

Chapter 9: *Race Discrimination*

9.1 STATEMENT FROM THE COMMISSIONER

This report covers my third year as the Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner at HREOC, a position I occupy alongside my role as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. Over these past three years I have become concerned by an increasing ambivalence and at times antagonism towards multiculturalism, both as a set of principles and as a government policy framing social relations within Australia.



Mr Tom Calma
*Acting Race Discrimination
Commissioner*

What is of particular concern is that the debate on multiculturalism tends to respond to, and be framed by, either international incidents involving terrorist attacks or, at the local level, incidents of racial tension or conflict. These events often lead to assertions by politicians or commentators, that such incidents result from the freedom multiculturalism gives people to practice cultures and religions that are anathema to the core values of Australian society.

I have argued in a number of places that these responses fail to take account of global trends. For instance, such responses fail to take account of the unprecedented increase of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity within contemporary societies. This diversity is part of the unstoppable movement of people, commodities and ideas at the global level.

For many people these are welcome developments that have opened the space for recognition of minority cultures in the public sphere. For others, these new realities activate old suspicions about other cultures and ethnic groups.

As Race Discrimination Commissioner, I see multiculturalism as a sound policy framework to promote understanding, respect and friendship among racial and ethnic groups in Australia. Multiculturalism also provides a basis for combating prejudices that lead to racial discrimination. Multiculturalism correlates with HREOC's legislative mandate to achieve equitable access and harmonious community relations. I have pursued a number of projects over the preceding year towards this goal and these are outlined below.

I have pursued in particular, a number of projects aimed at supporting Muslim communities in defending themselves against religious abuse and hatred. While this targeted work is necessary to ensure the concerns of particular communities are addressed, it is equally important that strategies are in place to educate the Australian community about the principles of non-discrimination enshrined in the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA).

9.2 RESEARCH AND POLICY

9.2.1 The *Unlocking Doors* Project: Engaging Muslim Communities and Police



Participants at the Victorian *Unlocking Doors* Forum.

The aim of the *Unlocking Doors* Project was to facilitate a dialogue between Muslim communities and police in order to build on the capacity of police to respond to incidents of racial or religious hatred and abuse. The project was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA).

The project was a response to the concerns expressed by Arab and Muslim organisations during HREOC consultations conducted through the *Ismaʿ* project in 2003 about the rise in anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice in Australia. The *Ismaʿ* Report advised that mechanisms were required to build trust between Muslim communities and law enforcement agencies in order to reduce the risk of further marginalisation of Arab and Muslim communities, in particular, young people and women.

The first phase of the *Unlocking Doors* Project included consultations and workshops with key stakeholders and Muslim community members involving more than 80 meetings and 15 workshops. Following this, a forum was held in September in Victoria and NSW. More than 200 people attended these forums, including uniformed and non-uniformed police, Muslim community members and their representatives, young people, Muslim women, and government representatives. A report of the project will be on HREOC's website later in 2007.

9.2.2 Muslim Women and Human Rights Forum

A Muslim women's forum on human rights, entitled *Living Spirit: Muslim Women and Human Rights Project – the right to participate in social change*, was held in Victoria in September 2006.



The Forum was co-hosted by the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria (IWWCV) and funded by DIMA. The project was supported by: the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria (EOCV); the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV); the Islamic Girls and Women's Group (IGWG); the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA); the Ethnic

Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV); the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI); the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition (VIRWC); and the Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE.

Prior to the forum, HREOC held meetings with more than 60 key organisations and individuals in Victoria and NSW to determine how the project could best address human rights issues for Muslim women.

The *Living Spirit* project won an award for excellence in the field of projects/initiatives beneficial to Australian Muslims in this country, and in particular, Victoria, presented by the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) and the Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA).

The forum aimed to promote common goals of harmony and understanding between Muslims and non-Muslim women in Australia. It was attended by more than 130 women from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, most of whom were Muslim women home-makers, students, service providers, community workers, religious leaders and professionals, including lawyers. Non-Muslim participants included church leaders, police, community workers, service providers, anti-discrimination agencies, media, government representatives and individuals.

The one-day forum included a hypothetical session called 'Righting the Wrongs: How would you respond?' which addressed the policy standards used by decision makers to respond to incidents of discrimination and abuse. There was also a morning tea with politicians and a 'Why Women Matter' exhibition profiling achievements and contributions to Australia by 10 everyday Muslim women. 'Veiled Ambition' and other DVDs were screened and 10 concurrent workshops were held exploring human rights issues facing Muslim women. The workshops included: Islam and human rights; the effects of anti-terrorism laws; media issues including freedom of speech and racial vilification; complaints mechanisms and anti-discrimination law; confronting stereotypes and misconceptions; and participating in social change and strategies for the future.

Participants also wrote their ideas and thoughts about the day, human rights and Islam onto a canvas mural which has been donated to the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria.

9.2.3 Meeting of state and territory equal opportunity managers working in the race discrimination area

HREOC hosted a meeting on 2 November of state and territory equal opportunity commissioners or their representative and the New Zealand Race Relations Commissioner. The purpose of the meeting was to:

- share information and experiences about race discrimination and the strategies being adopted to combat racism across Australia and New Zealand;
- identify common issues and possible partnerships; and
- develop common strategies on race-related issues.

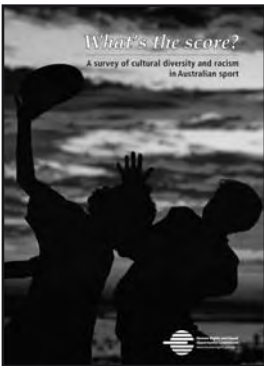
It was agreed to continue to hold regular meetings of state and territory EOC managers working in this area and to further identify common strategies.

