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Consultation hosted by the Anti-Discrimination Commission of Queensland (ADCQ) and Multicultural Affairs Queensland (MAQ), Brisbane, 16 June 2003

The meeting was chaired by Ms **Susan Booth**, Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Queensland. It was attended by 15 invited participants. Dr Bill Jonas, Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner, and Omeima Sukkarieh attended from HREOC.

Dr Jonas made the following points in an opening address

The Isma project was initiated because racism and prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians continue to be a serious problem in Australia. The consultations involve meeting with Arabic and Islamic community organisations and individuals across Australia to discuss their experiences, their needs and their opinions about existing and future strategies for overcoming prejudice and discrimination.

The project involves research as well as consultation. The research component involves finding out about existing strategies and programs which are in place federally and at a State or Territory level, that aim to counter anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice. HREOC is asking government and community agencies across Australia to evaluate existing projects and identify what more could be done.

HREOC has also commissioned a survey from researchers at the University of Western Sydney. The survey will ask community members in NSW and Victoria about their experiences of discrimination, vilification and other racially-motivated incidents and also whether the incident was officially reported. If it was, we need to get feedback on how seriously the complaint was treated, how effectively it was dealt with and whether there was any resolution. In cases where the incident was not reported (the majority, we expect) we need to understand the reasons why not.

The project is the beginning of a longer term process of engagement for HREOC. In large part we are consulting to obtain information to assist us in changing our practices, adopting new approaches and developing new projects to combat racism. Already, for example, there has been a lot of support for including religious discrimination and religious vilification in the federal anti-discrimination laws.

Ms Hurriyet Babacan, Executive Director, Community Outcomes Branch, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, made the following points in her opening address

Ms Babacan's Branch covers multicultural affairs among other issues. The Premier is also the Minister of Multicultural Affairs in Queensland. Key planks of the Multicultural Queensland Policy are valuing diversity and promoting opportunity, access and participation.

Australia is generally considered very good at settling migrants and welcoming new arrivals and to have a very good multicultural mixed population. However, there are often hidden prejudices and sometimes those hidden prejudices come out at critical times. Some of those critical times include economic hardship, unemployment, social change, war and conflict around the world. Those are just some of the problems that impact on discrimination and the acceptance of difference.

Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Susan Booth made the following points in her opening address

Queensland law makes race and religious vilification and discrimination unlawful, unlike the situation in NSW or at the federal level. Nevertheless the threshold is very high in Queensland – requiring proof of severe ridicule. The federal threshold would be preferable.

The first religious vilification case brought in Queensland involved an allegation that a candidate in a State election had published a brochure which vilified Muslims. The Tribunal found that it was vilification and the words which took the Koran completely out of context can't possibly have been anything other than vilification. However, the candidate was

covered by the exemptions because (1) during an election campaign there is a heightened ability to discuss such issues which is protected under the Australian Constitution and (2) the candidate had done so in good faith.

Some of the reasons given by community members for not making a formal complaint have included 'I don't want to seem ungrateful to my new country'; 'I've been vilified but I want to contribute in a positive way'; 'I want to succeed. I want my family to succeed. I also don't want other members from my community to think that I'm a whinger by bringing a complaint'.

It is possible now for a representative community organisation to bring a complaint of vilification so that the burden is not on the individual any longer.

In the period after September 11th ADCQ knew a lot of vilification was going on, but people did not know the Commission well enough or there was not enough trust there or the relationships were not strong enough for them to come and complain. Education and outreach are needed to build awareness and trust.

ADCQ has run a series of anti-racism training sessions in community languages and has published vilification cards in five community languages [referring to the 'Know your Rights' cards].

The meeting then opened up to discussion among the participants

The first speaker referred to the broader context of prejudice in Australia.

"Going back fifteen years ago when I came to Australia, things were happening then but of course since September 11th it's just the history. At meetings we talk about acknowledging traditional owners and then we move on. But in reality this land is under occupation. So that in itself generates a lot of these issues where I think the government establishes that domination and that control over this land and continues that by victimising individuals more than groups. Really they are asserting power over the traditional caretakers of this land. So I think there is something to be done in regards to something like a treaty that brings up that issue of who the land actually belongs to. And then if we have that, then we might actually see that all of us will be welcomed here on an equal basis. From my experiences when I first came to Australia I was in the Townsville area and there it was for me dreadful to see what was happening to Aboriginal people. What was happening to me was ridiculous: I couldn't get a unit to live in, I had to bond everything I had, a job even, I couldn't get a credit card, all of those sort of things. It was clear discrimination. I suppose for me is that we have to do something about the bigger picture otherwise we are all in the same boat."

Later, other participants referred to the impact of 11 September and also the additional impact of the Bali bombing.

"Racism in Queensland and indeed Australia is not from September 11th. It was much before. But now they have the license to say it in the open because of September 11th. They are the same people but they didn't dare to say it before. Now they say these people in the Middle East are terrorists and we have the right to tell the public."

"You have this in every country. Before September 11th I have lived here and had a normal life and maybe one out of hundred would come and give a story like that. Now I drive a taxi as well and now you get about ninety out of one hundred. They will not just tell you that you sound different. They will not look at you like you are a human. They look at you like all the Muslims are involved with it [i.e. terrorism]."

Experiences of prejudice, discrimination and abuse

Threats and harassment

"Since September 11th the problem has extended, before that I have never had that experience over here. I have driven a taxi, I have run a restaurant... we have a restaurant in New Farm and we have gone through about fifty to sixty phone calls, people threatening, people coming in with sticks. The police know about it and we have made a few complaints."

"A couple of years ago we [Muslim Women's Association of Queensland] were working with Brisbane City Council to get our first own premises and we were working hard for six months. We wanted to renovate the place and were really looking forward to it, then there was a meeting in the neighbourhood where we were asked to introduce ourselves and it went very well and the last week before getting into the premises, we got graffiti on the premises and because it's a hut in the middle of the Park we were so feared to get to those premises and then it was to who do we complain to, what can we do so we gave up."

Discrimination at school

"What is worrying me is what is happening in schools. A lot of it is very clear and obvious and a lot of it is not. Knowing that a lot of the young people from different groups are being targeted and they are being harassed. Some of them are showing up by reacting and fighting, not wanting to go to school, staying away, some are put on drugs as they are seen as depressed."

Discrimination in the workforce

"If you apply for a job and you do not get it they do not say it is discrimination. But I see a lot of it. Maybe it is not just against Arabs and Muslims. Maybe it is just against those who do not speak English as a native language. I am driving a taxi now and I see a lot of people from other nations. Everyone who is not from an English speaking country, they cannot get a job easily here. When I was at a University two years ago I overheard the receptionist saying to a friend that 'the bloody wog got the job'."

"I have finished my degree but I haven't faced any problems during Uni, but in getting jobs I do. You send in your C.V. and if they send anything back it usually says you are overqualified. They don't ask you for an interview. They ask you for your name, place of study...and that's where it stops. The situation for Arabs and Muslims was worse after the Bali bombing because it was more personal for Australians."

Allegations against the police

"The Logan Youth and Family Services produce cards on their rights and give them to young people and they (the kids) were picked up in the streets by police and made to eat the cards."

"Police officers are the worst offenders. Last month I was at the road and a car in the side lane came in front of me and I had to use my brakes and horn to warn him to stop me from being killed. A police officer on a motorbike stopped both of us and took us to a side street. Then he said that I must apologise to him [the other driver]. I said 'But he broke the law of traffic. He was going to kill me'. He said 'You have to apologise to him'. But I said 'I did nothing wrong'. But he insisted I must apologise. I told him who I was and said I will get your number and let us talk about it. He said 'Ok you go'. I said 'No. You book him for changing lane without indicating'. He said 'I didn't see that'. I said 'You saw me blowing the horn but you didn't see him jumping in front of me and me having to use the my car's best brakes possible to avoid within one inch collision?' He said 'I didn't see it'. I said 'Really?' I know my rights, so I asked him for his name and went to the high authorities. So I think it is about educating the authorities who see nothing and hear nothing. If I go to a police officer and say that man offended me and he is negative, he will not do anything. So next time I won't complain because the police do not do anything. I have threatened to take more action before. I know my rights and I stick to them and fight for them. Not everyone is lucky enough to have contacts. People get to the point where they take the law into their own hands."

"A lot of people do not have that courage, people coming from countries where they do not practise their abilities to stand in front of policemen even to tell them half of what you said. Unfortunately some of the experiences we have been recording are road rage and wearing the veil. What I do is take the number and go to the police station and give them the number and the details. When I went to the station, the police officer wasn't that friendly until I told him I am part of the Police Advisory Committee. He was then looking and saying that the details of the car do not exist. I say 'I'm sorry I know what I'm talking about. I gave you all the details. I am part of the Police Advisory Committee and I am going to complain'. He said 'I will follow it up'."

At home

"My neighbours told me last night that someone like Bin Laden came to see you. I didn't let it go and so I educated them and they apologised."

"About two months ago a lady going to the school nearby parked in my driveway. I told her to move her car then she said 'I'll send you back to where you came from'. So I took a photo of her car to give to the police."

In public places

"Myself and my husband since September have been abused in the city square several times and in one instance a man threw rocks at us and cut my niece's face. In face to face situations it is harder to combat. Knowing your rights in these cases doesn't help because the perpetrator is not known."

"Yesterday I had an interesting experience. Most people when they see me think that I am from overseas. I got off the plane in Sydney and as I was walking this fella was walking alongside me. He was trying to be nice and he spoke to me like I was someone from overseas. It was in a loud voice and he was gesturing. And I spoke back and said 'G'day mate. How's it going?' And he kind of stepped back. I have had some

horror stories. A young woman was saying to me she was born here and she has had people come up to her and say 'Why don't you go back to the country where you were born?'"

In the media

"The biggest problem we have is media. Especially when we went to war in Afghanistan and we went to war in Iraq, the media explained it wrongly to the people. They went the wrong way about it. If we could do something about that and let the people know exactly what happens over there and that this has nothing to do with the Muslims, especially the Taliban. Taliban and Muslims are not the same thing."

"It is important to educate service providers, students and teachers but the media is the problem as they create the perception as to the average Mr and Mrs Suburbia. They are fearful of difference and that is what we have to break down. The media is making it worse. It is frightening."

The impacts of prejudice and discrimination

"I think at the moment there is a lot of focus on the individuals. ASIO, refugees, Camp X-Ray...generally we are living a culture of fear. And in this culture of fear we try to encourage some sort of activism or stand up for your rights. I think we are probably seeing more kind of underground movements which in terms of fear are radical. They are going underground because this is what we are pushing them to do because we are not operating as an open society."

Complaints processes

Complaints procedures were criticised as unfamiliar and daunting.

"They have these laws but for the average person in the street it's trying to access something that is not accessible. Me being confident and being in the organisation I am in, it took me a lot of people who I knew to go to, to get to a point where somebody was prepared to say we will take it on from here. For me not knowing the legal system was quite a frightening thing. And people said 'Oh he's gone down that path! Watch what you are doing.' So I suppose for me it is what can we do to simplify these things so the average person gets a chance to lodge a complaint and see something get done about it. Otherwise people will just give up. It's frightening for those who know the legal system, so how is it for those who don't?"

