



ISLAMIC COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

ISLAMOPHOBIA
POSITION STATEMENT



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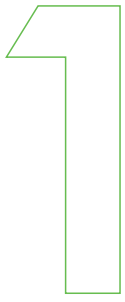


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ICV expresses its deep appreciation to the many people that have played an important role in researching, developing and reviewing this Islamophobia Position Statement. These include several highly respected academics, community activists and community leaders. The ICV puts forward this position statement in a sincere endeavour to meaningfully address the serious problem of Islamophobia and marginalisation of the Muslim community. It welcomes constructive engagement from stakeholders and interested parties.

PREAMBLE

The horrific massacre of over fifty Muslim worshippers¹ in Christchurch in 2019 shocked the world. It brought to public attention the very real threat of Islamophobia to the lives of Muslims not only in New Zealand but in any place where Muslims are a vulnerable minority. Despite near unanimous expressions of sympathy and outrage and demands that action is taken to prevent this ever happening again, the sad reality is that anti-Muslim sentiment is rising including in Australia and around the world.² This is driven by far-right extremist ideology which is a growing menace as warned by the ASIO Director General during the first “annual threat assessment”.³ The need for urgent and far-reaching action to stem the tide of anti-Muslim hate is clear. The ICV’s Islamophobia Position Statement discusses the local and global context, the contributing factors, the consequences, and makes recommendations for policy makers, law enforcement, and the media.



KEY TERMS

The ICV recognises the following key terms have a myriad of working definitions and, subsequently, the below do not attempt to exclude or replace these.

ISLAM

Islam is a monotheistic faith system, religion, way of life, moral code and set of principles. The word Islam translates to mean attainment of peace by submitting to the will of God. Islam provides guidance in all aspects of life: personally, culturally, socially, financially, economically and politically.

MUSLIM

Muslims are faithful to the tenants of Islam and believe there is no God but Allah. Muslims in Australia are culturally diverse and practise their religion to varied extents.

RACISM

Racism may be understood as “that which maintains or exacerbates inequality or opportunity among” groups based on their social, cultural, religious or ethnic identities.⁴ It can be expressed through racist emotions (stereotypes), racist beliefs (prejudice) and racist behaviours (including discrimination, harassment, vilification and violence).⁵ Racist emotions and beliefs may be unwitting and stem from ignorance, misunderstanding, unfamiliarity and “inflexible” ideas about “the traditional way of doing things”.⁶

ISLAMOPHOBIA

Islamophobia is “rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness”.⁷ Very simply, Islamophobia “is anti-Muslim racism”.⁸ Islamophobia involves the “rejection of Islam, Muslim groups and Muslim individuals on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes. It may have emotional, cognitive, evaluative as well as action-oriented elements”.⁹ Islamophobia is complex, but can be measured in the following ways:

- the experiences of anti-Muslim discrimination, marginalisation, harassment, vilification and/or violence
- the negative evaluations, attitudes and emotions of non-Muslims in relation to Muslims and Islam

VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Violent extremism may be understood as “the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence” to achieve political, social or ideological goals.¹⁰

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (CVE)

The Australian Government describes CVE as their “efforts” to “prevent processes of radicalisation leading to violent extremism, including terrorism, and where possible to help individuals disengage from a preparedness to support or commit acts of violence to achieve political, social or ideological ends.”¹¹



2

CONTEXT

The presence of Islamophobia must be acknowledged for it to be addressed and responded to collectively.

The ICV:

ACKNOWLEDGES that with a growing Muslim population, it's more important than ever to reject Islamophobia, promote social inclusion and provide support for those who experience it. As noted by the *Pew Research Center*, in 2015 Muslims made up 24.1% (1.75 billion) of the global population.¹² The Muslim population is projected to grow by 70% by the year 2060, accounting for 31.1% (12.3 billion) of the global population.¹³

RECOGNISES that the Muslim population is also growing in Australia. The *2006 Australian Census* recorded that 1.7% of Australians identified as Muslim.¹⁴ The *2016 Australian Census* recorded that 2.6% of Australians identified as Muslim (an estimated 604,200 people).¹⁵ The Muslim population in Australia is heterogenous and linked to 183 countries.¹⁶

NOTES that in understanding Islamophobia as a type of racism, we can better recognise that it presents in different ways. Racism is *internalised* when a person incorporates beliefs, attitudes or emotions "within their worldview".¹⁷ In the context of Islamophobia, *internalised* racism may present as internalised dominance or privilege and involve the "incorporation of attitudes, beliefs or ideologies about the inferiority of other social groups and the superiority of one's own social group."¹⁸ Islamophobia may present as *interpersonal* racism when "interactions between people serve to maintain or exacerbate" inequalities between groups based on their social, cultural, religious or ethnic identities.¹⁹

