

**Asia Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue
Phnom Penh, Cambodia, April 2008**

Report of the New Zealand Delegation

Background

The Asia-Pacific regional interfaith dialogue process began in Yogyakarta in December 2004. The governments of Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand and the Philippines co-sponsored the first dialogue which brought together delegations of 10 faith and community leaders from each of 14 countries in South East Asia and the Pacific. The process continued with meetings in Cebu, the Philippines in 2006 and Waitangi, New Zealand in 2007. Cambodia hosted the fourth dialogue in Phnom Penh on 2-4 April 2008.

After Yogyakarta, a delegation from Fiji was invited to join the dialogue to increase Pacific representation. The 15 countries that have taken part in subsequent dialogues are Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor L'Este, and Vietnam.

These fifteen nations together comprise 620 million people. They are made up of:

- 7 nations with under 10 million people (Fiji, NZ, PNG, Singapore, Timor, Brunei, Lao)
- 3 nations with 20-50 million people (Australia, Cambodia, Malaysia)
- 4 nations with 50-100 million people (Philippines, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam); and
- 1 nation with 245 million people (Indonesia)

Three nations have a Muslim majority (Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei), five have a Buddhist majority (Cambodia, Vietnam, Lao, Thailand, Myanmar), six have a Christian majority (Philippines, Australia, NZ, Fiji, PNG, Timor L'Este), and one has no single majority (Singapore).

Taken together, the 15 nations comprise approximately:

- 244 million Muslims
- 151 million Christians
- 149 million Buddhists
- 7 million Hindus
- 71 million other religions/no religion

The rubbing points in the region include majorities and minorities of each major religious group as follows:

- Christian majority, Muslim minority
- Muslim majority, Christian minority

- Muslim majority, Hindu & Buddhist minority
- Buddhist majority, Muslim minority
- Buddhist majority, Christian minority
- Christian majority, Hindu & Muslim Minority
- Intra-faith, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity

This points to the fact that conflicts in the region are often between majorities and minorities, rather than between religions as such.

Outcomes of the dialogue process

A summary of the outcomes of the dialogue process to date, based on individual country reports, was presented to a plenary of the Phnom Penh conference by the New Zealand delegation as follows:

- Faith leaders have established stronger relationships nationally and regionally
- Governments and faith communities have engaged more within each country
- Grassroots interfaith activity has increased
- International exchanges (media, academic, youth, women) have increased
- Regional support for global interfaith initiatives has grown
- Initiatives have been taken within and between countries in education programmes
 - In schools
 - In universities
 - Training religious leaders
 - Training government officials
 - Training media practitioners
- National Action Plans and Programmes have been developed

A copy of New Zealand's own country report is attached at Appendix Two.

New Zealand Delegation

The New Zealand delegation to the Phnom Penh dialogue comprised Dr Manuka Henare (leader), Catholic Archbishop John Dew, Anglican Bishop Richard Randerson, Religious Studies Professor Paul Morris, Federation of Islamic Associations President Javed Khan, Islamic Women's Council member Rehanna Ali, Presbyterian Minister Fei Taule'ale'ausumai, Dr Pushpa Wood (Hindu), Ven Amala Wrightson (Buddhist) and Race Relations Commissioner Joris de Bres. They were supported by Ambassador Dell Higgin and Senior Policy Officer Cathy McGregor from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Ethnic Affairs Minister Hon Chris Carter was a keynote speaker at the conference (speech attached as an appendix). The New Zealand Ambassador to Cambodia, Brook Barrington and members of his staff were also present at the opening session. Members of the delegation acted as convenors, rapporteurs and presenters at a number of workshops and plenary sessions. Professor Paul Morris presented a New Zealand paper

on conflict resolution (attached at Appendix One). The New Zealand delegation once again facilitated regional intra-faith meetings for Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and Hindus/Sikhs although they were not formally part of the programme.

Theme of the 2008 Dialogue

The theme of the Phnom Penh dialogue was “interfaith cooperation for peace and harmony”. Plenaries and workshops focused on:

- Follow-up to the Waitangi Declaration and Action Plan
- Achieving Security: Interfaith Action for Regional Peace, Security and Harmony (including workshops on security, tolerance and understanding, democracy and equal opportunity, solidarity and cooperation, and conflict resolution and peacemaking)
- Nurturing Initiatives at the Grassroots Level and Empowering Those Advocating Peace and Harmony (including workshops on the role of faith groups, women’s and community groups, civil society and government, cooperation between the media, faith groups and government, and effective use of education to shape the attitudes of the young and the wider community)

The New Zealand delegation led the session on follow up to the Waitangi Declaration and Action Plan (which included the analysis of the region and the outcomes of the process to date outlined above) and presented a paper on *Interfaith Dialogue and the Role of Religious Leaders and Communities in Conflict Resolution and Peace-Making* for the plenary and workshops on Empowering Those Advocating Peace and Harmony. A copy of the New Zealand discussion paper is attached at Appendix Three.

