



Australian Government

**Department of Immigration
and Multicultural Affairs**

Australia's dialogue with communities on security issues

**International Metropolis Conference
Lisbon 2006**

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The government's regular engagement with the Australian people

For many years, a priority of the Australian Government has been to establish and maintain effective and clear communication with communities across the country.

We knew, even before the 'war on terror' began, that it was important for people to have access to information and an effective and reliable communication link to the government.

Regular and credible communication builds successful dialogue

In our experience, different approaches to communicating each contribute to the development and maintenance of a successful dialogue.

Australia's approaches include:

- talking and listening to people and groups;
- supporting projects to bring people together;
- running national information campaigns; and
- developing practical answers to community needs.

Talking and listening

- The government's Community Liaison Officers network – maintains regular contact with some 8,000 individuals and community groups.
- Effective consultations with groups – travelling the country, hosting national and regional forums particularly to evaluate existing programmes and policy.
- Keeping in touch with mainstream communities' concerns.

Projects to bring people together

Living in Harmony – a national programme to promote shared values and address intolerance

- Funded community projects programme including ad hoc grants for emergency projects;
- A partnerships programme to develop strategic relationships with community, business and government sectors; and
- A public information strategy.

National public information strategy

- Since 1999, the focus of the strategy has been the annual 'Harmony Day' - a celebration for people to learn about and celebrate Australia as a diverse society united as one family by a common set of values.
- The strategy has now extended to encourage projects throughout the year.
- Tennis Australia, Cricket Australia, the Scouts and Guides are examples of partners in the strategy.

Practical answers to community needs

- Productive diversity – working with the business and corporate sector to recognise the value of Australia's diversity to the bottom line.
- Fair government services – helps everyone successfully participate in the Australian community and improves their chances of economic independence and social integration.
- Settlement services for refugees.

Australia's whole of government approach

- Federal government departments work together, maximizing the expertise and influence of different portfolio responsibilities.
- All levels of government: federal state/territory and local, working together.

This approach creates a coordinated, well informed outcome for all Australians.

When the society changes, and fear becomes the norm

The Australian Government's approach:

- Lead with courage;
- Listen to understand;
- Act with conviction; and
- Build alliances.

Leading with courage

Prime Minister's Summit with Muslim community leaders – August 2005

Ministerial level meetings with Muslim communities across Australia

Formation of a Muslim advisory body, the Muslim Community Reference Group – September 2005 until September 2006

MCRG summary of key outcomes

- MCRG recommendations and proposals were a key source of guidance in formulating the National Action Plan to build social cohesion, harmony and security.
- The group was instrumental in the planning of the Imams conference.
- It also assisted government to identify future directions for cooperative work.

Listening to understand

Building on the years of dialogue between the government and community groups and individuals, we focus on:

- Muslim communities' consultations – what needs to be done;
- Government departments and state/territory governments - what they can do;
- Identify strategic contacts/groups in the Muslim communities, including among women and youth.

Acting with conviction

- Youth Summits – national and regional.
- Developing the National Action Plan to build social cohesion, harmony and security.
- September 2006 national imams conference.
- Living in Harmony multi-faith community-funded projects and national partnerships.

National Action Plan to build social cohesion, harmony and security

- Brings together several federal government departments and state/territory governments.
- Supports and coordinates federal, state/territory and community projects.
- Four key focus areas: education, employment, integrating communities and enhancing national security.

Conference of Australian Imams

- Included contributions from Muslim leaders, women and youth.
- More than 100 Australian imams and other religious leaders attended.
- Communique highlighted:
 - United and strong denunciation of terrorism;
 - Intention to work toward having all sermons in English; and
 - Work toward a board of imams across all sects and nationalities.

What we see is working – our language

- Security is not only a law and order issue, it's also a matter of successful integration.
- There is a place in Australia's future for everyone, including young Muslims.
- The government acknowledges the important role of Muslim community leaders, and will continue to work with them.

What we see is working – our actions

Australia's 'whole of government' and 'all levels of government' approaches have developed a robust set of programmes and approaches to integration and security issues.

Australia's commitment to social cohesion and integration has established the government's credibility and allowed for effective dialogue on more sensitive issues.

Australia's achievements

In the past year the government has:

- extended our networks and contacts throughout Muslim communities;
- developed credibility as partners with Muslim communities in a mutually beneficial dialogue;
- developed practical expertise in working with this community at this sensitive time; and
- successfully encouraged bridge-building between groups within the Muslim community.

Australia's current challenges

- Maintain the momentum.
- Maintain dialogue with Muslim youth, without isolating them.
- Maintain government engagement while supporting Muslim community leaders to take an even greater, more visible role.
- Continue to develop a stronger understanding between the Muslim communities and the mainstream Australian society.