



NEW ZEALAND PLAN OF ACTION TO SUPPORT THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILISATIONS

December 2007 – June 2009



New Zealand Government

ALLIANCE OF CIVILISATIONS NEW ZEALAND PLAN OF ACTION

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INTRODUCTION

The Alliance of Civilisations is a United Nations initiative that aims 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”.¹ The Alliance (or AoC) was established in 2005 at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey.

Working in partnership with governments, international and regional organizations, civil society groups, foundations, and the private sector, the Alliance is supporting a range of projects and initiatives aimed at building bridges among a diversity of cultures and communities. It is developing an online clearinghouse of best practices, materials and resources on cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation projects as well as a Rapid Response Media Mechanism to provide platforms for constructive debate and opinion during times of increased tensions around cross-cultural issues.

The Report of the Alliance of Civilisations High-Level Group, released in November 2006, identified 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 President of Portugal 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. The AoC Group of Friends is a community of over 80 member countries and international organisations and bodies. The AoC also has a Secretariat based in New York which administers the Alliance.

The New Zealand Government is committed to the aspirations of the Alliance of Civilisations initiative, and hosted the first Asia-Pacific symposium to consider the AoC Report and its relevance to Asia-Pacific in Auckland on 23 and 24 May 2007.

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 idea of an inevitable “clash of civilisations”, endorsed the relevance of the AoC to the diverse communities in the Asia-Pacific region, and identified a combination of recommendations from the four AoC fields of action – education, youth, media and migration - that could usefully be progressed in our region².

The Asia-Pacific region is home to many of the world’s major cultures, civilisations and faiths. For the most part, in the 21st century, we live alongside each other in our wider neighbourhood with mutual respect for our various beliefs, cultures and differences, but at

¹ Alliance of Civilisations Mission Statement.

² Note the terms ‘region’ and ‘regional’ in this plan generally refer to the Asia-Pacific region, not to regions within New Zealand.

times we experience 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 of 4.028 million people is becoming more diverse³. For example, the number of New Zealanders identifying as of Asian ethnicity increased by 49 percent between 2001 and 2006 (to 354,500), while those identifying as Pacific peoples increased by 15 percent (to 266,000). Over the same period, the number of New Zealanders identifying with Islam increased by 53 percent (to 36,100), Hinduism by 62 percent (to 64,400), and the Sikh religion by 83 percent (to 9,500).

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 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAT), the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, the Department of Labour (DOL), the Office of Ethnic Affairs (OEA), Te Puni Kokiri (the Ministry of Maori Affairs), the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), the Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) and others, 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 to promote good relations with our near neighbours. In addition, local government, non-government and community organisations and citizens' groups play important roles in facilitating strong community relations, and in assisting new migrants to settle successfully into new communities.

³ Figures from Census 2006.

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

Accordingly, New Zealand, as a strong supporter of the AoC initiative, has developed this initial national Plan of Action 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 *Plan 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 Plan.

Part 3 provides links to source materials and additional information relevant to New Zealand initiatives.

PART 1: STRATEGIC AND STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

Overall Goal of the Alliance of Civilisations

The overall goal of the Alliance of Civilisations (AoC) 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.

Key Objectives

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

The New Zealand Plan of Action for the Alliance of Civilisations is structured around the following four objectives:

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

1.2 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.⁴ Participants at the Auckland Symposium endorsed the priority fields of action included in the Report, and endorsed recommendations for regional action within these themes, aimed at:⁵

- 1 **EDUCATION** - ensuring that education gives people an accurate picture of other peoples and cultures.
- 2 **YOUTH** - giving young people more opportunities to understand people from other countries and societies.
- 3 **MEDIA** - encouraging media to avoid stereotyping and overstating of conflict and disagreement.
- 4 **MIGRATION** - developing migration policies that avoid creating resentment or fear.

The New Zealand Plan of Action is consistent with these four themes.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE NEW ZEALAND PLAN OF ACTION

The primary objective of the New Zealand Plan of Action is to connect up international, regional, national, and local efforts towards the AoC mission statement. The New Zealand Plan 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 cooperative initiatives which could be used by other institutions, organisations and individuals.

⁴ Alliance of Civilisations Report p.25, available at www.unaoc.org.

⁵ Refer to full list of Symposium recommendations in Annex 1 of the Symposium report, available at www.mfat.govt.nz.

1.4 STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK

Co-ordination of domestic initiatives in the New Zealand Plan 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 (NZ Aid). Overall co-ordination of the Plan will be undertaken by the Ministry of Social Development. For each project within the Plan, the lead agency is bracketed at the end of the description.

The first review of the Plan of Action will be initiated at the end of 2008. The purpose of the review will be to update and refresh the Plan 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 Plan of Action - these have been established with their own separate, specific reporting and evaluation criteria. Reports about initiatives will inform the review.

PART 2: PLAN OF ACTION (DECEMBER 2007 – JUNE 2009)

2.1 NEW ZEALAND ACTIVITIES

Activities in New Zealand are divided into 'overarching projects' that cover many initiatives, and 'specific projects' which are those that particularly focus on achieving the goals of the Alliance.

