



The Islamic Women's Council of New Zealand (IWCNZ) is a national umbrella organization advocating for Muslim women since 1990. Over the last 33 years, IWCNZ has grown alongside the Muslim female population from 150 to more than 30,000. Focused on enabling Muslimah to achieve and thrive, IWCNZ facilitates community engagement, education, participation, and representation in New Zealand society through various activities. IWCNZ played a significant role around the Christchurch attacks, advocating for Muslim women's interests and participating in the Royal Commission of Inquiry to enhance public service approaches and has been pushing for digital platform regulations. Governed by a democratically-elected executive board, IWCNZ ensures active member participation and provides guidance and strategic leadership to improve the lived experiences of Muslim women.

Areas for Improvement for New Zealand to Address, as Offered by IWCNZ for Universal Periodic Review :

1. **Combat Violence Against Women and Children:** Increased efforts are needed to prevent and address all forms of gender-based violence, including in-person and online abuse, and ensuring victims have access to justice and support.
2. **Improve Representation and Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Minorities:** Greater efforts required to protect the rights and improve the socioeconomic conditions and welfare of Māori and minority groups, with particular focus on improved education, health outcomes, employment opportunities and respect for cultural rights and identity.
3. **Address Racial Discrimination, Islamophobia, and Xenophobia:** Work to eradicate racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and related intolerance and white supremacy through human rights legal reforms, awareness campaigns, more effective public reporting and data collection of hate crimes (including perpetrator ethnicity and gender), regulating social media for safe navigation, and funding independent media that promotes democracy, minority representation and rights.
4. **Guarantee Equitable Legal System Access and Treatment in Judicial System:** Undertake actions to guarantee equal access to the legal system, equitable treatment as victims, and the rights to information and truth. conducting sensitivity training for legal personnel and the judiciary, establishing monitoring mechanisms for equitable treatment, and improving access to justice and legal aid services.
5. **Enhance Counter-Terrorism Frameworks and Victim Support:** Improving counter-terrorism laws to ensure efforts are streamlined, effective, non-discriminatory, and protect victims' rights, including equitable access to legal, medical, psychosocial, and financial support.
6. **Support for Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers:** Advocacy for the rights of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, including improving policies for their protection and integration, and facilitating family reunification to maintain social well-being and cultural identity and preventing human trafficking and slavery.
7. **Promote Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women:** Initiatives to increase women's representation in leadership roles (with focus on Māori and minority communities), ensure gender pay equality, and advance women's rights in the labour market and across all sectors of society.
8. **Protect and Promote Children's Rights:** Strengthening policies and programs aimed at protecting children from abuse and neglect, reducing child poverty, and ensuring access to safe educational environments and healthcare.
9. **Enhance Participation and Rights of Disabled Persons:** Recommendations to improve accessibility, support, and inclusion for people with disabilities, particularly in education, employment, and public services.

HIGHLIGHTED CHALLENGES

Muslim women are experiencing per capita far more hate than other New Zealanders as they are targets due to several factors: Religion, Race and Ethnicity, Migrant, and Gender.

When intersectionality considerations are applied, using publicly released Police data, 4 out every 11 incidents of daily hate will involve a Muslim female. Muslim women represent less than 1 percent of the New Zealand population, yet IWCNZ can confirm Muslim women have received more than 36 percent of the nation's hate over the past two years. Our Middle Eastern and African sisters bear an even higher burden [Increased likelihood of experiencing hate for Middle Easterners (28%) and Africans (42%) compared to our South Asian sisters] See Graham-McLay, C. (2023, June 7). Exclusive: Racism, homophobia fuelling thousands of crimes in New Zealand each year, figures show. *THE GUARDIAN* Please note, this data is from June 2023, and hate has increased exponentially since the Gaza conflict.

While New Zealand has now established a hate incident monitoring and recording system, only some of the data obtained has been released. Further, there has not been a public discussion led by NZ Government of the results of the data register and there is no established process for the public release of the information recorded in the register, such as who are the main categories of perpetrators. This absence of public information leaves vulnerable communities, such as IWCNZ, to have to advocate on their own behalf. This, in turn, puts our IWCNZ leadership at further risk of hate and harm.

As a result, Muslim women continue to suffer the harm of hatred without full legal protections. The removal of considerations to protect vulnerable communities through an effective Bill of Rights and harmful speech legislation has kept the whole Muslim community at risk.

CONCERNING STATISTICS:

Serious Distress:

44% of MELAA learners vs. 28% overall.

Feeling Overwhelmed:

57% of MELAA learners vs. 49% overall.

Life Not Worth Living:

51% of MELAA learners vs. 41% overall.

ALARMING STATISTIC:

39% of MELAA learners have seriously considered suicide, compared to 26% of respondents overall.

Further, information from the Education Review Office shows that racism and harassment are present and widespread within the schooling environment. Data collected from a one-month period show ethnic youth encountered racist messages (19%), have been bullied due to ethnic identity (20%), had their identity, culture, or language ridiculed (22%) and observed mistreatment of their peers based on ethnic identity/culture (54%).

The consequences are having a significant impact on MELAA group learners (which include a significant number of Muslim

children), who report the lowest levels of "good to excellent wellbeing", higher incidences of distress, feelings of being overwhelmed, and suicidal contemplation. See Education Review Office. (2023). *Education for all our children: Embracing diverse ethnicities*. <https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/education-for-all-our-children-embracing-diverse-ethnicities>

These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions both for Muslim women generally but also for our children within the education environments to address inclusion issues, racism, harassment and bullying to improve outcomes and wellbeing across all ethnic groups within our communities.



