

RELIGIONS for PEACE AUSTRALIA

ANNUAL REPORT 2017 – 2018

This report for 2017 – 18 has been prepared for the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Australian chapter of Religions for Peace in Canberra (June 17th, 2018) and for the annual executive meeting of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace in India at Bengaluru (Bangalore) on 16th – 19th April, 2018. The past twelve months since the fourth historic Annual General Meeting in Canberra for the first time outside Melbourne following its founding in Melbourne in the very early 1970s has been characterized by the further structural consolidation of the RfP Australia network and some very worthwhile activities. With a regular phone hook-up three or four times a year and the Annual General Meeting in Canberra, Religions for Peace Australia has gained greater unity and cohesion across Australia as well as providing welcome support for those committed to interfaith activity and interreligious harmony.

Religions for Peace Australia is committed to the creation and maintenance of interreligious harmony in the cause of social cohesion and of encouraging religious traditions contributing to the social wealth of Australia, especially in countering religious extremism and religiously inspired violence, in countering religious discrimination in the construction of a multicultural Australia and in countering religious pathologies such as child sexual abuse in religious organizations. It directly supported the Hindu Council of Australia in protesting against a TV pro-meat advertisement by the Australian Meat and Livestock Council that was offensive to religion generally and Hinduism in particular.

A major achievement in Australia was the passing of the same-sex legislation by the Commonwealth parliament as a result of a compulsory survey of all voting Australians in which 61 per cent supported the change in the marriage legislation to allow persons of the same gender to marry. Most, but not all, religious groups were in favour of the legislation with evangelical Christians and Muslims being those most opposed. Alongside this has been a government review of

religious freedom; a personal submission by the chair of Religions for Peace Australia made the point that religious freedom is a relative, not an absolute, right, and that there should be a better formulated process of negotiated accommodation in allowing exemptions to a law or regulation (e.g. religious burial customs, the wearing of the Sikh *kirpan*). But there are limits, and this was exemplified with the recent jailing of an imam for performing the marriage of a 14-year old girl contrary to the civil law, thus sexually endangering the girl.

National UN Interfaith Week Address – 2016 Census Results

At Parliament House in Canberra in February, Emeritus UNESCO Professor Gary Bouma from Monash University, Australia's leading religious sociologist, presented the national UN Interfaith address on the results of the 2016 Australian census. He outlined how Australia has quickly moved to a more secular and multifaith nation with a huge jump in the number of those who ticked the 'No religion' box on the census form (see tables in the appendix of this report). However, Professor Bouma emphasized that other research shows that many of these 'no religion' people would claim to have a spirituality and to have had at least one religious experience. Because of the large intake of Muslim refugees and the higher Muslim birthrate, Islam has now replaced Buddhism as Australia's second largest religion after Christianity. There were very substantial increases in the numbers of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. There was a huge jump in the number of Indians coming into Australia as migrants, but there were also significant increases in those migrating from China, the Philippines and South Korea over the previous five years since the 2011 census. Chinese in all its spoken varieties is now clearly the largest language group in Australia, followed by Arabic and Vietnamese. There were big increases in the number of Hindi, Punjabi and Tamil speakers. As a result of these huge migration intakes, Australia is experiencing growing pains in terms of its infrastructure and housing affordability.

In Victoria, Emeritus Professor Desmond Cahill, the chair of Religions for Peace Australia, gave the UN Annual Interfaith Week Address in association with the chaplaincy at Melbourne University. Professor Cahill worked as a consultant with the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and in his address he appraised the final report of the Commission released in December 2017 which was 7,323 pages in length with 17 volumes. As well as government child care institutions and sporting and scouting organizations, a large focus was on religious institutions, especially those with large numbers of orphanages, boarding schools, daytime schools and youth clubs. The Catholic Church, as Australia's largest group, was a particular focus. The factors that are linked with the sexual abusing of children under 18 were found to be the easy availability of children to sexual perpetrators, the presence of psychosexually immature or maldeveloped religious leaders, especially if the particular religion had a strong opposition to homosexuality so that gay priests did not satisfactorily resolve their sexual identity, and poor child protection policies and practices in religious institutions. Child sexual abuse is a carefully

hidden and widespread phenomenon in every country, and is especially prevalent in families. The involvement of personnel from Religions for Peace Australia in the work of the Royal Commission is part of its commitment to child safety and child protection.

