

**World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) operating as Religions for Peace  
Australia ABN 49 320 161 142**

## **RELIGIONS for PEACE AUSTRALIA**

### **ANNUAL REPORT 2018– 2019**

This report of Religions for Peace Australia for 2018 – 19 has been prepared for the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Australian chapter of Religions for Peace in Canberra (June 17th, 2019) and for the annual executive meeting of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace in Japan at Osaka on 10<sup>th</sup> – 13th April, 2019.

This year's report cannot but be overshadowed by the recent atrocity in Christchurch in New Zealand where 50 Muslims, mostly male, were massacred by an Australia white supremacist. I would like to begin this year's report by having a minute's silence and the recitation of a Muslim prayer for peace based on the Qur'an (49:13, 8.61):

*In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful*

*Praise be to the Lord of the universe who has created us and made us into tribes and nations, that we may know each other, not that we may despise each other. If the enemy incline towards peace, do thou also incline towards peace, and trust in God, for the Lord is the one that hears and knows all things. And the servants of God, Most Gracious, are those who walk on the Earth in humility, and when we address them, we say "PEACE".*

The perpetrator came from a small, very Anglo-city of Grafton on New South Wales' north coast with extremely few adherents of faiths other than Christian. In his journeys across Europe and in his fraught digital journey, he took exception to the fact that two mosques had been built in a city whose very name is associated with the Christian tradition but where there is a significant white supremacist group. This has led to some deep soul-searching in both sister countries, including in New Zealand where gun control laws have been passed in imitation of the laws introduced into Australia in 1996 following the Port Arthur massacre. In Australia, the owners of social media have been called to account, and laws have been passed for them to take more responsibility for the material they allow or do not allow to be published on their social media outlets. In New Zealand, the interfaith movement has struggled to deal with a situation in which the New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, showed high levels of leadership. The movement is highly decentralized and does not have a strong national core. But New Zealand has shown very strong solidarity with its fellow Muslim citizens.

#### **Linking with GreenFaith/Australian Religious Response to Climate Change**

Over the past twelve months, Religions for Peace Australia has continued its important work both in Australia and in overseas contexts. The new key development for 2018-19 has been the linking with the organization, Australian Religious Response to Climate Change, led by Thea Omerod. Philippa Rowland, head of our South Australian affiliate, was the key link person in celebrating *Living the*

**Change** during October 2018 where, as members of diverse faith communities who care for Planet Earth, we came together to share stories of change, transformation and regeneration. This linkage is continuing and leading members of RfP Australia are undergoing training to be spokespersons on environmental and climate issues. RfP Australia was associated with nine such events around Australia.

In the previous month, in my role as Deputy Moderator, I led a delegation to China of Religions for Peace Asia, for a symposium on *Religion and Ecological Civilization*. Dr. Wu Zeze, head of the Policy Research Center for the Environment and the Economy within China's Ministry of Ecology and the Environment, outlined how 70 per cent of China's energy comes from coal which remains king in China and which leads to the catastrophic conditions in China's cities such as Beijing. China, being very aware of its vulnerability to climate change, has been working intensively to lower its reliance on coal. Much emphasis was being placed on green mountains and green hills and the development of renewable energy sources. Another strategy has been to have showcase projects to transform local ecologically damaged environments such as the Pujiang project which, after severe damage done by factories, especially a crystal glass factory, the Jinshi Lake and the Tongle Ecological Corridor have been transformed, complete with an interpretation centre to document what has been achieved since China embarked on its ecological refurbishment strategy in 2008. But China's progress may be impeded by internal contestation, low public- and private-business participation and China's commitment to the global market.

### **G20 Interfaith Summit, Buenos Aires**

The 2018 G20 Interfaith Summit, the fifth to be held since the first in 2014 at Surfers' Paradise, was again organized by our Queensland affiliate, Griffith University's Centre for Interfaith Dialogue and Culture led by Dr Brian Adams and held in late November, 2018 in Buenos Aires where it received much help from the Argentinian government and a message from the Argentinian Pope. Its theme was *Building Consensus for Fair and Sustainable Development* with four sub-themes: (1) Inequality, religion and the future of work, (2) Religion, environmental change and a sustainable food future, (3) Urgent priorities for social cohesion and (4) Religion, good governance and sustainable development. Emphasis was placed on victims of human trafficking, child exploitation, the education and permanent relocation of displaced peoples and the affirmation of human dignity. It was attended by over 300 from more than fourteen religious and interfaith organizations, intergovernmental (e.g. UNHCR) agencies and various INGOs and human rights agencies. Plans are in hand for the 2019 Summit to be held in Osaka and the 2020 Summit to be held in 2020 in Saudi Arabia. A detailed report on the Argentinian Summit is available from the Centre's website.

