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'Reclaiming Australian Multiculturalism: policy and practice in a shifting landscape'

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks go to Ms Cath Dwyer of ABC Radio for her warm introduction. Thanks also to Mr Ahmet Polat, Executive Director of the Affinity Intercultural Foundation, for inviting me to be with you today, to share some of my thoughts as Chair of the Australian Multicultural Council.

I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal of the Eora Nation as the traditional custodians of this place we now call Sydney. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present; as well as to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are present today.

INTRODUCTION

By now you possibly may wonder about my accent. My wife Hanna, son Adam and I arrived in Sydney as refugees in 1975. We escaped from Poland in 1973 and spent two years awaiting migration in Hamburg, West Germany. We chose Australia because perceived it as a democratic country, with solid economic and social opportunities and English language, and because it was far away from Europe. We arrived here on one-way German travel documents, with proverbial one suitcase and almost no English. Our first home was Villawood Reception (not Detention) Centre.

Since the arrival, we never looked back as Australia has extended to us her enormous opportunities. In my professional life, I have had the privilege to shape Australian multicultural and human rights policies and practices over the years.
Today I was asked to talk on a rather challenging the topic: "*Reclaiming Australian Multiculturalism: policy and practice in a shifting landscape*".

Let us start with the basics.

SOME OF THE HISTORY

In my view, Australian multiculturalism is a direct outcome of three basic factors working together:
- first, the mass and diverse migration that started after WWII and continues today;
- second, the aspirations and achievements of culturally and linguistically diverse communities; and
- third, Australia's egalitarian culture and our democratic government.

Let's start with a few comments about migration generally. In fact, the modern history of Australia is in large part the story of migration. Allow me to quote just few statistics to illustrate my point.

Since 1945, over 7.5 million people have settled in Australia; with annual intake rates often exceeding 1 per cent of Australia's population. Today, over 28 per cent of the total population were born overseas; nearly 50 per cent of Australians were either born overseas or have at least one parent who migrated to Australia.

The influence of immigration continues today. Because of its economic benefit to Australia, where migration into Australia is based primarily on the employment needs of the country (and the capability of prospective migrants to fill those needs) migration is likely to continue well into the future.

In a recent report on the economic impact of migration, the Migration Council Australia estimated that by 2050 migration will contribute $1.6 trillion to the Australian economy. This is nearly equal to the gains made over the last 35 years of women's participation in the workforce.

This mass migration delivers our cultural diversity. The 2011 Census showed that we identify with over 300 ancestries; and speak more than 215 languages, including some 40 Aboriginal languages. Apart from English, the most commonly spoken languages are: Chinese (largely Mandarin and Cantonese), Italian, Greek, Arabic, Indian (Hindi and Punjabi) and Vietnamese. In fact, in New South Wales nearly 23 per cent of the population speak a language other than English at home.

There is also enormous religious diversity. The most common non-Christian religions in 2011 were: Buddhism (2.5 per cent of the population); Islam (2.2 per cent); and Hinduism (1.3 per cent).

Such characteristics justify using the word 'multiculturalism' to describe Australia's demographic diversity.

The second basic factor of Australian multiculturalism combines the aspirations and achievements of culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Initially, assimilation of non-British migrants and the continuation of a mono-cultural 'Australian way of life' was the ideal. Non-British European migrants were expected to melt seamlessly into Australian society and adopt the Australian lifestyle as quickly as possible: learning English, becoming local patriots, and abandoning their previous national identities.

However, upon their arrival, non-British migrants did not dissolve easily into the Anglo-Celtic melting pot, but rather established their own lively communities with churches, sporting, youth and cultural clubs, associations, language schools, welfare and financial institutions. Effective community leaders and ethnic media, both of which have influenced Australian politics, also flourished.

Such institutions were established not only to maintain their cultures but also to help with settling into Australia and joining the broader society, rather than staying within their cultural enclaves.

The third element, Australian egalitarianism and democratic institutions, ensures that our upward social mobility structures remain open to the vast majority of new arrivals; clearly distinguishes Australia from the 'old world' countries.

By the early seventies, it had become obvious that cultures brought to Australia by migrants were not going to fade away and that the nation would be better served by accepting diversity rather than trying to eradicate it. Political parties also realised the importance of the so called 'ethnic vote' and the need for government involvement in management of such diversity.