Army Chaplaincy

In February 2017, the head of the 175 chaplains in the Australian Army, Brigadier Glynn Murphy, approached the chair of Religions for Peace Australia for assistance and guidance in transitioning both to a more culturally diverse army reflecting the demographic composition of Australia and to a multifaith chaplaincy containing chaplains drawn from the major world faiths other than Christian. In the last 20 years other comparable armies have begun making this transition but not the Australian Army. This project in partnership with the Australian Multicultural Foundation involved delivering eight regional seminars to army chaplains at army bases across Australia as well as a strategic planning conference over the whole of 2017. This laid the foundation for the Australian army chaplaincy to begin integrating Buddhist monks, Muslim imams, Hindu priests and other religious leaders into the ranks of army chaplains. This will be a longterm process over many years and some found it difficult to shift from an exclusivist position that excludes all other religions to an inclusivist and pluralist outlook that moves beyond Christianity.

Websites of RfP Australia

Our website (www.religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au) through the daily work of our webmaster, Chris Parnell, has now clearly established itself at Australia's no. 1 interfaith website. In 2016, there had been a significant decrease of 34.6 per cent in the number of hits from the previous year, possibly because of cloud computing where other servers take a copy periodically of the RfP Australia website and deliver it to their website visitors. It continues to highlight items of interest from across Australia and from around the world. In 2017, however, we received a massive 916,268 hits with 38,529 visitors making 53,881 visits and reading 242,222 pages. Currently the website is on track to reach one million hits in 2018. The most popular items were (i) the multifaith calendar, (ii) the annual report of Religions for Peace Australia (iii) the G20 Interfaith Summit (iv) the report, *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia* and (v) the paper, *Confusions about Australian Multiculturalism*. For the first time, most visitors came from Australia, followed by USA, France, China, Turkey, United Kingdom India and the Russian Federation.

Our newer website, Multifaith Education Australia, continues to grow in popularity with 96,624 hits with 2,529 visitors making 5,228 visits and reading 78,035 pages. The most popular downloads were (i) instructor guide materials (ii) Discovering Buddha (iii) Baha'i program materials, (iii) four Hindu educational

series of lessons and (v) the Code of Conduct of Religions for Peace Australia. It is clear that visitors are looking for particular education resources for informational and educational purposes.

State and Territory Affiliates

Our state chapters and affiliated bodies continue to be most active. One particular feature has been the focus upon climate change and the environment, especially by our South Australian, Queensland and Tasmanian affiliates, and which has been the no. 1 item on our national action plan. Discussions have begun with the leaders of ARRCC (Australian Religious Response to Climate Change) who are launching in late 2018 a campaign, *Promoting Sustainable Living*, aimed at developed countries which are the worst polluters, built around (a) energy efficiency and renewable energy, (b) the eating of less meat and (c) reducing the use of planes and cars which rely on fossil fuel.

In late 2017 and 2018, the Victorian chapter through Dr Sue Ennis has completed an audit of multifaith activity across Australia, the first time such an audit has been done in Australia. It is a complex document which has identified the gaps and shown how interfaith activity is almost completely based on volunteerism with little support from governments. The Victorian chapter in particular has begun a process of lobbying key politicians advocating for a greater profile and financial commitment to the multifaith movement in the context of social cohesion and interreligious harmony in the face of a noisy racist and nationalist, white Australia voice that rejects Australia's commitment to refugees. The Victorian chapter has been working in managing the transition to a new way of teaching religion in government primary schools though it has resulted in a diminishing of such teaching. It also has been helping to support the 26 local government multifaith networks and the seven networks in regional and rural Victoria though government funding for these networks has been declining.

In the Australian Capital Territory, the Canberra Interfaith Forum, as well as maintaining its Meditation Garden of Peace just off the main road from the airport into the city, has participated in the Canberra Multicultural Festival, been the key organization in organizing the Annual UN Interfaith Address at Parliament House, and briefed visiting Malaysian delegations on multifaith Australia and the governance and management of religion and religious diversity in Australia. It has held various informational and dialogue seminars, and a seminar on tolerance on the World Day of Peace.

The New South Wales branch led by Josie Lacey has continued its series of seminar meetings at Parliament House in Sydney with speakers from different faiths outlining the beliefs and practices of their faith. In 2017 -18, it had a speaker explaining the structure of Shia Islam as well as welcoming two Ethiopian Jews.

It also had input from Hugh Mackay, a well-known social researcher. The Women's Interfaith Network on Sydney has continued its work and meetings for prayer and meditation. Josie Lacey led a well-attended session devoted to the theme of religion and multiculturalism at the Darwin conference in October 2017 of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia.