"My friend, like many people comes from a background where she does not have the right talk and then suddenly facing all this discrimination in the street here because she dresses in traditional clothes and not being able to speak in the Australian accent then she is facing discrimination everywhere. She is frightened to drive the car by herself. I see the positive side also from all the support from the different organisations, from the police and from the anti discrimination people, they are still trying to help us but we are still in the beginning."

"There are processes I think around this table too we should also know that here is a Crime and Misconduct Commission and I was surprised when I went to the IDC [inter-departmental committee] meeting at the Premiers Department a couple of months back that so many of the public servants around that table didn't know about how to make a complaint. I thought well these people are representing the wider community and they don't know. So I think the complaint mechanism, the carrot and the stick approach and the complaint mechanism must be disseminated."

Community organisation strategies to empower community members and combat prejudice

"The Islamic Women's Association is encouraging women to stand up for their rights and to set an example. Part of our objective is to give an opportunity for Islamic women to work where they have difficulty, to work in other areas."

Government strategies to empower community members and combat prejudice

The following exchange about the Queensland Premier's public support for the Arab and Muslim communities in that state is instructive.

"Talking about roles in the media and the government, they went to this Anti Racism Reference Group at the Premiers Department and they keep asking 'Why is the Premier not doing something?' He is there, like this reference group is there, to react the next time there is a bomb somewhere. He is relaying information

through the reference group but the message is not getting across. There are little media releases that are known about. But the reality on a day to day basis is that the Premier is silent."

"I think you are wrong there. I think he is probably more proactive than any other Premier in Australia."

"I wouldn't say that. When was the last time you saw him, you know, going after in media and you know actually push one off?"

"The media is the media. You can't control it."

"No. I'm saying how many media releases have you seen since September 11th in terms of Queensland and multiculturalism?"

"And there are people complaining or being very concerned that they do not know anything about what the premiers are saying."

"In terms of the media you and I and some people around here read a lot of newspapers. And we read in between the lines and what is the real story. But there are frightened people out there in the suburbs who read it as it is and how do they access it?"

"I don't want to be defensive at all but since September 11th the Premier was immediately aware of the danger of a backlash. So the response to it was immediate. Statements were made by the Premier, by Ministers, by Principals, by Mayors, by community leaders to say that any backlash to the Islamic community would not be accepted. It didn't rate much attention in the media. The media release was certainly prepared [but] the media focused initially on another angle of the story. But the Premier led with another strategy which was through word of mouth leadership in making sure that community leaders, Mayors, Ministers were saying to their spheres of influence that this is a time for Queenslanders to come together not to fall apart. That was the same message which went out after Bali. The fact that the media doesn't pick up the story is the age old issue of how do you work with the media in a way which is going to promote the issue beyond the word of mouth. That's a difficult one. I don't know if we will ever get that right answer because the media is an independent voice that doesn't necessarily do what governments want it to do. If it did in fact we would be really worried."

"In the same media release that talks about harmony it also talks about how our arms and airports are in danger and the media picks that part of it up and says our airports are in danger but there is nothing that talks about harmony..."

"Unfortunately harmony doesn't sell very well. There are some things that are not in the Premier's control like the media, but some he does like schools and Education Queensland. He has probably the biggest control about giving direction to other government agencies, to make sure that people or teachers employed under that particular structure have got the right ideas about multiculturalism."

The hotline established by the Queensland government in the days after 11 September 2001 was briefly mentioned.

"It was un-useful. I was at a function where the Premier said he received sixteen complaints and he decided to disband the hotline because the most serious complaint was from a British man who resented being called a Pom. That was his statement."

"Mainly it is because people generally of non-English speaking backgrounds don't complain."

Police initiatives in working with an Islamic community organisation and with an Islamic school were favourably referred to. The Youth Affairs Network and the Queensland Commissioner for Children are working in partnership to provide advocacy training to youth workers. The Anti-Discrimination Commissioner has alerted Queensland newspaper editors to a NSW Anti-Discrimination Board study of reporting on Arabic and Muslim people and community issues (*Race for the Headlines*). ADCQ will provide training to community organisations on its new racial, religious, sexuality and trans-gender vilification provisions.

What more could be done to fight anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination?

Need for political leadership

"The big concern is that out there, there is discrimination in our schools and our government services and the difficulty is to get people to make a complaint. I think we need to hear it from the highest levels in government not only from Premiers, [also] from the chief executives, that this sort of behaviour is unacceptable. In order to get complaints, leaders at a national level need to speak publicly about the issue

and denounce loudly all acts of discrimination.”

With respect to a Courier Mail front page said to have called “all people who were not Anglo Celtic the Forces of Darkness” and NSW MP Fred Nile’s comments about Muslim women wearing chador:

“If the government was to emphasise to everyone this is not acceptable anymore, and tell the newspapers, perhaps this will work. Governments need to educate down the line.”

Senior bureaucrats’ public representations were also seen as significant.

“One of the conditions of employment [should be] to know the law before they speak to the public. Once they know that the government is applying these rules, this would make everyone know that it is not black sheep white sheep.”

“You also have to make sure that senior public servants, chief executives, are saying what we are saying at this level. It’s no good for it to be said at a policy level. It’s got to be said right up there. There should also be a reward and promotion for people in public services. We’ve got to put the record that it should be part of their problem initially. Or alternatively they won’t get promoted if they don’t understand the management of diversity and that is the case in a number of departments.”

Cultural awareness training for all service-providers

“Regarding cultural awareness, I have been trying to raise this with the Education Department. There are actually no mandatory requirements for teachers to go through any cultural awareness. Even the Health Department has something where you actually can’t do any health work before you do that. But we are happy to have our teachers take our students and have no cultural awareness! None at all. The individual schools do whatever they want. So if you get a racist principal, you will get racist teachers. And some schools have ownership over them by racist principals. So we need a centralised model: some of this stuff has to come centrally.”

“As service providers we must be culturally confident. There must be some criteria that say, if you want to be a sergeant, teacher or a police officer, what do you know about cultural issues and how do you demonstrate that confidence. I think the University of Sydney medical school is looking for that in Doctors now. If doctors are looking at why are the rest of them not? It is not enough to be aware and tolerant. You’ve got to be confident otherwise you are wasting your time.”

Need for personal contacts

“There is a big war between the Muslims and the Muslim countries and that mostly is because of media. To fix this you have to pass this to the everyday Australian living around the corner. I have invited all the neighbours in my house. I have shown them the video of what exactly happened in Afghanistan. I have actually gone through one hundred years of history with them and why there is a war. Why it has taken so long. Why there is still a war. And they have a lot of information from me now which they can pass on. That is the only thing you can do, give knowledge to the normal people living next door.”

“We need to show our humanity and take time to sit around a table with people, and then you will get a lot more people on side and saying that they are caring about me as a human being. They understand me as a person and therefore I will listen to what they have to say. I believe - and I don’t mean any particular department - that we have not done enough of that.”

“I agree. I am in an Islamic women’s group who sometimes get 20-25, sometimes get 60. The successful meeting is always when people come from government. A successful one was when the Police came to the centre and we talked to them about our fears and concerns. It makes them feel like they are very important and that’s why people come to talk to them. It empowers the women.”

“Commonality needs to be built and having an open frank discussion about how we can share it.”

Need to review complaints procedures

“When you are talking about complaints you have to make sure that they feel comfortable first. It’s not about whether they complain or not. They talk to workers, they talk to leaders, [with assistance] they do directly complain. But somehow if they have to go through structure by structure then they hesitate. It’s daunting for them.”

Need to contact community members not in touch with community organisations

“It’s important to get these people not represented by any organisation or group through places of first contact, such as Legal Aid, Centrelink, Universities, Settlement Services, and many more. Go where new arrivals go. There are places for instance Goondiwindi where there is cotton picking work and different people tend to go there at particular times of year where you might get one particular group where a lot of them are not informed about their rights. You need to follow people’s trends at particular times. So we need to try and use other people’s resources to get the message across.”

Need to contribute positively to Australia’s future

“As victims we cannot always defend ourselves. We have to think positively for building Australia, through educating ourselves and our people how we may behave. If you are innocent no-one can put you down. Think positive how you may build Australia as an Australian. Everybody is a migrant - even the Australians. Think always positively, how we may build Australia as good people. Then if I am not Australian then I am respected by Australians, I am welcomed by Australians. I had problems in my communities and I restored it through good ways, my love, true love. I cannot put my enemy in front of me and consider him an enemy. I consider him my friend. Otherwise we will always talk about discrimination, but we may have no answer. Think only how we may build Australia positively. Educate our people to behave well, that’s all. If you cannot have any job go to Centrelink and they will find a job for you. It’s easy. We need patience. You have to prove that you are Australian and that you are useful. And if you are useful, everyone will respect you and accept you.”

Concluding discussion

“There are people saying to us that ‘If you can’t be like us, then what are you doing here?’ What do we say in response?”

“I get asked ‘You’ve been here for 20 years and you’re still wearing that [referring to the hijab]?’”

“We need to keep focusing on and talking about good experiences.”

“A lot of people believe that you should not speak another language, for example that it’s rude to speak another language. People don’t understand that you need to sometimes speak another language because the person who you are talking to may not understand English.”

“Maybe people in taxis are afraid of taxi drivers because they speak another language to others while they have passengers.”

“When we are sitting in the park and talking amongst each other, it happened a lot that people are afraid and so discriminate against us. We should be as a nation encouraging kids to speak other languages.”

“It is a multicultural society so we need to respect that it is also a multilingual society too.”



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Consultation with Islamic Women's Association of Queensland Senior Women's Respite Group, Brisbane, 17 June 2003

The meeting was chaired by **Ms Galila Abdelsalam**, Aged Care Coordinator of the Islamic Women's Association of Queensland (IWAQ), and facilitated by Omeima Sukkariah (notes) from HREOC. It was attended by 81 invited participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Ms Hasnija Junuzovic interpreted the Bosnian and Omeima interpreted the Arabic.

IWAQ is the largest Muslim women's organisation in Queensland and has been active in advocating the rights of Muslim women. It currently has an ethnically diverse membership of over 280 families throughout Queensland and other states. IWAQ caters for the needs of Muslim women and their families encompassing welfare, culture, social and religious issues.

The Respite Group is an informal group of older Muslim women who meet weekly to form support networks, socialise and meet new people. In addition, group activities include English conversation classes, basic computer skills and regular information sessions on topics such as discrimination, Centrelink, role of police, and so on.

1. What are your experiences of discrimination and vilification?

All of the participants had either directly experienced discrimination or knew of someone who had. As Ms Abdelsalam said:

"Everyone here has been through an experience or heard about an experience somehow, and we can go on for days and days ... we all have that experience of feeling that people look at us as terrorists. As a Muslim woman, we are more a victim than any other."

It was difficult to cover all of the participants' experiences within the scheduled consultation time. However most of the experiences felt by the participants occurred in public spaces such as shopping centres and while driving. Other experiences described included attacks against mosques, by neighbours at home and direct and indirect discrimination based on misconceptions about the diversity of Muslims in Australia and about Muslim women.

Experiences in public places including shopping centres

One woman shared her experience of being prevented from shopping at her local fruit market, and spoke of how the police responded to her call for assistance.

