



Chapter 4. Current strategies

The Commission investigated existing initiatives that address anti-Arab or anti-Muslim prejudice at a local, state and federal level across Australia. Information was requested about current initiatives from seven federal government agencies, 37 state and territory government agencies (including education and police authorities), 83 local governments (mostly in areas with substantial Arab or Muslim populations) and 14 non-government and community organisations. Additional information about current strategies was also obtained via the consultation process and from 53 separate meetings with government agencies, community organisations and select individuals.

This chapter provides an overview of recent initiatives to address the issues summarised in the preceding chapters. We describe examples of both short-term crisis responses and longer term strategies to eliminate discrimination and vilification of Arab and Muslim Australians. A more comprehensive review of the many projects undertaken by governments and community organisations across Australia is available on the Commission's website.¹

4.1 Crisis responses

As noted in previous chapters, from about the middle of 2000, Arab and Muslim Australians have been subjected to public attention and debate as a result of events both within Australia and internationally. As documented in Chapter 3, many people reported experiencing various forms of retaliation following these events. This was also foreseeable as a similar situation unfolded during the first Gulf War in 1991.² The need for a comprehensive and immediate crisis response to deflect the worst of the backlash and limit its duration was clear. This Commission identified six objectives for a comprehensive response to crises threatening the safety and security of Arab and Muslim Australians. Responses were needed to:

1. promote positive public awareness about Arab and Muslim Australians
2. show support and solidarity with communities under attack
3. protect the safety of Muslim and Arab communities
4. empower Muslim and Arab communities to tackle issues affecting them
5. ensure complaints about discrimination and vilification are treated seriously
6. challenge stereotyping, discrimination and vilification.

These objectives were broadly endorsed by state and territory anti-discrimination and equal opportunity commissioners at a meeting in Sydney in October 2002 and again by the IsmaU reference group at its first meeting in March 2003. This chapter documents a range of initiatives to meet some of these objectives which have been introduced by governments and community groups in recent years.

4.1.1 Federal government

4.1.1.1 Public statements

Following the attacks of September 11, key federal government representatives called for 'tolerance' in an effort to quell any potential backlash against particular communities. Three days after the attacks in New York, the then Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Philip Ruddock, explicitly condemned scapegoating of Arab and Muslim Australians.

Regrettably, there have been reports to my office and my department that Australian Muslim and Arabic communities are being subjected to violence and vilification because of this ridiculous notion that they are somehow associated with the dreadful events in the USA ... I regret and condemn the incidents directed against Australian Muslims, including abusive language and threats of violence. Such incidents merely play into the hands of those, like terrorists, who do not share civilised democratic values.³

In a radio interview on 22 September 2001, the Prime Minister also spoke out and asked Australians not to allow 'our natural anger at the extremes of Islam, which have been manifested in the attack on the World Trade Center... to spill over to Islamic people generally'.⁴ Later the Prime Minister visited the Preston Mosque in Melbourne and reassured Muslims that they deserve the respect and tolerance owed to all Australians.⁵

Public statements made by members of the federal government following the Bali bombings in 2002 and during the war on Iraq in 2003 repeated many of the key themes first expressed after September 11: the war against terrorism is not a war against Islam;⁶ moderate Muslims should not be vilified because of the actions of Islamic extremists;⁷ diversity need not be promoted at the expense of unity and community harmony.⁸

According to consultation participants this strategy was not entirely successful. Many participants were critical of the lack of support they felt the community received from senior politicians. Many argued that Australia's domestic policies such as those on border protection, immigration detention and international activities such as the war on Iraq contradicted and therefore undermined those statements of support which were offered.⁹

4.1.1.2 Community relations strategy

Public statements of support from senior federal politicians were part of a broader community relations strategy developed and coordinated by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) in the wake of September 11. The strategy aims to address any potential threat to community harmony by:

- *Keeping the whole Australian community informed and reassured;*
- *Preventing the legitimisation of fundamentalist views that promote community disharmony;*
- *Giving affected communities their own voice; and*
- *Conveying to affected communities that the government will listen to community concerns and inform communities about the actions of Government.*¹⁰

The strategy includes engagement by the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs and DIMIA with leaders of affected communities and their constituents.¹¹ It also involves consultation with the Council for Multicultural Australia and all Commonwealth agencies through an Interdepartmental Committee on Multicultural Affairs.¹²

One of the members of this Interdepartmental Committee is Centrelink, the main federal government agency responsible for payment of social security benefits. Like other members of the Interdepartmental Committee, Centrelink was expected to develop a crisis response for its Arab and Muslim staff and clients. Within days of September 11, Centrelink's Chief Executive Officer wrote to all 24,000 staff urging them to treat staff and customers sensitively. Centrelink's network of Multicultural Services Officers (MSOs) was asked to obtain local feedback about customer and staff experiences and offer support. A national network of MSOs and other key staff was established to monitor emerging issues and exchange information. This group reported low level incidents of abuse directed at Muslim and Arab staff and customers, most of which occurred away from Centrelink offices.¹³ Centrelink also responded to reports that some female clients feared for their safety in public by arranging for them to use the service at alternative locations where they would feel more secure.¹⁴ The strategy of engaging with local communities and ensuring the safety of customers and staff and continuity of service was reactivated following the Bali bombings and during the Iraq war.¹⁵

4.1.2 State and territory governments

State and territory governments responded to the events of September 11, the Bali bombings and the war on Iraq by introducing measures to show support and solidarity with communities under threat, ensure complaints about discrimination and vilification would be treated seriously and protect Arab and

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Muslim communities from any racist backlash.¹⁶ Select examples of different strategies employed by various state and territory governments follows.

Premiers around the country rallied to support communities affected by racism by organising interfaith gatherings, meeting with leaders of Arab and Muslim communities and issuing statements calling for public calm.

