



Islamic Unity Society
In Unity There Is Strength

Notice to Members of:

- 1. Proposed amendments to the constitution of the Islamic Unity Society (IUS) in anticipation of winding up; and**
- 2. General Meeting of Members of the IUS in October 2024**

Salaam Alaykum Dear Member,

We hope this message finds you in the best of health and imaan.

After nearly 30 years of serving the community, the Islamic Unity Society (IUS) is proud to reflect on a legacy that has exceeded the hopes of its founding members. What began humbly in a London university prayer room, with the vision of four student pioneers, has grown into an organisation that has successfully met and surpassed its goals, alhamdulillah. It is with a sense of gratitude and accomplishment that we now look to close this chapter, having fulfilled the mission we set out to achieve.

As you may have noticed, the activities and volunteer base of the IUS have significantly dwindled in recent years, especially during and following the Covid pandemic. **The reality is that the IUS is now a non-operational charity, lacking the resources, volunteers, and clear purpose needed to continue.**

It bears remembering, from the outset, that the IUS was a trailblazer for the Shia Muslim community in the UK. We were the first English-language, student-led organisation that brought together followers of the Ahlul Bayt (as) from diverse backgrounds. Over the years, the IUS has pioneered many initiatives: groundbreaking lectures, seminars, workshops, study circles, and the introduction of English-language majalis. We were the first to organise summer (and winter!) camps, as well as facilitating international trips to several countries and well-received annual conferences, including the Imam Mahdi (atfs) Conference (2001). Meanwhile, the IUS Newsletter (a.k.a. *Voice of Unity*) showcased fresh original contributions, and the always popular IUS Wallplanner became a staple in Shia households (and student dorms) nationwide. We take pride in being the first Muslim organisation to partner with NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT). The IUS also raised and provided relief resources to various good causes and emergencies around the world through IUS Aid. Importantly, the IUS was one of the first organisations to include sisters in the main committee, with sisters holding various senior positions at a time when this was uncommon in any UK-based Muslim organisation, including university Islamic Societies. It may seem quaint now but in the 90s, there was occasionally the Sisters' Rep. role on the committees of various organisations – the IUS set the precedent going forward.

Over the past year, we have been engaging with Bates Wells – a law firm with the largest dedicated charity and social enterprise team in the UK – for advice on the best way forward given we have a sole Trustee and only a few Executive Committee (EC) members remaining. During our discussions, it has become clear that the IUS faces governance challenges that we consider prevent the IUS from continuing its operations effectively. We want to highlight the following, in particular:

1. **Roles and responsibilities of the EC and the Trustees:** The IUS leadership is made up of volunteers – the EC and the Trustees. The current structure anticipates the EC (headed by the Chair) manages daily operations and Trustees focus on the long-term, as well as the above legalities, but take a hands-off approach. However, given the EC's responsibilities include "*implementing the aims and objectives of the society*" and "*maintaining proper financial accounts and other important records and protocols about the activities of the society*" – which would typically be responsibilities of charity trustees – Bates Wells considers that the EC could be viewed as charity trustees as well. The constitution does not, therefore, reflect the reality.

In addition, the IUS has struggled to retain the required number of EC members and trustees who are committed, engaged and active, meaning that holding valid meetings of the IUS has become more difficult. The existing trustee and EC members have committed to remaining on board to oversee an orderly winding up; the remedial work necessary to overhaul the governance and administration of the IUS would be significantly demanding, however, and would require a complete review of the structure, constitution and many of the policies and procedures (please see below).

2. **Outdated governance model:** The IUS is an unincorporated association, meaning that trustees (and potentially members of the EC, as detailed above) hold all assets of the IUS as individuals and could be held personally liable for liabilities (in the event these could not be met by the assets of the IUS). For this reason, most charities are now established with a different structure (an incorporated structure) which ringfences risk and offers limited liability to its trustees – whilst the IUS could become an incorporated structure, this would take time, and it is likely legal assistance would be required, etc., meaning significant funds of the IUS would need to be spent on this process (in addition to the above-mentioned remedial work).
3. **Lack of Policies and Procedures:** There is no doubt that from one committee to the next over the last decade, despite people's best intentions, some key processes have slipped from handover to handover. There are a number of significant flaws in the maintenance of important paperwork that in some cases are too large to rectify with a small team.
4. **Aims and Objectives:** We wholeheartedly believe that the IUS has met its aims and objectives as set out in the constitution, alhamdulillah. However, some of our activities, such as the NHSBT partnership, have been flagged by Bates Wells as possibly falling outside the scope of our charitable objects as per the constitution. Were the IUS to continue, therefore, it would require work to regularise this – including asking the Charity Commission for consent to amend the IUS's charitable objects to ensure all activities are encapsulated going forwards.

Bates Wells has therefore made it clear that, as it stands, the IUS is not technically complying with its constitution (e.g., as some of its activities possibly fall outside its charitable objects) and the constitution is not fit for purpose in the long term. Running a charity under these conditions poses legal and financial risks for the remaining volunteers, and we have been cautioned this could become complicated (were the IUS to operate without the required number of trustees / members of the EC and outside of its objects, for example). **Taken together, these factors have created significant obstacles that we consider make it virtually impossible for the IUS to continue operating effectively.**

As the last remaining volunteers, we have explored every possible avenue and, having sought legal advice, believe that the best course of action is to adopt a new constitution that is streamlined with a simpler and achievable dissolution process, and which will allow the IUS to close in a clean, legal, and orderly manner. This is the only viable path to avoid further complications, and we seek your support in this decision.

We are incredibly proud of the IUS's lasting impact. Its legacy lives on through the knowledge and experiences imparted in countless programmes, camps, and trips; the skills developed by volunteers; and the lifelong friendships formed within the IUS community.

Like anything in this world, everything that has a beginning will eventually meet its end, and Allah (swt) instructs us to take care of our responsibilities. As the final Trustee and remaining EC, it has fallen on us to ensure we carry out our duties, moral obligation, and responsibility to the IUS.

Notices

A General Meeting will insha'Allah be held in early-October 2024, at which a motion to adopt an updated constitution, to allow the IUS to close, will be put to a members' vote. Both a Partner and an Associate from Bates Wells – who have been advising on this matter for the past year – will be present to answer any questions.

To facilitate this, and in accordance with the constitution of the IUS, a full member of the IUS has proposed the necessary amendments to the constitution to the Secretary of the EC, and we are circulating these to all members with this notice.

A further formal notice of the General Meeting will be circulated at least one week before the meeting date insha'Allah.

With Du'as,
The IUS Executive Committee

Thursday 5th September 2024