Working in the world of conflict mediation is always challenging but the past 12 months have been particularly testing in the Middle East. War continues to afflict large parts of the Arab world, destroying lives and frustrating the ambitions of the region's talented young people for a better life. Relations between Iran and its neighbours in the Gulf remain fraught and could yet spill into a wider escalation. Meanwhile the current policies of the United States have appeared to inflame, rather than cool, tensions.

Despite the difficulties that Forward Thinking’s team face, our work has continued and had a meaningful impact. In the Middle East, despite two time consuming elections in 2019, we have continued to provide those on the Israeli right with opportunities to reflect on the challenges they face in leading their constituencies at a durable, realistic settlement to the conflict. We have also maintained our work aimed at informing the Palestinian political debate about overcoming internal divisions, managing and resolving conflict and power-sharing in the Palestinian interest.

We have developed our engagement with high level officials in Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey through the Helsinki Policy Forum, including holding a meeting in New York during the UN general assembly as well as our regular meetings in Helsinki.

In the UK, our work with the Crown Prosecution Service has deepened significantly in this period, with dialogues resulting in them launching a number of work experience initiatives to increase the diversity of their workforce. We have also used this year to facilitate a number of conversations between British Muslim communities and the former Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Max Hill QC, as well as the Independent Review of Prevent team.

Once again, on behalf of the trustees, I would like to congratulate the team for their astonishing commitment and hard work. In today’s troubled times their efforts are often a beacon in the darkness.
OUR PHILOSOPHY

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:

- **INCLUSIVITY**
- **TRANSPARENCY & CONFIDENTIALITY**
- **FLEXIBILITY & ADAPTABILITY**
- **DEMAND-DRIVEN**
- **SUSTAINED COMMITMENT**
- **WORKING AT MULTIPLE LEVELS**

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

One of the greatest challenges confronting the Middle East today is the untapped potential of the region’s youth.

Two-thirds of the region’s population are already under thirty years old. Accelerating population growth in many countries in the region means that new frameworks for supporting and enabling young people to participate in the economy must be put in place to achieve sustainable, inclusive progress.

The Middle East and North Africa experienced the fastest expansion in educational attainment of any region in the world between 1980 and 2000, yet youth unemployment in the Middle East and North Africa stands at 26% - double the world average.

The most severely affected countries in the Middle East include:

- **Jordan** - 36%
- **Libya** - 42%
- **Palestine** - 46%
- **Tunisia** - 34%

**Women are disproportionately affected by youth unemployment:**

In Palestine youth unemployment among women is 69% and in Jordan it’s 54%.

Conflict and unemployment are closely linked, and to promote stability governments must ensure that pathways are open for young people to express themselves, earn a living and participate in society.

We believe that social, political and economic empowerment of its youth is therefore one of the region’s greatest opportunities to foster inclusive development and stability.

Accordingly, across all aspects of our work we seek to shine a light on the issues confronting young people and ensure their voices are not marginalised by political elites.

IN NUMBERS

540

MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES PARTICIPATED IN

- **196** in the UK & Ireland
- **76** in Israel, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza
- **41** in Tunisia
- **70** in Europe
Conflicts that are rooted in identity and competing claims to the same land cannot be solved by top down approaches like Trump’s proposal. The cultural and religious circumstances in 17th Century Europe and 20th Century Northern Ireland are very different. Nonetheless, the human challenges have much in common with today’s Middle East. There is much human learning and insights that are still applicable.

Westphalia and the Good Friday Agreement were multilateral, inclusive processes that did not endorse one creed or land claim over another. The aim of both was to find a formulation and structure which would enable people with conflicting identities to co-exist as neighbours. A new regional order was established and upheld by outside powers who acted as guarantors of peace by calling to account parties who failed to observe the terms of agreement.

The dialogue has become more orientated towards finding workable solutions to some of the challenges and obstacles in the path of peace. By engaging with a plan that blatantly ignores the aspirations needs of 70% percent of a young population who have no job prospects. A just and workable solution to the Israeli – Palestinian conflict is, for him, an essential starting point for addressing the bigger regional challenges. We fully endorse this analysis. Regional stability and economic prosperity cannot be achieved by circumventing the legitimate claims and aspirations of the Palestinian people.

In this respect, we fully understand the Palestinian leadership’s initial response of refusing to consider President Trump’s ‘Deal of the Century’. By engaging with a plan that blatantly ignores the legitimate claims and aspirations of your people, there is a real risk of growing instability if the region failed to address the aspirational needs of 70% percent of a young population who have no job prospects. A just and workable solution to the Israeli – Palestinian conflict is, for him, an essential starting point for addressing the bigger regional challenges. We fully endorse this analysis. Regional stability and economic prosperity cannot be achieved by circumventing the legitimate claims and aspirations of the Palestinian people.

In our judgement, the latest US proposals have complicated the search for a durable peace in the region. The plan on offer reflects a “fly by” analysis and fails to consider the realities on the ground, it also lacks any understanding of the insights that can be gained from studying the methodology behind previous successful processes, such as the Treaty of Westphalia and the Good Friday Agreement.

The past twelve months have proved to be extremely challenging for an organisation that strives to be demand-driven and fully responsive to the emerging needs of a region as diverse and complex as MENA and the Gulf. Escalating tensions between Iran and some of its neighbours, political uncertainty caused by two inconclusive elections within Israel and the ongoing divisions amongst the Palestinian factions were all factors that had to be carefully navigated as we pursued our efforts to establish the space for a level of meaningful reflection and dialogue that could lead to sustainable stability in the region.

Our work within Israel and Palestine was further complicated by the uncertainty created by the long-awaited publication of President Trump’s peace proposal and the consequent reluctance of the EU and other countries to be more decisive in their commitment to support realistic efforts at finding a durable solution to this seventy-year-old conflict. Yet despite this challenging background, our engagement and network within Israel and Palestine, as well as the wider region, has extended. The dialogue has become more orientated towards finding workable solutions to some of the challenges and obstacles in the path of peace.

In his address to a meeting of our Helsinki Policy Forum, the Jordanian Foreign Minister, Ayman Safadi, underlined both the seriousness and urgency of addressing these challenges. He warned of the risk of growing instability if the region failed to address the aspirational needs of 70% percent of a young population who have no job prospects. A just and workable solution to the Israeli – Palestinian conflict is, for him, an essential starting point for addressing the bigger regional challenges. We fully endorse this analysis. Regional stability and economic prosperity cannot be achieved by circumventing the legitimate claims and aspirations of the Palestinian people.

