



18 December 2019

Mahrukh Sarwar

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Dear Mahrukh

Your request under the Official Information Act 1982

Thank you for your OIA request, which has been transferred in part from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to the Department of Internal Affairs (the Department), and which was received by the Department on 21 November 2019. This transfer comprised parts 5 and 6 of your request, which I have responded to below.

5. *Where did the bridge-building initiative between the government and Muslim Community post 9-11 originate from and what initiatives was it based on or influenced by?*

The Office of Ethnic Communities (OEC) has worked in partnership with the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ) since the establishment of the Building Bridges programme in 2005. The programme aimed to build capacity within the Muslim community, build positive relationships between Muslim communities and wider society, and to counter negative stereotypes. This was particularly important following the rise of Islamophobia in New Zealand after the events of 11 September 2001.

6. *Why have the government stopped trying to bridge build with the Muslim community? What was the shift in DPMC policy that deprioritised bridgebuilding?*

The Building Bridges programme, although no longer operational, provided important foundations for the OEC to build close, respectful and collaborative relationships with the Muslim community.

This work continues and is of importance for the OEC and wider government. OEC has built and continues to grow relationships with Muslim communities. A number of our staff are themselves from an ethnic Muslim community, and are working to support or create opportunities for intercultural connection and understanding. Earlier this year we held 13 hui with Muslim women, youth, and Imams/male leaders to better understand their concerns post 15 March and to use this to inform part of our work programme.

In February 2020 we will host faith and interfaith regional hui to look at ways to grow a socially inclusive Aotearoa New Zealand, and address racism, discrimination and religious intolerance. Other examples include the annual Parliamentary celebration of Eid ul-fitr – and funding of Muslim community initiatives through the Ethnic Community Development Fund.

I hope this gives you a sense of the Office's ongoing work with Muslim communities.

Yours sincerely


Caroline Bridgland
Acting Director
Office of Ethnic Communities