



Message from the Commissioner



By now readers should be well aware that my statutory functions under the *Anti-Discrimination Act (NT)* ('the Act') include working towards the elimination of discrimination and promoting the principles of equal opportunity. With these goals in mind a significant portion of this issue of "Fair Go" is devoted to raising awareness of, and respect for, the Muslim community in the NT.

The Islamic Society of the Northern Territory (ISNT) held the second Islamic Awareness Week in Darwin in June 2007. This highly successful event was attended by many people and is designed to raise community awareness and promote understanding. The general public had the opportunity to learn and ask questions about Islam and thereby begin to remove some of the misconceptions held by many people.

There is a long tradition of Islam in Australia. The Macassans (from eastern Indonesia) had early contact with Indigenous people in the seventeenth century. Evidence of their presence can be found in cave drawings in northern Australian Aboriginal communities, and in the maritime museum in Ujung Pandang (Sulawesi).

Muslim Malay divers worked with the Dutch in the Western Australian and Northern Territory pearling grounds during the 1870s. By 1875 there were approximately 1800 Malay people working in Western Australia. However, most of them returned home.

Afghan camel drivers worked with European settlers from the 1860s onwards as they explored and opened up the dry interior and transported goods from one part of the country to another. Afghan people have been credited with saving the lives of numerous explorers and were essential in those early explorations.

One of the major projects in which Afghan cameleers were involved was the development of the rail link between Port Augusta and Alice Springs, which became known as the "Ghan" after the Afghanis. Cameleers also played an equally important role in the development of the overland telegraph line between Adelaide and Darwin from 1870 to 1872, which eventually linked Australia to London via India.

Through these early exploits a string of 'Ghan' towns were established along the railway and many of these towns had at least one mosque. The oldest mosque in Australia was built in Marree in the north of South Australia in 1861. Descendants of the cameleers built the 'Great Mosque' in Adelaide in 1890, with another being built in Broken Hill in 1891.

In the early part of the 20th Century the White Australia Policy made it difficult for Muslims of non-European background to come to Australia as the policy limited immigration on the basis of race. Albanian Muslims with lighter skin were accepted in the 1920s and 1930s as they were more compatible with the White Australia Policy.

The post World War II period saw a broadening of Australia's immigration policy and a number of displaced Muslims began to arrive from Europe. Between 1967 and 1971, approximately 10,000 Cypriot Turks settled here as part of an agreement between Turkey and Australia.

The 1970s also saw a shift in the federal government's attitude from 'assimilation' to 'multiculturalism' and this provided the opportunity for further migration to Australia. Currently there are Muslims from more than 60 ethnic groupings, with the 2006 Census providing a figure of approximately 300,000 people.



Darwin Islamic Centre and Mosque,

Muslims in the Territory are a diverse group both racially and culturally, originating from at least 23 different countries. As a result of this, during prayers conducted at the mosques in Darwin, Palmerston or Alice Springs, it is normal for an Indonesian to stand in line with an Anglo-Australian who is standing next to a Pakistani and so on to the end of the prayer row.

There are approximately 1500 Muslim families scattered throughout the Territory with people making significant contributions in a wide range of areas, including social, economic, cultural, religious and educational endeavours.

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International events in the last few years have brought new challenges to the Muslim community with the religion consistently being associated with terrorism. Much of what the general public knows is learnt from media reports aired on commercial television, talk back radio, tabloid press or inflammatory statements made by some high profile figures. These reports are often misleading and promote negative stereotypes and misconceptions.

Discrimination on the basis of one's religion is unlawful in the Territory and the ADC leads the community in promoting human rights, achieving equality of opportunity and community harmony for all people. As we work in the community, we hear stories of what is happening for different groups of people, and one of the stories we've been hearing of late is that some women are being asked to remove their head scarves at work. Of course this is discrimination on the basis of religion. Most employers in the Territory understand the Anti Discrimination Act sufficiently to refrain from such unlawful behaviour within their organisation or business.

A further misconception in the community is that Muslims are offended by the celebration of Christmas. The Islamic Society of the NT assures us that this is not the case and that Islam actively encourages all religions to enjoy their celebrations. So there is no reason to limit celebrating Christmas at your school, community centre or group on the basis of offending the Muslim community.

