30 November 2020

Mr Ahmed Shaheed

United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

freedomofreligion@ohchr.org

Dear Mr Shaheed,

**Call for input: Report on Anti-Muslim Hatred and Discrimination**

The Australian Human Rights Commission (‘Commission’) welcomes your continued examination of manifestations and root causes of intolerance, hatred and discrimination against persons based on their religion or belief. The Commission especially welcomes your holistic focus on anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination, which remains a significant issue in Australia and a matter of grave concern for the Commission.

*Sharing the Stories of Australian Muslims project*

In response to the mass shooting during prayers at a mosque in Christchurch (New Zealand) last year, the Commission launched national consultations with Australian Muslims to discuss how the community has been affected by the attack and other recent events, and about their needs and experiences of hate, violence and negative public commentary in Australia.

The *Sharing the Stories of Australian Muslims* Project aimed to:

* ensure the voices of Australian Muslim communities are centred in national discussions about Islamophobia, racism and related intolerances in Australia.
* build a national picture of the experiences of racism, racial discrimination and related intolerances by Australian Muslim communities in Australia.
* outline community identified ideas and solutions to address Islamophobia, racism and related intolerances in Australia.

The Commission collected survey data responses from over 1000 Australian Muslim community members and heard from Australian Muslims in consultations across Australia about their experiences and how the Commission can better support the community and address key challenges.

The main findings from the project include:

* Freedom of religion, education and interfaith relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Australia are among the most important priorities for Australian Muslims.
* The key challenges reported by Australian Muslims are:
	+ **Media and political narrative**: Community members spoke about the correlation between negative media and political narrative and an increase in aggression and violence towards Australian Muslim community members. Community members noted that politicians and media identities communicate inflammatory and inaccurate reports about the Australian Muslim community for political point scoring and publicly rebuke Australian Muslim leaders for not engaging with politicians and government. Community members also noted the inconsistency of political narratives and media reporting about Muslims and those about white Australians when circumstances were similar.
	+ **Racism:** Australian Muslim community members continue to experience racism on a personal level across Australia. This ranges from overt examples of being verbally attacked by colleagues and classmates; to less obvious but equally troubling instances of being followed by police and security officers; or more subtle instances of stereotyping and adjusted expectations of what Australian Muslim people should have or aspire to. Most community members noted that online harassment and threats were increasingly being played out in real life at many different levels with attacks on community places of importance such as mosques, and the doxing of individuals where their personal details were released on the internet with explicit threats of physically violence or abuse.
	+ **Systemic and institutionalised discrimination:** Australian Muslim community members have referred to economic, social and political institutions and processes that reinforce discrimination, and see acknowledgement and inclusion of their unique cultural identity and history as critical to inclusion. Community members noted that the broad misunderstanding of Islamic faith and the role it plays in the lives of Muslim community members meant that they were often intentionally and unintentionally excluded from access to opportunities in education and employment.
	+ **The need for broader community allies:** Australian Muslim leaders advised the Commission that the support of leaders from non-Muslim civil community organisations would have a stronger impression on engaging and improving cross-cultural relations.
	+ **Policing and the countering violent extremism:** Australian Muslim community leaders repeatedly raised concerns about the impact of countering violent extremism funding on the relationship and engagement between community and services. Organisations noted that countering violent extremism actions and programs were often counterproductive with the result that the allocation of security funding often resulted in the community being judged as too insular.
* Significantly, Australian Muslim community members consistently advised the Commission that the issues being raised in these consultations are neither new nor emerging but have impacted on Australian Muslim communities since 11 September 2001. Specifically, community members advised that they have repeatedly raised many of the issues above with governments, but seemingly without effect.

Due to the impact of COVID-19, the full report for the project has yet to be finalised. However, the Commission will provide the report to you as soon as it is available. It is anticipated this will be March 2021.

*A National Anti-Racism Framework*

Given the growing community concern about racism, Islamophobia and the current lack of focus on anti-racism at the national level in Australia, the Commission is developing a National Anti-Racism Framework to serve as a central reference point for actions on anti-racism to be undertaken by government, the Commission, NGOs, business, educators, health professionals, police, other justice authorities, civil society and the community.

The Commission anticipates that this framework will contemplate issues raised by your forthcoming report on Anti-Muslim Hatred and Discrimination and within your mandate as the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

Focal points of the framework include ensuring a national data collection system which can operate to identify the extent and severity of racism in Australia, strengthening multiculturalism and social cohesion, capacity-building in communities affected by racism, and ensuring that all Australian governments commit to eradicating racism and racial discrimination.

The Commission would be pleased to discuss the National Anti-Racism Framework with you or to provide further information about it if required.

*Further information*

The following individuals/organisations are engaged in research, monitoring and reporting around issues that may be of relevance to your forthcoming report:

* Professor Derya Iner, Islamophobia Register diner@csu.edu.au;
* Rita Jabri-Markwell, Australian Muslim Advocacy Network advocacy@aman.net.au;
* Professor Mohamad Abdalla, University of South Australia Mohamad.Abdalla@unisa.edu.au;
* Priscilla Brice, CEO, All Together Now (Research into racism in social and mainstream media) priscilla@alltogethernow.org.au;
* Professor Halim Rane, Griffith University h.rane@griffith.edu.au;
* Dr Andre Oboler, CEO, Online Hate Prevention Institute ceo@ohpi.org.au;
* Professor Kevin Dunn, Challenging Racism Project, Western Sydney University K.Dunn@westernsydney.edu.au;
* Professor Andrew Jakubowicz, online hate expert Andrew.Jakubowicz@uts.edu.au;

Earlier this year, the Commission published a position paper - [Freedom of Religion in Australia: a focus on serious harms](https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms/publications/freedom-religion-australia-focus-serious-harms-2020), which may also be of interest to you as it provides a snapshot of the collective experience and research on freedom of religion in Australia.

The Commission stands available to engage further with you and your office as you continue your examination of anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination.

Please do not hesitate to contact Gillian Eshman, Senior Adviser to the Race Discrimination Commissioner at Gillian.Eshman@humanrights.gov.au should you wish to discuss any aspect of this letter or require any further information.

Yours sincerely



**Chin Tan**

Race Discrimination Commissioner

Australian Human Rights Commission