

FORWARD THINKING

Frontline mediation. Challenging perspectives.

Annual Report

2022

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Message from the Chairman

It's been another year of rising conflict in the Middle East, making Forward Thinking's role in mediation even more relevant. Once again on behalf of all our trustees I'd like to thank the Forward Thinking team for all of their extraordinary efforts.

Throughout the year, whether on the ground in person or digitally, Forward Thinking has brought together diplomats and policy makers from all over the world into dialogue and helped forge new relationships between governments and people in conflict.

We are very proud of Forward Thinking's role and reputation in the region and grateful for the commitment and energy of the team and their commitment in such difficult times.

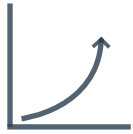
William Sieghart

WILLIAM SIEGHART CBE | CHAIRMAN OF FORWARD THINKING



Our Values

Conflict mediation requires addressing attitudinal challenges – entrenched – mindsets, fears and aspirations – that can inhibit moving forward on key disputed issues. Our approach to dialogue rests on six pillars:



Demand-Driven



Inclusivity



Transparency
& Confidentiality



Working at
Multiple Levels



Flexibility &
Adaptability



Sustained
Commitment

Our year in numbers:

662

in which we participated or facilitated

233

Middle East Programme

295

Helsinki Policy Forum

134

UK Programme

Timing, Language and Method do Matter

By Oliver McTernan | Director

Reflecting back on twenty years of active engagement in an effort to understand and, where and when possible, to mediate in the conflicts and challenges that the Gulf, Middle East and North Africa regions continue to face, I have come to appreciate the true importance of methodology, language and timing. Over the years we have witnessed too many efforts to resolve the ongoing disputes and conflicts fail, because insufficient attention has been given to the timing, language and methods employed by those attempting to find a solution.

April 2023 marks twenty five years since the Good Friday Agreement was signed. A resolution to the Irish conflict remains a work in progress, and yet the signing of the Agreement was a significant moment in an eight hundred year struggle over sovereignty, identity and the right to self-determination. It provided an agreed framework in which such fundamental issues could be addressed and worked through on a political level without resorting to street violence and armed struggle. Previous attempts to reach such an agreement failed simply because these knowingly excluded some of the key protagonists, who needed to be at the table to reach a durable solution. It could be argued that it took eight hundred years for those with the power to achieve change to understand the importance of inclusive engagement to make progress towards a real peace.

We have seen in the Middle East over the years how ‘top down’ imposed solutions do not last. A peace process, aimed at delivering a durable solution, needs to include all the combatants, who have constituency and authority. Any attempt to bypass those, who are too easily categorized as terrorists and therefore “beyond the Pale” of negotiations, is the equivalent to papering over a crack. Whatever is agreed in isolation from the realities on the ground will not be deliverable without the buy in from all the significant constituencies that are part of the conflict.

The language we use is equally important. It is all too easy to create misperceptions and unnecessary suspicion by a careless use of expressions already in common use. A good example of this for me is the use of the words ‘Normalisation’ and the ‘Abraham’ Accords to describe recent efforts at political rapprochement between Israel and some Gulf and North African countries. Common usage of the word normalisation implies either a returning to normal or a process in which something previously regarded as ‘extreme’ or ‘taboo’ comes to be considered as ‘normal’. In the light of this, I can understand why the use of this expression ‘Normalisation’ caused real alarm for many Palestinians. For them it is the normalisation of the abnormal – the ongoing occupation of the land designated to be their State.

The use of the title ‘Abraham’ is equally concerning. We normally speak of the Abrahamic faiths to designate a shared fundamental belief in monotheism. The word therefore has a specific ‘religious’ meaning. To speak of the Abraham Accords and the Abraham Fund is the equivalent to putting a theological overcoat on what is essentially a political process. It has unnecessarily given rise to the suspicion that the true goal behind these recent initiatives is to undermine Islam by creating an Abraham religion – a synchronised version of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The careless use in a political context of a particular religious term has provided an effective tool for those opposed to advancing a just peace and sustainable stability in the region. From Najaf to Gaza and beyond, I know some of those who are committed to promoting a better understanding between the different faiths are being singled out as ‘normalisers’. The language we use does matter.

Timing of initiatives is equally important. Too often international efforts to resolve the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, or internal disputes in the Gulf region, are driven by outside interests and therefore mistimed. The potential consequence of mistiming and ignoring the need for an inclusive negotiation process can be seen in the fallout from the failure of the Camp David summit in July 2000. It resulted in a deep sense of suspicion and mistrust, giving way to the anger and open hostility that ushered in the worst cycle of violence in a decade. The total impasse in negotiations that we have reached today will undoubtedly lead to an even more ferocious cycle of bloodletting.

To rush into a new round of negotiations will not prevent an escalation in violence. Neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis are ready for such talks. Both sides internally are too deeply divided to create any meaningful peace process. A more timely and meaningful intervention by the international community would be to use every diplomatic effort to persuade the Israeli authorities to stop the current daily routine of house invasions, arrests and extrajudicial killings by their military.

Equally important is to persuade the Palestinian authorities to hold open and fair elections for both the Legislative Council and the Presidency. The deep divisions that have taken root over the past seventeen years will not be resolved without elections and a total commitment by all the factions to respect and uphold the outcome. The international community and the Israelis must make a similar commitment. Now is the time for both political courage and vision if we are to avert a new cycle of unnecessary killing.

Sisyphus in the Middle East

By Sir Jeremy Greenstock | Trustee

This time last year the world appeared rocky enough. Since then, the global atmosphere has grown steadily worse. It is not just the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but the whole context for global stability and economic progress. Big-power relationships are more tense than at any stage since the end of the Cold War, with implications for the management of regional conflicts as well as for global peace. And the prospects for sustainable growth, not least in less advanced countries, are decidedly poor when energy and food prices have surged in the way they have in the past few months.