"Two or three weeks ago, [I] went to [the local fruit market]. You know how you pay money to get in? Well the security didn't let [me] in the market, and [I] said 'Why?' And they said 'Because people wearing like you, they steal from the market and maybe you're going to do the same thing'. [I] said 'But I would never do it'. But he still refused to let [me] get in. So [my] son, he got very angry and called the police, and when the police came he tried to convince the man to let [me] in and asked why he wouldn't. And the man at the door, the security man, I'm not sure who he was, said that 'That's my market and I can let in whoever I want, and I don't want her to be here because she's wearing the hijab and people wearing the hijab steal.' The police didn't even say anything, he just left. [My son reported it to the appropriate agency]. At the end, [I] didn't even get in the market. They told [me] that [my] name was listed as someone who steals there. [I] was stressed out and for one week [I] couldn't eat."

This story prompted the following response from another participant.

"If a Christian stole something from the supermarket, are they going to not let all the Christians come to the shop?"

Another incident at the same fruit market several years ago was also described.

"The sister was talking about [that fruit market]. I went there about six years ago, before September 11, but I had an experience. Somebody there threw something at me, and they were saying 'Do you want bananas, do you want bananas?' while they were throwing them at me. It was the people who were selling. It was humiliating."

Verbal abuse was a very common experience for participants.

"After September 11, I went to the shopping centre and the man came so fast at me and he shouted at me and abused me and put his finger up at me. Since then, I have always had people screaming at me and this is very common."

A recent convert shared a threatening experience where speaking back to the perpetrator provoked even more anger. A shop assistant came to her aid.

"I 'alhamdulillah' [ie thank God] have been a Muslim for three years. I've lost count of how many times I have been hurled abused at, not treated the same in supermarkets, or people try and stay in front of you with the trolleys, and I don't know it's just a lot of little things. I wear a black hijab and one particular incident where I was actually threatened with violence when this man. He was with his family as well and probably middle-aged, and he said 'Why don't you go back to Iraq?' And it was just because I was wearing a black hijab. I said to him 'Are you having a go at me?' If anyone abuses me I answer them back. I don't abuse them but I speak to them and they get a shock. I said 'You shouldn't be talking like that to anybody'. And he proceeded to scream and I felt threatened for my safety. I had to run into a supermarket...I had to run into a supermarket and go to a staff member and say 'Can you just stand here with me because otherwise I fear that this gentleman will hit me', because he was getting very angry and aggressive. The woman from the shopping centre was very good. And that's one incident of many."

This story prompted the following response from another participant referring to the perpetrator.

"That's no gentleman honey. That's evil."

Other experiences shared included.

"I remember a Somali lady being abused in the shop and people accuse them of not being clean. This is also common."

"I have been in a shopping centre with my son, sitting down and we were eating oranges and the lady next to me was sitting down and I felt a bit shy so I gave her some, and in the conversation, the lady asked me 'Where do you come from?', and I said 'Bosnia'. And the lady said, 'Oh, there's so many Muslim fundamentalists living in Bosnia'. And my son looked at the lady and said 'Are you sure? We are from Bosnia and we are Muslim'. And the lady says 'Sorry', and [she] didn't feel comfortable and stood up and walked away."

Experiences while driving

The discussion around experiences of discrimination and road rage while driving or passengers in cars was heated as over half of the participants agreed that road rage incidents were common and frightening as they could be potentially dangerous. The experiences took place often and mostly it involved the women being yelled abuse such as being called 'Osama' amongst other things.

One woman who had recently moved to Brisbane from Townsville said she had felt 'very safe in Townsville' and never directly experienced discrimination there. However, since moving to Brisbane she has had many experiences.

"I'm from Townsville. When I moved here I got abuse on the road while I'm driving, when I wear hijab where one group of teenagers scream and scream and scream, and this was at night and I was so nervous. I just kept quiet. Now I'm scared to drive."

Other experiences shared included.

"My experiences have been that I am often shouted at when I'm driving the car and it's not my poor driving either. I've actually sat in my car waiting to go onto a main road and had people shout at me as they go

across."

"Just the other day I was driving to my son's house and I had this man swear at me so badly, using the f... word a lot and swearing at my hijab, and I was in my car. Lucky I could lock the door."

A few women had experienced other drivers trying to run them off the road.

"This happens so often, all the time. Like one time I was driving back from the city with a friend and these young boys, they were driving and they swerved on purpose towards us. They wanted to run us off the road. Lots of things happen while we're driving."

"They always beep the horn, or try and run you off the road and into the gutter or footpath, verbal abuse, and that's dangerous. And the fear is that people would leave you for dead."

Another participant had moved from Cairns to Brisbane and described three experiences in the space of a couple of weeks.

"I've just moved down here from Cairns and I've just started to wear the hijab. I think I'm the youngest here today. I get a lot of abuse from older people and younger people. In the last couple of weeks I have a few stories that come to mind, like in a shopping centre I have accidentally hit another car and she'd just sworn at me. Driving on the freeway last weekend, coming back from the Gold Coast, I had a man in a car driving next to me doing the most disgusting gestures to me that were really obscene. But walking to work the other day someone yelled out 'Go back to your country'. I was born in Australia. But my ancestors are South African."

One of the younger participants spoke of how, after an experience she and her sister had while driving to TAFE, her sister cannot walk to TAFE which is only two minutes away from her home for fear of being abused by men working on road works.

"It was just last week, and it was just me and my sister and we were in the car and we both wear hijab. I was taking her to TAFE and there's a lot of road construction and I think they were Council workers. We're driving and the man had stopped the traffic, and there was a lot of guys and you know how we stereotype workers to be rude to women, and quickly I thought they're not going to say anything because we're two girls in hijab. But all of a sudden, we're driving up slowly and they started to do really rude gestures and yell remarks and me and my sister were shocked. And when we're driving back, we were quite scared that they were going to do the same thing. I got really annoyed and thought, 'Do I go back and say something, or do I just keep driving?' Then my sister yesterday, dad asked her 'Why didn't you come walking home from TAFE?' because we live very close to TAFE, just a two minute walk, and she said to him 'I don't want to, I'm scared'. He asked why and she said 'There was men' and then I told him that there were stupid idiots standing there and it was quite dangerous, so she couldn't even walk from TAFE to our house because of those stupid men".

Experiences with neighbours

One woman who lives across the road from her local mosque felt she was forced to move house because of constant harassment she experienced by a neighbour whom she believed was clearly anti-Muslim.

"...he puts his stereo up and he does it on purpose so he distracts the people so you can't even hear the Imam talking on the microphone inside, that's how loud it is. We used to live next to him and we moved house because of [him]. One lady came from the Council and he would abuse us and telling her that all these Muslims shouldn't come here and he would always abuse us and we lived next door. He told people they couldn't park on the road. I think there are a lot of people moving houses because of these things."

One participant described a positive experience with her neighbours.

"A lot of people, about 70% of people are very kind and polite and when they talk to me they say 'ma'am'. For example my neighbours are so nice, and they collect my washing when I am away."

At home

Some participants were also quite fearful of things happening to them outside their homes or the homes of relatives because of their clearly Muslim appearance.

"My brother's house is on [a main road]. He looks like Osama Bin Laden and dresses in Sunna (i.e. Islamic

dress). All his little boys dress in Sunna. Whenever we get off at his house, somebody shouts something at us. It happened to me, it happened to my mother; it's something to do with that house because they see people with this Sunna coming in and out of this house."

"One function my sister had at her place, and I think someone died, and the people parking in the street had come out after their visit and all their tyres had been slashed, and she won't have any functions anymore."

Experiences at the mosque

After September 11, Brisbane mosques were targets of violence and abuse, and participants state that this abuse continues today.

"Holland Park is the oldest mosque in Brisbane and the community around it is not a lot of Muslims and it is not in a low socio-economic area. Several women here are from there. So we all live around that area, but recently there has been a problem. Because when the men park their cars at the mosque, people just go around breaking the windows. Twice it's happened to my brother alone. This hasn't happened before and recently just started."

"It still happens at mosques. We go to Kuraby mosque and we still get people shouting at us. After the Bali incidents Kuraby mosque had got molotov cocktails thrown at it. And they break the windows of all the cars parked for prayer there."

"At the Logan Mosque also, many times people have thrown beer bottles and glass through the window while we were sitting inside."

Experiences using public transport

Although public transport was not a common theme in the discussion around experiences, one participant told of a conversation she had with a fellow passenger.

"The other experience is I met someone in the train, a black, a Fijian woman who asked us 'Where do you come from?', and I said 'From Bosnia'. And she was saying how many people ask her where she is from and I was talking and asked her if people ask her if she is black, if she is Muslim. And she said 'No, I am not Muslim, I hate Muslim people'. I looked at her and said 'Look, you are black, you are not Muslim and you hate Muslims, but I am a Muslim and I am proud to be a Muslim'. And the lady said 'Sorry'. And then I said to her 'what you are feeling is your problem, but I am who I am and Muslim religion doesn't teach us anything wrong, it teaches us to be a good person, an honest person, to be a good mother, and everything good'."

Experiences with police

One participant recalled her experience of being asked to take a breath test on return from prayers at the mosque. She felt the policeman was abrupt in his dealing with her.

"I had an experience where one policeman stopped me while I was driving the car. Two other women were inside the car where we were coming back from Ramadan time after prayer and as you could see Bosnian people are not much covered because we were brought up like that, and when it is Ramadan time when we coming back from prayer time we all cover. He stopped me for a breath test, and I said to him 'Where have you seen a Muslim woman drinking in a mosque?' And he said 'I didn't ask you anything, just do what I said to you'."

Other experiences

Being heard speaking another language was also mentioned as a reason people can be targeted.

"One lady that is not here that's been abused and discriminated against badly by one Australian man, telling her very bad things like 'shut your mouth', knocking on her door, screaming [because he heard her once speak a language other than English]. And I was personally abused by an Australian because I was talking another language and he said 'Why don't you talk bloody English?' and things like that. My husband was abused because he had a radio on playing in another language, not the English language, and that was in [our] own home, which is very scary."

"...my aunty and I were together, we were at a car park in Woolworths Mt Gravatt and we had an Australian child with us. I was saying to my Aunty in Urdu 'Put the child here'. And this man said to me 'Can't you speak in English, you're in Australia?' and I heard him even though he didn't say it loudly. I heard him and I said 'What are you talking about?' and he said 'Go back home!' and I said 'You go back home'. He looked at me and he said 'Where are you from?' and I said 'Arnhem Land!' As soon as you say an Aborigine they run away."

The misconceptions and stereotypes of what it is to be a Muslim were also discussed.

"People think Muslim women are stupid, and when we go to comment and they hear our English accents, they're shocked and they're surprised. It kills them."

Two women from Zimbabwe talked about their two very different experiences of what people think a Zimbabwean looks like. One woman believes that the discrimination she felt in Zimbabwe based on her colour was not unlike that she has experienced in Australia.

"I'm very unfortunate. When I was in Zimbabwe, I was always spoken about my colour and I come to Australia it's the same thing. People ask 'What's your name?' and I say 'Sharifa', and they say 'Oh, that's a Muslim name, how come you're black because the Muslims we know are white?' I get that nearly every day and even if I wear hijab or scarf or anything they ask 'Are you trying to be one of those?' Even in Melbourne I got this."