In this respect, we fully understand the Palestinian leadership’s initial response of refusing to consider President Trump’s ‘Deal of the Century’. By engaging with a plan that blatantly ignores the legitimate claims and aspirations of your people, there is a real risk of giving legitimacy to proposals that display not only a total lack of regard for international law but also a willful ignorance of their people’s narrative that has been shaped by their sense of identity and inheritance.

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This is exactly the process that is required in the Israeli-Palestinian context, if we are to reach the concessions and minimum level of agreement that will enable the conflicting parties to at least co-exist, if not to embrace a new level of co-operation. This is what we have been working to promote over the past fifteen years: an inclusive process led by people that represent constituencies on both sides that need to be on board to achieve a workable peace. Plans that are drawn up without the engagement and endorsement of key protagonists are like papering over the cracks in a room without first addressing the foundational faults in the structure of the building.

I am often asked why I keep working in a region where the prospect of achieving our goal seems so hopeless. My simple answer is that you must be an informed optimist. In other words, over the years we have learnt to distinguish between the public discourse that is often shaped by short-term political interests and the more realistic private assessments that recognise the ‘status quo’ is unsustainable. There is recognition across all the political factions on both sides that there is a real need for a strategic vision to end the conflict. Our work with secular and religious-affiliated political factions clearly demonstrates that an inclusive peace process to end this conflict is possible. What is lacking at present is the political vision and will of outside powers to encourage and support such an initiative.

At home in the UK, we have also been busy promoting a more inclusive approach in addressing not only the challenges presented by home-grown terrorism but also in promoting real social cohesion in different regions of the country. We have facilitated meetings between the Crown Prosecution Service and diverse Muslim communities aimed at promoting a greater awareness of the genuine concerns of many communities, in the light of high-profile terrorist attacks by individuals claiming to act in the name of Islam.

None of the programmes and activities contained in this report would be possible without the commitment of a young, dedicated team and the support of our Trustees and funders. It is a real privilege for me to work alongside such a committed group, driven by a desire to make a difference and to improve the lives of others. I am particularly grateful to the individual donors, Trusts and Governments as well as our Trustees for the confidence and trust that makes what we are trying to achieve possible.
The instability in the Middle East is spreading

Jeremy Greenstock
Trusted

We have grown used to watching the consequences of poor governance in the Arab World. The revolutions of 2011 found a range of hopes, but they faded all too quickly because it is less problematic to remove unpopular regimes than to replace them with better ones. The search for southerner routes to compromise between factions of different identity in Arab countries goes on, and this autumn’s protests in Lebanon and Iraq serve as a vehement comment on the slow progress being made.

I have commented before in these annual assessments on the greater capacity of the non-Arab states in the Middle East - Israel, Turkey and Iran - to be proactive in their own interests. The last twelve months, however, have shown up their vulnerabilities too. Instability really is infectious in a neighbourhood.

A striking feature of the Middle East at present, in contrast with previous decades, is the centrality of Iran rather than Palestine as the issue most likely to threaten regional order. No-one should be complacent about the trouble Iran causes, or is capable of causing, in its wider neighbourhood, largely through the use of proxy instruments. Nevertheless the demonising of the country by the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel is overdone. Iran is not a territorially expansive or aggressive power. The main concern of the unrightful ruling elite in Tehran is to exercise effective control domestically and to deter attacks from outside. The clerical regime is thoroughly disliked by the population and so it comes naturally to the leadership to use the bogey of foreign interference to try to preserve a rationale for national unity, under which it hides its repressive action. But that does not lay the basis for a stable future for the country.

The Iranian government has been tactically inventive, indeed sometimes quite shrewd in its risk-taking. In inspiring (at least) the growing opposition to his one-man rule reflects the strong secular appeal of authoritarian instincts between Erdogan and Putin is part of a pervasive modern trend, but things are getting out of proportion. Erdogan has put the Gulenists in their place domestically, and his insistence on purchasing a Russian air defence system and putting the Turkish commitment to NATO in double is an exaggerated response to the American refusal to extradite Fethulah Gulen to Turkey. Erdogan has similarly been trying to rid himself of Turkey’s Kurdish issue, which the tragic civil war in Syria has aggravated. Earlier in his period in power it seemed that there were grounds for negotiation on the Kurdish question, with both sides seeing the sense of compromise. The stronger Erdogan has felt in his internal control, the less he has been inclined to talk rather than suppress. Yet neither in Syria nor in Northern Iraq do military options look like they are eradicating the problem: Turkey’s invasion of Northern Syria seems to have learnt nothing from the travails of the US/UK in Iraq. The assertion of a narrow Turkish identity as the basis for loyalty to the state fits badly with the nature and history of the country. Indeed, as an increasing number of Turks begin to question the drift of Erdogan’s policy-making, a strange convergence is taking place. Where Erdogan’s party, the AKP, had earlier represented a religious approach within a secular state, now the growing opposition to his one-man rule reflects the strong religious preference within a religious state. Since Turkey, unlike Iran, is an established democracy, this authoritarian twisting of the Atatürk legacy will probably end badly for Erdogan, unless he can - by luck or better judgment - profit from an economic recovery that appears unlikely at present.

The third non-Arab power in the region is Israel. Under Netanyahu, the country has never been more in control of its immediate security environment and yet never more divided politically.

It is a strange paradox that the left wing of Israeli politics, formerly represented by a vibrant Labour Party, has almost totally collapsed, but the dominant right wing is riven with factionalism. Even such an advanced and intelligent society cannot resist succumbing to the most prevalent force in geopolitics, the culture of narrow identity. This commentary will go to press before we know the outcome of the latest Israeli elections, but none of the right wing parties have a straightforward route to forming a coalition majority. Just when the Palestinians are at their weakest, with Arab interest in a two-state solution tepid, with US support for Israeli unequivocal and with international disapproval of expanding settlements increasing, Israel stands divided and with its reputation for justice and human rights observance diminished.

What an opportunity there is for a united Arab approach to regional politics! Instead the main impression is one of a vacuum. The violent divisions in Syria, Yemen and Libya and the struggle for effective government in Iraq, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia make it implausible that any Arab government could lead a drive for a collective defence of pan-Arab interests or for a rapprochement that would enable the region to enjoy the security and prosperity that the world has come to expect from the Arab world.