Public statements

For example, immediately after September 11, the Queensland Premier called for understanding and acceptance of cultural and religious diversity and condemned the firebombing of the Kuraby Mosque in Brisbane.¹⁷ He also met with the leaders of Queensland's Muslim community to reassure them that the government would protect their safety and guarantee their right to practice their religion without fear of reprisal. To ensure these objectives were supported by the whole Queensland Government, the Premier wrote to all Ministers and the Director-General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet (who in turn wrote to all Queensland government departmental heads) urging them to promote positive community relations at every opportunity. The Queensland Government responded to the Bali bombings in October 2002 and the Iraq war in 2003 with the same kinds of messages and community engagement strategies it had used following September 11.¹⁸

Other states and territories with significant numbers of Arab and Muslim Australians responded with similar initiatives.

Interfaith events

The NSW Government organised an interfaith assembly which brought together leaders of all major religions with government officials to condemn terrorism and publicly support Australia's cultural diversity.²³ The Victorian Premier also coordinated a multi-faith gathering to mourn those killed in the September 11 attacks and publicly promote tolerance and harmony. More than 15,000 Victorians attended this gathering held on 20 September 2001.²⁴

Working with media

In Victoria and Western Australia the respective state Premiers sought to engage the media to promote multicultural values, support for affected communities and challenge negative stereotyping. In Victoria, on 6 December 2001, Premier Bracks, launched a television advertisement campaign promoting racial harmony. The advertisements featured 'ordinary' Victorians from a wide range of cultures, religions and backgrounds espousing the need for tolerance and respect for diversity. The advertisements were part of a broader education campaign to introduce Victoria's *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*. They were screened for six months free to air as a community service announcement by all television networks in Melbourne and regional Victoria and were reprinted in the lead up to the Iraq war in March 2003.²⁵ In Western Australia, Premier Gallop arranged a

meeting between local television news editors and Muslim community leaders to encourage information exchange and build relationships that would encourage fair and accurate reporting about Islam and the Muslim community.²⁶

Hotlines

To enable community members to report incidents of abuse and discrimination, several state governments established telephone hotlines. The NSW Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW set up a telephone hotline to assist Arabic and Punjabi speaking communities experiencing racial hatred. The hotline ran initially from 13 September to 5 October 2001 and received 400 calls in this period. It was discontinued after five weeks when calls tapered off significantly. It was re-established following the Bali bombings in October 2002 and again in response to the escalation of hostilities in Iraq.²⁷ The prompt establishment of the NSW hotline may explain, in part, why it received more calls than hotlines set up in Victoria and Queensland. The Queensland hotline, which was established in October 2001, received only 16 calls in three months of operation. None of the calls came from the Muslim community and none were related to September 11.²⁸ The Victorian 'Help Line', also established in October 2001, received approximately 30 calls in three months of operation, most of which related to disputes between neighbours and random abuse.²⁹

Departmental directives

State and territory education department heads and Police Commissioners played a pivotal role in reassuring communities about safety and security. For example in NSW, as in many other states and territories, the Director-General of Education issued memorandums to school principals about strategies and resources to help affected students and staff following September 11, the Bali bombings and the war in Iraq.³⁰ Following the start of the war on Iraq, the Victoria Police issued formal operating instructions to police on how to respond more effectively to racially or religiously motivated incidents. The Victoria Police, in cooperation with representatives of communities identified as vulnerable to vilification (including Arab and Muslim communities), also established a register to record racially or religiously motivated crimes.³¹

Community consultation

Involving communities affected by racism in the development and implementation of strategies was also important for state and territory governments. Following September 11, the Victorian Multicultural Commission moved quickly to coordinate a working group of representatives from Arab and Muslim communities, together with representatives from state education, immigration, police, multicultural and anti-discrimination bodies to monitor ongoing developments and improve responses.³² Following the Bali bombings, the New South Wales and Queensland governments both established committees to develop faster, more coordinated responses to community unrest in the wake of international events.³³

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From mid-October 2002 until August 2003, the NSW Community Relations Commission convened a Community Harmony Reference Group to foster communication between government and the parts of the community likely to be affected by this unrest. The group consisted of 45 leaders from Muslim, Jewish, Arab, Iraqi, Turkish, Indonesian and Sikh communities along with representatives from NSW government agencies, advisors to the Premier and senior representatives from the Anglican and Uniting Churches. A major outcome was the Community Relations Crisis Management Plan which details the protocols and procedures to be followed in the event of an incident locally or overseas which may impact on community relations.³⁴

The Western Australian Government developed a similar plan in the wake of the war on Iraq and convened a 'Community Relations Council' in 2003 to implement the plan. This Council comprised representatives of key government, community and non-government organisations including Muslim and Sikh associations and Migrant Resource Centres. One of this Council's initiatives, the brochure 'Racial Abuse is Wrong' (in English, Arabic and Hindi), includes contact details of relevant government and community service agencies for people likely to be targets of intimidation and violence.³⁵

4.1.3 Local governments

Some local governments have provided moral and practical support to local residents affected by international events during crisis periods. Local governments in areas with relatively high concentrations of Muslim or residents of Arabic speaking backgrounds, particularly in Victoria, have been most active. Some examples of initiatives undertaken by local Councils follow.

