

PRESS RELEASE:

FIRST NATIONAL JEWISH AND MUSLIM FORUM ON PEACE IN GAZA

At a time when there is an unending humanitarian tragedy in Gaza, Jewish and Muslim community elders and youth have met in a forum held at the Centre of Peace and Dialogue in Wellington. This was the initiative of FIANZ, the umbrella national Muslim organisation, to reach out to respected members of the Jewish community, to find a common platform for dialogue for a pathway to peace in Gaza, said **Abdur Razzaq**, Chairperson of FIANZ RCOI.

“Given there is polarisation of viewpoints, our social cohesion strategy calls for shared conversations on difficult issues and this has been the key objective of this peace initiative,” said **Farouk Khan** an elder of the Muslim community of Auckland and Senior Advisor of FIANZ.

“We need each other to make change. We came here to find common ground, and we agree that real solutions must recognise the equal human rights of all people”, said **Marilyn Garson**, co-founder of Sh'ma Koleinu – Alternative Jewish Voices (NZ). She also represented Dayenu, another national Jewish organisation working for peace in Palestine, whose speaker could not attend due to illness. The two organisations shall be merging soon.

The forum had both Muslim and Jewish speakers, with representatives of a number of government agencies present. “It was a first step in a difficult journey of seeking peace in a region which has seen over 75 years of violence and human tragedy. Here we had an opportunity to have a Aotearoa New Zealand approach, which is based on having respect and understanding”, said **Mustafa Farouk**, a prominent Muslim elder from Hamilton and Head of Interfaith Dialogue for FIANZ. “Today’s event was a success, in two ways”, said **Fred Albert**, a member of the Jewish community in New Zealand. “Firstly, we chartered new approaches based on dialogue and secondly, we lay the foundation platform, so that Jewish and Muslim youth can meet next month and continue this journey”.

“That both the Muslim and Jewish community members can have a shared narrative at this time of immense societal tension and polarisation with the unfolding ‘crisis of humanity’ [quoting the UN Secretary General], is rare in any other part of the world. We have to harness our smallness and our shared experience in this country”, said **Abdur Razzaq**. “Plans are progressing for a national gathering of Muslim and Jewish youth next month, so that the hard issues can be discussed, and a unified approach taken towards our response to the current tragedy”.

We would also like to convey our gratitude to all the government agencies who have been fully supportive and encouraging such dialogue. This all-of-society and all-of-government approach is precisely what the March 15 Royal Commission had advocated as the way forward. It is nice to see this taking shape, particularly at these challenging times”, said **Abdur Razzaq**.

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