



Te Tari Matawaka
Office of Ethnic Communities

Conversations with Aotearoa New Zealand's Muslim communities:

growing understanding after
the Christchurch terror attacks
on March 15, 2019.



Acknowledgements:

The 250 people from Aotearoa New Zealand's Muslim Communities who attended these dialogues participated as volunteers, and willingly shared their knowledge and lived experiences with us.

Attendees helped to create a picture of where government can focus efforts to make a difference for Muslim and wider ethnic communities.

We greatly appreciate their time, their willingness to share, and their support for this piece of work.

Malo 'aupito, Jazākom Allāhu Khayran, mihi koe koutou katoa.

Te Tari Taiwhenua
Department of Internal Affairs/
Office of Ethnic Communities



Foreword: Minister for Ethnic Communities, Hon Jenny Salesa

As-salāmu ‘alaykum, Kia ora koutou katoa, Mālō e lelei and Greetings everyone.

The Christchurch terror attack on March 15, 2019 was an event that shook Aotearoa New Zealand, and the world, to our core. It was especially shocking for our ethnically diverse and multifaith communities.

It is a priority for the Government to reassure ethnic communities that we continue to live in a country that is inclusive. That is why we have responded to ensure the community is safe. We have built international partnerships through the Christchurch Call to Action, developing the Crisis Response Protocol with global technology companies to prevent social media being used again in the way it was on March 15. We swiftly brought in firearms legislation that banned and bought back dangerous weapons. We have also set about a major review of policies around hate speech, Human Rights, and how we counter violent extremism online.

We are committed to building a country where every New Zealander remains proud to call Aotearoa home.

Under the leadership of our Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, we reached out to Muslim communities, as part of the healing process after March 15, to hear from women, youth, Imams, leaders and interfaith leaders. We listened to the long-term issues that need to be addressed and heard your ideas on how to respond. This includes tackling the racism and Islamophobia that underpinned the terrorist attack.

During the months of June and July 2019, I hosted dialogues with Muslim communities from around the country, supported by the Office of Ethnic Communities. Several themes emerged.

This report presents these themes and explores opportunities provided for us to work together to counter racism and religious discrimination, as well as to ensure communities are safe, and our country is more welcoming and inclusive of all people regardless of ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status.

I humbly thank all of you who contributed to this important work.

I would like to acknowledge all of the victims of March 15, families and loved ones. It is to all of you that we dedicate ourselves to building an inclusive society where everyone comes home safe from a mosque, synagogue, gurdwara, temple or church, every single time.

Hon Jenny Salesa

Minister for Ethnic Communities

Aotearoa New Zealand is home to many diverse Muslim Communities

In the 2018 Census, 61,455 New Zealanders identified as Muslim. Media coverage in our country tends to present a single view of what it is to be a Muslim but Aotearoa New Zealand's Muslim communities are incredibly diverse and represent a range of ethnicities.

Following the March 15 attacks, the Government felt it was important to hear directly from Muslim communities about what was critical to them, and what changes would help create a more diverse and accepting society.

The Minister for Ethnic Communities, Hon Jenny Salesa, held 13 meetings with approximately 250 Muslim women, youth, Imams and community leaders across Auckland, Hamilton, Napier, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin through June and July 2019. Participants reflected the diversity within Muslim communities and represented a range of organisations - including regional Muslim associations, student associations, non-profit and community organisations and groups.

Minister Salesa attended all meetings to specifically ask attendees for suggestions on what the Government should do to provide more support. What the Minister heard will shape Government's longer-term response to the March 15 attacks.

Discussion focused on safety and wellbeing, and how to grow a more inclusive Aotearoa New Zealand. The Office of Ethnic Communities (the Office) specifically asked, "what practical steps can we take to improve social inclusion, and enhance intercultural and interfaith unity?"

This report presents the key themes from the dialogues and identifies opportunities for addressing these themes through the Government's work programme.

Attendees noted the issues and themes discussed during these dialogues are not specific to Muslim communities and are relevant for many ethnic communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

What we heard – in summary

Across the meetings with women, youth, Imams and community leaders, the Office heard common messages around safety and wellbeing, the role of the education system in promoting diversity, the need for equal employment opportunities (including opportunities for government to lead by example), and the role the media can play in helping people understand diverse cultures and religions.

Safety and wellbeing

- Communities' sense of safety and wellbeing was adversely impacted by the terror attacks. The healing process will continue for some time.
- Women especially feel vulnerable due to the way their clothing can visibly identify them as Muslim.
- While awareness of, and support for, Muslim communities has increased, hate speech, racism, and Islamophobia persist in face-to-face interactions as well as online.

The role of the education system in promoting diversity

- The education system, including continuing education and professional development, needs to reflect our increasingly diverse society by providing fit-for-purpose education and training for cultural and religious awareness.