Moreland

Moreland in Victoria has over 9,000 Muslim and 8,000 Arabic-speaking residents. On 19 September 2001, Moreland City Council convened a meeting to discuss the impacts of the September 11 attacks on the local community. The meeting was attended by local Muslim leaders, service providers, neighbouring Councils and members of the Moreland Interfaith Gathering (which includes representatives of Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Indian and Eastern Orthodox religions). The group released a joint statement condemning the attacks and calling on people to uphold values of respect, dignity and social justice. The Moreland Mayor also announced the development of an education and awareness strategy for schools and the wider community to address the potential impact of racism on the local community.³⁶

Hume

Hume, also in Victoria, is home to over 15,000 Muslim and 6,000 Arabic-speaking residents. With over 2,000 Iraqi-born residents, Hume City Council was particularly

concerned about the impacts of the Iraq war on local residents. In April 2003, the Hume City Council convened a working group of local community representatives, community organisations, government agencies and religious leaders to address the local impact of the war. The working group met on several occasions to develop strategies to respond to current community concerns about how to contact family members in Iraq, and ensure access to information about available support services for individuals and families traumatised by events in Iraq.³⁷

Greater Dandenong

The City of Greater Dandenong (Victoria) has over 8,000 Muslim and 2,000 Arabic-speaking residents. In May 2003, the City Council, in partnership with the Ethnic Communities Council of the South East, organised a women's forum to discuss the possible negative repercussions of the Iraq war on the local Muslim community. A Victoria Police representative addressed the forum providing information about Victoria's *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* and a child psychologist discussed the issue of stress in children. The 240 women who attended the forum were also invited to express their concerns about community relations and the potential for racist backlash.³⁸

4.1.4 Community organisations

Community organisations representing the interests of Arab and Muslim Australians have struggled to cope with the extra demands placed on them by communities and clients feeling the impacts of international events like September 11. These organisations have supported their clients and challenged negative stereotyping about their communities in often trying circumstances with meagre resources.

*We work on the smell of an oily rag ... It is really a crucial thing that the government gives out money to community organisations to set up projects in order to create that sense of community.*³⁹

*The Muslim Women's Association (MWA) had to put all its programs and activities on hold and focus on the crisis needs of Australian Muslim women. We were dealing with issues such as fear of what neighbours might do to each other, how safe are children at school or work ... Our resources had to be channelled to deal with enquiries and concerns of service providers wanting to know how to deal with their Muslim women clients and Muslim women not knowing how to deal with the crisis surrounding them. We were used as a point for debriefing and we had to deal with a lot of telephone counselling as well as face to face counselling ... These events had a great impact on MWA and our ability to serve the everyday needs of our clients. Our resources were stretched to the limit ...*⁴⁰

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Despite operating in difficult environments, Arab and Muslim community organisations have sought to address discrimination, vilification and prejudice in various ways. Select examples of strategies undertaken by community organisations follow (a more comprehensive overview is available on the Commission's website at: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/racial_discrimination/isma/strategies/index/html).

Australian Arabic Communities Council

The Sydney-based Australian Arabic Communities Council (AACC) responded to major crises by monitoring incidents of racism and offering support to clients. Following September 11, the AACC set up a 'Racism Register' to document individual complaints of racist incidents in the community as well as negative media coverage which caused offence to members of the Arab community. In its first week of operation over 50 formal complaints were lodged. These complaints included concerns expressed by local Arab residents over a series of letters sent to them threatening violence unless they moved out of their neighbourhoods.⁴¹

Throughout this period, the AACC experienced an exponential increase in demand for services, particularly in relation to vilification and harassment cases. Community members called to express fear and many were in need of support. For a time, the AACC's resources were almost exclusively directed towards meeting these needs.⁴²

During the war on Iraq, the AACC again moved to support the Arabic community by offering counselling and referral services to people affected. The Council also issued media statements calling for peace and organised a fundraising campaign in support of UNICEF's Australian Iraqi Children's Appeal.

Australian Arabic Council

The Melbourne-based Australian Arabic Council (AAC) has also been active in defending Arab Australians from discrimination and vilification. The AAC was founded in 1991 following the first Gulf War to counter misrepresentations of Arab culture within Australia and to promote greater participation by the Arab community in Australian life. The AAC was able to monitor the rise in discrimination and racist attacks against Arab Australians following more recent international events through its 'Racism Register'. Established in 1996, the Racism Register was the only national database to record incidents of racism and vilification against Arab Australians both before and after September 11. After the attacks in the United States, the AAC recorded a 20-fold increase in reports of vilification made to the Racism Register.⁴³ The AAC was also active in challenging media misrepresentations of Arab culture and history during these crisis periods. The AAC was quick to condemn the September 11 attacks and urge the public not to scapegoat Arab or Muslim Australians.⁴⁴ In the ensuing months, the AAC issued a number of press releases documenting the rise in anti-Arab prejudice and discrimination, especially in schools.⁴⁵

Canberra Islamic Centre

Members of the Canberra Islamic Centre (CIC) found another way to address media misrepresentations. After September 11 and again following the Bali bombings, commemoration ceremonies were held at the Centre for the victims of the attacks. At these ceremonies, CIC members expressed their condolences for those killed in the attacks alongside the American Ambassador and a range of other invited guests. Rather than waiting for other organisations to spread the message that Islam does not condone terrorism, the CIC created a media event at which they could show *their* solidarity with other Australians in condemning the attacks. The ceremonies received media coverage in the *Canberra Times*.

*We created the media event. We created the photo opportunity. If you do that – the press will cover it. We set it up in such a way that would be convenient for them.*⁴⁶

Darwin Islamic Centre

In the aftermath of September 11, a similar event was held in the Northern Territory. The Darwin Islamic Centre hosted a multi-denominational gathering to publicly express abhorrence at the attacks and sympathy for the victims. It was attended by approximately 600 people including members of Darwin's Muslim community and representatives of government authorities such as the Northern Territory Police.⁴⁷

4.2 Long-term strategies

While consultation participants agreed that events such as September 11 triggered a rise in anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment, none believed that such events were the root cause of prejudice and discrimination. Most felt that present day crises were born of older, deeper and more complex problems. Therefore, sustained commitment to developing and implementing longer term strategies that tackle discrimination and vilification of Arab and Muslim Australians is vital. Governments at all levels and community organisations are already implementing some policies and strategies that address the root causes of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice.

