

## Harmony Day Speech

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we gather today, the Bunurong and Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here with us today.

On behalf of the Interfaith Network, it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this Harmony Day celebration.

I would like to warmly acknowledge and welcome our distinguished guests, including Cardinal Mykola Bychok, the Mayor Sophie Tan, everyone who is part of today's program, our respected faith leaders, community representatives, and the many members, colleagues and friends of the Interfaith Network who have joined us this morning.

I would also like to acknowledge the many new faces in the room, as our membership continues to increase, far exceeding expectations. I also like to welcome our newest appointments to the Executive team, Brother Christos and Brother Damien. I look forward to working with you both.

Thank you all for being here and for your ongoing commitment to building a more inclusive and respectful community.

I would like to begin by thanking our Executive Officer, Livia, and our wonderful Lilian, who have been working tirelessly since last night and early this morning to prepare for today. You have both done a wonderful job.

I would also like to thank Father Bruce Duncan for his support and for working closely with our Executive Officer, Livia, in preparation for today.

Here in Australia, and particularly in our wonderfully diverse community, we are privileged to live among people of many cultures, faiths, languages and traditions. Harmony Day reminds us that our differences are not barriers, but gifts that enrich our society.

However, while we gather here today in peace, we cannot ignore that many parts of the world are experiencing deep pain and conflict, weighing heavily on the hearts of many in our communities. Many of us have family, friends and loved ones directly affected by the violence and uncertainty. For others, it touches us through our shared humanity.

In moments like these, Harmony Day becomes even more important.

It reminds us that our greatest strength as a community is not that we all think the same or come from the same background — but that we choose to stand together with empathy, compassion and respect.

At times when global tensions rise, there can also be fear, misunderstanding and division. But our responsibility here — in our workplaces, our neighbourhoods, our schools and our community organisations — is to choose a different path, listening, kindness and standing beside one another rather than turning away.

Harmony does not mean ignoring differences or pretending that suffering does not exist. Harmony means acknowledging pain, respecting different perspectives, and still choosing to treat one another with dignity and care.

In communities like ours, where people from many faiths and cultures live side by side, we have an incredible opportunity to show the world what peaceful coexistence looks like. When

we share meals, celebrate each other's traditions, and support one another in difficult times, we build bridges that are stronger than division.

Today, let us remember that harmony is not just a word or a celebration once a year. It is something we practise every day — through small acts of kindness, open conversations, and by standing up for respect, inclusion and justice.

Let us continue to support one another. Let us show compassion, patience and understanding.

Because at the heart of Harmony Day is a simple but powerful message:

"Everyone belongs".

When we care for each other, when we listen to each other, and when we stand united in our shared humanity, we create the kind of community that gives hope not only to ourselves, but to the others.

Thank you all for being part of this journey of harmony, respect and unity.

Thank you for listening!

Over the past few years, the Interfaith Network has undertaken important work to strengthen its governance and position itself for long-term sustainability.

A significant milestone in this journey was the constitutional change approved at our 2024 Annual General Meeting. This was not a short-term effort, but rather the culmination of several years of careful consideration, consultation, and dedication. I would like to acknowledge the invaluable support of our pro bono legal counsel, whose guidance ensured this process was both thorough and effective.

As many of you know, IFN has never operated as a fee-based organisation. We do not rely on membership or subscription fees, and historically, we have not charged for our events. Instead, our work has been made possible through the ongoing support of Council, grant funding, and contributions raised through initiatives such as our Places of Worship Tours.

The constitutional change was a pivotal step forward, as it enabled IFN to apply for Deductible Gift Recipient status. I am very pleased to share that, with the continued support of our pro bono legal counsel and the dedication of our Executive Officer, this status was successfully secured in May 2025.

Achieving DGR status represents a transformative moment for IFN. It not only strengthens our financial sustainability but also opens new opportunities for growth, partnerships, and community impact.

Following this achievement, we turned our attention to building the systems and structures required to bring this to life in a meaningful and sustainable way. This has led to the development of our Donations and Gifts Strategy — a significant new initiative for our organisation, which we are proud to officially launch today.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank Tahlia Edwards, who has generously supported this work in a pro bono capacity. Her contribution, particularly in developing the donations section of our website, has been instrumental in ensuring we are ready to take this next step.

This strategy is not just about fundraising — it is about strengthening our capacity to serve, to grow, and to continue fostering understanding and connection across our diverse community.

I will now invite Livia to share more details about this strategy, including our ongoing commitment to supporting young people and nurturing them as the future leaders of our community.

Mehtap Williams

IFN President