RECOGNISES that existence of *structural* (or *institutional*) Islamophobia is evident when "fear and suspicion of Muslims" manifests and is "enforced through the enactment and advancement of laws, policy and programming built upon the presumption that Muslim identity is associated with a national security threat."²⁰ As such, *structural* Islamophobia is prevalent in state practices where Muslims or Muslim communities are treated unfairly, profiled, policed or subject to surveillance more intensely than non-Muslims or non-Muslim communities. Very simply, when the state places suspicion on, and demonises Muslims through rhetoric, law or action, they "authorise and mobilise" Islamophobia within society.²¹ Importantly, *structural* Islamophobia requires a consideration of both the consciousness of its perpetrator and the net outcome of their actions.²²

NOTES that this position statement will attempt to understand the scope of Islamophobia by considering:

- the experiences of anti-Muslim discrimination, marginalisation, harassment, vilification and/or violence
- the negative evaluations, attitudes and emotions of non-Muslims in relation to Muslims and Islam

NOTES that the scope and nature of Islamophobia is compromised by the under-reporting of incidents both in the international and Australian context. As explained in the *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, "only 12% of Muslims say they have reported cases of discrimination".²³ Similarly, the report *Living with Racism: The experience and reporting by Arab and Muslim Australians of discrimination, abuse,*

and violence since 11 September 2001 (compiled for the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission*), highlighted that “only 6.5%” of the 142 Muslim respondents “had reported incidents of racism, abuse or violence to the police.”²⁴ As such, although the following statistics demonstrate anti-Muslim sentiment and highlight the existence of Islamophobic incidents, it is important to reflect on the potential number of unreported incidents.

International Context

Although Islamophobia is present in many states, the following will highlight its presence using Germany, the United States of America and the United Kingdom as examples.

Germany

The ICV:

NOTES that Islamophobic incidents have been recorded as a “subcategory of hate crimes” in police statistics and criminal records since 1 January 2017.²⁵ As noted in the *Islamophobia in Germany: National Report 2017*, government records counted 71 attacks on mosques and 908 “anti-Islam” crimes against German Muslims, “ranging from verbal to physical attacks and murder attempts”.²⁶

NOTES that the *Islamophobia in Germany: National Report 2017* estimated that during 2017 the PEGIDA (*Patriot Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West*) movement led “76 demonstrations against the Islamization of the Occident”.²⁷

NOTES that the *Islamophobia in Germany: National Report 2017* cited research indicating that 60% of all Muslim “teaching staff” working in the German education sector “felt discriminated against” because of either their headscarf or other forms of anti-Muslim racism.²⁸

NOTES that the *Islamophobia in Germany: National Report 2017*, included research that considered the representations of Muslims or Islam in the German media.²⁹ The research indicated that in 60-80% of cases Muslims or Islam were represented negatively.³⁰ Of these cases, Muslims and/or Islam were depicted as “physically violent, gender oppressive, religiously fanatic and/or fundamentalist, as well as socially and culturally backward.”³¹

United States of America (USA)

The ICV:

NOTES that the *Targeted 2018 Civil Rights Report* recorded a 17% increase in anti-Muslim bias incidents in the USA between 2016 (2,213 recorded incidents) and 2017 (2,599 recorded incidents).³² The report noted that of the incidents recorded in 2017, 35% were “instigated” by federal government agencies.³³ The report also highlighted a 15% increase in anti-Muslim hate crime in the United States between 2016 (260 recorded incidents) and 2017 (300 recorded incidents).³⁴

NOTES that a survey conducted by the *University of Maryland* in 2017 estimated public perceptions towards Muslims in the USA.³⁵ Findings highlighted that 25% of respondents indicated a “very unfavourable” attitude about “The Muslim religion” and 8% indicated a “very unfavourable” attitude to “The Muslim people”.³⁶

NOTES that the *Southern Poverty Law Centre* identified 100 anti-Muslim hate group chapters in the USA in 2018.³⁷



United Kingdom (UK)

The ICV:

NOTES that the *Islamophobia in the UK: National Report 2017* indicated an increase in reports on the number of “attacks on Muslim places of worship” from 47 in 2016, to 110 in 2017.³⁸ The report also noted a 35% “increase in religiously motivated hate crime” with the “overwhelming majority” relating to anti-Muslim incidents.³⁹ The report also indicated that Islamophobic attacks in Greater London had increased by 40% between 2016 and 2017.⁴⁰

NOTES that the *Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey*, conducted by the *Pew Research Center*, indicated that 11% of respondents from the UK felt “very unfavourable” about Muslims, and 17% felt “mostly unfavourable” about Muslims.⁴¹

NOTES that *The Social Mobility Challenges Faced by Young Muslims* report highlighted the experiences of Muslims in the UK.⁴² Conducted by the *Social Mobility Commission*, the qualitative report noted that young Muslims “feel that they have to work ten times harder than their counterparts due to cultural differences and discrimination”.⁴³