4.2.1 Federal government

Multiculturalism – the policy framework

The Federal Government's policy, *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity*, is the national framework for tackling prejudice and racism in Australia.⁴⁸ It upholds the rights of all Australians to express their own culture and beliefs and to have equality of treatment and opportunity regardless of their race, culture, language, religion, location, gender or place of birth.⁴⁹

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DIMIA is the federal government agency responsible for developing initiatives that promote community harmony in accordance with the principles of multiculturalism. DIMIA does this primarily through the 'Living in Harmony' program.⁵⁰ This program includes the celebration of Harmony Day on 21 March each year, a partnership program in which DIMIA collaborates with organisations to develop model projects and an annual round of grants for community projects that promote harmony between people from different cultural, racial, religious or social backgrounds.

Harmony Day itself had a mixed reception among consultation participants. School students and their parents tended to be enthusiastic.

We have Harmony Day when we wear orange to represent that we are all one colour.⁵¹

In my children's school they have Harmony Day and that's good for the kids. It teaches them that Australia is composed of different people.⁵²

Community leaders tended to be less positive.

Harmony Day is too tokenistic – it doesn't necessarily cancel out the bigger political picture.⁵³

In recent years, the number of 'Living in Harmony' partnership projects and community grants that specifically address anti-Arab or anti-Muslim prejudice or promote interfaith understanding more broadly have increased.⁵⁶ Many of these projects are described in the paper of strategies available on the Commission's website.⁵⁷ Select examples include:

- 'Towards a Better Understanding of Islam and the Muslim Community in Australia', a partnership project commencing in January 2002 with the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC). One outcome of the project was publication of an information booklet, *Appreciating Islam* (2003), providing accessible information about Islam answering frequently asked questions about the Muslim faith.⁵⁸
- 'Sharing the Spirit of Harmony', a community grant awarded to the Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Australia in 2002. The one year project aimed to promote racial and religious unity among young Melkite people of different ethnic backgrounds (including Lebanese, Sudanese and Egyptian) together with broader youth communities in the Bankstown and Canterbury local government areas. Outcomes included a series of Harmony Day activities, information seminars and delivery of a workshop on operating a small business.
- 'Neighbourhood Harmony', a community grant to the Islamic Council of Victoria in 2003. The one year project aims to counter racial intolerance

against Muslims by building relationships within Muslim communities and with groups in the wider community. Activities will include interfaith gatherings, mosque open days and publication of a directory of participating organisations where relevant information will be available.

- 'Kuraby – Ashes to Awareness', a community grant to the Kuraby Harmony and Awareness Group (Queensland) in 2003. The project aims to promote greater religious understanding and tolerance locally by hosting school students and adults from different religious denominations at the Kuraby Mosque. Activities will include open days, interfaith meetings and discussion groups.
- 'Anti Racism Action Band (ARAB)', a community grant awarded to Victorian Arabic Social Services in 2003. The project aims to address negative portrayals of Muslim youth by forming and empowering a group of Arab and non-Arab youth to present a performance they have developed to schools and community groups. The project seeks to intervene in issues of racial isolation and forestall the creation of youth gangs.
- 'Building an Inter-faith Community', a community grant awarded to Affinity Intercultural Foundation (NSW) in 2003. This project seeks to overcome fundamental misunderstandings about other faiths by bringing groups from both Christian and Muslim faiths (especially Turkish) together in the Ryde and Auburn areas of Sydney. Among other outcomes, the project will provide training to all participants in dialogue and listening skills.

4.2.2 State and territory governments

4.2.2.1 Multicultural – the policy frameworks

All states and territories have multicultural policies and agencies responsible for promoting them.⁵⁹ State and territory multicultural policies provide a framework for public education on anti-racism and underpin a guarantee of culturally appropriate and non-discriminatory government services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. States and territories also have anti-discrimination laws and agencies which administer these laws to protect people from discrimination and vilification because of their race and, in some of the states and territories, because of their religious beliefs.

4.2.2.2 Anti-discrimination and equal opportunity agencies

Several state and territory anti-discrimination agencies have undertaken campaigns to inform Arab and Muslim communities about the laws and complaint processes which aim to protect them from discrimination and vilification. In November 2001, the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission

appointed an Arabic-speaking community educator for a six month term to inform Muslim and Arabic-speaking groups of their rights and responsibilities under Victoria's *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*. The project also involved the establishment and training of a group of advocates from community organisations to continue the education process about rights and the complaint process in Arab and Muslim community groups.⁶⁰

In February 2003, the New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board launched a six month Arabic and Islamic Community Education Initiative. Two Arabic-speaking education officers worked with Arab and Muslim communities to promote understanding of their rights under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977*.⁶¹ In March 2003, the Queensland Government distributed a 'Know Your Rights Card' to inform ethnic communities in Queensland about racial and religious vilification laws. The cards were prepared in languages spoken by Queensland's Muslim community and the distribution strategy targeted Islamic organisations. Other state and territory anti-discrimination agencies have also liaised with Arab and Muslim communities to gauge the issues affecting those communities and help increase awareness of anti-discrimination laws. For example, the Western Australian Equal Opportunity Commission has held meetings with Muslim community leaders and Muslim women to discuss strategies aimed at addressing discrimination in employment, discrimination against girls and women wearing religious dress and the inaccurate media portrayal of Islam.⁶²

In March 2003, the newly formed Australian Council of Human Rights Agencies (ACHRA), which is comprised of Commissioners and Presidents from state and territory equal opportunity/anti-discrimination agencies, also called on state, territory and federal governments to initiate a national anti-racism and religious vilification campaign in the wake of the war in Iraq.⁶³ To date, such a national campaign has yet to eventuate.