### **Other International Interfaith Activity**

Religions for Peace Australia has been involved in other international activities. In February 2019, Dr Sue Ennis and Dr Brian Adams represented Australia at the consultations for the World Assembly held in Yangon in Myanmar. In November 2018, Professor Des Cahill was invited by the Bangladesh chapter to speak at an international conference held in Dhaka on the theme of *World Peace through Interfaith and Intrafaith Dialogue*. His paper was entitled *The Role of Religious Leaders in the Creation of Peace, Social Cohesion and Religious Dialogue in the Context of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Asia*.

In February 2019 he was invited by the national chapter in South Korea to the World Peace Gathering and the International Conference commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March 1<sup>st</sup> 1919 Movement. This was the first non-violent resistance protest organized by 33 mainly religious leaders

against the Japanese occupation which had begun in 1910. Professor Cahill represented Australia as one of the thirteen international representatives to pray for peace at the border of the demilitarized zone in a telecast across the Republic of Korea after South Korea's seven major religious prayers had each prayed in their own tradition – the seven had in the previous week been in North Korea visiting its religious leaders. Professor Cahill's paper was entitled, *The Mixed Legacy of Religion and Religious Leadership in Resistance Movement: Reflecting on Korea's 1919 March 1<sup>st</sup> Movement*. Both papers are available on [www.religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au](http://www.religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au)

### **Report – Interfaith Activity in Australia**

Our secretary, Dr Sue Ennis, completed her survey and overview of interfaith activity across Australia. A project such as this had never previously been completed 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. It has become an invaluable document, especially in our interaction with Commonwealth and State political leaders where the Victorian chapter has been endeavouring to gain funding for an induction program for newly-arrived immigrant and refugee religious leaders who number approximately 2,000 per year who come either on a temporary or permanent settlement basis.

Last year, we reported on our overview on multifaith chaplaincy. Currently, we are in discussions with Melbourne's University of Divinity as to deliver possible courses in chaplaincy so as to overcome the dearth of appropriate chaplaincy training programs for current or future chaplains.

### **Website Report**

Our website, [www.religiousforpeaceaustralia.org.au](http://www.religiousforpeaceaustralia.org.au), continues to forge ahead, under the global-roving eye of our webmaster, Rev. Chris Parnell, providing an unparalleled service to Australia and the world. As anticipated in last year's report, the number of hits or total page views for the first time topped the million with a total of 1,059,701, an increase of 15.7 per cent from the previous year. The number of unique visitors was 47,116, an increase of 22.3 per cent. There was a rise in the number of visitors from Australia while others were from (in order) the United States, China, Turkey, Germany, France, Canada, Poland, India, Great Britain and The Philippines.

The five top downloads were in order: (a) The Golden Rule of Interfaith, (b) Discovering Buddha: Sample for Special Religious Instruction (c) Confusions about Multiculturalism (d) Interfaith and Social Cohesion in Australia: Looking to the Future and (e) the G20 Interfaith Summit. The five top search terms were: (i) religion and climate (ii) interfaith in Australia (iii) multifaith (iv) learning interfaith and (v) religious leaders peace conference.

### **UN Interfaith Week Addresses**

With the leadership of the Canberra Interfaith Network, Religions for Peace Australia again sponsored the UN Interfaith Week Address during early February in Parliament House working in tandem with the Parliamentarian Friends of Multiculturalism, Russell Broadbent (Liberal), Maria Vamvakinou (Labour) and Senator Richard Di Natale (Greens). The speaker this year was a very forceful Rabbi Morris Feldman, an orthodox rabbi from the local Canberra community, who lamented the rise in the number of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim attacks across Australia. He felt that the so-called honeymoon period soon after WWII when societies were very committed to addressing anti-Semitism in the aftermath of the Holocaust is coming to an end as younger generations do not have the historical memory for the evil of the Holocaust and a record number of Jewish people are leaving

European countries. He spoke of the ‘dignity of difference’ and emphasized the centrality of Israel for the Jewish people. About 100 people attended the event, including several key politicians.

In Melbourne, Religions for Peace Victoria in conjunction with Melbourne University’s chaplaincy sponsored the UN Address with Professor Gillian Triggs, an international law expert and formerly head of the Australian Human Rights Commission who clashed repeatedly with governments over the treatment of asylum seekers. She spoke about the right to religious freedom, and its legal complexities in the Australian judicial system.

### **State and Territory Affiliates**

In addition to the above initiatives, our state chapters and affiliated bodies continue to be very active, and we continue to work towards the establishment of a state chapter in Western Australia. Interaction, the youth network, is currently in a dormant state but we hope to take some new initiatives in the next little while.

