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Religious discrimination claim

By JOANNE FINLAY

Immigrants with strong non-Christian religious beliefs often face harassment and discrimination at work when they ask for time off for holy days or prayer time, according to Dr Juliet Sheen, a researcher for the Anti-Discrimination Board.

She said yesterday their requests are often met with indifference and lack of understanding. Many were victims of a tendency among Australians to regard unfamiliar

beliefs and customs as "foreign, strange and anathema."

The problem of observing holy days was particularly acute for Jews, Moslems and members of minority Christian religions such as the Seventh Day Adventists and the Worldwide Church of God.

Difficulties arose when holy days fell during the working week and because of fellow workers' and employers' ideas about holy days.

"Often they think it's a bludge."

She said that while a person might have spent all day praying when they were allowed to observe a holy day, it was not uncommon

for an employer to think he had spent the day on the beach.

Mr Ibrahim, president of the Egyptian-Muslim Association and secretary of the Islamic Board of NSW, has made a submission on religious discrimination and Moslems to Dr Sheen.

Mr Ibrahim said that each year Moslems observed the Ramadan, when they fasted between sunrise and sunset for 30 days. It ended with a huge feast named Eid El Fitr, which was a major holy day.

The Jewish religion specifies 13 days a year when believers are not allowed to work. Some may fall on a weekend.