



Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network

# End of Term Report to Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship 2011



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# MINISTER'S REPORT 2011

## Overview

The Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network (MMYN) will complete its fourth term in October 2011. Twelve members will be continuing for a second term and it is anticipated that a further 16 new members will be joining the Network. The MMYN will also be farewelling 13 members, who have contributed their ideas, time and passion to the MMYN - heartfelt thanks to them for all of their work.

The MMYN continues to advise the government on issues affecting young people from culturally and religiously diverse communities. The MMYN has engaged in a range of activities, consultations, initiatives and projects that have allowed members to discuss and promote understanding within the Network as well as in the wider community. Alongside such activities, the Network's advisory role to Government will continue to be a key focus in 2011-12.



The work of the MMYN in 2010-11 has been exciting and meaningful. This work has raised the profile of the Network, both within government and the community. It is anticipated that this momentum will continue to build in 2011-12 and all members, both new and old, will maintain an active role. Looking forward, the Network, with assistance from the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship (OMAC), will seek to develop a greater role in providing a link between government and the community in relation to youth, multifaith and multicultural issues.

This Report provides a snapshot of the work and experiences of the MMYN since October 2010.

## Network Meetings

The MMYN had four meetings in its fourth term: October 2010, February 2011, May 2011 and August 2011. Meetings provided MMYN members with the opportunity to discuss with each other issues that affect young Victorians from diverse backgrounds and faiths, and constructively engage with government and community representatives on these matters. In 2010-11 the MMYN met with a range of representatives including: the Hon. Nicholas Kotsiras, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, former VMC Chairperson Mr George Lekakis, and founder of community based organisation Refugees, Survivors, Ex-detainees (RISE), Ramesh Fernandez. MMYN meetings also gave members a chance to develop friendships, strengthen networks and share ideas.

## Key Issues

The first meeting of the fourth term, held on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 2010 at the Melbourne Town Hall, presented an opportunity for a broad discussion around issues impacting community harmony in Victoria. The group presented a range of issues to George Lekakis, former Chairperson of the VMC, at this meeting. At the second meeting in February 2011, members met to workshop and confirm key

issues of interest and areas of focus for the Network in 2011. These issues will be the focus for future MMYN meetings and possible projects. Key issues and areas of focus identified at the February meeting were:

- Anti-racism education and awareness

The MMYN is committed to addressing the issue of racism in our communities. The MMYN is interested in new ways of dealing with racism, for example, through education in schools, and community activities which draw positive attention to various groups within the community. The MMYN intends to enter discussions with young people about racism; formulate ideas for anti-racism campaigns and



events, as well as act as anti-racism advocates in the community. The MMYN would like more access to research into instances of racism, to ensure this issue is well supported and accurately addressed. **Outcome: Ubuntu Youth Stage and MMYN Schools Tour**

- Refugee, Asylum seekers, and New Emerging Communities

Issues facing refugees, asylum seeker and newly arrived communities are at the heart of the MMYN, with many members either representing these communities or working with them. The MMYN will continue to advocate for equality and social inclusion amongst all Victorians and in particular, young people. The MMYN is particularly interested in seeking consultations with organisations that assist newly arrived communities and refugees, to better understand the needs of these communities and advocate for projects and policies to best serve their needs. **Outcome: Young People, Identity and the Media: Perspectives from the Refugee Community Forum and RISE consultation/meeting**

- International Students

The MMYN has identified issues faced by some international students, including personal safety at night, on public transport and in public spaces. Other challenges faced by international students include housing, employment, transport and racism which have an impact on their rights and livelihoods. The MMYN is also concerned about the mental health of some international students. The MMYN feels very strongly about improving the standard of living of international students as a way of improving their mental and physical health. The MMYN would like to explore options of improving access to services for international students, as well as more targeted promotion of existing services. The MMYN aims to further consider and consult on this issue and deliver advice to government on ways to ensure the safety and welfare of international students living in Victoria. **Outcome: Ongoing monitoring of issue in current term and upcoming term**

## MMYN Projects

The MMYN has been involved in a number of initiatives and projects that have allowed members to voice the importance of interfaith and intercultural dialogue; raise awareness of both cultural and religious diversity and youth concerns; and build leadership skills.

