



Religions for Peace Australia  
Legally known as The World Conference of Religions for  
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## **RELIGIONS for PEACE AUSTRALIA ANNUAL REPORT 2022– 2023**

**Prepared by the Chair, Mrs Philippa Rowland, BSc. Ag, Grad Dip NRM**

**for the ACRP Executive Committee Meeting, Davao, Mindanao, the Philippines  
21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023**

### **KEY NATIONAL ISSUES**

#### **A. First Nations - Australian 2023 National Referendum on Voice to Parliament**

Religions for Peace Australia (RfPA) has key resource materials to share with multifaith leaders on the 2023 Australian Federal Referendum on the Voice to Parliament. Australia's last national referendum on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders was on 27 May 1967.

At that time, Australians voted to change the Constitution so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, like all other Australians, would be counted as part of the population and the Commonwealth would be able to make laws for them. A resounding 90.77 per cent said 'Yes'. Every state and territory had a majority result for the 'Yes' vote, after one of the most successful national campaigns in Australia's history. (See <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/1967-referendum>)

In 2023, Australians will again vote in a Referendum, this time to enshrine a First Nations Voice to Parliament. RfPA supports open dialogue and encourages faith leaders to inform their multifaith multicultural communities on the significance of this moment for all Australians. We uphold each person's right to vote in accordance with their own free will and seek only to share materials to enable informed decision-making.

Key information on the Uluru Statement from the Heart <https://ulurustatement.org/> sets out the 2017 invitation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to walk with them in a movement of the Australian people for a better future and calls for the establishment of a 'First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution' and a 'Makaratta Commission to supervise a process of agreement making and truth-telling about our history'.

As the Uluru Statement stated succinctly: "In 1967 we were counted. In 2017 we seek to be heard."

2023 Senior Australian of the Year Professor Tom Calma AO and Dr Marcia Langton AO provided insights on '*The Voice: How the Final Co-Design Report Enables an Effective Design for Indigenous Advice to the Parliament and Executive Government*'. A recording is available: <https://www.unisa.edu.au/connect/hawke-centre/events-and-exhibitions/events/2023/voice-to-parliament/#VoiceYouTube>

Religions for Peace Australia also remains involved in upholding the spiritual aspects of the reconciliation process, such as truth-telling sessions, and sharing prayers in solidarity.

## **B. Inter-Religious Council**

Discussions continue on the establishment of an Australian Inter-Religious Council (IRC). In principal support has been given by Bishop Philip Huggins, immediate past chair of the National Council of Churches Australia, and Hass Dellal from the Australian Multicultural Foundation established in 1988. The Australian Federal Gov is supporting social cohesion. There is quiet but meaningful work being carried out across Australia by RfPA member organisations.

This careful work continues towards the Strategic Vision for Religions for Peace, *Building and Equipping Interreligious Councils (IRCs) for Action* (May 2020), under the six strategic goals to advance multi-religious collaboration: (1) Peaceful, just and inclusive societies (2) Gender equality (3) Environment (4) Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (5) Interreligious education and (6) Global partnerships. Australia has yet to walk far down the ambitious path mapped out by Secretary-General Karam for all national chapters, but we are aware of the four methods of operationalization outlined for the national IRCs: (a) advocacy (b) knowledge management (c) capacity building and (d) humanitarian support. In addition, we note the expected levels of competence to be reached by IRC development in (1) governance (2) gender mainstreaming (3) management and administration (4) program operations (5) institutional sustainability and (6) global affiliation and networking.

## **C. Youth**

Sarah Haggar represented Religions for Peace Australia at the recent Asia and the Pacific Youth Interfaith Network (APYIN) Youth Peace Camp held in Manila, Philippines, 5-8 February 2023. This was the first time many youth delegates were able to meet face-to-face since the last Youth Camp was held in 2019. Sarah joined over 30 youth representatives from the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Indonesia, and Australia in discussions on the topic of *Asia Youth as Peacebuilders*. At times there were over 60 people in attendance, all passionate about the role of Asia-Pacific youth in peacebuilding processes and interested in connecting with, and learning from, other regional youth leaders. While the APIYN youth camp workshops and presentations were educational, just as much was learned around the dinner table talking to delegates from across Asia, making friendships, and cultivating an environment of peace in practice. Sarah came home inspired by the level of enthusiasm and commitment shown by these young people from across the region stepping into roles of significant responsibility. Sarah's full report can be found here: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cSLkTSfXz--nMJSPW\\_AmMcyBA1wINvp3/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cSLkTSfXz--nMJSPW_AmMcyBA1wINvp3/edit)

## **D. Interfaith Harmony and Multifaith Chaplaincy**

The importance of creating understanding and deep friendships between peoples of all faith backgrounds in Australia and across the world has become ever more important with the recent rise of religious and right-wing extremism, ongoing examples of hate speech and vilification of several faith communities, including but not only Jewish, Sikh, Muslim, Hindu.