Phnom Penh Declaration

The outcomes of the workshops were embodied in a declaration at the end of the Dialogue (attached at Appendix Four), which noted that:

“In reflecting on our progress since Jogjakarta in 2004, two realities have encouraged us. First, many countries have already demonstrated significant progress in promoting stable and cohesive communities. Second, it is now clear that there are many practical initiatives at all levels of society that have been implemented and have reduced religious disharmony and engendered cooperation towards the common good.

“In this light we have agreed to commit ourselves to work towards the following in conjunction with governments and other sectors of society:

- a. multifaith dialogue and cooperation;
- b. peace as a sacred priority;
- c. increased participation by women and youth in interfaith dialogue;

- d. sharing with our communities successful examples of multifaith dialogue and cooperation and encouraging others to participate; and
- e. interfaith cooperation that addresses issues of critical community concerns in our region such as poverty, HIV, human rights, environmental issues and natural disasters.”

The declaration included an action plan with 17 recommendations:

Relationships

1. We encourage governments to investigate possible mechanisms for maintaining regional interfaith activity between Dialogues.
2. We recommend further cooperation on the development of bilateral (country-to-country) programs and projects, encouraging interreligious cooperation and understanding.
3. We encourage a stronger focus on dialogue within religions, including through intra-faith dialogue at national and regional levels.

Education and Capacity Building

4. We recommend bringing educationalists together to develop curricula to promote interfaith understanding and human rights from religious perspectives.
5. We acknowledge the value of contemplative spiritual practices as an aid to promoting peace and resolving conflict.
6. We recommend the improvement of the religious education curriculum in order to help promote moderate religious views among youth.

Conflict Resolution and Peace Building

7. We recommend utilising religious and spiritual leaders of standing to assist in resolving inter-communal conflicts and tensions within the region.
8. We recommend strengthening collaborative religious structures and networks for developing conflict resolution skills, practices and attitudes in areas of inter-communal conflict.
9. We recommend exploring the possibility of joint projects and activities, engaging people across faith traditions in areas of communal tension.
10. We recommend the sharing of case studies of effective examples of responding to violence.

Grassroots initiatives

11. We recommend helping communities learn more about each other through informal settings such as community gatherings, festivals, sporting events or projects.
12. We recommend broadening of the dialogue process to include more of those not currently involved.

13. We recommend the development of mechanisms by which the role of women in interfaith activity can be further recognised, including through the establishment of women's interfaith forums and by providing training and support.
14. We recommend strengthening multi-religious youth networks across the region, encouraging cooperation, including through exchange programs, camps and training programs.

Media and Promoting Interfaith Understanding

15. We encourage the media to balance freedom of speech with responsibility.
16. We will work to ensure a positive contribution by the media in building understanding between religions and faiths with particular regard to how biased and inflammatory reporting may foment division.
17. We recommend further training to assist faith leaders to communicate effectively with and through the modern media.

Conclusion

As noted in the New Zealand delegation's presentation above, the process of regional interfaith dialogue that began in Yogyakarta in 2004 has undoubtedly contributed to stronger interfaith relationships both nationally and in the Asia Pacific region, and to an increase in interfaith activities at the grassroots level, international exchanges, regional support for global interfaith initiatives and initiatives in education programmes both nationally and between countries.

The delegation in Phnom Penh reflected on the growth in trust that was evident both between faiths and between national delegations over the course of the four dialogues, the increasing commonality of purpose and the focus on practical action. Religious tensions in the region have undoubtedly reduced over that period, and while the dialogue process may have only been one contributing factor, it has undoubtedly made a contribution.

The New Zealand delegation has at each dialogue undertaken the initiative in convening intra-faith meetings. We continue to find these an invaluable component of the overall process, and we express the hope that they will be an integral part of the official programme for future dialogues.

We noted that an omission in the process to date had been any consideration of the importance of developing interfaith awareness in business enterprises and in building economic relations, and considered this might be placed on the agenda for future meetings. We were also aware of our responsibility in reporting back to our own communities, and encouraging development of dialogue between the leaders of faith communities and the government within New Zealand.

We were happy with our input into the Phnom Penh Declaration and Action Plan, particularly in relation to increasing participation by women and youth and the pursuit of peace as a sacred priority. We supported the

recommendations in the Action Plan and commend them to government and faith communities.

