

# **Alliance of Civilisations New Zealand Implementation Plan**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Alliance of Civilisations (AoC) is a UN initiative, co-sponsored by Spain and Turkey, which aims to forge the collective political will to address the increasing polarisation between particularly Muslim and Western societies.

The Report of the Alliance of Civilisations High-Level Group, released in November 2006, identifies practical proposals – in the fields of education, youth, media and migration – to build mutual trust and understanding between communities. The AoC's High Representative, former Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio, has recently called for each member of the AoC Group of Friends to develop a national strategy to carry forward the AoC, listing practical steps to implement the Alliance's objectives.

There is a risk in New Zealand, as elsewhere, that those with a rigid adherence to their own beliefs and principles overlook the fundamental truth that diversity is one of humanity's greatest strengths. The New Zealand Government is committed to the aspirations that underpin the global Alliance of Civilisations initiative, and hosted the first regional meeting to consider the AoC Report in Auckland from 23-24 May 2007 in order to test the relevance of the AoC recommendations for our Asia-Pacific region.

The Symposium involved a broad cross-section of regional leaders and thinkers, including three members of the United Nations High-Level Group who authored the AoC Report. Participants rejected the inevitability of the "clash of civilisations"; endorsed the relevance of the AoC to the diverse communities of the Asia-Pacific region; and identified a combination of recommendations from the Report which could usefully be taken forward in our region, within the four AoC fields of action – education, youth, media and migration.

The Asia-Pacific region, in which New Zealand sits, is home to many of the world's great cultures, civilisations and faiths. For the most part, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we live alongside each other in our wider neighbourhood with mutual respect for our various beliefs, cultures and differences, but we are not immune from misunderstanding and discord. At the same time as we seek to build trust and understanding between different cultural and religious communities within our region, we need to be attentive to developments in and between our own communities within New Zealand.

New Zealand's population is becoming more diverse. The number of New Zealanders identifying as of Asian ethnicity increased by almost 50 percent between 2001 and 2006, while those identifying as Pacific peoples increased by 15 percent. Over the same period, the number of New Zealanders identifying with Islam increased by 53 percent, Hinduism by 62 percent, and the Sikh religion by 83 percent.

For New Zealand to remain a cohesive society, it must continue to build mutual trust and respect amongst its citizens, work to avoid the emergence of inter-communal tensions or intolerance, and guard against the emergence of extremism within any community. Without actions by government, civil society and local communities to address differences that may exist, or to overcome prejudice or alienation, there is a risk that diversity may become a source of intolerance, fear, uncertainty and even violence, rather than something to celebrate and nurture.

We have a long tradition as an open, parliamentary democracy, based on the rule of law and respect for human rights. We have an immigration policy that does not discriminate on the basis of religious or cultural beliefs. We have a solid track record of providing opportunities for a new life to refugees through the UNHCR and the opportunity for asylum seekers to make a claim for refugee status.

Government machinery such as the Human Rights Commission, Race Relations Commissioner, the Office of the Ombudsmen, New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID), the Office of Ethnic Affairs, Te Puni Kokiri, the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, the Ministry of Social Development, as well as NGOs such as the Asia New Zealand Foundation and the Pacific Cooperation Foundation, among others, form part of the architecture designed to promote and sustain respect for human dignity in New Zealand, and with our near neighbours. In addition, local government, non-government and community organisations, and citizens' groups play important roles in facilitating strong community relationships and concord, and in assisting new migrants to settle successfully into their new host communities.

Nevertheless, while government practice and programmes already align to the goals of the Alliance of Civilisations, there is room for improvement in how we manage diversity and work to build a truly tolerant and cohesive society.

Accordingly, New Zealand, as a strong supporter of the AoC initiative, has developed this initial National Implementation Plan to assist in advancing the goals and objectives of the Alliance of Civilisations. The Plan is divided into three parts.

Part 1 describes the *Strategic and Structural Framework* of the Plan and its relationship to the broader Alliance of Civilisations process. It draws directly on the recommendations made in the AoC High-level Group Report and the Asia-Pacific Symposium in Auckland, focusing in particular, on the four main fields of action: youth, media, education and migration.

Part 2 outlines New Zealand's *Programme of Action* for the coming 18 months (December 2007 – June 2009). A review will be carried out after twelve months to assess progress,

identify obstacles and constraints encountered and to develop solutions to overcome them, and to update the Programme.

