



Position Paper

October 2012

**Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations
(APRO)**

***Addressing Religious Discrimination in
Australia***

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1. About APRO

The Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations (APRO) is a peak body that was established in 2003 to help build interfaith harmony in Australia in the context of heightened global conflict and terrorism.

APRO is unique in that it comprises representatives of major religious bodies as well as national-level multicultural community organisations. APRO is a practical demonstration of how successfully diverse religious communities can work collaboratively in Australia. We consider this work vital to our goal of helping to build a harmonious community in Australia. APRO believes that any social inclusion agenda should include support for the hugely important interfaith work now being done in Australia and internationally.

This paper was written with secretariat support from the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), the peak national body representing the interests of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

2. Introduction

We, the members of the Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations (APRO), are proud to live in a country that embraces and celebrates religious diversity, and says a very public ‘no’ to racism and discrimination. Our legislative protections, social policy agenda and plethora of community-based anti-racism initiatives are testimony to the fact that racism and discrimination are unacceptable in Australia.

Within the ongoing national discussion about ways of ensuring that all members of our community are able to participate in all areas of public life in equal measure, without fear of discrimination and racism, there is one area that we observe has received less consideration. This is the area of discrimination and racism experienced by members of the community because of their faith. This discussion is becoming increasingly pressing as today’s racism and discrimination, it has been demonstrated, is often in fact premised on religion.¹ For this reason we have seen it pertinent to develop this position paper.

Australia in 2012 is a country that has an extraordinary level of religious and cultural diversity. The recent release of the 2011 census data has confirmed that near 70% of all Australians profess a religion,² and that this 70% is made up of adherents of a multitude of different faiths.³ While we recognise that secularism is also an important tradition in Australia, we cannot underestimate the role that faith plays in the lives, and the identities, of many Australians.

Despite this pervasive impact of faith in Australia, it is a sad reality that some of our community members have faced, and continue to face, discrimination and racism in their everyday lives because of their faith. At times this extends to harassment, vilification and in some instances violence.

This position paper will consider the nature of racism and discrimination experienced in Australia on the basis of religion, and will also look to what we, as a responsible community, can do to eradicate these incidents and promote and support a harmonious multi-faith and multicultural Australia.

¹ See for example: Dreher, T (2006), *Whose Responsibility? Community Anti-Racism Strategies after September 11*, UTS Press at <http://www.stepono.org.au/media/1703/whose-responsibility.pdf>, at page 2.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007), *Media Fact Sheet - Census shows non-Christian Religions Continue to Grow at a Faster Rate* at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/7d12b0f6763c78caca257061001cc588/6ef598989db79931ca257306000d52b4!OpenDocument> and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), *Cultural Diversity in Australia – Reflecting a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census* at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features902012-2013>.

³ Ibid.

The paper seeks to highlight issues for consideration by government, religious and community leaders, and the community at large, to ensure that Australia both protects the inherent right to freedom of religion and sends a clear message that discrimination and racism on the basis of religious belief is unacceptable and, indeed, in many instances, unlawful.

2.1 Summary of Recommendations

Education

APRO Recommendation: That adequate focus be placed in the incoming Australian National Curriculum on education about Australia’s faith diversity, and encouraging appreciation and understanding of the concept of faith.

APRO Recommendation: That faith communities be consulted in an ongoing manner during the development and roll-out phases of the Australian National Curriculum.

APRO Recommendation: That youth-focused interfaith programs continue to be supported and promoted.

Community Leadership and Interfaith Activities

APRO Recommendation: That ongoing government funding be made available to support interfaith activities in Australia.

APRO Recommendation: That religious and community leaders be encouraged to promote and embrace opportunities for engagement in interfaith dialogue and activities at all levels.

APRO Recommendation: That interfaith activities be conceptualised broadly – recognising that discourse should be the first step to broader engagement.

Political Leadership

APRO Recommendation: That the Parliamentary Friends of Interfaith Group host an appropriate annual celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week in the Federal Parliament every February.

APRO Recommendation: That government policy establish a greater focus on ensuring that members of religious groups do not experience discrimination and racism because of religious beliefs held.

APRO Recommendation: That political and other religious and community leaders actively speak out against persecution, discrimination and racism experienced by religious communities in all parts of the world.

Legislation and Regulation

APRO Recommendation: That greater consistency be sought across jurisdictions to protect against discrimination and racism perpetrated on the basis of religion.