Recommendations

We specifically recommend to the New Zealand government and faith communities, that:

1. Efforts be continued to develop high quality resources and standards to support the new provisions in the New Zealand curriculum relating to cultural and religious diversity and fundamental values.
2. Government officials be provided with a handbook and training on religious diversity, building on the work already done by the New Zealand Police in their '*Practical Reference to Religious Diversity*'.
3. Religious leaders of standing be utilised to assist in resolving inter-communal conflicts within the region and collaborative regional religious networks be established to develop conflict resolution skills, practices and attitudes in areas of inter-communal conflict.
4. The recommendations in the Phnom Penh Action Plan be taken into account in the review of the National Implementation Plan for the Alliance of Civilisations.
5. The government consider hosting a meeting of government and faith community leaders and members of the Phnom Penh delegation, perhaps in the context of the New Zealand Diversity Forum on 25 August to discuss existing and further initiatives in interfaith dialogue and cooperation, prior to the public interfaith forum that afternoon.

**Address by Hon Chris Carter, Minister for Ethnic Affairs
Asia Pacific Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and Harmony,
Phnom Penh, 3 April 2008**

Tēnā koutou katoa, asalaamu aleiykum, shalom, namaste, sat sri akal, metta, bula vinaka, warm interfaith greetings and may peace be with us all.

Just under a year ago New Zealand was proud to host delegates of all faiths and backgrounds from across our region for the third meeting of the Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue at Waitangi. That was a memorable meeting, notable for its relaxed atmosphere and friendly interaction between delegates, and for the lively discussions that ensued. At Waitangi, an evolving sense of confidence and trust in the Dialogue saw excellent progress made towards our shared goal of building bridges to bring together the diverse faith communities of our region.

The Waitangi Declaration and Action Plan set out some practical ideas for improving inter-community relations, and for enhancing interfaith understanding and respect through education systems and the media. The country reports that we have received from our Dialogue partners encouragingly indicate that, post-Waitangi, a wide range of interfaith activities throughout the region are succeeding in building inter-community cooperation, strengthening social cohesion, and encouraging a spirit of trust and respect amongst different faiths.

In New Zealand interfaith initiatives at the community and national level are flourishing. There is a strong interfaith network, and there have been a range of interfaith projects and meetings since Waitangi. These include: a very successful National Interfaith Forum just last month; a number of government programmes working to strengthen community cohesion; funding, just announced, for the establishment of a Centre for the study of Islam and Muslim cultures; the first ever national conference of New Zealand Imams; the first Hindu conference; the formation of the Buddhist Council, a newly released education curriculum reinforcing the principle of cultural diversity; and the development of a national action plan detailing how New Zealand will implement the Alliance of Civilisations initiative and promote inter-cultural dialogue nationally, regionally and globally. In addition a number of regional projects are being developed to implement Waitangi outcomes, particularly those relating to education, media and strengthening interfaith networks.

Now, we gather again in Phnom Penh, enjoying the generous hospitality of our Cambodian hosts, and energised and eager to take forward our earlier work under the theme for this Dialogue of Peace and Harmony. Our warm thanks, too, to our Australian co-hosts for all the work they have done to bring this meeting together.

My Prime Minister said at the opening of the Waitangi meeting, “we do not accept that there is anything inevitable or unavoidable about tension and conflict between ethnicities, cultures and faiths.”

New Zealanders firmly believe that tensions between cultures and communities can be overcome by dialogue, by education, and a willingness to learn from, to respect, to avoid misunderstandings and to be accepting of others.

It is my belief that this interfaith dialogue – driven by its overriding goal of promoting good relations, understanding and respect amongst different faith communities - can make a real contribution to preventing or reducing conflict in our societies. The New Zealand delegation will be lead a discussion during the second plenary session, exploring the possible contribution that faith and community leaders might make to resolving or defusing faith-based or inter-communal conflict situations in our region.

This Interfaith Dialogue is proving how civil society representatives can work together – and with their governments - to develop lines of trust and communication. The Dialogue encourages us to focus on the need for inclusion and respect for each other within our own diverse communities, so that no faith community feels marginalised or excluded. It assists us to see more clearly what is happening across the fault lines which exist within and between societies, and to understand better what can be done to bridge them.

As the well known Muslim scholar, Tariq Ramadan, said during his recent visit to New Zealand, “the best security is social cohesion and understanding”. And that, ultimately, is the goal of this Dialogue. We aspire to build a more secure and peaceful region. Through our discussions we seek to reduce the influence of those who would use religion as a justification for intolerance, fanaticism and terrorism. Indeed it is one of the founding tenets of our regional Dialogue that no religion should be used as a basis or justification for terrorist activity. We also look to identify social and cultural mechanisms that can be used to forestall or defuse inter-communal conflict.