Overarching projects

1 Connecting Diverse Communities

Connecting Diverse Communities is a cross-government work programme led jointly by the Ministry of Social Development and the Office of Ethnic Affairs to strengthen relations between diverse ethnic, cultural and religious groups and to improve social cohesion in New Zealand. It encompasses more than 70 separate initiatives. The high-level 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. (MSD and OEA)

2 New Zealand Settlement Strategy

The New Zealand Settlement Strategy is a whole-of-government framework led by the Department of Labour 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 includes a range of initiatives across government to support the achievement of this vision. (DOL)

3 Diversity Action Programme

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. (Human Rights Commission)

Specific projects

4 Building Bridges

This programme, led by the Office of Ethnic Affairs, 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 good relations between Muslims and host communities.

The Office is to investigate expanding the Building Bridges project. There are a number of possible projects; including expansion of the Muslim youth leadership programme, 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. (OEA)

5 Settling In

Settling In is a community development programme that works directly with refugee and migrant communities to develop and deliver the social services they want. Its vision is a New Zealand that welcomes and celebrates diversity, where refugees and migrants settle well and are able to contribute to our nation in all aspects of life – social, economic, civic and cultural. Settling In is administered by the Ministry of Social Development. Aims of the programme are to:

- identify social service needs in refugee and migrant communities
- purchase services where available
- develop capacity, skills and knowledge within the refugee and migrant communities
- work across government, NGO and community sectors. (MSD)

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'. (OEA)

New Initiatives

The following New Zealand 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 whether to broaden 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. (Ministry of Culture and Heritage)

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. (Ministry of Education)

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

c. **NZAID scholarships**

In consultation with national governments in Asia and the Pacific, New Zealand's NZAID agency will explore the benefits of New Zealand-based scholarship or training opportunities to promote religious understanding in the region. (NZAID)

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

New Zealand universities intend 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. (Tertiary Education Commission)

2.2 ASIA-PACIFIC: NEW ZEALAND'S REGIONAL CONTRIBUTION

This section covers New Zealand's relevant activities in the Asia-Pacific region.

Existing initiatives

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 region. Outcomes of the Auckland AoC Symposium have been published and made available for broad reference – refer to www.mfat.govt.nz. (MFAT)

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 South East Asian and South Pacific region to promote trust and understanding amongst religious communities. New Zealand hosted the third Dialogue in Waitangi in May 2007. New Zealand will participate in, lead discussion on one of the Dialogue themes, and help shape outcomes from, the fourth meeting in Cambodia in 2008. (MFAT)

3 Muslim Youth Leaders Exchange

This programme, piloted with Indonesia, hosts 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. (MFAT)

4 Academic Exchange

This programme supports academic exchanges in the region, including between religious studies scholars, encouraging intercultural interaction and access to regional expertise. (MFAT/Ministry of Education)

5 Inter-Religious Studies

New Zealand has provided support to a South East Asian regional University Centre of Excellence for research on inter-religious dialogue and for the development of an effective syllabus for inter-religious studies at tertiary level. (MFAT)

New Initiatives

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

a Youth exchanges

The Government will take stock of youth exchanges between New Zealand and other countries with a view to identifying and addressing gaps. (Ministry of Youth Development)

b Annual graduate media scholarship

This initiative will place two 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).

c Regional media programme

New Zealand is investigating, with regional partners, the scope for bringing together journalists in the region to enhance understanding of critical international issues - particularly in those fields where politics and religion intersect. (MFAT)

d Regional inter-cultural educational resources

New Zealand will support the development of regional educational material that delineates affinities and similarities among value systems and among civilisations. (MFAT)

e Cross cultural educational initiatives

New Zealand will support selected regional or bilateral cross-cultural educational initiatives in the region. (NZAID/Ministry of Education)

f Supporting curriculum development in countries of the region

New Zealand will support regional or bilateral discussion focusing on the inclusion of material on cross-cultural, "civics" and human rights issues within national education curricula, in order to support inclusive education systems that are well-grounded in principles of good citizenship. (NZAID/Ministry of Education)

g Broadening existing youth initiatives

New Zealand will add an AoC dimension to existing regional youth initiatives, particularly the Asia New Zealand Young Leaders Forum and potentially others, including the Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue, the Young Pacific Leaders' Conference, and the annual New Zealand Model United Nations. (MFAT/Ministry of Youth Development)

h **UNESCO material on cultural diversity**

New Zealand will facilitate distribution in our region of relevant UNESCO material on cultural diversity. (Ministry of Education)

2.3 NEW ZEALAND'S INTERNATIONAL CONTRIBUTION

This section covers New Zealand's activities at the international level.

1 **Alliance of Civilisations Annual Forum**

New Zealand will be represented at Ministerial level at the first Annual AoC Forum in Madrid, in January 2008. (MFAT, Minister of Ethnic Affairs)

2 **Alliance of Civilisations Youth Forum**

New Zealand will be represented at the first AoC Global Youth Forum in 2008, immediately preceding the main Forum. (MFAT)

3 **Alliance of Civilisations 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. (MFAT)

4 **Alliance of Civilisations Trust Fund**

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

5 **Alliance of Civilisations 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 projects 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. (MFAT)

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. (MFAT)

PART 3: APPENDICES (SOURCE MATERIAL, KEY DOCUMENTS, OTHER LINKS)

www.unaoc.org for UN AoC documents, the original AoC Report and the AoC Secretariat's Implementation Plan

www.mfat.govt.nz for New Zealand's AoC Symposium Report, as well as the 'Waitangi Declaration and Action Plan' from the 3rd Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue

www.oea.govt.nz for Connecting Diverse Communities project, building Bridges project, Intercultural Awareness and Communication programme

www.msd.govt.nz for Connecting Diverse Communities project, Settling In project

www.dol.govt.nz for New Zealand Settlement Strategy