



**Australian
Human Rights
Commission**

Religious Freedom Roundtable

Statement of purpose and Guiding principles

Statement of purpose

The Religious Freedom Roundtable provides a forum, within the structure of the Australian Human Rights Commission, for representatives of religious and spiritual communities to have ongoing engagement and dialogue about freedom of religion, conscience and belief (“religious freedom”) and its interaction with public policy in 21st century Australia.

Mutual respect

Religious freedom is central to human rights. As a human right, religious freedom does not sit in isolation. It interacts with other fundamental freedoms including freedoms of thought, conscience, speech and association, as well as property rights.

However, religious freedom is not unlimited. Like other human rights it must be exercised with a mindfulness of the rights of others, and has the potential to intersect and at times compete with other human rights such as equality before the law and government, and the freedoms of those without faith. The role of law should be to seek accommodation of competing rights and enlarge the freedom for all. Care must be taken to balance rights so that neither religious freedom nor any right with which it may intersect is granted an imbalanced privileging so as to permanently impair the enjoyment of the other.

To ensure that the religious freedom roundtable is a dialogue anchored in an understanding and respect for the rights of all Australians, the following guiding principles are proposed:

Guiding principles

As participants we recognise and respect that

1. Religious freedom is fundamental to the Australian way of life, and should be treated equally to all other human rights and freedoms.
2. Religious freedom is a fundamental human right that should be respected and not limited unless it infringes on the rights of others.
3. Religious freedom has an essential and important role in public life or civic affairs to contribute to the moral and spiritual guidance of our nation; and faith is as legitimate basis for participation in public life and civic affairs as any other.
4. Constitutionally, Australia is a pluralist, multi-faith society with a secular State.
5. Pluralism necessitates respect for a diversity of beliefs, both within and between religious faiths, those with no beliefs, as well as other attributes associated with an individual's identity.
6. No Australians should be unnecessarily excluded from participation in public life or civic affairs because of their faith, age, disability, gender, race, sexual orientation, or other irrelevant personal attribute.
7. Mutual respect is necessary for a functioning pluralist society to advance the rights of all Australians.
8. When considering issues that affect the rights of others, it is necessary to provide equal opportunities to engage and consider their perspectives with the objective of accommodating and enlarging the human rights of all.
9. All Australians should be treated equally before the law and government.
10. Individuals and communities of faith will continue to constructively work with government and other public agencies to uphold the law and improve Australia's moral and spiritual guidance.
11. Individuals and communities should be free to exercise religious freedom within the framework of Australian law.

Tim Wilson
Human Rights Commissioner
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