

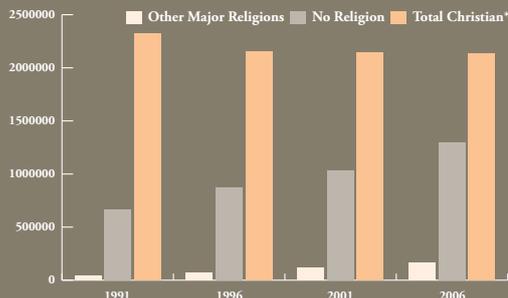
*Religious Diversity in*

# Aotearoa New Zealand



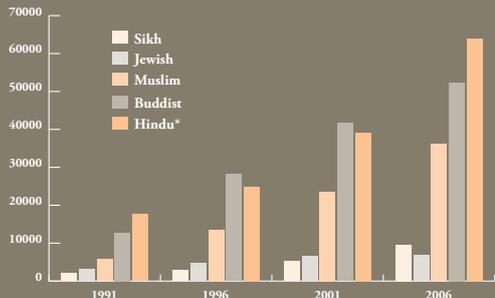
STATEMENT ON RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

## RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN NEW ZEALAND 1991–2006



\*Total Christian is an inclusive category which includes Māori Christian movements and the Latter Day Saints.

## GROWTH OF OTHER MAJOR RELIGIONS IN NEW ZEALAND 1991–2006



\*Excludes Hare Krishna's and Hindu based New Religious Movements.

For regular updates about the Statement on Religious Diversity and news about interfaith dialogue, you can subscribe to the Human Rights Commission's religious diversity e-newsletter, Te Korowai Whakapono. Email [nzdiversity@hrc.co.nz](mailto:nzdiversity@hrc.co.nz) or subscribe at [www.hrc.co.nz/newsletters](http://www.hrc.co.nz/newsletters).

Second Edition ISBN: 978-0-478-34951-1 August 2009

## FOREWORD FOR THE SECOND EDITION

The Statement on Religious Diversity was first published in 2007 and has since been endorsed by a wide range of faith communities. It provides a basis for ongoing discussion of religious diversity in New Zealand.

It sets out a number of principles which are grounded in international human rights treaties and the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, including:

- freedom of religion, conscience, and belief
- freedom of expression
- the right to safety and security
- the right to reasonable accommodation of diverse religious practices in various settings.

The statement also emphasises that the State seeks to treat all faith communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law, and that New Zealand has no official or established religion.

It encourages education about our diverse religious and spiritual traditions, respectful dialogue, and positive relationships between government and faith communities.

It offers a framework within which religious issues can be discussed both by faith communities themselves and within the wider New Zealand community.

I hope that the statement will encourage all New Zealanders, of whatever faith or ethical belief, to feel free to practice their beliefs in peace and within the law and to respect the right of others to do the same.

**JOHN KEY**  
PRIME MINISTER

## STATEMENT ON RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

New Zealand is a country of many faiths, with a significant minority who profess no religion. Increasing religious diversity is a significant feature of public life.

At the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, Governor Hobson affirmed, in response to a question from Catholic Bishop Pompallier, “the several faiths (beliefs) of England, of the Wesleyans, of Rome, and also Māori custom shall alike be protected”. This foundation creates the opportunity to reaffirm an acknowledgment of the diversity of beliefs in New Zealand.

Christianity has played and continues to play a formative role in the development of New Zealand, in terms of the nation’s identity, culture, beliefs, institutions and values.

New settlers have always been religiously diverse, but only recently have the numbers of some of their faith communities grown significantly as a result of migration from Asia, Africa and the Middle East. These communities have a positive role to play in our society. It is in this context that we recognise the right to religion and the responsibilities of religious communities.

International treaties, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, uphold the right to freedom of religion and belief; the right to hold a belief; the right to change one’s religion or belief; the right to express one’s religion or belief; and the right not to hold a belief. These rights are reflected in the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act and Human Rights Act. The right to religion entails affording this right to others and not infringing their human rights.

