



**Launch of 'Project Abraham'**  
**Sunday, 10 September 2006, 2pm**  
**Gold Coast City Council Centre, Bundall**

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**The Hon P de Jersey AC**  
**Chief Justice of Queensland**

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to launch this splendid initiative, the forum and the exhibition, together comprising "Project Abraham". I congratulate local leaders from the three Abrahamic faiths for facilitating it, and the federal government for foresight in providing some necessary material backing.

The focus of this event is the promotion of peace in society. It is interesting a Judge has been asked to perform this function today. It is interesting because a Judge's staple professional diet is not peace, but conflict; though I must acknowledge that one of the marked trends of my three decade legal career has been a decided shift away from adjudicated resolutions, to mediated, more consensual resolutions. A large motivation for that has been the prospect of restoration of amicable and productive relationships between parties previously in dispute.

For all that, I am privileged, and I hope vaguely qualified, to lend my enthusiastic support to a venture so interesting, and so potentially beneficial.

For a person my age, the so-called Cold War seemed interminable. Our relief and optimism with the fall of the Berlin Wall was boundless. But as, I suppose, world history should have warned us, the optimistic relief was somewhat naïve.

It is an extraordinarily depressing thing that the scourge of terrorism, which took root so soon thereafter, should be substantially based in religious intolerance and misunderstanding.

I venture my sad conclusion that the riots at Cronulla were undoubtedly racially inspired. I mention with dismay that in this nation, there are reportedly up to 25 anti-



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Semitic incidents per month. I note a view that the Israeli-Hezbollah war should arguably have been warranted, and the outpourings of intensely contrasting feelings it spawned. Even those few recent experiences establish, and beyond reasonable doubt, that this is a world in which peace cannot be taken for granted; we have yet even to secure it in lasting form.

Yet these great Abrahamic religions are premised on a peaceful, harmonious world, in which relationships are fostered by mutual respect and understanding. That is frankly the very antithesis of what we are currently seeing about us, and yes, from time to time even here in Australia. Our own retreat from the Anglo-Celtic cultural norm now goes back more than three decades, with the embrace of multi-culturalism in the 1970's. But our national cultural landscape, while now much more interesting, has not always since been characterized by harmony and light.

Those behind today's forum, and the related exhibition, correctly identify education as a key element in the drive to banish the religiously based intolerance and misunderstanding which feed this canker infecting contemporary society, a canker which periodically erupts with dreadful consequences.

Ironically, while religious misrepresentation has fuelled so much of the difficulty and disaster which presently beset humanity, these great religions have, I believe, nevertheless assumed augmented significance – as platforms for necessary change.

Spirituality is increasingly recognized as an essential key for personal and community fulfilment. I do not refer to blindly fundamentalist spirituality, but reflective spirituality, in which as individual citizens we acknowledge and accommodate the legitimate and respected differing beliefs of others.

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I was interested to read recently of a survey on the "Spirit of Generation Y" – that is, persons aged 13 years to 29 years. Roughly half claimed a religion. An interesting finding was that young people who take their religion seriously are more likely these days to exhibit positive civic attitudes and more acute social consciences. I expect that young people of that ilk will be particularly interested in this exhibition.

Just as in the courts adjudication is being supplanted by consensual resolution, I am confident the peace and harmony which many expected to follow the Cold War, in an enduring sense, will eventually come. But their advent awaits a new level of sympathetic understanding among the occupants of this planet.

It is abhorrent serious misunderstandings should have led to recent catastrophic world events. History will identify them as the stigma of the early years of this new millennium. It is abhorrent that that is, and will be, associated in any way with the name of religion, albeit the work of extremists who misrepresent their own religions, and the religious beliefs of others.

I applaud any initiative which seeks, to whatever degree, to avert that trend. It is therefore with renewed confidence, that I formally now launch 'Project Abraham'.