The area is crying out for a promoter of constructive dialogue. It appears to be in the long-run in Iran’s own interest to return to some kind of external relationships and a reasonably performing economy of a decade ago. Who now talks about Turkey as a model for the region? Erdogan’s obsession with the need for total control and his poor understanding of economic realities have left the country with a polarised social and political scenario and a deteriorating business and investment position. But it is Turkey’s flouting with Russia that has attracted the most comment. No-one is finding the United States the easiest of partners at present, and the mutual appeal of authoritarian instincts between Erdogan and Putin is part of a pervasive modern trend, but things are getting out of proportion. Erdogan has put the Gulenists in their place domestically, and his insistence on purchasing a Russian air defence system is taking place. Where Erdogan’s party, the AKP, had earlier represented a religious approach within a secular state, now the growing opposition to his one-man rule reflects the strong religious preference within a religious state. Since Turkey, unlike Iran, is an established democracy, this authoritarian twisting of the Atatürk legacy will probably end badly for Erdogan, unless he can - by luck or better judgment - profit from an economic recovery that appears unlikely at present.

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In the April election, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faced strong opposition from Blue and White’s Benny Gantz and he could not form a coalition leading to an unprecedented period of political chaos in Israel’s history. Both emerged equal running a campaign was that security concerns have helped to push Israeli politics further and further to the right.

In Gaza, many Palestinians have been shot and killed at the border during regular demonstrations as part of the Great Return March. Despite crucial efforts to remedy the deteriorating humanitarian situation and improve the daily lives of the people, the situation remains critical and is worsening in the absence of positive political progress. Meanwhile, in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, violence related to protests, military operations and settlement construction and expansion continues apace.

Two successive Israeli elections in 2019 have defined the domestic Israeli political landscape. One clear trend from the election campaigns was that security concerns have helped to push Israeli political parties to positions more to the right.

In Gaza, the economy is collapsing – a fact influenced by the decade-long siege and decreases in aid funding. Reconciliation between the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas, the de facto authority in Gaza, has not advanced. The geographical, social and political isolation between West Bank and Gaza fuels a dynamic of division between political leaders, but also between Palestinians. All the while, young Palestinians see an ongoing political discourse and division which does not help them realise their aspirations nor find solutions to daily challenges such as employment, health and education. Therefore, the level of youth political apathy is high, confidence in their leaders low and the conditions, particularly in Gaza, continually harsh. This fuels those who are able to make a choice between continuing to live in Palestine or consider leaving.

It highlighted the growing tension between religious and secular communities and how these can be manipulated for political advantage. The result saw lawmakers dissolve Parliament and, at the time of writing, the result of the second election, which took place in September, had done little to change the parliamentary arithmetic to form a coalition government. Thus, Israel remains in a period of unprecedented flux and now faces a third election in early March 2020.

President Donald Trump’s ‘Deal of the Century’ departed from previous international consensus on key issues including the status of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees and Gaza – which has moved the goal posts for any final settlement. In light of the US’ unilateral actions and perceived partisan support for Israel, Palestinians felt the Deal’s proposals alienated them from their legitimate political aspirations. Their response to Jared Kushner’s ‘Peace to Prosperity’ proposal was clear – Palestinians will not subvert their national political aspirations, or the hope of ending Israeli occupation for economic incentives, no matter how generous.

Over the last year we have observed successive Israeli elections, political paralysis between Fatah and Hamas, in addition to Trump’s deal. Political leaders must recognise the need to look again at key principles – that any acceptable option to bring an end to political violence must adequately address the visions and aspirations of all sides.
Delegation visits

In the past year Forward Thinking has continued to share the experience of peace and conflict in Northern Ireland with a diverse range of participants. The focus of each delegation was tailored to fit the group’s key interests. All, however, looked at the ongoing Irish Peace process and reflected upon the roles of identity and compromise in finding a durable solution to the conflict.

Forward Thinking continues to expose Israelis and Palestinians to the Irish experience for a number of reasons. While, there is no model or blueprint for successful conflict resolution, experience over the years has indicated that there is a significant opportunity for self-reflection when taking delegation groups to Northern Ireland. The meetings and workshops allow different groups to look at a conflict other than their own and explore how apparently irreconcilable political aspirations have been accommodated. This experience is helpful for some groups to re-examine their own perspective, as well as to explore how any lessons from the Irish Peace Process might be relevant to their context.

In early September 2018, Forward Thinking facilitated a visit to Belfast and Dublin for an Israeli political delegation including Likud ministerial chiefs of staff, political advisors, leaders, and academics. The group met with a range of British and Irish, unionist and nationalist figures with varied experiences of the conflict and peace process. It provided them with an understanding of the complexities of the conflict and the subsequent challenges involved in the pursuit of peace.

In October 2018, Forward Thinking organised a political, religious and civil society delegation of female leaders from Israel’s National Religious community to visit Belfast and Dublin. The delegation was exposed not only to realities of peace lines and legacy issues, but also to the complexities of Brexit and its repercussions. Reflecting on the implications of the Irish experiences for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there was agreement on the need to engage in order to have a voice in finding a solution.

In May 2019, Forward Thinking also hosted a delegation in Belfast and Dublin including mayors, political advisors and young party leaders. Discussions covered a range of topics including the role of leaders, and how to balance short term electoral victories with long-term strategy in pursuance of peace and stability. The group met figures representing different sectors of society, including police, politicians and civil servants, legal experts and leading figures from the peace negotiating teams. Meetings were held at Stormont, The Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

With all of the delegation visits undertaken this year by Forward Thinking there have been a number of commonalities. The continuing impasse affecting the Northern Irish assembly, the uncertainties caused by Brexit and the changing demographic and voting preferences with Northern Ireland have made for insightful and valuable discussions among participants and speakers alike. These experiences have immersed groups in the complexities of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, and given them an understanding of the ongoing nature of the peace process.

Similarly, in June 2019, members of the Forward Thinking team held a series of bi-lateral meetings in Jerusalem, Mgdal and Tiberias with members of the Knesset, ministerial advisors and Mayors, who had previously taken part in Ireland delegation visits. Meetings were held with individuals from across the political spectrum, including members of Likud and Shas. The meetings allowed for follow-up on previous delegation visits to Belfast and Dublin in order to discuss how best to consolidate insights gathered on these trips and to listen to different perspectives on recent events in the region. The visit came as Israel prepared for its second general election within a year in September 2019 and discussions explored the potential results of these elections and how they might shape the future direction of the country.

