

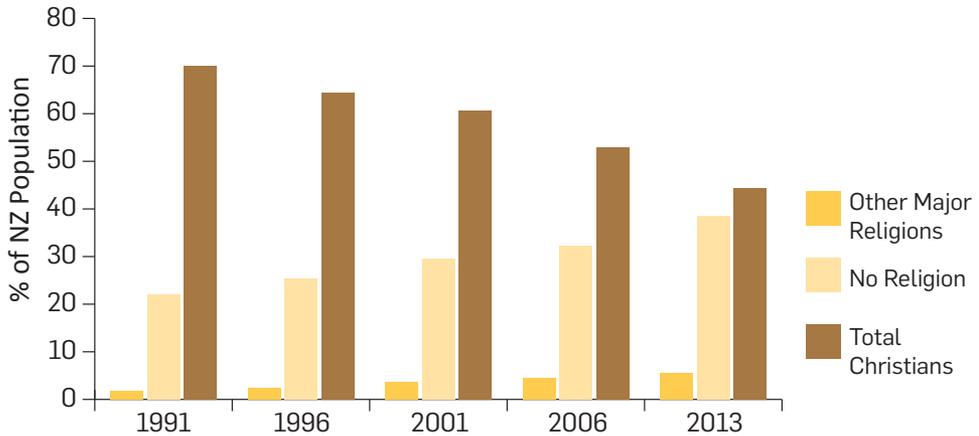
# Religious Diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand



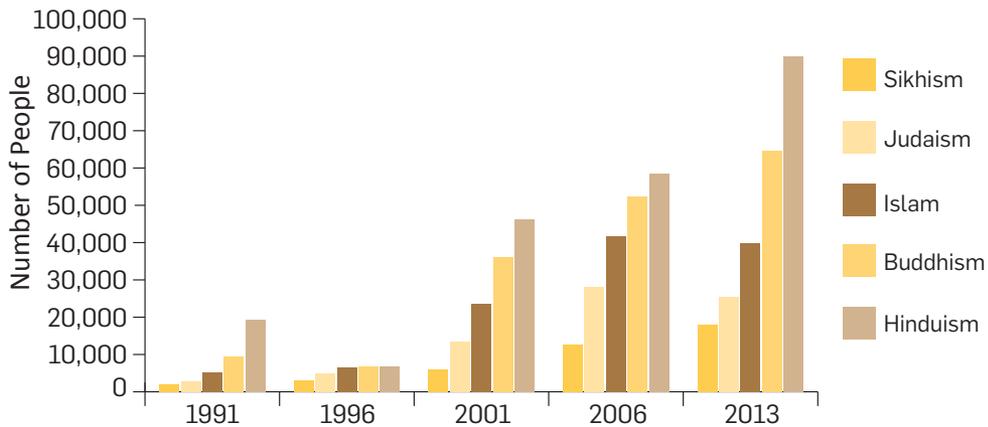
July 2019

Statement on Religious Diversity

## Religious diversity in New Zealand 1991–2013



## Growth of other major religions in New Zealand 1991–2013



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News and information about the statement and other religious diversity issues is available at [www.hrc.co.nz](http://www.hrc.co.nz) [www.rdc.org.nz](http://www.rdc.org.nz) and [www.interfaith.org.nz](http://www.interfaith.org.nz). Translations of the statement are also available in Te Reo Māori, Arabic, Chinese (traditional and modern), Gujarati, Hindi, Korean, Lea Faka Tonga, Le Gagana Samoa and Punjabi. These are available at [www.hrc.co.nz](http://www.hrc.co.nz) or [www.interfaith.org.nz](http://www.interfaith.org.nz).

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July 2019

## **Prime Minister's Foreword to the Third Edition**

This edition of The Statement on Religious Diversity is published in the wake of the Christchurch terrorist attack on 15 March 2019.

That day will be forever etched in our collective memories as the day a simple act of prayer led to the loss of 51 lives. The day that families practising their faith and religion in a place of peaceful worship lost their loved ones, and people in the surrounding community lost neighbours, colleagues and friends.