"I come from Zimbabwe too and people ask me 'Where do you come from?' I say 'Zimbabwe' and they say 'How come you're not black?' It's always an issue of colour and it's all about lack of awareness."

Another woman recalled her experience waiting to be served at a bank.

"I had a negative experience where after September 11 I was in the bank in the queue, and a man came from the back [of the queue] and told me 'Why do Muslim men abuse their women and treat them very bad?' I looked at him and I said 'Do you know how many Christians all over the world get abused by their men, their husbands, their brother, their father?' Then he looked at me and he couldn't answer and he went right back. This is common to be asked questions about this and also about polygamy."

Other impacts

There was a general feeling in the group that the biggest impact their experiences have had on them has been their overwhelming sense of feeling unsafe, leaving them with a sense of insecurity and fear as a result. The group has many unanswered questions as to why this is happening to them and who is to be held responsible. Participants have different ways of dealing with this fear and the experiences they encounter.

"...me and my sister we have this thing when we walk, we don't look left or right. Like I think how the Bosnian woman was saying, they're always under fear, where we are in fear but we walk to shopping centres with our head up high, but we don't look left or right in order not to catch someone's eye so not to give them an opportunity to talk to us. So we're not going to let them undermine us or limit us but we are under fear because we are looked at and we are the minority..."

When asked if they go out more with male relatives to feel safer, one young participant responded.

"...we don't go walking with our brothers. Because our brothers are like guards and if anyone goes to look at us they're going to look back at them and say something and we don't want trouble. They are very protective, even more now."

"This is the feeling of young women who were born or grew up in this country, and women who come as refugees also, there is always fear. They are not different like this."

Last year Brisbane City Council approved a development application for IWAQ's new premises, an old scout house refurbished into their new offices. However due to direct threats and graffiti on the new premises, the Open Day was cancelled and they took extra precautions in the future because the new premises are located deep in a park.

"It was a former Scout house and it was in a park and it was reconstructed into offices for us. It was in a park but you had to walk some distance from where we would park the car. Now we had an open day and we invited people down and everything was ok. There was an announcement put in the paper and at the very end it talked about that the Islamic Women's Association, and that would be our offices. The next day, we went there and there was graffiti on the cement, the wall of the building. It was very threatening. And we have the photos to prove it."

One participant thought that September 11 had an affect on Australia's immigration policies and spoke of how this has impacted on her directly.

"I have put in an application to bring my husband here to Australia from Pakistan. It has been four years since I lodged the application and they haven't approved it yet because they said it was due to security reasons but there is nothing wrong, They are just delaying it without purpose."

The influence of the media

There was strong agreement among the group that media has played a significant role in the negative portrayal of Muslims. They questioned the use of terms such as 'fundamentalist' and 'terrorist' and the media's linking of these terms with 'Muslims'. There was a general feeling in the group that they felt most helpless when it came to media vilification, mostly because of the powerful impact of the media.

"If something happens in Ireland, they will never say a Catholic terrorist, they would say Irish, but when it comes to Muslims, they would say a fundamentalist group, or terrorists or whatever. And they say Islamic terror."

We asked how participants feel about the media.

"The media is doing us more harm than good."

"We have the discrimination every day from the TV. Media is the worst perpetrator of discrimination."

One participant believed that the media was partly responsible for the fear of abuse that she feels even though she never experienced abuse while wearing the hijab.

"I came as a refugee from Bosnia and [my neighbour] said to me 'Go back to Bosnia, why are you here?' Since I covered, I didn't have any abuse but I feel inside that at any moment someone will abuse me or say something to me because every day, every time on TV, it's Muslim fundamentalist, or Muslim Terrorists. Why are they looking at us as fundamentalist and terrorism? Do they really think that we are like that or if they do something, [the media] say all Muslims in the world are like?"

The influence of the government

One participant was critical of the government's stand on refugees at the time of the Tampa incident.

"My daughter had an experience inside a shop and this man said to her 'Go home you illegal immigrant!' She was in tears because this was the time when the government was trying to win that election and they were cashing in on the boat crisis at that time. So the government is also responsible in certain ways for our experiences."

"Someone said to my mum, 'Go home you terrorist, go home you illegal immigrant!' and she said 'Well, you go home you escaped convict!'"

This led to a discussion about the existing divisions within the Muslim community and how the government and the community play a role in creating these divisions.

"What do the government expect when they are all day saying terrorist, Muslim, terrorist, etc, etc, and then on TV. Even those that have nothing to do with Muslims people think they are. So now you have Muslims who wear the hijab sticking with Muslims who wear the hijab and that sort of thing instead of standing united."

One woman compared the community's experience in Sydney to that of Brisbane.

"I've lived in Brisbane and I've lived in Sydney. I was born and raised here and I found with living in Brisbane, 'alhamdulillah', if you go to the mosques, you have Pakistanis, Indians, Fijians, Lebanese, the majority will all pray together and will all go to school together. We'll all socialise together and we live in harmony. However you go to Sydney and what I saw was quite disappointing. The Lebanese community stick together and they won't like anyone else. I know like they say 'Fijian Indian, oh no I don't like them'. So you'll notice that they've got like sects of different nationalities, which is really sad because they're all Muslim. They don't recognise themselves as Muslim but they recognise themselves by their nationalities, different nationalities. [Whereas] in Brisbane ... we do not have that and we've all got the same mentality

and we've got the one common thing which binds us together which is the [religion]."

One participant agreed but commented:

"Just to add one point to that. We have few people here, they have been here for 40, 50 years and it was only one mosque and they all prayed together and they never had that problem. But now unfortunately what you don't see I see, there is a mosque for Bosnian, South African, Arabs, and this will lead us to what happened in Sydney unfortunately. But there is no discrimination."

"I'm sorry I have to bring this up, but the Dharra mosque at one stage had a rule that you couldn't become a member unless you were Fiji born. Now it's cancelled and it's fine but can I just say that this is one of the reasons why we have tried so hard to promote the unity of different nationalities within this group and this is where we have a strength. In this group we are Muslims first and whatever else after; but Muslims first."

Causes of discrimination

Most of the participants have come to Australia either as migrants or refugees, escaping war and conflict in their own countries. Several members of the group believe that the conflict in their countries of origin has had a direct affect on the discrimination experienced by them in Australia.

One Iraqi woman said about the recent war on Iraq:

"The war has had an affect on us too and it has been really bad for us here and there. The missiles affect people in many ways, not just blood or death. What is happening here to us is because of what is happening there."

A Bosnian woman reaffirmed solidarity with the women in the room who feel fear and unsafe and likened their experience of fear with the fear felt in Bosnia. The participant also appreciated that in Australia even if you feel fear, you still have rights.

"We are always Muslim and sisters in Islam. What we have experienced in our life, being in our country... without even having hijab, we understand how you feel and how you have a fear inside your heart. We have that fear here and still now in our country there are people who have fear and are abused and still day by day so many things happen. But down there they don't have rights like here where there are organisations like anti-discrimination places to say 'look, such and such happened to me, could you protect me?'. Still now it's happening that Muslim people are being abused and victims in Europe."

One woman believes that the government needs to recognise the community's political differences as these differences and experiences encountered overseas have a direct affect on their experiences in Australia.

"Does this government recognise the difference between Serbs and Bosnian Muslim people? I have been abused by Serb people here in the shopping centre, and they actually forced us to come out of our country and we suffered a lot. I lost my husband and my son and like all of us, I have so much fear from them here too, especially after September 11. I just want to know if people and the government know anything about the communities, who they are and who we are?"

"Of course there is. There is discrimination within the Muslim communities themselves. For example you have Bosnian Muslims under pressure from people around them as well as issues between Bosnians and Serbs. Some of us are not recognised as being innocent parties in the war. The communities are separate because of what happens overseas. It carries on here."

One participant held strong opinions about what she believed was the reason for the overwhelming attacks and experiences encountered by the community in Brisbane and compared this to Sydney and Melbourne.

"After September 11, what I noticed from the media and what was going on, which really caught my eye, is that most of the backlash came on Brisbane. Our Brisbane people, the community, the Australians, feared more than Sydney and Melbourne and what I thought about that was that in Sydney, Lebanese have already terrorised the community down there, that's just a known fact, where in Brisbane, we've always stayed quiet. So when this happened, they feared and thought 'They're quiet now but they're going to come up'. That's why our Holland Park mosque got attacked, our Kuraby mosque got attacked, the Islamic school, the Islamic bus with students, even myself I got attacked and I had never been attacked before. The community got scared because we've always been quiet and we've always lived in harmony with the non-Muslims. When this happened they thought 'Oh, no, something is going to happen', whereas in Sydney and Melbourne [the community was already afraid]."

Reporting discrimination and the law

Many of the participants had some knowledge and level of understanding of the new anti-discrimination law in Queensland regarding religious vilification and had obtained this knowledge through an information session organised specifically by IWAQ for the group. After the state and federal law was explained briefly, a discussion took place about the importance of the new law in Queensland.

"The law should cover me based on me being a woman, so when you discriminate against me I should complain based on me being a woman not Muslim if Islam is not protected."

"Of course it makes a difference for us."

Other participants believe that fear should not prevent people from using the law to protect them.

"Law is not protecting us enough. Unless we use that law, we will never be protected. Like if someone breaks in and you're not calling the police, then how will the law protect you?"

Another participant believed that if the law could not protect them as Muslims then it should at the very least protect them based on other anti-discrimination laws, notably sex discrimination, saying *"I think [the law] will protect us as women"*.

2. What is being done to fight anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination?

IWAQ was funded to do a research project in partnership with Brisbane City Council (BCC) however the research was not completed due to limited resources.

"I was on a project as a Bilingual Facilitator with IWAQ after September 11, and I went to down to Milperra School, Brisbane Islamic School, the kebab shops, all Muslim organisations and businesses and personal people too in the area and I got a questionnaire as to what they are doing after September 11, have they been attacked or abused or whatever. Unfortunately the project stopped half way as I was just getting into it. IWAQ did do that but it stopped because BCC stopped resources half way because of the lack of resources, so this was being done in partnership with BCC."

'Celebrating Muslim Women' Day

One week after September 11, IWAQ organised a day called 'Celebrating Muslim Women' where people from mainstream and community organisations across Queensland were invited. The event was held at the Brisbane Showground and was entirely self-funded.

"...we just wanted them to understand that Muslim women were just like them. It was a great day and was very successful and the newspapers had all our photos in it...and we had people come from the Gold Coast, all the way from North Coast, Toowoomba, all came to support us. More than 500 people attended."

As well as being involved in interfaith dialogues *"where we Muslim groups visit church groups"*, IWAQ also forged relationships with other religious and community groups which participants believed was very successful.

"Centenary Seniors invited us. It's a mixed organisation or social group and a church group and we all went. They welcomed us and they gave us lunch and we told them we're not having meat, and they were really surprised and you know what the comment was? 'You women are exactly like us'. Also, they did a very good article on us and another thing they didn't realise there was they thought that only Arabs were Muslims and I said 'No, not all Muslims are Arabs and not all Arabs are Muslims, there are also Christian Arabs'."