Part 3 identifies source materials and includes additional information relevant to New Zealand initiatives.

## **PART 1: STRATEGIC AND STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK**

### **I STRATEGIC OUTLOOK**

#### **1 Overall Goal of the AoC**

The Overall goal of the Alliance of Civilisations is to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions and, in the process, to help counter the forces that fuel polarisation and extremism. (Source: AoC Implementation Plan 2007-2009)

#### **2 Key Objectives**

For New Zealand, the Alliance of Civilisations offers opportunities to contribute to the global debate about how to improve relations across cultures and religions and help develop projects - and ultimately outcomes - that meet our security needs and objectives.

More specifically, the New Zealand Implementation Plan for the Alliance of Civilisations is structured around the following four objectives:

- a Support the goals and objectives of the Alliance of Civilisations Report with a particular emphasis on carrying forward relevant recommendations both from the AoC Report and from the Auckland Symposium.
- b Implement activities in New Zealand that work to build a truly tolerant, and cohesive society
- c Build support within the region for bilateral and regional cooperation on carrying forward implementation of AoC projects.
- d Continue to work closely with the AoC Secretariat (including through participation in the Group of Friends) in advancing the AoC initiative globally.

### **II THEMES**

The AoC High-Level Report identified education, youth, media and migration policies as playing a critical role in helping to reduce cross cultural tensions and to build bridges between communities.<sup>1</sup> Participants at the Auckland Symposium endorsed the Report's choice of priority fields of action, and endorsed a number of recommendations for regional action within these themes, aimed at:<sup>2</sup>

#### **1 Education**

Ensuring that education gives people an accurate picture of other peoples and cultures.

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<sup>1</sup> AoC Report, page 25.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to full list of Symposium recommendations in Annex 1.

- 2 Youth**  
Giving young people more opportunities to understand people from other countries and societies.
- 3 Media**  
Encouraging the media to avoid stereotyping and overstating of conflict and disagreement.
- 4 Migration**  
Developing migration policies that avoid creating either resentment or fear.

The New Zealand Programme of Action is consistent with these thematic goals.

### **III OBJECTIVES OF THE NEW ZEALAND PROGRAMME OF ACTION**

The primary objective of the New Zealand Programme of Action is to ensure an enduring framework for the New Zealand response to the objectives of the AoC initiative with links between international, regional, national, and local efforts. The New Zealand Programme of Action will promote initiatives that:

- a **promote trust and understanding between diverse communities** by connecting people and organisations;
- b **reduce polarisation between societies** through joint pursuits and partnerships (including between Government and civil society) that help give impetus to innovative projects;
- c **build respect and understanding among cultures and empower voices of moderation and reconciliation** which can help calm cultural and religious tensions between nations and peoples;
- d **provide access to information and resource materials** drawn from successful co-operative initiatives which could in turn be used by other institutions, organisations and individuals.

### **IV STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK**

The domestic (national and community) activities of New Zealand Programme of Action will be managed at the local agency level. Co-ordination of domestic initiatives in the New Zealand Programme of Action will be the joint responsibility of the Office of Ethnic Affairs and the Ministry of Social Development. New Zealand's regional and international contributions will be led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID).

Overall co-ordination of the Programme will undertaken by the Ministry of Social Development.

The first review of the Programme of Action will be initiated at the end of the first twelve month period. The purpose of the review will be to update and refresh the Programme of Action in light of new initiatives and any further developments in the broader Alliance of Civilisations process. The review will not include detailed examination of initiatives within the Programme of Action - these have been established with their own separate, specific reporting and evaluation criteria. Reports about initiatives will inform the review.

## **PART 2: PROGRAMME OF ACTION (DEC 2007 – JUNE 2009)**

### **I PLAN OF ACTIVITIES**

### **II NEW ZEALAND ACTIVITIES**

#### **1 Connecting Diverse Communities**

Connecting Diverse Communities is a work programme to strengthen relations between diverse ethnic, cultural and religious groups and to improve social cohesion in New Zealand. The focus of the work programme is on:

- a strengthening intercultural relations
- b addressing discrimination and promoting respect
- c improving connections with cultural identity
- d capacity building and community development
- e building the knowledge base

#### **2 Building Bridges**

This programme was created to address a range of specific needs in the New Zealand Muslim community. It aims to provide information to Muslim communities to increase civic participation, foster leadership within Muslim communities and build relationships between Muslims and host communities.