The ADC takes this opportunity to wish everyone a safe and peaceful festive season.

Tony Fitzgerald, Anti-Discrimination Commissioner



Awards presented by Imam Adama Konda, for the Children's Arabic Language class 27.10.07 in Darwin (Front row l-r – Shamina, Rabia, Ayub, Fayaz, Hasan, Ilayas and Jihad; back row Minister Delia Lawrie, Atiq, Sadi and others)

Why I Wear Hijab

Madiah's Story

“Why do you wear hijab?” I have heard this phrase yelled at me so many times, in rather derogatory terms, that it has shaken my faith in being an Australian. Sometimes I have had trouble believing I am really from Australia, born and bred in Katherine, with Aboriginal blood.

I was thinking of wearing hijab for some time, and decided to do so because I wanted to identify myself publicly as a Muslim. My husband gave me the encouragement I needed and when I came back from holidays in Pakistan wearing hijab it felt so positive. It is a religious duty, but also exists to preserve a woman's modesty. It means you are not just a sex symbol, you have something to offer other than just your looks.

I work at Medicare Australia. I must emphasize that my managers and co-workers have always supported me fully. I remember one of my co-workers saying to me that what you wear does not change your personality. But sometimes I do get customers who want to pick on me because of my hijab. One lady complained to my manager that because of my scarf it gave her asthma and that I should not be in Australia. But Darwin is not short of good people. A lady, who was standing in line waiting to be served, saw all of this and wrote a letter to NT News. Racism must not be tolerated in Darwin. This lady who was complaining had an accent, which meant she was probably not born in Australia, yet, staff members like me had an Aussie accent.

You can't live your life in terror and be scared. I'm not going to be intimidated by people who don't understand. Thank God I am strong in my commitment to my religion.

In most pictures, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is depicted as a veiled woman. A modern-day Christian woman and Nobel Prize winner, Mother Theresa, also wore the veil. I'm not a bold person, but I think it will be a good thing for people to see that there are good Muslims out there. People must recognize that my neighbour is Muslim, my co-worker is Muslim, and they're not bad people.

Many non-Muslims have the wrong impression of hijab. They assume that because we cover, we're back 200 years ago. They think it's oppression. We don't see it that way.

Wearing hijab makes me feel that I have to be a role model because non-Muslims will form impressions about all Muslims based on the person's behaviour. I just have to be a better person, because I'm carrying this flag with me wherever I go.

You really do find out who your friends are. Some people avoid you, and some people want to get to know you better. I wear my hijab as I recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Next time you come across me, or anyone who shares my faith, walking in a shopping centre or having a meal at a restaurant, don't walk past. Stop and say “Hi!”

Madiah Haider
Karama

International Human Rights Day Celebration

The Commission is hosting a public event in Darwin to celebrate International Human Rights day on

10th December 2007 from 4.30-6.00pm.

2008 marks the beginning of a year of celebrations for the 60th year since the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN Assembly.

There will be speakers, entertainment and light refreshments, however numbers are limited, so please call 8999 1444 or email Rebecca.Lowe@nt.gov.au to reserve your place.

**We look forward to seeing you there.
Be inspired!**



The Imam's Story – My Experience at University

I am sitting in class with my fellow students waiting patiently for the lecturer to arrive. When the lecturer entered the class, the entire class could not help but notice that there was something in particular that he was pleased about.

The teacher had captured the sense of curiosity that he generated from his expression. He went on to tell us that he had just noticed two other female students within the university, wearing the Muslim dress. The teacher went on to say how impressed he was that, despite the current negative image being portrayed by the media against Islam, these two ladies had still taken the opportunity to take on tertiary studies and were not afraid to maintain their religious identity.

In hearing this I couldn't help but feel a sense of humbleness overcome me. It was a true sign that there are people out there who value diversity within the community and are not afraid to express it. Additionally, the fact that my lecturer displayed a sense of pride in what he saw promoted tolerance amongst all of my fellow students, regardless what race, colour, belief a human soul may have.

Adama Konda, Imam, Darwin

Mariam's Story

My name is Mariam and I am fourteen years old. The hijab means so much to me even though most people my age don't wear it. It has changed my life so much since I wore it.