- Unconscious - and sometimes conscious - bias continues to be experienced in our learning environments and education system.
- Learning environments must support an understanding of cultural and religious diversity, and ensure practical support is available by providing appropriate resources, for example, prayer rooms.

Equal employment opportunities

- Create equal employment opportunities for all and acknowledge that some groups -for example Muslim women - face higher barriers to entering and progressing in the work force.
- Employers need to look at how to incorporate cultural and religious diversity in workplaces.

The role of the media

- There must be better use of media to share positive stories in which diverse communities see themselves reflected.
- We all have a role to play in engaging with media in an informed way to counter narratives that perpetuate stereotypes, bias and misinformation.

What we heard – in detail

Safety and wellbeing

Attendees at all sessions were asked to reflect on their safety and wellbeing, and to share their reflections if they felt comfortable to do so.

The Office heard mixed experiences and emotions - while many feel physically safe (or safer) compared to other countries, their mental and/or emotional wellbeing has been affected by the terror attacks, acknowledging that the healing process will be slow and will take time.

Attendees told us that their sense of safety and wellbeing was further compromised and they felt a need to be more vigilant – to know escape routes, note who is around, and to know what places to avoid at night. Women especially told us they feel vulnerable because for many their clothing visibly identifies them as Muslim.

People acknowledged and appreciated the support from wider communities and noted the increased awareness of Islam and open discussions about culture, religion, racism and discrimination. However, it was also highlighted how racist, hateful and Islamophobic comments continue and, in many instances, had in fact become more overt, either face-to-face or on social media.

Participants also reported mixed experiences at school and workplaces. Some had experienced a lot of support, while others described schools and workplaces that showed either no or limited reaction to the terror attacks, and appeared not to consider the impact of these attacks on either individuals or wider communities.

Overall, feelings of vulnerability, reduced mental wellbeing and incidents of racism appear to outweigh positive feelings and experiences.

“Develop and support grass roots programmes. We need more understanding of how to access funding, how to get training for media, how to advocate – for example, through mental health initiatives.”

The role of the education system in promoting diversity

The Office heard, particularly from Muslim youth, the curriculum at all levels needs to better reflect the diversity of our student body by including lessons on different cultures, religions, minority groups and their history, and multiculturalism. The teaching of Aotearoa New Zealand history and understanding of tikanga Māori also needs more emphasis.

Muslim women and youth in particular told us that schools need to take a leadership role in providing a learning environment that fosters inclusivity and promotes the value of diversity while also addressing discrimination, racism, Islamophobia and bullying.

We heard that in order to understand diversity in a meaningful way students need opportunities to be exposed to diverse environments such as marae, places of worship, and other experiential learning environments.

There was a strong feeling that action is needed from educators at all levels when acts of racism are reported, with particular expectations of senior staff within the education sector.

All of the groups represented at hui strongly stated that cultural awareness and bias training should be regularly integrated into professional development for teachers, public servants, health care professionals (e.g. nurses), and business in general. This training could extend to what people should do when they witness acts of racism.

“There is a lack of complaints processes in universities; and it would be good to see some thoughtfulness about our faith – for example not scheduling exams during Eid.”

Equal employment opportunities

Muslims, especially women who wear hijab or burqa, told of facing barriers entering and progressing in the labour market, particularly in the private sector. There was a strong feeling that employers have limited understanding of Muslim employees’ needs.

We heard that participants want businesses to embrace a diverse workforce and increase corporate social responsibility. Businesses have room to improve hiring processes so they are more inclusive, and less affected by bias. There is room to create better work environments for diverse staff, for example allowing for prayer time and providing prayer space.

The lack of employment opportunities increases vulnerabilities for families and poses barriers to thriving communities. More initiatives to support people into work, and to help them access employment information would be welcomed.

There needs to be wider acknowledgement of the benefits of a diverse workforce, and more work done to build inclusive workplaces and create equal opportunities.

“Bring in cultural sensitivity training, start with government. Put it in codes of conduct – if the public sector is not doing it then why would others be inspired to do it?”

The role of the media

Everyone expressed how media have a responsibility to provide balanced news stories that allow for diverse perspectives, and raise awareness on issues such as racism, discrimination and Islamophobia. There was a strong feeling that Aotearoa New Zealand media outlets do not meet these responsibilities and needed to be held accountable for the way news is portrayed.

Attendees were clear that there is a role for all members of communities to engage with the media in a proactive way, and to encourage the media to highlight the many positive stories from throughout communities. People want to see media coverage normalising diversity by including messages of inclusivity.

Muslim women and youth told the Office how important it was to see Aotearoa New Zealand's diverse communities – including Muslim communities – positively reflected in the media through the news, TV shows, documentaries and social media.