National Religious Engagement

The national religious Zionist movement and associated parties in Israel have grown significantly in size and influence over the last three decades. These groups have traditionally been excluded from the peace process, as they are perceived as being intrinsically hostile to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, Forward Thinking has been engaging this group over the past 3 years in the belief that any durable resolution cannot marginalise such a significant constituency. As part of this engagement senior rabbincal leadership within the national religious community have expressed interest in understanding the wider religious and political debates surrounding the conflict.

In response, between the 18th-21st November, Forward Thinking facilitated a high-level religious scholars dialogue in Rome, bringing together leading regional religious scholars from the Jewish, Muslim and Christian traditions. The discussion allowed participants to explore how religious and political narratives become entwined in a conflict context, the significance of different interpretations of historical events, and the responsibility of religious leaders to engage with these complexities for the sake of their communities.

The meeting resulted in a number of practical recommendations, including learning materials and a desire for further dialogue. It also revealed a number of misconceptions from all sides about the other and was a valuable opportunity for inter-faith learning about the various positions on sensitive issues. This included discussing the importance of Jerusalem to Christianity, Judaism and Islam, as well as the possibility of shared custodianship of religious sites. In 2020 Forward Thinking will facilitate a second session of dialogue for religious leaders from across the different faith groups.

Palestinian Reconciliation

Political divisions within Palestine continued unabated this year, with the geographical and social isolation of Gaza from the West Bank arguably becoming more pronounced. The collapse of the unity government between Hamas and Fatah in January 2019 symbolises the depth of these divisions and highlights the distance that remains before an effective political compromise can be found.
During the year, Forward Thinking continued to respond to these internal Palestinian divisions. This work brings together Palestini-
an policy makers from across political parties and divides to have meaningful dialogue on the issues they face, and the opportuni-
ties for reconciliation in a very divided political context. This year, it has focused on both dialogue facilitation and sharing outside experiences of political division and conflict to help individuals reflect on the actions that are within their control, that may help resolve the impasse.

Between 16th-21st December 2018, Forward Thinking held a se-
ries of conversations in Gaza, Hebron, Jerusalem and Nablus with senior Palestinian political leaders from diverse factions focused on the steps needed to translate consensus on reconciliation into practical action, and the obstacles to this. In the context of the then proposed dissolution of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and the prospect of Israeli elections in early 2019, these were frank discussions about popular disillusionment with polit-
cical leaderships, the efficacy of efforts to bridge the gap and the need for tangible delivery to bolster talk of political strategy. The visit also provided the opportunity for figures associated with Northern Ireland’s peace process and power-sharing negotiations to offer insights into practical negotiation strategies, whether to offer to be at the table for those ‘hardline’ constituencies who may have previously rejected participation, or the need for all conflict-
quiry to come away with sufficient gains to present their posi-
tion as a win to their communities.

Following December’s engagement, in June 2019, Forward Think-
ing invited Professor Alain Lemperuer to host a series of work-
shops in the West Bank. Professor Lemperuer is the director of the Conflict Resolution and Coexistence Program at Brandeis Uni-
versity’s Heller School for Social Policy and Management. Profes-
sor Lemperuer facilitated negotiation skills workshops with youth groups at Hebron University. He also facilitated long overdue cross-party dialogue in Hebron. This discussion provided a space for frank exchange on the current challenges facing Palestinian unity, and issues particular to Hebron.

The group included leaders who have been previously engaged in Forward Thinking workshops, as well as new participants. Over the course of discussions, participants identified practical steps for cooperation based on mutual respect and understand-
ing. Following these discussions, a number of key achievements were made. Particularly, the buy-in to and interest in continuing cross-party reconciliation discussions was an important achieve-
ment. Across the years’ activities participants emphasised the importance of the role played by Forward Thinking in facilitating these dialogues, as many groups feel unable to meet without out-
side facilitation. Similarly, having time to discuss issues surround-
ing reconciliation in various locations across the West Bank and Gaza highlighted misconceptions that have arisen, and created opportunities to correct these.

Supporting the development of the Palestinian Educa-
tion sector

Through its work with the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher education, a clear need emerged for young Palestinians teachers to develop leadership, negotiation and vocational teach-
ing skills to help develop strong critical thinking skills among the next generation of Palestinians. In response to the need which was outlined by the Ministry, Forward Thinking has supported the department by helping organise and deliver leadership training for Palestinian teachers.

Five Palestinian teachers were chosen by the ministry to take part in the training at Harvard University, which involved an online course followed by a residential one. The aim of this programme has been to develop the leadership and negotiation skills of par-
ticipants and equip them with the skills necessary to improve education outcomes and implement reforms across Palestinian educational institutions.

Since returning the teachers have been implementing many of their new practices and staying in touch with other Middle East Professional Learning Initiative (MEPLI) scholars, to share best practices and effective teaching methods.

Building Understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian Con-
flict

We have also aimed to develop the understanding British Muslim political figures of historical and contemporary issues in the Israe-
I-Palestinian conflict by organising a delegation of representatives of the Conservative Muslim Forum (CMF) to Israel and Palestine between 19th-25th November 2018. Forward Thinking was asked to facilitate a series of political meetings between the group and Israeli and Palestinian officials from across the political spectrum. In a turbulent week for Israeli politics, which saw the resignation of the Israeli Defence Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, the group met with MKs and party officials from Likud, Shas, the Joint List and the Labor Party. Discussions explored the political priorities and vi-
sions for the future for each party for example, the role of religion within the Israeli state, the challenges facing Palestinian citizens in Israel, the trends within the left and trends on the right of Israeli politics. The group also travelled to Lower Galilee to meet munici-
pal leaders and explore examples of Jewish, Muslim and Christian coexistence in Israel at the level of civil society.

In the West Bank, the group met with senior officials from the Pal-
estinian Authority in Ramallah, Nablus and Hebron. Discussions explored the challenges facing intra-Palestinian reconciliation be-
 tween political factions in the West Bank and Gaza, the Palestinian education system, in addition to the impact of occupation. The group also met with David Quarrey, British Ambassador to Israel, and Philip Hall, the British Consul General to Jerusalem, in order to understand the role of Britain in the region. The meetings helped to provide a snapshot of the current political realities facing both sides.

