

The National Social Cohesion Conference On “Enrichment of a Socially Inclusive Australian Society: Challenges and Solutions (Held on 12 July 2011 A.D.)

An Investigative Report by free lance Australian Reporter Jamil Shibli, J.P.



I had attended the epic conference on Tuesday the 12 July 2011. At the advent of Dawn I got up & got myself prepared because it was supposed to be a Long Day to cover the Conference events. From 10 A.M. in the morning to 9 P.M. in the Night of 12 July 2011. I had been completely engaged in that Conference Sessions & I attentively listened to the Guest speakers who said about the issues of Social Cohesion !

The Multicultural Australian community with its many Diverse cultures has undergone great changes over the past twenty five years. However, there has not always been a broad community understanding or acceptance of this reality. In recent years, Australia's Multiculturalism as a framework for living with cultural diversity has come under increasing criticism.

In Australia, in contrast to many other Multicultural countries, people with diverse cultures live in relative harmony and diversity and multiculturalism have enriched a universal pluralism. Yet there are still challenges presented to us by the multi-faith and multi-cultural nature of our societies. This conference seeks to explore how to work towards a socially cohesive society in the context of contemporary realities and challenges. The Specific issues that were addressed :

- Multiculturalism and Social inclusion: Similarities and Differences
 - Diversity in Australian Social Landscape
 - Citizenship in a pluralistic society

The venue was at ACC&C Chapel/Charles Sturt University in Barton, 15 Blackall Street, Barton Australian Capital Territory

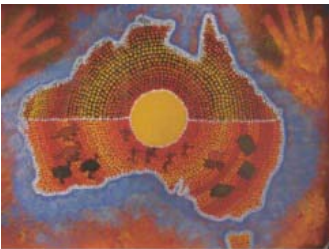
At first, I first spoke to Brother Abdul Celil Gelim who was one of the key organizers and had been briefed by him. Later on after Listening to the Guest speakers as well as the Local speakers, I had brief interactions with speakers, short interviews with those speakers and interviewed some Audiences from all walks of life. In Australia although We have got a Multicultural Policy, evolved into a multicultural society over the Decades and many Festivals that high lights multicultural Australia, Racism, extremisms and intolerance frequently stir the Australian Society !

In this conference, I met people of many cultures, people of various Faiths (Religions) and persons of mixed ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Many Canberra based activists joined with the other community activists from around Australia and abroad. In summary, Speakers had affirmed the unity of people of various cultures as well as of various religions. I spoke to University students who were enthusiastic about this conference and asked me about the Reporting matters to Middle East Media. I affirmed that I usually report to Marupalash.net where 5 Million readers in the Middle East and Southern Asia read the Articles about Australia and other Countries. The female students were very Curious about the Daily Lives of Women in Saudi Arabia of Arabic backgrounds and other Foreigners who live in Saudi Arabia. Australian lifestyle could be mysterious and very different to those Women residents In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In Australia, we have significant women Leaders in National, State and Territories level such as Governor General Ms Quentin Bryce, Prime Minister Ms Julia Gillard, The Chief Minister Ms Katy Gallagher of ACT, Premier Anna Bligh of State of Queensland, Senator Ms Kate Lundy and many more ministers and officials who govern this Nation of Australia. We are fortunate here in Australia that Men and Women can equally take part in the Elections, Civil service, Social and Community activities and so on. It does not usually happen in every other Countries around our present World. The Day session ended in 3.45 PM, there was a recess. In the Evening of 12 July 2011, the remainder session of the conference commenced. This part was Glorified by the participation of Top Level Australian Parliamentarians such as Senator Gary Humphries, Federal MP Andrew Leigh, ACT's Minister Joy Burch. Many intellectuals from different universities were present and came together in

discussions during the Dinner Time at Delhi Restaurant in Civic, Canberra City. I had been impressed by the contents of the speeches delivered by the Political Leaders (Parliamentarians) and the Theology experts who gave insight of the Concept of Social cohesion in a Multi-Religious and multicultural society like ours in Australia.