The Australian Context

The ICV:

NOTES that between 12 September 2001 and 11 November 2001, the *Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural New South Wales* recorded 284 incidents of racial hatred.⁴⁴ In 52% of reports, where religion could be discerned, 68% were directed towards Muslims.⁴⁵

NOTES that between September 2014 and December 2015, the *Islamophobia Register Australia* received 243 Islamophobic incident reports.⁴⁶ Of these, 54.3% occurred offline and 45.7%

occurred online.⁴⁷ The report identified that females were the victim in 67.7% of the incidents and males were the victim in 20.8% of the incidents.⁴⁸ In 11.5% of incidents, both males and females were present.⁴⁹ The report noted that religious clothing was referred to in 56.6% of the recorded incidents.⁵⁰ It also highlighted that increased reports of Islamophobic incidents coincided with the introduction of anti-terrorism legislation, negative media coverage of Islam or Muslims, and acts of terrorism.⁵¹ The *Islamophobia in Australia Report II*, recorded 349 Islamophobic incidents across 2016 and 2017 (24 months).⁵² Of these, only 12% were reported from Victoria, with 14 reported in 2014-2015 and 12 reported in 2016-2017.⁵³

NOTES that *Victoria Police* have the option to record offences as being motivated by prejudice against a group of people with actual or perceived common characteristics.⁵⁴ These characteristics may relate to sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, race, sex, age, disability and/or homelessness.⁵⁵ The *Crimes Statistics Agency* process and publish Victorian crimes statistics, as recorded by *Victoria Police*.⁵⁶ A review of the “offences recorded where offence was flagged as a prejudicially motivated crime based on religion” towards Muslims showed that in Victoria there were:⁵⁷

- 50 recorded offences between April 2014 and March 2015.⁵⁸
- 39 recorded offences between April 2015 and March 2016.⁵⁹
- 46 recorded offences between April 2016 and March 2017.⁶⁰
- 34 recorded offences between April 2017 and March 2018.⁶¹
- 53 recorded offences between April 2018 and March 2019.⁶²



NOTES that *The Resilience and Ordinariness of Australian Muslims: Attitudes and experiences of Muslims Report (2015)* highlighted the disproportionate experiences between Muslims in Australia and the national average.⁶³ Comparisons between the experiences of racism (2011;2013) and the national average (collected within the Challenging Racism National Survey 2001-2008) noted that:⁶⁴

- 61.6% of Muslim respondents had experienced racism in their workplace or when seeking employment, in comparison to the national average of 17.9%.⁶⁵
- 55.5% of Muslim respondents had experienced racism in education, in comparison to the national average of 17%.⁶⁶
- 60% of Muslim respondents had experienced racism by being called names or similarly insulted, in comparison to the national average of 21.7%.⁶⁷
- 43.5% of Muslim respondents had experienced racism in dealings with Police, in comparison to the national average of 7.4%.⁶⁸
- 40.5% of Muslim respondents had experienced racism when renting or buying a house, in comparison to the national average of 7%.⁶⁹

NOTES that *The Resilience and Ordinariness of Australian Muslims: Attitudes and experiences of Muslims Report (2015)* indicated that 78.8% of Muslim respondents *strongly agreed or agreed* with the statement: "The Australian media's portrayal of Muslims is unfair".⁷⁰

NOTES that the *Mapping Social Cohesion 2019: National Report*, produced by the Scanlon Foundation, presented the results of national surveys conducted in July-August 2019, indicating:

- 21% of respondents had a *somewhat negative or very negative* "personal attitude" towards Muslims.⁷¹
- 4% of respondents had a *somewhat negative or very negative* "personal attitude" towards Christians.⁷²

- 4% of respondents had a *somewhat negative or very negative* "personal attitude" towards Buddhists.⁷³

NOTES that the *Mapping Social Cohesion 2017: National Report* also indicated a positive correlation between age and anti-Muslim negativity.⁷⁴ Negative attitudes were recorded as:

- 1% for those aged 75 or over.⁷⁵
- 25% for those aged 45 to 54.⁷⁶
- 15% for those aged 18 to 24.⁷⁷

NOTES that *Islamophobia, social distance and fear of terrorism – A preliminary report* analysed data collected via a telephone survey of a representative sample of nearly 1,000 adult Australians.⁷⁸ Responses indicated that 11.9% of respondents *strongly agreed*, and 12% *agreed*, with the statement: "I would support any policy that will stop the building of a new mosque."⁷⁹ Furthermore, 4.1% *strongly agreed*, and 8.8% *agreed* with the statement: "If I could, I would avoid contact with Muslims."⁸⁰ Using an *Islamophobia Scale* ranging from 1 (Low) to 5 (High), the report demonstrated that of the 240 Victorian respondents, 10% were moderately high or high according to the *Islamophobia Scale*.⁸¹