However, we also remember that day for the way New Zealanders of all beliefs reached out and supported the Muslim community in their grief. In the aftermath of this attack, New Zealanders reaffirmed our commitment to a culturally and religiously diverse society, a society that rejects racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance.

The Statement on Religious Diversity sets out the principles that such a society is built upon. It was first published in 2007 and endorsed by a wide range of faith communities, with a second edition following in 2009. This third edition reflects the changes in our religious demography during the last decade. New Zealand is now the 15th most religiously diverse country in the world, sitting between Malaysia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. We are more diverse than Australia, Britain and Canada, and markedly more so than the United States of America.

The statement provides a basis for ongoing discussion and action on religious diversity in New Zealand. It sets out principles which are grounded in international human rights treaties and the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, including:

- the right to safety and security
- the freedom of religion, conscience, and belief
- the freedom of expression
- the right to reasonable accommodation of diverse religious practices in various settings.

The statement also emphasises that the State seeks to treat all religious communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law. It encourages education about our diverse religious and spiritual traditions, respectful dialogue, and positive relationships between and among religious communities, and between government and religious communities.

It offers a framework within which religious issues can be discussed both by faith communities themselves and within the wider New Zealand community.

This is all the more important after the events in Christchurch on 15 March 2019.

I hope that the statement will encourage all New Zealanders, no matter what their faith or ethical belief, to feel free to practise their beliefs in peace and within the law, and to respect the right of others to do the same.

**Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern**

Prime Minister

July 2019

## **Statement on Religious Diversity**

New Zealand is a country of many faiths. Increasing religious diversity is a significant feature of public life and includes those who profess no religion.

At the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, Governor Hobson affirmed, in response to a question from Roman Catholic Bishop Pompallier, that “the several faiths (beliefs) of England, of the Wesleyans, of Rome, and also Māori custom shall alike be protected”. This historic affirmation is the foundational basis for acknowledging the diversity of beliefs in New Zealand.

Tangata whenua, the first people of Aotearoa New Zealand, observed religious and spiritual practices often closely associated with the land and the sea. Today Māori spirituality remains a unique and integral part of national life.

Christianity has played and continues to play a formative role in the development of New Zealand, in terms of the nation's identity, law, culture, beliefs, institutions and values.

New settlers have always been religiously diverse, but recently some of their faith communities have grown significantly through migration from Asia, Africa and the Middle East. They too have a positive role to play in New Zealand society. It is in this context that public recognition of the right to religious freedom, together with the associated responsibilities of religious communities, must be recognised and upheld.

International treaties, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, uphold the right to freedom of religion and belief: the right to hold a belief; the right to change one's religion or belief; the right to express one's religion or belief; and the right not to hold a belief. These rights are reflected in the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act and the Human Rights Act. The right to religion entails affording this right to all and not infringing upon the human rights of any.

**The following statements provide a framework for the recognition of New Zealand's diverse faith communities and their harmonious interaction with each other, with government and with other groups in society:**

### **1. The State and Religion**

The State seeks to treat all faith communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law. New Zealand has no official or established religion.

### **2. The Right to Religion**

New Zealand upholds the right to freedom of religion and belief and the right to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of religious or other belief.

### **3. The Right to Safety**

Faith communities and their members have a right to safety and security.

### **4. The Right to Freedom of Expression**

The right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media are vital for democracy but should be exercised with responsibility.

### **5. Recognition and Accommodation**

Reasonable steps should be taken in educational and work environments and in the delivery of public services to recognise and accommodate diverse religious beliefs and practices.

### **6. Education**

Schools should teach an understanding of different religious and spiritual traditions in a manner that reflects the diversity of their local community and the national context.

## **7. Religious Differences**

Debate and disagreement about religious beliefs will occur but must be exercised without resort to violence and within the rule of law.

## **8. Cooperation and Understanding**

Government and faith communities have a responsibility to build and maintain positive relationships with each other, and to promote mutual respect, understanding and cooperation.

## **Origins of the Statement**

The development of a national statement on religious diversity was proposed by the New Zealand Interfaith Delegation that attended the Asia-Pacific Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2004. The dialogue was convened by Asia-Pacific governments in response to religious conflict in the region and around the world.

