

This letter is in response to your e-mail sent to us at the Auckland Inter-Faith Council on 10 February 2021. Thank you for your request for us to share our ideas for the New Zealand Government Action Plan. We understand that there is an international agreement to make the government more open, transparent and accountable in their decision making, to improve how government incorporates the needs of all citizens in their policy making, and to encourage active citizenship, contributing to changes at the community or national level.

AIFC Background

Auckland, with over 220 recorded ethnic groups, is one of the world's most culturally diverse cities. Every neighbourhood has people of many faiths living side by side. To enhance social cohesion and help prevent misunderstandings or prejudice, it is important for people to be able to learn about religious beliefs and practices, and dialogue with those from other faiths.

Established in 2003, Auckland Inter-Faith Council (AIFC) was formed to provide a platform for inter-religious dialogue and networking, and to create a model showing cooperation among religions. We are a voluntary non-profit association of persons from diverse faiths and religious traditions run by a committee of eleven volunteers from various faith traditions who meet regularly. Wherever possible committee members act on behalf of, and are supported by, their respective faith's leadership and community. AIFC offers public events that are held at different community and faith venues throughout the greater Auckland region. We also assist faith groups and government initiatives with public events, such as local and national services and remembrance events and celebratory occasions, by providing speakers from our committee of interfaith leaders.

As an initial response, we respectfully request the following three points to be included in the Action Plan. We request that the New Zealand Government:

- 1. Consider interfaith and faith groups as a significant sector for creating social cohesion, harmony and cooperation among religions.**

AIFC promotes and facilitates constructive engagement between different faith and belief communities across Auckland through dialogue, educational activities, civic involvement and the promotion of religious equality. Because of this long-time experience, and the diversity of our faith groups and committee faith leaders, AIFC is uniquely positioned to advance ethnic and religious cooperation and support communities at the grass-roots level in times of change and challenge.

- 2. Ensure there are consistent, effective and timely means of communication both ways between the New Zealand government and its relevant ministerial offices and AIFC.**

Because our volunteer faith leaders often hold full-time community responsibilities and work off-peak hours, we request to be notified as early as possible in order that we may attend and contribute effectively to governmental consultations and events.

- 3. Consider AIFC as a regular key community resource able to offer constructive consultative expertise and thought leadership for inter-religious dialogue, cooperation and social cohesion.**

With its nearly 20 years in the interfaith sector, AIFC can provide a wealth of experience and resources to support local interfaith groups, communities, situations and the general public.