### **Ubuntu Youth Stage @ Viva Victoria**

The *Ubuntu* youth stage was held on the 27th of March 2011, as part of the Viva Victoria celebration held at Federation Square. *Ubuntu* is a philosophy based on interconnectedness or humanity towards others. The word has its origins in the languages of southern Africa but is used in cultures across the



continent to refer to humanity compassion and respect. The *Ubuntu* stage was devised, planned and delivered by MMYN members, who wanted a youth-led element to the Viva Victoria festival. The *Ubuntu* Youth Stage was a huge success with nine performances from diverse groups across Victoria and provided an excellent opportunity for MMYN members to meet the new Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship,

Nicholas Kotsiras. With the success of this youth stage, the MMYN hopes *Ubuntu* will become a permanent fixture of the Viva Victoria festival, as it provides an invaluable platform for young people to express and celebrate their cultural diversity. Representatives from the MMYN also volunteered at the main stage of the Viva Victoria Festival.

### **MMYN/EYC Refugee forum**

On the 19th August 2011, the MMYN and the Ethnic Youth Council (EYC) hosted the joint forum: *Young People, Identity and the Media Forum: Perspectives from the Refugee Community*.

The one day forum, attended by 70 young people, provided a space for exploration of a range of issues including the implementation of school-based education on media-related issues, improving relations between new and emerging communities and media agencies and the need for greater accountability of the mainstream media. Panellists included representatives from media organizations, academics, young people interested in the media, and representatives from community-based organisations working with new and emerging communities. The sessions were followed by workshops, facilitated by MMYN members, which gave forum participants a chance to identify key issues and discuss strategies to effectively address these issues. A separate report has been prepared on the outcomes of the forum.



### **Emmanuel Jal Lions and Luminaries Project**

On Monday 17 October MMYN Members, in partnership with Footprints Enterprises and Multicultural Arts Victoria, will be facilitating a workshop on the topic of faith and culture with students at Dandenong High School.





The workshops made up part of the Emmanuel Jal *Lions and Luminaries* project comprising several performances, forums and school-based activities across Victoria in the month of October, that aim to educate young people about the importance of cultural history and identity; the joy of being creative and focused; and the empowerment of connecting as a community. Twenty Dandenong High School students, identified as young leaders and artists, will participate in the MMYN Faith and Culture

Workshops run by the MMYN which will be followed by a larger forum and evening performance by acclaimed international artist Emmanuel Jal, anticipated to be attended by over 100 young Victorians.

## Consultations and meetings

### **RISE meeting**

In May 2011, the MMYN met at the offices of the community-based organisation, Refugees Survivors and Ex-detainees (RISE). The aim of the meeting was to gain greater insight into issues affecting people from refugee communities and to hear from people from a refugee background. At this meeting members of the MMYN also met and heard from representatives of the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship (OMAC) Refugee Action Program and representatives from Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre's Ethnic Youth Council (EYC). Members heard both harrowing and inspiring stories from the speakers who all came from refugee backgrounds. This meeting formed the basis of the EYC / MMYN joint forum on issues around media, youth and refugee communities, which took place on 19 August 2011. The RISE meeting also prompted members to consider the advisory role of the MMYN, and whether there should be an increased focus on providing advice around particular issues.

### **Multifaith Advisory Group**

The MMYN was honoured by having a senior member of the Jewish community and Multifaith Advisory Group (MAG) member, Rabbi Ralph Genende, attend a meeting in 2011. Rabbi Genende drew attention to issues facing diverse faith communities and spoke about how organisations such as the MMYN and MAG can partner in the future to assist communities. One example of this was the MAG's coordination of support in the aftermath of the Black Saturday Bushfires. As a result of this meeting, the MMYN and MAG agreed to send two MMYN representatives to future MAG meetings to provide a youth perspective and advice to the group.

