

NEW ZEALAND MUSLIMS

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New Zealand is an island country in the south of the Pacific Ocean. It is located about 1500 km southeast off Australia between the South Pacific islands. The Muslim presence in New Zealand, which started at the end of the 19th century, has increased rapidly in the last two decades from the effect of the country's changing immigration policies. Compared to Muslim immigrants in other countries, they continue their lives in much better conditions without any oppression and discrimination except for individual incidents.

The Muslim presence in New Zealand began in the 1850s when an Indian family engaged in trade settled in Christchurch. Then, a 1874 census determined that 17 Muslims lived in the country, but there was no visible increase in the Muslim population for many years.¹ The first wave of Muslim immigration to New Zealand occurred in the early 1900s when many Indian tradesmen settled in New Zealand with their families. After this date, a permanent Muslim

presence in the country began. The second major wave of Muslim immigration occurred in the 1950s and 1960s.² With Muslims from Bosnia, Kosovo and Albania who had to leave their countries and their communist rules, Muslim population on the island continued to increase. By 1976, New Zealand Muslims exceeded 1,000 people, with immigrants from India, Fiji and Asia came for university education. Finally, as a result of the important changes made in the migration policy in the 1990s, many immigrants, especially from the Middle East and African countries, came to the country. After all these migrations, the Muslim population reached 57,276.³ This number constitutes approximately 1% of the population. The population of only 6,000 people in 1991 increased rapidly and New Zealand Muslim population is expected to be over 100,000 by 2030. As New Zealand is a country of immigration, only 25% of the Muslims there were born within the country's



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borders. Muslims of South Asian origin (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Fiji-Indian) constitute the majority of Muslim population of 40 different ethnic backgrounds including Iraqis, Afghans and Somalis. Furthermore, there has also been intense immigration to the country from Malaysia, Indonesia, the Balkans, Turkey, Egypt and Iran.⁴ About two-thirds of New Zealand Muslims live in Auckland. In addition, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch are also cities where Muslims live heavily.

As a result of their increasing number, New Zealand Muslims started to establish communities. The New Zealand Muslim Association (NZMA) was established in Auckland in 1950. Since then, similar associations have been established in many cities of New Zealand such as Wellington (1962), Christchurch (1980), Hamilton (1981), and Palmerston North (1982).⁵ In those years, these associations organized religious worships, Friday and Eid prayers, and also provided consultancy services on religious and family matters.⁶ With the increase in the Muslim population, New Zealand's first mosque was opened in Auckland in 1979. In the same year, a national organization representing Muslims in New Zealand called The Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ) was established.⁷ With this organization, issues concerning Muslims began to be managed in a more coordinated manner and the representation of Muslims in the national and international arena increased. In addition, the Islamic Women Council of New Zealand (IWCNZ) and the New Zealand Muslim Youth and Student Association were established within FIANZ in 1990.⁸ A commercial enterprise known as the Amanah Corporation was also established in July 2000 by FIANZ. The purpose of this company is to provide financial resources and funds to FIANZ. In addition, FIANZ regulates and maintains relations with international organizations such as the World Muslim League, the Arab League and the Islamic Development Bank, with diplomatic relations units in Wellington and Canberra.⁹

Another result of the rising number of Muslims in New Zealand is the start of Islamic education

activities. Religious education is of great importance in the formation of identity of Muslim children growing up in a non-Islamic society. Religious education of New Zealand Muslims is usually carried out through voluntary activities in Islamic centers. State-integrated schools that provide religious education also play a major role in the religious education of New Zealand Muslim children. The first private school belonging to Muslims is Al-Madinah School, founded in 1992.¹⁰ Since then, many schools such as Iqra Elementary School, Zayed College for Girls and Waikato Islamic School of Education followed suit, with the aim of continuing the Islamic lifestyle and tradition and raising Muslim children together with a certain consciousness. Today, New Zealand has 10 Islamic schools and about 30 Islamic centers.

Economic parameters and work-life are two of the most important indicators of Immigrants' lifestyle and situation. Most Muslim immigrants in New Zealand have a high living standard, but this is not true for all Muslims. While Indian and Fijian Muslims have a high level of employment (7% unemployed) due to their long-term residence in New Zealand, one-fifth of Somali and Afghan Muslims are unemployed.¹¹ It is also important to note that Indonesian and Pakistani Muslims have a relatively high employment level, as only 10% of them are unemployed.¹² However, unemployment rate is relatively high for Iraqi, Iranian and Malaysian Muslims (around 15%).¹³ In addition, Muslims in New Zealand generally work at a low level of managerial and professional occupations.¹⁴ One of the reasons for this is that Muslims are reluctant to fully comply with Western norms due to their religious sensitivity, even if they are well educated. Since they do not compromise when it comes to their religion, their position as managers has been decreasing. Finally, it is necessary to accept the fact that there are inequalities within the country but New Zealand Muslims have a very good living standard - high employment rate meaning low unemployment rate - compared to Muslim immigrants living in other countries.