The programme is to investigate expanding the Building Bridges project. There are a number of possible projects including an expansion of the Muslim youth leadership programme, providing a strategic leadership development programme for New Zealand Muslim leaders, developing the Imams Forum to promote understanding and knowledge of New Zealand laws and services, and organising a national conference on Muslims, Islam and the West to promote dialogue and understanding between Muslim and mainstream agencies.

#### **3 New Zealand Settlement Strategy**

The New Zealand Settlement Strategy is a whole-of-government framework to achieve agreed settlement outcomes for migrants, refugees and their families. Its vision is New Zealand's prosperity underpinned by an inclusive society, in which the local and national integration of newcomers is supported by responsive services, a welcoming environment and a shared respect for diversity. The Settlement National Action Plan Strategy is a programme that sets out a range of initiatives across government to support the achievement of this vision.

#### 4 **New Zealand Diversity Strategy**

The New Zealand Diversity Action Programme is a citizens' initiative, facilitated by the Human Rights Commission. It operates on a partnership principle, with an annual forum and annual projects and networks for interfaith cooperation, media and diversity, language policy and refugee issues. Each year a broad range of projects are carried out by partner organisations of the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme. The Programme promotes the following ten steps:

- a Develop a network of people and organizations supporting diversity.
- b Establish and build knowledge and web-based resources on diversity.
- c Foster diversity research.
- d Contribute to a conversation on constitutional issues.
- e Focus on education and youth.
- f Foster diversity in the media.
- g Support the successful settlement of refugees and migrants.
- h Celebrate diversity through cultural festivals and the arts.
- i Provide connections to our heritage through the involvement of all ethnic communities in historic, cultural and natural conservation initiatives and events.
- j Promote dialogue and exchange between people of different views, cultures and faiths.

#### 5 **Youth Exchanges**

The Government will take stock of initiatives in Youth Exchanges between New Zealand and other countries with a view to identifying and removing gaps.

#### 6 **Intercultural Awareness and Communication programme**

This training programme for public servants promotes cultural self awareness, knowledge of other cultures and building bridges between cultures as core competencies for workplaces. The public service seeks to lift broad intercultural awareness in the public service including in relation to Islam and new kiwis.

#### 7 **Development of New Initiatives**

The following new initiatives have been identified for development following the Auckland Symposium in May 2007.

##### a. **Media literacy on AoC issues**

A review of broadcasting content regulation will consider the desirability of broadening the role of the Broadcasting Authority, or any future content regulator, so it can promote a wider range of the public's interest in broadcasting, to encourage a more critical approach to broadcasting content on the part of audiences, and to promote greater collaboration between broadcasters and audiences. It includes questions on whether there should be a greater emphasis on

media literacy (which may be an avenue for increased understanding of AoC issues), and the possible role of an Authority in providing for this. AoC issues will be considered in determining appropriate content regulation arrangements in New Zealand.

Media training on AoC issues through the Journalism Training Organisation and journalism schools is to include provision of material on AoC issues, and engaging in discussion forums or one-in-one engagement with, practising journalists and editors.

**b. Strengthen the focus of education at school levels on faiths, religions and cultures**

The scope within the current social studies curriculum, is to be assessed with a view to strengthening the focus of education at school level on faiths, religions and cultures, by developing or sourcing background materials.

All schools with students in years 7 – 10 should be working towards offering students opportunities for learning a second or subsequent language.

**c. NZAID scholarships**

In consultation with national governments in Asia and the Pacific, New Zealand will discuss the benefits of New Zealand-based scholarship or training opportunities towards the furtherance of religious understanding in the region.

**d. Investigate the establishment of an Islamic Studies Centre**

New Zealand intends to develop appropriate opportunities to study Islam at the tertiary level and promote and develop expertise in Islamic Studies. Work will be undertaken to investigate the establishment of an Islamic Studies Centre.

