



Australian Federation  
of Islamic Councils

# National Anti-Racism Framework

**Submission by:**

1

# The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils

**Australian Federation of Islamic Councils**

*The peak body for Australian Muslims representing  
State and Territory Islamic Councils and Societies*



**Sydney (Head Office):** 932 Bourke Street, Zetland, NSW 2017

**Melbourne:** 66-68 Jeffcott Street, West Melbourne VIC 3003

**Canberra:** 21/41 Liardet Street, Weston ACT 2611

**Perth:** 17 Mercantile Way, Malaga WA 6090

**W:** [afc.com.au](http://afc.com.au) **E:** [admin@afc.com.au](mailto:admin@afc.com.au) **PH:** (02) 9319 6733



Australian Federation  
of Islamic Councils

The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (**AFIC**) is the peak Muslim body in Australia. As a peak community organisation, we concur with the Race Discrimination Commissioner that racial discrimination remains prominent in our communities. Racism continues to exist at all levels of society and in all industries. There are numerous cases which have been reported to us regarding Muslim women and men being discriminated against in the workforce and at school just because of their religious attire and practices. This discrimination is very frustrating and unacceptable.

At first it was surprising how many people were unaware of their rights to equal treatment and opportunity. Many persons who approached us complained of being victimised due to their “difference” but they added that it was normal treatment. It is shocking that instead of empowering the victims of racism society has had them believe that the only way to deal with this injustice is to accept it. This is unacceptable. No one should ever have to accept inequality or discrimination because they come from a minority group.

Many of our members and a large number of Australian Muslim men, woman and children continue to be victims of hate crimes and injustice due to their culturally diverse backgrounds and religion. It is distressing that racism continues to flourish in a country that prides itself for being a multicultural and accepting nation.



### Stories of first-hand racism

*A young manager of Nepalese culture at a café in Sydney's International Airport, during his shift an Australian man had come to sit at the café. The young man approaches the man and politely said 'Sir, these seats are reserved for customers only'. The man replied "you come here and take our jobs and then tell us where we can and cannot sit". The young man was hurt but upheld himself and to our surprise he said that this was normal treatment and he just had to get used to it because it happened so often.*

3

*A young accountant was constantly put down and discriminated by his employer in front of his peers for observing his fasting during the month of Ramadan while working. He was told that he should go eat something and that he should not fast at work. The fasting was not affecting his work but the constant harassment and discrimination made him feel insecure. He complained that he "dreaded waking up and going to work but felt that other firms may do the same and "better the devil you know."*

*A Senior Counsellor shared her story of a time she visited an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory to do some pro bono work. She was invited over to one of the community leaders' home for lunch and they served steak that was cooked in the microwave. She could not say anything as she felt that*



Australian Federation  
of Islamic Councils

*they did not know any better. She said “they are given resources such as a microwave but due to their lack of education and its availability they do not know how to utilise those resources”. What is the point of a scholarship you are not told about or an education that limits you?*

*There have been numerous cases where peoples’ CV have not been considered due to their ethnic names, appearances or their accents. People are judged based on their colour, background, sex and religion rather than their experience, skill and performance. This is the very reason why many people are forced to adopt ‘English names’ to be accepted and considered.*

4

The stories are endless and we could spend pages and pages sharing them. More importantly these are only some of the reasons that we stand with the movement towards developing an inclusive and effective National Anti-Racism Framework (the **Framework**). The current situation is a clear indicator that our existing anti-racism and racial equality measures are not prevalent It is imperative that we address these issues before they result in further harassment and/or violence to innocent and vulnerable people including children. Australia needs a framework that is prevalent, universally accepted and employed.