As a result, the final vestiges of the *White Australia* policy were removed in 1973, by the Whitlam Labor government, and migration from non-European countries started after the Fraser government came into office in 1975.

Since then, successive national and state governments acknowledge multiculturalism as an official government policy; and provide varying degrees of leadership in advancing support for cultural and linguistic diversity.

All levels of government have created various architectures of policies and programs to support cultural diversity (noting that Australia has not legislated relevant measures along the lines of the Canadian *Multiculturalism Act 1985*). This gives us the third component of the word 'multiculturalism' - as a set of government policies and programs.
Although discussion is informed by all three elements of multiculturalism: the demographic reality, integration and the architecture of government programs and policies; I will concentrate on the third aspect.

So let us start by briefly examining how the multicultural architecture developed over time and what needs to be done to ensure the future success of Australian multiculturalism.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF TODAY'S MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

The genesis of contemporary multiculturalism dates back to the Whitlam years (1972-75). Multiculturalism arose in the context of both a political contest to secure electoral advantage and because of social justice concerns.

The initial concept of multiculturalism, based on the Canadian model, was introduced by Al Grassby, the then Minister for Immigration during the Whitlam Labor government. His initial attempt to define multiculturalism was a rather confusing concept of '*the family of the nation*' with no formal policy established. However, key achievements during this time included proscribing racial discrimination and removing discriminatory provisions from the migration legislation.

Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (1975-83) also linked his political success with the advancement of multicultural policies. In fact, it was under the Fraser government that multiculturalism emerged for the first time as a well-articulated, government-endorsed policy supported by a range of government programs.

The 1977-78 Review of Migrant Programs and Services, and the resulting 1978 Galbally Report, defined the guiding principles of multiculturalism. It also led to the establishment of a range of ethno-specific services, and established the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, a national think tank with Petro Georgiou at its helm.

Several of those ethno-specific services continue to function today, including: the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Migrant Resource Centres (MRC), the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), and other English as a Second Language programs. The establishment of such services was the distinguishing feature of Fraser's approach to multiculturalism.

Fraser also pioneered establishing a range of advisory and consultative bodies to improve ethnic communities' access to government.

Prime Minister Hawke (1983-1993) initially perceived multiculturalism as politically advantaging the Liberal Party, and distrusted key players in the field. As a result, he started to dismantle the institutions and programs established by the former Prime Minister. The Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs was abolished and the existence of SBS was threatened.

Following public protests, the Prime Minister changed his approach and tasked Dr James Jupp to undertake a Review of Migrant and Multicultural Programs and Services and deliver a new policy approach. The resulting report recommended moving away from ethno-specific delivery to provision of services, wherever possible, by mainstream providers. This has evolved into the current Multicultural Access and Equity Policy.

Key achievements of the Hawke/Keating years (1983-96) included: establishing both the Office of Multicultural Affairs within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research. Access to government by culturally and linguistically diverse community leaders was also further advanced during this time.

Another milestone was the 1989 adoption of the national multicultural policy, *'National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia…Sharing our future'*. The *Agenda* emphasised the balance of rights and responsibilities and the need for migrants to accept the basic principles of Australian society.

Furthermore, the Labor government adopted a National Language Policy which enhanced both the teaching of non-English languages at schools and fine-tuned translating and interpreting services.

However, the high profile of multiculturalism during the Hawke/Keating years led to a populist backlash and subsequent need to clarify the underlying philosophy.

Prime Minister John Howard (1996-2007) won power when strong anti-multiculturalism, anti-immigration and anti-Asian sentiments were rampant and politically successful, including the election of Ms Pauline Hanson to Parliament.

The Prime Minister was initially reluctant to criticise Ms Hanson's public statements. However, following the emergence of her One Nation Party as a political power, the Prime Minister declared: '*there is no place in the Australia we love for any semblance of racial or ethnic intolerance*'.

The Prime Minister Howard's initial approach established the National Multicultural Advisory Council and launched a new multicultural policy, *A New Agenda for Multicultural Australia*, which advocated a '*shared national identity*' grounded in concepts of '*mateship*' and a *'fair go'.* He subsequently focussed on Australian Citizenship, introducing the Australian Citizenship test and expanding dual-citizenship rights.