4.2.2.3 Education departments and schools

State and territory governments also deliver education about diversity and anti-racism to the broader public, especially through schools. Education authorities in each state and territory have developed and implemented policies and programs that fight racism and promote respect for the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of students.⁶⁴ The broad framework for these policies and programs is set out in the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (the Adelaide Declaration) endorsed by state, territory and federal Ministers of Education in 1999.⁶⁵ The Adelaide Declaration encourages schools and education authorities to ensure that

... all students understand and acknowledge the value of cultural and linguistic diversity and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, such diversity in

*the Australian community and internationally.*⁶⁶

Establishing curriculum and developing resources to help meet these objectives has been a priority for many state and territory education authorities. One of the most important anti-racism resources is *Racism. No Way!*⁶⁷ The program consists of inter-related resources including a website with classroom activities that help teachers and students recognise and address racism.⁶⁸ It was launched in October 2000 and is managed by the NSW Department of Education on behalf of all Australian education systems. While the education kit aims to tackle racism broadly, there are some specific resources which promote understanding of Islam and Australia's cultural and religious diversity. For example, in April 2002, the fact sheet 'An Introduction to Islam in Australia' was included in the on-line resource kit as part of a series of fact sheets on different religions. A fact sheet on 'Terrorism' was also included in April 2003.⁶⁹

State and territory education authorities also have policies and procedures to ensure that education is delivered in an environment free from racism.⁷¹ For example, the blueprint for ensuring NSW schools are free from racism is set out in the 'Anti-Racism Policy Statement' and the guidelines 'Responding to Suggestions, Complaints and Allegations'.⁷² Specialist personnel such as Anti-Racism Contact Officers who provide advice to students, staff and parents experiencing racism in schools help apply these policies and procedures.⁷³

4.2.2.4 Police

Policing is another area where state and territory governments have established long-term strategies to address violence and harassment against particular communities, including Arab and Muslim Australians. Building trust between police and communities affected by racism is vital for the effective reporting and handling of incidents of racial abuse or violence. The Australian Federal Police and many state and territory police services have tried to build trust with Arab and Muslim communities through ongoing community liaison programs. Police-community liaison programs have existed in every police jurisdiction around Australia since the 1980s and 1990s.⁷⁴ Despite the diverse names and structures of these programs across states and territories, they share the common objective of establishing links between communities and local police with the aim of reducing and preventing crime, including racially and religiously motivated crimes.

The NSW Police Service has 37 civilian Ethnic Community Liaison Officers who help police engage with culturally and linguistically diverse communities at a grass roots level. Queensland has 125 Police Liaison Officers who engage with Indigenous and culturally diverse communities. Victoria has 10 Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs), who, unlike their NSW and Queensland counterparts, are sworn police officers. Victorian MLOs liaise with Victorian Arabic Social Services

(VASS), Australian Arabic Council, Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) and Victorian Multicultural Commission on a regular basis. In partnership with VASS, Victoria Police offered Arabic Language and Culture Courses for police officers in October 2002 and July 2003. The course comprised presentations from community members on important Arabic family, religious and cultural values.⁷⁵ Victoria Police has also implemented 'partnership policing' with ethnic communities through the Police and Community Multicultural Advisory Committee.⁷⁶ This joint committee of ethnic communities and police advises the Chief Commissioner and government on how they can work harmoniously with ethnic communities.

4.2.2.5 Community capacity building

State and territory governments have actively engaged in strategies to help build the capacity of Arab and Muslim communities to promote the well-being and self-esteem of community members, improve access to services and challenge stereotyping and negative misconceptions. For example, in 2001, the New South Wales Premier's Department initiated a comprehensive capacity-building strategy for Arab Australian communities which targets youth. The three year 'Youth Partnership with Arabic Speaking Communities' project is a joint initiative between community representatives from Arabic-speaking communities, business leaders and a range of NSW state government departments including the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW, the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Sport and Recreation and the Department of Community Services. The partnership has three objectives:

1. to promote the well-being of young people from Arabic-speaking backgrounds
2. to increase parent support and education to help prevent risk-taking behaviour
3. to provide children and young people with better learning opportunities and recreational activities for long-term personal development.

The project targets a population of 110,000 people of Arabic-speaking background living in ten local government areas in Sydney's west and south-west. Seventeen initiatives have been funded under the auspices of the project. These include a variety of educational initiatives to assist young people with learning, strengthen school and community relations and reduce truancy and behavioural problems. Funding to date for the Youth Partnerships project has totalled \$3 million.⁷⁸

4.2.3 Local governments

Local governments have also supported a range of capacity building projects

for local Arab and Muslim communities.

4.2.3.1 Community safety

In 2003, the City of Melbourne funded the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria to conduct research into the safety of Muslim and Arab women residing in Melbourne. The research has been commissioned to assess the nature and extent of attacks against women, to identify the range of responses undertaken by state and local government, community organisations and the Muslim community and to identify ways that the Muslim and Arab communities can be supported to deal with racial and religious violence and vilification. The project is expected to include a second implementation stage involving community education, planning sessions with relevant service providers and development of a series of safety strategies for women in high risk areas.⁷⁹

4.2.3.2 Interfaith networking

Another positive long-term initiative supported by many local councils around Australia has been the establishment of interfaith networks. The oldest such network is the Interfaith Network of the City of Greater Dandenong in Victoria. The network was founded in 1989 to promote harmony among people from different faiths and cultures in the local community. It is comprised of religious leaders from various faiths including Islam and engages in a range of educational activities to address misconceptions about other religions that are so often the cause of prejudice. The Network has published the document *Many Faiths: One People* which summarises the tenets of major religious faiths including Islam.⁸⁰ Other activities have included tours of local places of worship, public presentations about different religions and a video depicting various religious practices. The Network was also instrumental in developing a multi-denominational 'Sacred Space' in the Dandenong Hospital where patients and families of all religious faiths can pray, meditate and grieve in a culturally appropriate space.⁸¹

4.2.4 Non-government and community organisations

4.2.4.1 Interfaith networking

Many non-government organisations have shown their solidarity with Australian Muslims through participation in interfaith dialogues. The proliferation of interfaith groups over recent years has been dramatic. The Australian National Dialogue of Christians, Muslims and Jews founded in 2003 is the first formal cooperative organisation of peak Jewish, Islamic and Christian bodies in Australia. Its aim is to encourage Australians to respect the rights of religious communities and their places of worship and ensure that issues overseas do not intrude on the stability and tolerance of Australian society. Another peak interfaith body launched in 2003 is the Australian Partnership of Ethnic and Religious Organisations (APERRO). Members include representatives of the Muslim, Christian,

Jewish, Buddhist, Baha'i, Hindu and Sikh faiths as well as the World Conference on Religion and Peace, the Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia and the Australian Multicultural Foundation.