How does the Middle East, the archetypal area for pushing rocks uphill, look against this background? For some years now we have been observing the disheartening shift in regional capitals towards domestic control, avoidance of risk and reluctance to address structural problems or long-standing conflicts. As for their international outreach, most Arab countries have been hedging their bets in their relations with big powers. Their trust in the US's capacity to contribute to regional stability has sunk to a new low following the chaotic American withdrawal from Afghanistan. This has led to a greater Arab willingness to keep lines of communication open to Moscow despite Russia's contempt for international law in Ukraine; and the importance of China as a market for Middle East products, especially oil and gas, has encouraged stronger links with Beijing. It is not that states have moved to replace the Americans by siding with the autocracies; more that perceptions of American and wider Western decline and thus of a more equal geopolitical arena have led capitals in the Middle East and beyond to hedge their bets and look for transactional opportunities wherever they can be found.

This growing habit of shopping around for advantage comes on top of regional trends that have been intensifying for some years: a stronger focus on retaining power as the climate for political change grows more unpredictable; the downgrading of values and principles of behaviour as the impact of the UN fades over time; the lowering of respect for individual rights as the advanced democracies falter, which encourages the use of repression as an alternative; and the shunning of collective approaches to problem-solving because the compromises that are needed to make these work are too painful for insecure and beleaguered power centres. These instincts are

felt in non-Arab capitals as well: Erdogan's Türkiye has noticeably turned its back on NATO solidarity over Ukraine; Iran has to all intents abandoned the search for a JCPOA settlement because the hardliners supporting the clerical regime dislike the idea of a restored relationship with the West (even more so while Iran's internal protests persist); and Israel, though different in political character from all its neighbours, is currently caught up in a huge internal row over the government's accountability to its democratic institutions.

Then there are the regional faultlines. Tensions in the Gulf come at the top of this list, because the Sunni-Shia division – never a prominent cause of instability in previous eras – has deteriorated so badly in the new world of cultural identity and because Iran has shown itself so addicted to interference outside its borders: in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Bahrain, not to mention its enmity with Israel. This situation exposes the Saudis in particular to some awkward choices. They have wisely agreed to China's promotion of a new structure of communication with Iran; but the two countries' suspicion of each other remains strong. Riyadh still needs to maintain effective defence forces in the face of a potential Iranian threat, and yet their trust in their main defence supplier, the US, is fading. The incentive to deepen their links with Russia and China is currently strong, but these two cannot be relied upon as full security allies. At least with King Salman on the throne, they are resisting a closer relationship with Israel through the Abraham Accords while Palestine remains inflamed (and while they assess the implications of the new Netanyahu government), but they value Israel's presence as a bulwark against Iran. Their dilemmas even extend to the management of the global oil price through OPEC+, because they need to maximise their oil and gas revenues in order to fund their economic diversification programme – cocking a snook at the US in the process – but have to be conscious of the risk of hydrocarbon demand destruction if a high oil price slows down global growth and inspires a faster shift to renewables. Within this problematic mix, it looks as though Riyadh's priorities are: internal control and economic health; capacity to resist Iran if necessary; influence within the Arab and Muslim worlds; and freedom to deploy their external relationships as circumstances dictate.

Yemen merits a comment in this context. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reputation is closely caught up in this civil war and he cannot contemplate a settlement that looks like a retreat. Yet his former principal ally, the UAE, has steadily withdrawn its interest, Iran continues to poison the atmosphere with support for the Houthis, and the government in Sana'a is a long way from being able to stand on its own feet. No-one, not even the UN negotiators there, can see a route to a settlement. Even more than his attacks on dissidents abroad or his fury with Qatar, MbS's pursuit of 'victory' in Yemen has alarmed his GCC partners and symbolised his determination to carve his own path without calculating the effect on his neighbours. The gradual, but increasingly marked, differences with President Mohammed bin Zayed of the UAE reflect the difficulties which GCC members are having in forging a collective approach. The priority for every leader remains security at home and personal power projection, not the solving of shared problems. As for external relationships, there seems to be a growing awareness that no one partnership or defence understanding can be trusted to ensure national or GCC security, and that therefore a strategy of diversification, with a spread of different communication channels, is the way to build up enough self-sufficiency to cope with the unpredictability of modern geopolitics. Russia in particular is poised to exploit this new approach to the full; and we wait to see whether China is now preparing to involve itself more deeply in Middle East politics.

This forms a disheartening background to the search for progress on Palestine. Arab governments know that a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an essential component for durable stability in the Middle East, but they have signalingly failed to allocate high priority to it in recent years. Now, however, a growing dysfunctionality in both Israeli and Palestinian internal politics is increasing the risks of a new wave of violence. The Saudis appear to be assessing how to refresh the Arab Peace Initiative as a regional mechanism to pursue a

two-state solution, but it is unclear what new substance they can bring to a process that has lain stagnant for two decades. Popular discontent in the West Bank is aimed as much at the moribund leadership of the Palestinian Authority as at Israel, but the threat of an outbreak of real violence in and over Jerusalem, as Jewish Israelis seek to encroach on the holy sites, carries the greatest risk of an explosion. There is no sign of Arab or international concern of sufficient intensity to address this situation, with the Americans most noticeably absent from any suggestion of a diplomatic initiative. It is the view of Forward Thinking that this reflects a complacency amounting to real irresponsibility, which will one day be nastily exposed.

What chances, then, for reconciliation initiatives of the kind attempted by Forward Thinking, at the top of its class within civil society for thoughtfulness, persistence and convening power? We have not stopped being active. The combination of constant communication with all sides on the ground, discreet international meetings convened under the Helsinki Policy Forum, organisation of visits to Belfast to open up minds clamped on the status quo, and regular warnings to stakeholders of the dangers of inactivity has chipped away at the forces of stagnation and won widespread respect from those who know the dangers. Taken together with other work in the region, on Iran-Saudi Arabia, on Egypt and on Tunisia, plus the encouragement of wiser approaches to handling the UK's ethnic divisions, our tiny NGO is taking on some of the most intractable of today's social and political problems with more courage, understanding and innovation than most governments around the globe.

Let us ensure that FT has the support and the resources to keep rolling the Sisyphean rock back up the hill, because one day we shall see what a difference all this hard work has made.