This refocused approach to multiculturalism dealt more with practical solutions rather than symbolism, including increased funding for both the Adult Migrant English Program and settlement programs aimed at refugees arriving from the Horn of Africa.

The terrorist attack on 11September 2001 (which as it happened caught the Prime Minister in New York City) surprisingly delivered a new lease of life for multiculturalism. The *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity* policy statement was produced in 2003 and shifted the focus further towards unity and social cohesion.

Similarly, the 7 July 2005 terrorist attack in London led to The *National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security* and the Muslim Communities' Leaders Reference Group, both of which were developed as a result of the Prime Minister's Summit with Muslim communities' leaders on 23 August 2005.

During the 2007 federal election campaign, the Labor Party promised to return to the Hawke government's approach to multicultural policies and to re-establish the Office of Multicultural Australia. However, the establishment of the Rudd/Gillard governments (2007-2013) saw only some of the promises realised.

During the Rudd first period in government (December 2007 – June 2010), although multicultural issues were not given much prominence, the ground work on *'The People of Australia'* policy statement was undertaken. During that period the focus of attention (and resources) also further shifted toward the needs of refugees and away from the broader needs of other new arrivals, culturally diverse groups and the wider Australian community.

The Gillard government gave higher profile to multiculturalism. The then Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Chris Bowen announced a new multicultural policy during his well-publicised address to the Sydney Institute, on the topic '*The Genius of Multiculturalism'.*

When the new policy, *The People of Australia,* was launched, it reflected advice from the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council and focused on equality and anti-discrimination issues. It reaffirmed the well-established tenets of multiculturalism including: rights and responsibilities; non-negotiable respect for Australian foundational values of democracy and the rule of law; reaffirmation of equality between men and women; and the concept of a shared identity based on the common ground of 'mateship' and a 'fair go'.

The Australian Multicultural Council was also subsequently launched to advise government on implementing the policy and advocate on multicultural issues.

In summary, the Rudd/Gillard years can be characterised as a period of relative stability with a focus on the mainstreaming of services and the anti-racism strategy.

Similar relative stability characterised the Abbott government. Prime Minister Abbott reappointed the Australian Multicultural Council, but without an advocacy role. Rather, its initial responsibilities reflected his government's strengthened focus on social cohesion and productivity.

The re-emergence of the One Nation Party under Pauline Hanson in Australian politics constitutes an additional challenge to Australian multiculturalism.

The launch of the new multicultural statement '*Multicultural Australia – United, Strong, Successful*' on 20 March 2017 (by the Prime Minister, the Hon Malcom Turnbull MP, and the Assistant Minister for Social Services and Multicultural Affairs, Senator the Hon Zed Seselja) marks another important milestone in our nation's multicultural journey.

With this statement, the Government is renewing and recommitting its support for multicultural Australia. This is a statement of our times.

The key messages of the statement are:
- Economic and social integration by new migrants and their families helps them feel connected to their new home, while also contributing to Australia's prosperity.
- We are bound together by our shared values: respect, equality and freedom.
- Mutual respect and mutual responsibility are cornerstones of our harmonious society.
- Intolerance and discrimination are incompatible with Australian society.
- Even with strong borders and strong national security, our best protection is focusing on what unites us.

In summary, multicultural policies and programs develop incrementally over the years. Although they are developed in a political context, Australian multiculturalism is usually seen as a bi-partisan undertaking with Labor focussing more on social justice and racial discrimination; and the Coalition on social cohesion, fundamental values, citizenship and integration.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

So, where do we go from here; or how can we reclaim Australian Multiculturalism – the question which was put to me by the organisers of this event?

On the surface it appears that Australian multiculturalism works okay. The national annual Scanlon Survey reports, *Mapping Social Cohesion,* consistently show strong support for multiculturalism (86 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement *'multiculturalism has been good for Australia')* and for the notion that current levels of immigration should be maintained.

However, at the 2 July 2016 federal election, some half a million Australians voted for a party that calls for abolishing multiculturalism and stopping immigration, especially from 'Muslim countries'. If such policies were to be implemented, they would stall Australia's economic growth for years and undermine our social cohesion.

In addition, the Scanlon research suggests that there is an increasing experience of discrimination and racist behaviour, especially among visibly different migrant groups. There is also increasing concern around the issues of radicalisation and extremist behaviour by various groups throughout Australia.