APRO Recommendation: That consideration be given to extending the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) to include legislation that addresses and protects against religious discrimination in Australia. In undertaking this reform, the community must be consulted on the question of exemptions.

Employment

APRO Recommendation: That all employers, having regard to situations where adherence to a particular religion is a necessary qualification, be given clear information to clarify their responsibilities in relation to ensuring that discrimination is not suffered in the employment sphere on the basis of religious belief held.

APRO Recommendation: That complaints mechanisms available to address discrimination in employment be well promoted, and be made accessible (in particular through the use of interpreters) to all members of the community in order to ensure their effectiveness.

Funding and Support

APRO Recommendation: That funding be made available for peak interfaith agencies such as APRO so that they can continue and extend their operations.

3. Terminology

In this paper we speak of ‘religious discrimination’, as well as ‘discrimination’ and ‘racism’ experienced on the basis of faith, and we use these terms broadly and holistically. When we speak of discrimination and racism, we mean action (both covert and overt) which prevents the equal, safe, engagement in public life by members of the Australian community. This can take the form of experienced prejudice and injustice or harassment, violence, vilification or exclusion from opportunity.

While the term ‘racism’, in its strictest form, may be seen to be limited to acts perpetrated against an individual because of their ‘race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin’,⁴ we have chosen, in this paper, to use the term more broadly.⁵ Our usage extends the definition of this term to members of all religious groups in Australia. We recognise that using the term ‘racism’ in this context may not be viewed by all as the most appropriate terminology, as adherents of a single faith may certainly come from many different cultural backgrounds. However, we do feel that in this instance, in the absence of a similarly descriptive term coined in the context of religion, ‘racism’ is the term best placed to accurately describe the lived experience of some community members.

⁴ See for instance the definition of ‘racial discrimination’ in *the Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) s9 (1) – “It is unlawful for a person to do any act involving a distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of any human right or fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.”

⁵ The approach of including ‘religion’ within the scope of the definition of ‘race-based discrimination’ has at times been used – see for example: Klocker, N, Trennery, B and Webster, K (VicHealth 2011), *How does freedom of religion and belief affect health* at <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Freedom-from-discrimination/Freedom-of-religion-and-belief.aspx> at page 3.

4. Our Cultural and Religious Diversity

Australia is a culturally and religiously rich nation.

In 2012, 26% of us were born overseas. This figure extends to nearly one in two of us if we include those who have a parent who was born overseas. We come from across the globe, with growing numbers from outside of Europe – in particular from India and China.⁶

While the level of religious adherence in Australia has remained fairly consistent at near 70% in recent years, the diversity of religious adherence is ever evolving, reflective, in particular, of our recent waves of migration. For instance, the 2011 Census demonstrated an increased affiliation with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.⁷

We also recognise the traditions of secularism in Australia, and support the right to profess no religious belief (as identified by 22.5% of the population in the 2011 Census).

We believe that this position paper is equally relevant to those who profess no religion, and to those who do. The perpetrators of discrimination and racism come from all quarters, and we all share the responsibility to act to prevent such discrimination.

5. Freedom of Religion in Australia

Australians of all faiths and no faith are very fortunate to live in a country that works to protect the inherent right to freedom of religion – through our Constitution (s116), our accession to a number of UN Conventions which protect freedom of religion including *the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*, and through a number of State and Territory laws which seek to ensure that discrimination and vilification on the basis of religious belief are unlawful. **Nonetheless existing protections can be strengthened to ensure consistency of protection across jurisdictions and to more thoroughly implement international law into Australia’s domestic law.**

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), Cultural Diversity in Australia – Reflecting a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features902012-2013>.

⁷ Ibid.

We note here, in particular, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which we contend must be the starting point for any discussion around the protection of freedom of religion in Australia, which states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Recently the scope of religious freedom in Australia was considered in depth through the 2011 Australian Human Rights Commission's *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century* report. This seminal report not only considered the importance of religion in the lives of Australians, but also, as a result of a series of consultations, was able to garner a diversity of opinion around perceptions of Australia's religious character, and to hear varying views as to the need, and manner, of legislating to ensure freedom of religion is protected. What became very clear through the findings of this Inquiry was that there are no easy answers when it comes to the 'scope' of freedom of religion (and within this discussion the scope and limits of freedom of speech) and the very manner in which faith should be protected in 21st century Australia.⁸ Indeed, within the wider membership of APRO itself there are differing perspectives as to how the right to freedom of religion should best be protected and promoted.