In 2002, DIMIA funded a 'Living in Harmony' partnership project to gain a better understanding of activities of the various community interfaith groups. The project was conducted by the Australian Multicultural Foundation together with the World Conference on Religion and Peace and researchers at several Victorian universities. As part of the study, fourteen interfaith focus groups (which included Muslims) were held in states and territories across Australia. The purpose of these focus groups was to assess the feasibility of an Inter-Faith Council to act as an advisory body for government and non-government agencies. The report of the project, due for release in 2004, will outline the actions needed to achieve social cohesion in the area of religious and cultural diversity. Other outcomes include a booklet on Muslim Australians and a resource kit to provide community groups, educational institutions and government and non-government service providers with a better understanding of Islam and Muslims in Australia.⁸²

4.2.4.2 Tours and 'open days'

Mosque open days are another initiative undertaken by many community groups to foster understanding and acceptance of religious diversity. Since 11 September 2001, many mosques around Australia have held open days in an effort to demystify Islam and build trust between Muslim Australians and the broader public.⁸³ Organised tours of mosques for specific groups such as school children have also become increasingly popular. One of the major activities of the Affinity Intercultural Foundation (established in 2001) is to conduct tours of the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque in Sydney for school groups and other interested organisations and individuals.⁸⁴

Consultation participants commented favourably about the positive impacts of mosque open days and tours.

At Kuraby Mosque the other day, I was driving past and I saw a big Catholic school bus full of males and females and they were being shown the Kuraby Mosque. So things are already in process. I'm pretty sure that the view those kids had before they went into the Mosque was different and then they think, 'wait a minute, this is not a place that harbours terrorism, this is a peaceful place'. It breaks down the barriers.⁸⁵

4.2.4.3 School activities

Community groups have also undertaken various other educational initiatives which foster interfaith understanding and compassion, particularly among school

children. The 'Goodness and Kindness Campaign' is one example. The campaign was initiated in 2002 by the Jewish education program 'Chabad House' in cooperation with the Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations (FAIR). The program involves joint primary school visits by representatives from Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths who discuss shared values of kindness with students. Over 1,000 children participated in the program in its first year. In 2003, the campaign was awarded a DIMIA 'Living in Harmony' community grant to expand the schedule of school visits in Sydney, the Central Coast and Armidale.⁸⁶

Exchange programs and inter-school visits between Muslim and non-Muslim or Christian schools have also fostered interfaith understanding and acceptance amongst young people. For example, shortly after 11 September 2001 the predominantly Muslim students of Wiley Park Girls' High in Lakemba began a cultural exchange program of seminars and inter-school visits with students from the Catholic St Joseph's College in Hunter's Hill. In 2003 St Joseph's College received a DIMIA 'Living in Harmony' community grant to expand the exchange visit project and promote interfaith understanding between high school students. The program is said to have 'increased understanding between these young people because "the conversation is two way"'.⁸⁷

4.2.4.4 Cultural awareness and information seminars

Provision of diversity training by Arab and Muslim community groups is another positive initiative that has flourished in recent years. Many of the community organisations which participated in IsmaU consultations frequently deliver cultural awareness seminars to government and non-government service providers. General interest in these seminars has risen significantly over the last two years as has demand for more specifically tailored cultural awareness seminars from government service providers such as Centrelink, TAFE and some local area police commands.⁸⁸ The Muslim Women's Association of South Australia conducted some 66 cross-cultural training sessions for schools and service providers between January 2002 and July 2003.⁸⁹ To keep up with demand, the Association employed an education officer to coordinate and deliver the training along with a group of volunteers.

What we do is provide an information session on Islam and include things like: Who are Muslims? Where are they? Where are they from? As well as basic beliefs and talk about some of the misconceptions which have been thrown around by some of the media such as the complete misconception of women and also about the concept of Jihad. We always have question time at the end of it and we're always amazed. We have people saying 'Gosh, there are so many misconceptions and unfortunately we've been misled by the media'. The response has been great and really enlightening.⁹⁰

It's good going out to schools and seeing kids be totally non-receptive

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*and go 'Who's that person?' and then at the end of the session saying 'You know I didn't want to come here today, I really hated Muslims' and then say 'Now I feel a little more comfortable being with you'. It's good to hear that because you know that people always have the fear of the unknown and they just need that opportunity to come to know us and learn that they can relate to us.'*⁹¹

An innovative education project launched in 2003 by the Muslim Women's National Network of Australia offers diversity training to future journalists and broadcasters. Funded by a 'Living in Harmony' community grant, the project aims to challenge media stereotyping about Muslim Australians by building networks between journalism students and Muslims. The project involves delivery of a series of seminars for students of media at several NSW universities to increase their knowledge about Islam.⁹²

Another community initiated project which aims to address negative portrayals of ethnic communities in Sydney's south-west in the mainstream media is the 'Media Spaces and Places' project. The project involved writing workshops, interviews and discussion with a range of refugee and migrant communities (including a group of Afghan women and a Bosnian women's choir) to 'dissect and deconstruct' representations of racialised communities.⁹³ The project outcomes included a series of visual images and text addressing issues of crime and ethnicity and representations of Muslim women who wear religious dress which were displayed on bus shelters.

