**Statement at the AL MAHDI CENTRE, near Fareham, in the wake of the Westminster terrorist attack**

I am grateful for the welcome offered me again here at the Al Mahdi Centre and for the opportunity to speak briefly this afternoon. It is a pleasure to acknowledge again the willingness of Sheikh Fazle, and those with responsibility for the Wessex Jamaat community here, to work together in mutual respect seeking the good of community and society, especially the unity in diversity valued by both our traditions. I am especially honoured and touched that Aemun and Sajjad, and their families, on this special day of their Nikkah ceremony have allowed space for me to speak. Thank you, and congratulations on your marriage, with my prayers and good wishes for your life together.

For Christians today is kept as Mothering Sunday, when we honour our mothers, including our mother the Church, and also reflect on the relationships which nurture and sustain us as individuals and as community. Confronted last week by the action of a person who murdered and maimed in Westminster it is appropriate to reaffirm our commitment to what builds community and unites us, of faith or of none, in contrast to the actions and voices of those few who would divide us. I am here today to say, and I hope to confirm my words by my presence, that fear and hatred will not defeat the values we share. Those who died and those injured were denied the respect, dignity and sanctity of life which we believe is God given.

Emphasis over the last days on what divides may perhaps be inevitable and understandable in reaction to brutal acts as people search for an explanation. It is suggested that the actions of the perpetrator may have been inspired or orchestrated by IS. IS is not Islamic; by using Islamic in its name it misuses your faith. Actions like those seen on Wednesday do not honour the tenets and doctrines of faith. He is not representative of Muslims, and no motivation can justify what he did.

I come today to say that clearly and publicly, and to express solidarity and unity within our distinctive beliefs and faiths. Division and mistrust are not the way forward we choose in this country, or between us. We unite in prayer for those injured, for their families and friends, for those bereaved and who mourn. We give thanks to God for the lives of those brutally killed, and for the courage and skill of those who brought support and care. We seek to build and grow friendships and relationships under God - not to preach hatred and violence - and so to serve our community and country as well as God.

On Mothering Sunday we celebrate good relationships which enable growth and nurture. As we celebrate with Aemun and Sajjad – the uniting of two people and two families - I pray that they and we may be a sign of unity in diversity, of hope and Godliness.

**+Christopher Portsmouth**

**25/26 March 2017**