Information sessions and workshops

It was felt that it was important for IWAQ to continue to foster relationships between organisations such as police and the community and therefore to build trust between both.

"We had the police, Anti-Discrimination Commission and the federal police come and talked to us about what to do if you are ever caught in an incident, how to identify the person so that you will be able to get something done and the importance of recognising and learning the number plates on cars, so that if

someone does anything, look at the number plate and you can do something. So we tried to be a bit proactive in that regard through education." "Going on that line, I think IWAQ getting together; we start with a small group of five or ten and then the group now we have at least an average of thirty people every week. And that number is not coming and having a cup of coffee only and coming together and having lunch. It is to empower each other, and to open dialogue between each other so when we have problem we know where to go. We share information, and it's about having an opportunity to talk to [the workers] here as well, where one of the workers will encourage them to learn some English, getting a speaker every week just to give women an awareness of what is available to [them] and the federal police, the police, the Crime Stoppers, the Anti-Discrimination Commission. When they come here they have that relationship with [the community]. You have that small card which you know how to call people when you really need help (referring to 'Know Your Rights Cards')."

Working with police

"And 'alhamdulillah', there was a young man who was a Bosnian police officer here in Logan. They gave out his number so people who were Bosnian and would have a problem with language, at least had someone they could call directly...He was a Cross Cultural Liaison Officer I think. They were going to send him out west, but this is the thing with some of the police organisations; they waste good resources. He is a resource for them and they wanted to send him out where there were no Bosnians. But we lobbied to keep him here and now it has helped tremendously."

3. What more could be done to fight anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination?

Public education and education for service providers

Participants suggested that the general public and especially service providers need to be educated about Islam and about anti-discrimination laws. Promoting positive public awareness and the need for greater cross-cultural awareness between Muslims and the mainstream community were also mentioned. Other responses include:

"We need some education through the media about the laws and about what is happening in the community."

"No more propaganda on TV or other media about Muslims. Less propaganda and more friendship and love between people."

"The people who do this are a minority and it is this minority we need to put in the right spot and educate. When we talk about our negative experiences it doesn't mean we are not appreciated."

One participant talked about what she was going to do.

"I am a supervisor in a managing capacity at Woolworths, and I guess people do get shocked when they know I'm Aussie and Muslim. I see staff get shocked and react differently to customers who are Muslim. I will go back and recommend that staff be trained in anti-discrimination law and about the community they are serving, and I think that should be extended across all places."

School education

Better education for students at all levels was also mentioned.

"When we talk about education, I think we need to look at education in the schools, primary and high school, universities, because they're feeding them a lot of orientalist rubbish at the university level. So we need to have scanning of the curriculum at all levels."

Education in the Muslim community

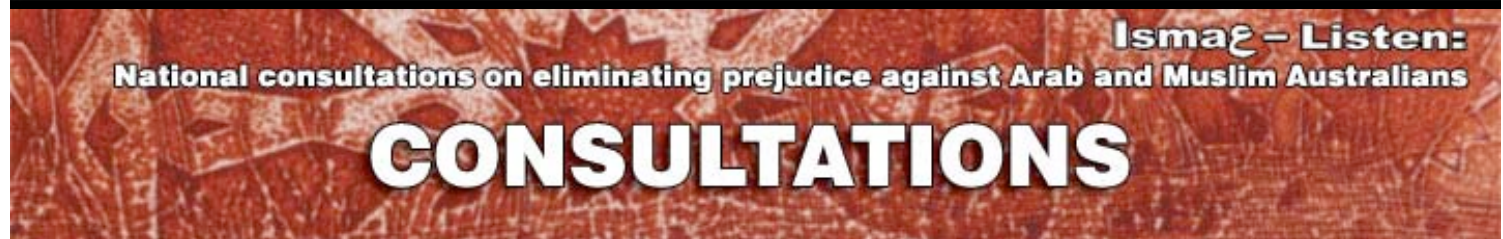
Participants were also self-reflective about the Muslim community itself with a few suggestions for change.

"I think the solution is also in our hands. We blame the government, and they are to blame partly, but we have to take a step back, educate ourselves and be able to educate the community. Because I know from myself, I wore the hijab as a representative, as a Muslim and you have to be strong in your heart. There are people who avoid the problems as a mechanism of protection and there's nothing wrong with that."

"There is a saying that goes 'there is no smoke without fire', so we have to start with ourselves and our flaws. We have to respect our religion, behave well and demand respect back."

"The best way is to say that I'm from Australia. If you say from Australia, they will never ask anymore questions."

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[Consultations Homepage](#) || Meeting Notes: 17 June 2003

Consultation with a group of young Muslim women aged between 18 and 30, Brisbane, 17 June 2003

The meeting was facilitated by Omeima Sukkariah (notes) from HREOC and was attended by six women aged 18-30.

1. What are your experiences of discrimination and vilification?

The following comments were made about where Muslims are at greatest risk and what has provoked major incidents.

"I've noticed that in the smaller country towns, even though Muslims do get discriminated against, the towns are a lot better than the big cities. I've noticed it when I go home to Innisfail, which is 65 kms south of Cairns. When I go back home, I have no problem at all. I'm one of the only ladies who wears the scarf. You might see one every couple of months but really there's no-one up there who wears it. I've actually had a ladies come up and ask me 'Oh, why do you wear it? You look so beautiful with it on'."

"[The Islamic Women's Association - IWAQ - office] got graffitied around the time of the 55 year sentence. There was a scout hut that the Brisbane City Council was doing up and IWAQ was using it temporarily and the graffiti was 'F... Muslim Sluts' and it was directed to the Muslim women. There were other threats made saying that 'We're going to rape your women'."

"These threats were sent to the Kuraby and Holland Park mosques by mail and they were saying that 'We are going to rape your women just like you raped ours'."

One participant commented on the complex of causes of anti-Muslim prejudice.

"The thing is that it's not just ignorance. It's multi-factorial, which means it's more than one factor. Firstly it's the media and it also comes back to your upbringing, socialisation, who you spend most of your childhood with, the types of people that you hang out with and all those things. It all plays a big role. So if you're in a household where your parents constantly say 'That black man is this, etc', unless you get the opportunity to meet with that person and you realise 'Hang on. I see something different than what my parents have been telling me'. [Without that] your attitudes and perceptions of that person will not change. So I think the basic thing is your upbringing and socialisation."

The women were not aware that Queensland law makes religious discrimination and vilification unlawful.

"I didn't even know about the law and the new religious vilification changes and I fee better knowing that now. The law if you know how to use it can be symbolic as well as practical."

One participant described the reluctance of the Islamic Women's Association to report incidents to the police.

"The other thing in regards to making official complaints was that after September 11, IWAQ got messages left on the answering machine and when we walked in the morning and listened to them. The majority of the calls were in support, and people were fantastic but there were a couple of women who made obscene and threatening phone calls and we told the police. But what ended up happening was because the police were finding out this information they would come and talk to you and ask you all these questions about what's going on. They started to come periodically to check up on what's going on. It's called I think the 'Islamic Taskforce'. And what happened was we retreated because we thought they're coming to ask about our community. They're coming to ask about what was happening but how do we know how they are going to use that information? What benefit is it going to do us to go and tell them all these things when they're not doing anything about it anyway?"

Another participant described her experience of complaining to the police about a serious assault.

"I was assaulted in a road rage situation and it was his word against mine. I wasn't seriously assaulted; he got out of his car, got into my car, threw my keys in my face and hit me and he had already tried to run me off the road and all sorts of stuff. Anyway, I then went straight to the police and told the police that I want to take it further. So they asked me if I was hurt, and they had a couple of photos taken and it was only a couple of bruises, and so on. The officer asked me 'Why do you want to take this further?' referring to the long process I had to go through. And the thing that made me want to take it further was the fact that if he can do that to a total stranger, how is he going to be with his wife, or daughter or girlfriend, or whoever? So I wasn't doing it for me, but I was doing it for the fact that it was one step at a time."

Another participant talked about her experience of complaining about incidents at school.

"Even though no-one supported me at school I don't feel that I could go and complain about any of it because I just feel that no-one will take me seriously and what's going to be done is going to take a lot of time, a lot of headache and I just don't want to go out of my way just for a bad outcome. It happened to me nearly everyday of last year and after September 11 so you just get tired. I went and I saw a Guidance Officer at my school and I went to her in tears and I told her what the other kids were saying. She sat me down and started saying to me that I had to understand that they were boys. She was trying to explain that whole peer pressure thing with the guys and that this was normal behaviour and I was so angry. I wanted her to tell me that they had no right to do these things. She did ask me 'Do you want me to take these boys up to the office with you?' But I said to her that if she was going to take these boys up to the office with me and I am going to tell them what they did, they're just going to give me more crap and they are just gonna deny it and gave me more crap in class and then it's going to explode into this big thing. So she said 'I will make sure that they announce it on parade [Assembly] and explain to them what happened on September 11 does not affect any Muslims directly and to leave them alone and not to harass them'. I didn't attend the next day because I was so tormented and traumatised. So I don't know what happened and whether they did it or not."

Employment discrimination

There was a feeling in the group that wearing the hijab is not a barrier to employment in Queensland, although Muslim women were the target of negative comments from colleagues following September 11.

"Basically hijab doesn't stop you. It's more qualifications and personality."

"[Male recruiters] see that you're straight with them, that you're professional but you're still a woman. You might be in hijab but bugger it, what's the big deal and they say 'Wow. You can actually speak; you've got an IQ.'"

"After September 11 I was working with well educated people in the biggest accounting firm worldwide and they were asking me 'What do you think of suicide bombers?'"

"One of my colleagues started talking about Osama Bin Laden and so on and she asked 'Why is Osama Bin Laden doing this?' as if I had the answer. She was totally against Osama Bin Laden and what he was doing and all that stuff. Then I explained to her that Islam is not like that and Muslims aren't supposed to do this. And anyway she actually said to me that she actually sympathises with the Palestinians. I just get this feeling from talking to people that the issue of Palestine is coming up and they are realising who's really innocent in this picture. People are starting to be more aware of the issues of Palestinians because I think particularly after September 11; the issue got more coverage even though it was all bad."

"You think it's just young people who don't know any better, but there's a 49 year old person I work with that calls me a terrorist and he should know better."

"I have a friend who is getting really pressured at work for wanting to grow a beard. Why? He shouldn't feel that way."

At school

One participant, a senior secondary student, described her experiences with both teachers and other students.

"My teachers would even discriminate against the religion and say 'It's all those Islamic people from the Middle East. They're terrorists'. And I would just look at my teacher in the face and I would go crazy. I started going crazy at every student in the class saying to them 'You're ruining my life. You don't understand how just talking casually can affect people'. And they're like going 'We should kick them all out'."

I'm just sitting there in the class thinking 'Hello, you're talking about me'. And the teachers allow them to talk like that and sometimes they are the centre of the conversation. My teacher was an Anglo-Australian and she was really bad. She [the teacher] was agreeing with them and then I said to her 'We're [Muslims] not the only terrorists here. Haven't you seen an Israeli Zionist and how many Palestinians they kill everyday?' And I was really upset and started swearing in front of her. I thought if she has no respect for me then I have no respect for her no matter what age she was, because I was just really devastated and she was like 'I'm sorry'. She just started saying to me later that 'I respect that you stood up for yourself and students generalise what Muslims are'.