Regional Security

By Alistair Burt

There has been a wry observation of tables turning this past year, when the relationship between the UK and MENA has been under scrutiny. Normally the British visitor is asked for an opinion on the latest bout of political instability to affect the region, from a breakdown in governance to public anger reflected on the streets or media. This past year the polite inquiries have come the other way, as bewildered friends have sought reassurance that the changing UK cast of Premiers and ministers does not mean that an historic relationship, but with many urgent and contemporary issues, is being sidelined by distraction.

It has not been an unfair question to ask. From an Integrated Review of Defence and Security policy which focused away from the Middle East, to a splitting of the MENA FCDO portfolio, to slow responses to physical attacks upon allies, the region was beginning to worry that the U.K. was following a supposed US lead, characterised however unfairly or indeed wrongly, as disengagement.

I think this is a premature judgement. Yes, there have been distractions, and the political upheavals, together with the drive for trade deals post Brexit, Covid recovery and the impact of the invasion of Ukraine have not been minor in their impact. But the UK remains alert and very active in the region, at Government, business and NGO levels, with its many unresolved issues.

Regional security looms large.

It's a changing region, and what is interpreted as US pull back could be better assessed as a recognition in which increasingly assertive states, appreciating the lessons of recent history, have become more aware of their need to take greater control of defence issues. Reducing regional tensions is an urgent and recurring theme of Forward Thinking meetings. Geography is not going to change, and the need to complement physical defence strategies with renewed diplomacy between states suffering strained relationships is one with which the UK is in much agreement. The UK's physical security presence throughout the region is not in question, continuing to contribute to multi-lateral maritime assurance, as well as vital training and other expertise. In diplomatic activity, with Iraq seeking to broker between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the UAE making clear that negotiation must be the better way forward

with Iran, and the efforts towards a lasting truce in Yemen—the U.K. has been supportive of these. The UK, as part of the P5+1, has been doing all it can to support a good conclusion to the JCPOA talks in Vienna, though these are now seemingly marooned as a result both of events in Ukraine and Iran's internal crisis.

But there is more to do. COP 28 in the UAE will ensure the greatest scrutiny on the contribution the region is making towards transition from fossil fuels and the UK's technical expertise and diplomacy has a role to play. As important are the Track 2, safe space efforts in encouraging a wider regional approach to the practical consequences of climate change, seen devastatingly often now with intense heat, drought, and dust storms throughout MENA. Working with those who are bringing together the states affected by a variety of common threats, including health and potential new pandemics, might provide a new opportunity for many interests in the UK to contribute.

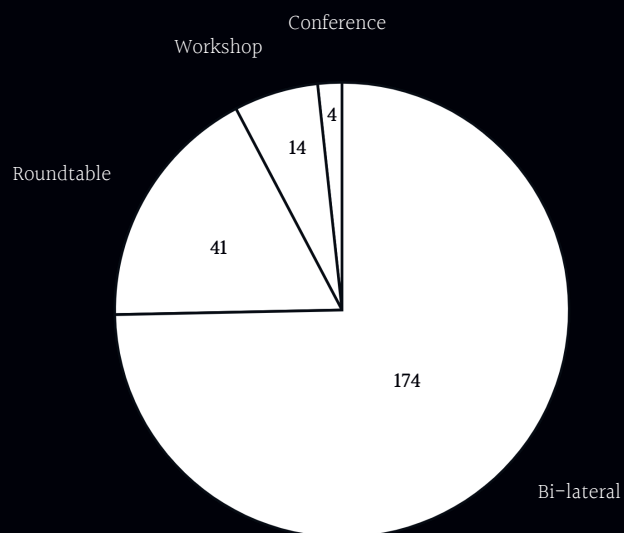
And still there is more. Libya and Syria cast a long shadow, and will not be exclusively internally settled, and there will be much restoration needed. The new Government in Iraq will look for support and expertise, and Lebanon's people deserve better than the governance they have endured. The promise of a new Middle East, with the technical and economic base of Israel being injected into the economies of the region through the Abraham Accords signifies much, but cannot deliver all that is expected without the issues between Israel and the Palestinian people being resolved.

In all these areas the UK's diplomacy, at HMG level and as practised by skilled NGOs who know their way around, has credibility. The UK Government needs to rebuild some relationships, and having a settled Foreign Secretary who knows the patch, and a Minister again combining MENA in one portfolio will help greatly in making a powerful contribution these next twelve months.

Middle East Programme

By Jordan Morgan | Middle East Programme Director

233 meetings and activities – at more than 97% of these events, Forward Thinking was the lead organiser.



Contextual Developments

The past year has underlined our long-held belief that the status quo in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is unsustainable and the risk of violence with a large-scale loss of human life is both real and growing.

Political factionalism and internal divisions, alongside a lack of political leadership, continue to limit the development of consistent Palestinian vision to achieve statehood. Palestinians from every generation are frustrated by a political leadership that is perceived as increasingly out of touch. This anger is only compounded by high unemployment and economic decline. The number of weapons on the streets of the West Bank has increased, and inter-communal violence has become a commonplace response to disputes at the community level.

The aggressive tactics of the Israeli military and increased incursions in the West Bank are leading to a notable shift in the attitude of many young Palestinians. Many now feel as though there is no political solution to end the conflict and that military options are the only way forward. Such attitudes are reinforced by the widespread belief that the international community no longer cares about Palestine. The West’s response to Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine led to accusations of ‘double standards’ on behalf of the international community, who are perceived as tacitly enabling the continued expansion of Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian lands by failing to enforce international law.

This worrying picture in Palestine has been accompanied by disturbing developments in Israel. Continuing political dysfunction limits the possibility for developing a clear political strategy regarding the conflict, with parliamentarians feeling unable to take

risks or engage in dialogue out of fear of losing votes. Following Israel’s fifth set of elections, the coalition now includes far right-wing parties who could ignite an already volatile situation in the Occupied Territories. Furthermore, the Abraham Accords have led to a perception among many Israeli policy makers that it is possible to achieve regional peace through bilateral agreements without engaging the Palestinians.

