



Priyanca Radhakrishnan meets with Religious Leaders

“Diversity is a fact in this country. Inclusion is the goal to strive for”, the Hon Priyanca Radhakrishnan met with religious leaders from diverse faiths. After more than a year of virtual meetings, the Religious Leaders Forum was held in-person in Auckland on 30 November 2022.

The Religious Diversity Centre in Aotearoa New Zealand Trust (RDC) has been hosting regular meetings of the Religious Leaders Forum since 2017. For these meetings, leaders from the major religions in the country join to discuss current topics and raise their voices to Government leaders.

This time, two MPs had joined the discussions: The Hon Priyanca Radhakrishnan, Minister for Diversity, Inclusion and Ethnic Communities, and MP Helen White participated in conversations with religious leaders who had come from across the country. They belonged to the Bahá’i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islam, Judaism and Sikh traditions.

The Minister thanked the religious leaders and their communities for their work in building trust and in cooperating beyond their own faith groups.



When addressing the religious leaders, she summarised the diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand with 213 ethnicities, more than 170 languages and many religions and people of no religion.

Under her leadership, the new Ministry for Ethnic Communities has identified 4 priorities in the interests of the ethnic communities:

1. Valuing diversity
2. Addressing economic barriers
3. Government services
4. Importance of connecting (incl. with tangata whenua).

The development of **Te Korowai Whetū Social Cohesion Strategic Framework** started after the Christchurch Mosque attacks on 15 March 2019, and includes the following:

“Societies that are polarised around political, social, cultural, environmental, economic, ethnic or religious differences provide conditions in which radicalising ideologies develop and flourish. Social cohesion is desirable for many reasons, one of which is that it is critical to preventing the development of harmful radicalising ideologies and downstream violent extremism.”

While everyone agrees that we want a society where we feel safe, valued and heard, the question remains: how do we get there?

The contributions of religious communities to society are often done quietly. However, during the pandemic, it was obvious that the religious leaders were playing a key role in the Government's vaccination programme.

Other areas where the religious communities contribute to developing a more inclusive society are, for example, their support of new migrants, their offer of education and social welfare programmes and their intergenerational approach.



The Religious Leaders expressed their appreciation for the recent Government move to include 'religious diversity' in the Social Studies Curriculum. Teaching and learning materials about religions will be included in the Social Studies curriculum where appropriate. The Leaders agreed they must be presented in a non-proselytising way.

The Hon Priyanca Radhakrishnan agreed that uniqueness and diversity make us stronger. “Disagreements are good - as long as differences of opinions are communicated in a respectful manner”.

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