Everyone agreed that by committing to include more diverse content, the media could play a key role in normalising diversity and supporting positive attitudes about different cultures and religions in wider Aotearoa New Zealand society.

“Although we have very capable people there is a lack of Muslims in national leadership positions. We are not visible as New Zealanders as much as we are as Muslims.”



Other themes raised and discussed

- Public spaces and public services need to be culturally appropriate and tailored to the needs of communities.
- Identity is complex and cannot be represented by a simple “tick box”. We must acknowledge each other as “New Zealanders” and move beyond the “us and them” narrative and stereotypes.
- Both government and communities have a responsibility to empower people to be the best they can be in a society that values equal opportunities and equal representation.
- Government and public services need to lead by example in addressing racism, hate speech, discrimination and Islamophobia, and create an environment of inclusion and acceptance.
- Resources need to be allocated to build strong and connected communities across the country.
- Greater outreach and a focus on commonalities can bring diverse religious communities closer together.

Focus: Muslim Leaders' Dialogue

The Muslim Leaders' Dialogue in Auckland brought together Imams and community leaders from across Aotearoa New Zealand for a day of discussion.

Discussion centred around the key themes that were raised in the other dialogues. However, there was broad discussion around mental health, and attendees advised there needs to be more targeted mental health support for Muslim men.

“In terms of mental health, we tend to keep a lot of things in ourselves. For Muslim males to talk about our feelings we require more nudging to open up”.

The younger attendees at the Leaders' dialogue held quite different views on issues, particularly around opportunities to participate in their wider community. This aligns strongly with discussions at the youth dialogues.

“Why do we not go collecting for cancer charities alongside other members of society? We need to integrate Muslim perspectives into wider society through individual and community action. We want the community to engage with Christian denominations to learn about their strategies for dealing with issues – for example drug and alcohol abuse.”

Focus: Muslim Youth

Conversations at the Muslim youth dialogues focused on the same key themes that emerged in all the discussions, around safety and wellbeing, education, employment and the role of the media.

In addition to this, the Muslim youth representatives had a clear focus on the need for youth voices to be reflected in any conversation with Muslim communities, and particularly highlighted that youth in all communities have a key role in leading the changes they want to see in our society.

“The youth right now will be leading NZ in the next few years. If they are neglected the future might not change.”

Youth attendees had a strong focus on the need for more culturally supportive public spaces and services – for example, youth centres. They discussed the need for more diverse youth representation in communities and suggested there is a role for local councils to help give youth a voice.

Youth attendees were clear that there is value in reaching out past their own communities, and want to take a more active leadership role within their Muslim communities. They see celebrating cultural identity and sharing celebrations with wider communities as important, and that initiatives to support diverse communities (including tangata whenua), co-operating and interacting with one another to create unity, as the key to building understanding.

“Don't expect people to understand and know you, if you are not willing to get to know them.”

Focus: Muslim Women

In the dialogues with Muslim women, the discussions on safety and wellbeing was strongly focused on how many Muslim women feel their visibility as a Muslim is greater than with many Muslim men.

Those who wear hijab or burqa explained that they felt even more visible following the March 15 attacks, and this affected their sense of safety and wellbeing. Women also reported that wearing hijab and burqa presented a real barrier to employment.

“It feels as though there is a certain image of what a New Zealander is, and I don’t seem to fit that description.”

Attendees want acceptance of diversity and difference and felt there was room for an ongoing public awareness campaign to encourage people to appreciate the growing diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand. Public seminars to unravel common stereotypes and to raise awareness would be beneficial.

“If we look at nature, it is full of different plants and colours; and together it is beautiful.”

Discussion stressed the role of the education system, both from the perspective of female students and from mothers supporting their children through their education.

Attendees felt that more leadership is needed in schools to create inclusive and immersive learning environments. They also focused on the need for professionals in all fields – particularly education – to receive cultural awareness and bias training.

Discussion also had a strong focus on what could be achieved through supporting grass roots initiatives, and attendees were clear that both government and communities have a responsibility to empower people to be their best within a society that values equal opportunities and representation.

“Allow for a cohesive sense of identity – (I want to) be able to bring all of who I am, and it is acceptable and welcome.”



Office of Ethnic Communities: Responding to what was heard

Supporting the Christchurch recovery

The Office of Ethnic Communities is one agency responsible for supporting the Government's Christchurch recovery priority. There is a specific work programme in-place for Christchurch and advice from those who attended the dialogues has further sharpened our work.

