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**CANBERRA MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY FORUM:  
„RECLAIMING AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURALISM:  
POLICY AND PRACTICE IN A SHIFTING LANDSCAPE” -  
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Australian multiculturalism is a direct outcome of three basic factors working together:

- First, mass and diverse migration that started after WWII and continues today;
- Second, aspirations and achievements of the culturally and linguistically diverse communities; and
- Third, Australia’s egalitarian culture and our democratic government.

Let’s start with a few comments about migration.

In fact, the modern history of Australia is in large part the story of migration. Allow me just to quote few statistics to illustrate my point.

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

The mass immigration continues today with 227,100 migrants arriving in 2013; and 205,900 in 2014. Because of its economic benefit to Australia, migration is likely to continue well into the future. In its 2014 report, Migration Council Australia estimates that by 2050 migration will contribute \$1.6 trillion dollars to the Australian economy.

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 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. They also developed effective community leaders and ethnic media, both of which influenced Australian politics.

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

Thus, for community leaders the word 'multiculturalism' often refers to a social compact about rights and responsibilities.

It is in this context, I wish to congratulate the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum for ten years of leadership and service to the Canberra community.

The third element, Australian egalitarianism and democratic institutions, ensures that our upward social mobility structures remain open to the vast majority of new arrivals; and 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.

The political parties have also realised the importance of so called 'ethnic vote' and a need for government involvement in management of such diversity.

As a result, the final vestiges of *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 meaning of the word of ‘multiculturalism’ as a set of government policies and programs.

Although tonight’s discussion is informed by all three meanings of multiculturalism: demographic reality, social compact and 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 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*’. Key achievements during this time included outlawing 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, under Fraser 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 established 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 the 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 were 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 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 to 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* put emphasis on 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 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, electing 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'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.

The refocused approach to multiculturalism often dealt more with practical solutions 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 11 September 2001 (which 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 were both 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, after establishment of the Rudd/Gillard governments (2007–2013) only some of such promises were realised. During the Rudd first period in government (2/12/07–24/06/10), although multicultural issues were not given much prominence, the ground work on '*The People of Australia*' policy statement was undertaken. During that period also a focus of attention (and resources) 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*'.

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 also reaffirmed the well-established concepts 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 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 focus on mainstreaming of services and the anti-racism strategy.

Similar relative stability characterises the Abbott/Turnbull government years (2013 to present). 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. Prime Minister Turnbull has spoken highly about multiculturalism on a number of public occasions, and the Council has been tasked to concentrate on empowering women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The Prime Minister's agreement in August 2016, to move a motion re-committing Parliament to equal respect, regardless of ethnicity or religion, sends

a strong message to all Australians: there is no place for intolerance in Australia. It also sends a signal to leaders from the political, business, media and community sectors to engage with their constituents on these matters.

However, a significant policy document on multiculturalism is yet to be produced and the use of consultation mechanisms is underutilised. Re-emergence of the One Nation Party under Pauline Hanson in Australian politics constitutes an additional challenge to Australian multiculturalism.

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 focusing more on social justice and racial discrimination; and the Coalition on social cohesion, fundamental values, citizenship and rights and responsibilities.

### **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 tonight’s forum?

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 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 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 five broad ideas I will present to you now are my own. They do not reflect the thinking of the Australian Multicultural Council, nor have they been endorsed by the Council. The proposals, however, are informed by the best practices from the earlier years.

First, the issue 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 – otherwise a policy vacuum will be created and any policy vacuum never stays empty for long in the public arena. Such messaging must be addressed to all Australians and must be divorced from any sectional interests. Also, to be effective any messages aiming 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 Prime Minister's equal respect Parliamentary motion to reach well into those sectors and organisations we lead.

Second, Australia needs a new multicultural policy that reflects the standards and values the vast majority of Australians agree to support – a statement that will recognise the value of cultural diversity and create opportunities for all people to participate in all aspects of public life.

I know there have been plenty of such statements developed in the past, and they would provide a good starting point. The past statements, on one hand, promoted commitment to Australia and our democratic values, egalitarianism and the idea of “fair go”; and recognised English as the national language. On the other hand, the statements recognised the diversity of Australia's population and stated that the various cultures, languages and religions should be respected and supported.

But it is important that a new document is developed, because it will give the government ownership of a multicultural policy and because the process of its development will involve public participation and have educational value.

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, 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.

Fourth, 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 the 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 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.

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

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 in a central government portfolio such as the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet or alternatively within the Special Minister of State 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 call for the re-establishment of a research institute focussed on immigration outcomes and social cohesion issues.

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

I hope that this meeting tonight 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.