"I used to get so many emails about the rallies and the number of dead in Palestine and stuff like that. I used to check my emails at school and all the kids would come up behind me and say 'You're gonna be a suicide bomber one day. You're gonna kill us all'. They keep saying stupid things like 'On your honeymoon, why don't you just suicide with your husband?' They say really stupid things. You try and explain things to them but they're not interested so after a while you hold your hand up to them and you say 'Talk to my hand'."

In the media

There was a consensus that the Australian media have overwhelmingly portrayed Muslims in a negative light.

"They portray Japanese women [who are also renowned for their modesty] and their culture as upcoming and forward in technology and they're just with it. Whereas the Arabs they always put us down; they put our women down. It's the media and they're the ones that are educating the public. I remember after September 11, I was so shocked because I've never been questioned about who I was until then and some of them were such stupid questions."

"That's true because post September 11 the media just spurred with anti-Islamic stuff. I went to school the next day and after that I was not treated the same and until now I am treated differently by everyone no matter what culture or anything."

"Australian talkback radio is the worst. Do you know what they are saying about Muslim women on talkback radio? They said 'Why do Muslim women always crash into people in the shopping centres with their trolleys?' And one lady caller says 'After September 11, in Sydney there were no Muslims in the shopping centres and that was the best time in my life'."

In public places

"I was driving back from the Gold Coast last weekend and it was about 1 in the morning. There was one other girl with me in the car. The boys, my cousins and my brother, were in another car and lucky for them being there. Anyway, the boys are behind us and we could see them and we're cruising 100 on the freeway. And I look over, and I have got my hijab on, and I look up and this guy in the car next to me just did some really obscene things with their tongues and other parts of their body. I'm driving along and thinking 'You disgusting men. What are you yukkie things? Like you are the epitome of scum'. Anyway we're driving so I just jam my brakes on the freeway, slow down to about 70 and then they jam their brakes on. So I put it into third and I fly past them and they just sped up. We called the boys on the mobile and told them to hurry up and catch up because there were these four guys in a four wheel drive - these disgusting animals - and they kept tormenting us on the freeway. We could have had an accident very easily on the freeway and I could have driven off the road any time looking over at them. And I couldn't help myself; I had to just give them the finger while I was driving. I sped up and I couldn't get away. Anyway, the boys came up and so there were three of us now driving on the freeway and it could have been very bad. They couldn't see them coming but as soon as they did they just took off because our boys were just screaming at them saying stuff like 'How dare you treat our sisters like that!'"

"Women aren't as scared [when their brothers or husbands are with them] but sometimes I get scared that they are around me because of what they will do. But the reality is they do provide you with some sort of protection."

One participant described how she took her own revenge on another driver.

"Another time I was driving with [a friend] and this guy took our parking space. He was a fair dinkum Aussie with the rats tail and everything and so I got out and tapped on his widow and told him that he had taken our parking spot and that we were waiting to park the car. He was going to move but his wife or girlfriend took a look at [my friend], saw her hijab of course and said to him, 'No, stay here'. I got really mad and I took his air caps off his tyres as souvenirs."

Community divisions

The group discussed the sources of discrimination in some detail, noting that the Muslim community itself is significantly divided.

"It's divided and it's more divided with different belief systems. I don't necessarily mean between sects but like you might have say for example everyone who is Sunni, and this is just an example, amongst the Sunnis themselves for example instead of looking at a group of people and saying 'mashallah', these people are trying to do things for the better of Islam, sometimes you feel like you're being dragged down and dragged under, so when you're trying to do the right thing, you're getting stomped on, and when you're not doing the right thing, you're getting talked about. It's a bit of a vicious circle."

"I think divisions do exist within the community, like people say Darah Mosque, the Fijian Mosque, or Kuraby Mosque is the South African Mosque is the Bosnian mosque. So people divide the community up in terms of what mosque they go to. But all mosques are for everyone and that's how it should be."

"I think this thing about divisions within the community, can I tell you it happens in just about every community I've lived in, whether it's Muslim or not. It's got nothing to do with Islam, and it's got everything to do with fear. Lack of education and fear is a dangerous combination. You put that together and you have a molotov cocktail of cultural paranoia."

2. What is being done to fight anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination?

Several community strategies and projects were mentioned by the group.

Train the Trainer Course for Dahwah

"This is a Dahwah training course to enhance the Muslims' knowledge on Islam in order not only to teach their community but be able to face outside questions that come in. Members of the Islamic Women's Association of Queensland undertook two five day courses and became trainers themselves. In order for Muslims to be able to feel more confident about themselves, we help empower Muslims to speak out. So a Muslim's going to come and attend the course for example, and the course is going to give them material and the first section for example is "Misconceptions on Islam", so when they look at the first section they say 'Ok, you might get a question on the street like why do you wear hijab'. There are those women that can answer them and there are those women that will fight at them and make narky comments at them and say 'What's your problem?'. And there's those people that will just become very passive and get upset or emotional about it and walk away. So the one thing I found in actually being able to conduct the training, and we've done about five training sessions here in Brisbane, is that our community is very difficult to get educated Islamically because you have people with different opinions, you have different people across the board, but participation is very hard to get. However we've gotten the numbers and participation has been quite high. Most of them have been people who are progressive thinkers who are maybe older. The overall feedback has been fantastic, and what it has enabled to do is get people to realise that Islam is not such a narrow path, it's wider, and enabling them to talk about Islam outside, and that has been used as a tool to fight the prejudice against them because instead of folding when they are asked a question, they question the questioner. And they are able to give them more information and broaden other people's thinking, so it's like a chain reaction. This is one thing that has really worked. You can connect to ietqld@yahoo.com for more information."

Australian Muslim Media Rights

"The objectives are to deconstruct journalism by giving the average Joe and Mary on the street or Ismail, Ahmed and Mariam, a voice where they can write in and say 'I saw this on Channel 9, these words were used to describe Muslims, it was ethnic profiling, etc', wack it up on the net and then everyone else can pick it to pieces, but it's more proactive than that. It's a yahoo group at Australianmuslimmediarights@yahoo.com"

"It is very effective. One strategy is to deconstruct journalism or the media system by saying ok, everyone here can have a go, everybody can have a voice, presenting each issue as it comes up in the media from a multitude of different angles and so everybody can have an opinion on it and it's effectively being aired on a big forum where there's a lot of people paying attention, and it's media watch. Let them know that we're not going to let them get away with it."

Cross-cultural health partnership

"Now we, IWAQ, have something in the pipeline. True we're the Islamic Women's Association and we cater our services just to Muslims but now we're going to be joining forces with Trans-cultural Mental Health which is a non-Muslim body and the Ethnic Community in the Gold Coast. We're actually spreading our wings and 'inshallah' [God Willing] to get out in the community and that's a way of educating people about us as well. The women on the management committee, they're educated, independent, working, and they have the characteristics that we need."

Australian business and aid relationships in Muslim communities or countries in our region may offer an opportunity to increase awareness of Islam among Australians.

"One good thing also that IWAQ did was that the State Development section in Brisbane City Council is building some new roads in Malaysia or Indonesia I think, and they asked IWAQ to go and explain Islam. We covered the basics of Islam. They asked us so they could be more culturally aware so that they could go to the country and respect their culture and beliefs. So there could be more cultural awareness out there, and there will be more understanding and that's what we need."

"It's about taking opportunities that are put out as well. When I was a secretary we went to the Mater Hospital when they were building the new women's section and they wanted to know cultural sensitivity issues and how the women's placenta is buried and all these things and what need not be done in accordance to Islamic beliefs, so we were there for the whole day doing a workshop with them."

3. What more could be done to fight anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination?

In education

There was debate about the value of cross cultural education in the classroom.

"It comes back to the curriculum. We have to start putting cross cultural awareness as part of educating kids at a young age."

Another speaker argued that the focus should be on the parent-child relationship, indicating that parental attitudes are of the greatest influence. There was also a discussion about how schools should deliver information to Muslim students about other religions.

"[My son] came and said to me [his teacher] is going to read us a Christmas story. Now my husband had an issue with it and I said to him, look, his particular teacher is not a Muslim, but my problem with it is this; number one it's an Islamic school so they don't need to be reading about Christmas, not that they don't need to know about it because my own parents are non-Muslims. They need to understand that there are different religions and what they celebrate but you don't want them to learn too much. [He] said that Christmas was yukkie but I told him it wasn't and tried to explain it to him. They have to be able to grow up with the ability to think and assess situations around them. Example is Christmas. It's around them and it may not be directly linked to them but they need to understand that it's a belief that other people have and we have to respect it. How hypocritical would I be to go and bring [him] up with this concept that they are all sinners and Christmas is bad when my own mother and father are not Muslims. How is he going to look at them with respect? He knows that they are not Muslims."

"If you want other people out there to accept Islam, you can't turn around and judge Christmas and Easter."

In the media

There was a call for the training and employment of more Muslim journalists.

In community leadership

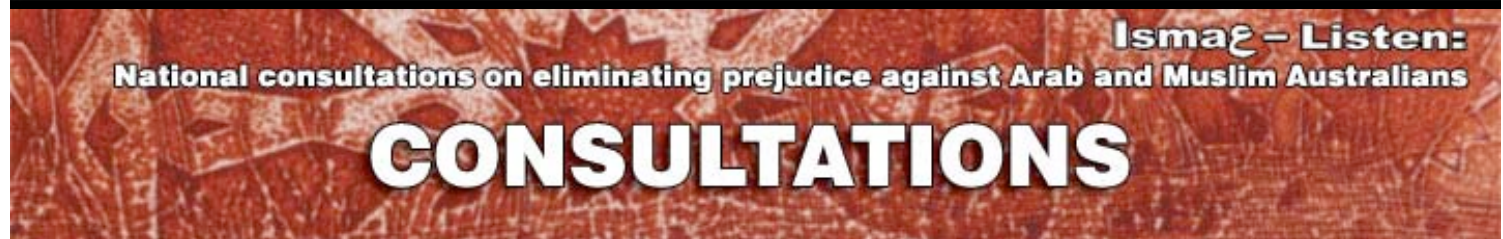
All participants agreed that community leadership should be a major focus as there is room for improvement at present.

"If you look at the Imams now they need training as to how to speak out. We need an Imam who is ready to stand up and speak out."

"But if you look at the Imams now, they're too scared to even speak out about anything to do with our religion because they are in fear that the audience aren't ready."

"I think that we are limiting ourselves if we are letting our Imams be our only representatives to the wider community or the media. What happens is that the females just get omitted anyway from the equation, like we're all invisible or something; so there needs to be more outspoken women and their needs to be more unification as well. Like all these other Islamic organisations that I know nothing about, there has got to be some kind of unifying factor here or common denominator that can bring us all together and it doesn't need to be one person. Why can't we go back to basics and be a bit more democratic about this? I think we also need to be very diverse about how we promote Islam to the mainstream community too. We need to present Muslim women as 'Muhajabine' [Veiled], not wearing the hijab, Anglo, African, Asian, Indian, non-Arab, different styles of dress, different styles of adornment, different styles of behaviour and practice and tradition and all that sort of thing. And this is where it gets hard because people's interpretations of Islam are so different and there are groups that will say that this is the only way, and you know what, I think part of the miracle of the Qur'an is that Allah (SWT) made a lot of things open to interpretation on purpose. This needs to be given validation too, so women with scarves get respect and women without scarves get respect. Women from different cultures also can say 'I'm proud to be Muslim' and get respect and not fall into that really narrow stipend where all of a sudden it's all about community education in Islam and how is the rest of the community going to relate to that? We need to encourage respect for diversity in the Islamic community and this will lead to greater solidarity."

