

Astana OSCE High Level Conference – plenary on education
Session 5
Intervention by Sana Saleem from the Three Faiths Forum.

ENGLISH only

My name is Sana Saleem, I am one of the education officers at the Three Faiths Forum, one of the UK's leading interfaith NGOs.

Education is at the heart of all the interfaith and intercultural programmes we deliver in the UK and worldwide.

Our model for promoting tolerance includes three areas:

1. Education to increase people's knowledge of faiths and beliefs. We promote learning about individuals using their personal stories, not only facts about religious traditions that are taught from textbooks. While religious literacy is important, connecting with real people's lives is much more effective in challenging misconceptions.
2. We know the best way to dispel incorrect assumptions is to meet people of different faith and belief traditions. But a one-off meeting is not enough, it must be a sustained and meaningful interaction.
3. Talking and learning is not enough. There must be shared activity by people of different traditions, working on common goals to make positive change on society.

This work is delicate, and must be facilitated by people who have a good understanding of their local situation. If done badly, it can cause harm and perpetuate stereotypes. People with experience and proven methodology must share best practice, and also their mistakes. We have been running interfaith education activities since 1997 and are building up a body of research and evidence to show the effectiveness of the activities.

If we are not the ones facilitating open discussions, others with divisive objectives will fill the vacuum. This work is essential and urgent.

We ask governments to invest, with money and resources, in the training of people to promote interfaith and intercultural harmony.