



Anglican Church of Australia

General Synod

CIRCULAR LETTER

To: Diocesan Bishops
Date: 22 May 2012
Subject: Sixth Regional Interfaith Dialogue

In late January 2012, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs sought nominations from mainstream faith groups in Australia for a delegation of ten individuals to attend the Sixth Regional Interfaith Dialogue in Semarang, Central Java, 12-15 March 2012.

The theme of the conference was *Strengthening Collaborative Communities to Promote Regional Peace and Security: Interfaith in Action*.

The letter of invitation contained the following information:

The Regional Interfaith Dialogue is one of the largest and most important interfaith initiatives in our region, involving a range of countries across Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Australia's participation as a co-sponsor and co-founder of the Dialogue (with Indonesia) is a key element of our efforts to build understanding between faiths and cultures and reflects our leadership and strong support of interfaith initiatives in the region.

...Given the proposed sub-theme of the Dialogue (Interfaith in Action), nominees should ideally have practical experience in fostering interfaith and inter-community cooperation through community-based, grassroots activities. We would also particularly encourage nomination of youth or future leaders.

All the costs were met by the Australian government.

The invitation was received two days before nominations were due.

At short notice the Metropolitans and the Bishop of Tasmania conferred about the invitation and identified some possible candidates. After ascertaining candidates' availability and suitability, I nominated the Reverend Samuel Green from the Diocese of Tasmania as a candidate to be considered for appointment to the delegation by the Minister. Below is relevant material conveyed to Minister in support of the nomination:

Mr Green is 46 years of age.

ABN: 90 767 330 931 • Suite 2, Level 9, 51 Druitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000
Tel: +61 2 8267 2700 • Fax: +61 2 8267 2727 • www.anglican.org.au

Mr Green has been ordained as a Deacon in the Diocese of Tasmania for the purpose of working with people of other faiths, primarily Muslims but also with Buddhists, in both the community of Hobart and in a university setting. His work in the community involves outreach and pastoral care through personal engagement at a practical level. In the university sphere, Mr Green provides pastoral care to international students in the University of Tasmania, but he also has many speaking engagements in universities around Australia with the specific aim of encouraging people of other faiths to engage with the Christian faith. This involves comparing the scriptures of the faiths in question. He is fluent in Arabic. He writes exegetical papers on the Koran and is working on a bible for Muslims to foster an understanding of Christianity from a Muslim standpoint. He has read the Buddhist scriptures. He has a deep understanding of the different faiths' approaches to reconciliation and peace. Mr Green's work with students sharpens his understanding of the thinking of the young and fosters empathy for their concerns. Mr Green graduated with the degrees of Bachelor of Chemical Engineering from the University of New South Wales and Bachelor of Theology from Moore Theological College and holds a Diploma of Ministry from the same College.

Mr Green was appointed to the delegation.

His report is attached.

On 11 May 2012, the General Synod Standing Committee passed the following resolution:

1. *That the report of Rev'd Samuel Green dated 13 April 2012 be received.*
2. *That the General Secretary be requested to thank Rev'd Green for his participation in the Dialogue and for his report.*
3. *That the General Secretary be requested to distribute the report to Diocesan Bishops and post the report on the General Synod website.*
4. *That the General Secretary be requested to liaise with Rev'd Green and appropriate bodies to explore implementation of the recommendations in the Action Plan attached to the report and report further to the Standing Committee.*

(SC2012/1/54)

I have set in train the process of exploring implementation of the action plan attached to Mr Green's report. If you have any suggestions or comments, they would be gratefully received.