The Humanitarian Conference

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains dire. Severe short-
ages of medical resources and staff, electricity and clean water continue to inhibit development in the strip. Unemployment has reached a record high of 53% and is higher among youth. At the same time, the politicisation of aid, in combination with the de-funding of UNRWA is putting the food security of hundreds of thousands of refugees in Gaza at risk. The humanitarian needs continue to be significant despite falling levels of donor commit-
ments.

In response and at the request of figures in the region, it was de-
cided in the autumn of 2018 that there was a need for a space to address the pressing humanitarian challenges and allow for coordination among UN bodies, NGOs and other relevant actors. Forward Thinking convened a high-level meeting in London on 5th December. This meeting brought together key stakeholders including: UNRWA, other UN bodies, foreign ministry representa-
tives from Europe, the Gulf States and Palestine, and aid agencies. It provided a confidential space with the aim of participants devel-
oping a shared analysis of the immediate challenges and identify where efforts should be prioritised. The December meeting high-
lighted the particular challenges of delivering humanitarian aid in a highly politicised Palestinian context.

The success of the meeting was seen in a number of shared issues and potential solutions being identified, as well as the sharing of analysis on the situation on the ground between parties. It was identified that more time is needed to discuss and follow on from the conference, and Forward Thinking will be facilitating a larger follow up conference in 2020.
To say the Gulf-MENA region is highly volatile and unpredictable is an understatement. The World Bank estimates that up to a third of the population of the Middle East has been directly affected by war in the past four years, with substantial indirect costs for neighbouring states. Managing the consequences of conflict, rather than building a positive vision for the region, has been a norm for policy-makers in recent decades. One result has been an increase in militarism and arms spending, exacerbating tensions. Multiple crises persist with little sense of progress, becoming stagnant. On the one hand, this can threaten to create a false sense of security and the belief that crises can at least be managed if not resolved. Yet, beneath the surface even the longest running conflicts remain highly unpredictable, retaining their potential to suddenly flare up again with devastating implications.

Broader shifts in global norms are exacerbating these challenges. Like other parts of the world, Europe and the Gulf-MENA are grappling with twin challenges of populism and polarisation. In combination, these trends are deepening existing crises, re-opening old divisions and promoting a zero-sum approach to politics. Sectarianism and the politicisation of people’s different ethnic, national or religious identities, is tearing at the seams of social cohesion. Social media – once held up as a force for liberalisation, building coalitions and facilitating social and political inclusion – can increase also discord and distrust. And, social media has further intensified the broader development of 24hr news demanding an instant response, threatening to overwhelm the capacity of policymakers to develop more thoughtful and measured approaches. Meanwhile a broader dynamic of popular discontent (driven in part by changes in the nature of work and the global economy) is undermining trust between citizens and their leaders.

These pressures at a national level have direct consequences for international affairs. The international architecture constructed after the Second World War to manage relations between states is under growing strain. Multilateral efforts to address common challenges are being undermined in the short term by unilateral actions of individual states. However, crisis can also beget opportunity and such actions are likely to cause reactions around which like-minded policymakers can rally to defend multilateralism and the principles of international law.

There is a strong sense that many challenges confronting the region – from active and unresolved conflict to structural challenges such as weak economies – are worsening rather than improving, and there is risk that an unexpected event could trigger wider conflict with uncontrollable consequences. There is zero trust between key influential states in the region such as Iran and Saudi Arabia or Egypt and Turkey. Given the context, developing mechanisms around common interest rather than waiting for trust to be built provides a way forward to address complex challenges that pose risks to the Gulf-MENA region and Europe. This is the challenging context in which the Helsinki Policy Forum must operate. Yet in spite of the difficulties, we have continued to make progress over the past year and successfully kept channels for dialogue open, even as broader tensions have mounted. We have organised high-level policy roundtables at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2018, in Helsinki in December 2018 and April 2019. These roundtables brought together high level policy-makers and government officials, parliamentarians and economists, from Europe and the Gulf-MENA with participation from Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

We held over 290 meetings with policy-makers throughout the year and approximately 76% of those meetings were with government officials or parliamentarians. The Helsinki Policy Forum is more than a series of meetings and events, but is an ongoing process of dialogue throughout the year in between meetings and gatherings on specific issues.
An important outcome of the discussions was the launch of a new network of female parliamentarians from across the Middle East and Gulf. This has facilitated the creation of another space where understanding can be increased, (mis)perceptions can be explored and peer-to-peer support can occur. A second outcome was the establishment of a working group on addressing shared challenges and risks from the environment.

Several clear recommendations emerged, including the urgent need to meet the demand from reconstruction to those areas affected by conflict as well as provide adequate provisions to refugees resulting from conflict. At the same time, countries were encouraged to integrate refugees into local economies so that they can continue to develop their skills to assist with the eventual transition to Europe.

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Environment Working Group

The Environment Working Group initiative was established after the Helsinki Policy Forum High-Level Working Group in the margins of the 2018 UNGA. In the meeting it was recommended to establish the working group to explore the environmental challenges facing governments in the Gulf-MENA. Environmental challenges can have severe implications, for example, negatively impacting food security, tourism or exacerbating fragile humanitarian challenges. It was decided that the Environment Working Group would begin by exploring challenges emanating from the sea and water pollution. The aim being to get a better understanding of mechanisms than can be developed to help states address challenges that are shared and the ramifications of which are uncontrollable and negatively impact on a number of countries. The Finnish Government have developed a mechanism with Estonia and Russia which helps to safeguard against the risks to the environment of oil collisions, spills or pollution into the sea. As a result, the Gulf of Finland is now one of the cleanest seas in the world. In cooperation with the EU and the GCC, Iraq and Iran we will now be facilitating a series of study groups for technical experts from these countries to learn about the GOFREP system in more detail. Following the study visits to Finland, a roundtable will be held in Finland with the experts and relevant Helsinki Policy Forum participants to discuss next steps in addressing the challenges in the Gulf. Meetings were held with the Saudi MFA, GCC and EU on a recent visit to Riyadh to discuss the study visits.

Libya – responding to unexpected crises

The value of the networks we establish through our work can often be highlighted in unexpected ways. Since 2015 we have been facilitating a dialogue between political leaders and government officials from across the Libyan conflict. Arising from those meetings was a desire from the Libyan participants to establish a working group on migration to improve Libya’s effectiveness at addressing the challenges of migration from a Libyan perspective. Over several months in late 2018 and 2019 we were able to help Libyan doctors respond to an unexpected crisis. Due to the conflict, certain drugs needed by patients with rare diseases, ceased to be delivered to Libya. A Swiss company was the only European company that produced the medicines required to treat the illnesses. Libyan MPs approached us on behalf of the doctors and patients to see if there was a way to address this. Through the network of the Helsinki Policy Forum we were able to assist and connect them to Swedish authorities who could establish a mechanism through which the medicines could be delivered.