Endnotes

- 1 http://www.humanrights.gov.au/racial_discrimination/isma/strategies/index.html
- 2 See, for example: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Report of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia*, Chapter 6, 1991.
- 3 The Hon. Philip Ruddock, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Media Release, 'Australians Urged Not to Scapegoat Innocents', 14 September 2001.
- 4 Prime Minister Howard, interview with ABC Radio, 22 September 2001.
- 5 Prime Minister Howard, transcript of speech to Australian Defence Association Melbourne, 25 October 2001. Similar statements were also made in respect and tolerance during his visit to Preston Mosque, Melbourne, on 17 October 2001.
- 6 Address by Prime Minister Howard to Federal Parliament, House of Representatives, *Hansard*, 14 October 2002, page 7500, and Media Release, 24 October 2002. See also: The Hon. Gary Hardgrave MP, 'Religious Discrimination: Kuraby Mosque Fire', House of Representatives, *Hansard*, 24 September 2001, page 31241.
- 7 Prime Minister John Howard, interview with Radio 2GB, 22 November 2002.
- 8 Prime Minister Howard's speech to Australian Federation of Islamic Councils Dinner, 12 April 2003.
- 9 Consultation hosted by Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia, Alice Springs, 5 June 2003. See also: Islamic Council of NSW, Sydney, 10 June 2003; Canberra Islamic Centre, Canberra, 2 June 2003; Consultation hosted by the WA Office of Multicultural Interests, Perth, 1 July 2003; Consultation hosted by the SA Equal Opportunity Commission, Adelaide, 16 July 2003.
- 10 Information from Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, 8 December 2003.
- 11 Minister Ruddock visited Lakemba Mosque in November 2002. See: Media Releases by Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, The Hon. Gary Hardgrave, dated 16 October 2002, 18 October 2002, 6 November 2002, 15 November 2002, 6 December 2002, 18 March 2003, 21 March 2003, 28 May 2003, 2 August 2003, 11 September 2003, 12 October 2003, 29 October 2003.
- 12 This committee was established in May 2000 and consists of around 45 representatives from various Commonwealth agencies. Its main aim is to ensure that federal government policies and programs are sensitive to multiculturalism.
- 13 Some of these incidents were directed towards people whom the perpetrators believed were Muslim or Arabic and who were actually people born in other parts of the world far removed from the Middle East
- 14 Information from Centrelink, 18 November 2003.
- 15 Information from Centrelink, 18 November 2003.
- 16 Information from Centrelink, 18 November 2003. See also: Muslim lawyers group, Melbourne, 27 May 2003; Consultation with Islamic Girls/Women's Group Inc., hosted by the Victorian Department of Human Services, Melbourne, 28 May 2003; Consultation hosted by the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (ADCQ) and Multicultural Affairs Queensland (MAQ), Brisbane, 16 June 2003; Women only consultation hosted by the Office for Women's Policy, WA Department for Community Development, Perth, 30 June 2003; Consultations with NSW secondary students at three government schools, Sydney, August 2003; Lebanese Community Council, Sydney, 4 September 2003.
- 17 The Queensland Government donated \$5,000 to the Kuraby Mosque to replace children's school books and desks destroyed in the arson attack.
- 18 Address by Premier Peter Beattie to Queensland Parliament, 22 October 2003.
- 19 See: NSW Premier, Media Release, 12 September 2001; Channel 7 News, 13 September 2001; Channel 9 News, 13 September 2001; Reported on ABC Radio, The Daily Telegraph and the Australian Financial Review, 14 September 2001.
- 20 Information provided to HREOC by Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW, 30 June 2003.
- 21 Information provided to HREOC by Victorian Premier's Department, 22 January 2004.
- 22 Information provided to HREOC by the Premier of Western Australia, 9 December 2003.
- 23 Information from NSW Community Relations Commission, 30 June 2003.
- 24 Information from Premier of Victoria, 22 January 2004.
- 25 Information from Premier of Victoria, 22 January 2004.
- 26 Information from Premier of Western Australia, 9 December 2003.

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- 27 Information from NSW Community Relations Commission, 12 January 2004. Note, in 2004 researchers from the University of Technology, Sydney, are conducting an analysis of data from the CRC hotline.
- 28 Consultation hosted by the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (ADCQ) and Multicultural Affairs Queensland (MAQ), Brisbane, 16 June 2003.
- 29 Information from Premier of Victoria, 22 January 2004. Note, the Western Australian Government set up a 24-hour Police Hotline to assist and support community members most vulnerable to vilification during the war in Iraq.
- 30 Information from NSW Department of Education and Training, 24 November 2003.
- 31 Information from Victoria Police, 3 December 2003.
- 32 Information from Premier of Victoria, 22 January 2004.
- 33 Consultation with Queensland Anti-Racism Community Reference Group, Brisbane, 18 June 2003.
- 34 Information from NSW Community Relations Commission, 12 January 2004.
- 35 Information from Premier of Western Australia, 9 December 2003.
- 36 Australian Arabic Council, Melbourne, 28 May 2003.
- 37 Information from Hume City Council website: www.hume.vic.gov.au
- 38 Information from City of Greater Dandenong, 30 October 2003.
- 39 Canberra Islamic Centre, Canberra, 2 June 2003.
- 40 Information from Muslim Women's Association, Sydney, 3 February 2003.
- 41 Information from Australian Arabic Communities Council, 5 February 2004.
- 42 Information from Australian Arabic Communities Council, 5 February 2004.
- 43 Information from Australian Arabic Council, 17 November 2003.
- 44 Australian Arabic Council Media Release, 12 September 2001.
- 45 Australian Arabic Council Media Release, 29 August 2002.
- 46 Canberra Islamic Centre, Canberra, 2 June 2003.
- 47 Consultation hosted by Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia, Alice Springs, 5 June 2003.
- 48 See: <http://www.immi.gov.au/multicultural/australian/policy.htm>
- 49 DIMIA, *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity*, 2003, p 6.
- 50 Information from Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, 8 December 2003.
- 51 Consultations with NSW primary school students (Years 5 and 6) at three Sydney public schools, August 2003.
- 52 Consultation with members of the Indonesian Muslim Community of Victoria, Monash University, 28 May 2003.
- 53 Arabic Workers' Network, Sydney, 29 April 2003.
- 54 Arabic Workers' Network, Sydney, 29 April 2003.
- 55 Youth Reference Group to the NSW Premier's Youth Partnership with Arabic Speaking Communities, Sydney, 7 April 2003.
- 56 In the 2002 Living in Harmony community grants program, two of the 42 grants awarded had an interfaith focus which included the Islamic community and five projects worked with Arabic groups to promote community harmony. In 2003, DIMIA funded 44 community grants, ten of which addressed anti-Muslim prejudice or had an interfaith focus which included the Islamic community. Another ten projects addressed anti-Muslim or anti-Arab prejudice more generally. Funding for all 20 community grants to address anti-Muslim or anti-Arab prejudice totalled \$683,000 and accounted for about 46% of the total funding awarded in 2003: information from Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, 8 December 2003.
- 57 See: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/racial_discrimination/isma/strategies/index.html
- 58 Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, *Appreciating Islam*, 2003. A summary of the document is available on the AFIC website at: <http://www.afic.com.au/apislam.htm>
- 59 These include: Office of Multicultural Interests (Western Australia); Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW; Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs; Victorian Multicultural Commission; SA Office of Multicultural Affairs; Multicultural Tasmania; Multicultural Affairs Queensland.
- 60 Preliminary consultation to launch Isma in Victoria hosted by Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission, Melbourne, 30 April 2003. Information from Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission, 13 November 2003.
- 61 NSW Anti-Discrimination Board, *Annual Report 2002-03*, page 30.
- 62 Information provided by WA Equal Opportunity Commission, 12 March 2003.
- 63 <http://www.eoc.vic.gov.au/materials/media/urgentgovernmentactionneededinwakeofwariniraq.html>