In a short message to THE Readers in Saudi Arabia Minister of Multicultural Affairs Ms. Joy Burch said that People here in Australia can see our Flourishing Australian Multicultural Society especially in our unique and vibrant area of the Australian Capital Territory (In Short ACT). Women residing in other Countries Abroad should learn about the progresses that our Australian women have had made and they have achieved various Distinctions in many professional fields. Other audiences and speakers are curious about people of the Middle East and wish that there could be cultural exchange visits between Australia and the Middle East. I will humbly ask the Readers to see the some Annexed messages by the speakers in this National conference on social cohesion. Thanks to all readers.

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The Commonwealth of Australia



Minister Joy Burch With Reporter Jamil Shibli



With Professor James Haire

Speakers Abstract and Biography



Professor Zeki Saritoprak

Director of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi Chair in Islamic Studies John Carroll University USA

Biography:

Professor Zeki Saritoprak has been the Nursi Chair in Islamic Studies at John Carroll University since 2003. He holds a Ph.D. in Islamic Theology (The Science of Kalam) from the University of Marmara, Turkey. He earned his Master's degree in Islamic Theology and Philosophy, and his B.A. in Divinity from the same university. He studied Arabic language for several years in Cairo while researching for his dissertation in Islamic Theology, entitled *The Antichrist (al-Dajjal)*. He is the Founder and former President of the Rumi Forum for Interfaith Dialogue in Washington, D.C.

He researched and taught courses at Harran University (Turkey), Georgetown University, the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. and Berry College in Rome, Georgia. Some of the subjects he has taught include the science of Kalam, Introduction to Islam, World Religions, Biblical Elements in the Qur'an, Islamic Spirituality, classical and contemporary Islamic movements, and interfaith dialogue as well as courses on Islamic personalities such as al-Ghazzali and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi.

In addition to presenting at numerous conferences and universities over the years, Dr. Saritoprak is also the author of several books and academic articles in Turkish, English, and Arabic.



Professor Greg Barton

The Herb Feith Research Professor for the Study of Indonesia, Politics program, School of Social and Political Inquiry, Acting Director of the Centre for Islam and the Modern World

Biography:

Prof Greg Barton joined at Monash University as the Herb Feith Research Professor for the Study of Indonesia in January 2007, based in the school of Political and Social Inquiry (PSI) in the Faculty of Arts. Prior to that he had worked for a year as an Associate Professor at the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS) in Honolulu, Hawaii, where he continues to have an association as adjunct professor. Before that he was an Associate Professor at Deakin University where had worked since 1993. He

developed and taught courses in the Politics stream on Political Leadership, Global Islamic Politics, and Society and Culture in Contemporary Asia, and earlier, in the Religious Studies stream, on Islam and Christianity. At Monash he teaches *Crisis Zone: the international relations of the Middle East*, in the undergraduate politics program and *Islam and Modernity*, *Political Islam*, and *Islam in Turkey and Indonesia* in the newly developed Masters of Islamic Studies.

At Monash Greg is Acting Director of the Centre for Islam and the Modern World (www.arts.monash.edu.au/politics/cimow) and Deputy UNESCO Chair in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations – Asia Pacific. For the past twenty years Greg has been active in inter-faith dialogue initiatives and has a deep commitment to building understanding of Islam and Muslim society. The central axis of his research interests is the way in which religious thought and religious communities respond to modernity and the nation state. His knowledge of Indonesia politics and society, especially of the role of Islam as both a constructive and a disruptive force, is internationally recognized. In recent years he has begun to make a comparative study of progressive Islamic thought in Turkey and Indonesia.

Greg has written or edited five books and published dozens of refereed articles and book chapters in this field, together with numerous essays. He is a frequently interviewed by the Australian and international electronic and print media on Islam, Islamic and Islamist movements and on Indonesia and politics. His biography of Abdurrahman Wahid (2002, *Abdurrahman Wahid, Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President: a view from the inside*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press) was published in 2002 (and translated and published in Indonesian in 2003). His book: *Indonesia's Struggle: Jemaah Islamiyah and the Soul of Islam*, was published in 2004 by UNSW Press (and by Singapore University Press in 2005). He is currently working on two other book projects: *Progressive Islamic thought and social movements in Indonesia and Turkey* (which returns to some of the themes and material he first addressed in his



published PhD thesis *Gagasan Islam Liberal*); and: *Islam's Other Nation: a fresh look at Indonesia*.

Professor Ross Chambers

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) Charles Sturt University



'Universities, Citizenship and Social Inclusion'

Abstract:

The paper will consider the contribution of universities in Australia to strengthening of a socially inclusive society. It will examine the role of student experience: preparation for citizenship in a post secular society; and, the place of theological and related studies in modern universities.

