

## Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019: Submission from Belong Aotearoa

13 September 2019

Thank you for inviting Belong Aotearoa (formerly known as Auckland Regional Migrant Services) to make a submission to the Royal Commission's inquiry into the attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019. Belong Aotearoa has delivered support to newcomers, multicultural ethnic communities and former refugees in the Auckland region for over 15 years as they build their lives in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Lives have been positively changed and yet the problems multicultural ethnic communities face are still present and prevalent. Our communities face many barriers to settlement and integration due to the systems in place as identified through stakeholder engagement with over 1,000 migrants and former refugees and research undertaken by us in late 2017. Discrimination and racism were identified as key challenges to belonging across every system, including health, housing, employment, and immigration.

Through our research, we recognised that racism and discrimination are entrenched in New Zealand society and many people in our communities expressed that they experience it frequently. The terrorist attacks in Christchurch on 15 March 2019 were a stark wake-up call, demonstrating to the nation how far we still have to go towards addressing these issues in our communities.

When we began to talk about racism to mainstream agencies, there was fragility around it and nobody wanted to hear the word racism being used openly. However, we shouldn't have to change the way we speak to be heard.

Below is our response to the submission, addressing the questions posed.

### **Suggestions for how government agencies should engage with New Zealanders on issues like safety and security.**

We convened a cross-sector policy discourse on *effectively Engaging Diverse Voices in Policymaking*, in August this year. The think tank of experts and senior leaders, from central and local government, the community sector, academia and business, identified and recommended the solutions below:

- Welcoming communities policy to be lead and guided by tāngata whenua to foster connectedness, inclusion and respect the mana of every person

- Creating culturally conscious policymakers - public servants receive cultural competency training delivered by the community. An echo of the solution our participants came up with at another hui we held in April and included later in this submission
- Better ethnic representation within central and local government to engender trust with the communities government agencies are engaging with – particularly on issues like safety and security
- Disrupting current community engagement processes. Co-design a new process / prototype to support effective engagement with multicultural ethnic communities, at a central and local government level, that is more relationship driven and less corporate / formal.
- Developing the collective voice and “ask” across sectors, to bring up a range of issues that matter to multicultural ethnic communities, in the lead up to public election forums to address what is working, what is not working
- A collective mapping of existing community services, programmes and organisations to connect the community to policy makers
- Communities are often over consulted with little accountability or results sharing. To effectively engage with communities, government agencies to commit to follow-up and action
- Improved policy capability and capacity of diverse groups.

### What do you see as the biggest risk to the security of communities in New Zealand?

**Racism and discrimination:** systemic racism, deeply held discriminatory beliefs and assumptions need shifting to create belonging and inclusion for diverse communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Power dynamics:** decision making to be more community-led to build a safe and secure Aotearoa New Zealand, with mutual respect and understanding between the community and government agencies.

**Policies or lack thereof:** there is no national strategy on diversity and inclusion to end racism and discrimination and guide anti-racism action, to prevent terrorist attacks like Christchurch happening again. We recognise that there is a Diversity and Inclusion strategy for the public sector predominantly focusing on gender representation. Undoubtedly, this is a very positive movement in gender equality however, the strategy requires a broader and deeper focus to include ethnic diversity and inclusion too.

**Poor relationships and connections:** good quality connections and communication between government agencies and communities is essential. Community leaders had spent years speaking up about discrimination against the Muslim community

(pre-Christchurch terror attacks) to the government, yet they felt their voices were not heard. To build trust with these communities again, government agencies need to commit to change and demonstrate this via positive action and policy changes.

### **When do you think government agencies should share information to ensure the safety of New Zealanders – whose information should be shared, when, how and why?**

If we do not put the measures in place as voiced by our communities, there will be a continued risk to the safety of our communities.

Public safety information should be shared regularly via all relevant communication channels.

### **What additional measures should be taken by relevant State sector agencies to prevent such attacks in the future? What could be done differently?**

In April, we convened a sector hui to bring together the leaders and organisations working in our communities to address how we create an inclusive Aotearoa New Zealand free from racism and discrimination, post Christchurch atrocities. Over fifty five participants attended the hui and together they called for action to catalyse positive change, keep our communities safe and to prevent future acts of terrorism in New Zealand:

The solutions put forward were:

- Policymaking that systematically and effectively engages diverse voices, to reflect the people the policies are designed to serve
- Cultural competency training for local and central government, delivered by local communities with lived experience
- A media campaign to promote inclusion as participants recognised the role that media plays in fuelling racism and discrimination
- A one-stop shop providing re/settlement support
- Supporting and celebrating young people exploring new cultural multi-identities through education
- The Ministry of Education to embed anti-racism, diversity and inclusion in the school curriculum with the aim to eradicate racism
- Supporting and resourcing inter-cultural programmes at the neighbourhood level that promote inclusion and tackle racism.

Systems conditions – state sector agencies to address the following:

- Decolonising institutions, structures and systems
- Democratic systems that enable diversity of participation and representation, to ensure local, regional and national decision-making responds to the needs and aspirations of diverse communities
- Addressing income disparity as a key driver behind other inequalities that disproportionately affect diverse communities; particularly by addressing equity of employment outcomes and ensuring a living wage
- Shifting attitudes towards empathy and understanding, and strengthening cultural literacy through education systems
- Policies/regulations that penalise egregious and bad faith reporting
- Political will for change – including local and central government policy settings (e.g. housing) that enable systems change in relation to equity, diversity and inclusion and anti-racism