



Australian Federation
of Islamic Councils

AFIC meets Australian Hindu leaders to overcome tensions

Media Statement

1 February 2021

Following inflammatory Webinar statements by a leading Hindutva advocate aired by the Hindu Council of Australia, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) met with Hindu leaders to discuss the gravity of the comments and seek a way forward.

The inflammatory statements clearly incite the same type of hatred that saw the pogroms by Hindutva advocates against churches and mosques in India. The rise of Hindu extremism in India is also believed to be behind rising Hindu nationalism and isolationism amongst Hindu diasporas.

AFIC organised a meeting through the former president of the Hindu Council, Professor Nihal Agar and current president Prakash Mehta. The meeting was held at a restaurant in the Sydney suburb of Harris Park on the evening of Saturday 30 January 2021. The meeting was attended by some of Australia's longest serving and most senior Australian Muslim leaders including Imam Abdul Qud-dos Al Azhari, head of the committee of eminent elders, AFIC National Sharia Board (who came all the way from Brisbane for this meeting). AFIC CEO Keysar Trad, The Council of Islamic Societies in NSW president Abraham Zoabi and the AFIC president Dr Rateb Jneid (who joined and delivered a statement electronically).

"AFIC, whilst accepting the reason for Hindu Council president Prakash Mehta's inability to come from Canberra due to a family emergency, did express disappointment that the Hindu Council Vice President was unable to make it." Said AFIC CEO, Keysar Trad.



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“Muslims have contributed to India's growth and development for over 1200 years. Muslims transformed India into one of the most powerful nations on earth. Muslims did not divide India and did not suppress Hinduism, but rather, celebrated India's cultural contributions and helped the nation grow. The majority of Indians remained Hindu during Islam's contribution to India, the temples were protected as were the places of worship of minority religions. Muslims have always been well-wishers for India, however, RSS, BJP and Indian government intolerance towards minorities has transformed India. We're extremely upset over the forceful annexation and blockade of Kashmir, the racist Citizenship Amendment Act, the pogroms and the rising sectarian intolerance in India.” Said Keysar Trad.

“We are happy that our long-time friend Professor Nihal Agar, former president of the Hindu Council was able to join us to offer his regrets over the inflammatory speech made by the Indian PM's speech writer during the 19 January 2021 Webinar. We also welcome the Secretary of the Hindu Council of Australia.” Said Mr Trad.

AFIC President Dr Rateb Jneid said in his opening speech said:

“The social disharmony in India breaks my heart.

“Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and minority faiths lived in harmony in the subcontinent for over 1200 years.

“When Islam came to the subcontinent, Muslim rulers respected the right of people to their faiths. The evidence for this is clear by the fact that the majority of Indians remain Hindus and faiths like Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism and other faiths continued to be freely practiced and their adherents prospered.

“Then came the European invasion and massacres, pillage and the usual divide and conquer with artificial boundaries creating ongoing disputes and animosity.

“Muslims do not look to India for its economic success or military might, we look to India as a nation of proud people who lived in harmony for centuries celebrating multicultural and multifaith diversity.



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“This is the India that we must strive for. Prime Minister Modi is NOT India, his divisive politics that have created religious fanaticism and hatred do not belong in India and they certainly do not belong in Australia. His speech writer's error-riddled speech clearly shows that the great Indian people are being misled with lies and misinformation.

“I welcome you all and look forward to continue to work together in harmony so that we can remind our families in India of what we once were, neighbours, friends and brothers, and what we can again be: United in our love for India rather than divided by political opportunists.” Dr Rateb Jneid (AFIC president).

AFIC's head of the committee of eminent elders, AFIC National Sharia Board (ANSB), Imam Abdul Quddoos Al Azhari said:

“**My dear friends**, I am so happy that we can come together like we once used to in my native India.

“I remember a time, growing up in India when nothing could divide us, we cared for each other, we looked out for each other, we celebrated our differences and learned from each other.

“It took an unfortunate speech to bring us back together and remind us of what we can be again. We are people who reject hate speech and welcome all friends regardless of their faith or culture.

“My friends, I came to this land a few decades ago to find generous people of all cultures and faiths living together peacefully, respectfully and lovingly. This does not mean that we don't have an occasional problem here or there. We do have some extremists here too, but overall, the majority of our fellow Australians like us, overcome isolated racist incidents, we rise above them and we continue to embrace each other whilst pushing divisive messages to fringe where they belong.

“We might reject a hate-filled message, but we will always leave our door open for reconciliation.



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“This beautiful land allowed us to find peace, opportunity and prosperity. Which of us does not set something aside to help his country of origin?”

“This my dear brothers and sisters was made possible only when we found a nation that celebrates the humanity of a person regardless of faith, race or other considerations.

“We all love India and want the best for India, this best only comes when citizens are accorded freedom from hate, freedom from violence, freedom from divisive political opportunism, freedom to learn, to work and to believe and follow the faith of their choosing. I ask you to put your hand in mine to live as brothers and sisters in Australia and to remind the leaders in India that India's prosperity lies in respecting the religious and cultural freedom of all the people of India.” Imam Al Azhari, ANSB.

“Muslims will always strive for social harmony and mutual respect, however, whilst we reach out, we also say that we will take an assertive stand to defend our faith, defend our beloved prophet, peace and blessings upon him, and defend human rights, whether these are the rights of innocent Hindus caught up in the RSS/Hindutva racism or Muslims in Kashmir, Assam or the rest of India. We want to see a fair India, an India that celebrates Multi-cultures and Multi-faiths just like Australia. Australia's success is vastly enhanced by our celebration of religious and cultural diversity, we wish the same success for India, but it must first eliminate religiophobia and xenophobia.” Said Mr. Trad.

Authorised by:

Dr. Rateb Jneid

President