NOTES that the *Challenging Racism Project 2015-16 National Survey Report* found that 31.5% of respondents expressed *somewhat negative* (21.1%) or *very negative* (10.4%) feelings towards Muslim Australians.⁸² The report also highlighted the pro-assimilation thinking of some Australians,⁸³ as 48.7% of respondents *agreed* with the statement: "People from racial, ethnic, cultural and religious minority groups should behave more like mainstream Australians". Similar thinking was also reflected in the *Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey*, conducted by Pew Research Center, which indicated that 50% of Australian respondents felt shared Australian customs and traditions were *very important* to national identity.⁸⁴



3

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

The factors that contribute to the manifestation of Islamophobia are complex and difficult to precisely identify. Some of the following factors may be considered both contributing factors and consequences of Islamophobia.

Orientalism

The ICV:

NOTES that both Orientalist and Islamophobic discourses have allowed a system of misrepresentations to circulate, compromising harmony and social inclusion.⁸⁵

ACKNOWLEDGES that Islamophobia has been shaped by the reasoning that underpins *Orientalism*. It has been noted that “Orientalism illustrated the extensive history and complex processes by which Islam and its adherents were othered, or more specifically, constructed and cast as inferior and subhuman, unassimilable and savage, violent and warmongering. Islam was everything the West was not, and it was assigned these and other damaging attributes in order to elevate the West and characterise it, and its people, as progressive, democratic, and modern.”⁸⁶

COMMENDS *The Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project* for developing a definition of Islamophobia that reflects its historical underpinnings: “a contrived fear or prejudice fomented by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure. It is directed at a perceived or real Muslim threat through the maintenance and extension of existing disparities in economic, political, social and cultural relations, while rationalizing the necessity to deploy violence as a tool to achieve “civilizational rehab” of the target communities (Muslim or otherwise). Islamophobia reintroduces and reaffirms a global

racial structure through which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended.”⁸⁷

Misrepresentations of Muslims and Islam

The ICV:

UNDERSTANDS that hyper ethnocentric and nativist discourses, often disguised as patriotism,⁸⁸ sometimes contribute to Islamophobic narratives. Although Islam (like Judaism and Christianity) is not indigenous to Australia, Islam has existed as part of the Australian fabric since 1650.⁸⁹

RECOGNISES that respectful critique or opposition to Islamic theology is not Islamophobic. As established by *The Runnymede Trust*, distinctions between open -“legitimate criticism and disagreement”- and closed -“Islamophobia, or unfounded prejudice and hostility”- views are helpful for understanding and identifying Islamophobia.⁹⁰ As such, a closed view of Islam may present it as monolithic, separate, inferior, enemy and/or manipulative.⁹¹ In contrast, an open view of Islam may present it as diverse, interacting, different, partner and/or sincere.⁹²

RECOGNISES the notion, that Islam is incompatible with Liberalism, as a closed view of Islam. Unfortunately, at times, Liberalism relies on the repression of Islam in order “to present itself as liberal and progressive”.⁹³

RECOGNISES the role the Australian media can play in circulating closed views of Islam and Muslims. Presenting or sharing Islamophobic ideas can allow them to gain “social currency” and “legitimacy” within a public forum.⁹⁴ Playing a fundamental role in influencing public perceptions, the media can subtly push normative boundaries of what’s acceptable and unacceptable.⁹⁵



UNDERSTANDS that a disproportionately negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims can contribute to Islamophobic views. In 2005, the *Social Research Centre*, in partnership with the *Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights*, conducted a "telephone survey of 600 Victorian residents" to understand "non-Muslim Victorians' perceptions of Muslims and Muslim Women."⁹⁶ The survey respondents who held negative views of Muslims, attributed them to:

- 18% "Improper treatment of women"⁹⁷
- 19.7% "Perceived associations with war and terrorism"⁹⁸
- 23% "Negative portrayal of Muslims through the media"⁹⁹
- 34.4% "Disagreeing with Muslim religion and culture"¹⁰⁰

Survey respondents also identified their main sources of information on Muslims (with respondents able to nominate multiple sources):¹⁰¹

- Media: 59.5% television, 48% newspapers and 16.2% radio¹⁰²
- Personal contact: 17.5% relatives and friends, 13.3% co-workers and clients and 8% community and cultural groups¹⁰³

NOTES that the *Who Watches the Media? Race-related reporting in Australian mainstream media Summary Report 2017* analysed 124 "race-related" opinion-based reports released across a 6-month period.¹⁰⁴ Focusing on Australia's most-watched current affairs TV programs (*A Current Affair*, *The Project*, *60 Minutes* and *7.30*) and most-read online newspapers (*The Australian*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Herald Sun*), they determined that 63% portrayed Muslims negatively, and only 7% portrayed them positively.¹⁰⁵

RECOGNISES that Islamophobic narratives take root and are amplified in the online realm, and that online hate can and does lead to violence in the offline world. Social media companies such as Facebook and Twitter have been complacent when dealing with the increasing use of their platforms to spread extreme hate and incitement to violence, most by groups and individuals that espouse far right ideology. Research by *Victoria University* highlighted that dangerous narratives that thrive on digital platforms without detection.¹⁰⁶ For example, the narrative that Muslims are 'inferior, sub-human, and inherently incompatible with Western liberal norms and values' is widely repeated.