### **The initial rationale for the statement was fourfold:**

- 1.** There was a need for discussion and dialogue about religious diversity among faith and interfaith groups and the wider New Zealand public. A national statement could be the focus for such a discussion, but it should arise out of public discussion rather than be developed and issued by the government.
- 2.** Around the Asia-Pacific region many instances of religious discrimination were noted. It was seen that the religious rights of citizens were often not clear, particularly for minority groups. It was felt that the religious rights of all New Zealanders, within the framework of democracy and the law, should be articulated alongside the associated responsibilities.
- 3.** While religious diversity is not new in itself, there was noted to be an increasing awareness of the religious lives of others, and thus recognition that religious diversity is a part of everyday life in communities, schools, and workplaces. It was further noted that in many countries this increased diversity has led to conflict, discord

and even violence. It was hoped, therefore, that a timely response to New Zealand's radically changing religious demography would be more positive and could provide a framework for enabling different religious and non-religious communities to live together in a state of peaceful coexistence.

4. It was felt that when issues over religious difference arose in future (in the media, the school, the workplace, the community), the national statement would provide a starting point for respectful discussion and offer guidance on ways to manage and resolve potential conflicts.

The first draft of the statement was presented by Professor Paul Morris to an interfaith workshop at the New Zealand Diversity Forum in August 2006. It was positively received and a broadly representative reference group was established to advise on its further development. The Human Rights Commission oversaw the consultation, with a closing date for submissions of December 2006. A revised statement was endorsed as a basis for further dialogue by the National Interfaith Forum in Hamilton in February 2007.

The process of bringing together different people to discuss these issues, in what for many was the first time, was as important as the statement itself.

New Zealanders often think ours is a secular country, where there is little concern about religion. The public meetings and submissions, as well as extensive discussion in the media in response to the statement, indicated that New Zealand is a place where religion is debated in public by informed and articulate people, including diverse believers and non-believers. A further consultation process was undertaken and a second edition, including a commentary, was prepared. It was published and endorsed in 2009.

Religious and ethnic diversity has increased over the last decade, as has the religious profile of New Zealand. The country is now home to sizeable Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Sikh communities alongside increasing ethnicised Christian communities and growing numbers of New Zealanders declaring themselves as having "no religion". A revised Statement was presented to the New Zealand Religious Leaders' Forum

in 2017 as a basis for discussion. Religious communities and Interfaith Councils around the country discussed the draft and made submissions. Further revisions were incorporated and a draft presented to the National Interfaith Forum in Wellington in 2018. This edition is the result of this process.

## **Commentary on the Statement**

The Statement on Religious Diversity concerns the interaction of people and communities of different religious beliefs with each other and with other people, communities and institutions. In setting out the rights and responsibilities of people and communities who profess a religious belief, it in no way diminishes the rights and responsibilities of others who profess no religion, which are of course equally recognised in international human rights law. Elaboration arising from the consultative process of the eight points contained in the statement is provided here. Since the second edition in 2009 further significant demographic shifts are evident. While Christian numbers have declined, other religious traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Sikhism) have recorded noticeable growth, largely due to migration. Migration has also impacted on the ethnic and cultural diversity within Christian churches. The number of New Zealanders reporting “no religion” has increased by more than 25% to nearly 40% of the population.

### **1. The State and Religion**

**The State seeks to treat all faith communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law. New Zealand has no official or established religion.**

New Zealand’s colonial political history as a nation began with a debate about having a Church of England clergyman lead prayers to open the very first session of the New Zealand Parliament in 1854. The religious differences of the representatives in the House was acknowledged – not all were Anglican and not all were Christian. This initial recognition of religious diversity was followed by an agreement that no one faith would have “pre-eminence”. We would not follow England in having an established church, and “all religious

denominations” were to have a “perfect political equality”. We do not have the strict demarcation between state and religion, characteristic of post-revolutionary states such as France, the United States of America or Turkey. Nor do we have a state religion like a number of the Scandinavian countries, or a formal state religion such as Iran or Pakistan.

