

Statement on Religious Diversity

The Statement on Religious Diversity is a project of Te Ngira, the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme. It was prepared by the Victoria University Religious Studies Programme and was the subject of a national process of public consultation coordinated by the Human Rights Commission. The Statement was endorsed by the National Interfaith Forum in Hamilton in February 2007 as a basis for ongoing public discussion. Click here to read Professor Paul Morris' speech to the National Interfaith Forum in which he outlines the background to the Statement, the submissions process and the feedback given on the individual clauses of the Draft Statement. Further amendments were made after this paper was discussed at the Forum. Organisations are invited to endorse the statement and to provide further suggestions on its content for future review.

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 acknowledgement 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



The AEN Journal is a New Zealand Diversity Action Programme Project

The New Zealand Diversity Action Programme, a ten point plan to strengthen cultural diversity, was adopted by a community forum at Parliament in August 2005 following the desecration of two Jewish cemeteries in Wellington. The Programme includes a call for dialogue and exchange between different views, cultures and faiths, and the establishment of networks.

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