Policing and CVE

The ICV:

NOTES that Muslims in Australia have been conceptually framed as a *suspect community*: "a sub-group of the population that is singled out for state attention as being 'problematic'¹⁰⁷. A *suspect community* is "sustained and encouraged"¹⁰⁸ by social and political discourses, and CVE practices that may be considered *structurally* Islamophobic. These have contributed to a "climate of high emotionality, resentment and distrust that can be highly counterintuitive to generating and sustaining relationships of trust."¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, Muslim communities have felt "under siege" or "unfairly singled out by the discourse and practice of counter-terrorism."¹¹⁰



4

CONSEQUENCES

The presence of Islamophobia in Australia hinders the potential for a socially inclusive society. The marginalisation and exclusion of Muslims in Australia compromises their wellbeing, sense of belonging and value, and inhibits opportunities of upward mobility.¹¹¹

The ICV:

UNDERSTANDS that religious vilification diminishes “dignity, sense of self-worth and belonging to the community” as noted in the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*.¹¹² Furthermore, it reduces the “ability to contribute to, or fully participate in, all social, political, economic and cultural aspects of society as equals, thus reducing the benefit that diversity brings to the community.”¹¹³

NOTES that experiences of Islamophobia may evoke feelings of marginalisation, humiliation, fear and social alienation.¹¹⁴ As highlighted in the *Islamophobia in Australia Report*, experiences of Islamophobia can also encourage feelings of: anger, disgust, disappointment, helplessness, fear of being alone in public, and a mistrust in multiculturalism.¹¹⁵

ACKNOWLEDGES that Muslim women and children are particularly vulnerable to Islamophobia, as highlighted by the *Roundtable Discussion on the Experiences of Muslim Mothers in Melbourne* (produced by *The Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria*).¹¹⁶ This discussion explored: acts of intimidation with the use of vehicles; a lack of interest by *Victoria Police* in responding to reported incidents; and “a diminished sense of belonging” stemming from the experience of public “verbal and physical abuse”.¹¹⁷

NOTES that Australian Muslims are often required to define their identities as both a Muslim and an Australian within the citizenship discourse. A study conducted by *Monash University* (2009) noted that over 90% of Muslim respondents agreed with the statement: “I can be a good Muslim and a good Australian”.¹¹⁸ However, due to the “ever-changing notions of what constitutes the acceptable attributes of citizenship and belonging”, many Muslims feel obliged to negotiate their identities within the Australian citizenship discourse.¹¹⁹

ACKNOWLEDGES the experiences of racism faced by Muslims in both institutional and everyday settings, as recorded in the *Challenging Racism Project 2015-16 National Survey Report*.¹²⁰ Experiences of *institutional* discrimination were recorded as:

- 60% in the workplace¹²¹
- 61.3% in education¹²²
- 55.9% in housing¹²³
- 57% in policing and the court systems¹²⁴
- 53.8% in seeking health care¹²⁵

Experiences in an everyday setting were recorded as:

- 55.9% at a sporting event¹²⁶
- 69.9% when using public transport or on the street¹²⁷
- 65.6% when online or using social media¹²⁸
- 49.5% when at home (or at the home of family or a friend)¹²⁹

5

THE ICV'S ROLE AND INTEREST

As a Muslim community organisation, the ICV understands its responsibility to denounce Islamophobia, empower and support Muslims, engage the wider Australian community and promote understanding and acceptance.

The ICV:

STRESSES that no individual should be subject to discrimination, harassment, marginalisation, vilification or violence due to their social, cultural, religious or ethnic identity.

RECOGNISES that Islamophobia disrupts socio-cultural harmony and negatively affects the wider Victorian Muslim community, compromising their wellbeing, identity and sense of belonging.

UNDERSTANDS that as a peak representative body for over 200,000 Victorian Muslims and more than 60 member societies, the ICV has a duty of care to the Muslim community. The ICV recognises its role is to provide support to, and advocate for, the wellbeing and rights of Victorian Muslims.

REMAINS committed to rejecting Islamophobia, supporting individuals and organisations within the wider Muslim community and promoting social inclusion and cooperation.

COMMITTS to working collaboratively with the broader Muslim community, Muslim community organisations, multicultural and multifaith organisations, the Victorian public sector, not-for-profit organisations, the Victorian private sector and educational institutions, to develop and refine resources, policies and projects intended to address Islamophobia in Victoria.





SCOPE

The ICV acknowledges both the breadth and depth of Islamophobia in Victoria.

