



**National Council of  
Women of New Zealand**

Te Kaunihera  
Wahine O Aotearoa

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13 December 2006

S06.49

**Submission to the Human Rights Commission Draft Statement on  
Religious Diversity**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organization representing 38 nationally organized societies. It has 31 branches spread throughout the country to which women from some 150 societies are affiliated. NCWNZ also represents a number of individual women.

Since its foundation in 1896, the Council's function has been to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international level through study, research, discussion and action. NCWNZ is non-party political and non-sectarian. The prayer which opens every meeting a national and branch level states members' resolve to set aside all prejudice and distinction of race, creed and class. Every Conference hosts an interfaith service.

Over the years NCWNZ has developed policy on the need for New Zealand to have a just and humanitarian policy on immigration and refugees, to recognize the benefits of a society enriched by a diversity of cultures and skills, to have respect for human dignity and to acknowledge the need for all to realise their full potential. In addition, this comment on the Draft National Statement on Religious Diversity is written from the perspective of general NCWNZ policy supporting justice for all, equal opportunities for all and the right for all New Zealand citizens to live in peace to carry out their lawful pursuits and way of life. Specific responses of several Branches and individuals are included as well.

**The eight guidelines are**

1. The State and Religion

NZ has no state religion. The State treats all faith communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law. [Supported]

2. The Right to Religion

NZ upholds the right to freedom of religion and belief and the right to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of religious or ethical belief. [Supported]

3. The Right to Safety

Faith communities have a right to safety and security. [Supported]

4. The Right to Freedom of Expression

The right to freedom of expression and freedom of the press are vital for democracy, and shall be exercised with responsibility and in an informed manner. [Supported]

5. Recognition and Accommodation

Reasonable steps shall be taken in educational and work environments and in the delivery of public services to recognize and accommodate different beliefs and practices. [Supported]

6. Education

Schools shall teach an understanding of the diversity of religious and spiritual traditions in an impartial manner.





Although members supported teaching an understanding of the diversity of religious and spiritual traditions, concern was expressed about the use of the word 'impartial'. This part of the Guideline is not practical unless the schools are restricted to state schools. Integrated schools and private church schools cannot be expected to accord to other religions the same degree of understanding and belief support as they accord to the religion for which purpose the school has been set up in accordance with the Integration Act. NCWNZ suggests that the word 'impartial' be replaced by the words 'fair and unprejudiced' or just 'fair'.

[Not supported in its current form]

#### 7. Religious Differences

Debate and disagreements about religious beliefs within faith communities and beyond is inevitable, but shall be exercised within the rule of law and without resort to violence. [Supported]

#### **Cooperation and understanding**

Government and faith communities shall seek to build and maintain positive relationships with each other, and promote tolerance and understanding in the community. [Supported]

In 'World Religions, Universal peace, Global Ethic', written by Hans Kung in June 2005 for the Foundation for Global Ethics, it is noted that six of the world's great religions, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism all have at least one belief in common, namely: Do to others as you would have them do to you. Greater understanding and tolerance can only aid universal peace and justice.

In the annual Otago University Peace Lecture held in September, Professor Paul Morris noted the increase in tension between the world's major faiths, at the very time when in most countries the population was becoming more mixed in race and religion. This initiative by the Human Rights Commission is timely. NCWNZ commends the Commission for its efforts to bring about a more tolerant and just society and thanks the Commission for this opportunity to comment on the Draft National Statement on Religious Diversity.

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**Convener Education Standing Committee**