*The following statement provides a framework for the recognition of New Zealand’s diverse faith communities and their harmonious interaction with each other, with government and with other groups in society:*

- 1. THE STATE AND RELIGION.** The State seeks to treat all faith communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law. New Zealand has no official or established religion.
- 2. THE RIGHT TO RELIGION.** New Zealand upholds the right to freedom of religion and belief and the right to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of religious or other belief.
- 3. THE RIGHT TO SAFETY.** Faith communities and their members have a right to safety and security.
- 4. THE RIGHT OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION.** The right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media are vital for democracy but should be exercised with responsibility.
- 5. RECOGNITION AND ACCOMMODATION.** Reasonable steps should be taken in educational and work environments and in the delivery of public services to recognise and accommodate diverse religious beliefs and practices.
- 6. EDUCATION.** Schools should teach an understanding of different religious and spiritual traditions in a manner that reflects the diversity of their national and local community.
- 7. RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES.** Debate and disagreement about religious beliefs will occur but must be

exercised within the rule of law and without resort to violence.

- 8. COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING.** Government and faith communities have a responsibility to build and maintain positive relationships with each other, and to promote mutual respect and understanding.

#### ORIGINS OF THE STATEMENT

The development of a national statement on religious diversity was proposed by the New Zealand Interfaith Delegation that attended the Asia-Pacific Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2004. The dialogue was convened by Asia-Pacific governments in response to religious conflict in the region and around the world. The initial rationale for the statement was fourfold:

1. There was a need for discussion and dialogue among faith and interfaith groups and the wider New Zealand public about religious diversity. A national statement could be the focus for such discussions, but it should arise out of such discussions rather than be developed and issued by the government.
2. Around our region there are many instances of religious discrimination. The religious rights of citizens are often not clear, particularly for minority groups. It was felt that our religious rights as New Zealanders, within the framework of democracy and the law, should be articulated alongside the associated responsibilities.
3. While religious diversity is not new in itself, there is a new consciousness of the religious lives of others, and religious diversity is increasingly part of our everyday lives

in communities, schools, and workplaces. In many countries this increased diversity has led to conflict, discord and even violence. It was hoped that our responses to New Zealand's radically changing religious demography would be more positive and provide a framework for different religious and other communities to live together in a state of peaceful coexistence.

4. When religious issues do arise (in the media, the school, the workplace, the community), the national statement would provide a starting point for discussions and offer guidance.

The first draft of the statement was presented by Professor Paul Morris to an interfaith workshop at the New Zealand Diversity Forum in August 2006, where it was positively received. A reference group was established to advise on the further development of the statement. The Human Rights Commission oversaw consultation, with a closing date for submissions of mid-December 2006. A revised statement was endorsed as a basis for further dialogue by the National Interfaith Forum in Hamilton in February 2007.

The process of bringing together different people to discuss these issues, for what for many was the first time, was as important as the statement itself. We often think we are a secular country, where there is little concern about religion. The public meetings and



submissions, as well as extensive discussion in the media in response to the statement, indicated New Zealand is a place where religion is debated in public by informed and articulate people, including diverse believers and non-believers.

#### COMMENTARY ON THE STATEMENT

The Statement on Religious Diversity is, as its title suggests, about religious diversity – it concerns the interaction of people and communities of different religious beliefs with each other and with other people, communities and institutions. In setting out the rights and responsibilities of people and communities who profess a religious belief, it in no way diminishes the rights and responsibilities of others who profess no religion which are of course equally recognised in international human rights law.

Further elaboration arising from the consultative process of the eight points contained in the statement is provided here.

- 1. THE STATE AND RELIGION.** *The State seeks to treat all faith communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law. New Zealand has no official or established religion.*

Our political history as a nation began with a debate about having a Church of England clergyman lead prayers to open the very first session of the New Zealand Parliament. The religious differences of the representatives in the House was acknowledged – not all were Anglican and not all were Christian. This initial recognition of religious diversity was followed by an agreement that no one faith would have “pre-eminence.” We would not follow

England, in having an established church, and “all religious denominations” were to have a “perfect political equality”.

We do not have the strict demarcation between state and religion, characteristic of post-revolutionary states such as France, the United States of America or Turkey. Nor does New Zealand have a state religion like a number of the Scandinavian countries, or a formal state religion such as Iran or Pakistan. So is New Zealand a Christian country? No, not in a legal or constitutional sense, even though there is a small Christian majority (Census 2006). It is important to acknowledge the significant role Christianity plays in our national life. This needs to be seen alongside a growing number of non-believers and other faith communities.