It's given me a whole new way to look at Islam and the people that follow it. I've always loved being a Muslim and following God's religion but I never showed it. Even though I believed in it so much wearing the hijab was not what I wanted to do.

I kept thinking of how I would be treated in school and all I thought was that I was going to be an outcast the day I will wear the hijab and so I kept postponing that day further and further. That is until I realized I was committing a sin. Even if my parents weren't forcing me to wear it yet I decided I have to wear it first for God and second for me to protect myself and make my family proud of me. And so in the middle of my seventh grade year I wore the hijab to school with my own will.

Well, the day I went to school right when I walked in the school doors I put my head down in shame. I couldn't bring myself to look up and all I wanted was to disappear. I started to walk faster and faster to my class with my head down. I know I should have been proud of myself at that time because I was following my religion however when I went back home I then started to feel that I am very proud of my self because I had done it! I wore the hijab to school! I did something I was really scared to do and I felt happy to please God. With the positive response from my teachers and my friends, it gave me extra encouragement.

Wearing the hijab has changed me and changed my self-esteem too. Now I don't care when people look at me in disgust or when people make fun of me.

Now, I am now stronger and my faith has grown. Moreover, now I am confident in telling my friends in school when they ask about my religion and I try my best to give the right image about Islam.

I am in eighth grade now and even though my seventh grade year was so hard for me to getting used to wearing the hijab. Islam has made me better as a person who tries to make God happy and lead their life in the right path.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all my teachers, friends and fellow students over the past 2 years who have given me support and to all the Territorians, I am very proud to live in a city where racism is not tolerated and people are free to practice their own beliefs.

Mariam Haider, Karama



Display of Islamic Art and Culture, Darwin Islamic Centre and Mosque, Wanguri

Community Awareness Survey

In this second half of the year the ADC staff conducted a Community Awareness Survey, to which some of our readers may have contributed. We now have the results of the survey which will assist our planning for public education and training in anti-discrimination law and issues of discrimination, human rights and equal opportunity. The analysis of results is incomplete but a full report will be available on our website by the end of the year and in the next edition of this newsletter.

The ADC was very pleased with a higher than expected response rate of 2044 responses. The majority of these responses were from the NT public sector (87%) which may reflect the method adopted to distribute the survey and also indicates to us that we need to double our efforts to engage the private sector.

The Commission is very grateful of the enormous number of insightful comments people provided. Thank you to everyone who participated.

Here are some interesting results:

- The majority of respondents (70%) rate the concern of other people about discrimination, equal opportunity and human rights to be lower than their own. The majority of respondents rate their concern as 'very concerned' (37%) and 'quite concerned' (33%). These results are consistent with national and international findings of respondents not having an accurate picture of how highly the majority of other people rate these issues.
- A considerable percentage of respondents who HAD heard of the *Anti-Discrimination Act*, marked false attributes (those not covered by the Act — physical appearance 89%, place of residence 48% and addiction 39%) as a basis for making complaints under the Act.
- A significant proportion of the respondents (15%) stated they were not aware of any groups that are disadvantaged in the NT society.



Conciliated Complaints

Race

A company was ordered by the NSW Administrative Decisions Tribunal to pay an Australian-Lebanese worker \$25,000 after finding his manager and others — including his union rep — had racially abused him. The worker, Mohammed Abdulrahman had been taunted with racial slurs, name-calling and nicknames, and had heard about others calling him a “bombchucker”. Co-workers had told him to change his name to “John”, and made demeaning remarks about his wife and her mode of dress. The racial harassment also included being called “Osama Bin Laden” and “Mokaakaakaahomed” by his manager. Mr Abdulrahman had asked other employees to help him stop the racial slurs but they “usually accepted the atmosphere on the floor”.

His manager told the tribunal everyone in the workplace was subjected to name-calling and offensive nicknames. He himself was referred to as “dago” and “wog”. But the tribunal said the name-calling of Abdulrahman was “qualitatively different” in that they suggested he was also a terrorist.