New Zealand is officially a bicultural structure based on the partnership between British Anglo-Celtic and Maori cultures. This structure was adopted during the establishment of the state in order to secure the local Maori culture against the dominant European culture¹⁵ However, with the immigration of people from many different countries and ethnic backgrounds, New Zealand has practically evolved into a multicultural structure. Highlighting religious and cultural identities, determining the limits of freedom of expression, wide-ranging freedoms in religious practices, convenient religious education, tolerance of all cultures, and protection of cultural values have contributed to the formation of this multicultural structure. As a result, New Zealand Muslims continue their existence as part of the multicultural New Zealand society and continue their lives without any oppression and discrimination - except for individual incidents - compared to Muslim immigrants in many countries of the world. However, with the increase of Muslim migrations in recent years, Muslims are no longer in a homogeneous structure. Today, the Muslim minority has a complex structure of around 40 different countries, such as the Middle East, Maghreb, Sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan, South, and Southeast Asian countries. These immigrants mostly come from closed societies where Islam is experienced in a more traditional way, so the demands of Muslims within the scope of religious freedom are increasing day by day.

The increase in the number of Muslims who live their Muslim identity more clearly and who have demands in this direction also causes a negative perception in New Zealand. With the effect of this perception, the process that started with 9/11 and its fallouts were the first phase of Islamophobia in New Zealand. Politicians of small parties started to speak out against the Muslim migrations, and it was mentioned that the unplanned increase of the Muslim population would have very bad consequences in the future. By 2006, two newspapers announced that they had decided to publish cartoons insulting Prophet Mohammed that were previously published in Denmark. After this announcement, Islam became the focus of public debate. After large-scale protests

of Muslims, then New Zealand PM Helen Clark was aware of Muslim sensitivity and expressed her regret at the incident but stated that she did not have the right to intervene with the newspaper editors. Although the cartoons were banned as a result of the increased reactions with the effect of this statement, isolated events of violence against Muslim immigrants continued in the country.

Together with these, publications of anti-Islamic propaganda in written and verbal media almost prepared the ground for a tragedy that followed. The Christchurch attack on 15 March 2019, in which nearly 50 Muslims were killed, revealed that Muslim hatred and Islamophobia in New Zealand could have horrifying and fatal consequences. Due to this attack, both politicians and society realized that right-wing ideologies that escalated under the shadow of anti-immigration policies posed a great threat; not only in Europe but also all over the world. New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern took an exemplary stance by not allowing the attack to cause divisions and internal disturbances in New Zealand with her prudent and inclusive attitude. After the attack, she declared national mourning and started her parliamentary speech by saying “Salam Alaikum”. The Quran was read in the parliament in memory of those who died in the attack, and immediately after the attack, she banned the sale of all automatic and semi-automatic weapons in the country. In addition, the Royal Investigation Commission made recommendations on the prevention of acts of violence and extremism in its comprehensive report on the attack. Given the latest developments, the perpetrator of the Christchurch attack Brenton Tarrant was sentenced to life imprisonment, and this has relieved society a little.

Jacinda Ardern’s liberal policies and discourses against ethnic and religious minorities continue, as we see efforts to preserve cultural coexistence and mutual tolerance in the country. Both the people of New Zealand and politicians should do their best to make this environment permanent, to prevent isolated events of discrimination, and most importantly, to prevent any more painful incidents such as mosque attacks.

Endnotes

- ¹ ISIS Drury, Abdullah. "Wish You Were Here; A Short History of New Zealand Muslims and Integration." *Nazhruna: Journal Pendidikan Islam*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2020, pp. 356.
- ² Pratt, Douglas. "Antipodean Angst: Encountering Islam in New Zealand." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2010, pp. 399.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Foroutan, Yaghoob. "Muslim Minority of New Zealand in Global Context: Demographic Perspective." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2017, pp. 512.
- ⁵ Buang, Ahmad Hidayat. "Islam and Muslims in New Zealand." *Journal Usuluddin*, vol.16, 2002, pp.140.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Drury, pp. 357.
- ¹⁰ Buang, pp. 144.
- ¹¹ Foroutan, pp. 516.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Kolig, Erich. "New Zealand's Muslims and Multiculturalism." *Muslim Minorities*, 9. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010, pp. 272.