

Over 40 faiths take united stand against violence

Faiths from throughout New Zealand have taken a powerful stand against family violence today by signing a joint national statement.

Over 40 faiths have worked together on a declaration that recognises the challenge of family violence and commits to taking action. Children's Commissioner Dr Russell Wills believes this is the first time a statement of this kind has been made in New Zealand.

"Faiths have a strong tradition of leading communities and helping people through tough times. By signing this statement they are extending that tradition in a meaningful way," Dr Wills said.

"Family violence has a devastating effect on communities of all kinds in New Zealand. The impact on children is particularly distressing and hard to accept.

"Our families deserve better and our children deserve better. All communities need to think about how they can be part of addressing these tough issues.

"I was heartened when approached earlier this year by Dr Zain Ali, Reverend Uesifili Unasa and Reverend Robert McKay who wanted to discuss ways faith communities in New Zealand could collectively address family violence.

"As a result we worked with faiths throughout the country on a National Statement Against Violence. It's a strong, powerful statement and a credit to all the faiths who have contributed to it.

"We recognise that faiths are very diverse and vary greatly in size and resources. So for some, the statement is a very important and brave first step. Other faiths have already made great advances in their communities in addressing family violence.

"I've been pleased with the commitment by many of the faiths to move beyond the words. Some faiths are starting to look at how they can better incorporate identification and prevention of family violence into their faith training and professional development programmes. They also want guidance on how to take action in a safe and appropriate way in their communities," Dr Wills said.

As a first step, the It's Not Ok campaign has offered support to the faiths on prevention initiatives, on whatever level is required by the respective faiths. This ranges from providing posters and brochures to assistance with training and policy development.

"I applaud all the faith leaders who have contributed and signed up to this National Statement today. It's a courageous and welcome step and one that other communities in New Zealand could learn from. We all need to be part of making this country free from violence."

Ends.

Full statement and signatories below. Faiths not yet signed up to the statement are welcome to contact Michelle Egan-Bitran at the Office of the Children's Commissioner on 09 374 6100 for more information and/or to become a signatory.

For more media related information please contact Anna Santos on a.santos@occ.org.nz or 027 696 5101

A National Statement

Family violence in our communities is one of the most significant moral, spiritual and social challenges that we currently face as a country. As communities of faith in Aotearoa New Zealand, we believe it is our responsibility to take a stand and address this challenge. Family violence is completely unacceptable and is never justified. Often the most vulnerable victims of violence are children, and it is here that we are taking a stand. Our children deserve the best we can offer them.

Accordingly, we have come together, as communities of faith, to declare the following:

- *We recognise that children are our future and as such are a significant and precious gift to society today.*
- *We understand that our beliefs, values and traditions will live on through our children*
- *We accept that the wellbeing of children is our responsibility.*
- *We acknowledge that children deserve our compassion, kindness, love and care.*
- *We believe we can make a difference in the lives of children and families.*

In light of these declarations we commit our communities to:

- *Accept our responsibility to stand up for our children, women and families. Refuse to tolerate violence within our families or communities or turn a blind eye to it.*
- *Strive to provide places of safety and nurture for the children and families of our community.*
- *Encourage our communities to report family violence, hold perpetrators accountable and provide support for victims.*
- *Ensure that our staff are trained to respond safely to family violence and are well supported with appropriate policies and resources.*
- *Partner with community organisations to ensure that families experiencing violence are referred appropriately and we will advocate with government for policies and resources to address family violence.*

10 December 2012

Signatories

Archbishop John Dew
Bhante Jinalankra
Beth Lew, National Secretary
Bishop Barry Jones
Bishop Brian Tamaki
Bishop Charles Drennan
Bishop Colin Campbell
Bishop Denis Browne
Bishop Patrick Dunn
Commissioner Don Bell, Territorial Commander
Dr. Anwar Ghani, President
Elizabeth Duke & Elizabeth Thompson

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference
Dhamma Gavesi Meditation Centre
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand
Catholic Bishop of Christchurch
Destiny Church
Catholic Bishop of Palmerston North
Catholic Bishop of Dunedin
Catholic Bishop of Hamilton
Catholic Bishop of Auckland
The Salvation Army
Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand
The Religious Society of Friends

Geoffrey Fyers
Haihn Dinh Njuyen, Chairman
Jimi Wallace, General Director
Pastor Don McDonell
Pastor Edward Tupai

Pastor Iliafi Esera, General Superintendent
Pastor Jerry Matthews, President

Pastor John Steele, National Leader
Pastor Lloyd J Rankin, National Director
Pastor Mark Whitfield, President
Pastor Mike Griffiths, National Leader
Prithipal Singh
Rabbi Mendy Goldstein
Rabbi Samuel Altschul
Rabbi Yitzchak Mizrahi
Reverend John Roberts, President
Olive Tanielu, Vice-President
Reverend Lucky Slade (Faifeau Toeaina)

Reverend Ray Coster
Moderator at the General Assembly
Reverend Rex Nathan JP
Reverend Dr Richard Waugh QSM,
National Superintendent
Reverend Te Ahorangi Wayne Manaaki
Rihari Te Kaawa
Robert Newson, Chairman
Rukman Wagachchi
Sensei Amala Wrightson, Chairperson
The Most Reverend D J Moxon
The Most Reverend W B Turei
Venerable Abbess Manshin