Actions:

The Office is:

- working with Muslim women's groups to identify and progress community-led responses to safety and wellbeing themes raised by women at the dialogues. This work will form part of a pan-ethnic approach to better support the wellbeing and participation for Muslim women;
- supporting several Muslim youth programmes and groups with capability building projects focused on areas such as mental health, leadership, wellbeing and participation;
- providing interim coordination and secretarial support to the Christchurch Muslim Liaison Group;
- widening and deepening our connection with Muslim leadership groups including Muslim Association of Canterbury, Linwood Islamic Charitable Trust, and the Bishopdale Mosque;
- providing support and resources for broader community-led initiatives arising from the Open Space Forum - a community-led, two-day workshop that identified focus areas for Muslim communities to build capacity, participation, and inclusion as well as focus on areas of development that are important to them;
- establishing a network to provide ongoing peer and professional support for Muslims employed by the public service in Christchurch;
- creating and supporting opportunities for Muslim and non-Muslim communities to connect with one another such as local Ethnic Leaders' forums; and
- in partnership with the Christchurch City Council and the Ministry for Social Development, facilitating the Community Activation Fund that provides small grants to community groups developing activities and events that promote social inclusion and wellbeing.

Wider Support for Communities

Attendees talked about government supporting grass roots community-led action, and helping communities understand how to access funding and other government support.

The Office administers the Ethnic Communities Development Fund (ECDF) that provides funding for community-led initiatives.

As a result, the Office has:

- received from government an increase in funding, from \$520,000 to \$4.2 million, per annum for the ECDF to support research projects, and multi-year funding for programmes of work;
- included a specific focus on social inclusion, community development, education, and employment as part of a wider review of the priorities of the ECDF in the light of increased funding; and
- made funding available throughout the year with decisions being made within eight weeks from receipt of application.

Actions:

The Office will:

- work with groups needing assistance with developing their projects, provide language assistance if required, and generally work alongside groups if they would like our support; and
- run funding workshops throughout the year that can be tailored to different ethnic communities including Muslim communities.

Safety and Wellbeing

The Office has been part of broader conversations regarding the right for people and their whānau to safe and peaceful worship, and to be free from harm. As a result, we have supported:

- priority communities to access the Safer Communities Fund to ensure mosques, synagogues and other places of worship are safe places of peaceful worship; and
- colleagues within the Department of Internal Affairs to develop potential initiatives to counter violent extremism online.

Actions:

The Office will work with:

- the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Justice on the focus area to ensure children live free from racism and discrimination (as part of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy);
- the Ministry of Justice and other government agencies on the Joint Venture for Eliminating Family Violence and Sexual Violence to develop a National Strategy to address family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa New Zealand;
- the Ministry of Justice on the review of hate speech and freedom of expression, and introducing new legislation designed to strengthen our counter-terrorism laws; and
- the Ministry of Health and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission response to the He Ara Oranga Report on the Government's inquiry into mental health and addiction.

Education

The role of the education system in addressing stereotypes, racism and discrimination was a strong theme of discussions.

There is already a significant programme of reform underway, led by the Ministry of Education, to reshape Aotearoa New Zealand's education system. This includes workforce development, response to Tomorrow's School report, Early Learning Strategy, revising the National Education and Learning Programme, and Reforming the Vocational Education System.

The Office will continue to work with the Ministry of Education to ensure that what we have heard through these dialogues is fed into their work. However, there are specific actions that we can undertake.

Actions:

The Office will:

- explore what resources have been developed to grow intercultural/diversity awareness in classrooms;
- support the development of resources that explain ethnic diversity and intercultural awareness; and
- develop a cultural competency framework (in addition to Māori and Pacific Peoples) for teacher professional development and practice.

Employment

The Office will continue to work with the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment to support delivery of a national employment action plan for refugees, recent migrants and ethnic communities.

The Office will contribute to this plan by specifically looking at how to remove barriers and the practical steps that can be taken to help employers – and future employees.

Actions:

The Office will:

- use what we have heard through the dialogues to help shape our work on the national employment action plan for refugees, migrants and ethnic communities;
- explore avenues for employment pathways and opportunities for ethnic communities to gain experience, for example through internship or graduate programmes; and
- work with the State Services Commission to look at how we can further support work to increase the diversity of the public service.

The role of the media

We all have a role to play in influencing how communities are portrayed in the media.

Actions:

The Office will:

- identify other government agency support for media training for Muslim Communities and look to coordinate with them;
- investigate what resources are currently available to support communities to tell their stories and connect communities with resources training and funding;
- work with community groups to identify community leaders and spokespeople that could benefit from media training, and fund and host training for these community members to attend;
- identify work already underway for non-profit organisations to counter existing negative stereotypes in media and to identify ways in which we could support this work; and
- compile a contact list for mainstream media interested in covering ethnic community news and a list of ethnic community media that can both be hosted on our website.

Your thoughts on this report can be emailed through to ethnic.communities@dia.govt.nz