The individual faith communities which the delegates to this Phnom Penh Dialogue represent, can, and are, playing a very useful role in developing networks and channels of communication which are already contributing to improved security in our region. Let us also encourage our communities to look to play a helpful role in defusing potential causes of conflict and ensuring that voices of moderation and reason have real resonance in our individual countries and throughout our region.

Thank you all, and I wish you well in your important work ahead.

Phnom Penh Dialogue 2008 on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and Harmony, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 3-6 April 2008

Country Report: New Zealand

1. Demographics

New Zealand has a population of approximately 4 million people, comprising over 2.6 million who identify as European, 565,000 as Maori, 354,000 as Asian, and 265,000 as Pacific Island. New Zealanders identified their religion in the 2006 census as follows:

Religion	Population	Percentage of population
Christian	2.1 million	50.7%
No religion	1.29 million	31.1%
Hindu	64,567	1.5%
Buddhist	52,392	1.3%
Muslim	36,150	0.9%
Other / Not Stated	600,169	14.9%

There is no official state religion. The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act affirms the freedom of religion, and the New Zealand Human Rights Act makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of religion.

2. Existing interfaith activities

There is an active interfaith movement in New Zealand. The Human Rights Commission facilitates a national interfaith network, with a monthly electronic newsletter, *Te Korowai Whakapono*, an annual interfaith policy forum as part of the New Zealand Diversity Forum (the focus of the August 2007 forum, for example, was religion in schools), and encouragement of participating organisations to undertake interfaith projects.

There are interfaith councils in many centres, which undertake a range of interfaith activities at the local community level. They meet together annually in February or March at the National Interfaith Forum. The 2008 National Interfaith Forum was held in March and focussed on the theme “Beyond Tolerance – Towards Understanding and Respect: Challenges and Opportunities”. A National Women’s Interfaith Forum and the first National Youth Interfaith Forum were held alongside this meeting, giving substance to the Waitangi Action Plan’s call for increased focus on women and youth in interfaith activities. The outcomes from these meetings, including a keynote address from the Governor General, Hon Anand Satyanand, are available on the Interfaith website www.interfaith.org.nz.

A key project for the New Zealand interfaith network in 2007 was the completion of a Statement on Religious Diversity (a copy of which was circulated at the Waitangi Interfaith Dialogue) which provides a framework for the discussion of religious issues by faith communities and the wider public. Following extensive consultation and public debate the Statement was published in May 2007. Faith communities and interfaith groups have since been invited to endorse the statement, and those who have done so include major Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Baha’i and other

groups. The Statement continues to receive endorsements from community and faith groups and other stakeholders. The Statement is due to be reviewed in time for the 2009 National Diversity Forum.

Other key milestones in interfaith activity in 2007 included New Zealand's hosting of the regional Alliance of Civilisations Symposium in Auckland and the Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue in Waitangi, both in May. New Zealand also co-hosted, with Australia, the International Conference of the Council of Christians and Jews in Sydney, which included a Jewish/Christian/Muslim youth dialogue.

New Zealand sponsored a visit to New Zealand early this year by Professor Tariq Ramadan, a widely published theologian and Islamic reformer currently based at St Antony's College, Oxford. The visit provided a valuable opportunity to engage with a leading voice in the debate over interaction between, particularly Muslim and Western, societies.

Religious diversity projects that have taken place since the Waitangi meeting have included:

- the first New Zealand national Hindu conference
- the opening of two major Buddhist temples
- the Building Bridges Programme undertaken by the Office of Ethnic Affairs and the Federation of Islamic Associations
- the first national conference of Imams
- Islam Awareness Week
- a second series of television programmes on well known New Zealanders of different faiths
- the formation of the New Zealand Buddhist Council
- a range of local activities, including exhibitions and series of seminars organised by regional Interfaith Councils
- a major exhibition and education programme on diverse faith communities at Waikato Museum in Hamilton
- participation in the week of Prayer for World Peace
- a three day inter-faith pilgrimage trail in March taking in various faith centres throughout the north of New Zealand

Forthcoming projects in 2008 include:

