

Statement of the Haifa Interfaith Forum

In Response to the Letter from Hackney – 2 August 2026

The Haifa Interfaith Forum brings together leaders of the city's Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Druze communities. The Forum operates under the auspices of the University of Haifa and the Mayor of Haifa, with a deep commitment to continuing to foster mutual understanding, respect and shared life among all of the city's residents.

Haifa is a unique model of a multicultural society, where diversity is not merely a demographic reality but a way of life. It is a city where Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze and Bahá'ís live together, work together, study together and build a shared society based on tolerance and trust.

For generations, genuine partnership has been part of Haifa's public life – in workplaces, schools, academic institutions and communities throughout the city. This is the everyday reality of Haifa, and it is what has made the city a model of coexistence in Israel and internationally.

It is precisely because of our commitment to shared life that we, the religious and community leaders who are members of the Haifa Interfaith Forum, express our deep regret over the letter by the Mayor of Hackney, Zoë Garbett, which contains numerous distortions, and firmly reject the claims made in it.

The letter presents a distorted picture of Haifa and of the State of Israel and disregards the reality that we live and shape together every day in our city. Rather than advancing the values of peace, dialogue and tolerance, it undermines them and drives people further apart.

Haifa has been and will continue to be a symbol of shared life, dialogue, tolerance and respect among people of all faiths and communities.

We call upon the Mayor of Hackney to reconsider and withdraw her statements, and we invite her to visit Haifa and experience firsthand the unique reality of our city – a city where residents and religious leaders of different faiths work together throughout the year, including during times of challenge and tension, and join forces to build a society based on mutual respect, shared responsibility and hope for a better future.

Members of the Haifa Interfaith Forum

Sheikh Rashad Abu al-Hija – Imam of Al-Jarina Mosque
Rabbi Eliyahu Bloom – Rabbi of the Rambam Community, Neve Sha'anani
Father Dimitrios Samra – Priest of the Greek Orthodox Church in Haifa
Father Derair Sahak Hovakimian – Head of the Armenian Community
Emir Muhammad Sharif Odeh – Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community
Rabbi Naama Dafni – Head of the Or Hadash Community
Sheikh Tawfiq Halabi – Imam and Member of the Druze Religious Council

Additional Forum Members:

Doaa Odeh
Father William Abu Shakra
Father Hatem Shehadeh
Father Youssef Yacoub
Father Nadim Shakur
Hagar Ronen Eliav
Hiyam Tanous
Rabbi Aryeh Cohen
Rabbi Yossi Shtemler
Rabbi Yosef Haim Biton
Yehoshua Marmur
Kamal Suleiman
Christine Alhazan
Muhammad Agbaria
Nizar Khatib
Saeed Khatib
Rabia Basis
Sheikh Jaber Mansour



Members of the Haifa Interfaith Forum with Mayor Yona Yahav at the Mayor's Sukkah, Haifa, 2025.

Photo: Reuven Cohen, Haifa Municipality Spokesperson's Office