However, APRO contends here, as we did in our contribution to the *Freedom of Religion and Belief* consultation process, that a key component of protecting freedom of religion, in Australia is working to actively end discrimination on the basis of not only race, but also religion. Australia has a responsibility to take proactive measures to ensure a harmonious society that embraces cultural and religious diversity.⁹

⁸ For more information please see: Australian Human Rights Commission (2011), *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century* <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/frb/report/index.html>

⁹ Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations (2009), *APRO Submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission on Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century*, at http://www.fecca.org.au/images/stories/pdfs/APRO_AHRC.pdf.

6. Religious Discrimination and Racism in Australia

Faith tradition is often inextricably linked with cultural and ethnic identity, with religious practice at the root of many cultural traditions. For instance we know that religious dress and ceremony can be inextricably linked with cultural identity. For this reason it can be difficult at times to determine whether discrimination and racism as experienced by members of faith based communities is as a result of their cultural background or their faith, or indeed a combination of both. Discrimination can also be compounded by other issues including gender and sexuality.

What we do know is that some members of faith based communities do experience discrimination and racism at least in part because of their faith. This is reflected in the results of the recent Scanlon Foundation Surveys – *Mapping Social Cohesion* - which revealed that, in 2011, 14% of respondents had experienced discrimination on the basis of **skin colour, ethnic origin or religion** over the past 12 months, up from 10% in 2009.¹⁰ Given this reality it is imperative that we work to recognise that faith can, and is, often a grounds of discrimination and can be an inherent element of racial discrimination more broadly.

Racism can take different forms. At times victims of racist conduct are targeted in a random manner, identified by their visual appearance. The 2011 NGO report to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination considered the harassment of Muslim women in the street which has seen women insulted, pushed, spat at, assaulted and having their hijabs pulled.¹¹ At other times, racism manifests through vandalism of religious places of worship – such as mosques, synagogues¹² and Hindu temples.

We also know that religious discrimination is on the rise, with reports that some faith communities, including the Muslims and Sikh Communities have, in particular faced increased racism since 2001.¹³ Annual Reporting from the Australian Jewish Community has also continually revealed the high level

¹⁰ Markus, A (2011) *Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation Surveys Summary Report 2011*, Monash University at: <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/mapping-population/--documents/mapping-social-cohesion-summary-report-2011.pdf>.

¹¹ *Freedom, Respect, Equality, Dignity: Action*, NGO Submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Australia (2010) at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngos/NAACLCHRLRC_Australia77.pdf at page 16.

¹³ Ozdowski, S (2003). 'Religious hatred in Australia' *Australian mosaic magazine* Issue 2. P. 4.

¹⁰ Dreher, T (2006), *Whose Responsibility? Community Anti-Racism Strategies after September 11*, UTS Press at <http://www.stepone.org.au/media/1703/whose-responsibility.pdf>.

of incidents of racist violence against Jewish community members – including physical violence, vandalism, harassment and intimidation.¹⁴

When it comes to equal access in areas of public life such as employment, an area where we have some strong state/territory based legislation which prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, we unfortunately still see that some members of faith communities feel that their employment opportunities are limited by discrimination,¹⁵ and this is evident through the many complaints received by the Australian Human Rights Commission on this matter.¹⁶

We also note here the following statements made by members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities who attended the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia's (FECCA) 2011 Access and Equity consultations.¹⁷

'I find I am faced with a lot of racism from employers who would rather have an Australian 4th/5th/6th generation working for them, than an ethnic person who is Muslim. However, my strong attitude to life is making me persevere no matter what setbacks I may come across, and I still treat my boss and co-workers with respect and with kindness even though they hold such strong racial thoughts.' - Access and Equity Survey respondent

'I keep a positive attitude although am faced with racism. I keep my religion hidden from colleagues.' - Access and Equity Survey respondent

6.1 The Impact of Racism and Discrimination

In 2011, Vichealth undertook a significant study - *'how does religion and belief effect health and wellbeing?'* In considering experiences of religious discrimination, what the researchers identified

¹⁴ 517 incidents were reported in 2010/2011, this being 38% higher than the average over the 21 year reporting period. This annual reporting is undertaken by Jeremy Jones AM – see: Jones, J (2011), *Report on Anti-Semitism in Australia – 1 October 2010- 30 September 2011*.

¹⁵ *Freedom, Respect, Equality, Dignity: Action*, NGO Submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Australia (2010) http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngos/NACLCHRLRC_Australia77.pdf at page 106.