- a multi-faith conference at Auckland University, Uni-Diversity, looking at Diversity and the Challenge of Change (September)
- progress towards the establishment of a Centre for Interfaith Dialogue and Education (CIDE) at Auckland's UNITEC polytechnic promoting interfaith engagement including education and dialogue
- a second national conference of Imams
- Islam Awareness Week
- the week of Prayer for World Peace
- the second national Hindu conference
- a national Convention for New Zealand Muslims
- the sixth Global Buddhist Conference in Auckland in December
- the Connecting Diverse Communities Programme led by the Ministry of Social Development and the Office of Ethnic Affairs
- a third series of television programmes on well known New Zealanders of different faiths

3. New projects/initiatives

New Schools Curriculum and Religion in Schools

A new national education curriculum was released in November, and one of its key underpinning principles is cultural diversity: All teaching is required to “reflect New Zealand’s cultural diversity and value the histories and traditions of all its people.” The curriculum also sets out values that are to be fostered throughout the curriculum and in the school community. These include **diversity**, as found in our different cultures, languages, and heritages, **equity**, through fairness and social justice, **community and participation** for the common good, and **respect** for themselves, others, and human rights. The new curriculum is to be fully implemented by 2010, and resources to support it will be developed over the next two years. Included in these will be resources to teach an understanding of different religions. At the same time, the Ministry of Education is working with faith communities to establish quality standards for religious studies in schools. Guidelines on religion and schools are also in preparation as a project of the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme, arising out of the discussions at last year’s Diversity Forum.

Alliance of Civilisations: National Implementation Plan

The Government published a report in November on the Asia-Pacific regional symposium on the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations initiative. As a further follow-up to the symposium, the Government has developed a national plan detailing how New Zealand will implement the Alliance initiative and promote inter-cultural dialogue nationally, regionally and globally. The National Implementation Plan takes forward the four focus areas of the UN report, namely education, youth, media and migration, which were also addressed in the Waitangi Declaration and Programme of Action.

The implementation plan will support existing and new initiatives that:

- a **promote trust and understanding between diverse communities** by connecting people and organisations;
- b **reduce polarisation between societies** through joint pursuits and partnerships (including between Government and civil society) that help give impetus to innovative projects;
- c **build respect and understanding among cultures and empower voices of moderation and reconciliation** which can help calm cultural and religious tensions between nations and peoples;
- d **provide access to information and resource materials** drawn from successful co-operative initiatives which could in turn be used by other institutions, organisations and individuals.

Existing initiatives that contribute to the plan are the Government’s Connecting Diverse Communities programme, Building Bridges Programme, the New Zealand Settlement Strategy and Action Plan, the Youth Exchanges Programme, the Intercultural Awareness and Communication Programme, and the Human Rights Commission’s Diversity Action Programme. In March the Tertiary Education Commission announced it would provide funding for the establishment of a joint New Zealand Centre for the study of Islam and Muslim cultures. New initiatives

foreshadowed are media literacy and standards programme, strengthening the focus on religions and cultures in the curriculum, and scholarships to promote religious understanding in the Asia-Pacific region. Contribution to a number of Asia-Pacific regional initiatives is also envisaged.

The following websites provide further information about these programmes and initiatives:

www.msd.govt.nz

www.hrc.co.nz/diversity

www.ethnicaffairs.govt.nzwww.immigration.govt.nz/settlement

www.mfat.govt.nz

www.myd.govt.nz

4. Follow-Up on the Waitangi Declaration and Plan of Action

The New Zealand delegation identified six areas within the Waitangi Declaration and Action Plan of particular relevance to New Zealand. These are listed below, together with follow-up action taken:

At the national level

- **Identifying clear points of contact within government for relations with faith communities and interfaith cooperation, including the interfaith network facilitated by the Human Rights Commission.** The Government has identified the Ministry of Social Development as the main contact point, in close cooperation with the Office of Ethnic Affairs. The Human Rights Commission continues to facilitate a national interfaith network.
- **Strengthening interfaith dialogue and addressing concerns within religious communities, making use of the Statement on Religious Diversity.** The Statement on Religious Diversity continues to provide a basis and focal point for promoting interfaith understanding.
- **Establishing an Asia Pacific regional interfaith network and database.** New Zealand was supportive of Australia's offer, following the Waitangi Dialogue, to develop and implement this initiative.
- **Providing education about religions, with a focus on developing resources for the new school curriculum which has a high-level focus on diversity.** Discussions are underway with the Ministry of Education as to how this can best be done.
- **Strengthening tertiary education institutions and religious diversity, including through student exchanges, research and establishing an Islamic Studies Centre.** The Tertiary Education Commission has recently announced funding for the establishment of a joint New Zealand Centre for the study of Islam and Muslim cultures. Other issues are being addressed through the Alliance of Civilisations Implementation Plan.
- **Promoting media awareness of issues around reporting related to religious diversity.** The New Zealand Journalism Training Organisation has done useful work in this area and an independent review of the Press Council has

recommended a role for the Council in advocating for journalism standards as well as receiving complaints. Other initiatives are under consideration.

