

18 March 2019

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS  
WELLINGTON



Dear Prime Minister

### **Muslim Cultural Advisory Group Established**

This letter invites urgent collaborative engagement and immediate contact with your office. As a Barrister Mediator/Facilitator and Muslim community leader from JustCommunity in Auckland, Aarif Rasheed has brought together our group of advisors, and a wider consulting group, to assist in providing urgent advice and support to the government on a culturally appropriate response but to address immediate needs and long-term change.

JustCommunity is an organisation set up to support government services to the community across the legal and social sectors. Recent work has included a report to the UN Universal Periodic Review on Maori access to Rehabilitation and the running of a unique extremism rehabilitation program with Corrections. It has combined our knowledge of the faith and Muslim community in NZ, with multi-disciplinary knowledge and awareness to provide complex professional advice. Our website hosts information about the complex cultural needs and supports via this initiative.

The people in our group are Dr Shaystah Dean, a Muslim Clinical Psychologist from Wellington, Dr Hinemoa Elder, Ngāti Kurī, Te Aupouri, Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi, Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist, MBChB, FRANZCP, PhD from Auckland, Emma Priest, a specialist criminal Barrister from Blackstone Chambers in Auckland, whose experience lies in the intersection of criminal law and human rights, particularly of Muslims, and Dr Khalid Shah, a psychiatrist, GP, cultural consultant in health, and a Muslim Mental Health researcher. These people have been selected for their diverse experiences, training and perspectives.

We will also be drawing on the expertise of numerous others of our colleagues and key advisory experts, but wish to note in particular the advice of: Assoc Professor & Director Maori & Pacific Development Ms Khylee Quince of the AUT Law School (Ngapuhi and Ngati Porou); former Chief Human Rights Commissioner Rosslyn Noonan -- Director of the University of Auckland Law School's Centre for Human Rights Law, Policy & Practice; and Christchurch Peacebuilder Wayne Marriott.

Our two Muslim founding members are New Zealand born and have grown up at the heart of the Muslim community, and offer considerable insight from their first-hand experience of growing up in NZ around their pioneering Muslim families. They also offer a critical bridge between older migrant community leaders and the younger Muslim population deeply affected by various complex interacting factors.

Our group as a whole brings considerable insight into the plight of such communities -- including of course Maori -- and the various manifestations of that plight across our justice system and society. This includes perceptions amongst key government agencies. This is thanks to the expertise but also the diversity of experience of all of our members.

In terms of immediate priorities, we see the need for urgent culturally-informed initiatives:

1. A cultural advisory panel across government agencies;
2. Muslim input into government via appropriate expertise and representation;
3. Dissemination of information about Islamic cultures, community-based Muslim events and other activities facilitating the engagement in activities promoting diversity and inclusion;
4. Guideline on discussing racism, history, and hate crimes in the public and curricula.

We acknowledge your initial efforts in the aftermath of Friday's terrorist attacks in Christchurch. We offer our collective experiences in well-being, psychology, law, human rights, faith and spirituality, in order to ensure that our response as a country is psychologically and culturally informed. Our intention is to assist the government, and to validate and support our devastated community in various critical considerations during this initial phase and beyond.

Accordingly, key objectives of the group include:

1. Support the government and agencies in providing culturally informed and appropriate support and advice to the Muslim community on an immediate and long-term basis;
2. Assist the Muslim community to have a voice and leadership role in healing the trauma of their experiences, including of anti-Islamic racism, in Aotearoa, New Zealand;
3. Assist in the facilitation of support to the Muslim community from both inside and outside the community, including addressing the complexifying needs of children and youth; and
4. Serve the wider community of Aotearoa, New Zealand community in the provision of culturally appropriate advice on facilitating and respecting the healing process, tailored to the unique diverse needs of local communities.

We envisage longer term work to provide leadership in inclusiveness and valuing of diversity in New Zealand culture at a deeper and more genuinely engaged level. We welcome the opportunity to work with government in the acute response phase. We have and will retain our connections with the Muslim umbrella body (FIANZ), with whom JustCommunity has an understanding in the area of well-being developing including Chaplaincy training.

Longer-term, we seek to grow the collective identity and belonging that is evident in the response of the wider New Zealand community to eliminate racism, and to educate the public on cultural practices that are relevant to community resilience, engagement, well-being, advocacy and support. In the interim, we invite immediately involvement with currently developing emergency initiatives to help Muslims feel safe, reduce anxiety and facilitating of healing.

Yours faithfully,



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for:

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