The Multifaith Association of South Australia has been revamping itself, its structures and its constitution in order to meet the new challenges. It conducted the End-of-Year multifaith service at the Unitarian Church in Norwood. It also was invited to present the multifaith blessing at the multicultural awards ceremony hosted by the State Governor, Hieu Van Le, a Vietnamese refugee. The Association has instituted a regular Music and Poetry Soirees in various places of worship, drawing upon the works of poets such as Rumi, Tagore and Gibran. It also held a seminar on 'Dying and the Different Faiths'. The Tasmanian chapter has been active with many innovative initiatives. It has been increasing links with politicians and academics, and assisted the Multicultural Community Council of Tasmania in preparing a booklet about the different faith traditions in Tasmania. It sponsored a seminar on Aboriginal fire husbandry and held a session on conflict resolution, 'Imagining a Different Future'.

Strong links have been established with Professor Samina Yasmeen of the University of Western Australia, and it is hoped that a functioning branch can be established in Western Australia.

Centre for Interfaith and Cultural Dialogue – Griffith University, Brisbane

Links with the Centre for Interfaith and Cultural Dialogue at Griffith University in Queensland have been further strengthened through Dr Brian Adams who successfully organized the first and second G20 Interfaith Summits in Australia and Turkey alongside the meeting of the world's political leaders. In 2017 the Centre organized the G20 Interfaith Summit in Potsdam in Germany on the theme of 'Religion, Sustainable Development and the Refugee Crisis,' and is currently organizing the 2018 Summit in Buenos Aires. Early in April 2018 it organized a multifaith Commonwealth Conference in Brisbane alongside the Commonwealth Games. The Queensland affiliate has also been holding training workshops on gender equality for women from Sudan, Bangladesh and Indonesia as well as roundtable discussions on Dealing with Difference: Peril or Promise and a Sufi Musical evening. It co-sponsored an Iftar dinner with the Muslim community and sponsored a conference on ecospirituality and a men's forum on domestic violence. In July 2017, it conducted a workshop on the Compassionate Cities Program. It has also sponsored a symposium on freedom of religion in association with the Notre Dame University (Australia) School of

Law.

In its small but significant way, RfP Australia has played its role at national and State/Territory levels in working for interfaith and multicultural harmony in a country where almost half of the population of 23 million are either immigrants or have at least one parent who was born outside Australia. With its website it has continued to provide a very welcome service not only nationally but internationally.

ACRP AND IMPLEMENTING ITS STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Unfortunately because of a visa difficulty, Australia did not participate in the 2017 Executive Committee meeting in Beijing. However, in July Professor Cahill spent three days in Tokyo at the secretariat finalizing the draft of the ACRP Constitution. Religions for Peace Australia has been fully supportive of the ACRP Strategic Action Plan that flowed out of the 2014 Incheon Assembly under the guidance of the Secretariat, and its chair has been participating in online ACRP Leadership meetings. Whilst Australia has addressed many of its aspects, it has begun to engage systematically with the plan. It very much values its relationship with the secretariat in Tokyo. Some of its members played key roles in the work of the Royal Commission on the Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and also RfP Australia has been opposed to the practice of child marriages which are against Australian law. Through the many and varied activities, Religions for Peace has been engaging in a range of activities promoting interreligious harmony and social cohesion and strengthening its own organization through action plans.

CONCLUSION

I want to thank all the executive members across Australia in our national organization and affiliated organizations for their support and great work, especially our secretary, Sue Ennis, and the office-holders in all our branches and affiliates. I also want to thank the ACRP Secretariat in Tokyo because ACRP is becoming more professional in its operation. Our work is important and is part of building a multicultural and interfaith society and a peaceful and harmonious world.

Desmond P. Cahill (Emeritus Prof.),

Chair, Religions for Peace Australia.

Deputy Moderator, Religions for Peace Asia

April 2018.

Table One: Birthplace Profile of Australia: 1996, 2011 and 2016 Census Comparison

1996 Census			2016 Census			
Country of Birth	Number	% of OSB	Country of Birth	Number	2011 – 2016 % increase	1996-2011 % increase
U.K.	1,072,514	27.44	U.K.	1,078,235	-01.60	+00.50
New Zealand	291,388	7.46	New Zealand	518,466	+07.30	+77.90
Italy	238,388	6.10	China(inc. HK)	509,355	+29.30	+200.60
China (inc. HK)	169,439	4.34	India	455,389	+54.20	+487.80
Viet Nam	151,053	3.87	Philippines	232,386	+35.70	+150.00
Greece	126,520	3.24	Viet Nam	219,322	+18.50	+45.20
Germany	110,331	2.82	Italy	174,042	-06.10	-27.00
Philippines	92,949	2.38	South Africa	162,449	+11.50	+191.40
Netherlands	87,898	2.25	Malaysia	138,364	+19.10	+81.40
India	77,521	1.98	Sri Lanka	109,849	+27.12	+133.80
Malaysia	76,255	1.95	Germany	102,595	-05.00	-7.00
Lebanon	70,224	1.80	South Korea	98,776	+32.50	n.a.
Poland	65,113	1.67	Greece	93,473	-06.50	-26.10
South Africa	55,755	1.43	USA	86,125	+11.80	+73.90
Ireland	51,469	1.32	Lebanon	78,653	+02.90	+12.00
Malta	50,879	1.30	Ireland	74,888	+11.20	n.a.
U.S.A.	49,528	1.27	Indonesia	73,213	+15.90	+65.70
Sri Lanka	46,984	1.20	Netherlands	70,172	-06.70	-20.20
Croatia	46,981	1.20	Fiji	61,469	+07.90	n.a.
Indonesia	44,175	1.13	Croatia	43,688	-10.50	-07.00

