**The Inaugural UN Interfaith Harmony Week Event at the Australian Federal Parliament House in Canberra, Wednesday 11th February 2015 from 6-8pm**

Australia is a country where approximately 24% of us were born out of Australia and approximately 46 % of us have one parent born out of Australia. We are a multifaith country, with over 100 different religions.

This inaugural event brought together three different groups of people. These were the Australian Federal Parliament Friends of Multiculturalism, Canberra Interfaith Forum and Religions for Peace Australia.

Although there were many other UN Interfaith Harmony Events in various parts of Australia, we feel this inaugural event is significant as it shows a formal Federal Australian Parliamentary and, a broad leadership response (see the Prime Minister’s Statement on the web site link below) to the call for interfaith harmony.

The outcome of the event: The above three groups (two are volunteer run) have a commitment to hold this event the first sitting week of the Australian Federal Parliament next year and possibly in future years.

This inaugural 2015 event was many years in the making as it brought three groups together

The first group was Religions for Peace Australia (a voluntary group) which was started in the 1970s in Melbourne in the State of Victoria. It was the group which sponsored the World Parliament of Religions 2009 Melbourne gathering. Initially the group was based in Melbourne but now it has branches or affiliates in New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia, Canberra (the Canberra Interfaith Forum) and is currently negotiating for a Queensland affiliate. Professor Desmond Cahill OAM is the current Chair of Religions for Peace Australia. He is also is member of the Australian Partnership of Religious Organizations and of the Victoria Police Multifaith Advisory Council. These links, plus his and previous chairs long established relationships with the Parliamentary Friends of Multiculturalism assisted with forming this event partnership.

(see <http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/index.php/about-us/organisation> and http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/index.php/about-us/history)

The second group was the Australian Parliamentary Friends of Multiculturalism. This group was jointly formed in April 2011 by the Member for Calwell, Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP from the Australian the Labour Party and the Member for McMillan, MR Russell Broadbent MP from the Australian Liberal Party. This cross party Australian Parliament Friendship Group in reality encompasses both multiculturalism and multifaith.

(see http://www.aph.gov.au/About\_Parliament/Parliamentary\_Friendship)

The third group was the Canberra Interfaith Forum (CIF) which was formed in 2010 (a voluntary group). CIF represents 12 spiritual faith traditions (Baha’i; Buddhist; Brahma Kumaris; Christian; Hindu; Indigenous, Muslim; Jewish; Pagan Awareness Network; Sikh; Sathya Sai; and Sukyo Mahikari). CIF facilitates dialogue, understanding and co-operation among people of various faith groups, including the Indigenous community, through public forums and seminars on various faith issues. CIF also facilitates active participation of youth from different spiritual traditions and local indigenous groups in environmental activities at its Environment Meditation and Healing Garden located in Canberra.

(see <http://www.canberrainterfaith.org.au/>)

Religions for Peace Australia (<http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au> ) website publicises most interfaith activities across Australia. Only some of these activities are run by Religions for Peace Australia’s branches or affiliates. Our webmaster is Rev Chris Parnell runs this site in a semi volunteer capacity.

Therefore, details of the 2015 Inaugural UN Interfaith Harmony Event at the Australian Federal Parliament House Canberra, Wednesday 11 of February 2015 can be seen across Australia and the World on our website at <http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/index.php/1086-world-interfaith-harmony-week-parliament-house-canberra>

\* last year our website had 1,197, 382 hits.

Submitted by Dr Susan Ennis

Honorary Secretary of Religions for Peace Australia