9.3 EDUCATION AND PROMOTION

9.3.1 New Racisms: New Anti-Racisms Conference

HREOC co-hosted a conference entitled 'New Racisms: New Anti-Racisms' with the University of Sydney on 3–4 November 2006. The University convened the conference in order to link the work being done at a theoretical level to combat racism with that being done within the broader community at an institutional and organisational level. The conference facilitated information sharing on how to address the new forms of racisms operating at the global, national and local levels.

9.3.2 Sport and Racism project



The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) funded HREOC to survey and compile a list of existing strategies to combat racism within sport that have been adopted by selected national sporting organisations, codes, government and non-government sporting agencies and human rights institutions. The report has been provided to the Department (now known as the Department of Immigration and Citizenship) and will be released in the latter part of 2007.

The report also gathers available baseline data on the level of participation by culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and individuals in sport as well as information on any projects which aim to increase Indigenous and CALD participation.

9.3.3 HREOC's new 'Community Partnerships' for Human Rights Program

Background

In response to increasing concerns expressed by Muslim organisations about the rise in anti-Muslim prejudice, HREOC commenced a series of consultations in 2002 through a project entitled, *Ismaʿ – Listen: National consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians* in which more than 1 400 people participated. These consultations culminated in a report of the same name published in 2003. This is available online at www.humanrights.gov.au/racial_discrimination/isma/

In 2005, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) examined the emerging issues around Australia's social cohesion, harmony and security. This led to the Ministerial Council on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs developing a national action plan building on recommendations and principles agreed between Muslim community leaders, state and territory leaders and other faith and community leaders.

Building on HREOC's substantial body of work in this area, HREOC received funding from the Australian Government's \$35 million four-year funding package to implement the National Action Plan (NAP) to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security.

As a result, in early 2007 HREOC established a new Education and Partnerships Section as part of the Race Discrimination Unit. The role of the new section is to implement HREOC's NAP activity in line with HREOC's functions through the 'Community Partnerships for Human Rights Program.'

Program projects

HREOC is focusing on two areas under the NAP: working with young Muslim Australians and law enforcement .

In its work with young Muslim Australians, HREOC will develop education strategies and resources associated with civic responsibility, discrimination, human rights and responsibilities education aimed at young people. HREOC will also work with law enforcement agencies across Australia to build their engagement with Muslim communities and to help address discrimination and vilification targeted at Muslim Australians.

HREOC will undertake a wide range of innovative projects to implement these initiatives in order to help build community capacity and social cohesion.

Attorney-General Philip Ruddock announced in June a number of HREOC's projects under the NAP. A summary of these projects is given below.

- *ESL Teachers' Human Rights Curriculum Resources Project:* This project will develop a new set of education resources to be used by English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers who teach English to non-English speakers about human rights and discrimination of all types and how Australian laws protect people.
- *Community Languages Australia (CLA) Human Rights Project:* This project is another education-oriented project in which HREOC is partnering Australia's peak national body for community language schools, the CLA. The project will develop classroom material about discrimination, human rights, cross-cultural respect, and where and how to make a complaint if discrimination or vilification occurs.
- *Community Police Partnership Project:* This project will build partnerships between police and Muslim communities across Australia. It will focus on working with young Muslim Australians and law enforcement agencies to help address discrimination and vilification.

It is anticipated that through joint projects, local networks will be established and a stronger sense of social participation, respect and inclusion within communities will be established.

- *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century Project:* This project will see HREOC partner with a range of organisations including the Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations (APRO), the community sector and tertiary institutions, to renew the 1998 HREOC Report on Freedom of Religion and Belief.

HREOC also intends to use the 'Community Partnerships for Human Rights' initiative to refocus on the critical issues relating to religious harmony. The human rights impacts of religious belief, cultural practice and spirituality in a globalised world threatened by fundamentalism, need to be closely examined.

In recognition of this issue, the Commissioner joined the Australian Government delegation to Waitangi in New Zealand in May to represent HREOC at the *Building*

Bridges Third Asia-Pacific Regional Inter-faith Dialogue. HREOC is also supporting the Australian Partnerships of Religious Organisations to conduct national dialogue on inter-faith issues, and one of its future research projects will focus on this area.

9.4 LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The Race Discrimination Unit contributes to legislative development by making written and oral submission to Parliamentary and other Inquiries. A list of these submissions can be found in Chapter 3 of this report, *Monitoring Human Rights*.

9.5 SPEECHES

A selection of public addresses made by the acting Race Discrimination Commissioner and his senior staff during 2006–07 is listed below. Speeches can also be accessed on the HREOC website at: www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/speeches/race-discrim/index.html

Australian Partnership of Religious Organisation (APRO) National Inter-Faith Forum, presented by Conrad Gershevitch, Director of HREOC's Education and Partnerships Section, Race Discrimination Unit, on behalf of the Race Discrimination Commissioner, Sydney, 18 June, 2007.

Eliminating Racism: Valuing Diversity Conference, presented by Margaret Donaldson, Director of HREOC's Race Discrimination Unit, on behalf of the Race Discrimination Commissioner, Melbourne, 21 March, 2007.

International Day of the Imprisoned Writer, Adelaide, 15 November, 2006.

Refugee Week, Adelaide, 18 October, 2006.

Cultural Competency Conference, Sydney, 8 September, 2006.

Local Government New Zealand Conference, Wellington, New Zealand, 18 July, 2006.