Furthermore, after renewed fighting broke out in Libya in early April, we were contacted by a group of Libyan MPs who asked for our assistance in arranging meetings in Europe with the aim of creating renewed pressure for a ceasefire. In response, we were able to organise meetings in Paris and London with a number of parliamentarians and which resulted in urgent questions being put to UK ministers. The exemplifies how the network of the Forum is able to respond to emerging crises in real-time.

Faith Based Organisations and Humanitarianism

The role of religious organisations in delivering humanitarian aid is becoming increasingly recognised. There are currently over 71 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, the highest level since the Second World War. To address this growing challenge, efforts have been launched to bring humanitarian actors together to jointly consider options for more sustainable action. Religious organisations have a critical role to play in this response, yet their potential has not been fully realised by secular policymakers who have concerns that they may discriminate in favour of their co-religionists or use humanitarian efforts as a cover for proselytisation.

In response, we were approached by the Sovereign Order of Malta to help convene religious figures from across Europe and the Middle East with the aim of drawing up a shared compact of principles that can inform the work of religious organisations delivering humanitarian aid. The goal is to devise a practical document that has real utility in crisis situations. In April, an initial meeting was convened in Rome, which resulted in a draft of the compact being written. We are now in the process of preparing a meeting in mid-2020 at which the compact will be publicly launched and disseminated amongst organisations working in the Middle East and Europe.

This forms part of the work of the Forum in promoting greater religious literacy in foreign policy making – an issue of growing importance given the renewed prominence of faith based actors in many parts of the world.

Policymakers are understandably focused on addressing immediate crises in the Middle East – not least trying to resolve ongoing conflicts. However, the region also faces a growing number of structural threats that demand urgent attention to avert potentially catastrophic outcomes. The consequences of a changing climate is amongst the most dangerous of these long-term challenges.

- The Middle East is forecast to be amongst the regions most negatively impacted by climate change. On current trends, the region will come under pressure on multiple fronts:
  - Temperature records are being broken across the region. Temperatures of over 50°C are increasingly common, with Kuwait holding the regional record of 54°C in 2016. Because of rising temperatures, some researchers warn that many cities could become almost uninhabitable by 2100.
  - NASA warns that the current dry period in the Middle East is the worst for 900 years.
  - Higher temperatures increase the strain on already limited water resources. The World Bank warns that 80-100 million people will be exposed to water stress by 2025. The Dead Sea has shrunk by a third in two decades, while in Yemen groundwater levels are falling by six metres a year in the country’s most heavily populated districts.
  - Growing desertification and increased sand storms are another result of a warming planet. Within 10 years, the UN warns that Iraq could suffer from 300 “dust events” a year. Dust storms cause major economic and health harm.
  - Research is ongoing into the respiratory impact of exposure to dust storms, but it is notable that as many as 25% of Saudi children may suffer from asthma as reported by the Saudi Initiative for Asthma.

Perversely, while climate change will deprive some the region of water it will inundate other countries. The World Bank warns that the MENA region is amongst the most vulnerable places on earth to rising sea levels. Some cities, such as Alexandria in Egypt, may disappear entirely, while low-lying areas in Libya, Qatar, Tunisia and the UAE are all considered at high risk.

Recent studies have indicated a clear link between climate disasters and an increased incidence of violent conflicts in fragmented states. This presents a clear risk to the stability of the Middle East and suggests that the longer climate change is unaddressed, the more likely further conflict in the region becomes.

Any effective response to climate change necessarily requires a degree of co-operation between states. Through the work of the Helsinki Policy Forum’s environmental working group, we provide an informal space where policymakers can gain a greater understanding of the common threats they face, disseminate learning, and explore the possibility of developing shared approaches. Given the scale of the challenge, we will continue to take this work forward as a priority.
In the coming year we will seek to build on this emerging consensus, working with both the established and new political forces that emerge after the elections. Where possible we seek to expose Tunisian policymakers to experiences from other countries that have undergone political transitions and explore their potential relevance. The aim will be to stimulate thinking among Tunisian leaders over how they can facilitate effective economic reforms.

Our year ended on a sad note, with the death of President Mohamed Beji Caid Essebsi at the age of 92. We had the great pleasure of working closely with President Essebsi on several occasions after the revolution of 2011. We witnessed first-hand his commitment to his country and his determination to ensure the success of Tunisia’s transition. His respect for the principles of dialogue and consensus were essential in steering Tunisia through a challenging time in the country’s history and in achieving a historic coalition government with Ennahda after the 2014 elections. For this, he will rightly be remembered as one of the fathers of Tunisia’s democracy. His death came with five months of his term remaining. Some feared that this could prove disruptive to the 2019 elections planned. Instead, the handover of power proceeded smoothly, and presidential elections were successfully brought forward without incident. Forward Thinking remain committed to offer whatever assistance we can to help Tunisia’s transition to succeed.
A volatile year for UK politics has thrown up particular challenges for Britain’s diverse Muslim communities. Disturbingly, hate crime has increased sharply, including racially and religiously motivated crimes, with Muslim women and girls being disproportionately targeted in these attacks. This has caused deep concern within communities and an urgent demand for government action to tackle the problem.

**“593% increase in hate crimes against UK Muslims after New Zealand mosque shootings”** - GUARDIAN, 22 MARCH, 2019

**“56% of anti-Muslim hatred victims at a street level are female”** - TELLMAMA

**“The volume of religiously aggravated hate crime referrals from police increased significantly from 508 in 2016-17 to 728 in 2017-18 – an increase of 43.3%”** - CPS HATE CRIME REPORT 2018

This difficult context reinforces the importance of policymakers hearing the perspectives of British Muslims and understanding the challenges that they face. Our approach remains based on the belief that, regardless of their background, British Muslim communities must be involved in influencing the political decision-making processes that will affect their lives. We continue to work closely with over 60 organisations nationally which represent the ethnic, theological and diasporic diversity of British Muslim communities. These organisations are dynamic and have the trust of local communities, however, decreases in funding and local authority grants mean that many are scaling back services or facing closure.

