peer with a distinguished parliamentary career on matters relating to conflict and civil rights

»FUNDERS & DONORS

We express our grateful thanks to the Foundations, Trusts, Individual Donors and Home Office for their generous support over the past year, including ; Westminster Foundation for Democracy; Rayne Foundation; Rayne Trust; City Parochial Foundation; Esmée Fairbairn Foundation; The Bedford Charity, Michael and Giancarla Alen-Buckley; Mr and Mrs Jean Fau; Pierre Keller; Sir Harry Solomon, Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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