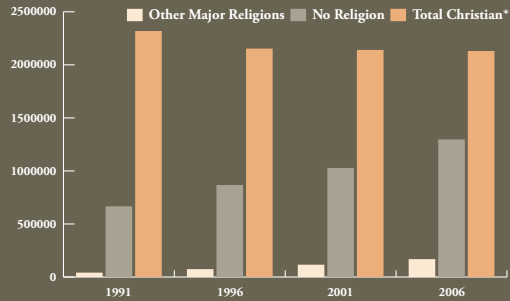


Religious Diversity in
New Zealand



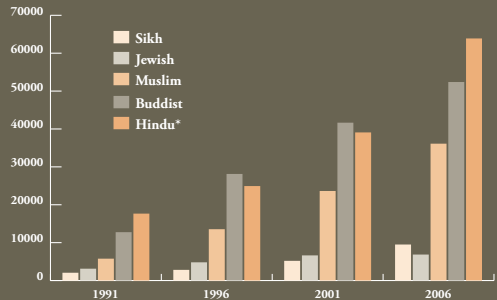
STATEMENT ON RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN NEW ZEALAND 1991–2006



*Total Christian is an inclusive category which includes Māori Christian movements and the LDS

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 monthly interfaith e-newsletter, *Te Korowai Whakapono* by emailing nzdiversity@hrc.co.nz

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PREFACE

Religion continues to play an important part in the lives of many New Zealanders. All the world's major faiths are represented here. Our Asia Pacific region is home to millions of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others.

New Zealand has been an active promoter of interfaith dialogue and cooperation for peace and security in our region and in the world, and we have sought to build relationships with other nations across religious boundaries. It was through the participation of a New Zealand interfaith delegation in the Asia Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue process in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2004, that the idea of developing a statement on religious diversity was first mooted. I welcome the statement which has been developed and commend it to all New Zealanders for further discussion and consideration.

This Statement on Religious Diversity has been developed through the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme as a community-based initiative. It offers a framework within which religious issues can be discussed both by faith communities themselves and within the wider New Zealand community. It is my hope that the Statement will help all New Zealanders, of whatever faith or ethical belief, to feel free to practice their beliefs in peace and within the law.

RT HON HELEN CLARK
PRIME MINISTER

FOREWORD Learning the art of dialogue is both a personal and social process. Developing one's skills and capacity for dialogue implies a willingness to be open while retaining one's critical judgment. Dialogue concerns us all: from decision-makers and leaders to individuals within each community.

As the United Nations agency mandated to promote intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, UNESCO works internationally to promote dialogue among different religions, spiritual and humanistic traditions in a world where conflicts are increasingly associated with religious belonging. It stresses the reciprocal interactions and influences between, on the one hand, religions, spiritual and humanistic traditions, and on the other, the need to promote understanding between them in order to challenge ignorance and prejudices and foster mutual respect.

The New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO is proud to be acknowledged as a partner in the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme that has led the discussion on religious diversity and is honoured to be associated with the publication of this Statement on Religious Diversity in New Zealand.

DAME SILVIA CARTWRIGHT
CHAIR
NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNESCO

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 Maori 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 our 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, in the school, in the workplace, in 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 undertook the process of 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 that we are a secular country

where there is little concern about religion but the public meetings and submissions, as well as extensive discussion in the media in response to the Statement, indicated that New Zealand is a place where religion is debated in public in a serious fashion by informed and articulate people, including believers of all kinds as well as 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 seeks to diminish the rights and responsibilities of others who profess no religion, but it is not primarily about them.

Some further elaboration 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 in that not all were Anglican, in fact not all were Christian. This initial recognition of religious diversity was followed by an agreement that no one faith would have 'pre-eminence' and thus we would

not follow England in having an established church and that '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, this is not so in a legal sense although there is a small Christian majority (Census 2006). It is, however, important to fully acknowledge the role that Christianity plays in our national life although this needs to be seen alongside a growing number of non-believers and other faith communities.

The State strives to achieve that 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 Bill of Rights Act and the Human Rights Act.

The right to religion is the right to be different and embraces 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 experience of vandalism to places of worship and 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. The freedom of expression here 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.

Following recent controversies 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 sensitivity to 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 schedules and calendars for prayer and holy days. Based on an initial recognition of religious difference many of these different practices can be readily accommodated with a degree of goodwill and a little 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 our New Zealand community, 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, that is, in the context of the humanities and social sciences. Such an approach is very 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, a compulsory subject in all English schools where even religious schools are required to teach about other faiths and the majority of English school students learn about the major religious traditions. It is vital that such teaching – it 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 but this is quite compatible with the teaching of the histories, rituals, and beliefs of other religious traditions. In fact, Roman Catholic and Anglican integrated schools currently have very good religious studies programmes.

New Zealand legislation has been understood by some (Education Act 1877) 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 faith communities, 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 cannot and should not seek to stop these differences from occurring, it is vital that 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 government, both local and national, has a parallel responsibility to seek to develop and sustain good relationships with religious communities in New Zealand.

Acknowledgments

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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 Statement on Religious Diversity was endorsed by the National Interfaith Forum in Hamilton in February 2007 as a basis for further dialogue. The Forum urged communities to engage with the statement as a means of promoting dialogue and understanding between faith communities, central and local government and the community as a whole.

Faith communities and other organisations are invited to endorse the statement and to provide suggestions for future amendment. The statement will be reviewed after two years, in time for consideration at the annual New Zealand Diversity Forum in August 2009.

Endorsements and suggested amendments can be sent to nzdiversity@hrc.co.nz. News and information about the statement and other interfaith issues is available at www.hrc.co.nz/religiousdiversity or www.interfaith.org.nz

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