Israel requires co-ordinated international support to recognise the real risks of its current strategy, and to navigate its way toward a durable option for ending the conflict. However, there is a deep weariness at the international level regarding prospects for finding a durable solution to the conflict in Israel and Palestine, with many countries adopting an increasingly risk-averse approach. Neither side is ready to meet given their domestic contexts. There is also very little sharing of analysis or efforts to develop a coordinated approach for dealing with the conflict, addressing violence in the West Bank, or responding to humanitarian conditions in Gaza. We have engaged extensively with the international community to share insights about the context on the ground and stimulate new thinking about the increasingly untenable context in Israel–Palestine.

During a time in which the international community has focused its attention on conflict within European borders, we remain committed to developing an environment that is more conducive to achieving a durable outcome to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Our work this year would not have been possible without the ongoing engagement of religious and secular leaders from across the political spectrum who remain dedicated to finding opportunities for progress. It is their efforts that underpin our belief that, despite an extremely challenging context, progress toward a just and durable resolution to conflict remains possible.



Oliver McTernan, Lyse Doucet, Tom Fletcher and Arthur Denario at the Hay Literature Festival, 3 June 2022

Programme Highlights

International Engagement

Between January and September 2022, we deepened our links and engagement with senior officials from Egypt, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, the OSCE, Qatar, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, UK, the United Nations, the United States and the Vatican. The purpose of this intensive outreach was to both raise awareness of the growing risks of escalation within the conflict and to explore how to reinvigorate diplomatic efforts to achieve a durable resolution. We have worked extensively to share Palestinian and Jordanian concerns about the challenges facing the status quo of Jerusalem's Holy Sites and the potential for widescale violence with the United States, Europe and the broader MENA-Gulf region. We have also shared our experiences more broadly, for example, on the 3rd of June 2022 at the Hay Literature Festival, where Oliver spoke with Lyse Doucet, Tom Fletcher and Arthur Denaro on the topic 'Democracy: Post Reconciliation'.

Palestine

In October 2022, we facilitated the visit of South African negotiators Roelf Meyer and Mohammed Bhabha to meet with diverse Palestinian leaders in Nazareth, Nablus, Gaza, Hebron and Jerusalem. The visit successfully shared the South African experience of conflict resolution, democracy building and the process which ended apartheid. Discussions focussed on how to build unity, overcoming differences to reach consensus, the role of the international community, the importance of an inclusive process, and the need for bold political leadership. Over the course of the week, meetings were held with over 230 Palestinian cross-factional leaders, diplomats, Forward Thinking's Palestinian Women's network, Palestinian academics, activists, in addition to, leaders and Knesset Members from the High Follow Up Committee, which is a coordinating and representative body for Palestinian citizens of Israel.

We hosted strategy conversations with figures from across the Palestinian political spectrum including Fatah, independents, the diaspora and the Palestinian Islamic Movement. The sessions were attended by Forward Thinking's advisory group made up of former

US, UK and Irish Ambassadors. Analysis from these meetings was shared with foreign ministries in Europe and the Gulf-MENA to assist policy makers and officials in their examination of the factors which limit the ability of Palestinians to reach national consensus. Leaders spoke frankly, exposing the challenges of the occupation, internal division, and the impact of international politics and regional alliances.

We have delivered workshops, conferences, and training to cross-factional political leaders, academics and youth, on topics such as effective negotiation; 'the Irish experience of conflict and its resolution on the island of Ireland'; 'Why the West Fears Islam'; and the Balfour Declaration. Significantly, we launched a training programme to develop prominent Gazan journalists' capacity to communicate the Palestinian narrative more effectively with the international community. Between March and May, we facilitated workshops on news verification, countering cognitive bias and developing shared values and media editing. Participants were all journalists for radio programmes or government ministries in Gaza, giving them a wide media outreach. They went on to establish a working group to ensure comprehensive coverage of developments in Gaza. One participant said, "out of all the courses I have taken, this course provided me with the most professional tools and new information."

Using our privileged access in Gaza, we have established an influential group of Islamic religious scholars in Gaza committed to examining the religious and theological dimensions of the conflict and developing a theological underpinning for any future peace process from an Islamic perspective.

Across Palestine, we have re-established a network of 25 diverse women to support the empowerment of their voices and roles within conflict-affected and divided societies. We have convened meetings in Stormont and Leinster House, developing relationships with key women parliamentarians, whom we will introduce to our Palestinian women's networks. Furthermore, we convened roundtable meetings with our Palestinian Women's Network in Ramallah, identifying challenges and opportunities for future co-operation as well as discussing how the issue of Palestine is understood at the international diplomatic level.



South African negotiator Roelf Meyer speaks to Palestinian leaders in Nablus, October 2022

Israel

In Israel we held seminars with political and religious leaders from across the political spectrum, including current and former MKs, government ministers, diplomats, political advisors, and Rabbinical leaders. We linked speakers with European officials to better inform European policy in real time, enabling a more detailed understanding of issues than one might get from reading the news or listening to public statements.

The conflict between Israel and Gaza in May 2021 brought the tactics of the Israeli police – a key factor in the escalation – to national and international attention and revealed the depth of tensions within mixed Jewish and Muslim communities. In response, we have exposed a new generation of Jewish-Israeli political leaders and Palestinian-Israeli MKs and advisors to the experience of police reform in Northern Ireland as part of the Irish peace process. One delegation to Northern Ireland was led by MK Aida Touma Sliman, Hadash, and included Palestinian-Israeli leaders. A subsequent cross-party delegation included Likud's MK Tzachi Hanegbi, MK Amichai Chikli and MK Meirav Ben Ari, Chairwoman of the Public Security Committee, to understand better the role of the police in promoting community cohesion and, importantly, how to shift from a military to a community style of policing in a conflict-affected and divided society.

To build on the successful religious leader's conference facilitated by Forward Thinking in Netanya (May 2021), we have deepened our engagement with the Sephardi Chief Rabbi, Yitzhak Yosef, and Rabbi Shemtov Menachem, the Chairman of the Rabbinate Union of Israel. As a result, a successful dialogue has developed and empowered the Chief Rabbi to reiterate to both religious and political leaders the long-standing prohibition of Jews from ascending the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif complex.