"But the wider community always turn to the Imams. They don't know who else to turn to. They don't realise that there are a lot of people who don't have anything to do with the organisations and Imams and that they don't speak on their behalf."



[Consultations Homepage](#) || Meeting Notes: 18 June 2003

Consultation with young Arab men's group aged between 16 and 26, Brisbane, 18 June 2003

The meeting was facilitated by Omeima Sukkariah (notes) from HREOC and was attended by eight young men. The consultation progressed very much as a group discussion and this summary records some of the exchanges between the participants.

What are your experiences of discrimination and vilification?

Racial abuse

Racial slurs reported included:

- Called 'Osama' by work colleagues.
- Called 'dirty wog' and 'you f...ing wog' by players on opposing sports teams.
- "I was called a 'dirty Lebbo' in a soccer game recently, and by an Assyrian!"

"There's a lot of mucking around and comments about people's race in sport and even though it's mucking around, it's still discrimination."

In public places

"In night clubs we are usually not let in because we are with girls and because we look Arab."

One participant described his sister's decision, not long after September 11, to remove her hijab.

"She found it very difficult to put a scarf on at school and she would come home crying some days. Once she walked into a shopping centre and a lady screamed out to her 'Please don't bomb the shopping centre'. She was serious; she was almost in tears. My sister walked up to her and said 'What the hell is your problem? You're crazy. What's wrong with you?' Just for no reason - for wearing the scarf, that's it."

"Sometimes you think if I'm with my sister she won't be targeted but if she's by herself then she will be."

One participant mentioned his mother's anxiety that he might become violent if someone abused her in his presence. Another noted that the tendency of services to treat everyone as if they are Anglo-Australian Christians is alienating for those who are not.

"Let me tell you something about the Australian mentality. Every time you go anywhere right, say to a hospital, a bank, a medical clinic, whatever, you know what's the first thing they ask you, 'What's your Christian name?' And the first thing I do, I just look at them and many times I have said 'My Muslim name is' Why can't they ask 'What's your first name?' Why do they have to ask what your Christian name is? They have this mentality where they think the whole world is just Christian and if you're not Christian then you're not a human being."

In the workplace

"My old boss knew I was a Muslim and he told my colleagues as a joke that I was with Al Qaeda. There's no need to say things like that especially when he holds such influence at work."

"At work another guy said 'Were you born here or are you of another background?' You get questions like that all the time and, you know, I don't even look Arab. I look as much an Anglo as the next person. He was trying to be funny but since September 11 these questions just got worse."

Barriers to obtaining employment were discussed.

"If your name is Mohammed I think it's hard to get a job. Hardly anyone employs someone with the name Mohammed anymore."

"I've actually known people who have tried to call for a job and when they say 'My name is Mohammed' they say the job's gone. But then two minutes later, just to test them, they call back and they say 'My name's Andrew or whatever', and they say 'Yeah, mate the job's still available. Do you want to come in for an interview'."

By police

Police scrutiny of a group of the participants on a visit to Sydney was criticised.

"This was just after the 55 year thing, the rape incidents and the sentencing. Me, [and friends] were having a friendly chat with these girls, and seriously it was just friendly chatting and it was out in the open in the public eye as well and these police officers pulled up right beside them."

"Just to put it into perspective, it was Parramatta Road, Friday night, 2 in the morning; everyone's coming home from clubbing so it was packed."

"Anyway, we were talking to these girls, they were ok with us and we were ok with them. We were also standing at least two metres away from them too. Anyway, cops pull up, park their car on the main road, they ask 'Girls are you all right?' The girls say 'Yeah we're all right officer'. The cops ask 'Are you sure?' 'Yeah, we're all right.' They ask again 'Are you sure?' Something like six or seven times they asked them and then one of us said 'Yeah, they're all right officer'. And one of the cops said 'You shut your mouth mate'. It was like they were saying to the girls; just say the word and they're gone. They wanted to arrest us. They were waiting for the girls to say we were harassing them."

"I don't think I've spoken to a girl without hesitating since."

"Yeah, I don't think I have too actually."

We asked about the attitudes of Queensland police by way of comparison.

"The cops I know and know me, they're pretty cool with me but the ones I don't know and don't know me are a different story. I don't think in Queensland they're that bad, I mean being honest you get those bastards but I bet there are bastards everywhere. Cops stop me and defect my car and it's not because my car is in bad condition but it's a hotted up car and it's a target for cops...nice car with an Arab driving it."

"I think that the older generation police are more discriminatory, and the new recruits are better."

"There aren't enough Arabs in the police force anyway."

The following incident was described by one participant.

"Just after September 11, one day I was driving on a main road. My car actually makes small noises because of one of the bolts. So a cop pulls me over and he parked right in front of me and started braking. It was the SWAT team and the dog was barking from the back of the car and it was real hectic. And another cop car comes up from behind. The cop ended up giving me a \$240 fine. But the point is he had no ticket book on him. I had to wait half an hour while he called back-up to get him a ticket book from the police station. I was fined for noise pollution. Someone could fart and be louder. It was ridiculous."

"What's that got to do with you being Muslim bro?"

"It doesn't but all three of us in the car were Arab looking and there was another car in the next lane that was clearly speeding. He could have stopped him. He asked me very weird questions. He asked 'Where are you from?' and I go 'I'm Australian'. And he asked me again 'Where are you from?' and I go 'I was born here'. And so he asked 'Where are your mum and dad from?'"

At airport security checks

"When I was on a Virgin flight, the lady at the check-in on the plane told me to take off my chain with the sword on it and give it to the flight attendant because she said it was a sharp object. [The sword is a small charm commonly worn on a chain as a religious symbol by Shiite Muslims.] I mean it was so small and that was just stupid."

"When me and my mum came back from Lebanon in August 2001, we were pulled aside for extra checking of our bags even though we had declared everything. The customs officer made me take my bumbag, shoes, socks and jacket off. She didn't find anything. She said 'I was hoping to find drugs on you'. That's exactly what they want."

"In December 2002 we came back from Jordan and on our return to Brisbane we were checked and believe it or not we were the only ones who were checked. They made us go through the X-ray and they found nothing. People would say that it's their job and that they just wanted to double check everything. But they don't do that with everyone, do they?"

In the media

"What about that point about whenever a Muslim does something, in the media they highlight their name and the fact of their religion but whenever someone else does it they never ever barely mention their name or their religion. Why only when it's a Muslim or an Arab they have to mention where they're from? This is the same sort of racism that has been happening to the Aborigines throughout the last well who knows how many years; that they have been crying out for. Why do they have to mention he's of Aboriginal appearance? I don't understand."

Sources and causes of racism

Participants described their perceptions about the underlying causes of prejudice against Australian Arabs and Muslims. They felt that most groups in Australia can be racist, not only Anglo-Australians. As one commented "It's multicultural racism".

Divisions within the Arab community were noted.

"I think actually that the Arab Christians these days want to separate themselves from the Arab Muslims. I think that there's even racism within the Arab community. The Christians want to separate themselves from the Muslims and actually want to be known as Westerners and not as Arabs. They don't want to be known as Arabs anymore."

Ignorance and a lack of interaction with Muslims were mentioned as common causes of anti-Muslim prejudice.

"When people say 'terrorist' or whatever, they don't say 'Arab terrorist', they say 'Muslim terrorist'. They say Islamic fundamentalism and some people don't even know what a fundamentalist is so they just think that it means Muslim."

"The fact of the matter is that the word 'terrorism' means 'Muslims'. I can give you a couple of examples. The IRA, they are one of the biggest terrorist groups in the world, they are never ever claimed as terrorists. On television they had that bomb the other day. They said the IRA organisation left a bomb in the truck and that they were going to do it because they don't believe in protestant beliefs. And they never used the word 'terrorists'. ... There are serious issues with the media."

"I think it's just a lack of knowledge that people have about the Muslim religion and they just see their views from the media. People are educated through their interaction with Muslim people and basically getting a better understanding of who they are and how they live."

"No, it's ignorance of people. That's human civilisation and you can't change it. You've got the less smart people and you've got the smarter people and the smarter people don't believe everything they hear."

One participant was concerned about the way the aggressive behaviour and comments of some influence the public's perceptions of all.

"Whether [Muslims in Australia] are doing the right thing by Islam or not doing the right thing by Islam"

they're still Muslims and they're still representing us. [Other] people only know what they see and what they hear. They're not going to know how we are as people because they've never met us before. It's going to be very hard for people to just click their fingers and change their minds and attitudes about Muslims for no reason."

"You get every culture doing bad things, like the Jews do bad things as well and so do Christians."

"But the Jews aren't against the people here. They think we are. Why? Because the people, all the media and everything basically, people don't know whether we are with them or against them."

Are existing legal protections adequate and effective?

We asked whether participants were aware that Queensland anti-discrimination laws have recently been amended to include religious vilification. None of them was aware of it.

"Shouldn't that already be taken as a given, why does it sound like it's a privilege to be protected in this country?"

"I've never heard of it. Why don't they give it more exposure?"

We then asked about their attitude towards making a formal complaint.

"Is the risk worth it? How successful will the complaint be if you can't even complain informally."

"What can you get out of complaining other than money? Taking money for your religion is wrong."

"You can stop it from happening again."

"But it's not going to stop it from happening again."

"If you take a case up and it does end up in court then it might end up with more bad publicity for the Muslims. And let's say you take up a complaint against your employer, they might not victimise you but there's a high chance the other workers will."

What more could be done to fight anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination?

Improving public awareness of Muslims

The participants made several recommendations for improving public awareness and acceptance of Muslims. One participant felt the awareness-raising should start within Muslim families, to teach moderation and balance.

"How about we educate our youth especially better about proper Islam not the sort of Islam that is either too left or too right and too extreme? How about a balance? You see, if the Muslim people had a better knowledge about the proper Islam which is not too extreme and not too light - which is the balance because in the proper Islam there should be a balance in life - and if that was taught to the Muslim people, then the non-Muslim people would learn more about the proper Islam itself. The only Islam that is being portrayed which is obviously through the media and whatever else, is the extreme Islam."

"Every family should start working on themselves. Every Muslim parent should teach their children the proper Islam and live the proper morals of Islam which are the highest of all morals. If every family started within themselves and they taught their kids the right way then their kids would start acting better towards people because the best morals and the best actions are taught in the proper Islam. If everyone followed it there would be no problems because the Muslims would treat people better than what people treated them no matter what because that's what we believe. And then against their will the people will start to believe that Muslims are good people because that's what we are supposed to be and that's what proper Islam is."

We asked whether interfaith dialogues would be effective. The comment was made that 'It's a start'.