So, is New Zealand a Christian country? No, not in a legal or constitutional sense, even though Christians constitute the largest religious group (Census 2013). It is important to acknowledge the significant role Christianity continues to play in our national life. This needs to be seen alongside a growing number of non-believers and other faith communities. The State strives to achieve equal treatment of all faiths.

## **2. The Right to Religion**

**New Zealand upholds the right to freedom of religion and belief and the right to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of religious or other belief.**

New Zealand is a signatory to a number of international human rights conventions that include the right to religion. This right is also reflected in New Zealand legislation, namely, the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act and the Human Rights Act.

The right to religion is the right to be different and includes the right to hold a belief or not to, to express that belief, and to follow the practices that arise from that belief, within the law of New Zealand. Further, the right to religion includes the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of religion or other non-religious ethical beliefs.

## **3. The Right to Safety**

**Faith communities and their members have a right to safety and security.**

This statement has resonated strongly with minority ethnic and religious communities who have reported experiences of violence and vandalism to places of worship and have concerns about

their personal safety. The right of religious communities and their members to safety and security includes both personal security and the security of places of religious worship and or gathering.

After Christchurch in March 2019, when places of worship, sanctuary and tranquillity became targets of hate, safety and security has become a major issue for all New Zealanders, and we must take steps to maximise the safety of religious communities.

#### **4. The Right to Freedom of Expression**

**The right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media are vital for democracy but should be exercised with responsibility.**

The rights of freedom of expression and freedom of the media are among the most significant rights underlying our democratic system and are vital for democracy. Both need to be exercised with the utmost responsibility and informed respect.

Freedom of expression includes both the right to religious expression and the right to express views about religion.

The media includes the media of religious communities themselves. The reference is to freedom of the media rather than the more limited freedom of the press, to include radio, television, the internet, and social media platforms. There has been national controversy over the publication of cartoons about the Prophet Mohammed, about artworks seen as blasphemous and the broadcast or publication of various material seen as offensive to Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The intention here is to call for an appropriate balance between these freedoms based on knowledgeable and respectful understanding of what is sacred to people of diverse religions and cultures.

The role that the internet and mainstream and marginal social media play in the fostering of hate and violence among cyber communities, as evident in Christchurch and other events internationally, highlights the need for further deliberation and debate focussed on freedom of expression and the safety of communities and individuals.

## **5. Recognition, Accommodation and Acceptance**

**Reasonable steps should be taken in educational and work environments and in the delivery of public services to recognise and accommodate diverse religious beliefs and practices.**

The phrases “reasonable steps” and “reasonable accommodation” are taken from existing New Zealand legislation. Increasingly, religious diversity impacts in the workplace. For example, some religious differences are given visible expression by requiring a certain dress code. There are religious observances requiring certain schedules and calendar dates for prayer and holy days to be observed. With goodwill and a commitment to workplace harmony the ‘differences’ associated with religious diversity can be easily managed. For example, time off for prayer sessions can be made up during breaks, and religious days off can be worked at other times or during holidays.

These clearly need to be based on real demand and each case decided on its merits and context. The practical accommodation of religious differences at work, at school and in the community will do much to promote confidence and integration in the wider community.

## **6. Education**

**Schools should teach an understanding of different religious and spiritual traditions in a manner that reflects the diversity of their national and local community.**

Education in schools about freedom of religion and religious diversity is essential if all are to understand ourselves as New Zealanders, our place in the Asia-Pacific region and in the wider world. This teaching should be about the different religions as an integral part of human societies, in the context of the humanities and social sciences. Such an approach is radically different from what has been traditional in New Zealand schools, which is a targeted programme of religious instruction as part of an individual’s formation within a particular faith. A number of other countries now routinely teach about different

religious traditions. As a result, many excellent models of religious studies are available.

It is important that such teaching, which already takes place in a number of New Zealand universities, is non-partisan, accurate and comprehensive.

New Zealand's integrated schools do have religious instruction for faith formation, and this is compatible with the teaching of histories, rituals and beliefs of other religious traditions.