Jordan Morgan, Middle East Programme Director, with H.E. Riyad al-Maliki, Palestinian Authority's Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum

We have further developed our engagement with the Likud party. Our network within the party is made up of Ministerial advisors with profound influence and who are willing to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We have built a diverse network of Israeli women leaders from Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli communities, including senior Knesset Members, political advisors, campaigners as well as religious and secular leaders. By building relationships with the political caucuses in Ireland and Northern Ireland, we will explore the role women have played in developing the conditions for peace in Northern Ireland and in politics.



Oliver McTernan and Jordan Morgan meeting with religious leaders at the House of Wisdom Institute in Gaza, May 2022



Israeli Public Security Committee Delegation to Northern Ireland with MK Tzachi Hanegbi, MK Meirav Ben Ari, MK Amichai Chikli and Alice Copland meeting with the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, May 2022



Islam and West Co-existence or Confrontation Conference at the Islamic University Gaza



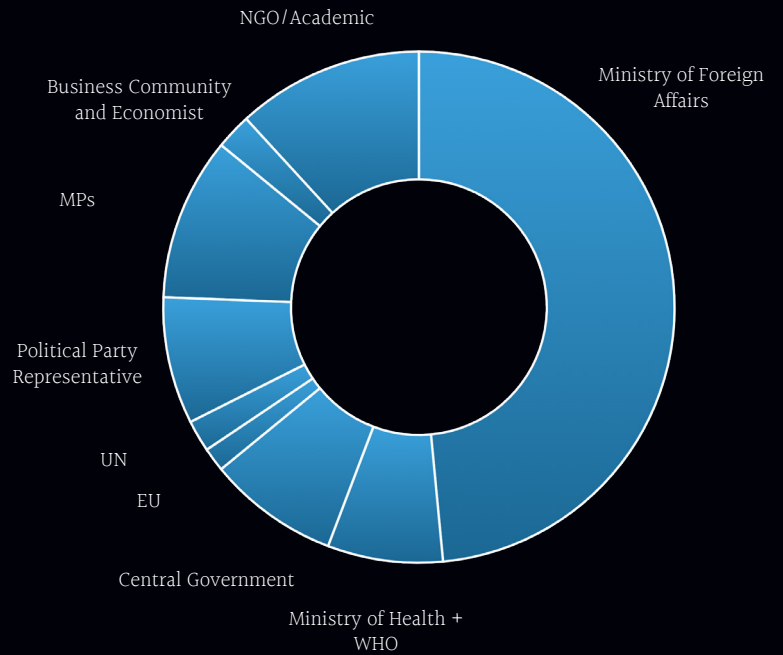
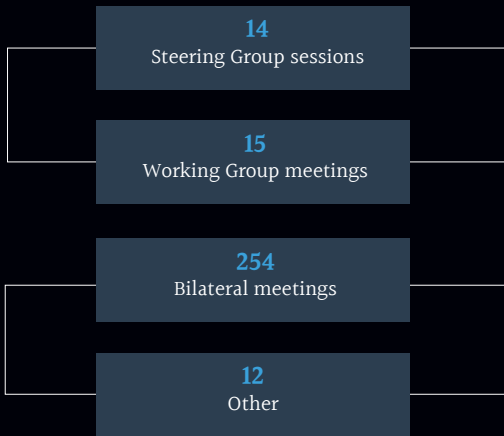
Discussion with students at the Islamic University in Gaza on Islamophobia in the West

Helsinki Policy Forum:

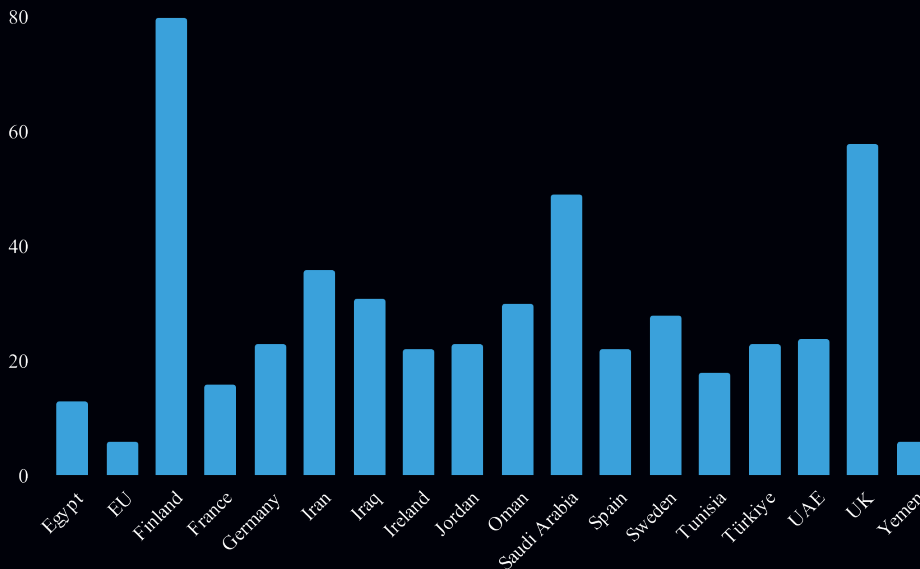
The year in review:

295

meetings took place in the HPF in 2021-22



Participants in HPF meetings by country



Introduction

The Helsinki Policy Forum continued to provide an informal space for high-level government officials from the Gulf-MENA region and Europe to exchange insights on shared policy challenges, address misperceptions, and work towards deepening cooperation and reducing tensions.

Steering Group meetings were held over the course of the year – in August and December 2021 and then March and June of 2022. Participating states included: the EU, Finland, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, the UAE, and the UK.

Throughout the year there was growing desire amongst policy makers in the Gulf-MENA region to de-escalate tensions. It was acknowledged that a new regional atmosphere would allow policy makers to divert greater attention and resources to be devoted to long-term challenges such as tackling youth unemployment and mitigating the effects of climate change. This new tone was reflected both in private discussions within the Forum and in new outreach initiatives launched by several governments. Iraq played a leading role in facilitating regional détente by hosting the Baghdad Conference in August 2021 and by providing a space for talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia aimed at restoring relations. Details of these efforts were provided by the Deputy Foreign Minister of Iraq, Nizar Khairallah at the December meeting of the Forum. Türkiye and the UAE also made significant efforts to improve ties with states in the region, potentially opening new spaces for cooperation on some shared challenges.