Biography:

Professor Ross Chambers has been the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Academic) at Charles Sturt University, Australia, since 2002. Prior to that appointment he was the Dean, Faculty of Arts at Charles Sturt University a position he held from 1992. Prior to his appointment as Dean, Professor Chambers taught the history of political and social thought. He is a specialist in the history of Russian religious and social thought.

Professor Chambers oversaw the establishment of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (ACC&C) in 1998. The Australian Centre is committed to promotion of interfaith dialogue, reconciliation and social inclusion in the context of democratic citizenship and religious diversity. Professor Chambers has been chair of the Board of Management of the ACC&C since 2002. Professor Chambers has been the sponsor within CSU of the introduction of Islamic Studies to the University's profile.

Professor Neal Robinson

Deputy Director of Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies - The Australian National University



'Religions and Social Cohesion: Retrospect and Prospect'

Abstract:

Mainstream religious leaders frequently claim that religion plays a fundamental role in maintaining social cohesion. Moreover, in multicultural societies, the more ecumenical among them make this plea not merely on behalf of their own religions but with respect to all the major faiths. Their detractors, on the other hand, insist that religion is a major cause of war and civil strife and has been throughout history. I shall argue that both views are substantially correct. The explanation of this apparent paradox lies in the recognition that religions invariably strengthen the cohesion of the in group but that this is usually to the detriment of outsiders. After a brief wide-ranging historical survey, I shall focus on Christianity and Islam. In the light of this, I shall argue that it is not sufficient merely to highlight texts that can be used to promote pluralism and tolerance, important though this is. In addition, it is necessary to safeguard individual religious freedom and to tackle the interpretation of biblical and Qur'anic passages that sometimes fuel anti-Semitism and the deep distrust of unbelievers.

Biography:

Professor Neal Robinson is Deputy Director of the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Australian National University. He was born in the UK where he gained his BA honours and MA from the University of Oxford, and his PhD from the University of Birmingham. He also spent two years studying at London University and a year in Paris at the Sorbonne as well as briefer periods in Tunis and Fez. After five years lecturing full-time on the New Testament in Cheltenham, he moved to the University of Leeds. There he switched his focus to Islam but initially also taught biblical Hebrew and the religions of the Ancient Near East. Since then, he has been successively Professor of Islamic Studies in the University of Wales (UK), Professorial Fellow in the University of Louvain (Belgium), and Professor of Islamic Studies in Sogang University Seoul (South Korea). He is the author of four books on Islam and numerous book chapters, journal articles and encyclopaedia entries.

Rev. Professor James Haire

Executive Director ACC&C



'The Challenges of Christian Existence in a Multi-Religious World'

Abstract:

This paper deals with the theological dilemma facing Christianity in a multi-religious society. A strong tradition within Christianity calls for the evangelisation of the world and in monolithic cultures this has apparently been relatively straightforward. However, Christianity faces the theological difficulty of how to be faithful to itself and radically tolerant in multi-religious communities.

Biography:

The Reverend Professor James Haire is Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Professor of Theology of Charles Sturt University (CSU), and Director of the Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre (PACT), all based in Canberra, the national capital of Australia. He took up his appointment in Canberra in 2003.

Before coming to Canberra, from 1987 to 2003 he was Professor and Head of the School of Theology at Griffith University in Brisbane, Queensland.

He served as national President of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) from 2000 to 2003, and was Chairperson of the National Heads of Churches of Australia, also from 2000 to 2003. He served as President of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) from 2003 to 2006.

He has been involved in inter-faith dialogue in both Indonesia and Australia, and has spoken extensively at inter-faith conferences internationally, including being a Keynote Speaker at the Fifth Asia Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue hosted by the Governments of Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and The Philippines in Perth, Australia in 2009. Among other things, he has lectured at the State Islamic Institute (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (STAIN)) in Malang, East Java, Indonesia, and has engaged in inter-faith dialogue with His Excellency K. H. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), former President of the Republic of Indonesia. He was also involved in peace and reconciliation discussions between Christians and Muslims in the Molucca Islands, Indonesia, between 2001 and 2005, after the violent communal conflict there. In 2009 he was involved with Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu in the conference related to the commissioning of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific. He became a Presidential Friend of Indonesia in 2010, at the invitation of His Excellency Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, President of Indonesia.

