

**JOINT STATEMENT OF AUSTRALIAN FAITH COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES:
AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID19 PANDEMIC SO FAR, LOOKING
AHEAD NOW.**

May 15, 2020.
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Compassion is at the heart of our faiths. It is our unifying ethic.

So it is with compassion that we make this Joint Statement as Multifaith Leaders.

We were initially drawn together in Video Conference on April 15 at the invitation of the Hon. Alan Tudge, Acting Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs. We were asked then to support the government's efforts to manage the COVID19 pandemic.

This Statement conveys our continuing readiness to assist.

We appreciate Minister Tudge's acknowledgement of the work being done by Australia's religious communities at this time to provide spiritual guidance, reach out to those less fortunate, and provide care to those who need it. While observing physical distancing, all traditions seek to provide individual and community connection and the qualities of hope and faith in the face of this global health crisis.

Both nationally and internationally, we are painfully aware of the suffering caused by this lethal virus.

Accordingly, we are aware of how COVID19 has rendered the vulnerable even more vulnerable, both in Australia and overseas.

Overseas, there are millions stranded in their own country or in another country, without work, food, shelter or access to our quality of Health Service.

Many lack even sanitisers and face-masks, and are in crowded circumstances with limited testing facilities to help prevent the spread of COVID19.

We cannot think of our circumstances without compassion for those so vulnerable in places where there continue to be wave after wave of COVID19 deaths.

Many of us have links with these places through our faith, family and friends.

Both as global citizens and as Australian citizens, we are united in wanting to work to help prevent further suffering.

We also know our shared ethic of compassion, shown in practical service, is our best way to counter how fears and anxieties might otherwise be exploited by those seeking to sow division.

In places infected by ignorance and prejudice, minorities are especially vulnerable.

In Australia, sadly, we know this as racism, whether it is directed against people of Asian, Muslim, Jewish or Sikh background or other minorities.

Thankfully, as a result of careful work together over many years, including as we have responded to other crises, there are relationships of warmth and trust which bond us together.

The cruel folly of these divisive forces is best countered, we know, by the knowledge that the current COVID-19 pandemic, affects us all, regardless of nationality, skin colour, religion, ideology, gender, sexual orientation or social class. Hatred can only divide and distract us, and thereby make us weaker and less well placed to overcome our common challenges. Co-operation

and compassion strengthen us by giving us the sense of common purpose we need to survive, care for one another and flourish. Our leaders must act accordingly.

Looking ahead, we know there will be more demanding days.

We will cooperate together and with our Governments so as to look after those most vulnerable, attentive to prevent anyone ‘falling through the cracks’.

We will cooperate to encourage our communities to follow the Health Guidelines which keep us all safer.

We will keep offering our spiritual practice, including our prayer and meditation, mindful of those anxious and distressed.

We recognise that this crisis has changed and will continue to change the way we work and live.

We know, therefore, the importance of our continuing collaboration as our decision- makers try to balance health and economic needs, with a staged approach to lifting restrictions.

We note, in closing, the stressful effect of cumulative emergencies over these last months: The devastating bush fires which have been followed by COVID19.

Gratefully and compassionately, we recognise the cost to the many Australians who have worked, and are working long hours to prevent further suffering and to assist those in need.

Given the reality of stress and weariness, we urge patience and forbearance with each other now, gentle care with our words and gestures.

Our unified leadership has brought us to a better place than might have been imagined.

With a little more giving and forgiving this can be an attractive part of what some are calling “the new normal”!

We will try our best to model this ourselves!

Our bruised and wounded world needs the example of a multifaith place where compassionate, humble service is the national practice.

We think our Australia can be that place, which gives hope to others.

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Dr Rateb Jneid – President, Muslims Australia-AFIC

Prakash Mehta - National President, Hindu Council of Australia

Natalie Mobini – Spokesperson, Australian Baha’i Community

Michael Wells, Chairperson, Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils

Peter Wertheim AM, co-CEO, Executive Council of Australian Jewry

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