If you wish to contact Mr Green, his contact details are:

Email: samuelgreen@gotalk.net.au

Telephone: 0424 084 514 (mobile)

ABN: 90 767 330 931 • Suite 2, Level 9, 51 Druitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000
Tel: +61 2 8267 2700 • Fax: +61 2 8267 2727 • www.anglican.org.au

Yours sincerely,



Martin Drevikovsky
General Secretary

Direct Telephone: +61 (0)2 8267 2701

Mobile Telephone: +61 (0)418 476 937

Email: generalsecretary@anglican.org.au

ABN: 90 767 330 931 • Suite 2, Level 9, 51 Druitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000
Tel: +61 2 8267 2700 • Fax: +61 2 8267 2727 • www.anglican.org.au

**A Report on the 6th REGIONAL INTERFAITH DIALOGUE
“Strengthening Collaborative Communities to Promote Regional Peace and Security:**

Interfaith in Action” Semarang, Indonesia,

11-15 March 2012 Rev. Samuel Green

Introduction

The Regional Interfaith Dialogue (RID) was started by the Australian and Indonesian governments because these governments felt that the different religions within the ASEAN nations needed a forum for dialogue. This was based on the understanding that the contribution of the different religions is an important element in the wider dialogue of these nations. The goal of the conference is to provide opportunities for connecting and cooperating for peace and harmony and also for the issuing of the Plan of Action paper which governments and other institutions can use for policy and interfaith activities.

Previous Conferences

Yogyakarta Dialogue - “Interfaith Cooperation” (December 2004)

Cebu Dialogue - “Regional Cooperation for Peace, Development and Human Dignity” (March 2006)

Waitangi Dialogue - “Building Bridges” (May 2007)

Phnom Penh Dialogue - “Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and Harmony” (April 2008)

Perth Dialogue - “Future Faith Leaders: Regional Challenges and Cooperation”. (October 2009)

Websites

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/asean/>

<http://www.regionalinterfaith.org.au/>

Delegation Team

Mr Tim Fischer AC, Delegation Leader. Miss Maryum Chaudhry, Executive Member, Islamic Council of Victoria. Priest Dilip Chirmuley AM, Hindu Society of South Australia. Reverend

Samuel Green, Interfaith Chaplain Anglican Church of Australia.

Reverend Professor James Haire AM DD, Executive Director, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Charles Sturt University.

Ms Maysa Hassan, Executive Member, Affinity Intercultural Foundation.

Mr Jeremy Jones AM, Anti-Racism Advocacy and Interfaith Chair Australian Jewish Community.

Dr Patricia Madigan OP, Chair, Commission for Interfaith Relation Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay.

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Professor Abd Malak AM, Chair, Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations.

Most Reverend Bishop Christopher Prowse DD, Catholic Bishop of Sale Roman Catholic Church.

Most Venerable Thich, Quang Ba , Deputy Chair for External Affairs, Unified Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation of Australia and New Zealand Executive Member, Australian Sangha Association Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils.

Mr Colin Milner, Director: Pacific Program, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Ms Stephanie Aeuckens, Director: ASEAN and EAS Section, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Mr Steve Barnes, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Ms Connie Lo, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Anglican Delegate

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade requested a representative from the Anglican church. Samuel Green's name was put forward and he was contacted by Martin Drevikovsky, the General Secretary of the Anglican Church. Samuel's name was then submitted to DFAT and he was accepted by DFAT for the delegate position.

Rev. Samuel Green is an Interfaith chaplain with the Tasmanian Diocese. He has worked with the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES) as a campus evangelist and Islamic specialist since 1999. He regularly travels around the universities of Australia helping the Christian groups to engage with their Muslim friends. He provides a theological and practical engagement with Islam at many levels.

<http://www.engagingwithislam.org/>

<http://www.reading-the-quran.blogspot.com/>

<http://answering-islam.org/Green/>

<http://www.anglicantas.org.au/people/?item=1060>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/engagingwithislam>

On Overview of the Conference

The conference was held in Semarang which is a very multicultural part of Indonesia. Most religions are represented in this area. There were around 150 religious representatives from the ASEAN countries at the conference.

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The first two days of the conference involved various meetings of the delegates. We were first addressed by Indonesian government representatives who explained the Indonesian policy of "Pancasila". This government policy aims to have peace between the government and religion and between the religions and it is integral to Indonesian policy making. We were told that the Indonesian motto is, "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" - Unity in Diversity.