The ICV:

AFFIRMS that this position statement is in accordance with the *Objectives articulated in the Constitution of the Islamic Council of Victoria*.¹³⁰ It particularly aligns with the following:

(iii) (c) Rightful citizenship of Muslims.¹³¹

(iii) (d) Social and religious betterment of Muslims generally.¹³²

(iii) (g) Promotion of all matters concerning the well-being of Muslims in Victoria, including human rights and fundamental freedoms and the maintenance of harmony and friendship in Victoria.¹³³

(vi) To promote peace, understanding and good relations among all people in Victoria, Australia and globally.¹³⁴

(vii) To build and sustain a Muslim community that is dynamic and responsive to changing needs and opportunities and that contributes to a society that respects and celebrates cultural diversity that is consistent with Islamic values.¹³⁵

AFFIRMS that the purpose of this position statement is to provide a well-founded and evidence-based response to Islamophobia. It does not serve to represent the opinions, experiences and feelings of all Muslims in Victoria. Instead, it serves as a starting point to collectively consider and thoughtfully respond to Islamophobia in Victoria.

ACKNOWLEDGES that this position statement may be relevant to: all impacted by Islamophobia directly or indirectly; those working to address Islamophobia; the *Australian Government* across local, state and federal sectors; non-government organisations; human rights organisations; civil society organisations; Muslim community organisations; universities and educational institutions; researchers; those working in legal spaces; employment agencies; police and security services; and the media.

RECOGNISES that this position statement commits the ICV to working with new and existing stakeholders to develop a thoughtful, holistic and structured response to Islamophobia in Victoria.



7

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognising the prevalence of Islamophobia, the ICV strongly encourages consideration of the following recommendations.

A. Review security and policing practices to consider their negative consequences on the Muslim community

i) That the Australian Government and State Governments review current laws, security and policing practices that have the effect of securitising Muslim identity and contribute to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of the Muslim community.

A strong national identity should be built upon a “wide radius of trust” (*social capital*), where all individuals and groups feel valued, included and able to access full and equal opportunities for social, economic and political participation.¹³⁶ *Social capital* in Australia has been compromised by processes of “securitisation” and “domestication” which have positioned Muslims “at the social margins, at the limits of citizenship, where they are constantly challenged to prove their trustworthiness and justify their claims to citizenship.”¹³⁷ In Australia, *securitisation* processes have involved “framing policy questions in logics of survival with a capacity to mobilise politics of fear in which social relations are structured on the basis of distrust.”¹³⁸ Processes of *domestication* have involved defining the parameters of “national values and culture”, the promotion of a “moderate Islam”¹³⁹ and the “rejection of radical Islam”. Muslims in Australia should not feel that their social citizenship is “conditional” and “measured by active efforts to integrate” or the “rejection of radical Islam.”¹⁴⁰

Policing and CVE practices in Australia have been “underpinned by political and social discourses that identify the threat originating from the Muslim community.”¹⁴¹ Consequently, the wider Muslim community has been constructed as a *suspect community* who is “singled out” as “problematic” not due to “suspected wrong doing” but because of their “presumed membership”.¹⁴² Surveillance, raids, informal questioning and political rhetoric, have contributed to feelings of stigmatization, being “unfairly singled out” and “under siege” within the community.¹⁴³

ii) That those working in policing and CVE engage in inclusive dialogue with the wider Victorian Muslim community to recognise and understand grievances with past and existing practices.

Such dialogue should critically evaluate the broader consequences of practices “overly focused on managing risk” to help inform future policy and practice.¹⁴⁴ The ICV contends that a commitment to meaningful engagement that values Muslims as “partners” rather than “subjects of scrutiny” is an essential starting point for re-building trust.¹⁴⁵

iii) That current and future policing and CVE practices are based on best practice approaches and are subject to proper judicial oversight.

Alongside strong community engagement, the ICV recommends future policing and CVE practices have a “sound evidence base”, offer mutual benefit¹⁴⁶ and are subject to judicial checks and balances.

iv) That Victoria Police review current approaches to community engagement and policing.

Research conducted in Australia has noted that the “perceived credibility and legitimacy of police” has been undermined by perceptions that police both “unfairly target” minority communities and also “neglect or trivialise the victimisation of these same communities.”¹⁴⁷ It is recommended that *Victoria Police* evaluate their approach across organisational, relational and operational levels, to enable them to better recognise the prejudicial motivation underpinning some of the “hostility directed towards minority communities”.¹⁴⁸

B. Renew and strengthen Australia's commitments to human rights conventions

v) That the Australian Government reviews its commitments and legal obligations to international human rights treaties, including: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.¹⁴⁹