¹⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission (2009-2010) *Annual Report*.

¹⁷ Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) (2010), *The Quest for 'a Level Playing Field'* FECCA Access and Equity Report 2010-11 at http://fecca.org.au/images/stories/pdfs/submissions_2011060.pdf.

was that such discrimination can be associated with a range of poor social and economic outcomes, this extending to reduced social cohesion and social connection and reduced morale and productivity in the workplace and in education. In particular the study highlighted the link between depression, anxiety and other forms of mental illness and experienced religious discrimination.¹⁸

Key reasons that racism must be eradicated have also been recently outlined in Australia’s National Anti-Racism Strategy. These include:

- Racism can shatter confidence
- Racism can undermine the ability to perform at work or in study
- Racism can affect physical health and life expectancy
- Racism locks people out of social and economic opportunities, entrenching disadvantage¹⁹

Moreover, racism and discrimination fracture us as a society, and prevent us from forming a cohesive and productive community. It is therefore imperative that we work as a community to prevent all forms of racism and discrimination – as this has no place in our democratic society.

7. Addressing Religious Discrimination and Racism in Australia: APRO Recommendations

This section is broken up into key areas for consideration. Each section works to consider what can be done going forward and concludes with a number of APRO recommendations.

7.1 Education

The teaching of respect and understanding for people of different religions should begin in the home and extend to the place of worship, the community, and especially the classroom.

¹⁸ Klocker, N, Trennery, B and Webster, K (VicHealth 2011), *How does freedom of religion and belief effect health* at <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Freedom-from-discrimination/Freedom-of-religion-and-belief.aspx>.

¹⁹ Australian Human Rights Commission (2011) *National Anti-Racism Strategy* at <http://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/files/National%20Anti-Racism%20Strategy.pdf>

We believe any Australian National Curriculum must ensure that students are exposed to concepts of faith and ethics, in a safe environment which promotes acceptance of difference of belief. All students need to be ‘religiously literate’ in order to live in our multi-faith, multicultural Australian society.

We support the call by the Religions, Ethics and Education Network of Australia (REENA) for focus on ensuring inclusion of the study of religions and ethics (from religious and non-religious perspectives) in the Australian National Curriculum and their call for a review of Special Religious Instruction in all Government Schools.²⁰

APRO also supports educational interfaith programs that aim to break down notions of difference, instead focusing on how students can work together.²¹

With new and emerging forms of racism, including cyber-racism and other forms of online hate, we also believe that students must be educated that such forms of bullying and harassment are absolutely unacceptable, and this extends to harassment on the basis of faith.

APRO Recommendation: That adequate focus be placed in the incoming Australian National Curriculum on education about Australia’s faith diversity, and encouraging appreciation and understanding of the concept of faith.

APRO Recommendation: That faith communities be consulted in an ongoing manner during the development and roll-out phases of the Australian National Curriculum.

APRO Recommendation: That youth-focused interfaith programs continue to be supported and promoted.

²⁰ Religions, Ethics and Education Network of Australia (REENA) website homepage - <http://www.reena.net.au/>.

²¹ See for instance the ‘Goodness and Kindness Program’ (Jewish Christian Muslim Association of Australia & The Together for Humanity Foundation) at http://www.stepone.org.au/media/2138/goodness_and_kindness_project.pdf.

7.2 Community Leadership and Interfaith Activities

APRO strongly supports the funding and facilitation of interfaith activities at the international, national and local levels.

Opportunities for interfaith dialogue, be they in the schoolyard or the boardroom, allow fear to be dissipated, and for members of different faith groups to identify commonalities.

However, it is time for interfaith to be taken to the next level, and this includes taking a ‘proactive’ rather than simply a ‘reactive’ approach when it comes to interfaith activities. As Professor Camilleri, founding director of the Centre for Dialogue at La Trobe University, identified in his 2009 article for *Australian mosaic* magazine, **“dialogue is not first and foremost about putting out bushfires, though it can certainly help. It is about prevention rather than cure.”**²² Strategies identified in this article included organising regular conferences to consider the outcomes of the many interfaith activities already in operation, and encouraging different faith communities to work on social initiatives together in pursuit of a common good.²³

The responsibility to encourage such interfaith activities should be shared, in part falling to religious and community leaders themselves. As the Australian Baha’i community highlighted in their submission to the 2011 *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century* Inquiry, religious leaders have a very important role to play, and it is imperative that they work to encourage an appreciation of Australia’s diverse society and promote tolerance and the protection of human rights wherever possible.²⁴

²² Professor J.A Camilleri,(2009) ‘*Interfaith Dialogue: the next phase*’, *Australian mosaic Magazine* – Interfaith and Inclusion (issue 21).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Australian Baha’i Society (2011), Submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission – *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century* at <http://www.bahai.org.au/Discover/WorkingforChange/Interfaith.aspx>.