At the regional level

- **Facilitate journalist exchange programmes around the region.** New Zealand has established an annual regional media scholarship. This initiative, launching this year, will place 2 recent New Zealand journalism graduates on an internship/study programme in South East Asia, to broaden their understanding of regional issues and inter-religious and inter-cultural relations. We also welcome various journalists from across Asia to New Zealand under our Seriously Asia journalist exchange programme. New Zealand is also investigating, with partners, the scope for a regional journalist programme focused on widening understanding of critical international issues - particularly in those fields where politics and religion intersect.
- **Facilitate further exchanges between people (e.g. youth, students, teachers, religious leaders, academics) of different faiths, within and between countries, and at the grassroots communal levels.** New Zealand facilitates a number of different exchanges around the region, including for youth, students, academics and religious leaders. A recent addition to exchange programmes is the 'Muslim Youth Leaders Exchange Programme' which piloted in 2007 with two Indonesian Muslim youth leaders travelling to New Zealand, interacting with our own Muslim communities, academics, interfaith team, officials and community leaders.
- **Support research projects exploring any nexus between religion and conflict; perceptions of security among different faith groups; and religious education in the region.** New Zealand has provided support to a South East Asian regional University Centre of Excellence for research on inter-religious dialogue and for further development of its own syllabus for inter-religious studies at the tertiary level. A New Zealand theology lecturer has also been seconded to the centre for 6 months to teach and provide assistance on curriculum development, and a lecturer from an Islamic university in Indonesia will undertake a 3-month fellowship at a New Zealand university this year. We have also provided support to a local Indonesian NGO for its research, capacity strengthening, monitoring and advocacy work to help achieve enhanced inter-religious understanding and gender sensitive policies in Gorontalo, Bali and Central Kalimantan.
- **Develop partnerships between faith groups, civil society and governments to work for social and economic justice, minority empowerment and reconciliation among conflicting groups within society.** New Zealand has provided support for a programme in Indonesia (involving several NGO partners including Islamic and Christian) to develop an effective advocacy and monitoring system to support the fulfilment, at a local level, of freedom of religion and belief.

**New Zealand delegation
April 2008**

New Zealand Delegation Paper

**Interfaith Dialogue and the Role of Religious Leaders and Communities
in Conflict Resolution and Peace-Making**

The New Zealand discussion paper at this fourth Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue in Phnom Penh, Cambodia develops themes from the 2007 Waitangi Declaration and Action Plan. Its particular focus is on the role that religious communities can play in conflict resolution and peace-making.

The last three regional dialogues in Yogyakarta, Indonesia; Cebu, The Philippines; and, Waitangi, New Zealand have successfully developed both domestic and regional interfaith agendas, a network of personal relationships and contacts, and most importantly of all a degree of trust between the participants that allows for genuine debate and discussion across religious and national boundaries. On the basis of this trust and growing mutual respect we hope to deepen the interfaith agenda to discuss religions and their particular role in conflict resolution and peace-making.

Many of the conflicts in our region, and beyond, can be seen to have religious dimensions. While this is not new (religion has been cited as a factor in conflict throughout history, specifically when religion has been utilised in support of specific political causes) the role of religion has been highlighted in the religious revivals of recent years, and in particular after September 11.

The response of those who overlook political or economic factors and view religion itself as the major cause of conflict is often to conclude that the best way to promote conflict resolution is to curtail the role and influence of religions. This one-size-fits-all approach falls short of appreciating the complex nature of local conflicts, identities or violence and has certainly failed to bring lasting peace to many longstanding conflicts in our region and beyond.

If we are concerned about peace in the 21st century then we cannot afford to ignore the involvement of religions in both conflict and conflict resolution. The contention in this paper is, thus, that religion must be part of the response to those conflicts and tensions with religious dimensions.

Throughout history religious leaders and communities have opposed war and actively sought to promote peace and reconciliation within and between communities. They have therefore played a significant role in many conflict situations.

Today, too, religious leaders and communities have potentially valuable contributions to make to conflict resolution and peace-making efforts. This is a reality only just beginning to be recognised academically, politically and internationally. The Alliance of Civilisations High-level Group Report included as one of its Guiding Principles that 'religion is an increasingly important

dimension of many societies and a significant source of values for individuals. It can play a critical role in promoting an appreciation of other cultures, religions, and ways of life to help build harmony among them'. Indeed, religion is a powerful force in the lives of the peoples of our Asia-Pacific region. The vital role that religion might play in peace-making needs to be acknowledged, highlighted and reinforced.