The State strives to achieve equal treatment of all faiths.

- 2. THE RIGHT TO RELIGION.** *New Zealand upholds the right to freedom of religion and belief and the right to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of religious or other belief.*

New Zealand is a signatory to a number of international human rights conventions that include the right to religion. This right is also reflected in New Zealand legislation, namely, the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act and the Human Rights Act.

The right to religion is the right to be different and includes the right to hold a belief or not to, to express that belief, and to follow the practices that arise from that belief.

Further, the right to religion includes the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of religion or other non-religious ethical beliefs.

**3. THE RIGHT TO SAFETY.** *Faith communities and their members have a right to safety and security.*

This statement has resonated strongly with the minority ethnic and religious communities who have reported experiences of vandalism to places of worship and have concerns about their personal safety.

The right of religious communities and their members to safety and security includes the security of person and property as well as the broader sense of being secure in being different.

**4. THE RIGHT OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION.** *The right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media are vital for democracy but should be exercised with responsibility.*

The rights of the freedom of expression and freedom of the media are among the most significant rights underlying our democratic system and are vital for democracy but need to be exercised with responsibility.

Freedom of expression includes both the right to religious expression and the right to express views about religion.

The media includes the media of the religious communities themselves. The reference is to freedom of the media rather than the more limited freedom of the press, to include radio, television and the internet.

There has been recent controversy over the publication of cartoons about the Prophet Mohammed and the broadcast or publication of other material offensive to Christians and Jews. The intention here is to call for an appropriate balance between these freedoms and an awareness of what is sacred to people of different religions and cultures.

**5. RECOGNITION AND ACCOMMODATION.** *Reasonable steps should be taken in educational and work environments and in the delivery of public services to recognise and accommodate diverse religious beliefs and practices.*

The phrases “reasonable steps” and “reasonable accommodation” are taken from existing New Zealand legislation.

Increasingly, we experience religious diversity in the workplace. Different people have different dress codes and schedules and calendars for prayer and holy days. Based on an initial recognition of religious difference, most of these practices can be readily accommodated with good will and a degree of flexibility. Time off for prayer sessions, for example, can be made up during breaks, and religious days off can be worked at other times or during holidays. These clearly need to be based on real demand and each case decided on its merits and context.

The practical accommodation of religious differences at work, at school and in the community will do much to promote confidence and integration in the wider community.

**6. EDUCATION.** *Schools should teach an understanding of different religious and spiritual traditions in a manner that reflects the diversity of their national and local community.*

Education in schools about religious diversity is essential if we are to understand New Zealanders, our Asia-Pacific region and the wider world in which we live. This teaching should be about the different religions as an integral part of human societies, in the context of the humanities and social sciences. Such an approach is radically different from a programme of religious

instruction as part of an individual's formation within a particular faith. There are excellent overseas models of religious studies. For example, it is a compulsory subject in all English schools (even religious schools teach about other faiths) and the majority of English school students learn about the major religious traditions. It is vital that such teaching, which already takes place in six New Zealand universities, reflects accurately the faiths being taught and is unpartisan in relation to different denominations and tendencies within a faith.

New Zealand's integrated schools do have religious instruction for faith formation, and this is compatible with the teaching of histories, rituals and beliefs of other religious traditions. In fact, current religious studies programmes in Roman Catholic and Anglican integrated schools are among the best available.

New Zealand legislation (Education Act 1877) has been understood by some to prohibit the teaching of religions in primary schools, but it does not, of course, relate to the teaching about religions and religious diversity at all.

The teaching about the diversity of religions should reflect the school community itself, the wider local community in which the school is located, and the national community of which we are all a part.

**7. RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES.** *Debate and disagreement about religious beliefs will occur but must be exercised within the rule of law and without resort to violence.*

Religious diversity is concerned with real differences between people, in terms of their values and what

they hold most dear. These deeply held differences will likely lead to future tensions within and between faith communities, and between faith communities and those who hold non-religious values.

In New Zealand we have had confrontations about artistic expression and the offending of religious sensibilities, legislative reforms and the rights of religious communities to follow particular practices. In various parts of the world these challenges of religious diversity have led to violence, riots and, on occasion, deaths. While we can not and should not seek to stop these differences from being manifest, it is vital we do what we can to prevent the descent of disputes into violence or breaches of the law.