Professor Raymond Canning

Co-Director, Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue Assistant Head, School of Theology-
Australian Catholic University



'Social Inclusion and Australian Catholics'

Abstract: As Waleed Ali notes, "Australia in particular is a compelling example of the fluidity of culture and identity ... Human societies are inescapably responsive to their changing surroundings." Catholics in Australia strove for well over a century and a half to gain recognition within the wider Australian society. Overlapping the later stages of this process, however, were significant shifts within that culture and identity itself, and new challenges to Catholics to use their own resources to enrich the very diverse and multicultural society of which they are part. Following a brief historical sketch, pivotal to which is the narrative of the German Catholic priest Fr Charles Jerger who was deported in 1920, the presentation will focus on four potential contributions from Catholic tradition and practice that can promote acceptance and friendship in Australian society. These are based on Catholic theological understanding of (1) the inviolable dignity of the human person, including the very least, (2) the vast potential of

human reason, and the commitment to cultivate it for the good, (3) the practice of hospitality, and (4) commitment to the common good of all.

Biography:

Professor Raymond Canning is Co-Director of Australian Catholic University's Asia-Pacific Centre for Interreligious Dialogue (APCID). His research expertise is in Christian theology, with a particular focus on the work of Augustine of Hippo, specifically his theology of the unity of love for God and neighbour. Since 2006 he has been active in studying and practising interreligious dialogue, and has played a key role in the establishment and implementation of the Chair in the Study of Islam and Muslim-Catholic Relations at Australian Catholic University. Professor Canning has a particular interest in the theological insights that can be derived from historical experience and Christian tradition, for the understanding and practice of interreligious dialogue in the present.

Professor Ismail Albayrak

Fethullah Gulen Chair in the Study of Islam and Muslim-Catholic Relations

Biography:

Ismail Albayrak was born in Ankara in 1968. Upon receiving his primary and secondary education he began to study in the School of Divinity/Ankara where he graduated in 1991. In 1994 he won a scholarship from the Turkish Higher Education Council to continue his postgraduate studies abroad. For this purpose, in 1995 he went to England. Ismail received his PhD degree from Leeds University in 2000. Then he started working at Sakarya University, Adapazarı/TURKEY. In November 2008 he was appointed to the newly established Fethullah Gülen Chair in the Study of Islam and Muslim-Catholic Relations at Australian Catholic University.



Dr. Salih Yucel

School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies, the Centre for Studies in Religion and Theology - Monash University

'Do Muslims see Australia as their home? The notion of watan al-sukna in Islam'

Abstract:

The concept of 'country' or homeland in Islam was defined by Muslim jurists in the eighth century. They set three categories: watan al-asli, the country of birth, watan al-sukni, the country of residence and employment, and watan al-safari, the country that's travelled to. Early Muslims arrived on Australian shores before Europeans, but they did not settle. Next came the Afghan camel drivers in the 1860s. Small groups of Muslims after both world wars. It was in the last 1960s when Muslims came in mass immigration. According to the 2006 Census, there are around 340,392 Muslims living in Australia. The loyalty of Muslims to Australia is being debated, researched and discussed by intellectuals, politicians, media and other Australians. Since the Gulf War and the September 11 terrorist attacks, this issue gained prominence. In this presentation, I will explore how Muslims in Australia view the country by relying on Islamic jurisprudence and results from a small survey. I will also discuss the issue of Muslim immigrants' faith: Is their faith part of the problem or part of the solution when it comes to social cohesion?



Biography:

Salih Yucel got Bachelor of Islamic Divinity – a five-year program and equivalent to undergraduate and Master's Degree – at the University of Ankara in 1982. He undertook various ecclesiastical roles for ten years for the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Turkey. Subsequent to attaining his Australian permanent-resident status, he completed Master of Theology at the University of Sydney in 1996. Salih Yucel completed his Doctorate at Boston University in 2007. His doctoral research was about Tibb Nabawi – Medicine of the Prophet – from the earliest to modern period together with the effects of prayer on healing.

He has been working as lecturer of Islamic Studies at Monash University in Melbourne since January 2008. Dr. Yucel is also coordinator of Islamic Studies program at Charles Stuart University in Australia.

He is author of two books.