The next series of meetings were lectures presented by various delegates explaining and illustrating various examples of interfaith dialogue within their communities. After each lecture there was time for questions and comments from the audience.

After these meetings we then had a period of visiting various temples, mosques and churches. This was an amazing time for seeing the countryside and appreciating the architecture and theology of these buildings. At most of these locations we were fed and warmly greeted.

We then had our working groups which were smaller group discussions. There were three topics of discussion:

- Conflict Resolution
- Future Leaders
- Education

I was in the education discussion group. These went for 3 hours and we heard the experience of every delegate and discussed and debated points. The goal of these groups was to formulate recommendations upon which governments and other organisations can base policy making decisions. These recommendations were collected into one statement called the Plan of Action, which I have attached.

My Reflections

I thought that the conference was very worthwhile and am thankful for the opportunity to attend. It was great to be able to meet and spend time with representatives from other religions. I made genuine friendships which still continue. This experience has forced me to work through how to be a good Christian citizen in a multi-religious society.

It was also a great blessing to meet many Christian representatives from the ASEAN countries. When we were visiting the temples, mosques and churches it was only the Christians who sang for joy about God's love for us; it was quite a contrast. We have continued contact with each other and many are keen for information on how to engage with their Muslim neighbours. It was also a great pleasure to be able to speak with Tim Fisher and learn from his diplomatic wisdom.

Meeting the government officials was also of great value. The government officials did not contribute to the public discussions but were very keen to talk policy at the many informal times. Many of the religious delegates were of the view that religion is about being good and that peace and unity comes from not discussing our differences. This was not what I was saying. I was saying that we must maintain the integrity of our traditions and work for peace while maintaining these differences. I had several long talks with DFAT staff who found my approach helpful. They

said that normally at these events the delegates say all religions are the same and that this actually gives the DFAT staff little to work with in terms of policy. I was invited by DFAT staff to provide more theological direction to them later in the year.

I was in the education Working Group and was able to contribute to discussion that became part of the Plan of Action. Many of the other suggestions were about how religions can work together with a common interest to promote harmony and these are worthwhile and can be seen in the Plan of Action. My contribution though was about the role of education regarding our differences. I made the point that it is not possible to have no conflict. As was pointed out by other delegates conflict is in all relationships. What matters is how we deal with conflict. I suggested that there was unacceptable conflict, killing each other, and acceptable conflict, the debates and arguments we see in our free media and have in our democratic parliaments. My suggestion was that we need an educational dialogue process that allows for the integrity of our religions to be maintained. Without this we will also never engage with the radicals of any religion. Therefore I suggested that universities should be places of dialogue and debate between religions.

My other suggestion was that we should acknowledge how people feel in this area and let them say how they feel. We heard an impassioned cry for help from the Buddhist community about the religious cleansing that is happening in southern Thailand. However, this was the only occasion. Many of the other groups who were suffering said nothing and it seemed that they did not feel safe to say what was happening to them. My suggestion was that we must let people say how they feel without dismissing them, and we must face our history.

This discussion above contributed to the following statements under Education in the Plan of Action.

- c. that our governments promote safe educational environments for interfaith learning and activity;
- e. that religious communities develop a core group of interfaith exponents who have expertise and experience in both their own religious traditions and interfaith dialogue;
- f. that religious communities take responsibility for acknowledging and overcoming historic and contemporary grievances;

The Australian and Indonesian governments take this dialogue seriously. They were not in any way trying to control proceedings but genuinely seemed to want to listen to the suggestions from the combined wisdom of the different religious communities. The statement produced by this conference, the Plan of Action, can be a very useful tool if we choose to be involved with it. It can be presented to governments and educational facilities for consideration in their policy making. It is sort of like the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. It is not binding, but if a government has agreed to it then it is to play a role in their decision making. The Australian government has agreed in principle to this Plan of Action and I feel that it is important for us to be involved and be part of the process and to use the Plan of Action in our engagement with government and other institutions.

Again I would like to give my thanks for the opportunity to be involved in this conference.

Your brother in Christ

Samuel Green
13 April, 2012