



Launch of *The Sydney Statement* for World Interfaith Harmony Week

After more than two year's work, [The Sydney Statement](http://www.thesydneystatement.org.au) was launched on its dedicated website, www.thesydneystatement.org.au, on the 9th of February for **World Interfaith Harmony Week**. *The Sydney Statement* is an interfaith charter for *Building Bridges Between Believers from Different Religions*. Like the other interfaith statements that inspired it, *The Sydney Statement* is named after the city where it was published. However, it is not limited to Sydney or even Australia, but is relevant to any multicultural, multireligious society in the world. Hence its relevance for World Interfaith Harmony Week.

This interfaith project is an initiative of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, in partnership with Western Sydney University, supported by the NSW Government with a COMPACT Grant through Multicultural NSW, and underwritten by St Columban's Mission Society.

The content of [The Sydney Statement](http://www.thesydneystatement.org.au) was generated by Youth PoWR (Parliament of the World's Religions), a coalition of young adults from different religions, including Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh. The project was directed by the Youth PoWR Committee of young adult volunteers from these religions, overseen by a Steering Committee of senior representatives and leaders from these religions, including peak state and national religious bodies, and administered by an Executive Team from the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations.

In 2019 Youth PoWR held four consultations with young adults from different religions across the north, south, east and west of Sydney to generate content for *The Sydney Statement*. In 2020 the Executive drafted the text in regular consultation with the Youth PoWR and Steering Committees. As the text was nearing completion, the wider Youth PoWR network were consulted to ensure that their voice had been captured in the text. Selected religious leaders and theologians were also consulted to ensure there were no incompatibilities that would give rise to objections from within





their communities. Finally, after 16 drafts, the text was submitted to the Youth PoWR network for an online vote. More than 200 people authorised its publication. With this formal approval, the Executive then commissioned the design of *The Sydney Statement* posters, booklet and website.

The homepage of the website displays the short version of [The Sydney Statement](#). Clicking on the links yields the long version of [The Sydney Statement](#). Clicking on the further links gives concrete suggestions for ways of carrying out the 21 commitments of *The Sydney Statement*. The website contains the story of *The Sydney Statement*, its origins, inspiration and who carried it out. There are also resources on interreligious dialogue, including links to national and international organisations and articles. **World Interfaith Harmony Week** is promoted as one occasion when people can make a special effort to engage in interfaith relations. There are more than 40 endorsements by civic and religious leaders. A-1 and A-4 posters and A-5 booklet of *The Sydney Statement* can be downloaded free from the website, and professionally printed copies can be purchased from the [online shop](#).

Most importantly, people can **sign up** to the values, principles and commitments of *The Sydney Statement* by simply submitting their name, e-mail address and details on the website. They can also post **comments** on how they are living out *The Sydney Statement* to encourage and inspire others. Over time, *The Sydney Statement* website will become a hub of interfaith interaction.

Due to COVID restrictions, the launch of *The Sydney Statement* was an online event. It was an **e-mail blitz** that went out to all 3,000 schools and all local councils in NSW. It also went to the 12,000 subscribers to Columban e-news. The Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations forwarded these e-mails to various faith, interfaith, dialogue partners, and Christian and Muslim mailing lists, accounting for another 1,000 e-mails and nearly 200 postal mails. The members of the Youth PoWR and Steering Committees also e-mailed it to their various faith and interfaith networks.

Faith and interfaith dialogue partners and media organisations had been given advance promotional packs to prepare publicity. On launch day, they e-mailed their various networks e.g., *Australasian Muslim Times* (AMUST) newspaper to 50,000 subscribers, *CathNews* to 13,000 subscribers, Multicultural NSW E-Maillink to 5,000 subscribers, Uniting Church National E-news to 3,000 subscribers and many others. The total number of people who received e-mail notification of the launch of *The Sydney Statement* is more than **96,000**. And there are more on other lists that we do not know about or for which we do not have statistics.



The report on the e-mail-out to the 1,611 subscribers to the Centre's newsletter, Bridges, shows 34% unique opens, which by industry standards is very high.



In addition, the launch of *The Sydney Statement* was also publicised on **social media**. The Centre's Facebook post announcing the launch <https://bit.ly/3utnO2l> (left) alone reached nearly 6,000 people. Many of the above faith and interfaith partners and media organisations also publicised the launch on their social media channels.

To date, we have received over 120 signatories on the designated website. Also, the few comments have been overwhelmingly positive e.g.:

Congratulations, what an awe-inspiring Statement! What a different world we would have if we all accepted the values of the Statement! (MB)

Sincere congratulations to all involved in crafting The Sydney Statement. It is an excellent vision and roadmap for how to live together in harmony in our multi-religious and multi-cultural world. It is both practical and doable and can be adapted and applied to different contexts or situations anywhere in the world. The goal of building bridges between believers from different religions is of crucial importance in today's world. The Sydney Statement can help achieve this goal. (LO)

Youth PoWR is planning a Media Launch of *The Sydney Statement* for the 11 March 2021, to which are invited the young people who generated and voted for it, the Governor of NSW, the Premier of NSW, the Leader of the Opposition, religious and civic leaders. It will feature young adults speaking and performing. Religious leaders from the Abrahamic and Dharmic religions will also address the audience. It will be a dynamic, diverse, energy-filled youth event to attract maximum media attention for *The Sydney Statement*.

We will continue to promote *The Sydney Statement* to people of all faiths and worldviews in the coming weeks, months and years. We believe that by *Building Bridges Between Believers from Different Religions* it has the potential to transform the interfaith landscape of the city of Sydney, of the state of NSW, of Australia and have impact around the world. We are delighted that it was able to be launched during World Interfaith Harmony Week.

Rev Dr Patrick McInerney
Project Executive Officer
The Sydney Statement