**III ASIA-PACIFIC: NEW ZEALAND REGIONAL CONTRIBUTION**

**1 Alliance of Civilisations Symposium**

New Zealand hosted the first regional meeting to consider the AoC Report and its relevance to the diverse communities of the Asia-Pacific. Outcomes of the Auckland AoC Symposium have been published and made available for broad reference.

**2 Asia Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue**

New Zealand is a co-sponsor of the Asia Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue, which brings together representatives of the major faith and community groups of 15 countries in the Southeast Asian and adjacent South Pacific region to promote trust and understanding amongst religious communities. New Zealand hosted the third

Dialogue in Waitangi in May 2007 and will participate, lead discussion on one of the Dialogue themes, and help shape outcomes from the fourth meeting in Cambodia in 2008.

**3 Muslim Youth Leaders Exchange**

This programme, piloted with Indonesia, brings Muslim youth leaders from the region on an educational programme in New Zealand, interacting with our own Muslim communities, academics, interfaith team, officials and community leaders.

**4 Academic Exchange**

This programme supports academic exchanges in the region, including between religious studies scholars, encouraging inter-cultural interaction and access to regional expertise.

**5 Inter-Religious Studies**

New Zealand has provided support to a South East Asian regional University Centre of Excellence for its own research and development of an effective syllabus for inter-religious studies.

**6 Development of New Initiatives**

The following new initiatives have been identified for development following the Auckland Symposium in May 2007:

**a. Annual youth media scholarship**

This initiative, launching in early 2008, will place 2 recent New Zealand journalism graduates on an internship/study programme in South East Asia, to broaden their understanding of regional issues and inter-religious and inter-cultural relations. (MFAT/Asia-New Zealand Foundation);

**b. Regional media training**

New Zealand is investigating, with partners, the scope for journalist training in the region focussed on widening understanding of critical international issues - particularly in those fields where politics and religion intersect (MFAT).

**c. Regional inter-cultural educational publications**

Supporting the development of regional educational resource material that delineates affinities and similarities among value systems and among civilisations (MFAT);

**d. Cross cultural educational initiatives**

Supporting selected regional or bilateral cross-cultural educational initiatives in the region (NZAID/Ministry of Education)

**e. Supporting curriculum development in countries of the region**

Supporting any regional or bilateral discussion focussing on the inclusion of material on cross-cultural, “civics” and human rights issues within national education curricula to support inclusive education systems that are well grounded in the principles of good citizenship (NZAID/Ministry of Education);

**f. Broadening existing youth initiatives**

Adding an AoC dimension to existing regional youth initiatives, particularly the Asia New Zealand Young Leaders Forum and potentially others, including the Asia-Pacific Regional Dialogue, the Young Pacific Leaders' Conference, and the annual NZ Model UN (MFAT/Ministry of Youth Development);

**g. UNESCO material on cultural diversity**

Facilitating distribution in our region of relevant UNESCO material on cultural diversity (Ministry of Education);

**VI INTERNATIONAL CONTRIBUTION**

**1 AoC Annual Forum**

New Zealand will be represented at Ministerial level at the first Annual AoC Forum in Madrid, January 2008.

**2 AoC Youth Forum**

New Zealand will be represented at the first AoC Global Youth Forum (immediately preceding the main Forum).

**3 AoC Group of Friends**

New Zealand was an early member of the UN-based Group of Friends supporting the AoC initiative and will continue to take an active role, including by attending and contributing to Friends meetings.

**4 AoC Trust Fund**

New Zealand was an early contributor to the AoC Trust Fund of NZD \$50,000, tagged for projects in South East Asia, and will consider, as possible, further future contributions.

5 **AoC Projects (led by the UN AoC Secretariat)**

As an active Member of the AoC Group of Friends, New Zealand will continue to work closely with the AoC Secretariat on the global Implementation Plan. Specific prospects for early consideration include:

a. **Clearinghouse**

New Zealand will consider what information it can contribute to the AoC Clearinghouse on best practices and initiatives underway at home and in our region on cross-cultural and inter-faith dialogue, education and cooperation.

b. **Rapid Response Media Mechanism to Address Cross-Cultural Tensions**

New Zealand will consider how we might best contribute to the AoC Rapid Response Media Mechanism, including by investigating the possibility of nominating a prominent person involved in cross-cultural issues and/or an author for op-ed pieces, and assisting in the distribution of media material produced.

**PART 3: APPENDICES**