**8. COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING.** *Government and faith communities have a responsibility to build and maintain positive relationships with each other, and to promote mutual respect and understanding.*

The right to religion, like all rights, entails responsibilities. This statement delineates the responsibilities of faith communities in relation to government and other faith communities.

These responsibilities include fostering relationships with other religious communities that promote not just tolerance, but understanding, respect and cooperation.

Likewise, local and national government have a responsibility to seek to develop and sustain good relationships with religious communities in New Zealand.



## Acknowledgments

The Statement on Religious Diversity is a product of the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme and was developed with the support of the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, Victoria University of Wellington, the Ministry of Social Development and the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO. The text was prepared by Professor Paul Morris, Victoria University of Wellington. He was advised by Race Relations Commissioner Joris de Bres and a reference group comprising Rehanna Ali (Islamic Women's Council), Glyn Carpenter (Vision Network New Zealand), Archbishop John Dew and Fr Jim Lyons (Catholic), Rohan Jaduram (Human Rights Commission), Bishop Richard Randerson (Anglican), Rev Jenny Te Paa (St John's Theological College), Bev Watson (Baha'i) and Dr Pushpa Wood (Hindu, Wellington Interfaith Council). A number of City and District Councils and interfaith groups organised public meetings to discuss the draft statement. Many organisations and individuals provided submissions.

*The commentary on the statement in this edition was revised by Professor Paul Morris in 2009 to take account of further public submissions received after the initial statement was published in 2007.*

*News and information about the statement and other religious diversity issues is available at [www.hrc.co.nz/religiousdiversity](http://www.hrc.co.nz/religiousdiversity) or [www.interfaith.org.nz](http://www.interfaith.org.nz). Translations of the statement are also available in te reo Māori, Arabic, Chinese (traditional and modern), Gujarati, Hindi, Korean, Lea Faka Tonga, Le Gagana Samoa and Punjabi. These are available at [www.hrc.co.nz](http://www.hrc.co.nz).*

*The Statement on Religious Diversity has been endorsed by:*

**NATIONAL INTERFAITH FORUM**, *Hamilton, February 2007*  
**THE SALVATION ARMY**, *March 2007*  
**SOKA GAKKAI INTERNATIONAL OF NEW ZEALAND**, *April 2007*  
**ANGLICAN AND CATHOLIC BISHOPS**, *May 2007*  
**MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE SOCIETY OF MARY**, *May 2007*  
**FEDERATION OF ISLAMIC ASSOCIATIONS OF NEW ZEALAND**,  
*June 2007*  
**ISLAMIC WOMEN'S COUNCIL**, *June 2007*  
**NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHAI'S OF  
NEW ZEALAND**, *June 2007*  
**WAIKATO INTERFAITH COUNCIL**, *July 2007*  
**AUCKLAND COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS**, *July 2007*  
**WELLINGTON COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS**, *July 2007*  
**COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS (NZ) INC**,  
*August 2007*  
**CHRISTCHURCH INTERFAITH COUNCIL**, *August 2007*  
**NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS**,  
*September 2007*  
**CONFERENCE OF THE METHODIST CHURCH OF NEW ZEALAND**,  
*November 2007*  
**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF  
NEW ZEALAND**, *October 2008*  
**THE SIKH CENTRE**, *July 2009*  
**HINDU COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND**, *July 2009*

*Produced for the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme by the Human Rights Commission and Victoria University of Wellington.*

**THE DIVERSITY FERN** is the logo of the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme. It was originally designed for Race Relations Day 2005 by Malaysian-born New Zealand designer Jean Voon. The fern represents the growing cultural diversity of New Zealand.

Baby fronds symbolising new growth

Middle Eastern (Iranian motif)

Vietnamese motif from fabric

Indian paisley design

Traditional Chinese  
character found on  
silk cloth

Samoan tapa cloth pattern

European Fleur de Lys, from the doors  
of St Patrick's Cathedral, Auckland

Traditional Māori kōwhaiwhai pattern from a painted  
panel in Manutuke church (1849, Rongowhakaata)