Religions for Peace Australia pays great attention to promoting interfaith harmony through developing and deepening friendships, understanding and mutual respect between peoples of many faiths who now call Australia home. This is put into practice through our interfaith prayers – with several online national events per year, and face-to-face gatherings in each State/Territory.

The two-year Multifaith Chaplaincy project funded by the Victorian Multicultural Commission is continuing. The project generated a useful website (see <https://www.multifaithchaplaincy.org.au/>) maintained by the RfPA Webmaster Rev Chris Parnell. This provides valuable information on the many various forms of chaplaincy taking place in Australia, currently encompassing the full range from Military, Health care, Education, Criminal Justice, Industrial, Sports, Migrant and Refugee, Youth and Emergency Services chaplaincies.

In South Australia, Emergency Services or *Disaster and Recovery Chaplaincy* training as it better known, is now being offered to people of all faiths. Adelaide now has Christian, Buddhist, Muslim and Jewish DRM chaplains trained and in active service supporting South Australians affected by recent damaging Black Summer bushfires (2019-20) and La Nina floods (2022-23). In time, we hope the circle of DRM Chaplains will continue to widen to include many faiths, so our carers can reflect the diversity of our Australian multifaith multicultural community. Rev Dr [Stephen Robinson](#) runs disaster chaplaincy training across Australia and the Pacific region – he is highly skilled and sought after as a speaker, trainer and mentor.

## **E. Climate Change and the Environment**

Climate disasters including the Pakistan floods highlight how vital it is to make swift genuine progress on climate action, including crucial next steps on Loss and Damage. Australia's delegation attended the 2022 [CoP 27 climate talks](#) in Egypt with a plan to reduce emissions and bring Australia back into the fold of countries taking genuine action. Yet, the frequency and intensity of extreme events continues to increase and current global commitments still fall short. We now have only seven (7) years to keep on track to keep global warming below 1.5oC.

Global oil and gas production must [decrease by 65% by 2050](#) to stabilize our climate, while developing any new oil and gas fields will prevent limiting global warming to 1.5°C or create stranded assets. Yet less than half the windfall profits to the oil and gas industry from the energy crisis go back into traditional supply and only a fraction into clean technologies ([IEA 2023](#)).

At the highest level, our faith communities and governments need to build capacity for swifter responses, and to help communities build long-term resilience to our changing global climate.

This resilience depends upon food and water security and adequate disaster preparedness. This resilience is largely supported by the ecosystem services provided by healthy biodiversity.

Australia's recent mega-floods and earlier Black Summer fires had a limited but significant impact on the price and availability of local fruit and vegetables for several months, so even our communities are not immune to the current impacts of climate change. Faith communities at the local and national level have worked hard to support those most affected and in greatest need.

RfPA continues to promote [faith-led climate action](#), including moves towards [fossil fuel divestment](#) led by the Australian Religions Response to Climate Change and others.

## **F. Standing with the Pacific**

As part of a nation that prides itself as being a good friend to Pacific Island communities, RfPA was glad to participate in local and national activities that drew attention to a global *Faiths for Climate Justice* (#F4CJ) *Interfaith Climate Statement* circulated in October 2022 by the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC).

RfPA is an affiliated member of ARRCC and co-signed an [Open Letter to Prime Minister Albanese](#). The [Media Release of 13 October 2022](#) is here alongside climate statements provided by a wide range of faith leaders. This Open Letter from 100 Faith and First Nation leaders from Australia and the Pacific humbly and respectfully requested that Australia:

- Actively participates in creating and endorses a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty
- Stops approving new coal and gas projects
- Ends public subsidies for coal and gas projects
- Fully respects First Nations peoples' rights to protect Country
- Re-starts contributions to the United Nations Green Climate Fund
- Assists extractive industry workers to prosper through jobs in sustainable industries.