- 64 For example, the Victorian Department of Education and Training has Guidelines for Managing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity which affirm the Department's commitment to anti-racism education and describe specific responsibilities for countering racism.
- 65 Department of Education, Science and Training, *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*. Goal 3.1 reads, 'Schooling should be socially just so that student's outcomes are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture, ethnicity, religion or disability; and of differences arising from students' socio-economic background or geographic location.'
- 66 *ibid.*
- 67 http://www.racismnoway.com.au/racial_discrimination/isma/strategies/index.html
- 68 Information from NSW Department of Education and Training, 24 November 2003.
- 69 For further information see: <http://www.racismnoway.com.au>. Note: a new project targeting a young audience of students (Years K-3) entitled *Prejudice. No Way!* was launched in 2002. It aims to develop foundation knowledge and skills for anti-racism education programs like *Racism. No Way!* Draft teaching and learning materials were trialled in ten NSW schools in Semester 1, 2003.
- 70 Consultations with NSW Teachers, Anti-Racism Contact Officers (ARCOs) and Community Information Officers (CIOs), Sydney, August 2003.
- 71 For example, the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services is currently updating its Anti-racism policy (1990) which outlines a commitment to providing schooling environments that counter racism and foster respect for cultural, linguistic and religious diversity.
- 72 Information from NSW Department of Education and Training, 24 November 2003.
- 73 *ibid.*
- 74 The term adopted by the New South Wales Police for its police-community liaison officers is 'Ethnic Community Liaison Officers' while other jurisdictions adopted the terms 'Multicultural Liaison Officers' and 'Community Liaison Officers' (Victoria Police and Queensland Police Service respectively).
- 75 Information from Premier of Victoria, 22 January 2004. See also: Consultation with Victoria Police Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs), Melbourne, 26 & 27 May 2003.
- 76 Information from Victoria Police, 3 December 2003.
- 77 Islamic Council of Victoria, Melbourne, 26 May 2003. See also: Consultation with Victoria Police Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs), Melbourne, 26 & 27 May 2003.
- 78 Information from NSW Premier's Department, 5 June 2003 and 8 January 2004.
- 79 Information from City of Melbourne, 10 November 2003.
- 80 <http://www.greaterdandenong.com/infopage.cfm?InfoPageID=1135>
- 81 Information from City of Greater Dandenong, 30 October 2003. See also: Consultation with Interfaith Network of the City of Greater Dandenong, Dandenong, 14 November 2003.
- 82 Information from the Australian Multicultural Foundation, 12 January 2004.
- 83 For example, in September 2002, Lakemba Mosque in Sydney held an Open Day. The Dee Why Mosque in Sydney also held an open day in April 2003 which attracted over 700 visitors. In January 2003, the Western Australian Islamic Network held an open day at a central mosque in Perth for people interested in knowing more about Islam.
- 84 Information from the Affinity Intercultural Foundation, 10 November 2003.
- 85 Consultation with young Arab men, Brisbane, 18 June 2003.
- 86 Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations, Sydney, 10 September 2003.
- 87 Consultations with NSW Teachers, Anti-Racism Contact Officers (ARCOs) and Community Information Officers (CIOs), Sydney, August 2003.
- 88 Australian Arabic Communities Council, Sydney, 10 June 2003.
- 89 Women only consultation hosted by the SA Equal Opportunity Commission, Adelaide, 17 July 2003.
- 90 Women only consultation hosted by the SA Equal Opportunity Commission, Adelaide, 17 July 2003.
- 91 Women only consultation hosted by the SA Equal Opportunity Commission, Adelaide, 17 July 2003.
- 92 Information from Muslim Women's National Network of Australia, Sydney, 15 November 2003.
- 93 T. Dreher, 'Speaking up and talking back: news media interventions in Sydney's 'othered' communities' in L. Jacka and L. Green (eds), *The New Others: Media and Society Post-September 11*, Media International Australia, No. 109, November 2003, pages 131-133.