**Australian Federation of Islamic Councils**

*The peak body for Australian Muslims representing  
State and Territory Islamic Councils and Societies*



**Sydney (Head Office):** 932 Bourke Street, Zetland, NSW 2017

**Melbourne:** 66-68 Jeffcott Street, West Melbourne VIC 3003

**Canberra:** 21/41 Liardet Street, Weston ACT 2611

**Perth:** 17 Mercantile Way, Malaga WA 6090

**W:** [afic.com.au](http://afic.com.au) **E:** [admin@afic.com.au](mailto:admin@afic.com.au) **PH:** (02) 9319 6733



Australian Federation  
of Islamic Councils

We cannot stress how pivotal it is that as a Nation we focus on a framework that is enlightening, accepting and inclusive. We need to educate our people at the same level and provide them with equal opportunities. It is not just about throwing people from diverse backgrounds in one room and demanding that they get along. We must focus on creating an environment that naturally promotes inclusion and cohesion. For instance, there should be more scholarships to schools and universities directed towards communities and families from low socio-economic backgrounds. Education is a powerful compass and will enlighten people on diversity. Only by educating our communities, especially our youth will we be able to take effective action to prevent racism and to efficiently respond to it where it occurs. The aim is to give every person the same opportunities with encouragement and support to take those opportunities and make the most of them. It is only by giving every young person equal opportunities that we may be able to address and hopefully eliminate racism and discrimination from the source.

5

Every life matters and we need to embed this principle in not only the minds of every Australian citizen and resident but also in their hearts. It is an idea to start with the people who have the most influence in society such as the government, the media, the Commissions, NGOs, businesses, educators, health professionals, police, other legal authorities, civil society, and the community.

**Australian Federation of Islamic Councils**

*The peak body for Australian Muslims representing  
State and Territory Islamic Councils and Societies*



**Sydney (Head Office):** 932 Bourke Street, Zetland, NSW 2017

**Melbourne:** 66-68 Jeffcott Street, West Melbourne VIC 3003

**Canberra:** 21/41 Liardet Street, Weston ACT 2611

**Perth:** 17 Mercantile Way, Malaga WA 6090

**W:** [afc.com.au](http://afc.com.au) **E:** [admin@afc.com.au](mailto:admin@afc.com.au) **PH:** (02) 9319 6733



Australian Federation  
of Islamic Councils

A key example is policing in Australia. Australian history unravels a dark and hate filled relationship between authorities especially police and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. This relation has been extended to include all minority group. Historically, racism was accepted as part of police culture, 'the us versus them mentality.' Whilst the culture has somewhat improved, there is still a long way to go.

Since numerous brutalities by police against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders had been repeatedly exposed, the Australian Government finally took a stand and formally recognised their situation. Consequently, there have been significant changes to police training and educational requirements. However, despite those changes it has been proven that racism amongst police continues to prevail today. In turn, we continue to see the vicious effects of discrimination. The AFIC cannot stress how vital it is that we not only educate police officers on the historical relationship between indigenous Australians and authorities but also on how to break the cycle of racism. For example, Australia needs to promote community-based rehabilitation rather than punishment especially for petty crimes committed by people who are put in situations where they feel that they have no alternative. Community based policing by people who live amongst the community and understand their needs will lead to better understanding and mutual respect.



**Guiding principles:**

- 1) Equality is to be the foundation of the framework. We need to educate the young and the old to overlook race, sex, religion, disability and status when meeting, considering, hiring or providing an opportunity.
  
- 2) Education is the means by which equality and acceptance can be achieved. It is not just about educating the people that can afford an education but provide better opportunities to those who cannot. Examples include:
  - A. More flexible scholarships for minority groups and educating people about those scholarships.
  
  - B. Providing easy access and better English classes for refugees and recognising their overseas qualification. Teaching people the English language will empower them to use their skills to better Australia and will prevent them from being excluded and discriminated against. We have had a number of refugees contact us and complain of the mandatory classes they have been assigned. These classes are impersonal and most refugees attend only because they have to. It should be a part of the Framework that the Australian Government provides better and more inclusive English classes. These classes should not just focus on teaching the language but also the culture and provide an environment where people can develop lasting friendships.