We assert that religious communities have the potential to work cooperatively through interfaith dialogue, and within a social inclusion framework, in educating against racism and guarding against extremist behaviours.

APRO Recommendation: That ongoing government funding be made available to support interfaith activities in Australia.

APRO Recommendation: That religious and community leaders be encouraged to promote and embrace opportunities for engagement in interfaith dialogue and activities at all levels.

APRO Recommendation: That interfaith activities be conceptualised broadly – recognising that discourse should be the first step to broader engagement.

7.3 Political Leadership

It is imperative, in multi-faith Australia, that our political leaders speak out regularly in support of religious freedom in Australia and against all forms of discrimination and racism, and that all community members share the responsibility to demonstrate religious tolerance and reject all forms of discrimination and racism.

We are very pleased that the Government's 2011 Multicultural Policy – *The People of Australia* put the spotlight on our multicultural society, and on the formulation of a national anti-racism strategy for Australia. We hope that future policies, at both the National and State level, continue to focus on these issues.

In 2011 APRO ran a successful Parliamentary Interfaith Roundtable in Canberra. This event demonstrated bipartisan support for the interfaith movement, and demonstrated a commitment to supporting Australia's religious diversity. Following this event a permanent Parliamentary Friends of Interfaith Group has been established to continue this positive agenda, a development that APRO warmly welcomes.

Australia also has a responsibility to speak out against the discrimination and racism being experienced by religious groups worldwide. It is imperative that we act as a responsible global

citizen and work towards a framework of tolerance and harmony at an international level. We ask that our political leaders, as well as our religious and other community leaders, ensure they work to promote and protect human rights in this manner.

APRO Recommendation: That the Parliamentary Friends of Interfaith Group host an appropriate annual celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week in the Federal Parliament every February.

APRO Recommendation: That government policy establish a greater focus on ensuring that members of religious groups do not experience discrimination and racism because of religious beliefs held.

APRO Recommendation: That political and other religious and community leaders actively speak out against persecution, discrimination and racism experienced by religious communities in all parts of the world.

7.4 Legislation/Regulation

Discrimination and vilification perpetrated on the basis of religion are currently legislated against in an inconsistent manner across jurisdictions in Australia.

For instance, at the national level there is no express protection against religious discrimination, only protection, in the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth), on the basis of ‘race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin’.

Anti-discrimination legislation in New South Wales includes ‘ethno-religious origin’ in the definition of race, but does not include ‘religion’ per se. As a result some, but not all religious groups fall within the purview of this legislative protection.

Victoria, the ACT, Queensland, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and WA, however, provide remedies for religious discrimination, including on the grounds of ‘religious belief or activity’ or ‘religious or political conviction’. Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania also prohibit vilification on the ground of religion.

Article 4 of the ‘Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief’, proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in November 1981, clearly articulates the obligation of States:

1. All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.
2. All States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.

In this light, APRO believes it would be desirable to work towards a more consistent legislative framework, and that consideration should be given – bearing in mind the considerations noted under the section on ‘Freedom of Religion in Australia’ - to making religious discrimination unlawful at the national level, particularly within the framework of the current review to consolidate commonwealth anti-discrimination legislation.

However, we highlight here, that while legislative development is certainly important, it is often through social and educational initiatives, which encourage and promote tolerance and understanding, that much of the good work to counter religious discrimination can be done.

APRO Recommendation: That greater consistency be sought across jurisdictions to protect against discrimination and racism perpetrated on the basis of religion.

APRO Recommendation: That consideration be given to extending the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) to include legislation that addresses and protects against religious discrimination in Australia. In undertaking this reform, the community must be consulted on the question of exemptions.

7.5 Employment

It is a sad reality that some members of our community are unable to attain, and participate in, employment in equal, safe, measure.

