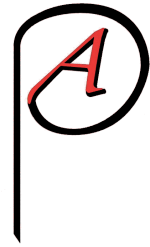


Progressive Atheists Inc.

Est. 10 Jan 2010 | Reg: A0054119U

Proud Member of Atheist Alliance International

Member Group of Secular Coalition of Australia



Victorian Government Multicultural Policy Consultation

Public Consultation held 3 February 2016

4 February 2016

Submission Summary:

1. Replace the term 'Islamophobia' with 'anti Muslim bigotry'
2. Inter-belief
3. Omniculturalism

We are grateful to the Minister and Department for giving us this opportunity to submit feedback on this policy document. The aims and objectives of our organisation are listed as an Appendix.¹

Overall the Victorian Government Multicultural Policy document² clearly expresses concern for human rights and equality for all diversity of citizens within the context of our secular democratic society.

1. Replace the term 'Islamophobia' with 'anti Muslim bigotry'

There is a legitimate concern in the world today that Muslims (and those who might be perceived as Muslim) might be subject to attack simply based on their faith identity (real or perceived). Progressive Atheists denounce such attacks.

Progressive Atheists have particular concern for the use of the term 'Islamophobia' in the document under the heading "Promoting human rights and equality". The irony of this is that Muslims who have been promoting minority positions within their faith tradition have been shut down from expressing their point of view by the use of the term 'Islamophobia'.

¹ <http://progressiveatheists.org/about-us/purpose-statement/>

²

<http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/2016/MulticulturalPolicyStatementPublicConsultationDraft.pdf>

We are concerned that minorities holding a Muslim identity, and their supporters, are prevented from speaking freely about their own interpretation of Islam and how that contrasts to other interpretations, or expressing their personal experiences within the Islamic tradition.

Progressive Atheists would like to propose that the term 'Islamophobia' be replaced in the document with the term 'anti Muslim bigotry', in order to better specify the concerns held, without restricting freedom to scrutinise or criticise ideas.

We would also like it to be noted that Progressive Atheists meetings attract a wide variety of attendees, many of whom are recent immigrants to Australia from countries such as Iran, Pakistan and Bangladesh, who would be persecuted for their beliefs in their country of birth due to blasphemy and apostasy laws. Progressive Atheists Inc. is a community organisation that is actively supportive of these emergent groups.

"Critiquing Islam, critiquing any idea, is not bigotry. "Islamophobia" is a troubled and inherently unhelpful term. Yes, hatred of Muslims by neo-Nazi style groups does exist, and it is a form of cultural intolerance, but that must never be conflated with the free-speech right to critique Islam. Islam is, after all, an idea; we cannot expect its merits or demerits to be accepted if we cannot openly debate it... My view is that no idea is above scrutiny, and no people are beneath dignity."

- Maajid Nawaz, Islam and the Future of Tolerance³

"Maajid Nawaz is an author and Founding Chairman of Quilliam – a globally active think tank focusing on matters of integration, citizenship & identity, religious freedom, extremism and immigration."

"Human rights and a respect for individual liberty are matters close to Maajid's heart. His work is informed by years spent in his youth as a leadership member of a global Islamist group, and his gradual transformation towards liberal democratic values."

"Having served four years as an Amnesty International adopted 'prisoner of conscience' in Egypt, Maajid is now a leading critic of his former Islamist ideological dogma, while remaining a Muslim."

- Maajid Nawaz, Executive Board Member of Quilliam Foundation⁴

³ <http://www.amazon.com/Islam-Future-Tolerance-A-Dialogue/dp/0674088700>

⁴ <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/about/staff/maajid-nawaz/>

2. Inter-belief

The term 'Inter-faith' is in common use to describe people from different faith traditions coming together. Progressive Atheists would like to encourage the use of the term 'Inter-belief' in order to be inclusive of non-religious individuals and groups and individuals as part of societal narratives.

3. Omniculturalism

Maajid Nawaz has also made comment on the policy of Multiculturalism⁵, which has lead to failings of integration in the UK. Maajid recommends consideration of Omniculturalism⁶ where education about group-based differences is only taught after children have learned about our human commonalities.

Progressive Atheists supports an investigation into the merits of Omniculturalism, especially with regard to focusing primarily on our commonalities, and seeing that all humans have a shared humanity. This policy may provide greater freedom for individuals to have mobility in their identity, rather than feeling subjected to a group identity.

⁵ <https://www.thinkinc.org.au/events/maajidnawaz/>

⁶

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-psychology-dictatorship/201407/why-omniculturalism-not-multiculturalism-is-the-solution>

Appendix One

Progressive Atheists Inc.

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Email: contact@progressiveatheists.org

Website: <http://progressiveatheists.org>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ProgressiveAtheistsInc>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ProgAtheistsInc>

Progressive Atheists Purpose Statement

We are the Progressive Atheists Incorporated (PA Inc): an organisation of like-minded individuals who want to affect a progressive social transformation within their local community. We seek to fulfil the following purposes⁷:

1. To foster functional democracy within PA Inc, its processes, procedures and activities;
2. To provide effective accountability of those entrusted with PA Inc leadership;
3. To act in solidarity with other progressive movements, organisations and groups that share our commitment to voicing issues affecting atheists, women, minorities, people with disabilities, people who identify as LGBTI, seniors, youth, other species and the environment;
4. To improve communication among progressive groups and organisations in our community in order to galvanise a united front for promoting secularism;
5. To strive for a secular society that grants personal and political freedom from religion, whilst retaining personal freedom of religion and personal freedom of conscience;
6. To create a safe and inclusive environment within which people are encouraged to discuss their ideas honestly, debate social and cultural values, develop ethics, promote social justice and contribute to universal human rights;
7. To go beyond divisive racial, religious, tribal, and sectarian constructs, and instead, contribute to a universal humanity.

⁷ <http://progressiveatheists.org/about-us/purpose-statement/>