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For immediate release

UNITING CHURCH SUPPORTS SYDNEY'S MUSLIM COMMUNITY

The Uniting Church in Australia has today expressed support for the Muslim community in Sydney, following a meeting last night by some 900 people opposed to a proposed Islamic school in the south-west.

President of the Church, Rev. Gregor Henderson, said the reaction by Christian Democrats MP, Fred Nile, was particularly disappointing and not one that the Uniting Church supported.

“Mr Nile’s interpretation of Islam, suggesting it is anti-Christian, is not an interpretation we support, understand or, indeed, have experienced,” Rev. Henderson said.

“During my recent visit to the Holy Land, I experienced only positive, friendly and encouraging relationships between Muslims and Christians committed to living in peace together.

“We met with many Christian and Muslim groups and we did not hear a single incidence of antipathy between the two faith groups. We can learn much from their example.”

In October this year, the Church welcomed an open letter by 138 Muslim scholars which called for Muslims and Christians to work together for peace.

Rev. Henderson said the opposition to the proposed Islamic school in Camden, including the very public rhetoric by Mr Nile, is damaging to community relationships.

“The growth of peaceful and harmonious communities requires finding common ground and understanding between the two religious communities.

“The hostilities we have witnessed overnight in Sydney’s south-west are a clear indication that there is not only a lack of understanding about the Islamic faith, but unwillingness by many in our community to nurture relationships for that purpose.

“The Uniting Church in Australia is not naïve about people’s fears in the current global climate.

“However, at this time of the year, when we reflect on Christ’s birth and the meaning of Christmas, we encourage people to open discussion with those of faiths and extend the hand of hospitality to all Australians.”