OSB = Overseas-born persons

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Table Two: Language Profile of Australia: 1996, 2011 and 2016 Census Comparison

1996 Census			2016 Census			
Language	Number	% of LOTES	Language	Number	2011 - 2016 % increase	1996-2016 % increase
Italian	375,718	11.79	Chinese	927,944	+42.47	+170.40
Chinese	343,193	10.76	Arabic	321,728	+12.03	+81.20
Greek	269,770	8.46	Vietnamese	287,175	+18.86	+96.30
Arabic	177,598	5.57	Italian	271,597	-09.42	-27.70
Vietnamese	146,264	4.59	Greek	237,588	-05.80	-11.90
German	98,814	3.10	Filipino	182,394	+33.27	+158.90
Spanish	91,265	2.86	Hindi	159,652	+43.37	+369.80
Macedonian	71,352	2.24	Spanish	140,817	+19.85	+54.30
Tagalog	70,441	2.21	Punjabi	132,496	+86.00	n.a.
Croatian	69,173	2.17	Korean	108,997	+36.61	+264.20
Polish	62,798	1.97	German	79,353	-01.27	-19.70
Turkish	46,204	1.45	Tamil	73,161	+45.88	n.a.
Maltese	45,223	1.42	French	70,873	+22.74	+77.40
ATSI	44,192	1.39	Urdu	69,293	n.a.	n.a.
Dutch	40,782	1.28	Indonesian	67,891	+21.52	n.a.
French	39,940	1.25	Macedonian	66,019	-04.11	-07.50
Serbian	37,204	1.17	ATSI	64,672	+04.65	+46.30
Hindi	33,983	1.07	Turkish	58,355	-02.13	+26.30

Language = language spoken at home by those aged over five years LOTES = percentage of total no. of speakers of languages other than English

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Table Three: Religious Profile for Australia: 1996, 2011 and 2016 Census Comparison

1996 Census			2016 Census			
Religion	Number	%	Religion	Number	2011-2016 % increase	1996-2016 % increase
Catholic	4,797,365	26.92	No religion	6,933,708	+44.55	+136.90
Anglican	3,903,323	21.99	Catholic	5,291,834	-02.70	+10.30
No religion	2,927,134	16.49	Anglican	3,101,185	-15.73	-20.60
Not stated	1,550,980	8.73	Not stated	2,238,735	+21.69	+44.30
Uniting Church of Australia	1,334,915	7.52	Uniting Church of Australia	870,183	-18.35	-34.80
Presbyterian & Reformed	672,660	3.79	Christian (not further defined)	612,371	+30.00	+236.70
Eastern Orthodox	492,304	2.78	Islam	604,240	+59.80	+200.80
Baptist	295,176	1.66	Buddhism	563,674	+06.60	+182.10
Lutheran	249,996	1.41	Presbyterian & Reformed	526,689	-12.15	-21.70
Islam	200,886	1.13	Eastern Orthodox	502,801	+02.13	+02.10
Buddhism	199,830	1.13	Hinduism	440,300	+59.80	+555.10
Christian			Baptist	345,142	-02.09	+16.90

	181,897	1.02				
Pentecostal	164,048	0.92	Pentecostal	260,558	+09.49	+58.80
Jeh. Witnesses	83,411	0.47	Lutheranism	174,019	-30.39	-30.40
Judaism	79,800	0.45	Sikhism	125,901	n.a.	n.a.
Salvation Army	74,136	0.42	Judaism	91,022	-06.49	+14.10
Churches of Christ	71,308	0.40	Jehovah's Witnesses	82,510	-03.65	-01.01
Hinduism	67,209	0.38	Secular Beliefs	39,180	n.a.	n.a.
Seventh Day Adventist	52,618	0.30	Seventh Day Adventist	62,945	-00.10	+19.60
Church of LDS	42,168	0.24	Church of LDS	61,639	+03.10	+46.20