Religious Studies is growing steadily as an NCEA subject (Religious Studies Achievement Standards, levels 1, 2, 3) in New Zealand schools. It is set to become a Scholarship Subject. This development has support from Boards of Trustees, teachers, and religious communities.

New Zealand legislation (Education Act 1877) has been understood by some to prohibit the teaching of religions in primary schools, but it does not, of course, relate to the teaching about religions and religious diversity at all. The teaching about the diversity of religions should reflect the school community itself, the wider local community in which the school is located, and the national community of which all are a part.

## **7. Religious Differences**

**Debate and disagreement about religious beliefs will occur but must be exercised without resort to violence and within the rule of law.**

Religious diversity is concerned with real differences between people, in terms of their values and what they hold most dear. These deeply held differences will likely lead to future tensions within and between faith communities, and between faith communities and those who hold non-religious values.

In New Zealand there have been confrontations about artistic expression and the offending of religious sensibilities, about legislative reforms and the rights of religious communities to follow particular practices. In various parts of the world these challenges

of religious diversity have led to violence, riots and, on occasion, deaths. While New Zealanders cannot and should not seek to stop these differences from being manifest, it is vital all are equipped to do whatever is possible to prevent the escalation of disputes into violence or breaches of the law.

## **8. Cooperation and Understanding**

**Government and faith communities have a responsibility to build and maintain positive relationships with each other, and to promote mutual respect, understanding and cooperation.**

The right to religion, like all civil rights, entails commensurate responsibilities. This statement delineates the responsibilities of faith communities in relation to government and other faith communities. These include fostering relationships with other religious communities that promote not just tolerance, but understanding, respect and cooperation. Interfaith councils and other bodies have been set up across New Zealand bringing people of different faiths together in dialogue and collective action. In 2016 the national Centre for Religious Diversity was established to foster an appreciation and understanding of religious diversity amongst all New Zealanders and to provide an independent and informed voice on religious and spiritual issues in the public sphere. Likewise, local and national government have an ongoing responsibility to develop and sustain good relationships with religious communities in New Zealand as an integral part of their shared responsibility for building social cohesion and a peaceful, stable society.

## **Acknowledgments**

The Statement on Religious Diversity was developed by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission and the Religious Studies Programme, Victoria University of Wellington. The text was written by Professor Paul Morris, Victoria University of Wellington, advised by Race Relations Commissioners Joris de Bres and Susan Devoy, with the help of Rohan Jaduram and Rakesh Naidoo. The Religious

Diversity Centre of Aotearoa/New Zealand hosted the New Zealand Religious Leaders' Forum (2017) which responded to the draft statement and arranged discussion and responses from their religious communities. Interfaith groups around the country also organised public meetings to discuss the draft statement. Many organisations and individuals provided submissions.

## **Endorsements**

- Anglican Bishops
- Auckland Council of Christians and Jews
- Catholic Bishops
- Christchurch Interfaith Council
- Council of Christians and Muslims (New Zealand)
- Dunedin Abrahamic Interfaith Group
- Dunedin Interfaith Council
- Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand
- General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand
- Hindu Council of New Zealand
- Islamic Women's Council
- The Methodist Church of New Zealand
- Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary
- National Interfaith Forum
- National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of New Zealand
- New Zealand Buddhist Council
- New Zealand Council of Christians and Jews
- New Zealand Jewish Council
- Religious Diversity Centre of Aotearoa/New Zealand
- The Salvation Army
- The Sikh Centre
- Soka Gakkai International of New Zealand
- Waikato Interfaith Council
- Wellington Abrahamic Council
- Wellington Interfaith Council

The Diversity Fern was originally designed for Race Relations Day 2005 by Malaysian-born New Zealand designer Jean Voon.

The fern represents the growing cultural diversity of New Zealand.

Baby fronds symbolising new growth

Middle Eastern (Iranian motif)

Vietnamese motif from fabric

Indian paisley design

Traditional Chinese character found on silk cloth

Samoan tapa cloth pattern

European Fleur de Lys, from the doors of St Patrick's Cathedral, Auckland

Traditional Māori kōwhaiwhai pattern from a painted panel in Manutuke church (1849, Rongowhakaata)