All four steering group meetings identified a shared desire for regional security mechanisms. However, there are differing visions on what shape these should take, and all accept that inclusive se-

curity arrangements will take time to develop. Accordingly, efforts can initially focus on developing consensus around the core issues states need to address and identifying that which is mutually beneficial. Cooperation on common threats and mutual interests – such as the environment, health, or the economy – can help build the confidence needed to address low levels of trust in the region that impede the establishment of a common regional security framework. The Forum is exploring how to deepen discussions on these areas of possible cooperation through its various working groups.

While efforts to de-escalate tensions must be regionally led, discussions in the Forum have repeatedly emphasised that Europe can play a supporting role. Europe's recent joint communication on a strategic partnership with the Gulf has signalled Europe's desire to deepen ties in the region.

While the Steering Groups primarily focused on forward-looking discussions to support efforts towards developing cooperation, they also provided a valuable space to acknowledge enduring challenges and address perceived misperceptions.

In this spirit, the March and June meetings examined the implications of the war in Ukraine for the Gulf-MENA region, where there are widespread fears that it will derail an expected economic recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic and provoke a food crisis in some of the region's most fragile states. A critical factor in the region's immediate stability is the JCPOA negotiations, the outcome of which remains uncertain. Hopes remain that if a satisfactory outcome is found, a refreshed JCPOA could provide a foundation for deeper dialogue on other regional priorities.



Participants at the June 2022 meeting of the Helsinki Policy Forum in discussion with H.E. Niels Annen, Secretary of State of Germany in the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development.



Julian Weinberg and Harry Higginson meeting with H.E. Dr Ahmed Al Saeedi, Minister of Health of Oman, to discuss the Health Working Group and how it can support the Ministry.

Health Working Group

The Health Working Group developed substantially over the year, providing a space for health officials from across Europe and the Gulf-MENA region to not only share analysis but to enhance cooperation on issues of mutual concern.

In September 2021, an online meeting was held to explore how efforts to control Covid-19 in the Gulf-MENA region were developing. Vaccine inequity was seen as an enduring challenge; aside from countries in the Gulf alongside Jordan and Morocco, no other country in the MENA region had been able to provide more than 15% of their populations with one dose of the vaccine. In countries affected by conflict such as Yemen, the percentage vaccinated remained firmly in the single digits. While COVAX had made a positive impact, policy makers were urged to explore how to build greater vaccine production capacity within the region. In the longer term, there was consensus that far more needed to be invested in pandemic preparedness. Although the costs involved in this seem considerable, they are dwarfed by the economic losses a pandemic can inflict – Covid-19 is believed to have cost the world economy USD \$10.3 trillion in lost output in 2020-2021.

A second focus of the Health Working Group was supporting the Global Health for Peace Initiative (GHPI). This has been spearheaded by the governments of Oman and Switzerland and seeks to intensify efforts to utilise health as a means of reducing tensions and building peace in conflict zones. Ensuring positive health outcomes should be a common interest that all can agree on regardless of ideology or political difference. It can therefore provide an avenue to bring the opposing sides of a conflict together. Not only can this meet immediate health needs, but it can initiate a process of dialogue between combatants.

In January 2022, the Health Working Group met online with H.E. Dr Ahmed al Saeedi, the Minister of Health for the Sultanate of Oman and Dr Ahmed Al Mandhari, the WHO's Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Region, to raise awareness of the GHPI ahead of the 150th Executive Board Meeting of the WHO. Over the coming months the Working Group continued to build support for the GHPI amongst its network, ensuring that it passed at the Executive Board and was advanced at the 75th World Health Assembly.

Women Parliamentarian Network

Despite substantial differences in political context, women parliamentarians in Europe and the Gulf-MENA region often face a set of similar policy challenges. The Helsinki Policy Forum's Women Parliamentarian Network (WPN) was established in response to this and provides a dedicated space for women leaders to meet to discuss issues they have in common, exchanging experiences of different approaches to addressing challenges and identifying where they may be opportunities to work together. In this manner, the WPN reinforces efforts to build greater cooperation in the Gulf-MENA region.

After several years of meeting online due to Covid-19, the WPN was able to meet twice in Helsinki in 2021-2022. The first meeting took place in December 2021, bringing together parliamentarians from Egypt, Finland, France, Iraq, Ireland, Libya, Tunisia, and the United Kingdom to examine the challenges facing women in leadership positions. Women often feel unable to achieve success without adjusting their behaviour to fit societal norms, and misogyny continues to be a powerful force. Even in countries that have achieved high-level participation of women in public life, challenges are ongoing and highlight that increased representation is not a 'silver



H.E Pekka Haavisto, Foreign Minister of Finland, addresses members of the Women Parliamentary Network, chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy, June 2022

bullet' that creates immediate changes in public attitudes. Broader changes to education and culture are necessary if the potential for women as decision makers, leaders and active members of society and public life is to be fully realised.

The second physical meeting took place in June 2022, this time focusing on the role of women in economic and financial decision-making. Discussions examined mechanisms to promote financial literacy amongst the general public. Ensuring all women have a good understanding of basic financial concepts is essential to ensure they have greater autonomy within the household and are less vulnerable to potential economic coercion from partners. Enduring legal barriers were also explored such as unequal property and inheritance rights and discrimination within labour markets, with participants sharing how efforts to address these challenges have developed in their respective countries. During the meeting, the network was addressed by H.E. Pekka Haavisto, the Foreign Minister of Finland, who discussed several foreign policy challenges with the group, including Finland's planned entry into NATO.

In addition to these two events, members of the Network also mobilised in response to the re-establishment of Taliban rule in Afghanistan. An online discussion was held on the 6th of October with prominent Afghan activists, to raise awareness of the humanitarian situation in the country and to explore how to ensure the rights of girls and women could be protected in the new context. Subsequently, efforts were made within the network to help women judges, facing threats to their personal safety, to escape Afghanistan and secure refugee status overseas. This exemplifies how the WPN has developed and is now able to mobilise responses to crisis in real time.