Family Federation for World Peace and Unification
Vietnam/Buddhist Then Thai Monastery
Soka Gakki International of New Zealand
Inspire Church Albany
North New Zealand Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
Assembly of God
New Zealand Pacific Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
New Life Churches International
Vineyard Churches Aotearoa New Zealand
Lutheran Church of New Zealand
Elim Church of New Zealand
Sikh
Jewish (non-denominational)
Auckland Hebrew Congregation
Wellington Hebrew Congregation
Methodist Church of New Zealand
Methodist Church of New Zealand
Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa
The Congregational Church of Samoa
Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

Methodist Church of New Zealand
Wesleyan Methodist Church of New Zealand

Te Aka Puho – Ohope Marae

Te Runanga o te Hahi Katorika ki Aotearoa
New Zealand Sri Lanka Buddhist Trust
New Zealand Buddhist Council
Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia
Maori Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand
Fo Guang Shan New Zealand

The Hindu Council of New Zealand (Hindu Dharma) endorses this initiative. The Hindu Council have chosen to write their own statement, which includes the declarations made in the National Statement, but also contain reference to Hindu philosophy and scriptures. This is also available on the Office of the Children's Commissioner's website.

HINDU COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND Incorporated

(Registered with Charities Commission Regd No: CC31281; Donee organisation status from IRD)

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DHARMA COMMUNITIES AGAINST VIOLENCE

The Hindu Council of New Zealand statement based on Hindu Dharma, in support of the Faith Communities Against Family Violence National Statement and as part of the same initiative

Violence in New Zealand society is a significant moral and social challenge that we currently face. Hindu Council of New Zealand (HCNZ), a group of dedicated volunteers from the Hindu community of New Zealand, believes it is our responsibility to take a stand and address this.

Violence has been eschewed by Hindu Dharma in the most ancient yet most modern writings of Hindu philosophy and scriptures, as is evidenced in the part of a *shloka* that appears in many Sanskrit works, including the Mahabharata.

“Ahimsa Paramo Dharmah”

This phrase was the guiding principle for the Hindu leader Mahatma Gandhi in the non-violent (Ahimsa) struggle for freedom against British colonisers in India. Within Aotearoa Maori society, a strikingly similar stand on non-violence was taken by Te Whiti O Rongomai of Taranaki fifty years before Mahatma Gandhi.

The stand Hindu Dharma has on opposition to violence is not just a mere matter of faith or religion, indeed religion and faith have often been one of the worst offenders in numerous brutal wars in human history, and the silent sufferers in those wars have primarily been women and children.

Hindu Dharma’s stand on non-violence or Ahimsa is a well thought out and reasoned principle, and hence a Dharmic principle, since violence threatens a family and society in a way that brings suffering not only to an individual but for generations.

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- We believe we can make a difference in the lives of children and families.

In light of these declarations we commit our communities to:

- Accept our responsibility to stand up for our children, women and families.
- Refuse to tolerate violence within our families or communities or turn a blind eye to it.
- Strive to provide places of safety and nurture for the children and families of our community.
- Encourage our communities to report family violence, hold perpetrators accountable and provide support for victims.
- Ensure that our staff are trained to respond safely to family violence and are well supported with appropriate policies and resources.
- Partner with community organisations to ensure that families experiencing violence are referred appropriately
- We will partner with community organisations to ensure that families experiencing violence are referred appropriately and provided with counselling, anger management, prayers, yoga & meditation. We will advocate with government for policies and resources to address family violence.

We will strive to educate the families with values of Ahimsa (non-violence in thought, word and deed).

Executive Committee

Hindu Council of New Zealand Inc
December 2012

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Explanatory note

1. Translation of the Sanskrit word Dharma into either faith or religion is inaccurate, it is more accurate to use the phrase Dharma when indicating Hindu community and culture, and many other communities from the “East”. Hence we have suggested the use of knowledge

and techniques available in Dharmic literature to promote non-violence as the main principle for a Dharmic way of life.

2. Quick Statistics about Culture and Identity – 2006 Census

The adherents of Hindu Dharma form the second largest community in NZ (64,392 - 2006 Census). Hindu Dharma followers (up from 39,798 to 64,392) increased by 61.8 per cent in the 2006 Census. Just over 2 million people, or 55.6 per cent of those answering the religious affiliation question, affiliated with a form of Christian religion (including Māori Christian). In contrast with the small decrease in people affiliating with Christian religions between 2001 and 2006, there was an increase in people identifying as non-Christians. The number of people indicating an affiliation with

- The Sikh Panth (9,507)
- Buddhism (37,590 people)
- Islam (36,072)

The increases in people identifying as non-Christians is mainly attributed to migrants, particularly from Asia. Almost 8 in 10 people (78.8 %) affiliated with the Hindu Dharma were born overseas, particularly in Southern Asia and the Pacific Islands. A similar proportion of people affiliating with Islam (77.0 %) were born overseas, mainly in Southern Asia, but also in the Middle East.