

## **IMPORTANCE OF THEME: “INTER FAITH DIALOGUE”**

Ladies and gentlemen, a very good evening to you and thank you for giving me the opportunity to say few words in such distinguished audience.

Indeed, I think that the choice of the theme - **Faith in the Global Village** - is very significant and timely for community cohesion in Islington.

Islington is a symbolic place for the diversity in ethnicity and faith which characterises modern global society:

- over 150 languages are spoken in our schools
- 40% of our population are born outside the United Kingdom – **including myself!**

Twenty years ago I arrived in Britain - a newly settled immigrant from Algeria. Today, thanks to British traditions of democracy, respect for cultural diversity and values and equality of opportunity – I wear Islington’s Mayoral Chain of Office. I believe I am the first woman Councillor and first Mayor in the UK from Arab World.

And why is this significant? Because it is a function of the strong inter faith dialogue and co-operation between communities which exists here.

But we cannot take harmony for granted. Bonds between neighbours, faith groups and school children have to be worked at. Society is in constant change and ignorance and lack of respect can undermine the good work being done by so many of you in this room.

Global actions which are reported from far away countries in our newspapers and on our televisions have a resonance here and have the potential to cause social unrest locally in Islington.

That’s why events like this to make the link between local and global are so important. I welcome a wider debate about discussing what faith means to our diverse communities, where the boundaries lie and how better to understand each other.

In this way we can as a community take responsibility for creating a safer and peaceful Islington that extends beyond our religious institutions and into our universities and colleges, schools, and public institutions.

The Interfaith Week in itself proves that our society is aware of the need and importance of interfaith relations, debates and actions.

Such actions are the best ways to guarantee further understanding of each other's faith or belief systems.

Islington Council is a supporter of Interfaith Week and our hope is to keep such interest throughout the year - not just one week in November!

Our hope is that the faith communities play fully their role in the wellbeing of our society. We need to develop a healthy understanding of each other and respect each other differences.

History tells us that extremists can use a period of economic hardship to use racial and religious differences to subvert communities. So during the current government cuts we must all work harder to protect interfaith relations from harm.

I personally believe that good people of different faiths can be easily united to work together to challenge social fragmentation, poverty, injustice and for peace in the world.

Lastly, I just want to say a special **thank you** to Roz Miller, Islington Faiths Forum, London Metropolitan University – all those who organised this excellent event and to all those who enrich our understanding of such a complex and important subject.

Thank you all and good night.