In recognition the current level of global warming is not safe, this moment in history calls for an urgent, courageous, visionary response, especially from those in power. Australia's leadership in this response, as part of its First Nations Foreign Policy, is vital for the vulnerable communities and ecosystems who depend on it. There is an ongoing global campaign of faith leaders calling on governments to develop and implement a [Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty](#).

## **G. Peace, Defence and Nuclear**

*A Forum on Religion, Peace and the Moral Issues of Fully Autonomous Weapons* held on September 22 (the day after World Peace Day) was supported by RfPA and co-organised by Quaker Friends, SafeGround, the Stop Killer Robots Campaign Australia and Pax Christi. Quaker Presiding Clerk Bruce Henry welcomed everyone and gave the Acknowledgement to Country. Rev Chris Parnell outlined the underlying commitment to peace inherent in all major world religions. Matilda Byrne from Safe Ground provided a comprehensive outline of the dangers of producing and deploying weapons capable of self-identifying and firing upon targets. She also described the Australian Government's role in promoting research and development of

such weapons, largely in partnership with weapons manufacturers and university students. Australian Universities are now engaging our brightest young people in weapons development.

The short film *“Immoral Code”* was shown. It demonstrates the chilling way robots make all decisions based on simple yes/no answers, thus incapable of understanding context, or assessing proportionality of response. For example, an autonomous weapon might target and kill an injured combatant, incapable of understanding this is against International Humanitarian Law. Immoral Code can be seen here: <http://www.immoralcode.io/> . Background on the threat of autonomous weapons available here: <https://www.stopkillerrobots.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/17215.pdf> For further information, please see: <https://www.fesny.org/topics/sustaining-peace/> .

## NUCLEAR ESCALATION

The global situation of nuclear proliferation and nuclear threats has worsened significantly since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Serious concerns continue to grow about the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station in southeastern Ukraine, the largest nuclear power plant in Europe and among the 10 largest in the world, now occupied by Russia and vulnerable. The United Nations nuclear energy watchdog has said the [nuclear safety situation at the plant](#) was "extremely vulnerable" and underlined the need for international protection (22 May 2023).

Australia does not have a nuclear industry, but it mines and sells uranium to other countries that do. Traditional owners/First Nations in the state of South Australia have suffered greatly through several generations from the nuclear fallout from the [Maralinga bomb tests](#) and contamination from the massive Roxby/[Olympic Dam Uranium Mine](#). Current concerns include the planned imposition of an unwanted [nuclear waste dump on Barngarla sacred land](#) and a national proposal to invest in bringing [AUKUS nuclear powered submarines](#) into SA waters.

Religions for Peace Australia will continue to speak out against nuclear weapons and nuclear contamination and to speak for the rights and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who do not want this poison on their land, [Irati Wanti](#). RfPA will also continue to host events and commemorations to uphold peace and non-violence and to honour those who have suffered, particularly through the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. RfPA signed [Interfaith Statement](#) on the moral and ethical imperative for nuclear disarmament, ahead of Tenth Review of the [global Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons](#)

## CHAPTER REPORTS

*ACT: Canberra Interfaith Forum - Chair Dean SahuKhan*

Canberra Interfaith Forum successfully organised a public forum interfaith forum. The new Fijian High Commissioner attended a lively Girit evening held to commemorate and celebrate the 144<sup>th</sup> year since indentured Indian labourers were sent to Fiji to work on sugar plantations. Canberra Interfaith Forum is considering a permanent Youth event around Interfaith and its role in World Peace. Such a title could be “Interfaith Harmony for Global Peace”. It may take the form of an annual contest in which young adults are asked to present an essay and take part in an oratorical contest on the topic of Interfaith and World Peace.

*New South Wales: led by Josie Lacey OAM*

Our NSW state chapter has moved its meetings. Its members come from the Baha'i, Buddhist, Catholic, Coptic and Protestant Christians, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faith traditions. The Women's Interfaith Network continues its valuable work to meet regularly for sessions of shared prayers and cordial exchange of views and friendship. Our next meeting will be in the lovely Vedanta Hall, Croydon, hosted by Rev Gayatriprana Mataji, who agreed to be first speaker on the Topic "Afterlife in your religion" followed by a light lunch of Dahl, rice & salad

*Northern Territory NT: Edwin Lourdes Joseph*

Hon Mark Monaghan, Speaker of the NT Legislative Assembly, kindly hosted a protocol reception for the official Darwin launch of the NT Branch of Religions for Peace Australia in October. which will eventually be incorporated. Home Affairs organised representatives from all Muslim communities to meet Regional Director.