All religions have profound spiritual visions of peace at the level of the individual, community and greater humanity. These visions conceive of a real peace, sustainable beyond conflict and war. They differ from contemporary dominant ideologies of perpetual and necessary conflict and include Christianity's St Augustine and his pacific vision beyond war and violence; the centrality of shalom (peace) in Judaism; and Hindu and Buddhist teachings about peace. The very name of Islam resonates with salem, peace. Allah is known as 'the most merciful and compassionate' while Christ is known by Christians as the 'prince of peace'. All religions contain these traditions of a peace that surpasses daily conflict and strife – a peace that goes beyond the temporary absence of war or conflict to a concept like the Qur'anic ideal of *nafs al mutma'inna*, the soul at peace (Sura 9:27). These traditional religious visions of peace can be an important resource for contemporary efforts to promote peace-making and conflict resolution.

Religious leaders have been able to draw on these religious traditions of peace to make valuable contributions to peace-making in the modern world. Religious leaders have proved to be major assets in peace-making in our own region. Buddhist leaders - Maha Gosananada here in Cambodia whose dhammayietra (pilgrimage of truth) had a significant impact - and Thich Nhat Hanh from Vietnam. There are also many examples of Muslim, Hindu and Christian peace-makers in our region.

Religious leaders enjoy a high degree of trust and credibility within and across communities and as such are often well placed to mediate between conflicting sides, or even just act as channels of communication. Religious-based peace-making has the advantage over political and diplomatic approaches in that it draws on the deepest of human feelings and motivations, including a spiritual desire for peace, and on how individuals and communities make sense of the world. Religious actors may therefore be seen as more independent and flexible in their peace-making efforts than traditional political players with a deeper and spiritual set of resources to draw on. Furthermore, local religious communities can utilise a unique network of personal and communal relationships. Religious leaders can open the way for greater personal contact during times of conflict, including through their ability to offer a different context for meetings between the protagonists. They may also have a greater capacity to mobilise communities in support of a peace process, including across borders.

A principal strength of religious traditions is that they represent a respected set of values. All religious traditions teach that peace is based on justice, wisdom, liberation and love. Further, they teach the sanctity of life; the need for ethical relationships between individuals and communities and for empathy

with the outsider; they favour self-discipline and restraint; and envisage obligations to other religious groups. Religious traditions can also draw on indigenous traditions of conflict management, compromise, negotiation and reconciliation which can be brought to bear on current conflict situations.

At the same time, however, it needs to be recognised that there are some vulnerabilities to the role of religious leaders and communities in peace-making that may need to be addressed. Reflecting the often complex combination of factors underlying particular grievances and conflict, it may be difficult to persuade some of the parties to a conflict of the utility of engaging with religious leaders. Similarly, in circumstances where religion is clearly an integral part of a conflict, religious leaders will not always be perceived by all parties as independent and well-meaning.

Multi-faith – or interfaith - engagement in conflict situations by religious teachers and leaders can be helpful in getting around some of these perceived difficulties. Religious leaders can bring religious wisdom, teachings and strategies about peace-making and experience to conflict resolution. State authorities and NGOs can support these activities by developing programmes of conflict resolution training consistent with, and drawing on, traditional religious teachings. At the same time, in a situation where religious leaders might be directly engaged in a conflict resolution process, it may be desirable to provide them with appropriate support for their involvement in the process.

Religious communities need to focus on developing the peace-making resources within their own traditions and to educate their communities and encourage them to make a commitment to peace with others. This paper is designed to encourage delegates of all faiths to discuss their particular understandings of the contribution that their religious traditions can make to conflict resolution and peace-making in our region - or at least to start this conversation – and, at the same time, to explore how our interfaith dialogue can move this process forward.

Recommendations

1 Religious communities in our region need to focus on the conflict resolution and peace-making capabilities of their respective religious traditions. The potential for religion to be a resource for peace needs to be taught by preaching, textual study, and religious leadership training programmes. Peace education should be an element of religious community education at all levels.

2 Research should be undertaken into the religious traditions and resources of the region and the findings reported back at the national and regional levels.

3 Interfaith dialogue workshops focussing on religious models of peace-making should be established for interfaith groups, locally, regionally and nationally.

4 There should be more interaction between religious and state authorities with the aim of developing religious-based approaches to peace-making alongside traditional diplomatic efforts, including developing religious based conflict resolution programmes.