In addition, I would suggest that there is a perception among some people that multiculturalism is no longer relevant to the broader Australian community - because it has been marginalised to serve only the needs refugee and perhaps Muslim communities.

What could we do to reclaim Australian multiculturalism and return it to serving as the key architecture for securing social cohesion for all Australians and equality of treatment for all newcomers?

The four broad ideas I will present to you now are my own. They do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the Australian Multicultural Council; they have not in any way been endorsed by the Council. The proposals, however, are informed by the best practices from the earlier years.

First, our efforts to keep Australia as a country of opportunity for new migrants requires renewed commitment.

There is enough evidence pointing to discrimination in both labour markets and access to services, as well as unequal treatment based on race, ethnicity and religion. For example, research indicates that people need to anglicise their names to get a job interview. There is also evidence showing that not only refugees, but also highly skilled migrants are having difficulties in securing their first jobs in Australia.

It seems that equal opportunity and anti-racism legislation have only limited impact and that new, more practical measures are needed to secure labour market outcomes.
We need a mechanism that would strengthen practical accountability of our large employers such as the Australian Public Service, banks or universities to advance equality of opportunity for Australians of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Such a system is already in place to advance gender equality under the federal *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012.* We need to adopt the Workplace Gender Equality Agency methodology to advance job opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse Australians. Or perhaps the *Act*'s mandate should be expanded, thereby creating a new Workplace Equality Agency that would also address the issues of cultural diversity and disability in our workplaces.

Second is the matter of leadership. We clearly need committed and re-energised leadership willing to actively advance arguments in support of multiculturalism. We need leaders who can effectively communicate that:
- multiculturalism is fair for all and delivers high levels of social cohesion and economic advancement; and
- racism, in all forms, is abhorrent.

At a national level, we need an effective communication strategy to advance the multicultural message. Governments must, much more strongly, advocate the benefits of migration, particularly its vital importance for the sustainability and growth of our economy. Such messaging must be addressed to all Australians and must be divorced from any sectional interests. Also, to be effective, any messages aimed at combating racial prejudice must be addressed to general audiences.

Leadership is needed from all sectors - politics, business, education, community, media; as well as individuals. We all need to go beyond our own communities and our cosmopolitan cities to engage with those who have never experienced diversity first hand; and perhaps are fearful of it.

And I make this call recognising that this room is overflowing with leaders who reach deeply into local communities and across oceans, linking to leaders and people of other countries. I encourage all of us to use our leadership opportunities to expand the influence of the new multicultural statement to reach well into those sectors and organisations we lead. The Affinity Intercultural Foundation provides a great example of leadership in advancing the message through their many ground breaking programs.

In this context, I also encourage community leaders here to join political parties, as clearly Australians of diverse backgrounds are underrepresented in our legislative bodies.

Third, we need to refresh our consultation mechanisms. In the past, multiculturalism thrived because it involved a direct linkage between government of the day and grass-roots community groups in search of solutions to often difficult and sensitive problems.
In fact, consultation mechanisms were very effectively used by the Fraser, Hawke and Howard governments. I remember intensive consultations leading to the development of the 1989 National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, before the second Iraq war and on many other occasions.

Now, broad public consultations appear to have fallen out of fashion for some reason unknown to me. Perhaps, there is a fear that consulting in public may give a platform to extremist points of view or popularise some uncomfortable ideas. I acknowledge that such risks do exist, but I think that the benefits of governments re-engaging with communities would outweigh such risks. The consultation process is democracy at work, which usually wins new commitment and delivers fresh ideas.

Finally, I strongly believe that multicultural policies and programs require better whole of government policy coordination.

I would welcome joining together Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship responsibilities and placing them back in a central government policy portfolio such as the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet responsibilities. I am of the view that locating multicultural affairs in the Department of Social Services simply sends a wrong message. Migrants are not a welfare problem; rather they are major and positive contributors to Australia's economy.

I also call for the re-establishment of a research institute focussed on immigration outcomes and social cohesion issues.

The suggestions I have advanced today are not revolutionary. They represent a mix of practical ideas, tested in the past, which could further advance the Australian concept of *'a fair go'* into the future.

I hope that this meeting today inspires you to take these ideas further, and that in the future we will continue to work together to advance a free and equal multicultural Australia for all. After all, "multicultural" needs to describe us all, not just refugees or not well to do segments of minorities.

Thank you.