We now aim for the WPN to further expand, incorporating representatives from more countries in the region and exploring new issues such as the role of women in peace processes, and how to tackle the rise of misogynist abuse online.

UK Programme

Understanding the Challenges

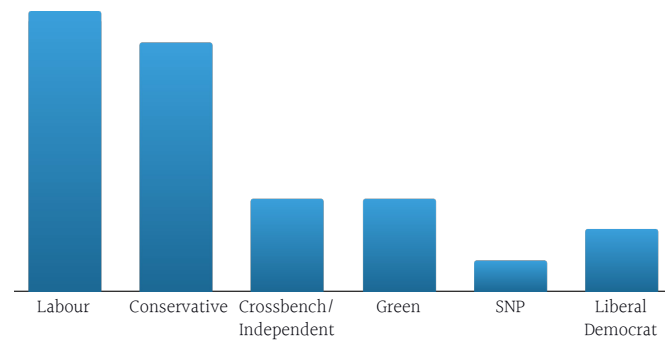
Our work facilitating channels of dialogue between Muslim communities and the Establishment to identify challenges and ways forward continues to be fundamentally important in a challenging UK context. Our work is based on the principle that Muslim community representatives should not have to 'leave their faith at the door' to engage openly with decision makers and processes that impact them and their communities. Throughout the year we have created unique opportunities for open and frank dialogue between establishment decision makers, including parliamentarians, and community representatives who represent a diverse network of Muslim communities.

Islamophobia at the national and international level continues to be of deep concern for communities with whom we are engaged and trust between communities and Establishment institutions is often very low. A survey led by the University of Birmingham released in January 2022 found that holding prejudiced views towards Islam is almost three times more likely among the British public than towards other religions. A report released in July 2022 drawing on evidence from the 'Beyond Us and Them' project showed that 73% of British Muslims reported that they had faced discrimination in the last month. According to Home Office statistics, in 2021 to 2022, 42 percent of religious hate crime offences were targeted against Muslims.

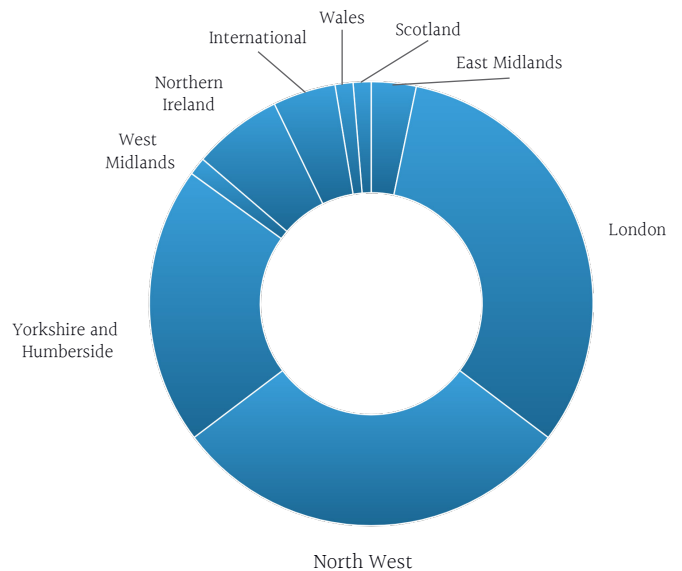
Islamophobia in the UK does not operate in a vacuum and a report by Professors Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez found that since 2020, hate crimes against Muslims in Europe have 'worsened, if not reached a tipping point'. Across Europe, policies understood as discriminatory towards Muslims continue to develop. In France, legislation has been introduced which has introduced restrictions on the practice of Islam. In Austria, Muslim civil society has been seen to be suppressed by the government. At the international level, for example in China and India, policies and practices perceived as discriminatory towards Muslims have also been introduced by the state.

Muslim communities that have been excluded from engagement with Establishment institutions are sometimes described as 'hard to reach'. Muslim community figures with whom we are engaged challenge this assumption, highlighting that rather than being 'hard to reach' their perspectives have been ignored or are not sought out. Our work challenges this frame of thinking to ensure that the perspectives of a diversity of Muslim communities from across the UK are heard and communicated to decision makers

Parliamentary engagement 2021-2022



Meetings by regional participation 2021-2022



“The role of Forward Thinking in listening to the concerns of Muslim communities in Britain and encouraging dialogue and identifying solutions that support understanding and cohesion in our country is outstanding. It has been a great pleasure in the last year to participate in aspects of its work.”

Dominic Grieve KC PC

Former Attorney General and former Conservative MP

Harnessing Insights and Responding to Need

Our work would not be possible without ongoing and intense engagement with our network. As a need-driven organisation, remaining engaged with communities is crucial for ensuring that we respond to the concerns and needs highlighted. This has been enhanced by the ability to engage in-person once again through events and regional community visits with our network across England.

In November 2021 and February and July 2022 we travelled to Batley, Bradford, Dewsbury and Manchester for meetings with community representatives and regional decision makers to discuss issues that are currently impacting Muslim communities and ways in which they could be addressed. We have also engaged closely with a range of community leaders representing diverse constituencies in London. Young British Muslims face unique challenges, particularly relating to employment opportunities and inclusion. Many report feeling that they are unable to express their faith in professional settings and this has limited their ability to advance careers in the fields which they choose. Community members also expressed concerns regarding Islamophobia, with some feeling as if they are not considered to be fully British due to being from a Muslim background. Some Muslims are choosing to leave the country as a result of feeling as if they are perceived not to belong in the UK.

In February and March 2022, community representatives highlighted concerns regarding the Nationality and Borders Bill that was at the time passing through parliament. In response to requests, we facilitated a roundtable for community representatives to directly share their perspectives about the legislation with parliamentarians who could affect the decision-making process.

Throughout the year, we have also continued to engage with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), including through attending regular Community Accountability Forum meetings which help to inform CPS strategy and policy.

Engaging Future Leaders

This year we have deepened our engagement with a diverse group of young British Muslims through our 'Pathways into Politics' programme and establishment of a 'Youth Policy Network' in early 2022.

Following the launch of the second cohort of Pathways into Politics in February 2021, we delivered a series of online workshops to provide further opportunities for development.