The Struggle of Ibrahim: Biography of an Australian Muslim

Prayer and Healing and healing in Islam

His current research is about "Memories of early Muslim immigrants in Australia post second world war"

Mr. Mehmet Ozalp

Executive Director of ISRA (Islamic Science & Research Academy) Adjunct Lecturer Charles Sturt University



'Cultural Ecosystems: Convergence of Social Inclusion, Multiculturalism and Pluralism'

Abstract:

In the last decade, Australia has shifted from multiculturalism to cultural integration and soon after to social inclusion policy. While it is natural for change and development of social theory and policy over time, relatively quick shifts in policy are indicative of the lack of clarity and direction of the social theory in Western world in general and Australia in ut. This paper will argue that a convergence of multiculturalism, social inclusion and pluralism is necessary to remove ambiguity and deduce a single social theory of cultural ecosystem. In doing so, I will examine three angles that are important for any social theory. These are fundamental unifying agent of society; manner of dealing with difference; and criteria for honour and stratification of society. Examining the strengths and weaknesses of multiculturalism, social inclusion and pluralism will provide a framework for a paradigm of cultural ecosystems.

Biography:

Mehmet Ozalp is a writer, academic and community activist. He has been involved in social, cultural and religious work since 1991 in various mosque and community organisations. He is one of the founders of Affinity Intercultural Foundation. He served as the founding president of Affinity for six years from 2001 to 2007 and as Executive Officer from 2007 to 2009. In 2009, Mehmet has founded ISRA Australia, an Islamic educational and research organisation. He is currently the President and Executive Director of ISRA. Between 2009-2011, he served as a director on the board of Auburn Gallipoli Mosque, one of the largest mosques in Australia. Mehmet also serves as the Muslim Chaplain at the University of Sydney and Macquarie University.

Mehmet is a prolific speaker on Islam and Muslims in Australia. Amongst other media appearances, he has appeared on ABC's Compass and ABC Radio's Spirit of Things. Mehmet was a member of the Community Harmony Reference Group with the Community Relations Commission in Sydney Australia established by the Premier of NSW during the 2003 Iraq war.

Mehmet has been teaching religious and Islamic studies since 1992. He has established and currently teaches courses on theology, Islamic history, culture and contemporary issues on Islam and Muslims. Mehmet is the author of two books: "101 Questions You Asked About Islam", "Islam in the Modern World". He is a PhD Candidate in Islamic Theology at the University Sydney and an adjunct lecturer at the Charles Sturt University.

Dr Andrew Leigh MP

Federal Member for Fraser - Representative for the Hon. Senator Kate Lundy, Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship, Parliamentary Secretary for the Prime Minister

Biography:

Prior to being elected in 2010 as the federal member for Fraser, Dr Leigh was a professor of economics at the Australian National University.

Dr Leigh has written extensively on a range of subjects, including education, taxation and social policy. He also writes fortnightly for the Australian Financial Review.

Dr Leigh holds a PhD in public policy from Harvard, having graduated from the University of Sydney with first class honours in Law and Arts. He has previously worked as a lawyer (including a stint as associate to former High Court Justice Michael Kirby), and as a principal adviser to the Australian Treasury.

Dr Leigh has been a member of the Australian Labor Party since 1991.



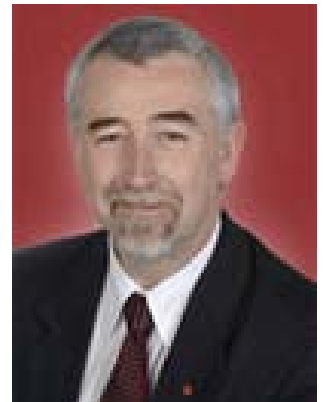
Senator Gary Humphries

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney General Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Materiel

Biography:

After obtaining an arts/law degree from the Australian National University Senator Humphries worked in Canberra as a lawyer and public servant. In 1989 he won a seat in the first ACT Legislative Assembly, going on to serve there for 14 years, most of that time as a minister. In 2000 he became Chief Minister of the ACT.

In 2003 he was chosen to represent the ACT in the Senate. In December 2009, Gary was appointed to the role of Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families, Housing and Human Services and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship by the Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott. Following the 2010 Federal election, Gary was appointed to the new roles of Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Materiel.



ACT's Minister Joy Burch

Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Women