"But the leaders already respect each other in a sense. It's the people that you need to be concerned about."

"At Kuraby mosque the other day I was driving past and I saw a big Catholic school bus full of males and

females and they were being shown the Kuraby mosque. So things are already in process. I'm pretty sure that the view those kids had before they went into the mosque was different and then they think 'wait a minute, this is not a place that harbours terrorism; this is a peaceful place'. It breaks down the barriers."

"It's like that dialogue between schools in Sydney - Wiley Park Girls High School and St. Patrick's College - you know how they swap their school students. But in a way that's shallow because it was obvious that was a one day thing only, an event made for TV. Obviously it wasn't something they did off the cuff. How else are you going to have publicity? It was a made-for-TV event. If you do that thing informally without the cameras, I think you are more likely to get some decent responses from the kids and the interaction is more genuine. I understand the idea of it, where they want to foster a better image in the media, but ...it's got to be mainstream."

"But if that's the first step then it's worthwhile but at the same time I think that program was good because my boss actually told me about it, he said he watched it and he said it was good."

The importance of Muslim role models was discussed. Hazem El-Masri's contribution in this respect was acknowledged.

"He's always out there as much as he can, speaking at and going to whatever he can to help the community. Who else do you know who does that?"

"I think he's a real good role model."

"They had this article once about him and how he prays before the game and he fasts during the games and stuff and they showed a picture of him reading the Qur'an and that was good. When he first started playing, his team mates called him 'Allah' but he asked them politely to not call him that."

"I think he has been the best Muslim role model in Australia, particularly for Arab Muslims. I really do."

School education on other religions and cultures

"I think we need to educate our school kids a bit more. You get to pick up a language to learn for example and in learning the language you learn about the culture. With religion classes they always had Christianity and nothing else, so how are these kids supposed to learn about the culture and the religion? In school when they teach languages they usually have Japanese or Italian and that's it, never anything else outside of that."

"I think before religion you've got to teach a person about other cultures."

Overcoming media bias

To conclude a very brief discussion as to whether it would be possible to influence the media or place positive stories about Muslims, one participant commented:

"I actually think that it's not pointless but it will come to no avail, because there is that much bad press about us already that a few shows here and there trying to give us a good name still won't help. The majority of the media is bad and it still won't help."

Improving Arab youth relations with police

We asked how police might work with more effectively with young people from Arabic speaking backgrounds

"More community work, I mean I'd like to hang out with cops more."

"I think there should be more Arab cops, because if there was more Arab cops that would break down the wall between the Arabs and the cops and the system."

"But that could backfire because just say some Lebanese Muslim did something really bad then other cops are gonna say just because this cop is Muslim that he let them off."



[Consultations Homepage](#) || Meeting Notes: 18 June 2003

Consultation with the Queensland Anti-Racism Community Reference Group, Brisbane, 18 June 2003

The consultation was chaired by Stephen Maguire, Director, Multicultural Affairs Queensland (MAQ), Department of Premier and Cabinet. It was attended by 12 Reference Group members and facilitated by Omeima Sukkariah (notes) from HREOC.

The consultation focus was mainly on the role and various initiatives taken by the Reference Group and other initiatives and projects being implemented in Brisbane, as well as what the members participating in the consultation believe still needs to be done to eliminate prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians.

The Anti-Racism Community Reference Group was established after the 2002 Bali bombings. It is coordinated by MAQ which believed that this international event had the potential to cause serious local consequences in Queensland.

Its establishment built on the experience of the Queensland Government response to the events of 11 September 2001.

The Reference Group was set up to discuss and develop a protocol for responding to crisis, such as '*what to do with information that came to them*'. It was established as a mechanism to think about what consequences will there be for Queensland of these events and is convened by Michael Hogan, Deputy Director General, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

"The protocol was not in place after Iraq because we were still working on it. Now we are in the process of developing it."

The Reference Group meets quarterly or on a needs basis. The members all felt that there is a particular need in Queensland for proactive strategies not reactive ones. They have been involved in a number of initiatives including the 'Racial and Religious Hatred - Know Your Rights' cards and education campaign with the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (ADCQ) which is a member of the Reference Group.

"We can't measure how effective these cards have been because it is so new but they have certainly been well received."

The response protocol is linked to counter-terrorism responses strategies developed in Queensland

Education

Members of the Reference Group felt a need to focus on school education in Queensland so some members formed a sister group with Education Queensland, and have since worked well with them to talk about education and issues of racism at a school level. They have been going out to meet with various school principals to talk about strategies and serious incidents of racism in their schools.

One participant commented on the importance of education and the availability of resources about different religions practiced in Australia.

"There are current international tensions around fundamentalism and therefore there is a great misinformation about Islam and the Arab world and this needs to be addressed."

"From an education perspective, my wife teaches a wholly able group who did a project on diversity. I gave a copy of the APMAB book [Australian Police Multicultural Advisory Bureau book on religious diversity] and the kids love it. The book should be utilised more widely, like in the army."

"NSW education made it mandatory for teachers to learn about respect and diversity and this needs to be the norm across states. The teachers college in NSW has made it mandatory as a core part of their qualifications and cross cultural training. We need to follow suit."

Police

"The Reference Group has a community relations focus. One of the greatest benefits from a police perspective is that we have consultations with community groups, government departments and...it is important to have constant consultation. It is one of the many strategies we have employed over the many years."

"The Police have Cross Cultural Liaison Officers to work with the community but they also have Police Liaison Officers who are unsworn members of the police force. We think having a combination of both works really well. Mostly they are Aboriginal Liaison Officers but now they are changing to meet community needs."

[Originally known as Aboriginal and Torres Islander Liaison Officers, Police Liaison Officers now include officers from Chinese, Fijian, Samoan, Vietnamese and Australian South Sea Islander backgrounds. There are now more than 120 PLOs throughout Queensland. The PLOs are employed by the Queensland Police Service to establish and maintain a positive rapport between Indigenous and multicultural communities and the Queensland Police Service. The primary role of the PLO is to promote trust and understanding through their liaison role by assisting the community and police to reduce and prevent crime, divert people from the criminal justice system, advise and educate police officers on culture and cultural issues and to improve community knowledge of law and order issues and policing services. A PLO does not have the powers of a police officer; however they may assist a police officer with detaining, arresting, searching or fingerprinting a person in certain circumstances. PLOs are supervised by District Cross Cultural Liaison Officers.]

What has been done?

"What has worked is the Queensland Premier's leadership. It allowed local government, LGAQ [Local Government Association of Queensland] and mayors to take initiative. It builds a climate of acceptance of diversity. They made an impact on the ground in the end and at least gave some ownership of this at a community level. The evaluation of this has been successful, that is, the LAMP program, which is the Local Area Multicultural Partnerships ... It comprises of 15 councils who have a LAMP worker and look at issues of community relations and access to services from people of NESB."

[The Local Area Multicultural Partnership (LAMP) Program is a partnership strategy between State Government and Local Governments across Queensland to support and promote multiculturalism in Queensland. Under the program, 14 LAMP Workers are employed in local governments, state-wide, as well as a Community Relations Project Officer who is employed by the Local Government Association of Queensland to coordinate LAMP across councils. For more information see www.premiers.qld.gov.au]

"Brisbane City Council have an anti-racism project there where they did a broader outlook project where they developed a database of anti-racism strategies at a national, international and local level. They did literature research on best practice models."

"They piloted a research on 70 different people of non-English speaking backgrounds called 'Hand in Hand' and three issues that came out which they put into practice, two of which are working in partnerships and working at a grassroots level. That to me says that education is the key."

"Last part of the program is the four year action plan which is a strategy of the Brisbane City Council. 10% of the strategies in the database are currently being evaluated."

What more needs to be done?

"HREOC should be a thoroughfare for state of the nation audits, for example, looking at what Education Queensland is doing to [address the issue of] racism and pushing recommendations for change towards them ... It is no good if central office brings in anti-racism strategies and then devolves the funding responsibility to district offices, so the head office foots the bill in lack of implementation."

"You can't rely on each agency to keep the Ethnic Communities Council informed of what's going on."

"There needs to be a state by state audit of where agencies are to get some consistency. HREOC needs to identify good practice across other's jurisdictions and at least evaluate them. Even trying to showcase

good examples is important. One example of an effective campaign is 'Under the Skin' by Education Queensland, but it's only targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. It needs to be broader. Race and business needs to also be a focus for everyone."

[Education Queensland developed 'Under the Skin: Combating Racism in Queensland Schools' to help foster school environments that promote racial diversity. It is a professional development package for teachers and others working in the field of education and is part of the anti-racism curriculum for Queensland schools. It includes two units 'exploring issues of significance to Australians'. These units are 'The Stolen Generation' and 'Immigration and National Identity'. For more information visit www.education.qld.gov.au]

"HREOC needs to get solid evidence as to what actually does work and whether it has an impact on people's attitudes, behaviours and values."

"When I was with the ADCQ, we commissioned a book called 'Moving Forward'. Incidences of racism are complex but one of the core things was that exponentially, incidences and particular incidents experienced by certain sections of the community escalated when global tensions escalated. So HREOC does have a responsibility to make it known to politicians, media, employers, teachers and so on, to understand the gravity of what they are saying, especially in the school yard."

['Moving Forward' is the result of a research project undertaken by the Graduate School of Education at the University of Queensland on behalf of the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland. It tells a series of stories from eleven different government and non-government schools showing the positive measures taken to promote harmony, respect, understanding and fairness between school members and with people in the community.]

"It is important to get access to ministerial committees to make sure this issue is taken as a serious one."

"Valuable thing is that there is data now so more anecdotal reports, so can HREOC have influence based on having data? People are collecting data through that nature by LAMP, but I believe that HREOC could produce data also. "

"But trying to get data on racist incidents is a minefield. For one thing how do you identify people using ethnicity, especially if you have to use the standard ethnic descriptors? It's almost impossible."

"Leadership needs to be committed through to education departments."

"At the Brisbane City Council we [have to be careful that] if projects and things get targeted at Muslims or Arabs it will tend to isolate that group further and it is difficult. It is more effective if you do more broader education [strategies]. So there needs to be a more holistic approach as you don't want to isolate others."

Communicating the message

"There was a Fashion Expo where it was a perfect place where you can send information through the 500 or so people attending and more of these [events] need to be utilised. Word of mouth is most effective in getting the message across about anything."

"Using the ethnic print and radio media is I think an important and an effective strategy. The infrastructure is there but the problem is that there is no market for it in Queensland."

"We need to open a dialogue between the ministry of parliament and the community at a national and local level. The message we should send in doing this is 'We are all Australians'."

"It also about attracting people at the grassroots level; people who aren't necessarily available. Ethnic media in this case should be more accessible."

"There is a good program in Victoria called 'Different cultures, One Victoria'. They had cameo messages on television, where the message is 'I'm from somewhere else but I'm proud to be in Victoria'. We should be thinking along these lines."

Need for more youth involvement

"One thing we have found is that young people isolate themselves and for example they don't go meetings. They have a fear of being members of IWAQ [Islamic Women's Association of Queensland] for example, because they are in fear of being associated with members of Islamic organisations. And they don't sit on this Reference Group either."