Response to the 15 of March Christchurch Terrorist Attacks: Justice, Truth and Reparation

Need for Fair and Impartial Judicial Inquiries

Whilst there has been a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Christchurch Mosque Attacks (RCOI), the probe did not fully meet the expectations of fairness and impartiality of similar inquiries. Specifically, this was the first NZ Royal Commission that did not hold any public hearings, did not allow key stakeholders to hear or challenge the evidence, and the RCOI itself was precluded by its Terms of Reference from looking into some key matters (i.e. social media platforms).

To ensure fairness and impartiality in investigating terrorist attacks, it is critical that the investigation is thorough, follows due process, aims to uncover the truth and remains independent. These are essential to understand the causes of the attack and adequately recommend preventive measures.

Right to Truth and Information

Both the Muslim community and the impacted family members of those massacred in the Christchurch mosques have inalienable rights to know the truth including being informed about investigation progress and findings. Transparency is an absolute necessity for public trust and buy-in into the recommendations. Unfortunately, the RCOI, was not an open process, only provided for limited information sessions and there was limited consultation on recommendations. The Islamic Women's Council of New Zealand sought to participate in the evidentiary process to be able to hear, test and challenge evidence, but we were not allowed. In fact, no bullet wounded individuals or impacted family members were allowed to do so either.

- **Lack of Transparency:** Unlike previous inquiries, the RCOI conducted its proceedings in private with no access of the public to hearings and evidence.
- **Limited Participation:** The decision not to allow affected parties and the wider community, including a Muslim reference group, to hear or challenge government evidence, restricted meaningful participation. Thus, limiting understanding of the events and diminished public understanding of the need for the recommendations.
- **Exclusion of Key Stakeholders:** By precluding media platforms and not considering their potential contributing factors, the RCOI may have missed a critical analysis of the role such platforms may have played in the dissemination/promotion of extremist content.
- **Suppression of Evidence:** The suppression of behind-the-doors testimony from government officials for 30 years, pre-emptively given (but not publicly disclosed until RCOI Report issued), has raised questions about the completeness and accuracy of the investigation, hindering full understanding of the causes.
- **Cleansed Report:** The report being "cleansed" for security reasons further contributed to concerns over its transparency and thoroughness. While security concerns are valid, the balance between protecting sensitive information and providing a comprehensive, unvarnished account is crucial.

Despite these shortcomings, IWCNZ acknowledges that the RCOI made a significant number of appropriate and needed recommendations. However, the process's limitations have impacted the effectiveness and implementation of these recommendations. The challenges and deficiencies of the RCOI are now impacting the current coronial inquiry as matters covered by RCOI are now considered for the most part outside scope for the inquest. Thereby, transferring the deficiencies of the RCOI onward to the coronial process. Further, the legislative mandate for coroners to primarily rely on police for investigations, despite potential conflicts of interest from police involvement in the Christchurch Attacks, undermines the investigation's objectivity and public trust, suggesting an independent investigatory body would better ensure transparency and accountability.

Securing the Right to Restoration and Reparation

In the wake of the Christchurch terrorist attacks, the ongoing challenges faced by the directly impacted and the community confirm the need for a multifaceted approach to reparation and restorative justice. The long-term well-being of those affected hinges on financial reparations and the provision of culturally appropriate support services. An effective response should encompass both individual and collective needs. Thus far, there has been insufficient reparatory actions.

Financial compensation must be paired with trauma-informed counselling and social services, specifically designed to meet the unique needs of the Muslim community. This approach acknowledges the necessity of addressing the physical, psychological, and communal impacts of terrorism.

- Improved access to mental health services needed for survivors and victims' families.
- Lack of faith and language-specific counseling leaves many without support, risking long-term damage.
- Racism and systemic barriers hinder access to comprehensive health services.
- Professional immigrants face barriers in having qualifications recognized, limiting assistance.
- Immigration issues increase isolation, with bureaucratic delays affecting healing.
- Dissatisfaction with ACC policies highlights fairness and equity issues, leading to financial instability.
- Insufficient support for youth who lost family members, impacting future societal contributions.
- Trauma affects employment, with some working part-time or leaving jobs due to stress.
- Lack of career clarity and under-addressed PTSD among younger demographics.

Clearly, the path to healing requires more than just financial and emotional support; it calls for truth-telling processes that allow for a collective understanding of the events and their root causes. Implementing restorative justice principles is key, focusing on addressing victims' multifaceted needs, ensuring accountability, and fostering dialogue and reconciliation within the community. There hasn't been a formal restorative justice program explicitly designed for the victims of the attacks, nor have there been public reports detailing such initiatives.

IWCNZ acknowledges the journey towards healing and reconciliation is complex, marked by challenges such as varying levels of victim participation. Despite these obstacles, a committed, community-driven approach promises to enhance dialogue, promote accountability, and contribute to a more understanding and peaceful future.

Community-Driven Approach: Achieving meaningful restorative justice demands sensitivity, cultural awareness, and consistent support tailored to the Muslim community. An inclusive, adaptive, and carefully planned strategy is crucial for facilitating healing and reconciliation, emphasising the need for a broad, yet personalized, response to the aftermath of the attacks.

However, the government's efforts have not been entirely absent of restorative justice elements. Certain actions have been taken that align with these principles, as evidenced by the implementation of some of the Royal Commission's recommendations and the provision of support to victims. This support includes some financial assistance and efforts to source culturally appropriate counselling, aimed directly at addressing the needs of those affected by the tragedy; however, it has not been consistent across the cohort. While these measures reflect aspects of restorative justice, the complete absence of a formal program encompassing dialogue, reconciliation, and accountability indicates that the approach may not fully meet the comprehensive needs associated with restorative justice. Further exploration, resource and investment are needed for a deeper understanding of these efforts.

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