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## Weekly Report of Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme

### Religious Controversies

#### 1. South Africa: Muslim and ZCC Students Forced to Remove Religious Head Coverings at NWU

In two separate incidents, students were asked to remove their head coverings at the North West University (NWU)'s South African campus. A Black Muslim and another student, a member of the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC), were asked to remove their head coverings during while taking exams. The Muslim Student Association of NWU has accused them of “racism through Islamophobia”, while the university reiterated the principles of freedom of religion.

Keywords: South Africa, NWU, ZCC, Head covering, Islamophobia, Racism

### Secularism, Religious Freedom and New Religious Movements

#### 1. Vietnam grants official recognition to the LDS Church

In a historic ceremony held in Hanoi, Vietnam officially recognized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) and its representative committee in the country, on 31 May. Earlier this year, an independent Vietnam Mission in Hanoi was created to strengthen local members and branches.

Keywords: Vietnam, LDS Church, Official recognition, Mission

#### 2. Faith in the spotlight as Australians tipped to lose their religion

A push for Australians to move the option of “no religion” to the top of the list of possible responses to the “What is the person’s religion?” has gained a great concern in Australia’s 2016 Census. The “Mark on Religion” campaign led by the Atheist Foundation of Australia (AFA) revealed rising numbers of people choosing this option. Since the census data is used

by governments to make important funding decisions, debates have intensified over the subtle change in the country.

Keywords: Australia, AFA, 2016 Census, “Mark no religion”

## **Peace, Reconciliation and Interfaith Dialogue**

### **1. Students visit Tokyo mosque to get unbiased glimpse of Islam**

A group of 360 students from a public school in Tokyo visited the country’s largest mosque in Tokyo, aimed at gaining a tangible, unbiased grasp of Islam – a religion still unfamiliar to most Japanese. Though basic knowledge of Islam is part of school curriculum in Japan, many schools believe that young people need more exposure to Islam’s values, which have been overshadowed by media reports on terrorism in recent years.

Keywords: Japan, High school, Islam, Religious education, Cultural experience

### **2. Germany backs interfaith project for refugee aid launched in Berlin**

A refugee aid cooperation initiative, supported by the Federal German Government and backed by Christians, Jews and Muslims, was launched in Berlin. During the ceremony to re-launch the earlier interfaith dialogue project, the parliamentary state secretary called on further consolidation and cooperation given the refugee crisis.

Keywords: Germany, Refugee Crisis, Refugee shelter, Muslim, Christian, Interfaith cooperation