Forward Thinking works to ensure these organisations remain connected with local and national policymakers in the hopes of addressing misperceptions; tackling common challenges and ultimately achieving more informed policies.

We are grateful for the support of the Ellerman Foundation and the Dulverton Trust who have made the delivery of the ‘Building Bridges’ Programme possible. We are also thankful to the Evan Cornish Foundation, who helped to facilitate our ‘Pathways into Politics’ programme which comprises a series of practical initiatives which aim to cultivate and develop the next generation of young British Muslim political leaders (aged 18-30) at a local and national level.

### Aims

Create understanding

- Open up spaces for diverse, grassroots Muslim communities and policymakers to interact through facilitation and mediation

Identify challenges

- Allow individuals with constituency to raise issues of concern to their communities, including those relating to criminal justice, counter-terror laws and access to political representation

Influence change

- Reflect challenges faced by British Muslims to local and national policymakers through bilateral meetings, producing and sharing reports from meetings, and feeding in insights to the local and national media

### PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

#### Informing the IRTL on Muslim experiences of CT legislation

Over September and October 2018, Forward Thinking facilitated a series of regional roundtables between Max Hill QC, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation at the time, and a diverse range of British Muslim community representatives. The initial series of meetings took place in Leicester, Dewsbury, Bradford and Manchester and engaged young people, faith leaders, community campaigners, members of local government and political activists. These meetings sought to build on a previous series of roundtables facilitated by Forward Thinking between Mr Hill and around 20 diverse community organisations in 2017 and engaged many of the same participants, thus enabling a reflective conversation in which communities identified where they felt improvements had been made and where challenges endure.

A wide range of issues were successfully explored, including the impact of the current legislation on the ability of small charities to carry out work overseas; the proposed changes to counter-terrorism legislation announced as part of the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill of 2018 (including the creation of a designated area offence); the use of Schedule 7 powers; the rise of hate crime and the government’s efforts to tackle far-right extremism.

In October, a final discussion was held at Finsbury Park Mosque on these issues. Discussions at the Finsbury Park meeting focused extensively on the potential implications of the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill of 2018 and the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2018. In particular, concerns were raised that the so-called “three clicks” provision of the legislation (which would criminalise accessing terrorist propaganda online on three or more occasions) could inadvertently block journalistic or academic research and risked straying into criminalising “thoughts” rather than “deeds.” Concerns were also raised that, without clear safeguards in place, the proposed designated areas offence could prevent vital humanitarian work in conflict areas. Several other issues were raised over the course of discussions, including questions over how the government are responding to the rise of far-right terrorism and what the Home Secretary’s changes to CONTEST might mean for the public and local authorities.

#### Supporting the Crown Prosecution Service’s Engagement with British Muslim Communities

In July 2018, Forward Thinking facilitated the launch of a new pilot programme ‘Community Conversations’ in Bradford on the 11th July 2018, and in Manchester on the 23rd July 2018, connecting local Chief Crown Prosecutors (CCPs) and representatives from British Muslim communities. These Community Conversations provide a unique opportunity for communities to share their experiences and perceptions in order to positively influence policy and practice within the Crown Prosecution Service.

Following this, in January and March 2019, Forward Thinking facilitated the third and fourth meetings of Community Conversations in Manchester. The proactive nature of the dialogue proved to be particularly beneficial, with participants having the opportunity to outline local priorities and discuss community led ‘bottom up’ approaches to tackle contemporary challenges their communities face.
These Community Conversations have continued to explore a number of issues, particularly how to improve the diversity of the workforce in different parts of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) in the North West, understanding why BAME communities are disproportionately represented within the CJS, and how the idea of restorative justice might be developed and applied within the North West. Additionally, a significant portion of these discussions focused on the issue of religiously and racially aggravated hate crime. The March meeting specifically focused on the issue of hate crime, with representatives from the CJS including the Probation Services and Criminal Justice Board seeking to offer assurances that they are working to improve their response and offering advice to participants on how to record and respond to abuse they might encounter on social media.

The CPS have sought to respond to community concerns through instituting a number of work experience programmes. They provided an opportunity for high school students to be given work experience with the CPS, with 6 University of Manchester (UoM) students also being offered work experience opportunities. Community members from ‘Community Conversations’ were integrated throughout the application process, including on the interview panel for the UoM work experience programme.

In February 2019, Community Conversations participants travelled to London to provide briefings on their experiences thus far. They shared good practice from the initiative and spotlighted the need for community conversations and engagement more generally. Participants spoke at a parliamentary briefing, which was well attended by cross-party MPs and peers, and meetings were held with Max Hill QC, CPS Director of Public Prosecutions; Baljit Ubhey, Director of Prosecution Policy and the CPS’s Inclusion and Community Engagement Managers.

The discussions highlighted that Community Conversations is a growing priority for the CPS and underpins the CPS’s national ‘Community and Inclusion Strategy 2020’ – a multi-year strategy focused on promoting fairness, equality, diversity and inclusion across the criminal justice system. The discussions highlighted that Community Conversations is a growing priority for the CPS and underpins the CPS’s national ‘Community and Inclusion Strategy 2020’ – a multi-year strategy focused on promoting fairness, equality, diversity and inclusion across the criminal justice system.

Supporting BAME Representation in Politics

The ‘Pathways into Politics’ programme has continued to provide opportunities for inclusive political participation, empowering representative young Muslim voices and breaking down barriers to their full engagement in civic and political life. Launched in Parliament in April 2018, the programme has enabled a range of young Muslims nationwide to positively engage with a variety of policymakers. The discussions highlighted that Community Conversations is a growing priority for the CPS and underpins the CPS’s national ‘Community and Inclusion Strategy 2020’ – a multi-year strategy focused on promoting fairness, equality, diversity and inclusion across the criminal justice system.

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"Community Conversations have been a fantastic addition to the work we do to build community confidence in the CPS and Criminal Justice System...

The Community choose the agenda ensuring that the conversations remain meaningful and relevant to their everyday experiences. They have been the catalyst for work with partners around hate crime and representation of BAME within our workforce, actively playing a role in a number of pilots designed to make a difference.

- Martin Goldman - Chief Crown Prosecutor, CPS North West

"Forward Thinking plays a vital role in creating opportunities for communication and engagement between the London centred policy makers, implementers and administrators and local communities.

