



## Message to Civic and Religious Leaders

From the inaugural session of *Youth PoWR*  
Sydney Baha'i Centre, 107 Derby Street, Silverwater  
17 September 2015

We, young people from diverse religions across Sydney, gathered here for the inaugural session of *Youth PoWR* (Parliament of the World's Religions) address the following message to our religious and civic leaders.

It is said that we walk into the future looking backwards. As a young and diverse community, we wish to acknowledge those who have travelled this path before us; as civic and religious leaders, you have continued to build a diverse society of which we are all a part. To our religious leaders, thank you for forming us in our respective religious traditions. To our civic leaders, thank you for providing us with the resources and infrastructure that encourages our multi-faith society to flourish. The 2011 Census of the Australian population recorded over 120 different religious denominations each with 250 or more followers. The reality of living in a multi-faith society is that we must continue to welcome people of all faiths and people of no faith in a way which not only draws on the strengths of our differences, but also draws us closer together by virtue of our common humanity.

Although the doctrinal teachings of the major world religions differ, the ethical, social and moral teachings largely agree. The fundamental spiritual teachings of most religions have at their core the same notion that human beings are created noble and have the capability to establish unity, love and fellowship with each other. In the sacred texts of the major world religions, common values such as The Golden Rule – treat others as you would like to be treated – can be found. To our religious leaders, we ask you to promote interreligious dialogue so that it becomes a mainstream concern of all our congregations. We ask you to open up for us those texts in our respective scriptures that illuminate and inspire positive interfaith relations. We ask you to highlight those teachings in our respective faith traditions that promote positive attitudes towards people of other religions, so that we can emulate and improve on those times and places in history when our ancestors enjoyed cooperative interfaith relations.

We acknowledge that as humans, we naturally surround ourselves with people who are similar to us. However, when we become preoccupied with our immediate communities - that we fail to look beyond - it is easy to start vilifying the "other". As our religious and civic leaders, we ask that you provide us with a living example of what it looks like to step outside our comfort zones, to embrace the other and to live in solidarity with people outside our immediate communities. To our religious leaders, we ask you to challenge exclusivist interpretations of our religions that separate us from others and to provide inclusive approaches that create a harmonious, multi-faith society. To our civic leaders, we ask you to provide appropriate facilities and protections that ensure all Australians can live their faiths freely with dignity and without vilification.

As leaders, you are in the best position to inspire us into creating a grass roots movement that will build a peaceful, just and fair society. We ask that you engage with each other and society at large in order to build a united front through dialogue. We ask that you support freedom of speech along with emphasising the respect commanded by revered fundamentals of every religion. We need more opportunities and resources for interfaith communication that are aimed towards promoting peace and friendship within our society. We need your collaboration with individual communities to strengthen their interests in pursuing a common agenda. We ask that your cooperation and commitment is ongoing, as it is only with perseverance in working towards this common goal that together we will bridge the gaps between our communities.

We assure you of our support and cooperation in building a vibrant, multi-faith society that embraces diversity.