While the employer had a discrimination and harassment policy, not only was it not properly implemented but the employer, “through its agents, the manager and supervisors, endorsed and condoned a discriminatory atmosphere in the workplace.” Mr Abdulrahman “felt that other employees were laughing at him and that they were also engaging in conduct, such as racially based name-calling, because it was seen to be endorsed by management”. The tribunal was satisfied Abdulrahman did not complain earlier because it was being carried out by his own supervisor “and the union delegate, a person he might have thought he could approach to resolve such a problem”.

The tribunal noted the discriminatory conduct caused great distress, humiliation and embarrassment. “It was engaged in a public manner in front of other employees. . . It was ongoing.” The racial discrimination was serious and warranted a payment of damages to Mr Abdulrahman in the amount of \$25,000. (*Abdulrahman v Toll Pty Ltd (2006)* NSW ADT 221)

Pregnancy

In 2007 a territory-wide company paid a bonus to all of its staff, except those who were on leave without pay. A female employee who was on maternity leave without pay complained that brand new employees received the bonus while some loyal, long-time staff missed out simply because they were on maternity leave.

The Commission discussed the complaint with the company which re-considered its bonus payment policy and agreed to pay the bonus not only to the complainant but also to other female employees who had been on maternity leave on the day the bonus was paid. The complainant was satisfied with this response and the complaint was settled.

Age

In 2005, when 50 years old, Ben applied for a position as a storeman with a large food retail store. He alleged he was refused the job because of his age.

The position was advertised as a “physically demanding role and environment”. Ben successfully completed an aptitude test, a group interview and scored 100% at a second aptitude test. It was when he had a personal interview and his date of birth was read that Ben noticed the “interviewer’s attitude change”.

The company responded to the complaint by saying that Ben’s interview was conducted in accordance with standard procedures, without reference to his age. Ben was not successful in gaining the position because other candidates were better qualified for the role. An applicant’s date of birth is required to confirm their identity and confirm their suitability for certain positions due to legislative age requirements.

The complaint was resolved at conciliation when the company agreed to remove the reference to date of birth from the “Identification Confirmation Form” used in their recruitment process.

Courtesy — **Equal Opportunity Commission of South Australia**

New training

In conjunction with the International Human rights Day Celebration, the Commission is offering a new training program, “Protecting Human Rights in Australia”. This will be one day program, to be held for the first time on Thursday 13th December. Training subjects are:

- Australia’s human rights commitments under international law
- Human rights protection in Australia
- Identification of human rights breaches that currently occur in Australia.

Outback training – the Commission continues to cross the Berrimah line!

In July this year, the Commission had the opportunity to work with the private sector at two outback stations visiting Brunette Downs and Anthony Lagoon. Training was provided in anti-discrimination, harassment and bullying for both management and staff. In September we worked with a third outback station, Camfield, although this time the participants drove into Katherine for the training. All three programs were highly successful, with very positive feedback being provided.

Public education and training programs have also been offered to McArthur River Mine near Borroloola in July; ERA at Jabiru in October, and Alawa Aboriginal Community at Hodgson Downs in November. The Commission visits Alice Springs on a regular basis offering both specific programs for organisations and public programs advertised through the training calendar and newsletter.

Annual Report

ADC 2006/2007 Annual Report is now available on our website www.adc.nt.gov.au. If you wish to receive a copy please contact the Commission.

Language videos have been converted to DVD

As many readers are aware ADC has produced an information video – “Your rights, Your Responsibilities” – which has been translated into the fourteen most commonly spoken NT indigenous languages. The videos are available from our Darwin and Alice Springs offices. ADC realised that few people use video recorders these days so the video has now been updated to DVD so that as many people as possible may access the material.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR ADVICE, TO REQUEST TRAINING OR TO BE ADDED TO THE MAILING LIST CONTACT:

Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission Darwin: 7th Floor, 9-11 Cavenagh St, Darwin • Postal Address: LMB 22, GPO Darwin NT 0801

Phone: (08) 8999 1444 • Free call: 1800 813 846 • Fax: (08) 8981 3812 • TTY: (08) 8999 1466

Alice Springs: Ground Floor Centre Point Building, 54 Hartley Street, Alice Springs (08) 8951 5818

Website: www.adc.nt.gov.au • E-Mail: administrationadc@nt.gov.au