Ant-Discrimination Act Amendment bill has been introduced in the NT. The proposal includes a requirement for the religious institutions not to discriminate anyone based on their sexuality but discrimination is possible based on religious belief. A submission on Clause 12: *there is also a concern regarding the possibility of deliberately offending some religious or cultural sentiments. The clause suggests broadening the definition so appropriately trained or accredited assistance animals are used by people with a range of disabilities. Some religions regard some animals as unholy, and such cultural or religious beliefs should be taken into account. Section 21 should include a subsection to provide protection to people with genuine beliefs, even if not rational.*

*Queensland Faith Communities Council, RfPA Observer – Margaret Naylor*

The Qld Police service hosted an excellent Multi-Faith Dinner attended by the majority of QFCC Executive members, with a focus on up-and-coming youth leaders. A new umbrella body called Queensland Muslims Inc was launched at Qld Parliament House on Saturday 20 August. Thirty Muslim community organisations are members. QFCC to organise a Multifaith Prayer Service in the Upper Chamber of Qld Parliament

*SA: Multifaith Association of South Australia – President, Philippa Rowland*

An Interfaith Service of [Healing Prayers for a Wounded World](#) brought many faiths together at a time of acute crisis, with extreme weather events, growing conflict and invasion of sovereign nations. In 2023 Multifaith SA, Churches Together SA and Pinnacle College ran a [Multicultural Vigil to Support those Suffering Earthquakes, War, Grief and the impacts of Climate Change](#)

Four meetings in early May re-invigorated our *Interfaith Rapid Response Network*, enabling faith leaders to stay in touch and share information, ideas and solidarity. We discussed our *Commitment to Interfaith Harmony*, written before the Reclaim Australia riots of 2015 and first read aloud at Interfaith Prayer Services for the Christchurch Massacre. This provided a chance to discuss three elements of how our community can actively:

1. Respect traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodians of Australia
2. Respect the integrity of each other's beliefs, cultures and traditions and promote understanding
3. Respect the environment that sustains us all, and seek to live in harmony with nature and reduce the threat of climate change to our Earth and support vulnerable communities.

There was keen interest in re-starting our visits to places of worship, and also to places of ecological sustainability so we can learn more about care for biodiversity and the Earth.

*Meditate for Earth*, our silent peaceful meditation on Parliament House steps continues monthly.

### *Tasmania*

Convenor Terry Sussmilch, concerned about the rise of extreme right-wing groups, worked with Tasmanian police to arrange a workshop on *Protecting Our Places of Worship* held at the Hobart synagogue. The police wanted faith communities to strengthen their relationships with Tasmania police. Safety audits were conducted with six places of Worship (Ethiopian, Hindu, Buddhist Uniting Church, Brahma Kumaris and Sikh). They have also worked with the police to break down barriers for people of minority faith communities when reporting prejudicially targeted incidents and a training package developed. Diwali has been celebrated widely and this has become an invaluable process for welcoming new immigrants from the Indian Sub-Continent.

Two workshops have been conducted on Family Violence in collaboration with Tasmania Police and the Dept of Home Affairs. There is a large unmet need for information about the laws and rights victims of family violence among minority faith groups in Tasmania.

### *Victoria*

We are delighted that Rev Sandy Boyce has joined our committee from the Faith Community Council of Victoria and newly appointed Executive officer of the Victorian Council of Churches. Alongside its chaplaincy and video projects, RfP Victoria made a submission on the 2021 social cohesion consultation held by the Australian Minister for Migrant and Multicultural Services, highlighting the role of religion in social cohesion and the role of government in the governance of religion and religious diversity. In addition to its work on the Multifaith Chaplaincy Project and its COVID-19 work, the Victorian RfPA has continued its membership of the Victoria Police Multifaith Council, continued to be involved in particular with regard to gay conversion practices by any religious group which is now illegal. It also participated in the *Set Them Free* Initiative led by Melbourne's Anglican Auxiliary Bishops.

### *Western Australia – Professor Samina Yasmeen, UWA*

Jack an intern has been working through a list and contacting faith-based groups in WA. When ready they will call a meeting at Samina's centre at the University of WA. Some discussion was held on how art be a successful way means that can bring people of faith together.

On 25 November 2022, a national online meeting was held on Faith Communities Preventing Family Violence <https://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/?p=15842> . This and a subsequent national online meeting were both well attended, with participation from many jurisdictions and excellent input from experts from several States.