In New South Wales, the state chapter led by Josie Lacey continues to have its regular meetings in the State Parliament House and the Women’s Interfaith Network continues its valuable work to meet regularly for sessions of praying and cordial exchange.

In addition to its work on incoming immigrant and refugee religious leaders, Victoria organized its own Living with Change event, and has continued its membership of the Victoria Police Multifaith Council though this will likely change in the next 12 months following the formation of the Police Multifaith Youth Advisory Committee. Professor Cahill will remain on the Council because of his academic expertise.

Besides its G20 work, the Queensland Centre for Interfaith Dialogue and Culture organized a series of public fora on *Who is My God?*, as well as a student networking initiative on Global Connections. It also cosponsored with Believing Women in a Peace Walk against Domestic Violence, plus multifaith dinners and Compassionate City workshops. It also engaged in Community Dialogues with the Anti-Discrimination Commission of Queensland.

In Canberra, the Canberra Interfaith Forum under the leadership of Dean Sadhu Khan celebrated the seventh anniversary of the establishment of its Environmental Meditation and Healing Garden just off the road to the airport, planting another 200 native shrubs after the Aboriginal elder, Tyrone Bell, conducted a ‘Welcome to Country’. It conducted a Multicultural Community Forum to celebrate Family Week and the importance of family. On two separate occasions the International Day of Peace was celebrated in September, and its AGM was conducted at the Theo Nataras Multicultural Centre in October.

The South Australian chapter, beside its leadership in the environmental initiatives, introduced an interfaith panel discussion to the local Anti-Poverty Network and it continued its Music and Poetry evenings. It also continued its meetings with other faith leaders to discuss joint commitment to inter-faith harmony.

Our Tasmanian chapter held a meditation session with the Aboriginal community called Meditators without Borders, and participated in a research project on interfaith activity in Tasmania as part of a broader research project across Australia. The Multifaith Centre at the University of Tasmania after damaging floods has been refurbished and it became the site for the celebration of the UN

International Day of Peace. It also worked with the Hindu community in a celebration of Diwali in Franklin Square. It continued its representation on the Multicultural Society of Tasmania.

### **Thanks and Two Congratulations**

I want to thank all the members across Australia for their support and great work. Everyday, both nationally and internationally, religion continues to figure very prominently in many and varied ways. Our work is important and is part of building a multicultural and interfaith society.

Lastly, I want to finish off by congratulating two great women interfaith leaders who have had very praiseworthy milestones over the past twelve months. Firstly, I want to congratulate Rev. Helen Summers, who has been a member of our executive over many years, and is one of the great pioneers of interfaith in Australia. She has been the director of the Interfaith Centre of Melbourne since its foundation. Her Centre was awarded the King Abdallah II World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize for her committed work over many years. His Majesty King Abdallah II was awarded the 2018 Templeton Prize on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018, in the Washington National Cathedral, and one of the world's foremost Muslims gave a special address in response. He said that as Muslims "*we are working on every continent to defend Islam against the malignant sub-minority who abuse our religion. And we do this not to please our friends, not to please the world, but to please God. And as long as there is life in our bodies and faith in our hearts, we will continue to do so... ..The great commandments to love God and to love our neighbour are found again and again in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other faiths around the world. It is a profound message, calling every one of us to look beyond ourselves. And this outward insight is the source and hope of all co-existence. And when we ask about hope and co-existence, no issue is more important than Jerusalem*".

The second congratulation is for Mrs Josie Lacey, chair for so many years of Religions for Peace New South Wales and of the Women's Interfaith Network. Late in 2018 she published her autobiography, *An Inevitable Path – A Memoir*. She arrived in Australia as a little girl with her Jewish parents in January 1939, fleeing Europe just before the Holocaust enveloped Europe, including many of her own family. Josie has been a prodigious community worker for her own community, for the migrant communities and for Religions for Peace. A recent heart attack has not slowed her down. The very first paragraph of her book sums up her attitude to and learnings from life: *In one corner of my dining room are sepia-toned portraits of my large and proud Central European family. The people are in their formal Shabbat clothing. This photograph is of a golden wedding anniversary, a joyous occasion. However, many of the members of this family were not permitted to grow older. Staring out at the camera are representatives of three decimated generations. Some might say it is a highly active life I lead, but I see it as a life with no time to lose. To not honour my commitments would be tantamount to dishonouring the memory of my family and my people.* We thank her for the gift of her story and what she has given to community work.

Desmond Cahill (Emeritus Professor),  
Chair, Religions for Peace Australia,  
April 2019.

**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	181,897	1.02	Baptist	345,142	-02.09	+16.90
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
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