



Lessening Tensions in a Tumultuous World: The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies

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(Judaism, Christianity and Islam) in the interests of deepening mutual understanding at a time when tolerance often seems to be captive to newspaper headlines. The magazine is freely and widely distributed to

leading political and religious figures in the region, both Christian and Muslim, as well as to others interested in the continuation of fruitful relations among the adherents of different faiths.

Since 1999 the RIIFS has published the semi-annual *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (BRIIFS)*, a peer-reviewed academic journal that publishes research articles, essays and book reviews contributed by recognised scholars working in all fields of the humanities and social sciences.

The Royal Institute works to promote dialogue between Muslim and Christian Arabs and to assess their mutual relations, as Arabs, with the Western world. At meetings convened by RIIFS scholars, researchers, religious leaders and journalists have asked such questions as: What is the role of Christian Arabs in Arab/Islamic society and how may it be enhanced? What are the responsibilities of Christian Arabs to Arab/Islamic society? Can Christian Arab identity be instrumental in cultivating positive relations between Muslim Arabs and the West? What is the impact of the migration of Arab Christians to the West upon the

strength and sustainability of the region's Christian communities?

RIIFS has long been concerned with the Arab image in the West. A 1998 meeting focused on the apparent European and American identification of the Middle East with such threats to global peace and democratic order as terrorism, resurgent Islam, totalitarian governments and weapons of mass destruction. This negative perception of the region and its peoples has been repeatedly invoked in recent memory, particularly by the United States, to justify the severing of diplomatic relations, the application of economic sanctions and even the use of military force.

Since the events of 11 September the Royal Institute has given renewed thought to how it may further contribute to the lessening of tensions between the Arab/Islamic and Western worlds by designing programmes targetted at policy makers and educators. Genuine progress will take time. There is always the possibility that a new outrage – real or perceived – will harden prejudices and feed sterile conflict. No matter what the future holds, the Institute will continue to work to foster understanding and deepen tolerance on both sides of the divide.

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Established in 1994, the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) emerged from a process of consultation with educational, cultural and interfaith institutions in the Middle East and the West started a decade earlier. RIIFS was originally intended to serve as a centre for the study of Christian and Jewish traditions in the Arab/Islamic world and for the enhancement of understanding of regional diversity with a view to lessening Middle Eastern tensions. Initially focusing on religion, religious diversity and the Middle East, the Institute has broadened its scope to encompass the interdisciplinary study of cultural interaction worldwide.

From the Institute's inception, its work has involved research, publication of reference works and periodicals, and organisation of workshops, conferences and lectures. In addition to publishing academic works pertaining to Christianity and Muslim/Christian relations in the Arab World, RIIFS produces a quarterly magazine *Al-Nashra* which serves as a forum in which Muslims and Christians may discuss contemporary interfaith issues, particularly as they relate to Arab and Islamic societies. *Al-Nashra* also strives to shed light upon the historical relationship between the three Abrahamic religions