Article 18 of the ICCPR outlines that: “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of [their] choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, Article 26 of the ICCPR, states: “All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal

protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”¹⁵¹

*The Australian Human Rights Commission's submission of Information concerning Australia's compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to the United Nations Human Rights Committee.*¹⁵² Within section 12.1 *Freedom of Religion*, the Commission “notes that freedom of religion or belief is not directly protected under Federal anti-discrimination law.”¹⁵³ As per the *Australian Human Rights Commission's* suggestion, the *Australian Government* should review the jurisdictions of the USA, UK, France, Canada and New Zealand, which all consider “discrimination on the ground of religion [as] unlawful.”¹⁵⁴

Article 4 of the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, as within the *Religious Freedom Review*.¹⁵⁵ Article 4 expresses that “all states shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.”¹⁵⁶ It also notes that “all states shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, on the grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.”¹⁵⁷

The ICV recognises the importance of the *Universal Periodic Review* of Australia's human rights



obligations, conducted under the auspices of the *Human Rights Council*.¹⁵⁸ As noted in the *Universal Periodic Review (2015)*, the ICV agrees that “advancing measures to protect freedom of speech, freedom of religion and other common law rights and liberties have not been given sufficient focus domestically”.¹⁵⁹ The ICV believes that the establishment and adoption of an Australian Charter of Rights would “make directly applicable the human rights jurisprudence which has developed internationally”¹⁶⁰ and provide human rights protections in accordance with the *United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.¹⁶¹

C. Increase protections against religious vilification and discrimination

vi) That the Australian Government implement a parliamentary code of conduct that eliminates hate speech against racial and religious minorities.

In recognition of the enabling role played by Islamophobic discourse in the political and public domains, and as per the ICV-led petition, the ICV calls upon the *Australian Government* to develop and adopt a Parliamentary Code of Conduct that includes race ethics.¹⁶² Such a Code would demand that “All parliamentarians reject discriminatory, divisive or exclusionary statements. This means any statements that are not consistent with the values of social inclusion, tolerance, and respect for all persons regardless of colour, gender, national or ethnic origin, culture and religious belief.”¹⁶³

vii) That the Australian Government implement laws that protect against vilification and hate speech against individuals and groups based on their religious identity.

Anti-Muslim discrimination, marginalisation, harassment, vilification and violence occur in an enabling environment.¹⁶⁴ As such, the presence, or absence, of legislation can legitimise or delegitimise Islamophobia.¹⁶⁵

As noted in the *ICV Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Inquiry into the status of the human right to religion or belief*¹⁶⁶ there is a clear absence of legislative protections for religious minorities against vilification. The current *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* provides protections against vilification on the basis of race but there is no equivalent protection “for people to safely practice their freedom of religion in Australia.”¹⁶⁷ As such, the ICV would support the introduction of new religious vilification laws that include effective thresholds for prosecution.

viii) That the Victorian Government strengthen anti-vilification protections including revising the thresholds in the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act to make it more effective.

Religious vilification is unlawful in Victoria as per the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*. The Act states: “A person must not, on the ground of religious belief or activity of another person or class of persons, engage in conduct that incites hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion or severe ridicule of, that other person or class of persons.”¹⁶⁸

This includes on the internet and over email.¹⁶⁹ However, the ICV contends that the threshold for conviction potentially undermines the purported aims of the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*. Since the introduction of the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*, there has only been one conviction, which found three far-right nationalists guilty of vilification in 2017.¹⁷⁰

D. Strengthen the way Islamophobic incidents can be reported and responded to

ix) That the recording of racial and religious hate crimes by police be made mandatory with the inclusion of additional mandatory offence classifications that reflect racial and religious vilification.

The successful enforcement of any anti-vilification legislation such as the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act* depends on more effective reporting and recording procedures of hate crimes used by the police. Currently, it is at the discretion of the police officer whether the hate incident is recorded as a hate crime, and police officers will often pursue other charges because they are perceived to be easier to prove and carry greater penalties.¹⁷¹ The mandatory recording of prejudice motivated crime is important to build community trust in the value of reporting; to facilitate any subsequent court decision-making by magistrates; and for accurate data collection.

x) That the Australian Government and Victorian Government consider third-party reporting mechanisms hosted in trusted community organisations such as the Islamic Council of Victoria

or the Islamophobia Register, as an avenue for capturing and reporting prejudice motivated crime in addition to police statistics.

Islamophobic incidents in Victoria may be recorded to various reporting services including the *Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission*, *Victoria Police*, the *Islamophobia Register Australia* and the *Australian Human Rights Commission*. As each reporting service operates within a different remit, Islamophobic incidents are recorded, responded to and analysed differently. In addition to the under-reporting of incidents, this inhibits the potential to accurately understand the scope of Islamophobic incidents within Victoria. The ICV encourages each reporting service to consider avenues for collaboration, explore opportunities for data sharing, and review and refine their processes for recording incidents. Such a review should involve a holistic assessment of the barriers faced by the wider Muslim community in accessing these reporting services, to better support the community and allow for improved data collection. Furthermore, reporting services should strengthen their capacity to provide appropriate support to Muslim community members who connect with their service.

