



United Religions
Initiative



PRESS RELEASE

28 February 2024

OBAMA ADVISER AND NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER TO VISIT UK.

Preeta Bansal, President Obama's former senior policy advisor, will visit the West Midlands, Leicester, and London between March 1 and 4.

Ms Bansal, an American social entrepreneur, is the Global Chair of the United Religions Initiative (URI), the world's largest interfaith organisation. She will be accompanied by the executive director of URI, Jerry White, a campaigner and humanitarian activist who shared in the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize for his work in banning landmines.

The two will be part of a delegation of URI activists from the United States and Europe coming to Britain at the invitation of URI UK, a charity headed by Deepak Naik MBE from Coventry.

The visit will include visits to places of worship, a touring exhibition and conferences in Birmingham, Sandwell, Leicester, Coventry, and London. These will address difficult themes such as preventing violence in all its forms and the fragility of interfaith work.

The conferences are designed to discover innovative ways for faith groups and other stakeholders to work effectively, inspiring people to action, bringing hope, and creating opportunities and prosperity for local communities.

Deepak Naik said, "Events in the Middle East and elsewhere are posing real challenges for good relations between faith groups here in Britain. On top of that, we learned of the tragic closure of the Inter Faith Network for the UK, which has done outstanding work in supporting dialogue for over 25 years. It is vital to strengthen interfaith activity in the UK and draw in new participants."

Preeta Bansal said, "Britain has always had a good reputation for interfaith dialogue, and my colleagues and I are keen to learn more. We also hope our experiences will provide fresh perspectives for activists here and give rise to new projects and approaches."

The conferences will feature keynote speeches from prominent interfaith activists, MPs, local councillors and panel discussions designed to produce practical projects and working partnerships.

URI UK hopes that UK interfaith initiatives will choose to become URI 'Cooperation Circles' because of the visit, giving them access to resources and contacts worldwide.

Those wishing to attend a conference should email URI UK Trustee Warwick Hawkins MBE for details (warwick@faithinsociety.org.uk).

Note for Editor

The URI is a global network with over 1,150 member grassroots groups ("Cooperation Circles") in 110 countries. URI Europe has more than 60 Cooperation Circles across 25 countries. These are actively engaged in youth and women empowerment, environmental protection, promoting freedom of religion and belief, and fostering multifaith cooperation to address social issues. The visit to the UK comes at a time of significant global challenges. It intends to bring fresh perspectives to the UK interfaith landscape and enhance URI UK's mission of promoting enduring daily interfaith cooperation, ending religiously motivated violence, and creating peace, justice, and healing cultures. More information on URI is at <https://www.uri.org>.

URI UK is a registered charity that pursues URI's global aims within the UK context. Its objectives are:

- To build peace and understanding between people of different religions and cultures
- To focus as much on social action projects (bringing people together by doing positive work in our communities) as on dialogue – the two are complementary
- To work with all who share its values, such as places of worship, youth groups and community activists
- To welcome people from any background and of all faiths or none

Since it was reconstituted in 2022, it has run three projects:

- An event to coincide with the International Interministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion and Belief, where young people and community activists debated human rights and social justice and planned practical actions to safeguard FoRB.
- An event at the Balaji Hindu Temple in the West Midlands, where local residents and people of all faiths came together to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III with music, good food, children's activities and the planting of trees.
- Participation in a vigil at Coventry Cathedral to express solidarity with the families of those killed during the Israel-Hamas conflict.

For more information, please email warwick@faithinsociety.org.uk .