### **Web Master: Reports on Websites**

***Religions for Peace Australia website*** is averaging 208 new visitors per day, looking at 4-5pp per visit. Visitors mainly from Australia; Turkey, Saudi Arabia, UK, China, India, Sweden and the Russian Federation. Microsoft Bing has been on site 18,034 times this year.

Downloads are

- \* Importance of Interfaith Dialogue (CIF) \* Golden Rule of Interfaith
- \* Diverse Faiths of Tasmania \* 2022 Multifaith Calendar
- \* JINAPAÑJARA - Buddhist Recital to overcome Sickness and Disturbances

- \* Chaplaincy and Special Spiritual Care
- \* Child sex abuse and the Catholic Church
- \* Living the Change Seminar & Living the Change in Multicultural Australia

**Multifaith Education Australia** averages 65 new visitors per day, looking at 2/3 pages per visit. Visitors from the US, Australia, South Africa, Iran, Ukraine, India, Poland, Lithuania, and then Indonesia. Visitors from Ukraine are not surprising, in the light of events in that nation.

**Popular downloads are:**

- \* Interfaith Education Guidelines
- \* Buddhist Instructor Guide Materials \* Discovering Buddha
- \* Sikh Awareness Presentation
- \* Baha'i SRI Program Materials
- \* Celebrating Together - NSW HSIE
- \* Code of Conduct for SRI teachers and \* Hinduism SRI Term 1

**Multifaith Chaplaincy Website** approx 29 (new) visitors per day, looking at c 3 pages per visitor. Visitors from Australia, USA, Russian Federation, Lithuania, Great Britain, Canada, Sweden, India, Germany and France.

**Popular downloads on this site are, inter-alia:**

- \* Guide for Movement Chaplains
- \* ICV Handbook Caring for Muslim Patients
- \* Inclusivity in UK Pastoral, Spiritual, and Religious Care: A Humanist Perspective
- \* SCA Capability Framework 2020
- \* Non-religious spirituality
- \* Three Short Case Studies of Non-Religious Spiritual Care
- \* Reflective paper for leaders: Chaplains can be a key treatment resource in secular workplaces
- \* Chaplaincy in General Practice
- \* Grossholme: Beliefs nurture Chaplaincy
- \* Position Description - Muslim Chaplain

**Recent Significant Meetings with Faiths/Faith leaders attended by the Chair of RfPA:**

*Celebrations of Swami Narayanan organisation (BAPS) in the Sydney Opera House and the Adelaide Convention Centre for centenary celebrations their Guru and fifth spiritual successor Pramukh Swami Maharaj. (<https://pramukhswami.org/>). There are Swami Sri Narayan Temples being built around Australia, eg [in Adelaide](#), with growing recognition of the significant community service carried out by BAPS during the Covid Pandemic.*

*Hosted Interfaith visit of Venerable Galkande Dhammananda Thero, Executive Director, [Walpola Rahula Institute for Buddhist Studies](#) in Sri Lanka. Ven Dhammananda is actively engaged in promoting social justice and harmony for an inclusive plural society. He actively used social media to propagate nonviolence during recent interreligious and interethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka. Some of his videos on 'Bahujana Hitaya' (for the betterment of all) are on YouTube. This link offers one of his presentations in UK: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fmgyN78nrA>*



*Girmit Celebration of the Fijian Indian community* (Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist) 144 years since sent by the British as indentured labour to work on sugar plantations in Fiji. Hosted by Canberra Interfaith Forum Sri Kanti-lal Jinna AO in the new ACT Hindu Temple and Community Hall. Keynote speakers Dean Sahu Khan and Fijian High Commissioner Mr David Kolutagane

*2023 Australian Sangha Association (ASA) and Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils (FABC) dialogue* between ASA, FABC and Home Affairs to facilitate communication on visa requirements for visiting monks and nuns. (See YouTube video: [Visas for Monastics](#) )

### **Religions for Peace Australia 2023 Annual General Meeting**

RfPA will conduct its 2023 AGM in Canberra on 18 June 2023. Our Guest Speaker will be Professor Nicole Asquith of UTAS, Professor of Policing and Emergency Management, who is the Convenor of the Australian Hate Crime Network. She will be speaking about her extensive work supporting vulnerable people who face hate speech and targeted violence in our society. See this link for further information: <https://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/?p=16832>

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