The Australian Human Rights Commission, exercising its responsibility to seek to conciliate complaints of discrimination in employment on the basis of religion, in order to meet Australia's obligations under International Labour Organization Convention No. 111, has reported that 16.8 % of the ILO complaints it received in 2009-2010 related to discrimination on the basis of religion, demonstrating that this is indeed a significant issue.²⁵

From discussions with our constituents we know that a key issue in relation to employment discrimination is covert/systemic racism and discrimination, which operates to exclude highly skilled potential employees. This is particularly troubling during a time when Australia is seeking to strengthen and grow its workforce.

Some workers may also face overt and violent forms of racism within the course of their employment. As recently as October 2012, there have been reports of racial abuse against workers, in particular cab drivers, as they seek to go about their day to day work. The NT News reported on 12 October 2012 the horrifying incident of an Indian born Sikh Taxi driver being racially abused and bashed by drunken passengers, with his Turban pulled off during the attack. Sadly this type of attack was not an isolated incident.²⁶

What we know, from our constituents, is that incidents of faith-based discrimination and racism very frequently go unreported due to shame, fear or unfamiliarity with complaints mechanisms. It is therefore imperative that there are processes in place to encourage and support communities to be heard, and to reinforce the message that discrimination and racism are unacceptable forms of behaviour.

APRO Recommendation: That all employers, having regard to situations where adherence to a particular religion is a necessary qualification, be given clear information to clarify their responsibilities in relation to ensuring that discrimination is not suffered in the employment sphere on the basis of religious belief held.

²⁵ Australian Human Rights Commission (2009-2010) *Annual Report*.

²⁶ Meagan Dillon and Nigel Adlam, *Sikh Cabbie Racially Abused and Bashed in Darwin*, (12 October 2012) *NT News*.

APRO Recommendation: That complaints mechanisms available to address discrimination in employment be well promoted, and made accessible (in particular through the use of interpreters) to all members of the community in order to ensure their effectiveness.

7.6 Funding and Support

Finally, we call here for increased and continuing funding and support for not only peak interfaith agencies such as APRO, but also for programs operating at the grassroots level which work to foster religious understanding and tolerance and which support interfaith activities at the local level. Without support for the advocates in this arena, the importance that faith plays in the lives of very many Australians can go unrecognised, and the experiences of faith communities (be they positive or negative) can go unheard.

APRO Recommendation: That funding be made available for peak interfaith agencies such as APRO so that they can continue and extend their operations.

8. Conclusion

We recognise that in Australia we are fortunate to live in a country that seeks to protect freedom of religion and in which we are able to practice our faiths openly and proudly.

However, through this position paper APRO has sought to draw attention to the very real plight of Australians who face discrimination and racism simply because of their faith, and to highlight issues for consideration by government, religious and community leaders and the community at large, so that religious discrimination in Australia becomes a relic of the past.

We commend the recommendations in this position paper.

Appendix: Membership of APRO

Members

National Council of Churches in Australia
Muslims Australia (Australian Federation of Islamic Councils)
Executive Council of Australian Jewry
Australian Baha'i Community
Australian Sangha Association
Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils
Sikh Community
Hindu Council of Australia

Associate Members

World Conference on Religion & Peace
Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia
Australian Multicultural Foundation
Federation of African Communities Councils
National Council of Migrant Resource Centres and Migrant Support Agencies

Academic and community advisors:

UNESCO Chair in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations, Asia Pacific

Key Resources

- Australian Human Rights Commission (2011), *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century* <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/frb/report/index.html>.
- Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations (2009), *APRO Submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission on Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century*, at: http://www.fecca.org.au/images/stories/pdfs/APRO_AHRC.pdf.

- Dreher, T (2006), *Whose Responsibility? Community Anti-Racism Strategies after September 11*, UTS Press at <http://www.stepona.org.au/media/1703/whose+responsibility.pdf>.
- Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), *Australian mosaic* magazine, issue 2 (articles of faith), issue 21 (Interfaith and Inclusion) and issue 31 (Fighting Racism and Discrimination in Multicultural Australia).
- CERD NGO Committee (2010) *Freedom, Respect, Equality, Dignity: Action, NGO Submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Australia* http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngos/NACLCHRLRC_Australia77.pdf
- Klocker, N, Trennery, B and Webster, K (VicHealth), *How Does freedom of religion and belief affect health* (2011), at: <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Freedom-from-discrimination/Freedom-of-religion-and-belief.aspx>.
- Markus, A (2011) *Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation Surveys Summary Report 2011*, Monash University at <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/mapping-population/--documents/mapping-social-cohesion-summary-report-2011.pdf>.