

## Submission for introduction of the Human Rights Act

The introduction of such an act would at the least cement legislatively the idea of freedom of religion. Although the current Australian Constitution through section 116 disallows the Commonwealth from making laws that prohibits the free exercise of religion, one wonders its impact where tolerance of others' religions is at its extreme low. It certainly isn't a safeguard for rights of individuals.

The current Queensland legislation on anti-discrimination also provides very limited protection, if any in certain instances, for religious intolerance, to use a neutral term.

Although at this juncture the proposed Bill is not as yet known, the idea of freedom of religion in legislative form could not come at a better time for Muslims. With the current climate of religious ignorance and fundamentalist religious labels against the wider Queensland Muslim community, it is certainly a welcome piece of legislation. It would, it is thought, also reflect the majority views of other Australians and in particular Queenslanders in terms of allowing Muslims to freely exercise their religion. Muslims of course have been residing for generations in Australia; their participation in the community has been quite significant. In particular currently, because of the increased need to break the stigma towards Islam, the Muslim community wants to further partake in sealing the understanding between them and the wider Australian public in understanding and respecting each other's beliefs. This would be an ideal platform in order to demonstrate Islam in its form and the way it has positively embedded itself in the Australian culture. This law would thus reflect the need for a harmonious relationship in Queensland.

Similarly it would bring Queensland in light with Article 18 of the ICCPR and as such would reflect a world view of human rights, more particularly a right to religion.

It would be an opportune moment as well to reflect the multi-cultural society that Australia is said to be, in order to strengthen the ability of Muslims to freely exercise the right to worship openly without outside influences and through such transparency, which this legislation would bring, allow closer ties with non-Muslims. In our view, it would allow for important conversations to be had to foster understanding between each other, against the background of knowing that freedom to religion is now an enshrined legislative right.

Religion for Muslims is not only a private ideal. It is a way of life and as such the need for such a freedom is an absolute necessity for Muslims to be able to fully exercise such a right. This may be an unknown feature to other non-Muslims. The security it would provide for its exercise would allow Muslims to continue being productive members of this community and to be able to comfortably perform their religious duties. It would not be a tool to impose our own beliefs upon others; quite the opposite. It would simply satisfy what our religious duty is personal to each and every one of us.

Freedom to religion of course would not be inconsistent with other laws but would simply ensure that ability to hold one's beliefs and exercise them. It would not allow Muslims to create or live by their own rules, where such rules are inconsistent with Queensland law. Muslims simply want to be able to exercise their fundamental religious duties without the fear of non-protection from the State. It is not an agenda for Islamic imposition, but rather a freedom of one's conscience.

If the state were to make acts against such religious expression unlawful, it would allow for further cohesion, it is thought, between Muslims and non-Muslims in Queensland.

It would be recognition for what really is intrinsic to a Muslim's identity.

AMARAH

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