



**National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand**

Te Rūnanga Wairua Tapu o nga Bahá'í o Aotearoa

18 March 2019

Statement about the Christchurch tragedy

We express our profound sorrow at the loss of so many lives in Christchurch on Friday 15 March 2019 and condemn this attack on innocent people in their place of worship. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Muslim community and all those who are now grieving.

Such troubling events have, in the past, seen the genesis of efforts for peace and unity. It was a spate of racially motivated attacks that led to the first celebration of Race Relations Day in 1999, inspiring the Race Unity Speech Awards, an annual forum that has allowed thousands of young people to share their views on the ideal of racial harmony and the steps necessary to realise this ideal in Aotearoa.

Let this moment be the same. Let us examine the powerful and destructive social forces that have led to this tragedy, and the still more potent powers of the human spirit that can establish unity, justice and harmony in our society. Let us reflect on our shared identity, not only as New Zealanders but as members of a single human race. Let us consult earnestly with one another about the measures necessary to re-establish and safeguard the security and tranquillity of our nation. Let us one and all take decisive action to make New Zealand a true leader in demonstrating the oneness of humanity, showing the strength of our loyalty not only to our fellow New Zealanders but to the people of all other nations. Let us not content ourselves with relative excellence but strive persistently until our nation fully realises the ideals of peace, inclusivity and harmony that so many of us hold dear.

Above all, let us support youth and children in their constructive efforts. The atrocity that occurred overshadowed a day when thousands upon thousands of young people showed the strength of their desire for a just and sustainable future. Young people have great ability to drive forward important causes, such as that of racial unity and inclusivity, as they are often less encumbered by the conscious and unconscious biases that perpetuate racial prejudice and inequity.

It is the responsibility of adults to comfort and counsel our young people, to give them hope, to listen to their views, and to support their efforts towards personal growth and social change. With this loving encouragement, the young people of Aotearoa may – in the words of a well-known Bahá'í prayer for youth – "guide the wayward, lead the hapless, free the captives and awaken the heedless".

Arohanui
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