

The establishment of the Centre for Dialogue was approved by the Academic Board of La Trobe University late last year. This is a major initiative which will have not only local and national but international significance.

The proposed *Centre for Dialogue* will have the following characteristics:

It will be *inter-cultural* (exploring a great many religious and cultural traditions) and *inter-disciplinary* (bringing together the insights of many disciplines, including cultural studies, religious studies, education, international relations, sociology, law, philosophy, history, and economics).

It will serve several interrelated functions:

- ◆ *Community development* and empowerment nurtured by the application of the dialogue method across ethnic, religious and cultural divisions;
- ◆ *Educational projects* (designed to promote the philosophy, practice and method of dialogue and better understanding of different societies, cultures and faiths in schools and institutions of higher and continuing education);
- ◆ *Pure and applied research* of international standing that addresses the challenges and opportunities presented by cultural, religious and political diversity and conflict – locally, nationally, regionally and globally;
- ◆ *International networking*, exchanges and co-operative projects, with an emphasis on Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, China and Southeast Asia;
- ◆ *Policy advice* to community organisations, governmental bodies, and international agencies.

It will foster interaction and dialogue between organisations representing diverse religious traditions, professional associations and non-governmental organisations more generally, research institutions, think-tanks, and representatives

of key constituencies, including government, industry and international organisations (e.g. World Bank, WTO, UNDP, UNHCR other UN agencies, EU, ASEAN).

The Centre, in close consultation with other institutions, will seek to establish a multi-nodal Global Network for Dialogue, with Melbourne as one of its central nodes. The basic idea is that a global network be formed, comprised of partner organisations, principally research institutes and university-based centres. This will be the long-term aim, but we are beginning with collaboration between institutions and individuals located in such centres as Naples, Oxford, Heidelberg, Moscow, Hawaii, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Shanghai, Nagoya, Tehran, Jerusalem, Istanbul, Athens and Nicosia.

Projects that have been running in anticipation of the Centre being established include:

- *Australia's handling of tensions between Islam and the West since September 11*
- *Religion and Conflict: implications for Southeast Asia and Australia*
- *Schools Dialogue Project* (which has as its core a pilot scheme involving 6 to 8 schools) designed to assist teachers to develop study programs and extra-curricular activities informed by the dialogue method and multicultural values
- *A series of consultations and workshops* involving key sectors of the community, including educators, religious and community organisations, and media
- *La Trobe Cyprus Project* (fostering interaction between the two Cypriot communities).

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