We continued to deliver workshops as part of our 'Conflict Resolution Network' which was developed in response to needs highlighted by young people with whom we work. Workshops connected participants with speakers such as Dr Dalal Iriqat, Assistant Professor and Vice President of International Relations at the Arab American University Palestine (AAUP), and Rabbi Shem Tov Menachem, a special adviser on religious dialogue and diplomacy and a prominent figure within Israel's Jewish orthodox community at the political and religious level. The purpose of the meetings was to provide opportunities for young people to develop their understanding of international politics, conflict resolution and diplomacy so that they are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to create positive change in this area.

Our Youth Policy Network focuses on providing opportunities for alumni of the Pathways into Politics programme to use the skills they have gained to work collaboratively to create policy change on issues they have identified as important. This also helps to ensure the sustainability of the programmes. The group have highlighted the challenges faced by young British Muslims today and shared a desire that the next generation do not face the same discrimination that they have.



Mohammed Kozbar with Maisie Cook and Alice Copland and Finsbury Park Street Iftar, April 2022



Highlighting Community Perspectives: The Independent Review of Prevent

The Prevent strategy remains an issue of key importance and is perceived by many as negatively and disproportionately impacting Muslim communities. As the Independent Review of Prevent continued, we ensured that community perspectives regarding Prevent and the Review continued to be heard by decision makers.

In the absence of formal engagement with the Review by Muslim community representatives with whom we work, we shared briefing papers with parliamentarians to ensure that the perspectives of Muslim communities regarding Prevent and the Review are heard directly. We produced a briefing paper following a series of online roundtables with community representatives to gather up-to-date insights on these issues. We have developed relationships with parliamentarians from across the political spectrum to ensure that the perspectives of Muslim communities that may not have been included in the Review were still heard and understood. In June 2022 we held a private roundtable discussion in parliament to raise further awareness about the Independent Review. The meeting was hosted by Afzal Khan, MP for Manchester Gorton and attended by Muslim community representatives, parliamentarians, and other relevant experts.

Responding to requests for greater understanding of how the issues that the Prevent programme aims to address are managed in other contexts, we travelled to Northern Ireland in February 2022 to meet with organisations delivering services for young people in Northern Ireland. Conversations focused on how initiatives to strengthen societal resilience are implemented in the Northern Irish context and whether any insights can be relevant in other parts of the UK. For approaches aimed at supporting young people to be effective, it was stressed that they must be led by those who have the trust of and are rooted within communities.

Tanzidah Islam, participant in our 'Pathways into Politics' programme and 'Youth Policy Network' shared her experiences of being a young Muslim in Britain today.

Malcolm X once said "If you stick a knife in my back nine inches and pull it out six inches, there's no progress. If you pull it all the way out, that's not progress. The progress is healing the wound

that the blow made. And they haven't even begun to pull the knife out, much less heal the wound. They won't even admit the knife is there." Today in the UK Islamophobia feels like an unseen, unacknowledged, invisible problem.

Growing up in a white-majority area meant that I was expected to explain my existence constantly. When it came to food options, I would pretend I was vegetarian to avoid explaining what 'halal' meant and accentuate my Otherness as a consequence. Every week a new headline would dominate the news and my teenage self would dread the school day as I knew the topic of terrorism would inevitably be brought up in class. Boys would yell 'Allah Akbar' and make bomb noises in the corridor; people that I thought were my friends would even make terrorist jokes behind my back. 'British values' were taught in school, Othering those 'non-Brits' with barbaric values, because, apparently, only British people could be 'tolerant', 'accepting', and 'respectful'. Often, I found myself defending my British identity, unbeknownst that I would eventually find my citizenship would become a 'privilege' instead of my birth right. I vividly remember, at 8 years old, a boy saying I could not possibly be British if my parents were Bangladeshi, and again at 11 when a boy in British Values class said the hijabi woman on the PowerPoint could not be British with 'that thing on her head'. It comes to a point when you exhaust yourself with defending your mere existence, yet, I never regretted making a fuss and being outspoken in the face of Islamophobia. Relentlessly, I would be put in a position to push back against ignorance at such a young age, and continuing in that theme, I aim to keep doing just this – to educate, raise awareness and champion our right to exist without discrimination.

I'm elated to be part of the Youth Policy Network to help spread the message that Islamophobia is a real problem in the UK. Visible Muslims fear for their lives, workplace discrimination is rampant, and media vultures disguise reprehensibly obvious Islamophobic remarks due to freedom of speech. Despite these grievances, we lack the tools to expose this hatred for what it is. Through this forum, I hope to spur change and help expose the knife that is Islamophobia, healing the communal wound so that future generations can flourish without fear of discrimination or dehumanisation.

Finances

Statement of financial activities for the year ended 31 July 2022

	Unrestricted funds 2022	Restricted funds 2022	Total funds 2022	Total funds 2021 (Restated)
	£	£	£	£
Incoming resources				
Incoming resources from generated funds:				
<i>Voluntary income</i>				
Private donations	16,613	-	16,613	62,600
Grants	-	606,664	606,664	500,824
Other incoming resources	-	-	-	-
Total incoming resources	16,613	606,664	623,277	563,424
Resources expended				
Expenditure on:				
Charitable activities	-	744,978	744,978	544,495
Governance costs	69,874	-	69,874	61,822
Total resources expended	(69,874)	(744,978)	(814,852)	(606,317)
Net incoming resources before other recognised gains	(53,261)	(138,314)	(191,575)	(42,893)
Other recognised gains	-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds	(53,261)	(138,314)	(191,575)	(42,893)
Reconciliation of funds				
Total funds brought forward	39,013	408,707	447,720	490,613
Transfers between funds	50,952	(50,952)	-	-
Total funds carried forward	36,704	219,441	256,145	447,720

There were no recognised gains or losses for 2022 other than those included in the statement of financial activities.

There were no acquisitions or discontinued operations during the current year.

We would like to thank all of our funders, without which our work over the past year would not have been possible.

This includes:

John Ellerman Foundation

Pears Foundation

Philip King Foundation

Porticus

Rockefeller Brothers Fund

The Dulverton Trust

The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland

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