On 30th November 2018, Forward Thinking facilitated a further ‘Pathways into Politics’ discussion in Manchester. The discussion was facilitated to respond to the lack of opportunities for minority ethnic political leaders, serving to provide a space for participants to hear about the diverse challenges and opportunities a career in politics presents. Participants at various stages of their professional careers were in attendance, with representatives from civil society organisations, community activists and students aspiring to a career in politics. Subsequently, the meeting allowed for the coming together of a cross-party group of political leaders from a national and local level with young Muslim leaders, aged 18-30. Speakers and panelists included; Rt Hon. Mohammed Atif Khan MP CBE (Labour), Councillor Hashim Bhatti (Conservative), Amna Abdal (Labour) and Councillor Tamoor Tarig (Labour).

Based on the success of this initiative, we have sought to address the challenge identified in the meeting whereby young people struggle to navigate faith in politics through launching a leader-ship and mentoring programme for young Muslims. Ensuring an effective and transparent independent re-view of Prevent.

On 22nd July 2019, Forward Thinking facilitated a roundtable between representatives from the Home Office and diverse British Muslim community representatives from Manchester, Bradford, Birmingham and London. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the Independent Review of Prevent, its proposed Terms of Reference (ToR) and the appointment process for the Independent Reviewer. The meeting developed from roundtables Forward Thinking facilitated between 17th-18th July 2019, in West Yorkshire and the North West of England. The objective was not to discuss the relative merits or criticisms of Prevent but rather to focus on the review process and how to ensure its effectiveness and transparency. This new programme of work has the potential to develop further in the coming months, allowing those that would not otherwise have the opportunity to engage with the Independent Review to air their views.

- Ish iq Ahmed - Strategic Policy and Projects Officer, Khidmat Centres, Bradford

Participants at a Pathways into Politics event hosted at Bradford City Hall. The meeting provided an opportunity to explore the barriers confronting BAME youth interested in a career in politics.
W hen I arrived in British Muslim communities for the first time in 2015 the biggest challenge identified was the gap in trust between diverse groups and national Government. This had grown over the years and was the product of multiple factors ranging from the disproportionate outcomes suffered by BAME individuals in the criminal justice system, to the impact of austerity and limited economic opportunities.

However, one of the biggest forces driving mistrust was the absence of genuine dialogue with the Establishment – an absence driven by ingrained reluctance in parts of the government to engage with the full diversity of Muslim community organisations.

Many political leaders do not know which communities to speak to, or fear accusations of engaging with the ‘wrong type of Muslim organisation’, which generates a dynamic of exclusion. Indeed, I was shocked to find the security services had advised one prominent department not to engage with certain communities due to perceived safety risks. Had this advice been followed an immensely positive body of work would not have been possible.

As an organisation we believe that inclusivity is essential, and that engagement is not a prize to be bestowed upon certain groups or communities. This sometimes means reaching out to those with controversial views that one may personally not agree with. Here the principle that ‘engagement does not equal endorsement’ of views, an idea developed from the conflict in Northern Ireland is essential. Decision makers must adopt it more broadly in order to restore confidence in their activities.

This underlines the key insight from my time on the UK Programme – nothing can replace real human engagement that allows communities and political leaders the space and time to listen to one another’s concerns and generate more informed debate through mutual understanding. It is once channels for communication are shut down that rumour, suspicion and animosity flourish. These are precisely the conditions in which nefarious groups can grow.

Communities possess a wealth of expertise, which is valuable to policy development, so Whitehall and Westminster must do more to reach out. By going directly into communities, including those Government deems ‘problematic’, one can gain an insight into invaluable perspectives on how policies work in practice and how they are perceived by those they are meant to serve. This is increasingly important when too much of the debate on British Muslim communities has been shaped by ‘outsiders’: unrepresentative groups can grow.

There is no blueprint for successful community engagement. However, it is important for institutions to find individuals with empathy and emotional intelligence who can navigate very different worlds from one morning to the next. It is clear that some in positions of power are better at it than others.

Over the past four years, we have successfully connected Ministers, MPs, Lords, successive Independent Reviewers of Terrorism Legislation (IRTL) and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) with community representatives from across the diversity of Britain’s Muslim population, including communities from which terrorists have emerged. At times, this involved bringing communities into the Westminster bubble, however, for the most part it has consisted of bringing those from Westminster into communities.

The result of inclusive engagement has been positive both for communities and officials. They have built confidence, trust and relationships that did not exist before. Two-way, action-driven engagement has offered a chance to explicitly confront assumptions and ask questions, decrease suspicion and establish relationships between institutions and communities across perceived lines of difference.

Visits have helped those in positions of power make and shape informed policy whilst also protecting the rights and values of ‘hidden’ minorities. Whilst the perspectives presented are not representative of all British Muslim communities, frank and honest engagement allows for a greater discernment of issues and a chance to unpick unhelpful conclusions that seem to be undermining rather than strengthening trust in national Government.

In 2016-2018, we established the first national dialogues between diverse British Muslim communities and respective Independent Reviewers of Terrorism Legislation. These engagements aimed to contextualise the impact of counter terrorism laws on British Muslim communities. This has helped build confidence in the rule of law, but there is still a long way to go. With the CPS, between 2017 and present, we helped establish a pilot community engagement process between communities and Chief Crown Prosecutors, which has been adopted as a ‘business as usual’ approach across the CPS in their policy and practice across England and Wales.

These approaches matter because communities are increasingly diverse, complex and difficult to comprehend and navigate. What is clear is that these efforts to engage must be expanded and built upon. Government institutions must avoid becoming closed and instead be reinvigorated and energised by engaging the communities they serve.

It has been a great privilege to work on UK ‘Building Bridges’ Programme, which I hope made a contribution to alleviating some of the challenges facing British Muslim communities. Dialogue is a simple concept but complex in practice. It takes real courage to sit and be willing to hear uncomfortable truths and have your perspectives challenged. I remain profoundly grateful to all those across the UK who have been willing to do so in Forward Thinking’s meetings.
This was a year of transition for Forward Thinking in which several long-standing colleagues and Trustees left the organisation. We want to express our sincere thanks to Edward Channer and Isobel Scott-Barrett, who both left in early 2019 to pursue new opportunities. We wish them the very best of luck in their future careers and are grateful for all of their hard work over their time at Forward Thinking.

We also want express our deep thanks to Lord Hylton and Baroness Kennedy who have recently stepped down from our Board of Trustees after many years of committed service.

We are happy to welcome Jeremy Greenstock and Justin Dowley as the new members of the board of trustees and look forward to working with them in the years ahead.