

## Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century

### Background

This project will build on a number of significant pieces of work, including:

1. HREOC's own report, released in 1998, *Article 18: Freedom of Religion and Belief*
2. The more recent report, funded by (then) DIMIA in 2002-03 and released in late 2004 *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia*
3. The reports and outcomes of the national and state-based Muslim youth summits (held between December 2005 and due to end in June this year) as well as the outcomes of the national conference of Australian Imams which also had contributions from Muslim leaders, women and youth (held in September 2006)

### Project

HREOC has commissioned the Australian Multicultural Foundation, in association with RMIT University, Monash University, and the Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations to prepare a report on *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century*.

The project aims to work with Islamic faith communities as well as other interfaith, faith and civil society organisations to record their concerns and proposed solutions to build a more socially cohesive and harmonious society that protect and promote *Article 18* of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The project will produce a major report on these issues which includes:

- demographic information about the size, spread, growth and location of religious groups in Australia; and
- recommendations for promoting freedom of religion and belief (including secular belief) in Australia

### Objectives

- evaluate response to *Article 18: Freedom of Religion and Belief* and its recommendations.
- work with spiritual and religious communities and civil society organisations to record their concerns regarding *Article 18*.
- work with spiritual and religious communities and civil society organisations to record their concerns regarding *Section 116* of the Australian Constitution.
- model a cooperative approach to constructing a response to issues of freedom of religion and belief.
- roles, rights and responsibilities of religious, spiritual and civil society organisations in implementing the commitment to freedom of religion and belief as articulated in *Article 18* and *Section 116* of the Australian Constitution.
- assess, in the context of recent changes to Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation that have been enacted to respond to the 'war on terror', whether these changes have had any impact upon freedoms of religion and/ or belief and/ or cultural identity, as well as the freedoms to publicly express or act in accordance to these beliefs and identities.

- explore the interface between religion, political and cultural aspirations.
- analyse whether new technologies (especially communication technologies) are changing the role, practice, promotion or evolution of religious and other forms of belief and behaviour.
- examine cultural rights and whether cultural beliefs are impinging on human rights.

### **The Australian Multicultural Foundation (AMF)**

In 2002 the (then) Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (now the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship) commissioned AMF to produce a report on religion in Australia and its relation to national security. *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia* was released in 2004.