E. Improve the standards of media reporting

xi) That the Australian media, old and new, must abide by Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance's (MEAA) Journalist Code of Ethics¹⁷² and that the MEAA strengthen penalties for repeated violations.

The ICV strongly encourages the Australian media to review the recommendations within the Who



*Watches the Media? Race-related reporting in Australian mainstream media Summary Report 2017.*¹⁷³ The following recommendations deserve particular attention: “The regulations covering media conduct (and journalistic standards) must be strengthened so that definitions of racism include both overt and covert forms”, and, “News agencies must ensure journalists receive training about racism so that fewer journalists file negative race-based reports.”¹⁷⁴

Members of *Australian Press Council* are bound to *Standards of Practice*, which apply to all forms of published material including “text, headlines, photographs, graphics, captions, audio [and] video”.¹⁷⁵ As these *Standards of Practice* also apply to non-members (only in the complaint resolution process), the ICV encourages the *Australian Press Council* to strengthen the *Standards of Practice* to better protect the Australian Muslim community.

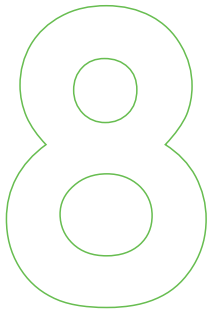
Members to the *MEAA* must reflect on their commitment to the standard: “Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.”¹⁷⁶ The ICV encourages the *MEAA* to strengthen penalties for those who repeatedly violate their *Journalist Code of Ethics*. The ICV reminds the *MEAA* that as per the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, “It is unlawful for a person to do an act, otherwise than in private if: (a) the act is reasonably likely to, in all to circumstances, to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or a group of people.”¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, “an act is taken not to be done in private if it: (a) causes words, sounds, images or writing to be communicated to the public”.¹⁷⁸

F. Better regulation of the online domain to stamp out hate content

xii) That the Australian Government and the Victorian Government introduce a set of standards and sanctions for unacceptable online hate content that vilifies racial and religious groups, and legislates for such offensive content to be reported, taken down or filtered

Online hate creates an overwhelmingly toxic environment which can inspire people to commit serious criminal offenses. As such, appropriate civil and criminal codes of prosecution should be considered for online vilification.

Whilst it is difficult to regulate the Internet, the ICV believes that legislation plays an important role in addressing online vilification. Facebook is the leading platform for anti-Muslim abuse according to Australian and international studies.¹⁷⁹ Social media companies such as Facebook have a responsibility to ensure that the content posted on their platforms are in line with community standards and do not breach vilification and hate speech laws. The likes of Facebook should be compelled by law to regularly review and strengthen their online content standards and procedures for moderating online content and removing offensive material in a timely manner



IMPLEMENTATION

The ICV commits to the following efforts and actions.

Further researching the factors that contribute to Islamophobia. The ICV acknowledges that Islamophobia cannot be effectively addressed without a sophisticated understanding of the myriad of contributing factors.

Strengthening efforts to advocate for the rights of Muslims, discredit Islamophobic discourses and denounce misconceptions and misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims. The ICV also commits to highlighting laws and practices that inadequately protect Muslims in Australia.

Partnering with Muslim organisations at a local, national, and international level to increase the effectiveness of advocacy strategies and actions that address Islamophobia in all its forms.

Contributing to the design, promotion and implementation of local, regional or national projects, policies or legislation aimed at addressing Islamophobia and providing support for those within the wider Australian Muslim community who experience Islamophobia.

Participating in forums and collective action networks that promote inclusion and seek to reduce hate.

Working with the *Priority Communities Division* and the *Multicultural Liaison Officers* within *Victoria Police* to strengthen meaningful community engagement, policing and risk management.

Conducting community education focused on recognising Islamophobic incidents, responding to Islamophobic incidents with support and reporting Islamophobic incidents.

Continually refining and expanding the *ICV Islamophobia Support*¹⁸⁰ online platform and service to ensure that it meets the needs of the Victorian Muslim community. The ICV will continue to identify and review appropriate psychological and legal support services and community services from the Eastern, Western, North West and Southern Metro regions of Victoria.

Ongoing consultation with *Victoria Police*, *Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission*, *Australian Human Rights Commission*, the *Islamophobia Register Australia* and other relevant stakeholders to evaluate the ways Islamophobic incident data may be better captured, analysed and collated. For the ICV, “systematic collection of information” is essential for presenting a “reliable and nuanced picture” of the scope and nature of Islamophobic incidents in Victoria.¹⁸¹ Academics, Muslim community organisations and the wider Victorian community are invited to assist the ICV in this process.

Remaining resilient and hopeful that collaboratively we can create a more respectful, equitable and inclusive Victoria.





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