### **Premier's Consultation on the 2011 Victorian Families Statement**

Ms Friyana Billimoria, a first term MMYN member, attended the Premier's consultation on the 2011 Victorian Families Statement in July 2011. The consultation was an informal discussion over lunch between the Premier, The Hon Mary Wooldridge and diverse Victorians, who contributed different experiences and perspectives. Participants discussed a range of pressing issues for Victorian families: from day-to-day matters like public transport and access to childcare, to the longer term ideals of the notion of cultural harmony and a sense of Victorian identity. The Premier was interested in the work of the MMYN to promote youth involvement in multicultural activities and was keen to utilise

engagement with community groups to facilitate greater dialogue about a Victorian identity and belonging.

## **MMYN Ambassadors**

Representatives of the MMYN have been actively involved in a range of activities and events over the past year as ambassadors for the MMYN. Some of these activities include:

### **Premier's Gala Dinner**

MMYN members were invited to attend the Premier's Gala Dinner during Cultural Diversity Week in March. It was a great honour for the members to be invited to celebrate Victoria's diversity with cultural and faith leaders in Victoria. The members thoroughly enjoyed the many performances from different cultural and faith groups and the opportunity to meet with Victoria's culturally and religiously diverse community members.



### **Multifaith Advisory Group**

Members of the MMYN were invited to represent the Network at MAG meetings throughout 2011. The inclusion of MMYN representatives at MAG meetings fosters a stronger relationship between the two groups and allows for youth perspectives and advice to be heard during MAG meetings. Both the MAG and the MMYN have expressed interest in maintaining this arrangement and hope to work more closely together on future projects.

### **OMAC Work Placement**

Benjamin Cusick, an MMYN member and policy and research student, interned at OMAC between June and August 2011. He described it as "a great experience" through which he gained insight into the working of OMAC and how policy and projects are delivered to support culturally and linguistic diverse communities in Victoria.

### **Victorian Multicultural Commission Youth Commissioner**

MMYN Member Yasmin Hassen was appointed as the first VMC Youth Commissioner on 25 August 2011. As an active member of the MMYN, it is hoped that Yasmin's appointment to the role will raise the profile of the MMYN and allow her to act as a valuable conduit between Victoria's youth the VMC and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship. Yasmin herself is actively involved and committed to promoting multiculturalism in the community, particularly with youth. She was born in Ethiopia and, having initially arrived in Victoria as a refugee, is a member of the Oromo community. She has substantial experience working in the youth and interfaith sectors.

### **United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Integration: Building Inclusive Societies Forum**

MMYN member Ali Majokah represented the Network as a panellist at the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) forum: Integration - Building Inclusive Societies (IBIS). The forum took place on 7 October at the Melbourne Town Hall, and was attended by Mr Jorge Sampaio, the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, and former President of Portugal, along with more than 200 forum participants from the academic, development and government sectors.



As a member of the youth breakout session panel, Ali spoke about his involvement with the MMYN and issues of youth identity, faith, culture and self-expression. The session was also attended by Yasmin Hassen, MMYN member and VMC Youth Commissioner, who fulfilled the role of panel discussion moderator. Yasmin used her mediation and communication skills to complement and generate valuable discussion at the session.

## Future Focus

### Increased advisory role

At the August meeting, members considered whether the MMYN could be more active as an advisory body. The group agreed that during the next term there should be an increased advisory focus. This could include more consultations in the community and more frequent/targeted briefings and reports to the Minister or appropriate bodies. Members agreed that this will be explored in detail at the first meeting of the next term (October 2011) and implemented throughout the year ahead.

The progress of the MMYN over the last year has been significant. MMYN members look forward to future consultation, projects and an increased advisory focus, and are preparing to welcome 13 new members in November. This will also include farewelling 8 second term outgoing members, and five outgoing first term members whose work and contributions over the last two years have been invaluable. A huge thank you to outgoing members: Ching Yee Choo, Benjamin Cusick, Timothy Deitz, Majur Deng, Marcus Frajman, Puneet Gupta, Olivia Hang, Mohammed Isah, Kir Judet, Rajinder Kumar, Ibrahim Merhi, Samuel Pearson, Devinder Singh and Alan Wu.

