

**THE GOVERNOR, ACCOMPANIED BY MRS DE  
KRETZER, LAUNCHES THE INAUGURAL UN WORLD  
INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK AT PARLIAMENT  
HOUSE**

**Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2011**

**Reverend Helen Summers**, Director, The Interfaith  
Centre of Melbourne

**Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP**, Chair Standing Committee on  
Migration

**Heads of Churches and faiths**

**Representatives from the United Nations**

**Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:**

As we meet to day let us recognise the legends and beliefs of the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet, the Wurrundjeri people, part of the Kulin Nations and pay our respect to the elders both past and present.

My wife Jan and I are delighted to be here today to share with you in the celebration of such a special occasion.

This week commencing 1<sup>st</sup> February 2011, marks the inaugural United Nations Interfaith Harmony Week, a tradition which, I hope, will not become simply a permanent observance in the international calendar, but

also one that will provoke thought about religious tolerance and enact positive change, understanding and acceptance.

For many of us, it is unfathomable that interfaith harmony, something so seemingly inherent in our own culture, is the fuel of so much unrest. Around the world there are too many places where religious intolerance is rife. Indeed, most of us are unable to imagine a place where people are oppressed or unable to practise their religion openly and where they are incapable of expressing their values. In too many countries this tension is the cause of constant unrest and conflict.

We in Australia are fortunate to live in a diverse, multicultural society that accepts freedom of expression and freedom of religious belief without prejudice, discrimination or judgment. In our country, we are at liberty to practise our respective faiths openly and without fear. We are able to do this as we accept the existence of diverse religions. We accept that these religions have as their core, belief in a faith defined in the Oxford dictionary as “a firm belief, especially without logical proof”. All of our religions or faiths fall into this definition. Faith is also defined as “complete trust or confidence”. In essence all

of our religions require us to have faith, that is complete trust and confidence in faiths that are, as defined, “firm beliefs, especially without logical proof”. In fact all of us who believe in any religion have undertaken a “faith journey”.

We value the similarities and the differences of these religions and hence we are able to live harmoniously together.

In this way, Australians can be an example to the rest of the world. We can demonstrate the way in which people of all religious faiths and backgrounds are able to live and worship harmoniously together, with a genuine mutual respect for each other, their beliefs and their traditions.

And so, in the hope that all citizens of the world may enjoy these freedoms, the United Nations General Assembly has established the World Interfaith Harmony Week. The purpose of this initiative is to promote recognition and “dialogue among different faiths and religions to enhance mutual understanding, harmony and cooperation among people”.

I would like to share with you a message sent by Prince Ghazi Bin Mohammad, Personal Envoy and Special Adviser to the King of Jordan, who drafted the original resolution:

*“I am hopeful, that by the Grace of God, despite global events, the World Interfaith Harmony Week can greatly contribute to harmonious relations between people who love God and the neighbour, or who love the good and the neighbour. It is a platform for us all to stand up and in unison say that we demand peace for this age; and we demand it now. Allow me to commend Rev Helen Summers and The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne for what they are doing for the World Interfaith Harmony Week this year, 2011. It is local-based efforts like that the world needs. May God bless all involved.”*

I echo Prince Ghazi’s message and trust that our observance here today will have a lasting and significant impact on the initiative as a whole around the world. So as we gather today on this first day of February, we join similar gatherings commemorating this occasion in Austria, Estonia, Germany, Israel, Kenya, New Zealand, Pakistan, the United States and the United Kingdom. I take great pleasure in officially launching, here in Victoria,

the Inaugural United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week. I wish you every success and look forward to seeing the fruits of your good work around the world in years to come.

Thank you.