C. We must also introduce into our national primary and high school curriculums, teachings that promote respect and appreciation for difference. Children must be taught the take home message that difference complements (or completes) a society, it is to be welcomed, learnt from and celebrated. We must teach them with relatable examples and reward them for showing the desired level of respect and appreciation. We must also teach them that difference is not just cultural or religious or political, but also difference in ability (or disability) and difference in gender all make our society more interesting. Not everyone needs to have the same abilities or culture or faith or skillset, but together, with all our differences, we make a nation.

D. Diversifying lunch menus at schools and universities.

3) Housing grants enabling persons from low socio-economic backgrounds to afford housing. We must discourage ghettos and engineer our all suburbs to be welcoming of diversity Racism is presented in the structure of Sydney's suburbs. An example is Western Sydney which houses mostly socio-economically disadvantaged persons from non-Australian background where as the Northern Beaches will house mostly well-to-do persons from white backgrounds. This form of segregation is what feeds future racism.





Again, this form of racial discrimination unveiled itself during the most recent COVID lockdowns in New South Wales. Xenophobia and Islamophobia were very salient, especially in the different types of lockdowns imposed on different Local Government Areas (LGAs) and the type and style of policing within those areas.

Racism will continue to grow until and unless we support and promote culturally diverse relationships within all sectors of government, society and the community. For instance, having neighbours from different backgrounds, religions and so on is the first step to educating our citizens and residents that difference is beautiful. Diversity should be appreciated not hated or feared. To be accepting of our differences enables us as a community to put a stop to racism. There is so much that Australia as a Nation has gained from being diverse and it is imperative that we protect and promote that diversity.

- 4) Community based policing. The focus should be on improving police 'style' and 'substance,' making police officers members of the community rather than the “men in blue who just want to give you a hard time.”
- 5) To reduce racism the Australian justice system must concentrate on community-based rehabilitation rather than punishment. There are endless accounts and articles regarding the overwhelming number of under privileged



- 6) persons that have been given longer sentences than Anglo Australia. This is evident amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia overall, the Lebanese in Sydney and the Sudanese in Melbourne. We need to reassess the environment we are subjecting people to and the effects of the apparent quick fix of just putting them away. A white Australian, especially if they are well-to-do would not get the same treatment and if it had been so there would be media coverage on their story for days.
- 7) Integration not assimilation. Embracing our difference in a peaceful manner rather than having migrants and refugees forced to 'assimilate' to the Australian way of life. A beautiful example of this is the Ramadan night markets in Lakemba. It is uplifting and exciting to see so many people from different religions and cultures attending the night markets and sharing in a part of the Muslim celebrations.

It is in our opinion that the Framework should focus on achieving the following outcomes:

- 1) Education including scholarships;
- 2) Diversifying suburbs;
- 3) Better facilities and access to those facilities;
- 4) Better education and integration classes and opportunities for refugees;
- 5) Supporting sustainable and equal employment;



Australian Federation  
of Islamic Councils

- 6) Equal employment opportunities and protecting employees' workplace rights;
- 7) Community policing;
- 8) Equal healthcare for all persons especially in remote areas; and
- 9) Acceptance and appreciation of diversity.

The **AFIC** thanks you for the opportunity to have our voices heard and to share only a few of our stories. We hope that our submission along with the number of others that you receive assist you in developing the right **Framework** to counteract racism. We are proud to be part of the movement towards acceptance (and appreciation) and we support the fight against racism.

11

Yours sincerely

Dr Rateb Jneid

Kind regards,

**Dr Rateb Jneid**

*President, AFIC*

**Australian Federation of Islamic Councils**

*The peak body for Australian Muslims representing  
State and Territory Islamic Councils and Societies*



**Sydney (Head Office):** 932 Bourke Street, Zetland, NSW 2017

**Melbourne:** 66-68 Jeffcott Street, West Melbourne VIC 3003

**Canberra:** 21/41 Liardet Street, Weston ACT 2611

**Perth:** 17 Mercantile Way, Malaga WA 6090

**W:** [afic.com.au](http://afic.com.au) **E:** [admin@afic.com.au](mailto:admin@afic.com.au) **PH:** (02) 9319 6733