5 Governments should consider providing training on religion and religious issues for officials who might be involved in conflict resolution, and providing appropriate support for religious leaders who may be involved in conflict resolution processes.

6 Local and national interfaith and community groups should consider sponsoring the publication of resource materials to assist peace-making, and subsequently helping to disseminate the materials to relevant community groups and promoting discussion and understanding of them through workshops.

7 Countries could be invited to nominate religious leaders from within their communities who might be invited to play a role as peacemakers in situations of conflict or tension within the region.

8 National interfaith delegations could foster contact, including through the establishment of e-mail networks, with interfaith delegates and communities in areas of inter-communal conflict.

9 Countries could be invited to explore, with members of national interfaith delegations, the possibility of visits by community leaders from, and joint projects with, regions of communal tension.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this paper is that peace is a sacred priority in different religious traditions and therefore religion, and religious leaders, can be a positive and powerful force in promoting peace and conflict resolution. This is particularly the case in the new context of interfaith dialogue.

New Zealand Interfaith Delegation
April 2008



Phnom Penh Dialogue 2008 on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and Harmony 3 - 6 April 2008

We, the participants in the Phnom Penh Dialogue 2008 on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and Harmony - from Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam, gathered in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 3-6 April 2008.

This Dialogue builds on the commitments from previous Dialogues in Yogyakarta in 2004, Cebu in 2006 and Waitangi in 2007.

We thank the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia for hosting the fourth Regional Interfaith Dialogue, and for providing the opportunity to appreciate the richness of Khmer cultural traditions. We also express our appreciation to the Governments of Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand and the Philippines as co-sponsors of the Dialogue process.

We were very much encouraged by the comments made by His Excellency Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of Cambodia, as well as senior representatives from the host and co-sponsoring countries at the opening ceremony, “endorsing the principle of a culture of peace and calling for its spread to all the corners of the world”.

In reflecting on our progress since Jogjakarta in 2004, two realities have encouraged us. First, many countries have already demonstrated significant progress in promoting stable and cohesive communities. Second, it is now clear that there are many practical initiatives at all levels of society that have been implemented and have reduced religious disharmony and engender cooperation towards the common good.

In this light we have agreed to commit ourselves to work towards the following in conjunction with governments and other sectors of society:

- a. multifaith dialogue and cooperation;
- b. peace as a sacred priority;
- c. increased participation by women and youth in interfaith dialogue;
- d. sharing with our communities successful examples of multifaith dialogue and cooperation and encouraging others to participate; and

- e. interfaith cooperation that addresses issues of critical community concerns in our region such as poverty, HIV, human rights, environmental issues and natural disasters.

ACTION PLAN

RELATIONSHIPS

1. We encourage governments to investigate possible mechanisms for maintaining regional interfaith activity between Dialogues.
2. We recommend further cooperation on the development of bilateral (country-to-country) programs and projects, encouraging interreligious cooperation and understanding.
3. We encourage a stronger focus on dialogue within religions, including through intrafaith dialogue at national and regional levels.

EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

4. We recommend bringing educationalists together to develop curricula to promote interfaith understanding and human rights from religious perspectives.
5. We acknowledge the value of contemplative spiritual practices as an aid to promoting peace and resolving conflict.
6. We recommend the improvement of the religious education curriculum in order to help promote moderate religious views among youth.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION and PEACE BUILDING

7. We recommend utilising religious and spiritual leaders of standing to assist in resolving inter-communal conflicts and tensions within the region.
8. We recommend strengthening collaborative religious structures and networks for developing conflict resolution skills, practices and attitudes in areas of inter-communal conflict.
9. We recommend exploring the possibility of joint projects and activities, engaging people across faith traditions in areas of communal tension.
10. We recommend the sharing of case studies of effective examples of responding to violence.

GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES

11. We recommend helping communities learn more about each other through informal settings such as community gatherings, festivals, sporting events or projects.
12. We recommend broadening of the dialogue process to include more of those not currently involved.
13. We recommend the development of mechanisms by which the role of women in interfaith activity can be further recognised, including through the establishment of women's interfaith forums and by providing training and support.
14. We recommend strengthening multi-religious youth networks across the region, encouraging cooperation, including through exchange programs, camps and training programs.

MEDIA AND PROMOTING INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING

15. We encourage the media to balance freedom of speech with responsibility.
16. We will work to ensure a positive contribution by the media in building understanding between religions and faiths with particular regard to how biased and inflammatory reporting may foment division.
17. We recommend further training to assist faith leaders to communicate effectively with and through the modern media.

We recommend that this Dialogue process continue and that options for hosting the next meeting be explored.

Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 4 April 2008